

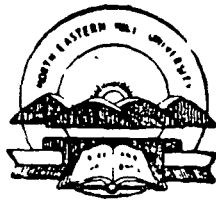
# THE ASSAMESE MUSLIM SOCIAL STRUCTURE STUDY IN A GOALPARA VILLAGE

*By*

**SAIFUN NESSA**

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY  
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENT OF THE  
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

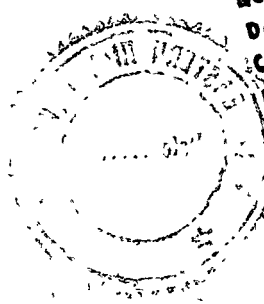


**NORTH-EASTERN HILL UNIVERSITY**  
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## CERTIFICATE

It is certified that the Dissertation on "The Assamese Muslim Social Structure : Study in a Goalpara Village", submitted by Miss Saifun Nessa to the North-Eastern Hill University for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy is a bonafide research work prepared under my supervision. The materials embodied in this Dissertation have not been submitted in part or full for any other diploma or degree to any other University or Institution.

This Dissertation may be placed before examiners for evaluation.

Dated Shillong,  
the 24.12. 1988.

(A. C. SINHA )

**Professor and Head  
Department of Sociology  
North Eastern Hill University  
Shillong—793014**

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A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

The thesis on 'The Assamese Muslim Social Structure : Study in a Goalpara Village' is a modest exercise for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy from North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong. The village study is based on first hand information collected from the respondents in the field. Secondary source materials were consulted at the various libraries at Shillong, Guwahati and Goalpara. Many persons in their different capacities helped in multitude of ways towards completion of the thesis. Hereby, I acknowledge a deep sense of gratitude to them.

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Dated Shillong,  
the 24<sup>th</sup> December 1988.

*S. Nessa.*  
( SAIFUN NESSA )

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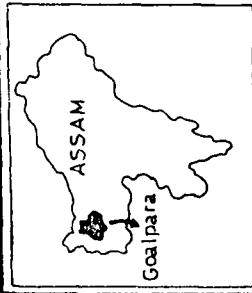
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CHAPTER - I

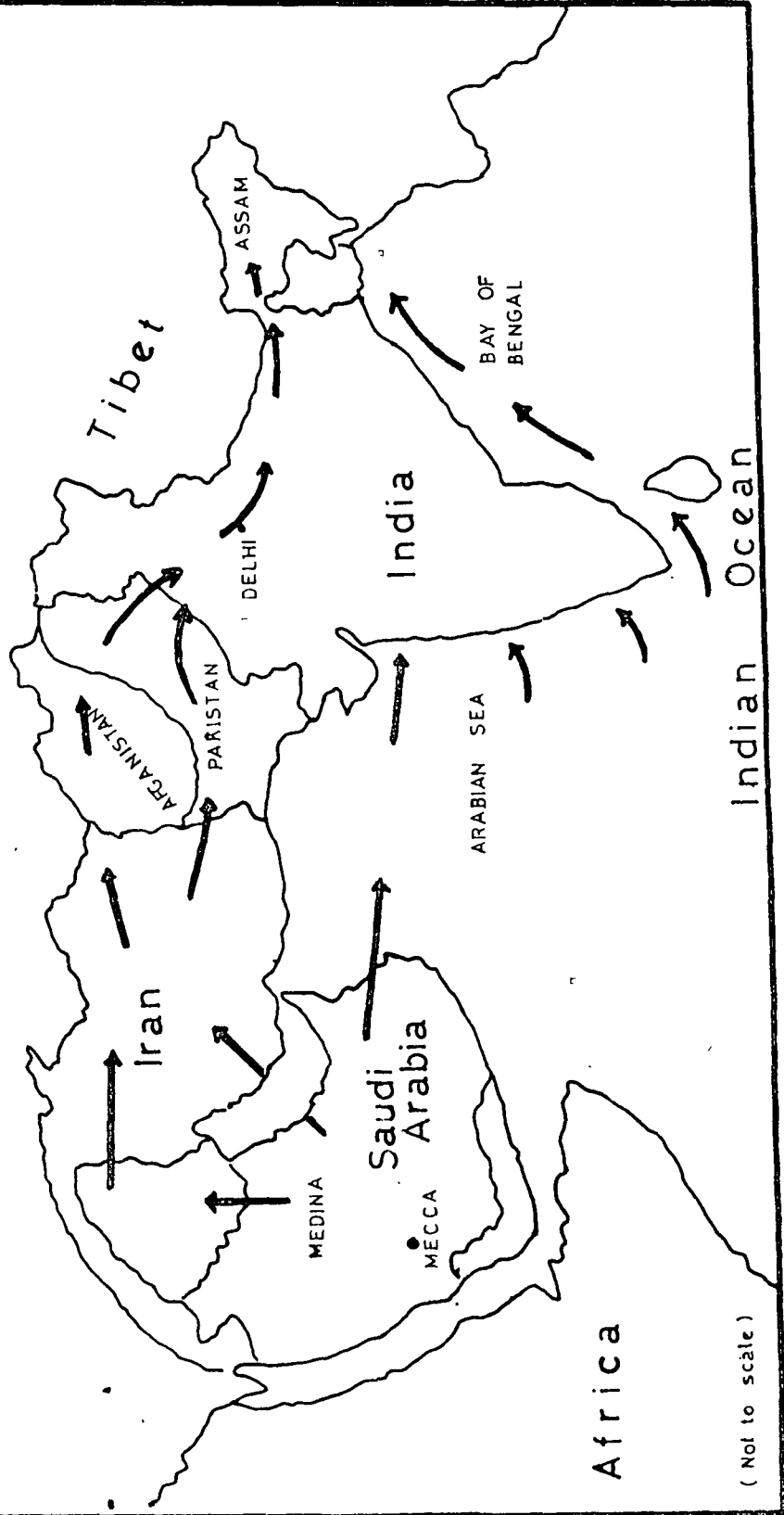
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# WEST & CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES ROUTES OF MUSLIM INVASION TO INDIA



Europe

China



Indian Ocean

( Not to scale )

Map. I

INTRODUCTION  
SOCIAL STRUCTURE : THE CONCEPT AND METHOD

THE CONCEPT

-An ordered arrangement of functionally inter-related parts makes a total system. Thus, an animal organism, a machine and even a society is said to be in the possession of a structure. Here, an attempt is made to understand how different sociologists have defined this concept of 'social structure'. Herbert Spencer, an early thinker, used the concept 'structure' in the analysis of society and understood it in terms of part-whole relationships, where the parts are meaningful in terms of function. He gives us the 'organic analogy' for the understanding of society.

A.R. Radcliffe-Brown explains that the components of social structure are human beings; the structure itself is an arrangement of persons in relationship, institutionally defined and regulated. "In the study of social structure the concrete reality with which we are concerned is the set of actually existing relations, at a given moment of time, which link together certain human beings".<sup>1</sup> Thus, his concern is not with the actually existing relations among

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1. A.R. Radcliffe-Brown. Structure and Function in Primitive Society (Cohen and West Ltd., London 1952 Reprinted in 1968) p.192.

Tom, Dick and Harry, at a particular point of time. The concern is with the general form of social relations i.e., the general or the normal form becomes the core of the social structure. The structural form may be understood by a consideration of the continuity of social structure. Continuity is possible because social relations extend over time and space; Of course by 'continuity of social structure' he does not mean it as static as a 'monument'. But he means a mutable continuity like that of the organic structure of the living body. The possibility is that the social life constantly renews the social structure. In spite of these changes the general structural form may remain relatively constant. He uses three terms - 'social morphology' 'social physiology' and 'social evolution'. Firstly, one has to study as many forms of social structure as possible and find out the similarities and differences among them. With this background, various functional life-processes and development has to be studied.

Claude Levi-Strauss examines the concept in terms of abstraction. To him social structure has nothing to do with empirical reality. Social relations consist of raw materials out of which model making for social structure emerges. Social structure is not the sumtotal of social relations but it is more than that. It is an abstraction based on concrete reality.<sup>2</sup>

2. Claude Levi-Strauss. Structural Anthropology (Penguin Books Ltd., Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England 1963) pp. 279-280.

✓ To Talcott Parsons, the structure of a social system is essentially the relation between actors in interaction, between actors in their capacity of playing roles relative to one another. "Social system is a mode of organization of action elements relative to the persistence or ordered processes of change of the interacting patterns of a plurality of individual actors".<sup>3</sup>

✓ S.F. Nadel uses the term in a restricted way by using the notion of 'Role'. To him, "societies are made up of people, societies have boundaries, people either belonging to them or not; and people belong to a society in virtue to rules under which they stand and which impose on them regular, determinant way of acting towards and in regard to one another .... they follow from rules by calling them 'institutionalised' or 'social'".<sup>4</sup> Thus, structure can be found by finding out the network or relationship between role performances.

Neil Smelser and S.M. Lipset write that social structure refers to organized bundles of human activities oriented to the 'directional tendencies' of a social system. By 'directional tendencies' they mean the

3. Talcott Parsons. The Social System (Amerind Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd. New York 1951) p.24.

4. S.F. Nadel. The Theory of Social Structure (Cohen and West Ltd. London 1957. Fourth impression, 1969) p.8.

necessities which must be met if the social system is to continue; Basic directional tendencies are the functional exigencies; 'utilization of resources' is another important condition; For example; the nuclear family is a set of institutional roles, one major function of which is the socialization of youngsters. In contributing to this function the structure utilizes the resources (the means that facilitates the performance of the function and then the system) of a social system.<sup>5</sup>

Like Spencer, Raymond Firth understands the term 'social structure' in terms of the part-whole relationship. He understands it with 'anatomical analogy'. He writes, "It must be concerned with the ordered relations of parts to a whole, with the arrangement in which the elements of social life are linked together - some factor of constancy and continuity must be involved in them".<sup>6</sup> But social relations consists of person to person relationship and also relationship among major groups in society. Thus, controversy arises as to whether interperson or inter-group relationship should be the main account in describing a social structure.

Jean Piaget's notion of structure endorses three

3. Neil.J.Smelser and S.M. Lipset. Social Structure and mobility in Economic Development (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1966 Reprint 1969) pp.3-4.

6. Raymond Firth. Elements of Social Organization. (Tavistock Publication 1951. Reprint 1971) p.30.

important ideas i.e.; wholeness; transformation and self-regulation: "... structures have elements; but the elements of a structure are subordinated to laws; and it is in terms of these laws that the structure qua whole or system is defined",<sup>7</sup> On stability with transformation he writes, "conservation along with stability of boundaries despite the construction of indefinitely many new elements presuppose that structures are self-regulating",<sup>8</sup>

#### COMMON ELEMENTS

From the above major definitions, some common points emerge. The term 'social structure' is generally defined with reference to other concepts such as 'whole', 'system', 'coherence', 'set of relationship', 'stable inter-relationship among parts', 'totality' and so on. Secondly, this 'whole' is viewed not as a static system, but a mutable system which results from the changes brought in the parts or elements. And thirdly, the transformation and continuity takes place within the boundary of the structure, in an ordered manner which maintains stability.

The problem of defining the concept of 'social structure' arises, because the concept does not have its support in objective reality, though it is built on it. Concepts like man, dog, house, book etc., can be precisely

7. Jean Piaget. Structuralism translated and edited by Chaninah Maschler (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1973 First published in 1968) p.7.

8. Ibid., p.14

defined as they have their support in objective reality. Any of these concepts can be defined by comparing and abstracting the similarities and differences of all individual cases. This advantage of the possibility of comparison is however lacking in the concept of social structure. Here, comparison is possible at the level of abstraction or secondary materials only. The former category of concepts have a reality independent from the definitions. But the concept of 'social structure' does not have an independent existence or categorical meaning until it is defined.

#### INDIAN UNDERSTANDING OF 'SOCIAL STRUCTURE'

Indian authors basically take 'caste' as the point of departure for understanding Indian social structure. This system is viewed as an structural functional all encompassing unity, which explains social structure as a 'whole'. Caste is the oldest feature of Hindu society. It divides the society and makes these divisions inter-dependent. However, class is the divisive factor in the contemporary society. Thus, 'caste' principle of the understanding society is an old pattern and 'class' principle of understanding society is a new pattern. Thus, social division represents Indian society and economic division represents Western society.

Subscribing to the view for the understanding of social stratification in order to understand social structure Yogendra Singh says, "these issues relate to questions of theory, structure and process.... and their variations in societal and cultural contexts".<sup>9</sup> He neither sided up with functional approach nor with the conflict approach, for the understanding of Indian social structure. To him, it is significant to note that most of the functional theories of social stratification come from the Americans and the conflict theories come from the continental sociologists.

K.L. Sarma makes it clear to us as how such identification enters in the realm of the study of social structure. He clarifies, "Such notions have been part of the colonial legacy and dependence of Indian scholars on their Western big brethren.... To establish the superiority of Western society and culture, the scholars of the West glorified the class system".<sup>10</sup>

Marxian model, which emphasises on conflict, cannot explain Indian social system which is based on caste

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9. Yogendra Singh "Sociology of Social Stratification: A Trend Report in ICSSR. A Survey of Research in Sociology and Social Anthropology (Popular Prakashan, Bombay 1974 Vol.I) pp.311-314.

10.K.L. Sarma, Essays on Social Stratification (Rawat Publications, Delhi 1980) p. Introduction.

principle. Because the underlying ideas of caste-based social system are harmony and inter-dependence. So K.L. Sarma tries to understand Indian society not exactly on the basis of any model but with the development of a framework which emerges from the history and present structure of Indian society and culture. He suggests class point of view of caste and vice-versa. While pointing on the limitation of the existing theories and by forwarding the alternative, he says, "hence a need for structural historical perspective taking into account the particular normative and relational aspects of Indian society".<sup>11</sup> Thus, he is concerned with the empirical particularistic situation.

Either of the above two, cannot be clearly the best to explain Indian context. These theories are conditioned by respective social history. Thus, it follows that, in the understanding of Indian society one needs to take into <sup>account</sup> the empirical social history and situations. Explaining either caste or class with the aim to understand a society will not lead us far. Reason becomes clear when we read Y. Singh thus, "We find that a series of overlapping or intermediary structural forms exists in India that range from caste, ethnic group to class without having been individually crystallised".<sup>12</sup>

11. Ibid., p.xiii.

12. Yogendra Singh. Op.cit., p.336.

Accepting the above mentioned views of the non-Indian and Indian sociologists as suggestions, the present study will be taken up on the following lines :

Firstly, it becomes clear that, taking any of the relevant approach as the model and trying to fit the social structure of the village within it, does not make any sense and it is a clear indication of fitting the structure arbitrarily within a frame- like a round peg in a square hole. Because, the frame is based on the social history of a non-Indian society.

Secondly, there is uniformity of opinions regarding the acceptance of a village to be a system with definite structure. Actors with status and role form the stable groups and institutions. Norms, rules and values which are sanctioned as 'social', determine the social relationship at all those units which are permanent in society.

Thus, it is proposed to study these aspects as they are. These are: Marriage, family and kinship, social groups, economic system, authority and the system of social control, religion, norms, value etc. which make the system of a village. All these aspects will be understood in terms of continuity and change. Because change is ubiquitous.

## APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The word 'structure' means a totality. In order to understand the structure of a particular social setting, earlier thinker belonging to the Organismic Functionalist school like Herbert Spencer presented us with the 'Organic Analogy'. 'Structure' is understood in terms of part-whole relationship. Spencer in his Organismic theory identifies 'social structure' with living organism, in terms of functional part-whole relationship. Further he views that as the part of a biological organism has no meaning without the total framework, similarly, a part of a society cannot survive in isolation except within the framework of a society. However in the part-whole relationship in organismic analogy, he finds differences between living and social organisms - differences that weakens the analogy.

In the study of 'structure' the most important, related and supplementary term is 'Function'. A part of the structure gets its meaning only in terms of 'functions',- which it plays for the total system. Organismic analogy fails at this point. Unlike a biological entity a part of a society has no existence and cannot be understood without its function. Thus, to understand social structure one needs to step in with the analysis of 'function' of the unit.

Taking 'function' as the point of departure for the understanding of structure, Emile Durkheim attaches a

special connotation to it. To him, function of a social organization 'is the correspondence between the social institution and needs of the social organism'. Thus, he understands by it not merely the activity, but the end achieved by the activities. For example, to him, Division of labour or social differentiation fulfils certain needs.

A.R. Radcliffe-Brown understands the term 'Function' as a 'necessary condition of existence'. He differentiates 'activity' from 'function'. He was influenced by Durkheim and contends that - Function is the contribution which a partial activity makes to the total activity, of which it is a part.

Bronislaw Kasper Malinowsky, the father of sociological functionalism, studied Australian aboriginal families of Trobriand island of Melanesia. His study holds function and unity of culture as the basis of social integration and - social structure. To him, the word function is almost synonymous with the word 'use' or 'utility'. It is the specific arrangements of its parts, the place that each element occupies and the way in which all the elements are linked together - these make each culture original and specific. To him, no cultural form survives unless they constitute responses to individual and social needs. All these are written in his article - 'culture', which is considered as the 'manifesto of functionalism'.

To Malinowsky, cultural traits exist in society because these satisfy psychological, technical, economic or cultural needs of the individuals and society, which help in the maintenance and continuity of the social structure. So, in order to understand 'social structure' he starts with the functional approach, i.e., function of each cultural elements towards the system.

R.K. Merton however, criticises earlier functionalists and develops his own idea of 'function', which encompasses various possibilities - having heuristic value. To Radcliffe-Brown, it is condition, in which all parts and elements of the social system work together for the perpetuation of the social structure. Merton criticises, this notion of 'functional unity of society'. To Merton, degree of integration is an empirical variable. Malinowsky understands that, all standardized cultural forms have positive function for the existence of social structure. Historically, functionalism came from the theory of survival.

Merton clarifies that instead of attributing function to each element, we can talk about a third possibility i.e., 'non-functional'. Thirdly, he talks about the indispensability of cultural item. But the question arises as to whether cultural item is indispensable or the function of it is indispensable. Merton finds that

the one and the same cultural item may have multiple functions e.g., social solidarity can be maintained not only by the universal cultural item of 'Religion' but in non-religious societies, it may be maintained by Law and Morality etc. Thus, it is proved that the cultural item of 'Religion' is not indispensable for the maintenance of social structure. His idea of functional 'alternative', 'equivalent' and 'substitute' is important.

Another important contribution in his functional analysis is the concept of 'dysfunction'— another possibility, which was hardly emphasized by earlier functionalists. Earlier anthropologists view society as 'static'. But, with the introduction of this concept of 'dysfunction', Merton talks about social dynamics and change. To him, "The concept of dysfunction, which implies the concept of strain, stress and tension on the structural level, provides an analytical approach to the study of dynamics and change".<sup>13</sup>

The structural functional approach at this analytical point takes us near to the second approach to the understanding of social structure, which in the sociological jargon is known as Conflict or the Dialectical approach.

13. R.K. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure (Amerind Publishing Company Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1968 enlarged edition) p.107.

There is a rich tradition of conflict Approach in sociological literature, which may even be stretched beyond the formal founding of sociology, as an academic discipline. It stems out from the simple universal principle - No two persons are alike either physically or in intelligence. Thus, one in order to excel the other, must enter in competition, which results in superiority vis-a-vis inferiority of status. Conflict between these status holders becomes unavoidable; conflict is ubiquitous.

However, the major contribution to this approach is made by Karl Marx. Marx takes 'conflict' and 'class struggle' as the point of departure for understanding social structure and its growth and development. The first sentence of "The Communist Manifesto" starts with <sup>the</sup> history of Class Struggle. He identifies conflict in the economic structure, which he calls the base or infra-structure, because men enter into competition for the satisfaction of the basic needs. The infra-structure in turn determines and shapes the super-structure i.e. the non-economic structures. The process of change is geared up in a society by the conflict and change in the economic structure. Thus, to Marx, conflict and change are the essential co-relates, which must be analysed, in order to understand social structure.

Thus, sociologists present us with two contradictory approaches to the study of social structure.

Neither of these two approaches can be totally accepted. Protagonists of both the approaches, are in the face of strong criticism, because their ideas are based on sweeping generalizations, ignoring each and every possibility. This is the reason why readers are presented with extremely contradictory theories. Thus, these theories get the status of middle range theories rather than grand unified theory.

Structure-Functionalists have put too much emphasis on unity, harmony and functional integration; thereby depicting in each society an utopian situation of equality, peace, stability, harmonious relation between groups, roles and institutions forgetting the possibility of inequality and social disequilibrium. Thus, it is hyperbolic. While on the other hand, conflict approach is based on conflict, contradiction and antagonism which operationalise the social system. Not only the social system, at a particular point of time, but even social change and development is understood as a product of conflict between individuals and between groups. 'Harmony' is thoroughly discarded in this approach.

Both these approaches are one-sided. Because, 'function' and 'conflict' are equally important and work for social reality. Thus, the present social structure will be studied with a pluralistic conceptual frame i.e., with a combination of both structure-functional and conflict approaches, as supplementary to each other.



## OBJECTIVES OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The present study is an outcome of a microscopic empirical study conducted in a neatly represented Assamese Muslim village - Dakaidol in the district of Goalpara. The study was conducted in a Goalpara village because historically, politically, geographically, demographically and culturally, this frontier district of Assam has been occupying a significant position so far Muslim contact and their influence are concerned. Such a representative settlement exhibits a number of salient features as part of the social structure. Attempts are to study the features such as :

(a) Village economy as a part of the social system is proposed to be studied. It is the pivot around which a host of social relations revolve. Agricultural economy encompasses a wide range of social relationships. Agricultural economy vis-a-vis social relations offer an interesting study.

Readings of secondary materials inter alia gives us the picture that social and economic status of the Assamese Muslims coincided in the past. Study of the relationship among different groups to land, the economic role of the social groups and the emergence of the non-agricultural occupations in a rural area; the variety of non-agricultural occupations and the mode of participation of each member to the respective economy will focus on the social structure. A contemporary Indian village is not only a unit of production and consumption but a unit of

distribution too. At the same time, all the requirements cannot be produced locally. So, villages are interdependent. The present socio-economic structure in the context of change, is proposed to be studied.

(b) Family: This is the basic unit of social structure. Study of the types and functions of family becomes important, because activities of the members of the family interlock them with different kinds of institutions in the society, in terms of their various functions, such as social, economic, political, religious and cultural.

(c) Study of kinship and patterns of marital relationship is also important, as it is the another important aspect of a human settlement. The base of the family is determined by these factors. To Bottomore, "Kinship is supremely important in primitive societies. It is a chief factor in maintaining social unity, and it constitutes the framework, within which the individual is assigned economic and political functions, acquires rights and obligations, receives community aid, etc. Usually, therefore, "the most effective way to study the social structure of a primitive society is to begin with the analysis of Kinship".<sup>14</sup> This however, does not mean that Kinship is not an important factor in modern or urban

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14. T.B. Bottomore, Sociology : A Guide to Problems and Literature (Blacki and Son (India) Ltd., Bombay, 1962) p.179.

society. The fact is that its impact and role differs in degree, in rural and urban areas. Thus, nature of functioning of these basic facts of life is proposed to be studied in the rural setting. Kinship is the basic organizing principle and it enters in all the aspects of social life. Besides being the determinant of status and role, the extent of Kinship relations, over space will depict a settlement in a network of settlements, i.e. its relation with the neighbouring areas and will help us to understand, not only the concept of an 'isolated village' but also the process of expansion of social and economic frontiers.

(d) Rituals, ceremonies and festivals are other important features, of a rural society, This is proposed to be studied at two levels: Firstly at the individual personal level and secondly, at the societal level. The Durkhiemian notion of sociological significance of religion, as a factor for promoting co-operation, harmony, fellow-feeling, integration and as a regulator of human behaviour, for the greater interest of the society is proposed to be understood.

(e) Village authority system appears to be another important element which is responsible for guiding and controlling the people and thereby maintaining social order- all according to the accepted patterns. Traditional control of religion and Kinship are significant in the village social life. In Indian democratic set up, usually the qaon

panchayat is the custodian of power at the lower level. The village is the last link in the process of 'democratic decentralization'. The control of the society, will be examined at two levels: viz.,

i. The factors that determine leadership.

ii. Secondly, the functions of the village panchayat will be examined, keeping in mind the desired objectives of these, as outlined in the National Plan Policies. Thus, both the indirect and direct means of social control will be analysed.

(f) Another important aspect of the village life is the status and hierarchy of the social groups. Authors like G. Ansari, M.K.A. Siddiqui, Imtiaz Ahmed among many others, have highlighted the situation that, Muslim society in different regions of the country got stratified into multilayer, caste-like pyramidal structure, which is modelled on the Hindu caste system. Ansari writes, "Since the Indian caste system is basically a Hindu phenomenon ... and since the Indian Muslims of immigrant origin have merely borrowed it, the Muslim caste attitude in social behaviour is not as rigid as found among Hindus".<sup>15</sup>

Leela Dube examines this system of inter-dependent, hierarchically graded groups among the Muslims in India

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15. G. Ansari. op.cit., p.52.

and the system is conditionally termed as "caste-analogues"<sup>16</sup>. Irshad Ali has identified caste-like groups among Assamese Muslims also.

Thus, the phenomenon of social division will be examined at two levels. Firstly, at the behavioural level, as an organizing principle of social structure and secondly, the behavioural situations will be examined in the context of the ideological notion of prescribed egalitarianism. The gap between practical and ideal situation will be identified.

(g) The Assamese Muslims coreside with the non-Assamese Muslims, so their relation with them will also be examined. This will help us to understand the social structure of the Assamese Muslims. Thus, their relationships with the Bengali Muslims and Hindustani Muslims at social, economic, cultural and political levels will be examined.

(h) Culture of the little tradition as a product of the cross-fertilization of Indo-Islamic and indigenous civilization is proposed to be studied. The relationship between the Assamese Muslims and the larger community will be studied at the two situations :

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16. Leela Dube, "Caste Analogues among the Laccadive (Lakshadweep) Muslims" in Irtiaz Ahmed, Caste and Social Stratification among Muslims in India (South Asia Books, New Delhi, 1973) p.57.

(i) Islamic influence on the lives of the locals and (ii) Local i.e., Hindu and tribal influence on the lives of the Muslims. Thus, overt cultural behaviour, norms, values, level of exposure to the outside world etc., are proposed to be studied.

#### SOURCES OF DATA

Data for the thesis were collected from both primary and secondary sources. First hand data were collected from the fifty household heads, in the carefully selected representative Assamese Muslim Goalpara-village - Dakaidol. In order to understand the social relationship existing between Assamese Muslims and Bengali Muslims, data were collected from fifty Bengali household heads. The size of the sample was comparatively less there, and that was due to the objective of the study. Attempt was not to study the social structure of the Bengali Muslims but to understand their willingness or unwillingness to merge with the Assamese Muslim society. These fifty respondents belong to two Bengali Muslim villages neighbouring the Assamese Muslim village.

Data were not collected from any non-Muslim respondent. To understand the inter-relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims, general experience coupled with secondary source materials are used. Few indigenous elderly persons including the Vice-President of the Gaon Panchayat

Caretaker of the Shrine (details follow) were particularly interviewed in the village, who specifically narrated the history of the village. Family ceremonies were attended and local markets and nearby areas were visited.

Secondary or documentary source materials available in the English, Assamese and Bengali languages were consulted in North-Eastern Hill University Library, State Central Library at Shillong, North-Eastern Council Library, Shillong, Gauhati University Library, District Library, Guwahati; Assam Statistical Office, Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies and Assam Secretariat Library, Guwahati. In the district of Goalpara, materials were collected from Census Office, Office of the Mahakuma Parishad, Office of the Deputy Commissioner, Department of Statistics and from the Sub-Divisional Library.

Besides these Books, records and documents available in the personal files with the local writers were consulted and their knowledge on the problems were sought for consideration. For this purpose, a visit was made to Bongaigaon to consult with the Principal of the Bongaigaon College, who had written extensively on Goalpara. With the similar interest in mind, a school Inspector and literateur was also consulted. Suggestions offered by those writers particularly proved helpful in the study.

## METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected from the respondents through Interview Schedules which were written in Assamese. Standardized questions were included for the purpose of quantification. It has to be mentioned at the outset that the first-hand information, had to be collected through the help of various techniques. The well developed techniques of Research Methodology could not be followed at all the times and the elements of the techniques were adjusted in order to suit the demands of the situations.

The Interview Schedules included questions on opinion and facts in multiple choice and check list. It was hardly possible to write the answers to the questions on the Schedules in the presence of the respondents. In the village, establishment of 'rapport' and discussions were possible, in the absence of paper and pen. So, in majority of the cases, the schedules were used more as Interview Guides. In the majority of the cases data were written after coming back from the houses of the respondents, immediately or within two to three hours, in the absence of the respondents. In some cases, the diary also could not be used to jot down points and, therefore, had to rely solely on memory. Of course, there were few chances where the villagers themselves advised the researcher to jot down points and cautioned that 'memory is likely to fail'. Thus, few schedules could be filled up in the village itself.

The features of homogeneity aided to relate some of the features of the village life. While in some cases responses could be jotted down making use of the time spent by the respondent in his/her blinking of eyes and in yawning etc. I fully agree with Paulin V. Young and my field experiences coincide to the following: "Some of the students, who used the interview first, noticed that, after informants were given a schedule or self-administered questionnaire, they indicated a loss of interest and a change in the warm relationship that had previously obtained. Under these conditions some students reported a marked decrease in respondents' articulateness and a pronounced, desire to end the questioning as soon as possible".<sup>17</sup> Realising those problems, every effort was made to acquire the responses in a natural situation; without disturbing the rapport established, - by the use of paper and pen

As a silent spectator, only the manifest function of a particular event could be understood. So, in order to understand both manifest and latent meaning or to use Merton's wordings of subjective disposition and objective consequences- it was attempted to observe and question them, to get the proper meaning of events.

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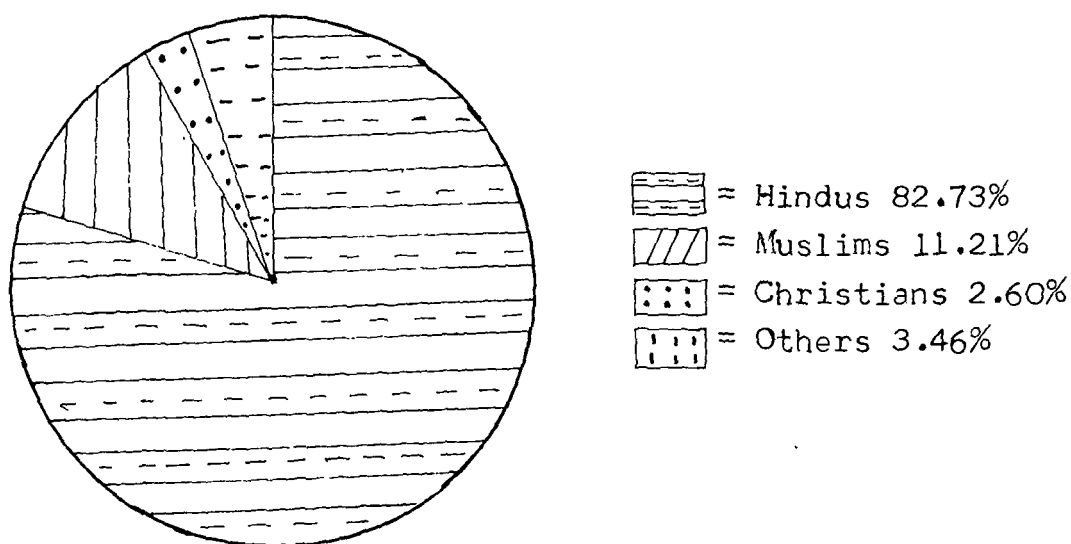
17. P.V. Young, Scientific Social Survey and Research  
(Prentice Hall of India Pvt. Ltd., 1979) p. 25.

## SELECTION OF THE FIELD

According to the Census of India 1971, there were 24.56% Muslims in Assam to the total population.<sup>18</sup>

However, the Assamese Muslims are concentrated only in the Brahmaputra Valley districts. This percentage ranks Assam as the second highest Muslim populated state of the Indian Union, only next to Jammu and Kashmir. The distribution and spread of the Muslims show a degree of concentration in the different parts of the Brahmaputra Valley.<sup>19</sup>

Diagram No. I Pie-chart, showing Religion-wise Division of India's population, 1971 Census of India



18. Census of India 1971. General Report, Series - 3, Part 1-A, Assam, p.31.

19. B.M. Das et al. "The Assamese Muslims: Their Physical Features" in Journal of the Department of Anthropology (Gauhati University, Gauhati, 1980, No.6) p. Preface.

Diagram No.II Pie-chart showing Religion-wise Division of Assam's Population, Census of India, 1971

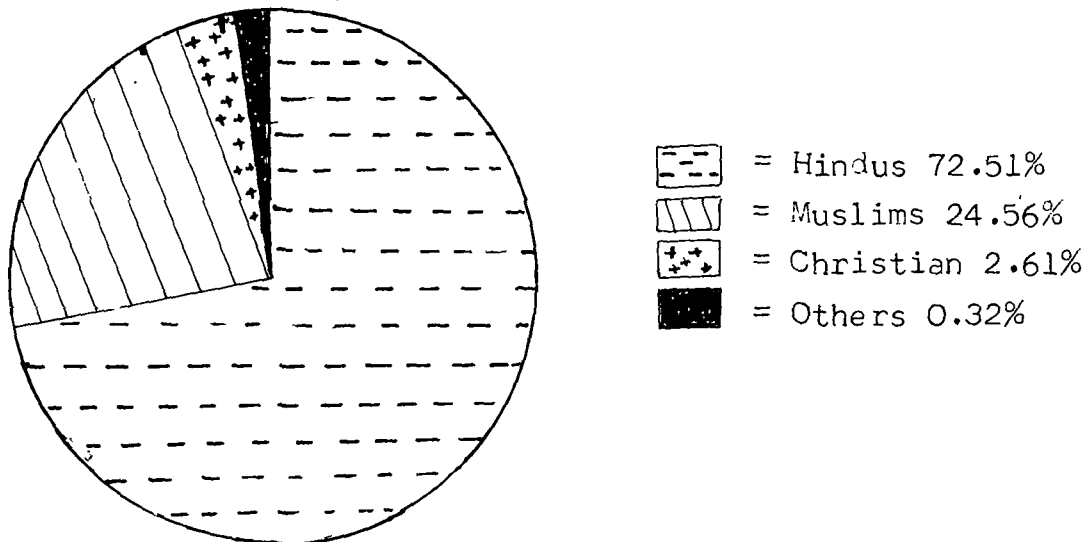


Table No.I \*

Proportion of followers of Hinduism and Islam in Assam according to 1971 Census (District-wise break-up)  
 Percentage of Muslims according to 1971 Census is 24.56% (including Karbi Anglong, Cachar, North Cachar and Mizoram)

State District	Total	% of Hindus	% of Muslims
Assam	100	72.51	24.56
Goalpara	100	53.92	42.25
Kamrup	100	69.96	28.93
Darrang	100	78.45	16.19
Nowgong	100	59.70	39.39
Sibsagar	100	92.22	5.27
Dibrugarh	100	92.41	3.09
Lakhimpur	100	89.57	7.54
Karbi Anglong		Not necessary for our present analysis as we are concerned with the Brahmaputra Valley districts only.	
North Cachar			
Cachar			
Mizoram			

\* Source: Census of India, 1971 (Series-3, Part 1A, Annual Report Assam, Table VIII. 2) p.94

The above table brings to light the highest percentage of Muslims in the district of Goalpara which is 42.25% to the total population. Incidentally, this is more than the state's Muslim percentage of population. Demographically, being the reservoir of a good number of Assam's Muslim population, the district of Goalpara was selected for the study. Because of its geographical location Goalpara came into recorded Muslim contact as early as in the thirteenth century. A Goalpara village is selected, by assuming the existence of an oldest Muslim settlement there.

Table II \*

District-wise Rural Urban distribution of Assam's Muslim Population. Census of India 1971 -

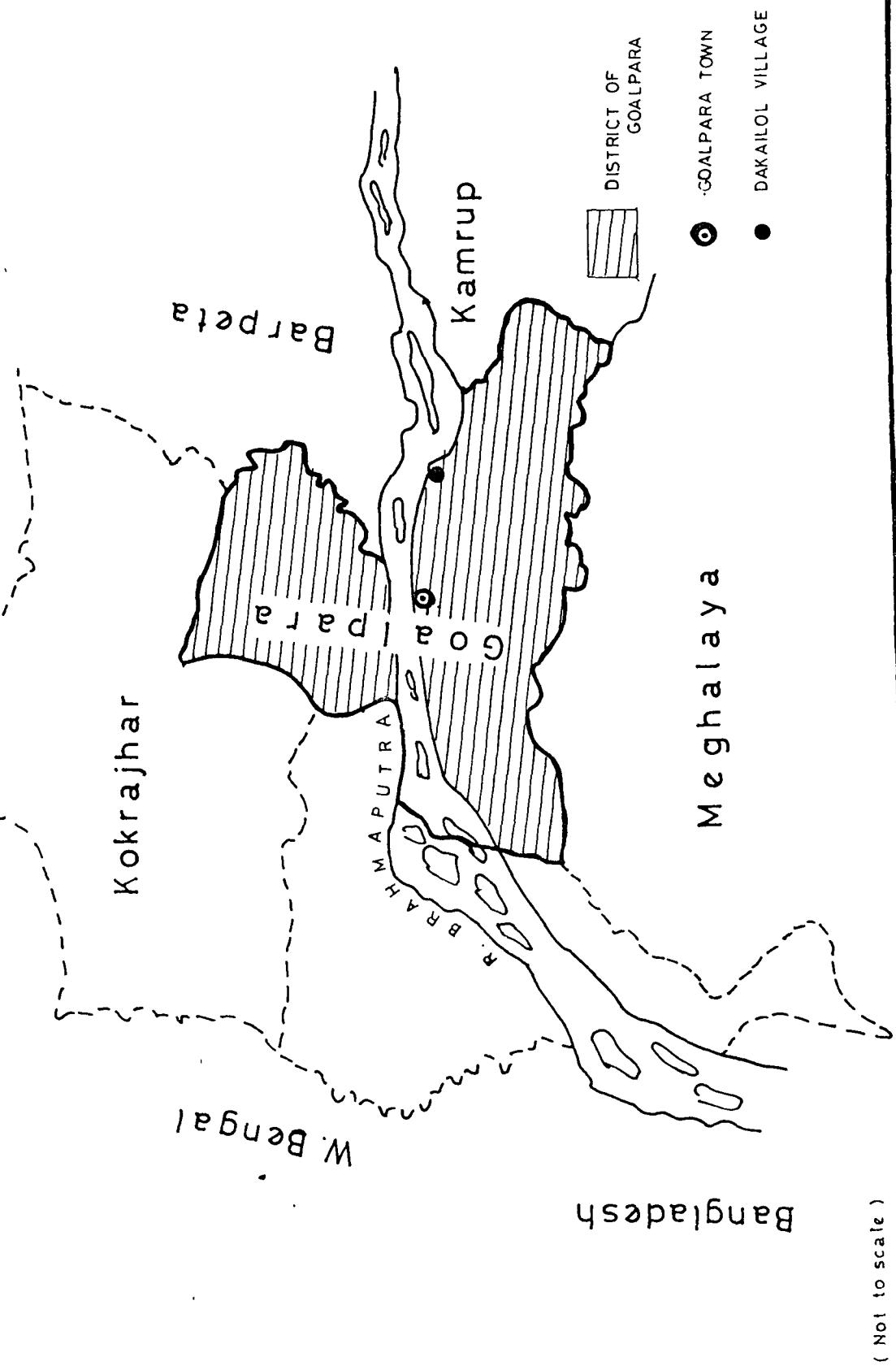
State/District	Total	Rural	Urban	Muslims	% of Muslims	
					Rural	Urban
Assam	100	91.18	8.82	24.56	25.85	11.21
Goalpara	100	92.26	7.74	42.25	44.26	18.32
Kamrup	100	88.26	11.74	28.93	31.75	7.72
Darrang	100	94.02	5.98	16.19	16.70	8.14
Nowgong	100	92.90	7.10	39.39	41.48	12.10
Sibsagar	100	91.58	8.42	5.27	4.62	12.34
Dibrugarh	100	83.88	16.12	3.09	1.99	8.83
Lakhimpur	100	96.44	3.56	7.54	7.11	19.18
Karbi Anglong						
North Cachar						
Cachar						
Mizoram						

Not necessary for our present analysis

Note: It is striking to note that percentage of rural Muslim population is higher in Lower and Central Brahmaputra Valley districts while the percentage of the urban Muslim population is higher in the Upper Brahmaputra Valley districts viz., Sibsagar, Dibrugarh, and Lakhimpur.

\* Source: Census of India 1971, General Report, Assam. Table IV 2 and VIII.1) pp.63,93,94. Goalpara comprised of Goalpara, Dhubri, and Kokrajhar sub-divisions. In 1983, the three sub-divisions were upgraded to districts.

THE PRESENT DISTRICT OF GOALPARA WITHIN THE BOUNDARY  
 OF THE ERSTWHILE DISTRICT OF  
 GOALPARA ( Prior to 1983. )



( Not to scale )

Map II

In 1971, 91.18% to the total population in Assam consisted of rural dwellers and only 8.82% to the total population consisted of urban dwellers. Three-fourth or 78.06% of the working population was engaged in agricultural activities and the rest was engaged in non-agricultural activities. It is significant to note that the composite state of Assam had only one class I town of Guwahati. There were twenty four class IV towns and Goalpara was one of those class IV towns with a population of 16,703. It had a Municipality to govern it and functionally it was a service-cum-trade and commerce centre.

#### FIELD WORK : ENCOUNTER AND EXPERIENCE

Dakaidol is situated 10 k.m. south East to the Goalpara town (Map No.II). It was just a coincidence that the maidservant of my host at Goalpara belonged to this particular village. She provided a tremendous assistance to overcome my diffidence and establish my existential among the villagers. The nature of her assistance was so great that writing a report on my fieldwork can never be complete without appreciating her role.

For the first time I went to the village in

October 1985 when secondary materials from local writers and local offices were collected. An initial survey of the village was made. This was followed by the actual data collection in January 1986 - in the off agricultural season. While writing the final draft of this thesis the area of study was visited once again in December 1987 with a view to clear up certain doubts.

To my bitter experience and sad surprise, dry lands could be seen in the village. Moreover, the village was visited in the off-agricultural season. Broken huts; (with a few exceptions) and broken hearts, misery and suffering - are the mark of the village life. India is a land of villages and prosperity of the country depends on the prosperity of the villages. But the villages are replete with poverty. The country is progressing notably in scientific space research while the gamut of the country's population are living below the poverty line.

The first problem lies in my unmarried status coupled with the educational background. An Assamese Muslim unmarried female researcher pursuing with village study was looked upon with a mixture of feelings - surprise, sympathy, encouragement, occasional pity and at times, affection.

An attempt was always made to win friends and

co-operation of the villagers. Besides being well behaved to seek friends, some measures were evolved. I carried a camera with me, donated in the shrine, distributed chocolate to the children .. all were done to go closer to them. Situations were photographed for better memorization. M.N.Srinivas tells us as how these petty gestures help one to win friends. He says,

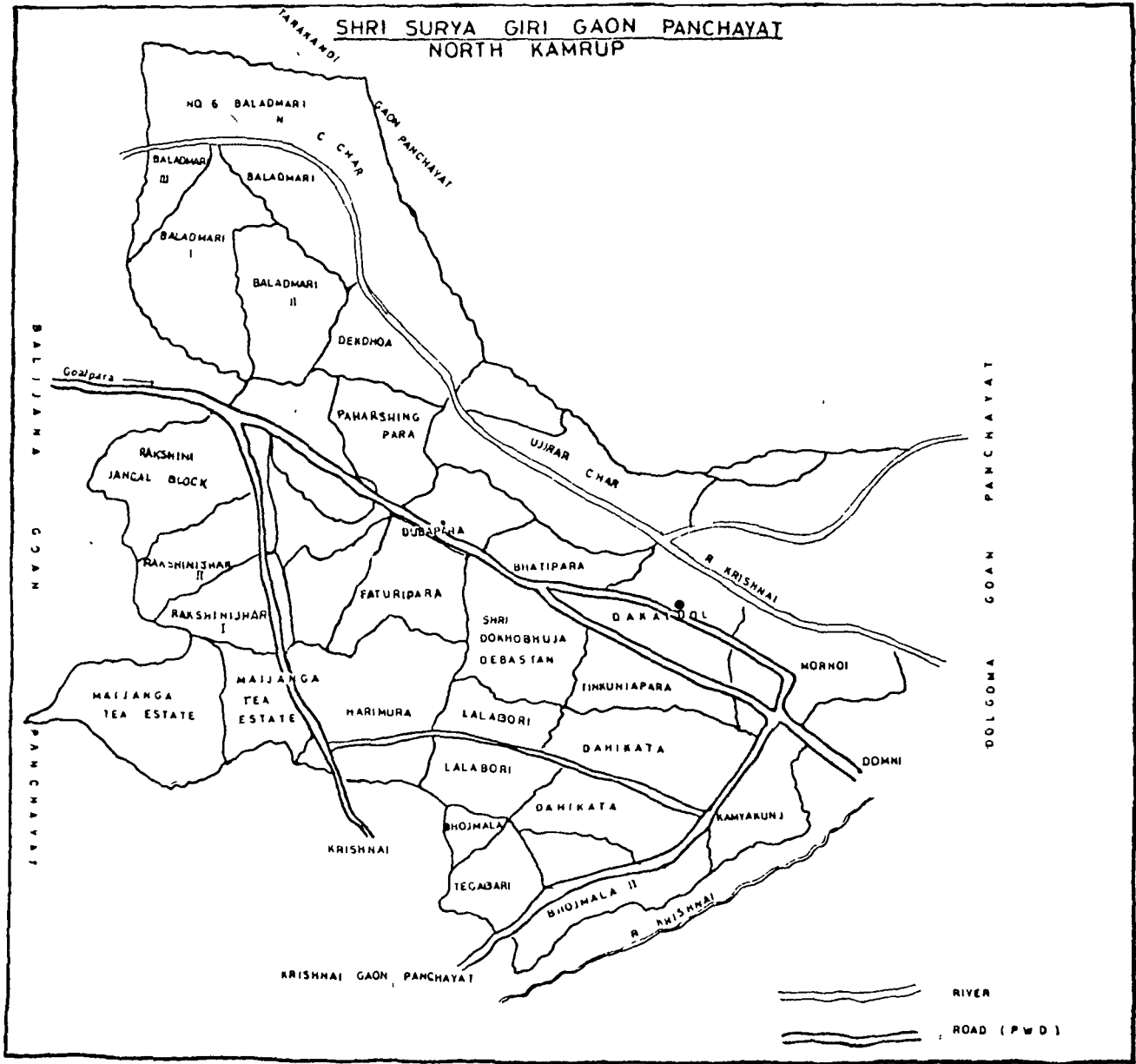
Like every other anthropologists I had taken a medicine chest with me to the village, and it proved to be a boon. I dispensed medicines to villagers complaining of headache, flu or malaria, I had a supply of ointments and bandages for those suffering from cuts, bruises and boils. A few villagers complimented me on the 'power' of my medicines and added that the village Doctor did not have them .<sup>20</sup>

Throughout the field study, I was accompanied by atleast two of my close relatives and worked under their 'protective umbrella'. We used to reach the village around 8-30 in the morning and return before nightfall. My happiness was due to the fact that the gap between the researcher and the respondents could be bridged to a satisfactory extent.

Few words on the then prevailing (January 1986) political situation deserve mention. The long years of turmoil for deporting the foreign nationals from Assam subdued for the moment and the election to the Assam

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20. M.N. Srinivas. The Remembered Village (Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1976) p.19.



Map III .

Source: Available in the Mohokuma Parishad Office, Goalpara.

Assembly could be held. In the state 'Assam Gana Parishad' (A.G.P.) became the ruling party while the 'United Minority Front' candidate returned from that constituency, to which the village belongs. In such a situation I was often misunderstood as a spying agent of AGP - the ruling party. This doubt had to be satisfactorily cleared up through several answers before I could establish my status as a 'clean' social researcher.

Initially, the whole problem was narrated to the Vice-President of the then dissolved 'Shri Surya Giri Village Panchayat' under which the village falls (Map No.III). Being a resident of Dakaidol, his contribution was significant. He organized for an informal meeting of the elderly persons of the village in his residential courtyard, where the problem was narrated and assistance was sought. During the study I was often misunderstood as a social worker and a person to whom they could articulate their grievances with the hope that, that would ultimately percolate to the grant giving authority or to the Government.

I have enough to share with Veena Dua who writes, "The problem which bothered me most during fieldwork was the fact of my being a women, and that too an unmarried

one".<sup>21</sup> Because of my single marital status the movement was restricted. Most of the female researchers have returned from the field with same experience. Leela Dube says, "An unmarried woman travelling alone in these areas was unconceivable to the people. I, therefore, decided to conduct my field investigations under the protective umbrella of my father-in-law".<sup>22</sup>

Being a member of the Muslim community, I got a chance to study an insight stimulating case. We were invited to attend a Jiafat (rites performed at the fortieth day of the deceased). Social significance of religion could be thoroughly and clearly understood, which is discussed in chapter V of this thesis.

Finally, it can be remarked that, fruitful understanding of any area, rural or urban is possible with practical experiences only. One comes across diverse possibilities, exceptions and experiences in the encounter which help one to understand a problem in totality. Secondary source materials can only supplement

21. Veena Dua. "A Woman's encounter with Arya Samaj and untouchables: A Slum in Jullundur" in M.N.Srinivas et al. (ed.) The Field Worker and the Field: Problems and Challenge in Sociological Investigation (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1979) p.120.

22. Leela Dube. "Womens' World - Three Encounters" in Andre Beteille and T.N.Madan (ed.). Encounter and Experience Personal Accounts of Fieldwork (Vikas Publishing Agency, Delhi, 1975) p.157.

the writing. About the experiences in the field Anand Chakravarti has pointed out, "Fieldwork is a personal experience for it involves close interaction with the subjects of one's research. Every fieldworker has therefore to arrive at his own equation with his informants. There can be no clear-cut, prescribed formula for handling any given situation, for each situation is unique".<sup>23</sup> About the uncertainty, it is written, "Fieldwork is an amalgam of methodological rigour and the unpredictable consequences of the personality of the observer".<sup>24</sup>

#### ISLAM : THE RELIGION

'Islam' means 'Resignation to the will of God'.<sup>25</sup>

The Arabic word 'Al-Islam' means 'The Surrender' to Allah.<sup>\*26</sup> One who submits to Allah is called a Muslim (Muslima if female).<sup>27</sup> The essence of Islam is for 'Peace'.  
The religion had its root in West Central Arabian desert,

23. Anand Chakravarti. "Experiences of an Uncaptulated Observer: A Village in Rajasthan" Art. in M.N. Srinivas et al. (ed.) op.cit., p.39.

24. Cited in Idem.

25. Thomas Patrick Hughes. Dictionary of Islam (A Cyclopaedia of the Doctrines, Rites, Ceremonies etc. of the Islamic Tradition, Cosmos Publications, New Delhi, 1982, First English print 1885) p.220.

\* Allah, the God in Islam, one, who is qualified by the qualities of Lordship, entitled to the divine attributes.

26. Md. Marmaduke Pickthall. The Meaning of the Glorious Koran (A Mentor Book, New American Library, New York 1954) Surah V. III) p.96.

27. F.M. Denny. An Introduction to Islam (Mc Millan Publishing Company, New York, 1985) p.74.

where the then prevailing socio-historical upheavals had to be turned to peace.

The religion of Islam with its 'belief in one God' emerged as a distinct faith and was produced before the humanity by the Prophet Muhammad towards the early seventh century A.D. Of course Prophet Muhammad was not to be credited for the establishment of Monothesim. He was just a codifier who reiterated the existing notion of one God. About the origin of monothesim, M.A. Karandikar writes, "The earliest known reference of monothesim is found in the ancient Egyptian hymn in praise of the great God Amon. The hymn is considered to be 3000 years old".<sup>28</sup>

The religion has borrowed much of its principles from Judaism and Christianity. "Islam the religion is a system of beliefs and practices initially revealed by Allah to Muhammad, enshrined in the Arabic Koran, supplemented by tradition, and modified through the ages in response to changes in time and place. A historical offshoot of Judaism and Christianity, it is most closely related to them".<sup>29</sup>

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28. M.A. Karandikar, Islam in India's Transition to Modernity (Orient Longman, Bombay, 1968) p.1.

29. P.K. Hitti, Islam a Way of Life (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1970) p.2.

Islam is not only a religion but Islamism is a way of life too. It has three main aspects, viz., religious, political and cultural. A Muslim derives guidance in life from the Koran\* and the Hadith. Pickthall writes, "Al-Fatihah, "The opening", or Fatihatu'l-Quran, "The Essence of the Qoran", as it is variously named, has been called the Lord's prayer of the Muslims. It is an essential part of all Muslim worship, public and private, and no solemn contract or transaction is complete unless it is recited".<sup>30</sup> (Surah I).

Shariah is the Islamic code of life; and Sunnah means the words and the deeds of the prophet, which are compiled in the Hadith, during and after his death, by his followers, which includes his associates too. Due to this fact, the Koran is 'one' while the Hadith are 'many' - with little variations. Every good Muslim is expected to think and act according to the dictates of the Koran and the Hadith.

A good Muslim is supposed to stand on the five pillars of Islam. These include: bearing witness that there is one God and recital of the five basic Kalima or creed;

\* Koran, also written as Quran.

30. Md. M. Pickthall. op.cit., p.31.

Performing Namaj or daily prayer; Roza, observing fast in the whole month of Ramadan (the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar); Hajj or making the pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca;\* (Map No.1); Zakat or giving alms to the poor.

The simplicity and magnitude of the religion was so great that, it did not take much time to spread over from the Arabian Penninsula to India (Map No.1) and likewise it crept over to the other parts of the World. To-day, the World's Muslim population accounts to be one hundred and seventy five millions, which is divided into two distinct sects, viz., Shiah and Sunni.\*\* The numerical strength of each group, becomes evident, from the following statement- "... according to Wilfrid Blunt's estimate the Shiah sect only numbers some ten millions out of the one hundred and seventy five millions of the Muhammadans in the World".<sup>31</sup>

#### ISLAM : ITS ESSENCE

About the basic tenets of Islam, Yogendra Singh writes,

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\* Mecca : the cradle of Islam.

\*\* Shiah : followers of Hazarat Ali, Son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad.

Sunni : Followers of Prophet Muhammad.

31. T.P. Hughes, op.cit., p. Preface.

Islam has no clergy, as any Muslim may lead a congregation in prayer. Similarly in ideal-typical form Islam has a more developed orientation towards the holistic principle in its conception of social order than even Hinduism. The holistic principle in Hinduism is derived from the primacy of the normative order (dharma) which is internally differentiated and hierarchized in socio-cultural manifestations. In Hinduism the principle of holism is a co-ordinate of the principle of hierarchy.<sup>32</sup>

On the other hand, such views are not rare, which consider Islam as outmoded and belonging to the remote past. It is due to the fact that, unfortunately, the religion is thoroughly misunderstood. We read Md.Qutb, who compiles the views of the missionaries of Islam as,

Islam is not a mere creed, nor does it represent simply an edification of souls, or a refinement and training of human virtues but is rather a harmonious whole that also includes a just economic system, a well-balanced social organization, code of civil, criminal as well as international law, a philosophical outlook upon life along with a system of physical instruction, all of these flowing from the same fundamental creed of Islam and its moral and spiritual temperament .<sup>33</sup>

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32. Y. Singh, Modernization of Indian Tradition (Thomas Press, Haryana, 1973) p.63.

33. Md. Qutb. Islam : The Misunderstood Religion (Board of Islamic Publications, Delhi, Second Edition, 1982) p.Preface.

## MUSLIMS IN INDIA

None can deny the fact that the Muslims could intrude upon the Indian sub-continent because they brought with them a humanitarian but simple religion coupled with their interest in trade and politics. Gradually, millions of Indians got attracted to its fold. A reflection to the history gives the date of India's first Muslim contact in 650 A.D. Thus, it occurred as early as in the seventh century, "when the Arab ships made certain raids on the coast of Bombay and Sind. These raids were primarily directed towards plunder".<sup>34</sup>

However, the first organized attack took place in 712 A.D. when Muhammad, son of Quasim, Governor of Persia, invaded Sind.<sup>35</sup> But, "the force of this Arab movement on the western frontier was exhausted when it reached the Indus Valley".<sup>36</sup> After this retreat, India was free from Muslim attack till the late tenth century. It again started in tenth century with the rise of a Turkish Kingdom

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34. Ghaus Ansari. Muslim Caste in Uttar Pradesh (Ethnographic and folk culture society, Lucknow, 1960) p.24.

35. Cited in Jafar Sharif. Islam in India or Qanun-i-Islam translated by G.A. Herklots (Curzon Press, London, 1921) pp.4-5.

36. Ibid., p.5.

in Ghazni and "a fresh series of attacks were launched against Indian territories by these Muslim Turks".<sup>37</sup> These Turks were the early converts to Islam.

The Muslims form the country's second major religious community; numerically with 11.21% (to the total population) against 82.73% of Hindus, it forms a minority community.<sup>38</sup> 11.21% Muslims or 61,418,269 souls may be divided into two categories. They are: (a) A small group, who are the descendants of the foreign warriors, traders, and preachers. These people, on the other hand, are the product of the cross fertilization of foreign fathers and Indian mothers. Thus, in due course the offspring lost the foreign blood in their veins. (b) The majority are the local converts predominantly from low caste Hindus and aboriginal tribals, who might have been devoid of Arabian blood.

#### STATUS OF THE INDIAN MUSLIMS

Much has been written on the status and conditions of this minority community in India. Thinkers

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37. G. Ansari. op.cit., p.25.

38. The Times of India. Directory and Year Book 1980-81 p.272.

are divided on this point. Some thinkers are of the opinion that, in India Hindus and Muslims have equal status. It is believed that "historically as well as in magnitude, Islam is an important and sociologically very meaningful culture tradition in India".<sup>39</sup> Majority of the community are recruits from the locals. But common experience is that - Muslims in India are not treated on equal terms like that of the Hindus. About the status of Indian Muslims, thinkers like M.N. Roy's remarks deserve special mention. He says, "For the orthodox Hindus who constitute the great majority of the Indian population, the Mussulman, even of noble birth or high education or admirable cultural attainments, is a 'mlechha'-impure barbarian - who does not deserve a social treatment any better than accorded to the lowest of the Hindus".<sup>40</sup> He further writes, "... the prejudice still persists not only as an effective obstacle to national cohesion but also a hindrance for a dispassionate view of history ... No civilized people in the World is so

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39. Yogendra Singh. op.cit., p.56.

40. M.N. Roy. The Historical Role of Islam (Ajanta Publications, Delhi, 1939) pp.2-3.

ignorant of Islamic history and contemptuous of the Muhammadan religion as the Hindus".<sup>41</sup>

Because of their lowly political status, the Muslims in turn, are blamed. According to the Hindu communalists, the low status is due to the fact that the Muslims have not accepted Hindu culture and because of that they are isolated. However, one has enough evidences to show that in the Hindu-Muslim prolonged contact, both the groups have been equally influenced and reciprocally benefited..

Asghar Ali Engineer cautions, "It would be erroneous to maintain that in India Muslims do not partake to indigenous cultural milieu and keep themselves aloof from cultural mainstream".<sup>42</sup> Culturally an Assamese Muslim is different from a Bengali Muslim and a Bengali Muslim is different from a Bihari Muslim. This regional differences make it crystal clear that Islam in India gets an indigenous flavour. Patrilineal Muslim society is even

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41. Ibid., p.3.

42. Asghar Ali Engineer. "The Myth of Mainstream".art. in Point Counterpoint 1985 Vol.I No. II p.48.

adapted to matriliney in the Kalpeni island in the Arabian ocean as depicted by Leela Dube in her study.<sup>43</sup> In fact, the Indian Muslims belong to the Islamic Great Tradition and Indo-Islamic little tradition or the Indianized Islamic tradition.

Islam prescribes unity and brotherhood while Hinduism is based on inequality among the believers. Chidananda Dasgupta says, "Hinduism is a house divided. It was never a religion of brotherhood; all its men are not equal before God. Its religion sanctions, indeed decrees, a frozen social hierarchy. It promotes the separate, if peaceful, co-existence of group identities without admixture".<sup>44</sup>

The upper caste Hindus get polluted not only by touching, but even by seeing a lower caste Hindu or an 'untouchable'. This is the land, where men may be 'untouchable' and need either to cover themselves or not to come out during broad day light - all, to keep the purity of the upper caste intact. Such attitudes have religious

43. Leela Dube. Matriliney and Islam (National Publishing House, Delhi, 1969) p.3.

44. Chidananda Dasgupta. "Diversity in Unity: The Challenge of division and an answer: a National Culture" Art. in Telegraph. Fifth Anniversary supplement, 1987, p.9.

sanctions behind. Hence, it is foolish on the part of the Muslims to expect an equal status with Hindus in Hindu India. The partition of India is mostly blamed for this, but, it cannot be well accepted. Partition just added fuel to the fire. Dasgupta further comments, "Today it has become plentifully obvious that the Hindu-Muslim divide is not the only, not even the most important, separatist axis in the country's psyche. Indeed the time has come to see the 1947 Partition of India as the first of many cracks and seismic faults in the structure".<sup>45</sup>

A glance at the diversity of principles of each system will help better understanding. For example, Hindus practise 'Satee' (burning of the widow in the pyre of her husband) while Muslims practise widow re-marriage. Hinduism prescribes monogamy while Islam prescribes polygyny (limited). Hindus go for infant or child marriage while Islam prohibits it in strong and clear words. Purity and pollution are important and integral part of Hindu society while Islam prescribes 'close up' (with one another), with clarity. The do's and don't's are so clarified that it helps a Muslim to fight against social evils. Likewise

45. Idem.

'cow' is a totemic object for Hindus while beef steak is preferred by Muslims. Hindus prefer leaving a bit of food in the dish while eating, while Islam prescribes licking of the dish and not a single particle of food should be left over. Thus, no human beings are to be blamed for the inferior status of the Indian Muslims. Basic differences in religious, cultural and social elements keep the two communities separate from one another.

#### ISLAM MAKES WAY TO INDIA THROUGH ADJUSTMENTS

A process of reciprocity made the adjustment or adaptation of Muslims in India possible.

Islam as known and practised by Indian Muslims, is not a replica of Islamic society envisioned and given concrete shape by Muhammad; it is conditioned to a great extent by historical and socio-cultural forces operating in the Indian environment. In other words, Indian Muslim society is the product of a prolonged interaction between the Islamic Great tradition and Indo-Islamic Little tradition which is largely based on folk, unwritten customs, conventions and habits handed down from generations. The daily life and behaviour of an average Indian Muslim is governed more by the Indo-Islamic Little tradition than by the Islamic Great tradition .<sup>46</sup>

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46. A.R. Momin. "Muslim Caste: Theory and Practice", Book Review in Economic and Political Weekly (Vol.X No.14, April 5, 1975) p.580.

Islamization, cultural diffusion and acculturation by Indian tradition on the other hand prove the uniqueness of the religion and culture whereby Hindus got attracted and adapted to the cultural elements of the Muslims. The Islamic way of life makes such adaptation possible. Egalitarianism, high status of women, right to education for both sex, alm giving to the poor and handicapped, and such other institutions, synchronize well, with modern scientific principles. The principles of communism and socialism is just a repetition, of what has already been emphasized in Islam. Ramadan, the long month of fasting, inculcates social discipline, moral and emotional control which leads to social control. The significant feature of Hajj, is directed towards strengthening universal brotherhood and fellow-feeling in the congregation of world's Muslim pilgrims at Mecca. Thus, contemporary modern social principles have affinity with Islam.

Emile Durkhiem finds religion as the "worship of society". He rejects the worship of supernatural; it is because, he finds that worship of supernatural object is just an illusion. But, Islam is a religion which propagates worship of supernatural on the one hand and the

activities in the secular life gets its purpose and meaning within the religion. Thus, in Islam, the sacred and the profane are one and the same.

Coming back to the main point again, we see that, the simplicity of the religion and the magnitude of the social arrangements have attracted a multitude of India's population. Conversion into Islam had a magnetic attraction. This becomes evident from the fact that we have rare evidence of use of any direct means for proselytisation. Large scale proselytisation also never took place. Jāfar Sharif writes, "In the early days of Muhammadan rule, compulsion and the pressure of special taxation, particularly the Jizya or poll tax on non-believers during the reign of Aurangzeb, were used to enforce conversion. In the more recent period, direct propaganda seems to have been infrequent".<sup>47</sup> But such notions are controversial because history proves that, the underlying intention for imposing Jizya was not proselytization but to attain a stable land administration system. Commenting on the numerical strength of the Muslims, Jāfar Sharif correlates social customs with higher birth-  

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47. Jāfar Sharif. op.cit., p.2.

rate among Muslims. Unlike Hindus, social customs among Muslims include: widow remarriage, prohibitions regarding early or infant marriage. We can further add, 'Polygyny' as the cause of high birth-rate among Muslims.

Muslims could enter into the country's national life and culture not only due to the simplicity of the religion; but then then prevailing socio-political condition as a 'pull' factor helped such access. Had there been strong opposition from the native rulers, it would not have been possible for Muslims to intrude India. Even if, somehow the Muslims could enter, spread of Islam and Islamism could never be made possible unless the locals embraced it. Because as M.N. Roy says,

No great people with a long history and civilization, can ever succumb easily to foreign invasion, unless the invaders command the sympathy and acquiescence, if not active support, of the masses of the conquered people . . . . Mohammad Ibn Kassim conquered Sindh with the active assistance of the Jats and other agricultural communities oppressed by the Brahmin rulers .48

- is an example.

Liberal attitude of the Muslims to assimilate with the locals, made the path of adjustment, smooth.  
48. M.N.Roy. op.cit., p.81.

Indianization of the intruders and Islamization of the local converts helped in the process of adaptation.

#### RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Today, the Muslims form a part and parcel of the larger Indian society. Thus, in case one decides to uncover the different aspects of the Indian social structure, the Muslims form a significant constituent. However, sociological research on the life of this group of Indians is meagre, as few analytical studies have been conducted so far. Hence, it is imperative to undertake such a study. We agree with Azra Kidwai, "Sociological research on Indian Muslims should be of immense interest as India has provided a homeland for Muslim immigrants over centuries".<sup>49</sup> Thus an attempt is being made to study the social structure of the Indian Muslim society from the Brahmaputra Valley.

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49. Azra Kidwai. "Social Structure of Indian Muslims"  
Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.XII, No.31,  
July 30, 1977.

NATURE OF THE EXISTING LITERATURE  
A REVIEW

Much have been written on the Indian Muslims. However, these contributions mainly come from Historians, Ethnographers, British administrators, Geographers, Philosophers, and Political Scientists. Some of such important studies are mentioned below.

Ja'far Sharif is to be credited for writing a full length volume entitled 'Qanun-I-Islam' which was published in 1921. This original work was made available to the English readers by G.A. Herklots who translated the book into 'Islam-in India'. Ja'far Sharif writes on customs, rites, rituals, social habit of the Muslims in the Deccan Plateau. Each and every ritual performed by the Muslims during Birth, Marriage, Death and in other crisis, are minutely observed by him. He shows very clearly, as how an Indian Muslim is influenced by the Hindu tradition. In order to explain it with clarity he relies on history - He starts with the ethnography. However, it is more historical rather than an analytical sociological study. One would become critical on Herklots' translations to

English of the contents of the book. Because, the very title of the book is not translated into exact English meaning.

In the year 1939, M.N. Roy, a Brahmin of Bengal wrote on the role of Indian Muslims towards Indian tradition, in its historical perspective and published, "The Historical Role of Islam". M.N. Roy's attempt to become value-free and depict the fact of the historical role of the Muslims is significant. He highlights the significant role played by the Muslims on the one hand and the local understanding of the Muslims as 'Mlechha'—impure barbarian on the other hand. He forms the synthesis of the Indian Muslim society in between these two opposite extremes.

This historical study was followed by W.C. Smith's 'Modern Islam in India', published in the year 1940. Smith calls it 'A Social Analysis'. He talks in terms of Intellectual Movements, Political Movement and Organized Theological Groups formed in India by the Indian Muslims. Thus, it covers well the politico-historical aspect of the

Indian Muslims. Being a western writer, his attempt was not to study the inner dynamics of the Muslim society, hence it is far from being sociological.

Tara Chand writes on "Influence of Islam on Indian Culture" in 1946. He describes the cultural influence on various aspects of Indian society. Such types of general studies are available in the existing store of literature. We will however, add some more analytical and sociological studies to this catalogue.

After Independence much have been written on Indian Muslim society. Bound up by their respective aims and objectives, these thinkers have written on one or the other aspect of the social life of the Muslims. Among the aspects, 'Caste and Intercaste Relation' gets prominence. The interest is possibly created by the striking feature of the caste-like groupings existing in the Indian Muslim society, which is otherwise supposed to be non-hierarchized or equal, so far the ideological notion is concerned.

Some of such studies are mentioned here. Raghuraj Gupta writes on 'Caste Ranking and Intercaste Relations among the Muslims of a Village in North-Western U.P.' and published the book in the year 1956. This study makes it clear that the model of caste in Muslim society in India is percolated from the indigenous system. Ansari added almost similar type of study through his publication "Muslim Caste in Uttar Pradesh" in 1960. He shows, how the acculturation with natives is the cause of the development of caste divisions among the Muslims of Uttar Pradesh.

'Muslim Communities in Gujrat' was published by a Historian S.C. Mishra in the year 1964. Striking feature of this study is that, Mishra studied different Muslim communities in Gujrat like, Arab, Ansari, Behlims, Bhands, Bhoi, Chauhan, Dhobi, Maliks and the like. These communities derive their names either from traditional occupation or due to historical growth. This book is partly historical and partly sociological, in the sense that the social organization is discussed in the context of historical development. The close affinity between History and Sociology is reflected in this study.

Similar study was conducted among the Bengali Muslims by Uma Guha and published the work, 'Caste among the Rural Bengali Muslims' in 1965. On the seclusion of Muslim Women Vreede de Steurs Cora authored in 1968, 'Parda - A Study on North Indian Muslim Women'. Leela Dube, however, departs from this trend of study. She travelled to Laccadive and studied the Muslim community of Kelpani island and came back with a new experience of a matrilineal Muslim society which is supposed to be patrilineal. Her work, 'Matriliney and Islam' published in 1969, explains with clarity, that a Indian Muslim society is not only influenced in some aspects but the very structure is shaped by the Indian tradition.

J.N. Sarkar, gives us another type of study in his publication, 'Islam in Bengal' in 1972. This is a study on religion, Under the editorship of T.N. Madan 'Muslim Communities of South Asia : Culture and Society' was published in 1976. This study depicts along with the Asian countries, the society of the Indian Muslims. National, Regional, Ethnic, Social and Sect divisions among the Muslims in Calcutta were studied by M.K.A. Siddiqui. The

outcome of this study is 'Muslims of Calcutta : A Study in Aspects of their Social Organization' in 1974. He identifies the society on the basis of different criteria, as mentioned above. Besides the other segments, the social segments include the system of caste.

Major contributions come from Imtiaz Ahmed, who compiles studies on different Muslim societies, all over the country in his series of volumes. The first volume was published in 1973 entitled, 'Caste and Social Stratification among Muslims in India'. The book incorporates articles on 'Caste-hierarchy in a Meo Village of Rajasthan' by Agarwala, 'Social Stratification among Muslim Tamils in Tamil Nadu' by Mattison Mines; Endogamy and Status Mobility among the Siddiqui Sheikhs of Allahabad' by Imtiaz Ahmed; 'Status and Power in a Muslim dominated Village of Uttar Pradesh' by Zarina Bhatti. Leela Dube gives the concept of 'Caste-analogue' in her article 'Caste Analogues among the Laccadive Muslims' and few others.

Studies on Marriage, Family and Kinship on different Indian Muslim societies by different scholars

get published in the second volume in the series, 'Family Marriage and Kinship among Muslims in India' in 1976. This was followed by the third compiled series, 'Ritual and Religion among Muslims in India' in 1981. This was followed by "Modernization and Social Change among Muslims in India" in 1983.

So far very little sociological studies have been conducted on the Assamese Muslims. Mohini Saikia, in the year 1978 published his valuable work 'Assam- Muslim Relation and its Cultural Significance'. In order to understand 'cultural significance' he goes deeper into history. Relying on history he traces different ways and means through which Islamic culture slowly and gradually penetrates into even the inner aspects of local Assamese society. Numerically being the smaller group, local influence on the Muslims is also significant. The first effect of Muslim invasion resulted in the 'Growth of Muslim Population in Assam'. Appointment of Muslims in different departments of the State, is the important step towards cultural penetration. He finds out the influence of Islam on Literature, Language, Music, Painting and on Assamese

customs and beliefs and shows the local influence on food habits, dress, ornaments, customs beliefs etc. on the Muslims.

A commendable sociological work is made by A.N.M. Irshad Ali. His Ph.D. thesis is on - "Social Relations among the Muslims in Rural and Urban Situation". He studied the groups and social relations existing among the Assamese Muslim communities in three situations - Rural, Peri-urban and Urban. This is a study on the nature and content of Assamese Muslim social life. The quality of social relations which the Muslims maintain with their non-Muslim neighbours is also examined. Social segments like Garia and Maria; and segments like Syed, Sheikh and Maria and their inter-relationship is highlighted. He also discusses on the Bengali Muslim immigration into Assam and formation of the 'Neo-Assamese Muslim Society' by them. Assamese Muslim social life is well depicted in this work.

Irshad Ali, also writes with A.C. Bhagabati in 1971 on 'Family and Kinship among Assamese Muslims' ; 'Occupational Change through Generations among the Assamese

Muslims' in B.M. Das edited, 'Contemporary Anthropological Research in North East India' in 1974' ; 'Hindu-Muslim Relations in Assam' was published in "Man in India" 1979 ; 'Influence of Indigenous Folk Traditions on the Assamese Muslims' was published in "Assam Academy Review" in 1985. He contributed article in Imtiaz Ahmed's "Family Kinship and Marriage among Muslims of India" in 1976. His article on "Kinship and Marriage among the Assamese Muslims", This is a part of his Ph.D. thesis, title of which has already been mentioned. Here, he gives particular interest to this particular and important aspect of social life. He also writes a paper on 'Social groups among the Assamese Muslims'.

Besides these, several articles, novels, papers are published on the Assamese Muslims, by different authors. Abdul Malik, Abdus Sattar, Jamiruddin Ahmed, to name a few, have studied Assamese Muslim society. Though these are not intensive and full length sociological studies yet these provide an important source of secondary materials and guidance for anyone who studies Assamese Muslim social life. The above review makes it clear that though much have been written on the Assamese Muslims, yet the stock has not been enriched by analytical studies, and little

has been done on Assamese Muslim social structure. To get a proper insight into the Assamese Muslim society, intensive fieldwork and collection of first hand information will be desirable.

#### SOME BASIC CONCEPTS AND THEIR OPERATIONALIZATION

In the study of Indian village community an attempt has always been made to analyse it either as 'Little Republics', 'isolated community', 'economically self-sufficient' and so on. Thus, the study on the compactness of the village gets prominence. According to Brij Raj Chauhan, "The issue of unity of village communities has received considerable attention in discussion on the nature of the Indian villages. The discussion easily gets caste-centred..."<sup>50</sup> In order to examine the self-containedness of the village, it will be analysed in the light of nature of self-sufficiency, impact of British Rule in Indian villages; 'Sanskritization', poverty, and new avenues of employment i.e., necessity vis-a-vis new

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50. Brij Raj Chauhan. "Rural Studies" in ICSSR  
A Survey of Research in Sociology and Social  
Anthropology, Volume I (Popular Prakashan,  
Bombay) 1974. p.88.

invention and so on.

Emile Durkhiem's concept of 'solidarity' is also proposed to be analysed. Thus, mechanical solidarity, the nature of collective conscience and the emerging differentiation will be studied to understand the Assamese Muslim social structure.

Another major interest in the field of Indian village study is - the caste and caste principles as the determinant of social structure. Authors have already pointed out the existence of caste like features in the Muslim societies in the country as a whole. This is due to the Hindu impact. For which it cannot be categorically termed as 'caste' but identified as 'caste-like' division, 'social stratification' and 'caste-analogue' etc. An attempt is made to understand, the nature of caste rigidity, principles of purity and pollution and inter-caste relation. These situations will be examined according to the sanctions given in the Islamic religious script.

In the analysis of caste the closely related concept of 'dominant caste'; fulfilment of the criteria of

a caste being dominant, as given by Srinivas; and the nature of dominance, and the nature of acceptance of the power and dominance by the non-dominant groups; and the changes will be examined.

Hindu-Muslim cultural contact and the emergence of the indigenous civilization will be understood by Milton Singer's and Mc Kim Marriott's twin processes of 'universalisation' and 'parochialisation'. Besides these, many other sociologically meaningful concepts of 'Monogamy', 'Polygamy', 'Islamization', 'Assamization', along with the Islamic concepts of kfir (non-believers), Momin (a good Muslim) etc., will be examined in the discussion.

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CHAPTER - II

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VILLAGE INDIA AND THE GROWTH OF THE  
MUSLIM SOCIETY IN ASSAM

RURAL INDIA

'Village' as a unit of social science research is a development of the nineteenth century. In spite of the processes of social change - both directed and non-directed, India continues to be a land of villages inhabited by the reticent people, who strive hard to get two meals a day. Thus, some scholars find the Indian village as isolated, self-contained immutable social system. They put the blame on the rural dwellers for resisting change. Another group of scholars with a practical bend of mind see the villages in the Third World Countries having mutable social systems. Reality shows that community sentiment is more tradition oriented because of which rate of change and progress is not rapid.

The third group of scholars finds Indian village as a unit in the wider network of social, political, cultural and economic relations both at the temporal and spatial levels, thus nullifying the possibility of 'remote', 'isolated', 'self-sufficient' Indian village. These different and extremely contrasting views possibly

depict the Indian villages in different periods of her history. Village studies are conducted in different parts of the World, both in the far west and in Asian countries under the realm of the academic discipline - Rural Sociology. However, reflection on rural life and its problems can be stretched back to the early existence of rural society. A.R. Desai remarks on its development as an academic discipline thus,

It was since about the middle of the nineteenth century that more systematic observations on the history of the origin and transformation of rural society have been advanced. The impact of the capitalist industrial civilization upon the social economy and social structure, in various parts of the world, forced the attention of scholars to the study of the trends of rural social development .<sup>1</sup>

Village studies are conducted not only by sociologists and social anthropologists, but Census Officers, Administrators, Economists, Geographers, Political Scientists and literary men have conducted such studies. They are guided by their respective aims and objectives and studied within the set framework of the discipline. Such studies are conducted both individually and also by a group of researchers ;

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1. A.R. Desai, Rural Sociology in India (Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1969 Reprint. . . . . 1984) p.6.

officially and also on personal interest. Thus, we have single village studies, twin village studies and multiple village studies. Several village studies are also conducted under the heading of 'Peasantry' or 'Peasant Society'.

There is a growing opinion among researchers as highlighted by Biplab Das Gupta, that the

^,..village studies should not limit themselves merely to their research functions, but should in addition act as instruments of change. The researchers should not simply collect data or act as participant observer, but should act as catalyst of change and help in mobilising local initiative and encouraging collective action within the framework of a development programme .<sup>2</sup>

He is however, aware of the dilemma. Those studies, which are financed by government, naturally get influenced by the government in matters of writing. So universities and researchers, "should develop conventions and rules to safeguard their research autonomy, and the right to publish their findings and make them available to anyone who may want them, including those opposed to the government and the class structure it represents".<sup>3</sup>

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2. Biplab Dasgupta (ed.). Village Studies in the Third World (Hindustan Publishing Corporation (India) Delhi, 1977) p.4.

3. Ibid., p.5.

Dasgupta says this, after judging the possible reaction on the part of the government to 'critical research findings'.

Rural sociology had its growth in America. That was a response to the 'exploiter period' in the history of America. In the Asian countries including India, Desai has shown that rural sociological research developed basically as a response to the "impact of the capitalist Industrial civilization upon social economy and social structure".<sup>4</sup> The period of British colonial imperialism and the consequence can be regarded as an 'exploiter period' in the Indian history.

It can be written, without any doubt, that the colonial interest and policy had caused tremendous decay to Indian village site. It caused deterioration not only in the rural economy but in the super-structure of the rural society. This breakdown ultimately demanded reparation and to revive the old days of self-sufficiency, studies on rural communities, particularly after the country's Independence, was a mark of response to it. Britishers had left the country indeed but left behind its rich, advanced, glorious tradition and plan policies. These are hard nut to crack for the Indians.

4. Desai, Loc. cit.

Even after completing four decades of Independence, India continues to be a 'land of villages'.\* The total population of the country in 1981, was 68,51,84,692 souls. In 1981 there were 3,949 towns and 5,57,137 inhabited and 48,087 uninhabited villages in the country.<sup>5</sup> Thus approximately three-fourth of the country's population is scattered over 6,05,224 villages. These villages are no longer self-sufficient. These are impregnated with poverty, ill-health, illiteracy and numerous social ills and evils.

A rhetorical question is put here: why and how the country's days of happiness have passed away and what is the process operating behind it. Undoubtedly, the country has a rich potentiality. But, contemporary Indian villages show a lop-sided development. This can be understood, if we see the present as a product of the past. For the purpose of understanding, the already existing opinions are reiterated.

Indian village economy during the Pre-British days was a symbiosis of agriculture and cottage industries.

5. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India. India 1986 : A Reference Annual Publication Division 1987. p.16.

Indian ancient society differed significantly from Tribalism. Possibly such a self-sufficient village economy was termed by Karl Marx as, 'Asiatic mode of production'. While depicting this self-sufficient nature of economy and its mode of transformation Marx writes, "this simplicity supplies the Key to the secret to the unchangeableness of Asiatic societies, an unchangeableness in such striking contrast with the constant dissolution and refounding of Asiatic states, and the never-ceasing changes of dynasty. The structure of the economic elements of society remains untouched by the storm-clouds of the political sky".<sup>6</sup>

India was ruled by the Pathan, Mughal, Maratha, Sikh and Britishers in their turn. But self-sufficiency could remain intact till the advent of the Britishers. Desai writes,

The self-sufficient village as the basic economic unit had existed for centuries in India and, except for some minor modifications, had survived till the advent of the British rule, in spite of all political convulsions, religious upheavals and devastating wars. It stood impregnable in the face of all foreign invasions, dynastic changes, all violent territorial shiftings in inter-state struggles.<sup>7</sup>

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6. Cited in A.R. Desai, Social Background of Indian Nationalism (Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1948) p.12.

7. Ibid., p.7.

However, the British political economy expanded the self-sufficient socio-economic frontier of the villages. They injected in the rural minds the novel concepts of commercialisation of agriculture, private property on land, money and market, etc. In the society, polarization of masses took place and imbalance was brought to the economy. The villagers now had to produce agricultural surplus for the market. But, local abilities naturally failed to compete with national and international markets with their simple agricultural implements of plough and bullock. The failure of Indians brought success to the Britishers. Industrialization stood as a challenge to cottage industry. Conspicuous growth of the class of non-cultivating owners in an agricultural society had a serious consequence. India became an 'economic colony of Britain'.

Besides this, high population growth and natural calamities of flood or draught every year and social customs of land division for inheritance, mortgage (ultimately lose) or selling land and invest money for social ceremonies however, remained as inner enemies to the country's problem.

Industrialization had a serious repercussion. Products of cottage industry could not compete with mill and factory products and did not get market. Clothes produced in mills were cheaper than clothes produced in handlooms. Thus, those who had earned major amount of living through handloom and handicrafts, fell back on agriculture. They were unskilled for the employment in factories. That poured oil to the fire. The agricultural land which had already been led to the crossroad now had to bear the load of those artisans. Thus, the means and end achieved by industrialisation was de-industrialization which had adverse affect on the basic mode of production viz., land, agriculture and cottage industry.

The Indian villagers became the experimental group for the colonial rulers, on whom they conducted several experiments; one after another to see as which could bring more profit, easier tax collection and money, ultimately to be syphoned off to Great Britain. The Zamindari settlement, introduced the concept of 'private property' on land. Private ownership of land created absentee landlordism, which resulted in low production due to the creation of a class of non-cultivating owners. This, happened in a situation when

the demand for the agricultural production was more. Desai finds out, "The new revenue system introduced by the British in India superseded the traditional right of the village community over the village land; landlordism in some parts of the country and the individual peasant proprietorship in others".<sup>8</sup> Both the Zamindari and Ryotwari settlements as planned by the Britishers, resulted in novel experiences which had been unknown in the Pre-British India. Land, which were communally owned, now acquired commodity value and the cultivators got alienated from their bread basket.

However, it would not have been possible for the Whites to exploit the rural situation without the support of the natives. It must be mentioned that a section of the Indians - both Hindus and Muslims joined hands with the Britishers. The Britishers gave honorary titles of 'Khan Bahadur' and 'Khan Sahib' to Muslims and 'Rai Bahadur' and 'Rai Sahib' to Hindus to be prefixed before their names, which ultimately upgraded their status among the Indians. Bewitched and befooled by the British policy, this group of people worked at the cost of the natives.

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8. Ibid., p.38.

They educated their children in English medium schools by degrading the mother-languages. They counted the Britishers more as eye-openers than as exploiters and remained as assistants to them, by giving them local support. They ape the British culture and the latter always remained as a reference group to the former.

Britishers land policies, however, had the following consequences. In the womb of self-sufficient village economy, there emerged the national agriculture. This, coupled with the already existing traditional social evils led to sub-division and fragmentation of land and made holdings uneconomic; land got transferred to non-cultivating owners. These coupled with natural calamities paved the way for the money lenders; incapability of refunding money led to land alienation and rise of serfdom. These created polarisation of classes and pauperisation of the rural masses.

Today, we can refute the concepts as 'self-sufficient' 'isolated' etc., to denote an Indian village. There is expansion of relation beyond the boundary of 'bamboo-hedge' in matters of economic, political and social relations. But, these relations are not expanded systematically. Much have been done to rebuild the village

society in its manifold aspects. Leaders of free India have tried, yet forty-one years have passed without showing a satisfactorily improving trend. Not only the economy, but the whole social and cultural order is at a crossroad, which is a British legacy. The unsatisfactory improvement is due to the lacuna in each plan policy. For example, Hindi is made the 'Rastra- Bhasa' but the mushroom growth of English-medium schools all over the country is not discouraged. Developmental programmes are urban oriented. In order to know about the villages all over the country, a review of the existing literature is a must. With this aim in mind a brief review of literature is offered below.

#### VILLAGE STUDIES : A BRIEF REVIEW

Whenever there is a problem, whatever its nature may be, identification of its causes, its nature and to find out its ends, howls the attention of the intellectuals and the curious minds. Study on rural problems is as old as the human co-operative settlement on the globe is. However, in Indian situations, a drastic and distorted change were introduced with the coming of the Britishers and with the establishment of colonies whereby, immense harm was caused to the country through the adoption of different means. As a result, village studies were

conducted to highlight the different aspects of the village social life within the structure.

Some studies were conducted on the special aspects of village life, while others were general in nature. The British East India Company can be regarded as the torch-bearer in the direction of rural studies. The Company for its interest, conducted some objective type of village studies in the later part of the nineteenth century. For example, the decennial Census of India started in the year 1872. Indians definitely owe to the Britishers, as these studies of facts have always been used as important and almost authentic sources of historical information even today. Government of free India is also able to carry out such survey following the colonial masters. Thus, it was the far Westerners who studied the Indian society first.

Asian villages occupied the pages of written history with the publication of the following epoch making volumes, viz., "Village communities in the East and the West" was published by Henry S. Maine in 1872. Being a pioneering work Maine's writing suffers from incompleteness. He tries his best to depict the Indian

rural site. Maine could not use authentic data which had been collected earlier. Because Census of India was also printed in the same year i.e., in 1872. Thus, his understanding was superficial. He does not explain raiyatwari form of villages in India. Tribal villages also do not get attention.

Maine's work was followed by B.H. Baden-Powell's "The Indian Village Community" in the year 1896. The Indian villages are depicted with special reference to the physical, ethnographic and historical conditions. He discusses on both the types of villages viz., the joint village and the raiyatwari village. He devotes attention on the tribe and the village too. Three years later in 1899 Baden-Powell published another book entitled, "The Origin and Growth of Village Communities in India". These two volumes together give the picture of India's village communities. It is because, he could use available secondary materials, which had been difficult for Henry Maine.

During the first part of the present century Dr. Wiser and Mrs. Wiser conducted a study in Karimpur, a village in Uttar Pradesh and published the commendable work, "Behind Mud Walls" in the year 1930. Much credit is

due to Wisers because of the fact that these American anthropologists stayed five years in the field and worked as participant observers. The volume is unique in another way. The changes over a generation or over three decades were again highlighted by Mrs. Wiser and thus gave the volume completeness in 1960. On the basis of experiment on the same village W.H. Wiser published another book "The Hindu Jajmani System" in 1936. Interdependence of various occupational families and the functioning of a system of a village is described by this non-Indian scholar. About their unique contribution, David Mandelbaum writes, "He and Mrs. Wiser were among the pioneers in working out the approaches to village development which are today being used throughout India and beyond India".<sup>9</sup> Even today their effort continues to assist in the national growth. We quote Mandelbaum once again, "Their efforts in the India Village Service and in teaching about rural realities entered into the shaping of the great Indian government movement for community development".<sup>10</sup>

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9. William Wiser and Charlotte Wiser. Behind Mud Walls 1930-1960 (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1963) p.vi, Forward by David G. Mandelbaum.

10. Idem., . . .

About the Wisers' pioneering and humane study M.N. Srinivas remarks, "The quality of the information gathered by the Wisers was superior to anything collected before, and when this was put into a holistic framework, ... the result was a memorable picture not only of Karimnagar but of village life in the sub-continent, the microcosm reflecting the macrocosm".<sup>11</sup>

In the realm of the study of rural society important and connected names are Robert Redfield, G. Slater, Dwight Sanderson, T.L. Smith, P.A. Sorokin, N.L. Sim, Earnest Fader and others. Gradually several studies on village life and peasant societies were published, basically in the Third World countries, with the idea to highlight the problems. Few examples of studies conducted in non-Indian societies are given below.

William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki published their study on "A Polish Peasant Family" in the year 1918. A Russian village was studied by Geroid T. Robinson, who published in 1932 on "Crafts and Trades among Russian Peasantry". Eric R. Wolf has published his work on Mexican

11. M.N. Srinivas. "Village Studies, Participant Observation and Social Science Research in India" in Biplab Dasgupta (ed.) op.cit., pp.29-30.

village in 1956. Study by Paul Stirling on "A Turkish Village" was published in 1965. "The Worker Peasant in Europe" was published in 1969 by Harvey Franklin. Likewise, Chinese village, Villages in Vietnam were also brought to light. In the study of rural society, Theodor Shanin and Daniel Thorner's names also deserve special mention. Besides this, villages in America and Africa were also studied. For example, Earnest Feder published in 1968 on "Latifundia and Agricultural Labourer in Latin America". "African Peasantries" was published in 1971 by John S. Saul and Roger Woods.

Indian villages have been studied both by Indians and non-Indian scholars. Such studies were conducted on various aspects of rural life. Areas of interest are on: caste system, 'jajmani' system, family and kinship system, Village economy, acculturation, rural religion, social changes and transformation, village development etc.

A review on the study of Indian villages will be incomplete without studying the role of Gandhi and his followers in rural developmental experiments i.e., in matters of rural reconstruction. Gandhian ethos of rural reconstruction and to revive the country's days of self-sufficiency (prior to British annexation), demanded

sociological understanding, on the manifold aspects of the rural society. Gandhi entered into Indian politics in 1915, after coming back home from South Africa. As a philanthropist he could gain popularity particularly among the rural masses. His pragmatic approach towards the understanding of rural problems and acceptable solutions which he offered made him a remarkable figure in the contemporary Indian history. He realised the outcome of the British policies, which caused immense harm to the rural masses and tried to do away with all those lop-sided developments.

Gandhi felt the urgent need to revive cottage industry, improve agriculture in the indigenous way, impart education through mother-tongue, introduce vocational training centres for 'Basic Education' before the society gets completely ruined. But a group of Westernised Indians refused to join hands with Gandhi and went against Gandhian ethos. Thus, Gandhi had to face many odds, when he tried to revive Indianness among Indians.

The Gandhian approach was, however far sighted, practical and realistic rather than hyperbolic. He offered those guidelines which were easily possible for the villagers to follow. On the other hand Vinoba Bhave's

idea of rural reconstruction was based on the idea of sacrifice of higher degree. Bhoodan (contributing land), Sramdan (contributing labour), Sampattidan (contributing property) for the 'have nots' and social welfare were the keynote of his movement. Every act indicated deliberate parting with one's possession-which is more idealistic and a rare possibility in the human society. Thus; in Vinoba Bhave's idea absolute emphasis was given on 'social' development. Whereas Gandhi's emphasis of social development was through developing each unit or individual of the society. No doubt, in Bhave's Bhoodan movement some decoits surrendered to the Government, who were ultimately re-habilitated in the land acquired/<sup>in</sup>the movement. But it did not have any significant impact in most of the States including Assam.

Rabindra Nath Tagore's approach of rural reconstruction was also practical. Imparting informal training or 'education for life' in the institution of 'Santiniketan' was a major step in this direction. However, anyone who wanted to hark back to the traditional system, ignoring the foreign culture, had to face serious criticism. About the critique of Gandhi, Dhanagare writes, "Among his critics two sections of the then contemporary

Indian opinion were more prominent. One of these represented various shades of militant nationalists and the other the newly emerging left wing of Young Marxists".<sup>12</sup> Whatever the criticism and whoever the critics might be, Gandhi was undoubtedly a spokesman or an advocate of the reticent and helpless rural poor in particular, and of the misguided Indians in general.

Many persons criticised Gandhi for his notion of Khadi, commenting that he was taking the country back to the 'Dark ages'. Those critics accepted the mill produced clothes as ideal for use. But, Gandhi put emphasis on handloom or Khadi because, "It connotes the beginning of the economic freedom and equality of all in the country... It means a wholesale swadeshi mentality, a determination to find all the necessities of life in India".<sup>13</sup>

After the achievement of Independence Gandhi's idea of rural reconstruction was implemented as National Plan

12. D.N. Dhanagare. Agrarian Movements and Gandhian Politics (Institute of Social Sciences, Agra University, Agra, 1975) p.18.

13. Cited in Directorate of Information and Public Relations : Towards Real Swaraj : Gandhi on Constructive Programme Issued by DIPR, Assam, Shillong, n.d.) p.9.

Policy in the form of Community Development Programme. Immediately after 1947, political leaders faced the urgent need for reconstructing the villages. Those were done in the lines laid down by Gandhi. In order to achieve real freedom from the British yoke, after independence the country put her best foot forward to achieve socio-economic upliftment of the rural mass. To implement plan policies and to benefit the rural people, the need of the hour was to understand the real or practical nature of the rural problems. Problems vary from village to village. That demanded and invited community studies.

Of course, those studies which were guided by this particular aim,

they still cover that portion of total life which comes under programmes of directed change. They leave the elements of 'social structure' practically unattended as also the vast changes occurring beyond the scope of community development and Panchayati Raj. Significant among these, even at the policy level, are problems of land-tenure, position of under-privileged groups in rural areas, major irrigation schemes, and the like.<sup>14</sup>

Gradually village studies were conducted with sociological perspective. Different thinkers and scholars

"Rural Studies" in ICSSR  
 14. Brij Raj Chauhan / Survey of Research in Sociology and Social Anthropology. Vol.I (Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1974) p.85.

have studied different aspects of the village life. Economists have studied from economic point of view while Political Scientists have studied from political perspective. Sociologists have taken into account different types of social relations.

#### STUDIES ON THE DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF VILLAGE LIFE : A GLANCE

Important contribution in India's village study is made by M.N. Srinivas. He not only described Indian villages, but developed concepts and theories to understand different situations. One of his major works was published in 1952, entitled "Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India". This publication was a landmark towards sociological understanding of Indian village. In this book, the concept of 'dominant caste' was used by Srinivas. His view of religion was through the understanding of the caste system. Inter-caste dependence on the one hand and caste mobility on the other were studied by him. In this book he uses another concept i.e. 'Sanskritization'. It is a process by which low caste Hindus and tribals move up in the caste hierarchy, by imitating the customs of high caste Hindus. He first used the term 'Brahmanization'. But he found that Coorg customs were influenced by non-Brahmin

dominant caste. So he uses the term 'Sanskritization'.

This was followed by the compiled publication on "India's Village" in 1955. Among others, S.C. Dube writes on 'A Deccan Village' while Mc Kim Marriott writes on 'Social Structure and change in a U.P. Village'. In 1955, S.C. Dube, published his book "Indian Village". Dube studied the social structure of Shamirpet, a village in the Deccan Plateau of India. This microscopic study takes into account all the aspects of Shamirpet's social structure. He studied the social life of both the Hindus and Muslims. Economy governed by caste principles, religion, social relation, family and internal organization, authority and machinery of justice etc., are studied as functional part of the system. Because of meeting the deficiency of full length village study Morris Edward Opler has described this study as "a tonic to present-day research into Indian Village Life".<sup>15</sup> In the same year D.N. Majumdar published his edited book "Rural Profiles". Srinivas's contribution in this book is very important. He wrote on 'Village studies and their significance'. Unique in the sense that he made the need of village study clear and evident to the students and researchers.

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15. S.C. Dube, Indian Village (Allied Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Bombay, 1967 First published in 1955) p.viii in the Forward.

In 1955, Mc Kim marriott published the edited book 'Village India'. In this book Srinivas wrote on "The Social Structure of a Mysore Village". To understand the social structure of Rampura, a Mysore village, he starts with the understanding of the concept of 'dominant caste'. To him, "The concept of the dominant caste is important for understanding inter-caste relations in any local area, and for understanding the unity of the village".<sup>16</sup> The unity of the village finds further expression in ritual context. Finally, he shows that acquisition of land along with Sanskritization, make mobility in the system possible.

E. Kathleen Gough contributed in Marriott's book on "The Social Structure of a Tanjore Village". In order to understand the structure of social relations within the village she considers it in the light of the following points - The extent of Kumbapettai, the Tanjore village as an isolable social unit, and, discusses this problem with reference to economic organization, local administration, ritual practices at the village level, inter-caste relations of a social nature within the village and some general relations of the village to the wider community.

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16. M.N. Srinivas. "The Social Structure of a Mysore Village" in Mc Kim Marriott (ed.), Village India (The University of Chicago Press, London, 1955) p.17.

She finds that the Brahmins were the land owners. Their loss of land breaks up the traditional local social structure. Independence from the Brahmin achieved by the lower caste through the acquisition of land or by entering business etc., led to the breakdown of the traditional hierarchical caste order. She also shows the transformation from caste to class. During her study, Kumbapettai had moved about halfway in the transition from the relatively stationary feudal subsistence economy to a much wider-scale, expanding capitalist economy.

Mc Kim Marriott wrote on 'Little Communities in an indigenous Civilization'. This was a study on Kishan Ghari a village in Uttar Pradesh. Marriott vividly examined the possibility or impossibility of identifying Kishan Ghari as an isolable whole. It is shown that, the social system of the village reaches beyond its central locus far into the outside world, while the outside world in turn reaches into the most central core of village society. The concepts of 'Universalization' and 'Parochialization' are thoroughly used to understand the indigenous civilization. It is said, "Although Kishan Garhi is a conservative and a relatively traditional village, I cannot say that it is a self-contained, complete little community comparable

with primitive little communities".<sup>17</sup> In this same book, Alan Beals published on 'Interplay on factors of change in a Mysore Village'. This and Srinivas's study of Mysore village when used as complementary to one another, give a beautiful picture not only of Mysore villages but of the Indian villages in general. Same book carries article by David Mandelbaum on the Kota society. In 1955 Robert Redfield published on "The Little Community". The changing trend is well depicted by his concept of Folk-urban continuum'.

As an extension of Srinivas's contribution in Marriott's book, another article was published by him in The American Anthropologist in the year 1956, entitled 'The dominant Caste in Rampura'. Next year in 1957, Ramakrishna Mukherjee published on "Six Villages of Bengal : A Socio-Economic Survey". Not only villages in Bengal were studied, but villages in Orissa was also covered. In 1957, F.G. Bailey wrote on "Caste and the Economic Frontier : A Village in Highland Orissa". Both these authors studied their respective villages in the context of their changing trend. F.G. Bailey e.g., shows how the expansion of economic or political boundaries of the village affects

17. Mc Kim Marriott's 'Little Communities' in an Indigenous Civilization' in Ibid., pp.178-179.

the traditional caste ridden society. Basically, this expansion started during the British rule in India.

G.S. Ghurya, wrote on "Caste and Class in India" in 1957. This study, though not exactly a case study of any one village, yet in the discussion on 'caste', village social life gets attention. The year 1958 was equally productive too. In that year Oscar Lewis published on "Village in Northern India : Studies in Delhi Village". He shows, that the village is vitally connected with the outside World by marriage, descent and political alliances. Thus, it is not a cut off unit but a unit in the wider network of relations. In that D.N. Majumdar again wrote on 'Caste and Communication in Indian Village'. S.C. Dube wrote on "India's Changing Village" in 1958. These studies clearly refuted the British conception of Indian villages as immutable.

In the year 1960, Central Indian Village was brought to light by Adrain C. Myer, who published on 'Caste and Kinship in Central India : A Village and its Region'. This is the most significant village study which deals with various aspects of kinship system of the village. To him, caste may be viewed in terms of inter-caste relations within the village. Whereas

sub-caste may be understood only when we can identify the kin ties spread over a region. Thus, to understand caste and its divisions we shall have to take into account not only the relation within but outside relations too. In 1960, F.G. Bailey also published on "Tribe, Caste and Nation : A Study of Political Activity and Political change in Highland Orissa," where he shows that the expansion of political relations links the village in the wider network of villages. "Politics and Social Change, Orissa in 1959" was published by F.G. Bailey in 1963.

In 1964, Alan Beals published on "Gopalpur : A South Indian Village", and G. Chattopadhyaya wrote on "Ranjana : A Village in West Bengal". Both these sociological works contribute on their own way towards village studies. K.S. Mathur also added to it by his publication of "Caste and Ritual in a Malwa Village" in 1964. In 1965, T.N. Madan published his work "Family and Kinship : A Study of the Pandits of Rural Kashmir". He gives an analytical description of the basic unit of a village i.e., a family in the wider context of Kashmir's Kinship organisation. Madan brought out that in the Pandit (Brahmin) Kinship system there is a strong patrilineal descent ideology but no patrilineal descent groups. The composition, functioning, recruitment of members, of a pandit household is explained

with the notion of 'developmental cycle of the domestic group'. The understanding starts with the relations of members belonging to one Chulha. But, he does not take into account some of the distant relations. Above all, he has to be credited for his minute observation of customs, process of recruitment, dispersion in the family, and also for observing the petty squabble among the members in a Pandit family.

Srinivas's Tagore Memorial Lecture series imparted in Berkeley in 1963 was published in the year 1966, in the form of "Social Change in Modern India". He explains here, the twin processes viz., Sanskritization and Westernization, which bring social change in India. It becomes evident from his study that both these processes weakens the traditional caste rigidity. When the dominant caste are being imitated by the non-dominant caste the dominant caste shows resentment even by beating the other. But gradually the gap between the two are narrowing down. Changes in Indian villages are well depicted in this study and this enhances the merit of the book.

The changing patterns of stratification was also studied by Andre Beteille. He published the book in 1966

entitled "Caste Class and Power : Changing patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village". To him, 'caste', the traditional order, does not lead us far in the understanding of a contemporary Indian village. External forces disrupt the traditional pattern and create economic and political systems which are no longer based on caste. Brahmins, Non-Brahmins and Adi-Dravidas had their respective occupations. But today white-collar jobs in towns and cities are caste-free. The non-Brahmins from Sripuram can engage themselves in such jobs and work with the Brahmins. Thus, this multi-caste village, like other caste villages in the country are moving towards an open social system and stratification is determined by achievement and not by ascription. Along with Nepal and Ceylon, Indian caste system was also studied, and Christoph Von Furer-Haimendorf's edited book was published in 1966 entitled "Caste and Kin in Nepal, India and Ceylon : Anthropological Studies in Hindu-Buddhist contact zones".

K. Ishwaran published on "Tradition and Economy in Village India" in 1966, which aims at a detailed analysis of the traditional economy of an Indian village. In 1968, he published "Shivapur : A South Indian Village". The author considers Shivapur as a representative of India's villages not only in its size, land distribution,

economy, caste and religious composition, but also in the degree to which it has been influenced by classical Hinduism and the forces emerging from the policies of the federal government. Though he claims that this multi-caste village is a representative of Indian villages, yet it can be said that it represents villages in Hindu India. This village cannot represent a tribal village and even a Muslim village, which are part of Indian villages. In the same year Brij Raj Chauhan and Anad Chakravarty published their studies on Rajasthan villages entitled, "A Rajasthan Village" and "Contradiction and Change in a Rajasthan Village" respectively.

In the year 1969, Srinivas published "India : Social Structure". Srinivas makes extensive use of the caste model for the understanding of Indian society. He does so because he finds such stratification is ubiquitous in India. It is found in all the groups existing in India.

Besides Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains, and Jews - all are based on endogamy. Different essays on social life in India along with Ceylon and North West Pakistan featured in Edmund Leach's "Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North West Pakistan" in 1969. In 1970, T.K. Oommen published "The Concept of Dominant Caste" and in the same year S.N. Agarwal wrote on the

"Demographic Study of Six Urbanizing Villages". Srinivas published "The Remembered Village" in 1976. Data collected in 1948 were damaged in a fire. He remembers the village Rampura and describes the culture and social life. Not only he recapitulated to be called a novelist but he used the data which he had recovered in the field diary. But, it has to be admitted that, he could not substantiate the views with quantitative data. Recently in 1982 "Rural Life in Rajasthan" was published by S.S. Gahlot. Thus, we see that different authors have described village social life in North, South, West and Eastern parts of the country.

However, village studies in North East India is meagre, but not a totally neglected subject. Fact is that, sociological studies are negligible. A handful of researchers have conducted such studies, basically as a part of their academic career or for contributing a paper. In 1972, A.N. M. Irshad Ali and Ananda Charan Bhagabati wrote on 'Hindu-Muslim Relations in an Assamese Village', in the Bulletin of the Department of Anthropology, Gauhati University. They find the Hindu-Muslim relations, basically unity and cultural affinity in a village called Singimari, the peasant village situated some thirty-two kilometers north-east of Gauhati city. In 1974, Irshad Ali completed his

Ph.D. thesis in the Gauhati University entitled, 'Social Relations among Assamese Muslims in Rural and Urban Situations'. The social changes occurring in Assamese Muslim village is well depicted by him. In order to understand that he studied not only a rural situation but relations in three situations - viz., in rural, peri-urban and urban situations - Singimari, in the Darrang District, Uttar Jalukbari in the vicinity of Gauhati, and Muslim residential community of urban Gauhati, respectively.

Rural social stratification in Assam was studied by Ranjit Kumar Bhadra for his M.Phil. dissertation completed in 1975 entitled, 'Emerging Patterns of Social Stratification'. The emerging pattern of rural class structure and rural power structure is studied by him. Irshad Ali modified a part of his Ph.D. thesis and published his article 'Kinship and Marriage among the Assamese Muslims' in Imtiaz Ahmed's "Family Kinship and Marriage among Muslims in India" in 1976.

However, Indira Barua published her Ph.D. thesis in 1978 entitled "Social Relations in an Ahom Village". She studied Moranjan, An Ahom village and took that as representative of five major groups of the

community, i.e., 'Mohan', 'Deodhai', 'Chetia', 'Bhuyan' and 'Changmai'. She studied economy, household, religion and kinship in their changing patterns. Society is mutable and social changes are inevitable. She is of the view that though changes take place in different aspects of social life, yet the role of tradition is strong in matters of social-religious rites whereby identity of different groups could be maintained.

Thus, it can be concluded that village studies received a boost and institutional support, immediately after Independence. Thus, in 1950's and 1960's almost each year was productive in nature. Secondly, such studies are conducted in different aspects of village life, like family and kinship, economy, religion etc. Thirdly, number of full length village studies are comparatively less in North East India. Thus, there is a need of conducting more village studies all over the country and particularly in the cut off North Eastern Region of the country. Lastly, we see that, all the studies can be divided into two categories. Some are fact finding and descriptive studies, while others are analytical studies, developed with the aim of developing theories and concepts.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE MUSLIM SOCIETY IN  
THE BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY

The recorded growth of Muslim population in Assam dates back to the beginning of the thirteenth century. Thenceforth, there emerged the Assamese Muslim society in the Brahmaputra Valley. The intruders, through a process of Assamization attracted local converts; and the local converts through the process of Islamization helped in the growth of the Muslim society.

Systematic account of the medieval history of Assam can be found in the writings of Muslim historians and Chroniclers in their works, such as, "Tabaqaṭ-i-Nasiri" by Minhajuddin Siraj (1256-57); "Fatiyah-i-ibriyah" written by Mirjumla's chronicler, Shihabuddin Talish and 'Baharistan-i-Ghaibi' by Mirza Nathulla. Ahom Buranjis (history) are also important source of information about the medieval history of Assam. Archaeological remains, such as rock inscriptions, architectural designs etc., also stand as important evidences to events.

Another important source of information regarding Muslim history and social life is the oral tradition; some

of which are now available in the form of compiled published works. This category mainly includes devotional songs composed by different Pirs and Sufis.\* Zikir, Jari, Hasan Rajar Geet (songs) were composed by Pirs mainly to propagate and stabilize Islam in Assam.

To understand how Islam crept to the Brahmaputra Valley from the Arabian desert and also to get an insight into the tradition and cultural ethos of the Muslims in this valley, it becomes necessary to study the growth of Muslim population in its historical perspective. Assam came into Muslim relations through conquerors, traders and preachers. Those were the agents who helped in the spread of Islam in the Brahmaputra Valley.

#### MUSLIM INTRUDERS IN THE MEDIEVAL HISTORY OF ASSAM

The Muslim invasion of Assam had started earlier than the advent of the Ahoms in the year 1228-29 A.D. In 1202 A.D. Muhammad-Bin-Bakhtiar Khilji also known as Ikhtiaruddin or Bakhtiaruddin, a general of Muhammad Ghuri, conquered Bihar and Bengal. After conquering the whole Northern India he then advanced towards the Kingdom of Kamrup (Assam), which was also known as 'Kamrud'. Khilji

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\* Pir: Saint ; Sufi : One who initiates disciples in mystic order.

belonged to the Turkish race, the early converts to Islam. His aim was to conquer Tibbet and China. Kamrup was conquered by Khilji because it fell on the way to Tibbet.

Recorded conversion of locals started as early as in 1205-1206 A.D., when Khilji conquered Kamrup. During that period, the Western part of the Goalpara district was inhabited by the 'Mech', 'Koch' and 'Tharu' tribals. E.A. Gait writes, "Guided by a Mech chief, Muhammad Bakhtyar marched northwards... through a country inhabited by the Koch, Mech and Tharu tribes.... He was there assisted by the Mech inhabitants, and with their aid managed to find his way".<sup>18</sup> Not only the chief, but a significant portion of the Mech, Koch, and Tharu tribals were converted to Islam.

However, authenticity of those information mentioned in Minhajuddin's report, *Tabaquat-i-Nasiri*, raises doubts. Because, he did not personally accompany Khilji. Later on, he collected the information from the eye-witness Nizamuddin and Samuddin, when they returned to Delhi.<sup>19</sup>

18. E.A. Gait. A History of Assam (L.B.S.Publications, Gauhati 1905, Reprint (second edition) 1981) pp.36-37.

19. Medini Choudhury. Luit Borak Aru Islam (Assamese, Rhiho Books, Gauhati, 1982) p.12.

Of course through cross study e.g., studying the rock inscription' at Kamrupnagar (North Gauhati), Minhajuddin's information can be accepted.

The first organised attack against Kamrup was made in 1227 A.D., under the leadership of another Turk, known as Ghiyasuddin Bakhtiyar alias Hisamuddin Iwaz. He was defeated and driven back by Raja Prithu. In 1257 A.D. another Turk, belonging to the Sunni sect of Islam, Nawab of Bengal, Malik Yuzbeg alias Tughrilkha, invaded Kamrup and captured the capital Kamrupnagar.<sup>20</sup>

According to Minhajuddin, Islam spread widely in Kamrup from the time of Tughrilkha's invasion. As the then king of Kamrup was defeated by Tughrilkha, so the king allowed him to spread Islam in Kamrup. Tughrilkha built a mosque at Kamrupnagar (North Gauhati) and introduced Islamic beliefs and practices among the Muslims. He introduced the system of Jumma Namaj (Friday prayer) among the Muslims. As per Medini Choudhury, had there not been a well established Muslim society before Tughrilkha's invasion, it would not have been possible on the part of

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20. Cited in P.N. Dutta. Glimpses into the History of Assam (Dutta and Sons, Shillong, 1981) p.69.

Tughrikha to introduce the system of Friday prayer.<sup>21</sup> Choudhury even assumes Muslim settlement in Assam, before the conversion of Ali Mech in 1205 A.D. (The Mech chief who accompanied Bakhtiar Khilji). After those three major Turkish invasions, the Kingdom of Kamrup was free from notable Muslim attack till 1498 A.D. There were, however, "occasional Muslim raids, particularly from the direction of Mymensingh".<sup>22</sup>

Major invasion of Hussain Shah took place in the year 1498 A.D. Invasion of Bit Malik in 1527 A.D. invasion of Turbak in 1532-33 A.D., and till 1671 A.D. several invasions by the Mughals were noteworthy. During the reign of king Nilambar of the Khen dynasty, Hussain Shah captured the capital of Kamata. "Hussain Shah's conquest of Kamata had, however, one consequence. Muslims in large numbers settled in Hajo and other regions of Kamata after the conquest. A Muslim divine, Giasuddin Aulia built a mosque at Hajo. This is known as Poa-Mecca to the Muslims even at the present time".<sup>23</sup>

In the year 1527 A.D. the first Muslim attack

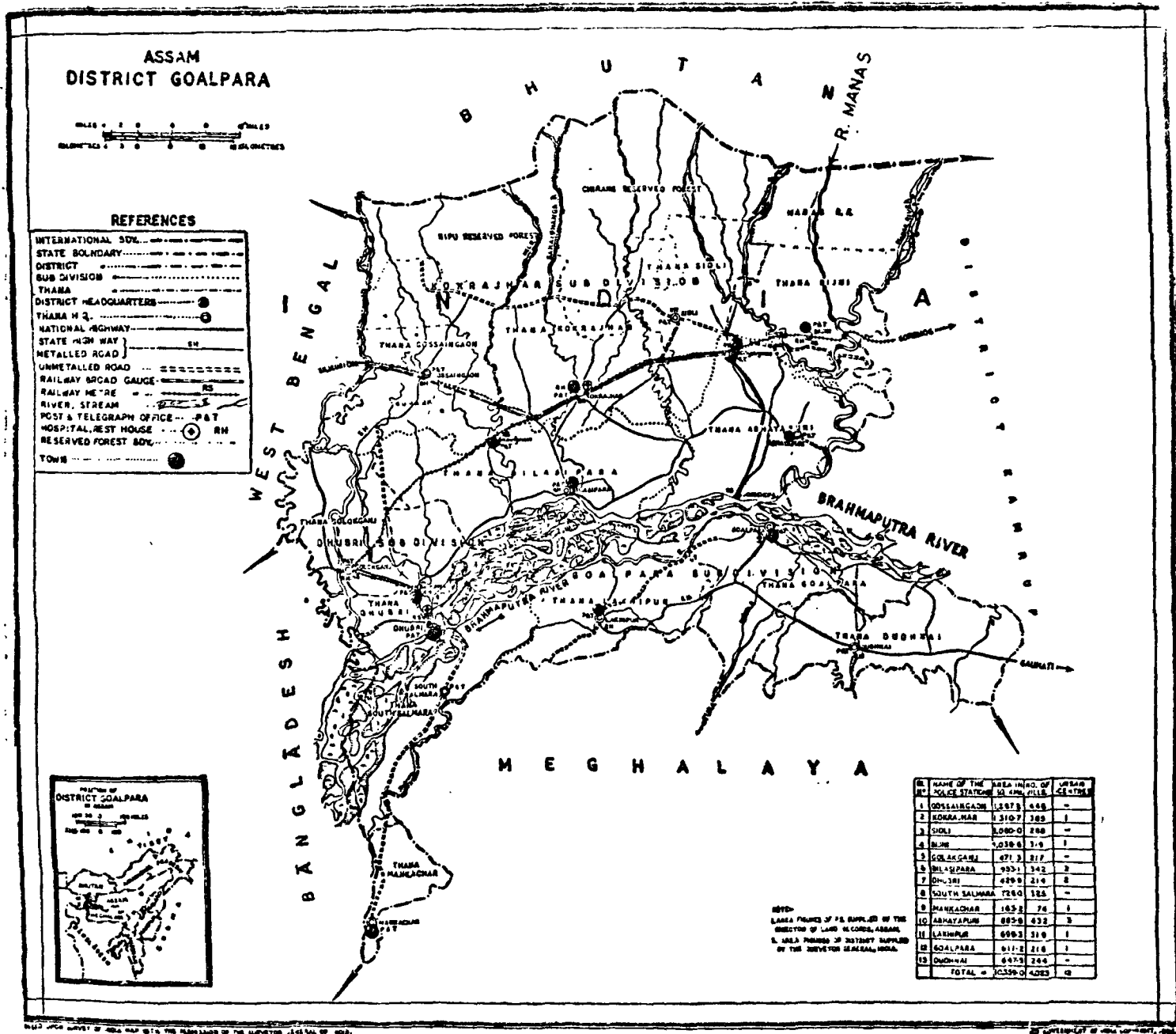
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21. Medini Choudhury. op.cit., p.23.

22. M. Kar. "Muslim Immigration to Assam" in Social Scientist (Vol.8 No.7 February 1980) p.68.

23. P.N. Dutta. op.cit., p.82.

# Map IV



THE INDO-BANGLADESH BOUNDARY SHOWN ON THIS MAP IS THE ONE EXISTING PRIOR TO THE CONCLUSION OF THE AGREEMENT ON MAY 16, 1974 BETWEEN INDIA AND BANGLADESH.

Source: Census of India 1971 Village and Town Directory, Goalpara.

against Ahom Kingdom took place. It was followed by Turbak's invasion in 1532-33 A.D. in 1533 A.D., after several Ahom-Pathan conflicts, about two hundred Muslims were killed and nine hundred of them were captured by the then Ahom ruler. This led to the emergence of a new group of Muslims in Assam, known as Moria. S.K. Bhuyan remarks, "The history of the Ahoms of the seventeenth century was mainly the history of the Assam-Mogul conflicts which arose out of the ambition of the Moguls to extend their territories further to the east,..."<sup>24</sup>

In the year 1657 A.D. Shah Jahan's illness was followed by a war of succession among his sons. Taking advantage of the situation Prannarayan, Raja of Koch Behar seized Goalpara and North Kamrup from the Mughals. He also captured Hajo (Kamrup). Meanwhile Aurangzeb, the Emperor of Delhi, appointed Mir Jumla as the Governor of Bengal and ordered him to recover the Mughal possession. In the year 1682 A.D. Gadadhar Singha ousted the Muhammadans in the battle of Itakhuli. Henceforth, the river Manas was accepted as boundary by both sides (Map No.IV). The district of Goalpara remained with the Muslims.

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24. S.K. Bhuyan, Anglo-Assamese Relations (L.B.S. Publications 1949, Reprint 1974, Assam) p.4.

Sociologically, it becomes significant to note that the prolonged contact of more than 475 years can be regarded as 'the factor' in the growth of Muslim population in Assam. When the Muslims were successful in a war, they were allowed to extend their territory and thus established Muslim settlement in Assam. On the other hand, when they were defeated, Muhammadan armies were captured by the indigenous rulers. These captives stayed back in Assam and married locally.

Such trend leads us to conclude that, the greater the relationship, greater was the possibility of the growth of Muslim population in Assam. It was not of much significance whether they came in friendly or hostile relations. According to S.K. Bhuyan, "The nucleus of the present Muhammadan population of Assam was formed during the period of Muhammadan conflicts, the main stock being strengthened from time to time by fresh immigration and conversion".<sup>25</sup> In the Ahom Kingdom, those Muslims were appointed in various departments, according to ability and previous status, We quote S.K. Bhuyan once again,

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25. Cited in Emdad Ullah. "Muslim Saints and their tombs in Assam" in North Eastern Spectrum (United Publishers, Gauhati Vol.1. No.2, 1976) p.31.

A large number of Muslims were appointed in several departments of the state, minting of coins, painting, carpentry, embroidery work, sword making, gun-casting and the manufacture of gun-powder. Several learned Muslims generally known as Parsi-parbias, or Persian readers, were attached to the Ahom court, and their main occupation was deciphering and interpreting of Persian documents, drafting and supervision of the Persian correspondence of the government',<sup>26</sup>

Besides the intruders, Ahom rulers imported many Arabic and Persian scholars, Muslim artisans and they were engaged as masons, engravers, spinners, and as workers in state arsenals. Since then they have been contributing their skill, art and intelligence for the enrichment of the native culture. Barpujari writes, "The new-comers from the neighbouring districts of Bengal were not only the most numerous, but they exerted considerable influence on the social economic and cultural life of the Assamese".<sup>27</sup>

#### PIRS AND SUFIS

Scholars such as Amalendu De opines, "...besides the conquerors, the sufis also played a vital part in the

26. S.K. Bhuyan. op.cit., p.14.

27. H.K. Barpujari. Assam in the days of the Company 1826-1858 (Spectrum Publications, Assam, second edition) p.295.

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spread of Islam in Assam".<sup>28</sup> Those 'militant propagators of Islam', "of the early period belonging to different orders performed various duties as saints, warriors and preachers. They accompanied the conquerors with their bands of warrior saints. Similar things happened in the early history of Islam in Assam".<sup>29</sup>

It is believed that with the aim of spreading Islam, 360 Aulias (Pirs) entered India.<sup>30</sup> One of the earliest Sufis who entered India was Khawja Mainuddin Chisti from Persia, who settled down at Ajmer in Rajasthan. The word Pir means 'old', denotes a mystic guide (Shah, Shaikh, Mursid or Ustad) or Sufi, who initiates murids (disciple) in the mystic order. But while all Pirs are Sufis, all Sufis are not Pirs.<sup>31</sup>

The Pirs propagated the philosophy of Islam; converted some indigenous people to their faith and tried to stabilize Islam. The Pirs and Sufis were patronised by the Muslim residents of Assam and could maintain their

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28. Amalendu De. Islam in Modern India (Maya Prakashan, Calcutta, 1982) p.195.

29. Ibid., p.197.

30. Mahesh Neog. Pobitra Asom (Assamese, Assam Sahitya Sabha Publications, Assam, 1969) p.348.

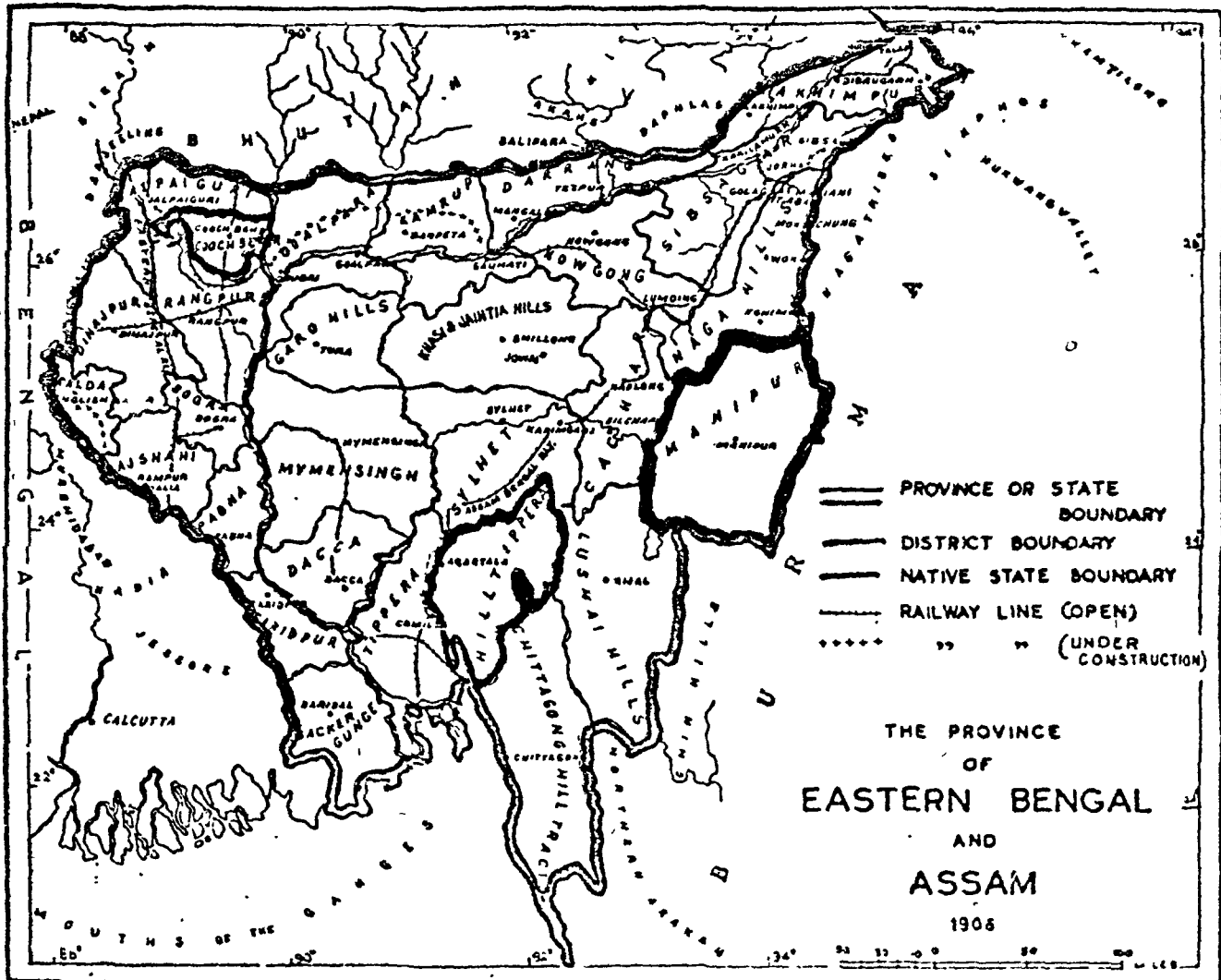
31. J.N. Sarkar. Islam in Bengal (Ratna Prakashan, Calcutta, 1972) p.29.

living with the land grants made by the different monarchs and few other neighbouring Rajas. Dakaidol, the village under study experiences the same. The revenue-free land was known as Inam land or Pirpal zami. The Sufis had to stabilize Islam because during the early period of their settlement the converts were Muslims only in name, not in deed. They could not be called momins (good Muslims). Besides this, as Assam was regarded as 'the land of magic', so great warriors were invariably accompanied by Pirs and Mullas.

#### MUSLIM INTRUDERS DURING THE BRITISH RULE AND AFTER INDEPENDENCE

After the British subjugation of Assam in the year 1826 A.D., it was made a part of the Bengal Presidency. This made the beginning of the process of silent invasion of the Bengali Muslims, who were land hungry but 'Industrious Agriculturists'. There were various 'push and pull' factors, which made the immigration from the adjoining East Bengal (Bangladesh) possible. This invasion has a greater impact on the demography of the indigenous Assamese.

Immigration into Assam started as early as in the year 1874, when Assam emerged as a full fledged province of



PREPARED UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

Map No. V - Source: H.K. Barpujari, Political History of Assam, Vol. I (Govt. of Assam, 1977).

the British Empire. Creation of the Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam in the year 1905 (Map No.V) helped in the process of immigration. "Assam's immense economic potential, coupled with the reluctance of the indigenous people to do toilsome and hardwork, and absence of capital and entrepreneurship made such immigration imperative. Between 1871-1901,... The main immigration were tea garden labourers and the Bengali Muslim cultivators".<sup>32</sup>

The farmer migration continued through a chain migration process. This was officially encouraged by the British who were anxious to put to use virgin land in Assam. Besides that, 'colonisation' and 'developmental' schemes of the Muslim League Ministry were the 'pull' factors, which motivated such immigration. However, in 1940 the Ministry's leader, Syed Sadullah, took up the 'developmental scheme' with 'Grow-more-food campaign'. Under this programme, the Mymensinghias, most of whom were Muslims, were encouraged to come to Assam and they were allotted permanent land in Assam. Seeing that, the British Viceroy Lord Wavel remarked it rather as a 'Grow-more Muslim campaign'.

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32. S.K. Dass. "Immigration and Demographic Transformation of Assam 1891-1981" in Economic and Political Weekly (Vol.XV, No.19, 1980) pp. 850-851.

It gets a fillip when "During the period between 1939-41, the Saadullah Government allotted one lakh bighas of land in the Assam Valley for the settlement of East Bengal immigrants".<sup>33</sup> Bengal famine in 1943, also gave an impetus to immigration. Independence of India also could not stop such influx of non-Indians. On the other hand, Provisions of Nehru-Liaquat pact on April 8, 1950; Indira-Mujib pact on February 8, 1972, Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Peace between India and Bangladesh on March 19, 1972 are no way less significant. All those favourable conditions led to the cumulative growth of Bengali Muslim immigrants.

It is always alleged that some political parties created a 'vote bank' from these non-Indians, thus immigration has a political motivation and that Muslim League Ministry wanted to make Assam a Muslim dominated province. But, economic motivation must also be taken into account. Mahesh Bhuyan says that, peasant immigration from East Bengal had started as early as in 1901, but the idea of Pakistan crystallised only in 1930's. The Muslim League

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33. Quoted in A.C. Bhuyan and S.P. De (ed.). Political History of Assam 1940-1947 (Government of Assam, Gauhati Vol.III 1980) p.262.

Ministry also came in a much later period.<sup>34</sup> However, in order to grow more food, the Muslim League Ministry could have resorted to any other alternative and not just following the British Policy.

With the construction of Roadways and Railways besides the Bengali Muslims, Muslims mainly from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have been coming to Assam in search of employment as washermen, tailors, barbers, bakers, butchers, retailers, petty hawkers and shop keepers etc. Invariably they come to Assam leaving their families behind and send a better part of their earnings back home. However, unlike the Bengali speaking immigrants, the percentage of these Hindustani speaking Muslims migrants is negligible and they are mainly concentrated in the urban centres.

Thus, today Muslims of Assam is isomorphic in nature. The group consists of (a) the indigenous Assamese speaking Muslims, who are spread over the Brahmaputra Valley districts. (b) The Bengali speaking Muslims, mainly concentrated in the char (river islet) and majority of the concentrations are in the lower Brahmaputra Valley

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34. M. Bhuyan. "Immigrant Population of Assam" (unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Gauhati University, 1977).

districts and (c) The Hindustani speaking Muslims who are mainly found in the urban areas of the valley.

#### THE ASSAMESE MUSLIM SOCIETY : ITS IDENTIFICATION

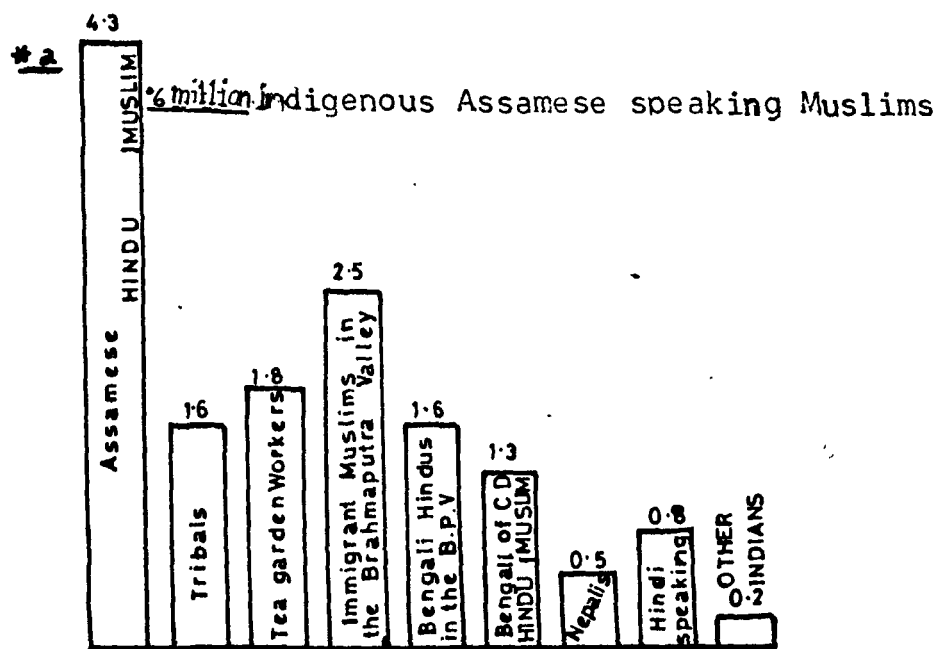
The Assamese Muslim society consists of the 'indigenous' Assamese speaking Muslim population of Assam, distributed over the Brahmaputra Valley districts. They present a synthetic cultural tradition - of the 'larger Assamese' and the 'Great Islamic tradition'.

Demography and geographical distribution however shows that the mother-tongue of the indigenous Muslims is Assamese but all the Assamese speaking Muslims are not indigenous. According to the 1971 Census of India, Assam had a total population of 14.63 million. Amiya Kumar Das divides the whole population of Assam, depending on Census Reports, - which is diagrammatically represented in a Bar Chart below :

Diagram No. I

Bar Chart showing the division of Population  
in Assam

Figure in million. Total population of Assam  
1971 Census - 14.63 million



Population composition of Assam, 1971 Census

Source : Census and Calculations Drawn in A.K. Das :  
Assam's Agony.

When we observe the above Bar Chart it becomes clear to us, that the percentage of the indigenous Assamese Muslims is very small. The percentage of immigrant Muslims is four times bigger than the indigenous Muslims in the Brahmaputra Valley. When we calculate portion \*a in the above Bar Chart, we find that this portion represents .6 million population (about 6,00,000 souls only). According to the Census of India, 1971, Assam's Muslim population was 35,92,124 or 3600,000 approximately. It can safely be assumed that, the Assamese speaking Muslims are concentrated only in the Brahmaputra Valley districts. Our concern is to find out the approximate figure of the local Muslim population. Though there is no available Census data to figure out the exact percentage of this group, yet we can generalise on certain assumptions.

Myron Weiner, who fails to find out the exact number of the original Assamese Muslims, says that their number is very small, since this consists only of the decendants of Mughal prisoners of wars, who stayed back in Assam and a small number who were converted or migrated during the Mughal period. But, it must be kept in mind that though Weiner talks about the Mughal period only, history shows that Muslim relations to Assam had started as early as in the thirteenth century. According to Weiner,

in the year 1891, there were 8 percent Muslims to the total population in the Brahmaputra Valley, which increased upto 24 percent in the year 1961. So Weiner believes that two-third of the Muslims are migrants or descendants of migrants who settled in Assam after 1891.<sup>35</sup>

T.K. Choudhury writes,

We know that the number of original Assamese Muslims was very meagre which is evident from the fact that between 1891 and 1931 the Muslim population in Assam rose by 109 percent as pointed out by Kingsley Davis. That means the increase in Muslim population in Assam has not been the result of conversion or natural increase but of migration is an accepted fact. As such out of 36,00,000 of Muslim population in Assam in 1971 we can safely assume the number of original Assamese Muslim population to be about 6,00,000, if not less and the immigrant Muslim population to be 30,00,000 if not more.<sup>36</sup>

Census Superintendent of 1931 C.S. Mullan remarked on the ever increasing number of the Muslim immigration. He wrote in 1931, "It is sad but by no means improbable that in another thirty years Sibsagar district will be the only part of Assam in which an Assamese will find himself at home".<sup>37</sup> Taking C.S. Mullan's statement as a premise we

35. Myron Weiner. Sons of the Soil: Migration and Ethnic Conflict in India (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1978) p.102.

36. T.K. Choudhury. Demographic Trends in Assam (B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1982) p.40.

37. Census of India 1931, Vol.III Assam, Part-I Report 1932 p.52.

can proceed in the following line - we can safely assume that the percentage of the Muslim population in the district of Sibsagar, according to the 1971 Census of India, by and large consists of the indigenous Assamese Muslims. Muslim population of Sibsagar is 96,801 persons. Basing on Mullan's observation, we can assume this number as average, - then the erstwhile six districts of the Brahmaputra Valley will have  $96,801 \times 6 = 58,08,06$  or 6,00,000 approximately.

Besides these, when one analyses the growth rate of Muslim population from 1871 to 1971 it can be found that, unlike the other districts, the district of Sibsagar experiences a usual growth rate while lower Brahmaputra Valley districts including Goalpara, experiences an abnormal growth rate. The abnormal growth rate of the Muslim in Goalpara is always attributed to the influx of Mymensinghias. Point to remember is that, Goalpara, being the frontier district of Assam came into the contacts of the Bengali migrants at an early date. Thus, Goalpara has been a district with the highest Muslim population in the Brahmaputra Valley.

Sibsagar had a Muslim population of 4.3% in 1871 while 5.27% in 1971 i.e.,  $5.27 - 4.3 = .97$  or 1 percent approximately over 1871, estimated Muslim population. So,

logically, we can rely on the size of the Muslim population of Sibsagar and take that as average, which gives us only 6(six) lakhs indigenous Assamese Muslim population in the Brahmaputra Valley out of 36 lakhs Muslims in Assam (Assam includes Barak Valley also). Significant to note that Goalpara alone has more than 6 lakhs of Muslim population.

The indigenous Muslims in the Brahmaputra Valley speak the Assamese language -- which is an Indo-Aryan language. Its immediate ancestor is Magadhi -- the language of Magadh (present Bihar). It is a corruption of Prakrit (spoken form of Sanskrit). The three languages namely, Oriya, Bengali and Assamese bear close resemblance because of their common origin. The Assamese Muslims speak Assamese, but it is mixed with Arabic, Hindi and Urdu words. John Platts describes Urdu. "the Hindustani language as spoken by the Mohammadans of India and by Hindus who have intercourse with them and who hold appointments in government. It is composed of Hindi, Arabic and Persian with Hindi constituting the back-bone so to speak".<sup>38</sup> Language of the Assamese Muslims get the flavour of this Hindustani language.

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38. Cited in Akhilesh Mithal. "Urdu: The Sparkle of a Ruling Elite, English would still be the dominant language" in Telegraph Fifth Anniversary supplement 1987 p.37.

The Assamese Muslims are the descendants of the following groups of people, viz., descendants of (i) prisoners, who were captured in different wars-between Muslim intruders and the indigenous population of Assam; (ii) of the established families of successful Muslim conquerors; (iii) local converts to Islam in different periods of history. Though large scale conversion did not take place at any particular time, yet frequent conversion of locals gradually helped in the growth of the Muslim population in Assam; (iv) the descendants of the Muslim artisan families, brought by the Ahom rulers. They were appointed in various departments of the state; (v) descendants of the preachers.

Descendants of the early Muslim settlers (mentioned above) form the Assamese Muslim society. They married locally. They mixed up and took up the language and culture of the indigenous people. Conversion of locals helped, in the spread of elements, among the Muslims, which were typically Assamese. One of such Assamese Muslim communities, in its manifold aspects, empirically studied, are presented here.

VILLAGE DAKAIDOL • SETTING AND PHYSICAL  
FEATURE

The village Dakaidol is situated 10 kilo meters South East to the Goalpara town. It comes under the 'Shri Surya Giri Gaon Panchayat', under the Matia Development Block. The total area of the village is 264 acres,<sup>40</sup> and it is inhabited by approximately 1150 persons.

A tributary of the river Brahmaputra runs in the Northern boundary, Mornoi is in the Eastern boundary, Saljhar on the South and Bhati para - Shri Surya Pahar (hill) on the West. A Kaccha road links the village with the main road at a distance of half-a-mile. This kaccha road bisects the village into two divisions. Bus service is available to them; buses ply from Goalpara to Mornoi. Assam State Transport Corporation (ASTC) Bus ply once a day in that route. In the morning it goes from Goalpara and it returns in the afternoon. Prospective passengers from the village face problems to come to the Goalpara town (nearest) in the morning. There is hardly any other means of road transportation. This is one of the basic reasons for the economic backwardness of the area.

40. Census of India 1971, District Census Handbook, Goalpara, p.134.

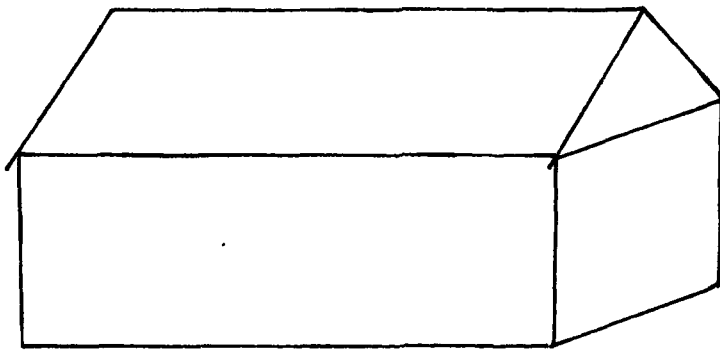
There are five bullock carts in the village which are used for transportation of goods. Those who want to cover the road from Goalpara to Dakaidol riding bicycle or on foot, they usually go in a group. It was a nice experience to see such a group. Such a group was crossed on my way to Dakaidol. They were going back from the Goalpara town, after they had participated in a religious festival. They were tired and relaxed under the shade of trees, keeping their bicycle beside, which were loaded with their bedding. That situation was almost similar to the caravan in the Arabian desert. This is done, due to lack of proper transportation. The significant feature of the village is the existence of the old shrine, well known as the Panjatan dargah or the Dakaidol Dargah. Surrounding the shrine, there is the Assamese Muslim settlement.

#### THE RESIDENTIAL PATTERN

97 percent of the houses are kaccha huts i.e., thatched huts with walls plastered with mud and the roofs are made of paddy straw known as kher. The shrine and the mosque however have the semi-Assam type houses with tin roof. Both these small houses are in pitiable conditions. The mosque does not resemble with the mosque the residents have in the town, nor with the mosque as they have in the

North and South of the country. It looks like a small residential hut. Only when one goes closer to it, one can get the idea that it is the house used for non-residential purpose. Recently, a resident has opened the only grocery shop in the village, in a cement concrete small building with tin roof.

Fig.I THE SIMPLE STRUCTURE OF THE MOSQUE



The above sketch shows the structure of the simple type mosque in the village. Same is the condition of the shrine. This is due to the general economic backwardness of the residents in Dakaidol.

During the study it was observed that the villagers are no less religious minded. Of course, it must be admitted that the knowledge of the history and culture of the Islamic World and Islam is somehow less in degree in the village. The reason being lack of educational facilities and

lack of exposure to the Islamic world.

The condition of the Indian Muslims in general has been far from the typical Islamic pattern since the growth of this society. Gait observed the condition of Muslims, towards the beginning of the twentieth century. The society emerged in the thirteenth century but Hindu influences have been remaining strong till today. Gait cites,

As for the Musalmans who had been taken prisoner in former times and had chosen to marry here, their descendants act exactly in the manner of the Assamese, and have nothing of Islam except the name; their hearts are inclined far more towards mingling with the Assamese than towards association with Muslims. The Muhammadans who had come from Islamic lands engaged in the performance of prayer and fasting, but were forbidden to chant the call to prayer or publicly recite the word of God.<sup>41</sup>

This was the general situation. However, the situation was slightly different in Goalpara, because it remained under the Muslims for a longer period of time. Yet they also could not change towards perfection in the new religion as the society composed of local (Hindus and tribals) converts. Initially, they could be identified as kfir (non-believer). Earlier to that i.e., in 1881, the condition was such, "Some of them never even having heard

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41. Cited in E.A. Gait. A History of Assam (L.B.S. Publications, Gauhati, Assam, 1905, Reprint 1981) p.149.

of Muhammad, and others imagining that he correspond to the Hindu Rama";<sup>42</sup> twenty years later also in 1901, the experiences were not happy as they continued to remain ignorant about their religion. We read, "the Mussalmans in Assam were cut off from their co-religionists, and not unnaturally become lax in their observances and doctrine".<sup>43</sup>

We come to the discussion of physical feature, In the village, the residential units are scattered, Narrow lane (mud) or small foot paths (mud) join the huts. Two distinct residential patterns can be traced in the village. This is determined by the size of the family. Depending on the size, they have,

- a. One family in one compound
- b. More than one family and thus a cluster of huts in a compound. Evidently, this is the mark of nuclear family and joint-family respectively.

In case of the first type, there are either two or three huts in the compound. One is the residential hut, second is the kitchen and third is the cowshed. The central courtyard is in between.

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42. Cited in Census of India, 1901, Vol.IV. Assam, Part I, Report p.43.

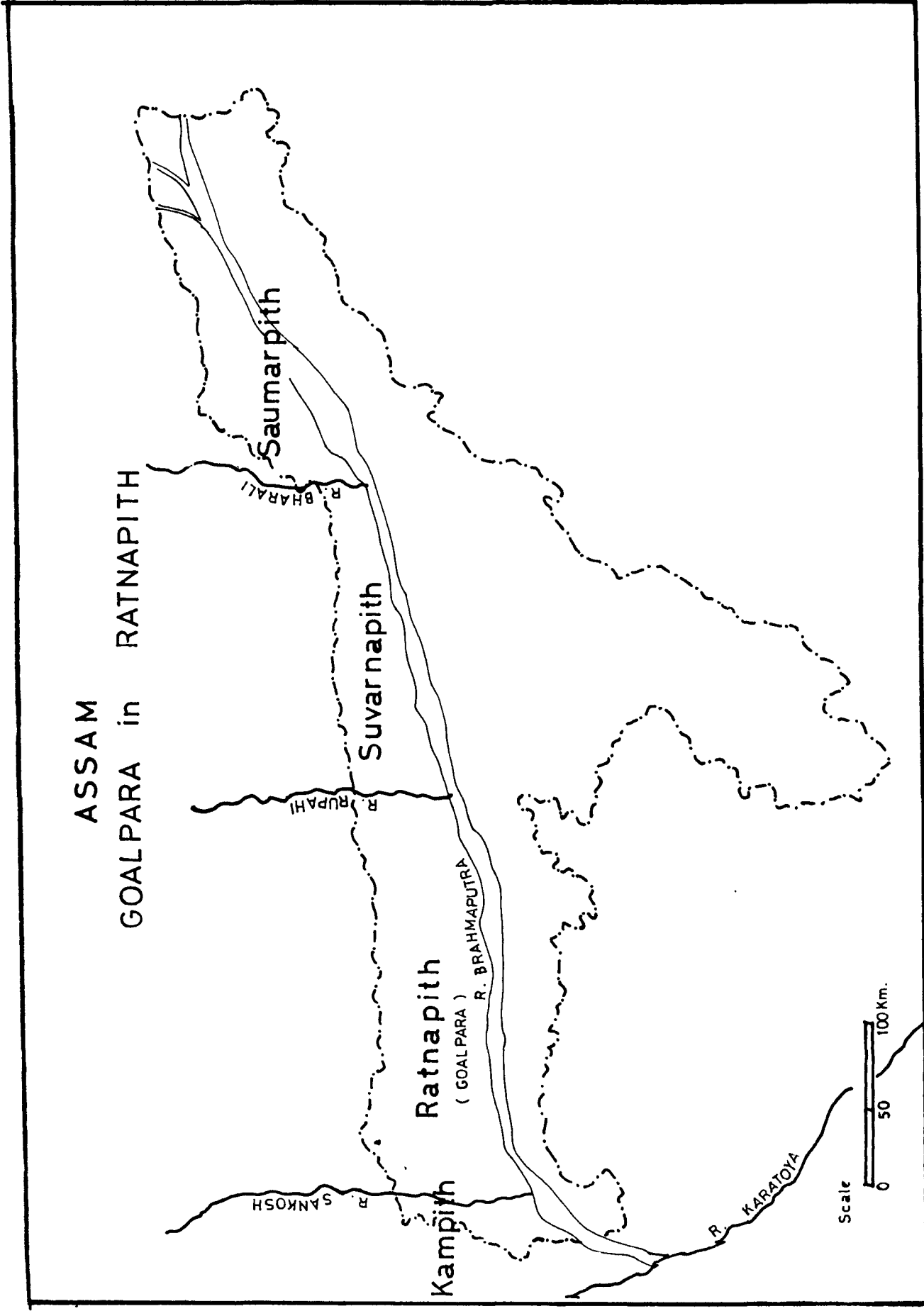
43. Idem



Bengal, Mirjumla invaded Kamrup. He was accompanied by mighty warriors, who were locally known as Dacoits - these who forceably seized property including land. Those dacoits (warriors) settled there and the settlement was named after them as 'Dakaidol', i.e., 'Dakait' means dacoits and 'dol' means group. Hence, Dakaidol. The shrine is known as Dakaidol dargah. However, on the basis of it, it cannot be presumed that the shrine was established in later period and named after the village, because it is also known as Panjatans' dargah.

The second belief runs thus: Once, when Dak (post) was carried in a boat, the Dakowal's (postman) boat got drowned. Since then, the place is known as Dakaidol. However, the first view is more popular, and today, the residents of the original Dakaidol village, trace their ancestors, who came to that area during the Mughal invasion of Kamrup.

The villagers narrated the history of the village with reference often made of the nearby Shri Surya hill (map No.III). Because of their repeated reference of the hill and due to the growing curiosity, a personal visit was made to the hill. A description is given below :



Map . VI

The hill consists of seven terraces for which it is named as Satali (seven hills). Numerous statues (scattered throughout the hill) of Lord Siva takes us back to the glory of the Asura dynasty, during 01-355 A.D. However, the estimated number of statues of Lord Siva are 9999.<sup>44</sup> During the rule of the Asura dynasty, the land was inhabited by the people, known as Kirats or Kirati. They belonged to the Mongolian race of the Tibbeto-Burmese language speaking group. They worshipped Lord Siva or Mahadeva who was also known as Kirat. We read in Gait's work, "This kingdom stretched southwards as far as the Bay of Bengal and its western boundary was the Karotoya".<sup>45</sup> After the defeat of Ghatak Asura, worship of Lord Shiva weakened. That marked the beginning of the worship of other God and Goddess.

One would find today figures of Mahabir Jain, Goddess Durga, Sun, and Moon, Bhagaban Ganesh - engraved in big stones. Ancient Kamrup was divided into four Piths (portions) viz. Kampith, Ratnapith, Suvarnapith and Saumarpith. Goalpara formed a part of Ratnapith (Map No.VI) Ratnapith is that holy place where different religions and cultures viz., Hinduism, Buddhism, Vaishnavism, Sikhism, Islam and Christianity flourished.<sup>46</sup> Dakaidol and its

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44. Shyam Nath. Shri Surya Pahar (Assamese) (Shova Press, Goalpara 1971) p.29.

45. Gait, E.A., op.cit., p.15.

46. A.C. Sarkar. Ratna Pithat Abhumuki (Assamese) (Ratnapith Prakashan, Bongaigaon, Assam, 1961) Reprinted 1977) p.29.

neighbouring areas shared the same experience. According to the oral tradition, during the Nawabi rule in Delhi, a Pir visited the hill and the neighbouring areas. Once, during his visit to the hill, he saw a pair of fishes in a pond. But, his attempt of fishing was futile as the pair disappeared. As an offence, the irritated Pir cut the noses of the deities. Immediately, he could hear a divine conjecture, cursing him that on his back home, he would commit matricide. Exactly that happened and for that crime he was exiled. According to the prophecy the Pir had made while leaving for exile, after twelve years the Pir's daughter got married to a man who came from Persia. However, few villagers remember him as a man from Delhi. Anyway, he was an outsider. This man became the care-taker of the shrine. The villagers recall the second Pir as Sabood Ali Darbesh.

It is believed that the Badshah of Delhi was pleased at the Charisma of the first pir and through the Nawab, he was allotted 6875 Bighas of revenue free land or Inam land or Pirpal Zami. The grant was made in the name of the Pak Panjatan (Holy five) viz., Bibi Fatima (Prophet's daughter), Prophet Hazarat Muhammad, Hazarat Ali (Prophet's son-in-law), Hazarat Hussain and Hazarat Hasan (Prophet's grandsons). Subsequently, after the death of the Pir the darqah was built over his tomb. During the Muslim rule,

other care-takers of the dargah were also appointed from Delhi.

The original Bronze Plate through which the grant of the Lakhi Raj (tax free) land was made is now lost. However, the present care-taker of the shrine, Syed Talib Ali, who traces his descent from the earlier Pirs could show us several documentary sources relating to this grant. Xerox copy of such an important document is attached herewith, in the appendix.

The Southern part of Goalpara went to the British in 1765 and was included in the permanent settlement of 1793, while the Northern part went to the British only after the Bhutan War in 1864.<sup>47</sup> Subsequently the Northern part was known as Duars (door or passage) while the Southern part was known as Pargana. The Muslim village of Dakaidol in the Habraghat Pargana was under the Hindu, Bijni Zamindary. In spite of that, prior to the British annexation they enjoyed the revenue-free land.

However, there was a lacuna in the grant. Approximately 7000 Bighas of the tax free land was granted,

47. B.C. Allen. Assam District Gazetteer, Goalpara, 1905. p.16.

which included not only the village Dakaidol but the neighbouring areas including the Shri Surya Hill. But the Chauhad i.e., boundary of 7000 Bighas (approximately) was not demarcated with clarity. This created serious confusion during the British regime. During the British rule tax was levied on this originally revenue-free land. Now, only, 17 Bighas of revenue free land under the dargah lies with the village community.

The original dargah had been washed away by the soil erosion of the river Brahmaputra. It was reestablished in a small hut. This stands as the most important source of religious inspiration and divine support - not only to the Muslim villagers but both for Hindus and Muslims from outside the village. However, it is regrettable that Census of India 1971, in the District Hand Book, Goalpara, remains silent, while remarking on the places with religious, historical and archeological interest. Though, Dakaidol and Dashabhuj (Shri Surya hill) are the two places of religio-historic significance, yet these are not mentioned in the Census Report.

Today, the Dakaidol dargah is considered very 'powerful' (spiritually). People go there, conduct sacrifice and get their honest wishes fulfilled. A sword and

a stone with a footprint were recovered from the soil erosion. Today, these are found inside the dargah; the footprint is covered with a red cloth. While a Jata, (a grinder), lies unused outside the hut of the dargah.

THE PEOPLE AND THEIR GEOGRAPHICAL  
DISTRIBUTION WITH REFERENCE TO  
THE BENGALI MUSLIM IMMIGRATION

Today, the village consists of three distinct hamlets locally known as Chuba. These are the East Chuba, Middle Chuba, and North West Chuba. At present, the three hamlets have 70, 50, and 75 households respectively. The three hamlets differ from each other in terms of their origin. It is as follows :

The spatial limit of the (present) three hamlets were originally one, i.e., Dakaidol and it was inhabited by the indigenous Assamese Muslims. They were 'almost' self-sufficient in the revenue free land. After the advent of the British they had to pay tax to the Government through the Bijni Zamindar. After Independence, Acts of the Assam Land Reform measure were enacted. Different Acts such as The Assam Assessment of Revenue Free Waste Land Grants Act 1948, The Assam Land (Requisition and Acquisition) Act 1948, The Assam State Acquisition of Zamindaries Act 1951, etc. and several policies were introduced to settle

land with landless peasants no matter whether they are indigenous or immigrants.

Gradually, the original Muslims lost control over their revenue - free land. Government acquired the revenue-free land and hence they were alienated. It has already been mentioned that, in the Northern boundary flows a tributary of the river Brahmaputra. In the 'charf' (alluvial land, near the river side) lived the Bengali Muslim immigrants. They are known as Bhatia to the locals. It means that they came from areas west to Goalpara - basically East Bengal. The Bengali Muslim Peasant immigration continued since the beginning of the present century, and continued unabated.

Towards the turn of this century, growth of population in Bengal reached the saturation point which resulted in the over pressure on cultivable land and only immigration could provide a possible solution to the problem. T.K. Choudhury writes, "The Virgin and fertile land of Assam attracted the Muslim agriculturist population from the adjoining province erstwhile Bengal from the very beginning of the present century ... This movement can be termed as "farmer migration" as distinguished from migration of tea garden labourers".<sup>48</sup>

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48. T.K. Choudhury. op.cit., p.36.

Incidentally, the majority of the immigrants were Muslims. They took up cultivation of jute and rice on easy terms of tenancy. They were employed by the landlords of Goalpara. The settlement pattern of the inhabitants in Dakaidol is the mirror of the influx and settlement of the refugees from East Bengal and the alarming crisis that it creates in the Assam Valley. A microcosm reflecting the macrocosm. To understand the settlement pattern we hark back little into the history.

In the settlement pattern of the village, two distinct land allotment and settlement patterns need to be highlighted. The North West hamlet of 75 households is inhabited by the Bengali Muslims, who were rehabilitated there in 1953. After a decade i.e., in 1963, at the end of the devastating flood, in the eastern part of the village another group of Bengali Muslim immigrants were rehabilitated, who had suffered in the char. The old Assamese Muslims of 50 households are concentrated in the middle hamlet, Here, the middle hamlet is often referred as the village Dakaidol.

It is significant to note that the original Muslims are outnumbered by the immigrant Muslims. Only one

fourth of the Muslims belong to the indigenous stock. This definitely has a serious repercussion on the economic, political and even social aspects of the village life. Of course, there is no problem of identification, as the basic organizing principles keep the distinctiveness of the two communities.

#### THE PEOPLE

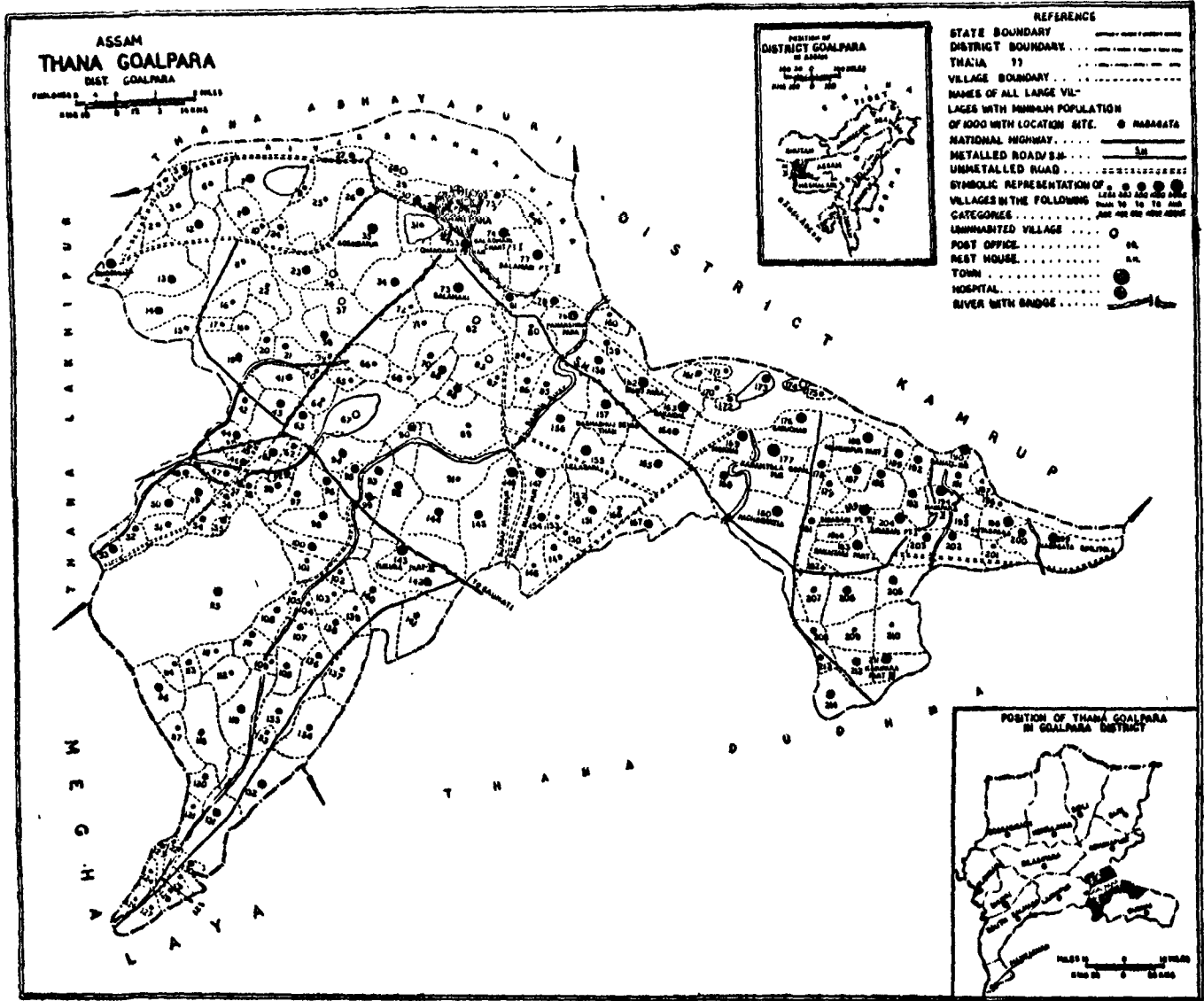
The study has shown that the indigenous Muslims consists of: the descendants of (i) Mughal warriors (ii) Preachers who came from Persia and Delhi (iii) Local converts from lower caste Hindus and aboriginal tribes. By asking a question on Varna (caste) two distinct communities could be identified. These are Syed and Sheikh. 4 percent of the respondents prefix the title Syed before their names and claim their descent from the Preachers, who were believed to have descended from Prophet Muhammad, through his daughter Fatima and son-in-law Ali. They also include descendants of Mughal warriors.

The majority of the respondents know themselves as Sheikh and claim to have descended; from (i) the Muslim warriors and (ii) local converts. Thus, the boundary of Syed and Sheikh can not be determined once for

all. The respondents were not very sure about their origin. Ambiguity arises because both the groups claim their descent from Muslim warriors. The Syed-Sheikh difference will be discussed in the chapter VI.

So far the physical appearance is concerned, one can hardly find a difference from their Hindu (tribal and non-tribal) brothers. This strengthens the assumption of Islamic conversion. Eyes, noses, complexion, height etc., are very much similar with the Hindus. However, the distinction can be maintained and Muslims can be identified, judging on their overt behaviour and created looks. A Muslim male wears beard and keeps his hair little longer to match with his longer beard. He wears Pyjama kurta and keeps his head covered with a Topi (cap). Some others wear Lungi and Shirt or a kurta and topi. Almost all of them (men, women and children) prefer to remain barefooted. Wear either a leather or a rubber sleeper when walk a long distance.

However, identification of the fair sex pose little problem. They synchronise with the womenfolk of the larger Assamese community. The womenfolk dress in Mekhla chaddar, which is the typical costume of the Assamese women. But, a married woman can be easily identified from her Hindu counterpart, as she does not wear vermilion and



Map VII

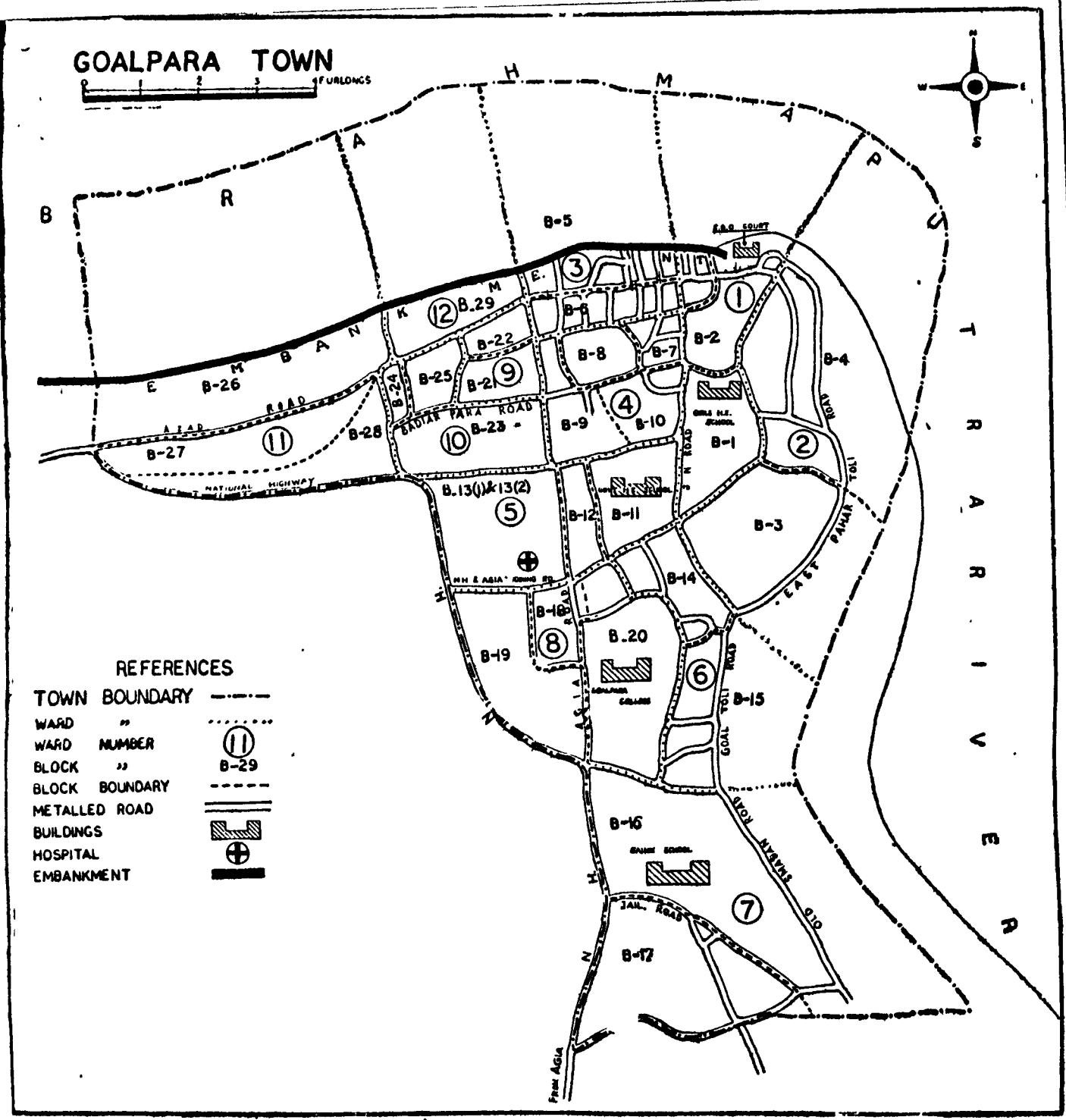
Source: Census of India 1971, Village and Town Directory, Goalpara.

always covers her head with the end of her chaddar, (agsul). Some of the women also wear Saree. Assamese is the predominant language. This is enriched by Hindi and Urdu words. They belong to a syncretic cultural tradition, which is a combination of Islamic, Assamese Hindu and local tribal culture.

#### AMENITIES AVAILABLE

Dakaidol (Map No.VII) location code 163 is included under the Goalpara Police Station. Educational background is under a state of sorry affair. Education is a birth right of every man and woman. Realisation of this birth right is possible with the expansion of educational facilities. After forty one years of Independence democracy seems to have failed when we direct our attention, inter alia to the educational facility available in the village. In the village there is only 1(one) primary school. At a distance of 1(one) kilometer i.e., in Dubapara (L.C. 158) there are 1(one) middle school and 1(one) primary school.

Medical facilities are available within a radius of 1 kilometer. There are two hospitals; one each in Kadamtola and Harimura—location code 177 and 156 respectively (Map No.VII). Both the hospitals are not well



Map VIII

Source: Census of India, 1971 Village and Town Directory, Goalpara.

equipped. So the villagers if possible come to the Civil Hospital at Goalpara town 10 kilometers away.

Communication system is also not very satisfactory. Dugapara (158 L.C.) at a distance of 11 kilometers (approx.) has a post office. The nearest Telegraph Office is at a distance of 10 kilometers in the Goalpara town. If they travel eastward, at a distance of 22 kilometers i.e. in Dolgoma (L.C. 178) they get the benefit of another Telegraph Office. Thus, the nearest town to the village is the Goalpara town, at a distance of 10 kilometers North West (Map No.VIII).

The village is not electrified nor even the neighbouring areas. It is totally cut off from the protected water supply scheme of the Government without purifying water drawn from the river is used as drinking water. Fetching water is a work for both men and women. They wash clothes and take bath in the river. In the nearby areas of Bhatipara (L.C. 162) there is well, and in Tinkuniapara (L.C. 164) the villagers get water from both well and tank (a small pond). The river water gets polluted every day. But, the villagers seem to be least bothered about health and hygiene. Toilet and Latrine do not have separate rooms. It is mostly done open-air. In few households, a big well

covered with plank, and well bounded with four Dhari (wall woven of cane), without roof - is used for these purposes. This is the worst experience in relation to health and hygiene in the village.

There was not a single urban area in the Goalpara district during 1872. Hunter writes,

The population of the Goalpara district is entirely rural, and the people do not evince any tendency towards urban life. According to the results of 1872, there is not a single town in the District containing upwards of 5000 inhabitants. Mr. C.F. Magrath's District Census compilation thus classifies the villages: There are 777 villages containing less than two hundred inhabitants; 306 with from two to five hundred; 175 with from five hundred to a thousand; 60 with from one to two thousand; 9 with from two to three thousand; and 3 with from three to four thousand.<sup>49</sup>

The nearest town to Dakaidol i.e., Goalpara town, emerged when the Goalpara Municipality was first constituted into a town committee under the Act of 1868 on 1st May 1875.<sup>50</sup> "In 1876, the Government of Assam adopted the Bengal Municipal Act, 1876, Urban areas under this Act were categorised into four classes viz., first and second class

49. W.W. Hunter. A Statistical Account of Assam (B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, First published 1879 Reprinted 1982) p.48.

50. V. Venkata Rao. A Hundred Years of Local Self-Government in Assam, Calcutta, 1967) pp.62-63.

Municipalities, stations, and unions. Under this Act second class Municipalities were established at Goalpara ... in 1878...<sup>51</sup>

One of the significant elements of a town is the existence of a Municipal Corporation or a Municipality or a Town Committee or a notified Area or a Cantonment. Thus, we see that Goalpara emerged as a town with the expansion of a second class Municipality in 1878 and today it gets the status of being a class IV town. Dakaidol is situated near a class IV town.

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51. D.P. Barooah (ed.). Assam District-Gazetteers - Goalpara District, (Govt. of Assam, Gauhati Assam, 1979) p.421.

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CHAPTER - III

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## THE ECONOMIC STRUCTURE

In order to understand the contemporary village economy and the social structure in Dakaidol we need to review the history in its different phases. Historical facts give us the clue for the understanding of the present society. Unlike the importance given to forest in a primitive or ancient tribal economy, 'Land' has been occupying the most important position in the Asian agricultural economy. In the following section, an attempt is made to understand land and land relations in the village throughout its history.

### THE LAKHIRAJ LAND : A BRIEF HISTORY

Land, agricultural activities and agrarian relations are to be understood in order to understand the rural economy. It has already been mentioned in chapter II that the original inhabitants of Dakaidol enjoyed revenue-free land, known as Inam land. During the Muslim rule in India the Nawab of Delhi made a land grant of 6875 Bighas (7000 Bighas approximately) to a Pir. Unfortunately, the original plate through which the land grant was made is now lost. During the British rule, in the year 1862 tax was imposed in this revenue-free land. The imposition of tax agitated the minds of the locals for which ultimately, they had to file court cases. The document attached at the appendix speaks the story of this Inam land. Since the language in which it

is written in Bengali, few sentences of the document are translated below.

Because of the weakpoints in the original document, today one may question the validity of the grant which was 7000 Bighas approximately. Controversies arose and the British Government could impose tax due the following reasons: (a) The second line of the document is translated: The Pir-pal or the revenue-free land of the Dakaidol Mouza lies in the Habraghat Pargana under the Raja (King) of the Bijni Zamindary. Claims were filed by the people of the Mouza following the decision of the Revenue Department of the Government.

(b) A land grant was made. But the boundary of the same was not clearly demarcated. Land alienation could not be stopped; non-demarcation of the boundary created confusion not only in the Revenue Department, but also among those who had been enjoying the Lakhiraj land since the Muslim rule in India (P.5. of the document).

(c) It is mentioned that twenty years back i.e., in 1842, the original plate was lost when the Goalpara court was set on fire. The loss of the original plate created all the confusion and crisis, subsequently (P.5).

In order to prove the authenticity of their

claim we need to rely on several sources. Firstly, such a situation could have arisen. It is definite that, a land grant was made. It is a part of the history, that kings donated revenue-free lands for the settlement of the devotees. Such revenue-free lands are found all over the state. During the early period, population was less, resources were plenty, as a result of which the need for demarcating the boundary was not felt. Besides this, the measurement of land in terms of Gaz, Bigha etc., were only subsequently developed.

Secondly, the British reclaimed land to suit their economic interest. The villagers reported that they had been free from interference of local zamindars before the coming of the British. It indicates that the local zamindars were aware of the grant. In the year 1907, Kheru Sheikh commented to the British officer J.C. Arbuthnott thus, "I cannot say by whom the lands were originally granted to the Muhammadan Fakir ... There is a dispute as to whether it is Lakhiraj. I do not remember having paid any rent since I got the land. Bijni demands rent from me, but I decline to pay on revenue-free land".<sup>1</sup> Thus, we see that Bijni

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1. Government of India. Department of Revenue and Agriculture 1908. Land Revenue. File No. 507 of 1907 Serial No.2. (Witness No.18) p.26.

zamindars had not demanded rent as land was revenue-free. Only when Bijni formed an estate during the British rule, the zamindars finally asked for rent for the government. It is even more difficult to refute the claim when we study social and economic status of the residents in the pre-British and early part of the British period, though the size of the land i.e., 6875 Bighas cannot be categorically accepted.

#### SOCIAL GROUPS AND THE VILLAGE ECONOMY

Dakaidol, being a part and parcel of the larger Assamese community, could not remain isolated from the caste influences. The Brahmin preachers in the Hindu society had been occupying the apex of the socio-economic ladder. The preachers in Dakaidol were the owners of the revenue-free land. By imitating their Hindu counterpart the Muslim preachers kept themselves away from performing manual work in the agricultural field. In order to establish their superiority, the preachers claimed themselves as Syeds. The Syeds leased out the land to the non-Syeds. The non-Syed, i.e., the Sheikhs were the local converts. In that patron-client relation both the groups were equally benefited.

In Dakaidol, the Syeds enjoyed especial privilege,

as they were not under the local zamindars. It is commonly assumed that self-sufficiency and economic equality prevailed during the pre-British days. However, to Amalendu Guha economic equality is a myth, because there was the system of giving revenue-free land or land at low rate of revenue to high caste Hindus and Muslims.<sup>2</sup> That created superiority and inferiority in status. There were a handful of owners and multitude of actual cultivators. Land was cultivated by the simple hand made plough and bullock. The client was paid in kind (paddy) at the end of the harvest season. This patron-client relation created the attitude of superiority and inferiority in different levels of social relations. But everyone was free to choose his occupation and people of Goalpara used to do it. While writing about the people of Goalpara, Hunter mentions, "The people of Goalpara generally are good imitators, and anything that is new to them they try to copy. This is partly owing to the fact that caste restrictions are not so strict as they are in other parts of Bengal".<sup>3</sup>

2. Amalendu Guha. Zamindar-Kalin Goalpara Jilar Artha - Samajik Awastha (Assamese, Socio-Economic situations in Goalpara during the Zamindari period. B.N. College, Dhubri, 1984) p.13.
3. W.W. Hunter. Statistical Account of Assam Vol.II (B. R. Publishing Corporation 1982. First published 1879) p.51.

Joint family was the predominant type. Kinship bond was so strong that it entered every aspect of their life. The Syeds started getting their status heredity-wise and practice of endogamy helped them to keep the group compact. Kinship bond was strongly operative in the Sheikh section of the community. Land were cultivated through family labour, where men, women and children, all were engaged. Agricultural activities were divided between the sex. It was the menfolk who prepared the soil for paddy. Seeds were sown broadcast by men. Weeding, transplanting etc. were done exclusively by the women. As each and every member was active in a family or in the society, so almost each family was self-sufficient. Such a rigid economic or patron-client relation could remain intact until the coming of the Britishers.

#### TRANSFORMATION DURING THE BRITISH RULE

The British brought about an undesirable change in this economy. The first bitter experience was the imposition of tax on the Inam land. Since then, subsistent economy has been under a tremendous pressure. Here, we direct our glance to the general economic condition consequent on the coming of the Britishers. For this, we quote Amalendu Guha,

Traders and bankers from other Indian provinces flocked to Assam and, in the absence of local business acumen, they provided the economy with the necessary, yet exploitative services of trading and banking. All these factors helped the rapid growth of the population of the Brahmaputra Valley - from an estimated one million in 1826 to about two millions by 1872 - and of the economy as well. But the economic growth was almost entirely limited<sup>4</sup> to its foreign-owned and foreign-managed sector.

Whatever the developmental schemes the British adopted, these were limited by the colonial interest. To put to use the fertile land, they encouraged immigration. In 1930's and 40's Muslim League Ministry also encouraged the same under the 'grow-more-food' campaign.

The Syeds who started their lives as non-cultivating owners, had to resort to agriculture, towards the end of the 19th century. Seeing the highly differentiated Indian villages, thinkers like Andre Beteille finds "It misleading to use the blanket term 'peasantry' to describe it".<sup>5</sup> However, the Hindu India is always represented in such studies. No doubt, 'peasantry' in its strict European sense cannot be applied in the study of the Indian community. But, identification of the Assamese Muslim society in

4. Amalendu Guha. Planter Raj to Swaraj : Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam (ICHR. New Delhi, 1977) p.19.

5. Andre Beteille. "The Study of Agrarian Systems: An Anthropological Approach" in Man in India (Vol.52 No.2 April-June 1972) p.160.

Dakaidol from this point of view will also be misleading. Because, this Assamese Muslim society makes us aware of the existence of a feature which lies in between tribal and caste situations.

### LAND REVENUE SYSTEM

So far the land revenue system under the Muslim influence is concerned, we read Saikia,

Sultan Husain Shah ... the first of the Muslim kings to rule over a part of Kamrupa for about seventeen years. The entire Western region of the country upto Koch Hajo in the east remained under his control from 1502 to his death in 1519 A.D. ... he replaced the Bhuyans or feudal lords in the region by a new type of administration ... We have so far, very little information about the revenue system that prevailed in the country before this date... Alauddin Khalji ... to introduce a new legislation by which he replaced them by state revenue officers... This Khalji emperor is also credited as the first Muslim ruler of India to insist on actual measurement of land in the country.<sup>6</sup>

But, due to his short period of rule in Assam, he could not carry on with such modifications. But Bhuyanship was transferred to Parganas. Koch Hajo (which included Goalpara) was annexed by the Mughals in the time of Parikshitnarayana, who reestablished the Muslim system of

6. Mohini Saikia. Assam-Muslim relation and its Cultural Significance. (Luit Printer, Gohaghat, Assam, 1978) pp.158-160.

revenue. "As it was in other parts of the Mughal empire, the land in Kamrup was also divided into several classes, such as the Khiraj or taxed land which comprised of the ordinary cultivating tenure, the Nisf-Khiraj or half assessed tenure and the la-kheraj or revenue free tenure".<sup>7</sup>

#### NON-AGRICULTURAL OCCUPATIONS

Usually in a caste society, all the non-agricultural occupations are performed by different occupational groups. It is beneath the dignity of the members of one occupational caste group, to do the activities of the other group. Siddique finds out that the Muslims of Calcutta have patterned their society according to the occupational caste groups of Calcutta. To him,

Muslim society in Calcutta is not only segmented on ethnic lines but elements of stratification are also observable in it in spite of the constraints of Islamic egalitarianism and the stress of urban mode of fluid interaction. The best agreed positions are those of the Syed at the top and the Lal Begi sweepers at the bottom. Rest of the groups occupy intermediate positions in the hierarchy ... determined by a number of criteria,<sup>8</sup>

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7. Ibid., p.164.

8. M.K.A. Siddique. Muslims of Calcutta : A Study in Aspects of their Social Organization (ASI Calcutta 1974) p.117.

Similarly, Ansari gives a neat catalogue of the Muslim castes in Uttar Pradesh. He writes, "Thus, according to the census returns of 1931, the following are the major Muslim castes. The classification of these castes into different groups is the work of the author.

- |      |                               |  |
|------|-------------------------------|--|
| I.   | Ashraf :                      | Sayyad<br>Shaikh<br>Mughal<br>Pathan   |
| II.  | ... ..                        | Muslim Rajput  |
| III. | Clean Occupational<br>Caste : | Julaha - Weaver<br>Darzi - Tailor<br>Qassab - Butcher<br>Nai or Hajjan - Barber<br>... |
| IV.  | Unclean Caste :               | Bhangi - Sweeper <sup>9</sup>  |

Thus, Muslim society in India is a replica of the Hindu society of the particular region. Invariably and logically, Assamese Muslim society is a replica of the Assamese Hindu society. Unlike the rest of the country, there were few occupational castes in Assam. Caste principles were never rigid in Assam, due to the impact

9. G. Ansari. Muslim Caste in Uttar Pradesh (an Ethnographic and Folk Culture Publication, 1960) p.35.

of many liberal and humanitarian schools of thought - as Islamism, Vaishnavism, Tribalism and so on.

The weaver, as an occupational caste group never existed in Assam, Each family possessed a loom which was made by the menfolk. Men and women, irrespective of caste, knew the art of rearing worms and spinning. Women, irrespective of social background and marital status, were skillful weaver. There was no group of cotton carders. Among the Hindus, fishermen were known as doms. But fishing was <sup>a</sup> game for everyone. Instruments needed for fishing were made by the men.

Thus, some features of the original tribal egalitarianism could be identified in the Assamese Muslim society. About the traditional Assamese economy and society A.K. Das rightly comments,

The Assamese people have been called lazy ever since the beginning of British rule, because they did not take labour jobs in tea plantations and railroad construction.... The main reason for the apparent "laziness" was that Assam was a land of plenty and the people had an easy life. Traditionally, the Assamese economy was self-sufficient. The food was home grown; fish and game was plentiful; cloth was woven from Muga, paat, and eri worms reared at home; every family had its own loom; and they built their own homes with wood, bamboo and thatch, all of

which were plentiful. Beggars were almost non-existent [sic].<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, we read Barkataki's findings thus,

Almost every Assamese villager himself makes his family's requirement of bamboo articles such as fishing tackles called polo, jakoi, kuki etc. For use in the house and the kitchen they make kula, dala (trays of varying sizes), bisoni (fan) saloni (sieve) and other articles of attractive shapes and sizes. Bamboo mats are made and used extensively for such purposes as drying of vegetables, paddy and rice .... patis are used in summer as underlay for beds for their cooling effect.<sup>11</sup>

The traditional economy of the village Dakaidol was agricultural in nature. Economy was self-sufficient. Agricultural economy was supplemented by cottage industry. A patron-client or high-low status, coincided basically in land relations. However, in non-land relations an equality was maintained. All the non-agricultural occupations, and services were performed without any 'caste' barrier. Social structure was not maintained by jaimani relations; like in other parts of the country each family was not specialised in one activity; skilled as they were in all the activities so they could fulfil the requirements. Fishing

10. A.K. Das. Assam's Agony : A Socio-Economic and Political Analysis (Lancers Publishers, New Delhi, 1982) pp.23-24. .

11. S. Barkataki. India - The Land and People : Assam (National Book Trust, New Delhi, India, 1969) pp.78-79.

or weaving for example was practised by both Syeds and non-Syeds.

#### WOMEN AND ECONOMY

Women are known as economically dependent. But the study shows that the women in the agricultural economy in Dakaidol, have been playing 'almost' an equal role as the menfolk. The predominant mode of production in this village has been agriculture. In order to realise their contribution to this agrarian economy, we will analyse their participation in both agricultural and non-agricultural occupations.

In the agricultural activities, we identify a division of labour. Both sexes positively contribute according to their capacity. Soil is made ready by the men. Seeds are sown by men; Women are engaged in activities as weeding and transplanting the plants. They also protect the field from wild animals. Men also join hands with them. Harvesting is also shared by men and women. Paddy is brought home by the men and the women, while paddy is husked in Ural or Dheki (wooden mortar and a particular instrument) by the women. This remains exclusively a

woman's job. A woman's job does not end here. Winnowing fan (Dala, Kula) etc., are used to clean the husked paddy. Rice is thus separated from dust.

Rice is used not only for two meals daily. The womenfolk in particular prepare, Cera (flatten rice), Muri (puffed rice), Pitha (snacks) from rice. Bora rice which is better for such snacks is usually brought from the market, as cultivation of Bora rice needs more care. It was observed that, when the agricultural season is not on, the men get time to relax whereas the women throughout the year, remain busy in domestic work, in agriculture, or in preparing cane materials. No doubt, they are assisted by the men in the field, and in the preparation of cane materials. Their contribution towards fulfilment of the other requirements of the family is also significant. They are engaged in poultry-farming and cattle-rearing. Among the domestic fowls reared, chicken, duck etc., deserve special mention. Cows are reared for milk, a portion of which are sold inside the village.

Every woman in the village (who was met) recall their glorious handloom. Women, both married and unmarried, know the art of spinning and weaving. Once, clothes were produced at home. This remained a significant pursuit of

every woman. They had no respite from their loom. This feature was not peculiar to the study village, because Amiya Kumar Das writes,

Every Assamese woman, irrespective of caste or religion, is supposed to know weaving... Mahatma Gandhi was amazed to find skillful and artistic weaving talents among the Assamese women when he visited Assam in 1921, especially when he was putting embargos sic / on the use of foreign clothes and was asking everyone to spin and weave their own clothes. This tradition is not found in any part of India.<sup>12</sup>

Here of course, we should not forget the skillful tribal weavers from the hills of Assam.

The women in Dakaidol used to weave Mekhla Chadder (woman's costume) Gamosa (towels) clothes for men, bedsheets, bedcovers, bags etc. Thus, the women could produce all the necessities of the family. An interesting story connected with Assamese weaving runs thus,

There is a little story about the Assamese ~~student~~ student in Calcutta, somewhere at the turn of the 20th century. The student lived with a few other Bengalee students. For New Year's Day he received a parcel from his mother... The roommates immediately asserted that he belonged to a low caste, 'Tati' (weaver) family and asked him to move out. He had to comply.<sup>13</sup>

The family loom had been occupying an important place of decoration. The introduction of mill products

12. Das, loc.cit.

13. Idem

from Manchester, gradually put the handloom into disuse. Spinning went almost totally out of hand. Weaving continued. Today, in spite of Gandhi's attempt to revive the cottage industry for real 'Swaraj', the village Dakaidol shows a pitiable and touching scene. As a legacy, of the British rule, 'weaving' is almost completely ruined. Only one handloom in running condition can be found in the village. The weaver produces only for her family and does so if someone in the village asks her to do that. She gets the yarn from the market. Today, maintaining a handloom has become expensive. The cost incurred is more in this respect. So people use those cloths which are available in the market. In the weekly market along with other commodities, sometimes such cloth of rough quality (handloom) are sold. These are mainly produced by the weavers of the neighbouring areas, who can still afford to weave. The poorest section of the community in Dakaidol depends on such cloth in order to help them meet their primary need of clothing.

Few women (majority of them are widows) teach Koran to the local children, thereby adding Rs.50/- or Rs.60/- to the purse. In cases of extreme poverty, daughters are sent out mainly to the Goalpara town to work as maidservants. Thereby they get food, clothing and shelter. Besides these a little amount of around Rs.60/-

or Rs.70/- (maximum) on a monthly basis is given to the parents. Girls are preferred for such jobs.

#### THE PRESENT OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE

The present occupational structure is evident from the following table :

Table No.I PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS ENGAGED IN DIFFERENT OCCUPATIONS

Sl.Nos.	Primary occupations	Nos.	P.C.
1.	Agriculturists	44	88
2.	Petty Traders and Shopkeepers (Grocery)	3	6
3.	Tailor	1	2
4.	Carpenters	2	4
TOTAL		50	100

For 88 percent of the villagers agriculture is the primary occupation. So, the agrarian social structure of the village needs specification. Despite the diversity of social arrangements on land in different parts of India, Daniel Thorner attempted to reduce them into well defined and precise social categories, on the basis of the three following criteria :

1. Type of income obtained from the soil -  
(a) rent (b) fruits of own cultivation (c) wages
2. The Nature of Rights -  
(a) ownership (b) tenancy (c) share-cropping rights (d) no rights at all
3. The extent of fieldwork actually performed -  
(a) absentee landlord who does no work at all  
(b) those who perform partial work (c) total work done by actual cultivator with family labour (d) where work is done entirely for others to earn wages.

Taking these criteria, Malik, Kisans and Mazdoors with sub-groups within each category are identified in the agrarian social structure.<sup>14</sup> The agrarian social structure in Dakaidol is described below :

Table No.II AGRARIAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Sl.Nos.	Group of Agriculturists	P.C.
1.	<u>Kisans</u> (small working peasants)	66
2.	<u>Mazdoors</u> (share-croppers)	14
3.	<u>Mazdoors</u> (landless labourers)	8
	TOTAL =	88%

14. Cited in D.N. Dhanagare. Peasant Movements in 1920-1950 (Oxford University Press Bombay 1983) pp. 13-14.

Thus, it appears that all the agriculturists are not the plough cultivators. They differ from one another in respect of land rights. The wage earners sometimes work in the land of the Bengali Muslim small owners. However, such categorisation is possible only at the conceptual level. The boundary of each group cannot be determined for all the time. Sometimes a Kishan also employs a labourer, and on the other hand a wage earner is not always an agricultural labourer.

In majority of the cases, the income from the field is not enough to provide two meals a day. Flood affects the production almost every year. Various non-agricultural occupations (as has been mentioned already) performed by each and every (able) member of the family, serve as a supplementary source of income for the family. Besides this, it is significant to note that agriculturists irrespective of their traditional status (as Syed and Sheikh) are engaged in plough-cultivation. There are six holdings of areas of about two hectares each while forty-four holdings are with areas less than a hectare. The average size of the agricultural holdings is between 3-4 Bighas. This is more than the state's average. It is estimated that in Assam there are 12,60581 small holdings

with areas of one hectare or less, this occupies 5,54,598 thousand hectares of land. The average size of holdings in this category is about 0.44 hectares while 48 holdings with areas of 50 hectares or more occupy 43.3 thousand hectares of land. The average size of holdings in this category is about 9 hectares.<sup>15</sup>

There is only one grocery shop recently opened in the village. According to reports, two brothers own the shop. They were agriculturists, but lost their parents at an early age. The sons worked as servants and struggled hard to rise in life. Gradually with the favour of luck and with their hard effort they had accumulated little capital and started the shop. Now this is their primary occupation. Two percent tailors can be found in the village. However, it is significant to note that he and his wife do not belong to Dakaidol. Both of them are from North Salmara sub-division. They are now settled in Dakaidol to earn a livelihood. The carpenters were originally agriculturists. Now, due to non-availability of sufficient land, and dearth of carpenters in the locality, they have resorted to carpentry.

Six percent of the villagers, who do not own any agricultural land, except the plot attached to their huts

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15. Statistical Handbook of Assam 1980. Government of Assam, Gauhati 1980, Table No.25.

of one or two Bighas, are engaged in petty business, while for 30 percent of the residents petty business is the secondary occupation. This includes participation in the weekly hats (markets) in nearby villages. Goalpara is known for the timber merchants but in Dakaidol, there are only associates to timber merchants. Those who possess bulls, take them to the interior forest to assist the mahajans (merchants). Bulls are used for bringing wood from forests. Such men are paid by the mahajan in cash. Such works are toilsome and risky, yet these are considered lucrative. There is only one Kisan's family where, one of the sons is a matriculate. He is employed in an office. However, his income is accepted as secondary to the family's income. It is significant to note that till the last generation agriculture was the primary occupation of the villagers in cent percent of the cases.

Both primary and secondary sources combined together give the following scale of income in Dakaidol. Such tabulation has been done in order to understand their standard of living. This will be better understood in the light of their expenditure. Thus, it is also necessary to examine the size of their families.

Table III. ANNUAL INCOME AND SIZE OF THE FAMILY

Sl.Nos.	Amount (annually)	Percentage of households	Average size of the family
1.	below - 3600	2	3 persons
2.	3601 - 6600	32	4 - 6 "
3.	6601 - 9600	46	6 - 8 "
4.	9601 - 12600	14	6 - 9 "
5.	12600 - above	6	8 - 9 "
TOTAL		= 100%	

The monthly income and expenditure for a person on an average is within the range of Rs.100 - Rs.160. Undoubtedly, this can be called a poor village as this income just provides two meals a day. Sometimes, a secondary income (irregular) brings a promising fortune, when they get the other necessities of life as raw materials for repairing their houses, buy the second and third pair of clothes and acquire simple furniture, radio set etc.

#### EXCHANGE OF GOODS AND SERVICES

One of the serious repercussions of the introduction of the market economy, could be visualized as the cause of the breakdown of the traditional joint family system and also the strong and all encompassing

kinship bond. As per the villagers, there was a time, when everything was available at home. Only salt had to be brought from outside. And that satisfied not only their bare necessities of life, but they had fruits, vegetables etc., which were also available in abundance. Their grand parents belonged to that rich economy. However, their parents had to handle money economy. And today, the market forms an important spot of transaction.

Secondary source materials make us aware that, even during Mir Jumla's invasion in the middle of seventeenth century, market economy was rare. While writing about the Ahom capital Garhgaon Shihabuddin Talish writes, "The only traders who sit in the bazar are betel-leaf sellers. It is not their practice to buy and sell articles of food in the market-place. The inhabitants store in their houses one year's supply of food of all kinds, and are under no necessity to buy or sell any etable".<sup>16</sup> Such was the situation in the village too.

Gradually, during the British period, the concepts of money and market were brought into. The condition of trade in Goalpara in 1870's are well depicted by W.W.Hunter.

16. E.A. Gait. A History of Assam (LBS Publications, Gauhati, Assam 1981, First edited in 1905) p.150.

It runs thus, "The local trade of Goalpara is carried on by means of periodical fairs on the occasion of religious festivals, as well as at permanent markets. Small shops are scattered all over the country, and hats or markets are held on certain days of the week in most of the villages. Besides these, a number of petty traders, called basania bepari, literally floating or moving traders visit almost every village, for the purpose of exchange or sale of certain articles, and the purchase of others".<sup>17</sup> It is however, found that some of the floating traders ultimately settled down in Goalpara.

Like, many other villages, the village Dakaidol has its own market place and market day, locally known as hat. In different villages the hat takes place in different days of the week. The day allotted for the weekly hat in Dakaidol is Saturday. This remains a busy day where people from nearby villages participate as buyers and sellers. On the hat day, here and there, one can see persons carrying articles in two big pasi (cane baskets) in a Bhar (carrying stick). The hat basically exhibits products from cottage industry and agricultural sector. However, the lines between buyers and sellers cannot be drawn once and

17. W.W. Hunter. op.cit., p.76.

for all. Depending on the amount of commodity they possess, their nature of participation varies from buyers to sellers. Rice, oil, vegetables, chicken, duck, some clothes (handloom) handicraft like pasi, bisoni etc., are bought and sold. It is a miniature fair of local products, held according to the local need.

Different services are available to them in the following way :

Services of -

Barbar : Both these services are monopolised by Behari and  
Cobbler Muslims and Bihari Hindus. Among the Hindus, there are Barbars and they serve the Hindus. These services are not always available within the village'. Cobblers especially do not visit the village. So, in order to receive this service one needs to come out of the village. The Barbars are known as Hajjam. It is however, significant to note that these Bihari migrants inherit their occupation traditionally. They are the members of their respective 'occupational caste' group unlike the Assamese.

Butcher: Monthly or weekly, whenever they need, few villagers contribute money and buy a cow. The

person who is more interested, take the lead, and in the corner of his kitchen garden or any such convenient place within his residential compound, slays the animal. Those who had contributed money are given a share of it, known as bhag. The size of the bhag is determined according to the amount of the money paid.

**Fuel Supplier :** Many of them go for collection of wood in the nearby jungles. It is a part of the daily routine of the children. Besides this there are some fuel suppliers mainly tribals - Koches and Garos, who carry wood in a Bhar for selling. Fuel is sold in the Saturday hat too.

**Weaver :** They do on their own. But, since weaving has become a costly affair, so they get clothes from the market.

**Carpenter:** Available within the village. Services can be received on payment of money.

**Potter :** Articles produced by him are sold in the market. As there is no potter in the village, they buy these in the market.

**Milkman:** Bullocks and cows are an integral part of the rural economy. Thus, a milkman does not belong to any caste group. He is available within the village. Those who do not depend agriculture, usually do not possess bullocks also. They buy milk locally. Collection of wood for fuel and taking the bullocks and cows to nearby grassy **fields coincide**.

**Blacksmith :** For the services of these persons they need  
and  
**Goldsmith** to come to the town.

Thus, it is found that the concept of 'occupational caste' proved to be a misnomer in their economic relation. It is very much based on the principle of equality. Achievement determines their status and not ascription. Traditional status is not the determinant of role; role determines their social status. Exchange of goods and services takes place in appreciable way. The society is free from the system of hereditary bondage and hereditary occupation.

## AGRICULTURAL SEASON

Rice is the staple food crop. Along with it, mustard, pulse and variety of vegetables are grown. In Assam, three different types of rice are grown. These are Roa, Ahu, and Bao. Cultivation of Roa dhan (transplanted paddy) requires much care, effort and time. The plants need to be transplanted. The whole process takes around ten months to be completed. Seeds are sown by April and crops are harvested latest by January. The fine quality rice like Lahi, Joha and Bora (sticky rice) fall under this category. As extra effort is required, so the villagers do not cultivate Roadhan.

Sometimes Ahu and Bao are sown in the same field. The advantage of cultivation of Ahu is that, it ripens quicker. However, some of the villagers cultivate Baadhan Ahudhan also sometimes needs transplantation. Before the monsoon starts, the field for Ahudhan is made ready by ploughing and harrowing the land. Seeds are sown broadcast by March. But it needs a flooded area. Before sowing, the land is manured with cowdung. Thus, the field is nourished by rain water and cowdung; chemical fertilizer is not used.

Water is necessary for such fields. But repeated floods which is a topographical feature of Assam, lead to

the destruction of the paddy and the discomfort of the villagers. Artificial irrigation system and even hand pumps are not used. Thus, in case of drought they face serious problems. Similarly, for manure, they depend only on cowdung. But cattle disease is also common. Frequent passing away of cattle, hinders in the task of manuring the field. Mechanisation of agriculture is a remote possibility. They solely depend on animal and man power. Thus, loss of cattle causes immense harm. Besides these, pests also destroy the paddy. Thus, the field needs to be properly cared and watered. But, they are too dependent on nature for which they have already suffered in the past.

If, all the conditions remain favourable, the paddy ripens by December. Thus, the harvest season begins. This is the season of merry-making. The field is cultivated and harvested through family labour. All the families come closer in this season. Festival associated with this season is Bihu known as Rangali Bihu, literally, the festival of merry-making. Bihu has two aspects, religious and non-religious. Since it is a Muslim community, they participate in the non-religious aspect of it. A question was asked, as to when do they exactly harvest the paddy. They answered, 'after the Bihu'. Further probe has shown that their concern for the festival

is due to the fact that by the last part of January (after the Bihu) the field becomes completely ready for harvest. Thus 'Bihu' is not merely a Hindu religious festival, but is also an indicator of the end of the agricultural season, the end of the toilsome work, leisure for at least two months etc., and it restrengthen solidarity. The harvested paddy is taken home, thrashed by cattle and stored in the Bharal (granary), Strict vigil is kept so that rats do not destroy the paddy in the store. Each year they keep a portion of the crop to be sown next year, locally known as Bidhan.

Thus, 'agriculture' serves not only as an economic means but also strengthens the kinship bond and social solidarity. Family labour is used for the cultivation, where labour is divided according to sex and age. When the necessity arises, they take help of their kins from the extended family too. They help each other by providing the cattle or labour. In times of crisis, during flood and drought they come closer to find a way, for asking relief from the Government, which plea according to them, remains unattended. In the time of merry-making too they develop their feeling of 'social existence'.

## POVERTY VS. DEVELOPMENTAL MEASURES

Village economy had been a symbiosis of agriculture and cottage industry. There was a time when land was more, and people were less, and the concepts of money and market were unknown. According to Amalendu Guha, there was a time when shifting cultivation was the mode of cultivation in Goalpara. Land was more, people were less. He opines that such a system of changing field was favoured because without manuring the field, they could cultivate rice (Ahu), mustard, pulse etc., and produce a good yield. This was prevalent not only in Goalpara but in other parts of the Brahmaputra Valley too. With the influx of the Bengalees from East Bengal the simple technology related to shifting cultivation has undergone major changes.<sup>18</sup> But today, due to the settlement of the Bengali Muslims in the major portion of Dakaidol, and with the growth of population, the middle hamlet in Dakaidol experiences a decline in land-labour ratio. Besides this, subsistent edonomy is replaced by money economy.

The Government in free India has introduced many developmental measures in the form of Community Development, Green Revolution in the form of High Yielding

18. Amalendu Guha. 1984. op.cit., p.33.

Varieties Programme etc., for the development of the base of the country's economy. Despite the implementation of these programmes the fieldwork in Dakaidol, has yielded a shocking and utterly disappointing picture. Naturally a question is raised, 'can it be accepted as a representative of Indian villages'. Acceptance of such view would lead the Government's efforts of rural development no where. Whatever the nature may be, the subsistent economy faces a serious crisis. Here, we turn our attention to the secondary materials. Hayami and Kikuchi write,

Asian village community have been experiencing major changes. The land-labour ratio has been declining rapidly due to population growth at an explosive rate. In order to sustain a subsistence level of income, attempts have been made to increase land productivity; the efforts are reflected in the development and diffusion of seed-fertilizer technology and the expansion of irrigation systems. Despite such efforts, the value of labour has declined relative to the value of land.<sup>19</sup>

Forty one, years have passed since Independence. We are flooded with the Literature explaining the steps taken by Government of free India to improve the rural scenerio and thereby to check the decay and damage of the local situations caused by imperialism. Gandhi's noble and far-sighted idea of rural reconstruction for the

19. Hayami and M. Kikuchi. Asian Village Economy at the Crossroad : An Economic Approach to Institutional Change (University of Tokyo Press, Japan, 1981) p.3.

achievement of real Swaraj led to the evolvement of Community Development Programme (CDP) and revival of 'Panchyati Raj'.

An analysis of the present economic condition of the village will itself prove, how far the Government have succeeded in making the people conscious about their needs and means to achieve this. Much has been done by the Government, but much more is yet to be done.

In the post Independence era, several Land Reform and Revenue Regulation measures have been passed by the Government with the aim of abolition of intermediaries, distribution of land to the actual cultivators, security of tenancy rights etc. Besides the Acts, the State Government had to adopt various measures for the settlement of the landless people. Char<sup>\*</sup> area development programme for instance had to be taken to rehabilitate the flood affected refugees. Such a group of flood-affected refugees were allotted land in Dakaidol in 1953, which caused land alienation, tension and crisis among the original Muslims. It is written,

Besides the various acts ... the State Government adopted many policies regarding settlement of land. With the increase in population both in rural and urban, as a

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\* Char : river islet.

result of natural growth as well as influx from outside the pressure on cultivated lands is becoming more and more. The State Government has found it extremely difficult to cope with the mounting problem of landless peasants. The problem has become more acute due to (1) large-scale erosion of lands every year by rivers; (2) acquisition of and requisition of lands for public purposes such as defence, railways, oil exploration etc; (3) accomodating a large number of refugees from East Pakistan..."<sup>20</sup>

It is significant to note that the State Government gave more importance to rehabilitation of the refugees, rather than on sending them back. It was suicidal in the sense that land was taken away from the locals, by clubbing them under the provision of any of the Acts and these were used for the settlement of the refugees. They were given land according to the size of the family and in no case it exceeded 10 Bighas. By 1959, the Assam State Acquisition of Lands belonging to Religious or Charitable Institutions of Public Nature Act, was passed. This Act, however, gave concession to the owner, by allowing them to retain a certain portion for the institution.

With the support of and under the cover of such policies in 1963, another group of flood affected landless refugees were settled in the land of Dakaidol. All the refugees were given Patta(document).

20. Directorate of Economics and Statistics. World Agricultural Census ASSAM 1970-71. Gauhati Assam p.30.

Thus, such developmental measures were pro-refugees and were against the development of the natives. The economy of the Assamese Muslims is replete with poverty. The developmental measures caused immense and irreparable damage to the economy of the original Muslims.

The modus operandi of the other directed process of social development is also far from satisfactory. The village is not yet electrified, as a result, artificial irrigation remains a myth. High Yielding Varieties Programme (HYVP) has not made any headway. Mass illiteracy prevails. Stagnation and dropout at the middle school level is the common feature. In order to know as how far the State Government and villagers come closer and join hands for the implementation of the policies of rural reconstruction, we need to discuss the nature of the agency through which these would have been possible.

'Panchayati Raj' had been in the form of three tier system in Assam prior to 1974. Later on this was changed to two-tier system. When there was the three-tier system, there were the following agencies.

Mahakuma Parishad - at the sub-divisional level.

Anchalic Panchayat - at the Block level.

Gaon Panchayat - at the village level.

Later on, the institution at the Block level was changed to an advisory committee thereby pruning the Raj into two-tier system. Down to the block level, the institution at the top are Government bodies. While Gaon Panchayat which consists of several villages is a non-Government body. Here lies the lacuna in the problem - the gap between Government and the masses. Thus, the developmental programme of CDP does not reach the village.

The aim of CDP, which was launched in 1952 is such,

In more specific terms, the objective of the Community Development and National Extension Programmes is to assist each village in planning and carrying out an integrated, multi-phased family and village plan directed toward increasing agricultural production; improving existing village crafts and industries and organizing new ones; providing minimum essential health services and improving health practices; providing required educational facilities for children and an adult education programme; providing recreational facilities and programmes; improving housing and family living conditions; and providing programmes for village women and youth.

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21. The Ministry of Community Development, Government of India: A Guide to Community Development (Delhi, 1957) p-2.

Surprisingly, this package programme could not make any headway in the village Dakaidol. Poor agricultural production, declining cottage industry, lack of educational facilities etc., remain as the potent cause of mass poverty in the Assamese Muslim Community in Dakaidol.

#### POVERTY AND RURAL INDEBTEDNESS

Failure to implement the developmental measures and growing poverty as mentioned above lead to the problems of indebtedness. The insecurity of agricultural production due to flood and drought, and death of cattle remain the main causes of indebtedness. Besides these, during the time of crisis, as during marriage, sickness and death they become the victim of indebtedness.

However, in cent percent cases, credit is not taken from the Bank. It is taken from relatives and friends. Friends largely include Bengali Muslims from the neighbouring hamlets. However, it was a nice experience to know that the amount of it is not very high. The standard of living is poor but ratio of indebtedness is not high. In cases of extreme poverty, they go for wage earning or work as servant or dalal (intermediator). They do not even

hesitate to seek employment in the Bengali Muslim household. Because, when agricultural crop is destroyed misfortune falls not only upon one or two families but it becomes the society's misfortune. Every family remains in hardship. No one possesses a surplus to be given as debt. Thus, asking for loan does not turn out to be fruitful. Besides this, begging is forbidden in Islam, 'work to live' is the principle. However, they help each other by giving little paddy to be returned afterwards or such other articles, all of which are to be returned. This is based on a silent reciprocal exchange system, which ultimately helps them to meet each other's needs. Thus, they share articles and not money.

But, they need to enter in debt during the time of family's crisis - as death. Unlike Hindu society the expenditure for the disposal of the death cost them little. As per the Islamic principle, this becomes a crisis not only for the family where the misfortune occurs but it stands as an obligation for the society. It is disposed in a simplest way with an expenditure of Rs.40/- or Rs.50/- minimum, which they can manage. For digging the grave money is not required, because a belief prevails that one who digs forty graves gets forgiveness for his sin and will be

rewarded with the comfort of heaven. Praying for the deceased needs no money, because everyone, even a child in the family, a tailor or a carpenter can lead a prayer and conduct the same if he has sufficient knowledge of it.

On the completion of forty days, the family of the deceased, needs to organise a prayer service and some eatables are served. Those, who can afford, invite all the villagers to participate in the prayer and for lunch or dinner. Those who cannot afford, call for the prayer and distribute some sweets in the form of Tobarak after the prayer. The response of the villagers remain the same. Spending beyond one's capacity is proscribed in Islam.

Circumcision of male child and marriage, are the other two important events in life. Fixing the date of these functions is very much dependent on a good harvest. On both the occasions prayer services are organized because this part is obligatory. And performance of this obligatory part does not need much money. Money is required for the performance of the non-obligatory part (as organizing feasts) which otherwise is socially significant.

Dowry is not a serious problem for the villagers'. But they reported that the expectation always remains. As a result of which, i.e., for the fulfilment of the expectation, some money needs to be spent. If someone can afford to spend more, they do it and others take financial help from relatives or friends'.

Thus, it is found that indebtedness does not turn out to be a serious problem in this village'. Some of them are definitely indebted to friends and relatives'. The rate of debt is not high and on the other hand these are given without charging any interest; which are likely to be refunded'.as the respondents say'. One of the reasons for this is that demand and consumption of interest of loan granted for poverty are religion-wise prohibited'.

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CHAPTER - IV

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## MARRIAGE FAMILY AND KINSHIP

Levy writes, "Muhammad the prophet was the agent through whom believers were made aware of the divine laws which are explicitly or implicitly embodied in the Koran and his (the Prophet's) Sunna, the sum total of his ordinary doing and saying. Upon them in turn, the shar or sharia is, by hypothesis founded".<sup>1</sup> These govern the religio-socio life of the Muslims; stand as a source of inspiration, support and guidance in their worldly existence. As per tradition every Muslim thinks, acts and interacts according to the principles embodied in the Koran and Hadith.

In India, the Islamic Great Tradition is flavoured with the indigenous civilization. When the Great Tradition of Islam was percolating down its religio-cultural elements, it was difficult for the local converts to totally accept it. This obstruction has germinated the Indo-Islamic Little tradition.

Today, the Muslims in the village are basically monogamous. The Great Islamic Tradition gives sanction to

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1. R. Levy. The Social Structure of Islam (Cambridge University Press, 1962) p.242.

polygyny, to give support to forlorn females. But this is so localized that, society looks askance at polygyny. It is because the few cases of polygyny in the village take place not to support the destitute women.

The Great tradition and the Little tradition operate at two distinct levels. The Pirs and Sufis percolated the elements of the Great tradition to the Muslims who are non-literate. Their parochial understanding gave a slightly different shape to the original culture. Transmission of the original cultural elements through the literati is theoretically termed as 'Universalization'. The localized pattern is known as 'Parochialization' in sociological literature. Both the processes are universal for which we confront with regional differences of one cultural element in the behavioural level.

The concept offered by Milton Singer could be better understood by their application by McKim Marriott in his study of the religious transformation in Kishan Ghari - in Cow Nourisher Worship. In our present study our attempt too, is to understand the parochialized or the localised form of the Great Tradition, in the light of the elements as given in the Great Tradition.

The example given by McKim Marriott is mentioned here. "The Sacred hill of the Purāna has become in each household yard a literal pile of cowdung, shaped into a rough homunculus with four embracing walls appended to its neck, and decorated on top with 'trees' of straw and cotton".<sup>2</sup> It is because "Downward spread, like universalization, is likely to be characterized by transformations".<sup>3</sup> These processes are conceptualised : "To refer to the kind of transformation of cultural contents which is apparent in the festival of Cow-Nourisher Worship - the downward devolution of great-traditional elements and their integration with little-traditional elements - a term is needed".<sup>4</sup> McKim Marriott further writes, "For this movement, which is the reverse of 'universalization', I suggest the term 'parochialization'. Parochialization is a process of localization, ..."<sup>5</sup>

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2. McKim Marriott. "Little Communities in an Indigenous Civilization" in McKim Marriott (ed.) Village India (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, London 1955, Seventh Impression 1967) p.200.

3. Ibid., p.199.

4. Ibid., p.200.

5. Idem

It is commonly agreed that in order to understand kinship network and the modus operandi of the Kinship bond, a village serves as an ideal place to conduct experiment. Kinship determines status, economy, family, marriage and so on. An Agricultural village joins all the sub-structures, that it possesses through the strength of the Kinship bond. The strength of the Kinship bond gradually diminishes as an area moves in the direction of being urban. The pattern and size of the family, marital ties etc., are very much dependent on Kinship ties. These aspects of life in rural situation is analysed in this chapter, keeping in mind the Islamic ideological notion and guiding principles.

In Dakaidol it is the primary duty of the parents to get their sons and daughters married off, when they reach adulthood. Child marriage could not be traced due to the prescription in Islam. Islam considers marriage as the basic fact of life which helps perpetuation of the human race. The residents of Dakaidol are very much particular in this matter. About the principles Jāfar Sharif summerizes, "Marriage is enjoined on every Musalmān, and celibacy was condemned by the Prophet,..."<sup>6</sup>

6. Jāfar Sharif. Islam in India or the QANUN-I-ISLAM  
(Curzon Press Ltd. London 1921, Reprint,  
1975) p.56.

Divorce with proper reason and remarriage for both widow and widower - all are made possible in Islam - to achieve the ultimatum of security for everyone and for social health. The common principles remain the same everywhere and for everyone; there are variations in the mode of operation only.

#### SITUATIONS IN DAKAIDOL

It is almost a universal belief that girls are destined to be housewives. The natural division of human species conforms to this. Socio-cultural condition makes such ideas more deep rooted. In the village, despite the realisation of the need of educating the girls their financial condition never permits them to do so. Thus, they are compelled by circumstances to believe that education of girls in a patrilineal society is a clear waste of the scarce resources. Moreover, education of girls is never appreciated. Thus, we have seen that social and economic conditions are equally responsible for illiteracy among the girls. Due to financial constraints education of the boys is also lagging behind their urban counterpart. This is more due to the drawback in the educational system. It is sad to notice that, the new educational policy hardly reaches the poor villagers.

Gandhi's notion of education is still valid for the villagers : "Education should be so revolutionized as to answer the wants of the poorest villagers instead of answering those of an imperial exploiter".<sup>7</sup> Undoubtedly, the country has made considerable improvement in different areas. But, this healthy structure is built upon a weak foundation. Because of this disparity, blind imitation of the foreigners (Britishers) and lack of far sighted efforts of the National Plan Policy makers all the developmental programmes remain as myth to the people at this grass root level.

The institution of marriage though universal, takes different forms in different circumstances. Malinowsky writes, "The different forms of marriages are not stages in an evolutionary series, as Bachofen, Spencer and others would make us believe, but marriage is fundamentally one and its variations are determined by the type of community, its political and economic order and the character of its material culture".<sup>8</sup> Marriage in Islam is a civil contract, which is permanent unless dissolved by divorce. This contract has religious sanction behind.

7. Directorate of Information and Public Relations, Assam. Towards Real Swaraj (n.d.) p.13.

8. B. Malinowsky. "Marriage", Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1960 Vol.14. pp.940-950.

## AGE FOR MARRIAGE

Not a single case of child marriage is recorded in the village. It is because child marriage is prohibited in Islam. It is realised that the contribution of the girls in the economic activities in the village is significant. Besides doing the household works, they contribute in the agricultural activities. But, it becomes an important duty of the parents to get their daughters and sons married off when they grow adult. It turns to be a social need. The age of marriage for boys and girls as reported by the respondents, is beneficial to a great extent for the welfare of individuals and society. The age of marriage of boys and girls for the last ten years has been thus :

Table No. I AGE FOR MARRIAGE (FOR BOYS AND GIRLS)  
(in percentage)

<u>Sl.No.</u>	<u>Age (Year)</u>	<u>Boys %</u>	<u>Girls %</u>
1.	16 - 18	2	32
2.	19 - 21	4	54
3.	22 - 24	40	12
4.	25 - 27	48	2
5.	28 - 30	4	-
6.	30 - above	2	-
		100	100

88 percent of the marriages of boys take place between 22 - 27 years of age. Comparatively the age of marriage of girls is not very satisfactory, 32 percent of the marriages take place in between 16 - 18 years of age. 63 percent of the marriages are however ideal in the sense that it takes place between 19 - 27 years of age. However, the respondents are of the view that if the daughters are married before twenty years of age, getting a spouse becomes easier. So they try to get their daughters married off before this age. Thus, it is understood that, daughters are disposed off before twenty years of age to avoid social criticism and inconvenience. ✓

The contribution of girls towards household and economic activities make them important members in society. This idea gets strengthened by the following responses. In 6 percent of the cases where boys marry before 21 years of age, is due to the fact that in order to look after the household activities and to perform allied works a person's service becomes necessary in the family. In such situations the parents come out with the possible solution - recruiting a daughter-in-law through the marriage of the son. Thus, age of marriage is determined by the economic conditions, activities, and need of the family of a helping hand.

## SELECTION OF SPOUSE

Marriage arranged by parents is the predominant form of selection in Dakaidol. Thus, social and economic condition of both the contracting families stand important. Personal choice of the bride and groom is considered secondary. When marriage takes place within the village there is the possibility of the bride and the groom seeing each other before marriage. When the partner is from outside the village such possibility is rare. "Ideally, the Arab groom could not choose his own bride, since he never had an opportunity even to see her until the marriage contract had been concluded; he usually waited until the wedding day itself".<sup>9</sup>

A preliminary contract is made between the parents or guardians of the contracting parties. If they come to an agreement, then the consents of the bride and the groom are taken. This procedure follows, when the groom accompanied by his close relatives and friends go to see the bride in her home. When the discussion reaches an advanced stage, the consent of the bride is taken. Here discrimination can be identified. In 80 percent of the

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9. W.J. Goody. World Revolution and Family Patterns  
(The Mac Millan Company. London, New York,  
1970) pp.88-89.

cases informing the bride becomes just a formality. Thus, her personal choice is not taken into account in the selection of her groom. In the Interview Schedule a multiple choice question was included to know about the criteria of selection. The responses recorded are given below :

Table No.II CRITERIA OF SELECTION : RESPONSES IN PERCENTAGE

<u>Sl.No.</u>	<u>Criteria</u>	<u>Girls</u>	<u>Boys</u>
1.	Literate	30	30
2.	Caste	-	-
3.	Hardworking	100	100
4.	Rich family background	-	-
5.	Cultured family background	100	100
6.	Health & Physical appearance	100	100
7.	A bread earner (for boys)	-	100
8.	A job holder (other than agriculture)	26	26
9.	A religious leader ( <u>Mauluvi</u> )	-	-

The above table gives us the following information. 30 percent of the respondents want that the groom should be literate. The qualities of hardworking, cultured family background, health and beauty, are looked for in the selection of the bride. In selection of a groom cent percent of the respondents look for the

qualities of hardworking, cultured family background, health and physical appearance and he has to be a bread earner. <sup>six</sup>Twenty-six percent of the respondents prefer a job holder, other than agriculture. Such as bus conductors, petty businessmen, brokers etc.

'Caste' background seems to have no impact in the selection of spouse. Similarly, rich family background is also not 'the' criterion. To them achievement is more important than ascription. However, they like to establish marital ties with families belonging to the same income group. They are of the view that religion and society are interwoven. They cannot be separated. A Mauluvi is one, who devotes more in religion and thereby tries to separate society from religion. They are little concerned about the worldly needs and pleasure and hanker for other worldly asceticism. So a Mauluvi is never preferred as a groom. The villagers want everyone to be religious but not fanatic.

#### KINSHIP AND SELECTION OF SPOUSE

Kinmarriages are popular among the villagers. Such marriages were the predominant form in the older generation. However, in the new generation there are

changes; yet in the presence of an available spouse among the kins marital tie is not established beyond the bond. Selection of the Kin for marriage is very much determined by the Islamic law, which is followed as an obligation. The rules they follow is written in the Koran with clarity,

Forbidden unto you are your mothers, and your daughters, and your sisters, and, your father's sisters, and your mother's sisters', and your brother's daughters and your sister's daughters, and your foster-mothers, and your foster-sisters, and your mother-in-law, and your step-daughters who are under your protection (born) of your women unto whom ye have gone in-but if ye have not gone in unto them, than it is no sin for you (to marry their daughters)- and the wives of your sons who (spring) from your own loins (it is forbidden unto you) that you should have two sisters together, except what hath already happened (of that nature) in the past .10

It is further said,

Lawful unto you are all beyond those mentioned, so that ye seek them with your wealth in honest wedlock, not debauchery.11 (Surah IV:24)

Such prescriptions are based on three types of relations viz. (i) Consanguinous, (ii) affinal and (iii) fictive. The villagers follow this principle and thus, though Kinmarriage is popular yet the following types of relations are not established.

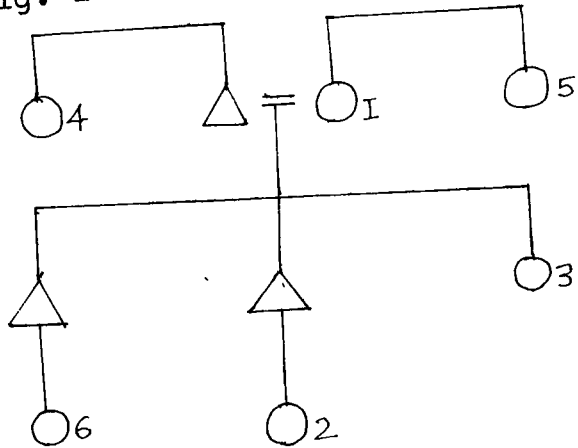
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10. M.M. Pickthall. The Meaning of the Glorious Koran. (A Mentor Book, The New American Library, New York 1953) Surah IV.23 pp. 81-82.

11. Ibid., p.82.

These are -

Fig. I

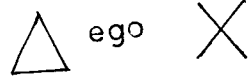


Ego is prohibited to marry the six females in the diagram. They are -

Ego's -

1. Mother
2. Daughters
3. Sister
4. Father's sisters
5. Mother's sisters
6. Brother's daughters

Fig. II



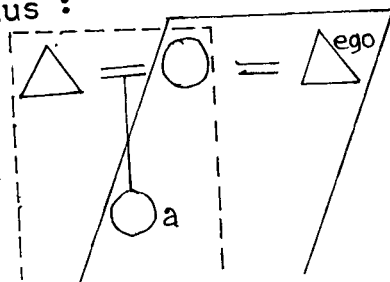
1. Foster mother
2. Foster sister
3. Step daughter

Ego is prohibited to establish marital ties with

Nos. 1, 2 and 3.

So far wedlock with step daughter is concerned

it is thus :

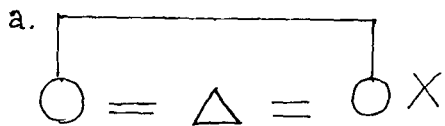


As ego and (a) have no blood relations, such situation may permit ego to marry 'a'

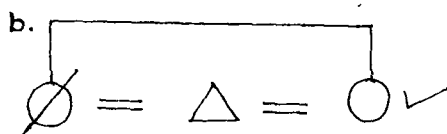
Descent group

Residential group

Fig. III



Sororal polygyny is not sanctioned.



Under situation b. it is sanctioned.

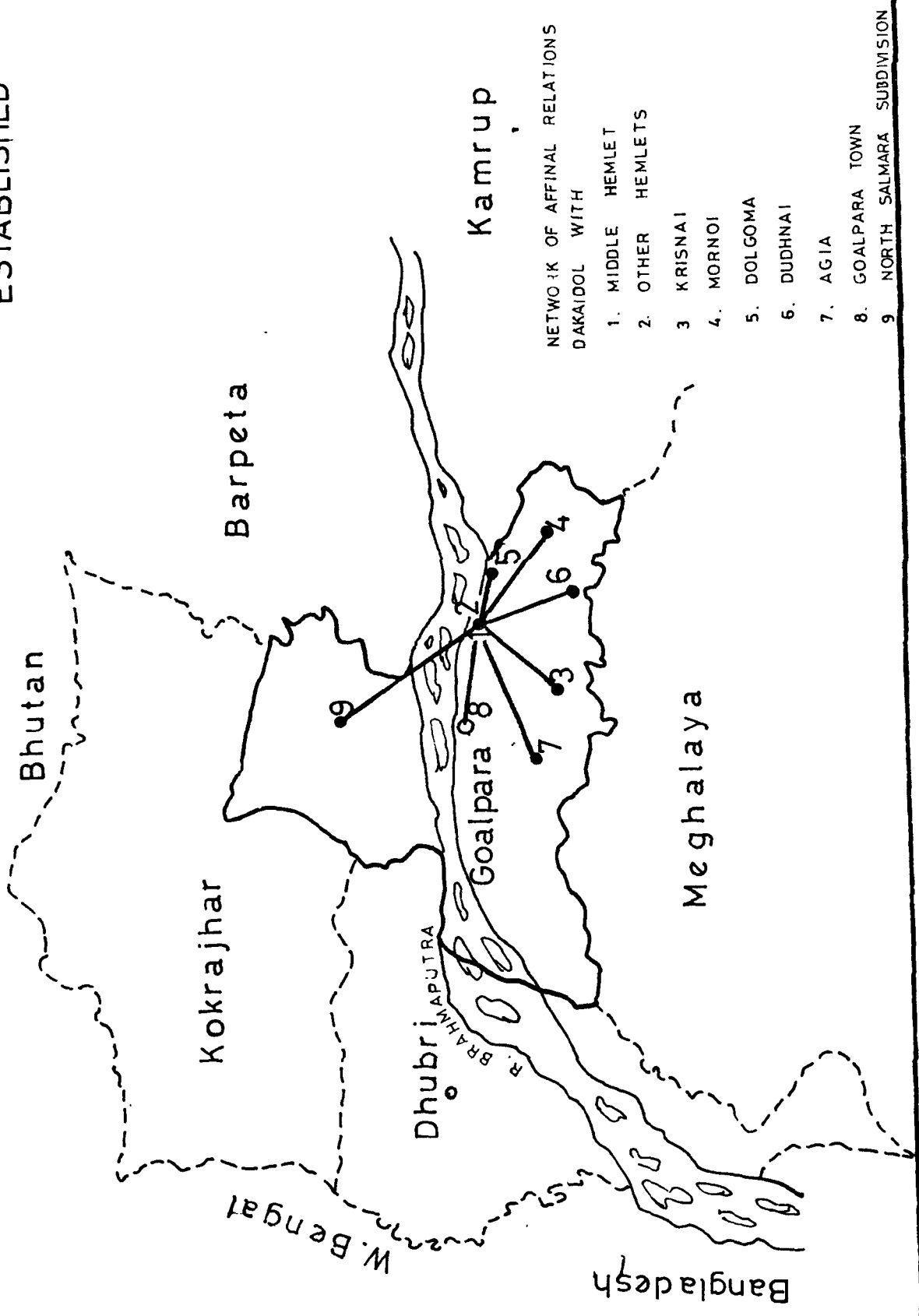
It is noteworthy that the villagers are aware of such prohibitions. Such relations are always considered as taboo. Even case iii b. cannot be traced in the village.

A probe has shown that kin-marriages are popular because it is easier, and favoured by the majority of the residents. Because of kin-marriage which has been in continuation since the inception of the Assamese Muslim society in Dakaidol, today one can identify clusters of a few patrilineally related kingroups. It has already been mentioned that, kin-marriage is popular even today. However, due to non-availability of spouse within the kin-community coupled with the development in infra-structural facilities, the percentage of kin-marriage is gradually receding.

Kin-marriage helps to keep the property intact with the original group. Notably, such situation is found not only in Muslim society but prevalent in many other tribal societies, e.g., in the matrilineal Garo society a mother-in-law weds the husband of her deceased daughter, so that the property inherited by the daughter remains with her (mother). According to the cent percent of the villagers, the most important advantage of such marriages are : the problem of adaptation in a new environment (for the bride) is less. Because, the process of socialization for the bride and the groom remains one and the same.

Besides this, such marriage creates village level endogamy; this provides security to the bride. The members of the bride's natal home keep constant vigil over the outgoing bride and always stand as her support. Secondly, the bride, the groom and the two families are related to one another not only through a particular marital tie, but linked through other relations also. Such situation is recorded where the bride's father has a daughter-in-law, or sister-in-law or such relatives already existing among his extended relations, belonging to the groom's family. Thus, two families usually remain responsible and obliged to one another.

GOALPARA: PLACES WITH WHICH AFFINAL RELATIONS ARE ESTABLISHED



Map IX.

## SPATIAL EXPANSION OF AFFINAL RELATIONS

Spouse; near at home, within the hamlet is most favoured. But, due to expansion of socio-economic frontier, improvement in transportation and communication network, coupled with the non-availability of local partners, affected the institution of marriage, in matters of selection of mate. Today, affinal relation extends beyond the boundary of the 'bamboo fence' of the village. Social group endogamy of Syed and Sheikh which was in existence earlier, no longer finds a way today. Marital relations cut across group and regional boundaries. About the shift from endogamy to openness and the reason operating behind it, a discussion is offered in chapter VI of this thesis.

Here an attempt is made to identify the expansion, of affinal relations over space. Cent percent of the marriages, take place within the district and 'almost' within the Goalpara sub-division. Four percent of the daughters and 6 percent of the sons are married to spouses in North Salmara sub-division i.e., on the Northern valley of the river. (Map No. IX)

Table No. III THE SPATIAL NETWORK OF MARITAL RELATION  
( In Percentage )

<u>Sl.No.</u>	<u>Places</u>	<u>Daughters married to</u>	<u>Sons married from</u>
1.	DAKAIDOL (Middle Hamlet)	52.	54
2.	DAKAIDOL (Other Hamlets)	--	4
3.	KRISNAI	12	14.
4.	MORNOI	10	12.
5.	DOLGOMA	2	-
6.	DUDHNOI	2	4.
7.	AGIA	8	6.
8.	GOALPARA TOWN	10	-
9.	NORTH SALMARA SUB-DIVISION	4	6.
		100.	100.

The above table gives us the information that majority of the marriages take place within the hamlet. It is significant to note that, 4 percent of the daughters-in-law are recruited from the Bengali Muslim Society. Regarding this trend, a discussion is offered in Chapter VI of this thesis.

## DOWRY : ITS FORM

The responses of the villagers on the problem of Dowry widely vary. As a result of which an indepth study had to be conducted. Tabulation of the responses gives us the following picture:

Table No. IV EXPECTATION AND DEMAND OF DOWRY

1. <u>Son's Marriage</u>				2. <u>Daughter's Marriage</u>			
a. <u>Expect</u>		b. <u>Demand</u>		c. <u>Fulfil expectation</u>		d. <u>Fulfil demand</u>	
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
92%	8%	100%		80%	20%	10%	90%

The above chart shows that, the society in Dakaidol is by and large free from this social evil compared to other parts of the country. It is but a human nature to expect. It is always expected that the bride's family gives her the requirements in her wedding. When a question was put on the expectations involved in it 92 percent of the respondents categorically said 'yes'. The 8 percent of the respondents said 'No', reluctantly.

However, it is 'never' demanded. Whereas in cases of girls 10 percent of the respondents said that, they needed to fulfil the demand. This clashes with response 1.b.

In fact, this 10 percent respondents got daughters married outside the village. It is a promising experience to learn that when marriage takes place within the village, dowry does not pose a problem. It is because Kin-marriage is popular. Thus, it is realised that Kinmarriage or Kinship helps positively in maintaining social stability in Dakaidol. Each one has much obligation to the other as they are related. So, the question of demanding dowry does not arise. Cases can be located where the husband's father is the elder brother and wife's father is the younger brother. Similarly, cross-cousin marriage could be located. The guardians do not claim, which would otherwise weaken the relationship between siblings.

#### TYPES OF MARRIAGES

Monogamy, is the usual form of marriage in the village. In 82 percent of the cases, monogamous marriage is reported, and in 18 percent of the cases Polygamy is reported. In 4 percent of the cases three wives can be

located and in 14 percent of the cases polygyny is in the form of bigamy. The respondents who enjoy polygyny, were interviewed. Usually the second contract is established when the first wife passes away, or is insane, quarrelsome or divorced. He gets the social approval to remarry. However, 4 percent cases were reported where two wives are housed in the same compound, in separate huts.

Polygyny is thoroughly discouraged, except under the unavoidable conditions. In fact, Polygyny which is now considered as a social disgrace in the Assamese Muslim society in Dakaidol - is due to the impact of the monogamous Hindu society i.e., due to the impact of the indigenous civilization and secondly due to financial constraints.

The underlying idea behind Arabian polygyny was to give security, food and shelter to destitute women, because, she needs protection. About the limited polygyny the Koran says, "Marry of the women, who seem good to you, two or three or four; and if ye fear that ye cannot do justice (to so many) then one (only)"<sup>12</sup>. This statement however, nullifies the statement already mentioned regarding the relation between monogamy and Hindu impact. It must be said that both the reasons written and

12. Ibid., p.79.

practised equally help for the development of the monogamous form of marriage. Because, with the assumption of Hindu impact, we cannot go far. In Hindu society, polygyny was freely practised by the aristocratic classes. A local Assamese weekly provides with the information that, at the practical level it is found that the percentage of the cases of polygyny is more among the Hindus, than among the Muslims. This is analysed from a Report which was published in 1974, by the Ministry of education and social welfare, government of India.<sup>13</sup>

Md. Qutb rightly remarks, "With regard to the institution of polygamy we should not lose sight of the fact that it is just an emergency law. It does not at all represent any fundamental principle of Islamic law".<sup>14</sup> Thus, polygyny is a means (ideologically) to provide 'justice' and 'shelter' to the destitute women. Today, society looks askance at this type of marriage, because this institution was taken a distorted shape. It is mishandled and thereby the purpose of polygyny is defeated.

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13. Editorial. Mujahid (Assamese Weekly Newspaper) 17 January, 1986 (Islamic Sahitya Prakashan Samiti, Gauhati).

14. Md. Qutb. Islam: The Misunderstood Religion. (Markazi Maktaba Islami, Delhi, 2nd edition 1982) p.119.

Md. Qutb's comment is applicable in the study area. He writes, "...what is required of men is justice which being difficult to achieve in polygamy, the injunction virtually comes to imply that men should contact with one wife only. Thus the Islamic law in normal life favours monogamy rather than polygamy".<sup>15</sup>

#### TYPES OF FAMILY

'Marriage' gives rise to 'family' and the social sanction for procreation derived from the contract, gives rise to 'kinship'. These three basic facts knit together, fabricate the human social life. 'Family' is the basic association and nexus of social relation. Meyer Fortes writes,

A social system, by definition, has a life ... one is the life span of the individual, the other is the physical replacement of every generation by the next in the succession of death and birth .... In all human societies, the workshop, so to speak, of social reproduction, is the domestic group. It is this group which must remain in operation over a stretch of time long enough to rear offspring to the stage of physical and social reproductivity if a society is to maintain itself. This is a cyclical process. The domestic group goes through a cycle of development.... Marriage is certainly a crucial

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15. Idem

element in determining choice of residence by or for a person .16

The type of the family is very much dependent on the economic activities of the family and community. Traditional families in Dakaidol were large unit. The chula (hearth) was common even for thirty to forty persons. Large joint families were the predominant form. Like their Hindu counterpart they lived in joint families. But as kin marriages were popular so family tie was more strong and the unit was composed of Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary kins. Such large families were in existence towards the end of the last century. Fertile land was available in abundance. In the agricultural economy man-power was needed - for ploughing, sowing, weeding, watering, protecting from wild animals and from natural calamities. All the requirements were produced at home. As such, joint living was a possible solution to the economic activities. Due to consolidation of land-holding, cultivation was fruitful and easy.

A socialistic outlook existed in the joint family; old, incapable and sick persons' lives were insured in such

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16. Meyer Fortes in Jack Goody (ed.). The Developmental Cycle in Domestic group. (Cambridge University Press, First edited in 1958, Reprinted in 1978) Introduction pp.1-4,

families. Thus, characteristic feature of the society in Dakaidol was marked by collective conscience, what Durkhiem calls mechanical solidarity. Such large joint families cannot be traced in the village today. Reason being pressure on agricultural land. With the development of land alienation in the British period there emerged a corresponding breakdown in the structure of the joint family. When the size of the family holding became smaller there was surplus of manpower, and the earnings from the field was not enough to provide food to all the members had to of the joint family. As a result of this, members had to be sent out for earning. Thus, with the disintegration of economic interdependence, large families also disintegrated. Agricultural land and residential area got sub-divided and fragmented. Within the same compound there are more than one ghar (house).

A household is called as a ghar in the vernacular term. A.M. Shah defines, "It is called ghar in the vernacular, and refers essentially to a residential and domestic unit comprising the person or persons living together under the same roof and eating food cooked in a common kitchen".<sup>17</sup> In the village all the families cannot

17. A.M. Shah and M.N. Srinivas. Household Dimensions of the family in India: A Field Study in a Gujrat Village (Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1973) p.8.

be called either joint or nuclear. Possibilities exist in between these two extremes. To explain such a situation A. M. Shah has already provided us with the concepts - simple household, compound household and extended family.

The average size of the family is already depicted in the economic structure (Table No.III). For 88 percent of the household 'agriculture' is the primary occupation. But, depending only on agricultural earning means starvation. So one or two members work outside as wage earner, petty traders, etc. Because, the size of the agricultural land is small, so there is surplus manpower and there is the need of earning.

Marriage does not simply minimise a member in the bride's family, but with her inclusion, the groom's household is reshuffled. Now, due to economic independence each married son is expected to take care of his wife and children (unmarried). Joint living is ideal, so long as each member has his/her role to perform, With the pressure on agricultural land, the womenfolk is left with lesser work. 'Idle brain is devil's workshop' - goes the proverb. After completing their household chores and little agricultural work they engage in gossiping, because, they

have no opportunity to articulate and ventilate their grievances. With the interference of mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law their conditions become more miserable. These lead to quarrels and family disputes, mainly because, the source of income is not collective but individual (head). As time passes, <sup>on</sup> these quarrels spark off and lead to the division of the ancestral property- the only possible solution.

It is observed that, the elder brother after getting married, remain attached with the original home. The second brother prefers to secede from the original ghar, when he gets married. Thus, in the developmental cycle of the domestic group, with the beginning of third phase (marriage of the children) home and hearth break off.

As per the respondents, the parents favour to get their sons separated during their (parents) lifetime, so that the burden of the father is shifted to and equally shared by the sons. Thus, separation is the best resort. Such situation exists not only in the area under study; other scholars have also identified the same. A.N.M. Irshad Ali returns with the same experience from his fieldwork in Singimari and Gauhati in Assam. He says, "They say

that though the joint family is an ideal type, in practice it is better to live separately from parents or brothers following one's marriage. This according to them, saves a lot of unpleasantness which often results from a prolonged common sharing of the same economic and domestic arrangements".<sup>18</sup>

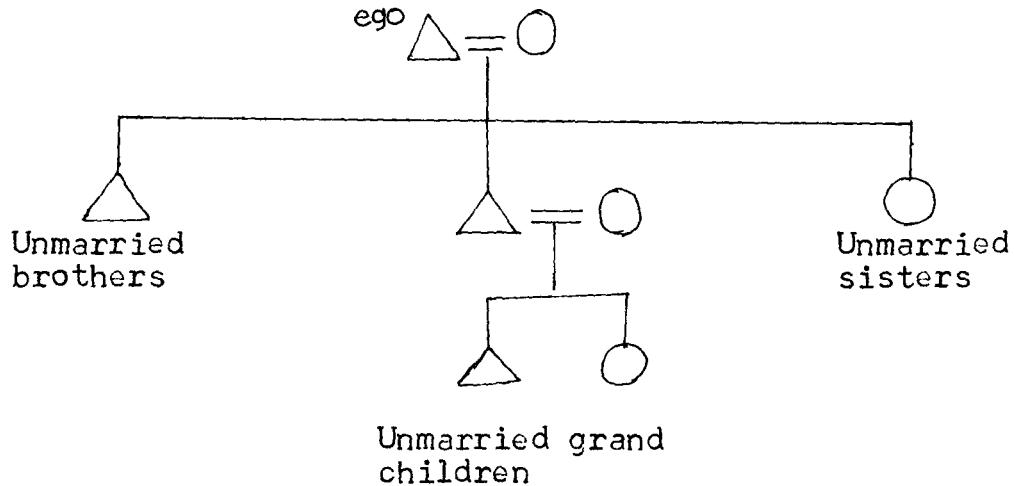
This study gives us the members now present in a household. Table No. III in Chapter III, shows the existence of a small three-member family. A widow lives **with her daughter and son-in-law in her household**. Other daughters are married away. The son-in-law is called Ghar Joai with a sense of underestimation. Because, Patrilineal rule does not permit matrilocal residence. Families with 8-9 members today, once had been larger units. With the passing away of parents, splitting away of brothers, with the married (outgoing) sisters now the ego (respondent) has to look after 8-9 members.

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18. A.N.M. Irshad Ali. 'Kinship and Marriage among the Assamese Muslim' Art. in Imtiaz Ahmed. Family, Kinship and Marriage among Muslims in India (Monohar Book Service, New Delhi, 1976)p.18.

The usual pattern of majority of the households are 'medium households' of the following type :

Fig. No.IV



As soon as there is one more recruitment by marriage ego's household gets splitted. Again, it is rare to find members of three generations alive at the same time. Usually with the birth of the third generation, the last phase in the cycle (death) for the first generation begins. Gradually, household of each brother (ego's sons) turns to a smaller unit, and the sisters are recruited by other households.

#### RELATIONS WITHIN THE FAMILY

The network of relations existing among different status holders in a family is discussed here; in terms of inter-personal relations. Marriage gives the status of

husband and wife to two persons of the opposite sex. So firstly, their relation in the family is taken into account.

#### HUSBAND AND WIFE

The Muslims in Dakaidol share patrilineal, patrilocal and patriarchal system. This gives the husband of the family an 'absolute right', not to act as a tyrant but to perform his duties in an all round way. He is almost an authoritarian figure. He is the master of the house with the full responsibility of fulfilling the needs of his dependents. Labour of the family is divided between the husband and the wife. Part of the agricultural work is done by the husband; usually the heavy works are done by the husband; while, weeding, harvesting etc., are done by the wife. Thus, besides doing household works, bearing and rearing of children, she extends her helping hand towards her husband's work.

Unfortunately, the husband keeps himself away from the household works due to the stigma attached to it. His leisure time is spent with his friends. The role of the wife or women in the family is of great significance. Centering around the women, the type of the family develops.

So it is expected that the husband and wife should have a close relation ; the husband should consult his wife in decision-making regarding family matters.

In order to find out the position of the women in the family, data were collected on their level of participation in family matters :

Table No.V HUSBAND CONSULTS THE WIFE

Sl. No.	Decision regarding	Never consulted (NC)	Occasionally consulted (OC)	Frequently consulted (FC)	Always consulted (AC)
1.	Family Budget				(AC)
2.	Buying Property, Lands, Clothes, other articles		(OC)		
3.	While offering financial help to his brothers and sisters	(NC)			
4.	Education of children	(NC)			
5.	Marriage of children				(AC)
6.	Family planning			(FC)	
7.	Division of property				(AC)

Out of seven situations in three situations viz., Nos.1,5, and 7, the wives are always consulted. Because both the husband and wife know the amount of earning, their necessities and their hardship. So if the wife is not made aware of the earning it will lead to deficit budget. Children belong to the parents, and marriage of the children is considered the prime duty of both of them. Both of them are equally eager in this matter. Hence, there is reciprocal consultation. While dividing the property, wives are consulted because she is to inherit a portion of her husband's property.

For buying property and some other commodities the wife is occasionally consulted but she is always informed. However, there is hardly any consultation regarding education of the children. But, the wife is sometimes never even informed while ego offers financial help to his brothers and sisters. Because, he cannot do so with the family's earning. Due to the financial crisis, even if she is consulted she is bound by circumstances to stand against it. So, the ego enters into indebtedness.

However, in a joint family the status of the wife of ego's son is miserable. It is said that 'rights' and 'duties' coincide. But, in such cases the daughter-in-law

is devoid of rights and she has duties only to the mother-in-law, to the father-in-law, to the brother-in-law (elder and younger) to the unmarried sister-in-law, to the married sister and to the members of the extended family. Thus, the young wife just remains as a maid-servant (the term is used little rudely). She is not even allowed to speak to her husband in the presence of other members of the family. Gradually, when she becomes the mother of a child, she fills the urgent need of satisfying her wants. This situation provokes her to articulate. She tries to ventilate her grievances through her husband. The husband-son faces dilemma to side up either with his wife or with his parents. But, in all the cases, at last the young wife succeeds. Because, the parents gradually become physically and so economically dependent on the son and daughter-in-law. Thus, squabbles due to generation gap is a common feature in every family, where victory of the younger generation is sure.

Thus, in the husband-wife relation, the husband dominates the scene. Without consulting the wife the husband can perform some activities, but the opposite situation can never be expected. She does each and every activity only with the permission of her husband. Thus, the wife is a second-grade member in the family in relation to her husband.

## PARENTS-CHILDREN RELATION

Parents work hard for the maintenance of the family - children. Children are expected to join hands in the effort. The children remain under the obedience of the parents, roughly till ten to twelve years of age. Because, after this age, due to poverty, the parents expect physical labour and financial help from their children. Sometimes sons and daughters are sent away to work as household servants. Such an attitude of the parents weakens the relation. It is understood that usually both sons and daughters remain more obedient and obliged to their mothers. They remain more affectionate to their mother. Mother-child bond is the basic bond.

For their poverty, illiteracy, they consider the father responsible. A married daughter remembers her 'mother's home'; she hardly refers her natal home as her 'father's home'. A married son faces a dilemma in adjusting with his wife chiefly due to his concern for his mother whose sentiment he never wants to hurt. It is because the mother always remains submissive while the father is the patriarch.

## OTHER RELATIONS

The relation existing between father-in-law and brother-in-law with a married girl is her respect and obedience to them. In turn she gets support and affection from them. But the study has shown that the relation existing between her and mother-in-law is obedience, more due to fear than due to respect. Mother-in-law - daughter-in-law relationship in the village is usually not ideal. The expectation of the mother-in-law is always higher than what she deserves. She forgets her role which is expected to be performed. She has always to say something against the daughter-in-law. The daughter-in-law when becomes sufficiently provoked takes help of her husband or brother-in-law (younger) and father-in-law. The relationship existing between sisters-in-law is partially friendly and partially agitative, whereas the relationship existing between sister-in-law and brother-in-law (younger) is supportive, affectionate and friendly. However, this relation cannot be identified exactly as a joking relation, because in the absence of the mother-in-law the sister-in-law takes her place in relation with her brother-in-law (younger).

The Relationship existing among siblings is marked by love, sympathy, dependence and assistance. Brothers and sisters are good friends. But the sisters always remain answerable to the brothers, especially to the elder brothers. They follow the rules of incest taboo. The elder brothers and sisters exercise their authority over the youngers. Similarly, the eldest brother take the responsibility of settlement of the youngers. He is next to the father in his influence and responsibility in decision making and in problem solving. However, dispute among brothers regarding ancestral property and its division is an important feature. Such disputes are solved by mutual consent under the leadership of the elder brother.

#### THE RURAL WOMEN, DIVORCE, AND REMARRIAGE

In the patriarchal societies of Hindus and Muslims, the status of the women in general are inferior to that of the men. Thinkers portray Muslim women more as a non-human object rather than a living creature. She is supposed to be etiolated by covering herself from top to toe. Through her veil she can see others, but she is not to be seen by others.

A discussion is already offered on the family structure, when it is stable. Natural division has made the women weak and dependent on men. So, here an attempt is made to study the condition of the women in a broken family. It has already been said that the women in the village are active and important members in the family. The economic role of the women which is already discussed, makes them important in the family and society. No one is under Burkha\* (costume which covers the women from top to toe) but everyone is under Purdah (seclusion).

The difference between Burkha and Purdah needs to be explained. Has the Koran prescribed Burkha for the Muslim women - is an important curiosity to be satisfied. In the Koran, there is not a single verse which talks about Purdah - in the form of veiling a woman from top to toe. But there are verses which clearly enjoin that modesty is an important mark of Muslim women. It is the interpreters or translators of the Koran who have created this problem of understanding. The religion is free from this evil.

Kings, in different periods of World history have created laws and shaped the religion according to their

\* Also written as Burqa.

interests. Veiling of women is the outcome of such prejudice, done in order to keep the women under control and submission. Moreover, the notions of Purdah and Burkha are presented here more as a hypothesis rather than a finding. The word Purdah is a Persian word, it means a curtain. But, the cradle of Islam is Arab and not Persia. The language of the Koran is Arabic and not Persian. Thus, we can assume that 'women modesty', as mentioned in the Arabic Koran gets an extreme form of modesty in the form of Burkha in the Persian translation of the holy script.

MarMaduke Pickthall's English translation of the Koran has been regarded as dependable. Because, in the task of translating the holy book to English he was assisted by Arabic friends. About the dress and behaviour of the Muslims, the Koranic verses are translated by Pickthall thus,

"Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and be modest ..."

"And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest, and to display of their adornment only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils over their bosoms, and not to reveal their adornment..."<sup>19</sup>

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19. M.Pickthall. op.cit., (Surah XXIV:30,31) p.255.

Doranne Jacobson, after analysing the situation comments, "The relevant Koranic passages, however, are somewhat ambiguous and not prescribe in detail the ideal features of a woman's dress and behaviour".<sup>20</sup>

Under the above situation, we have sufficient reasons to believe that 'veil' does not mean a curtain or veiling with cloth and keep the living organism, alive hidden, but it means modesty or the veil of virtue. This modesty is known as Abru. Abru is repeatedly prescribed in the Koran. Misinterpretation of the ideological notion and due to parochialization, "Muslim women observe purdah in a wide variety of ways within South Asia and throughout the World".<sup>21</sup>

In Dakaidol, Purdah in the form of Burkha is nowhere to be seen. However, womenfolk keep their modesty and always maintain distance from an outsider, particularly a man. They do not even want to communicate with any outsider female. But, they satisfy their curiosity by peeping through the fence and thereby minutely observe the behaviour of the outsider. Because of these situations, the

20. D. Jacobson. "The Veil of Virtue: Purdah and the Muslim Family in the Bhopal Region of Central India" Art. in I. Ahmed. op.cit., p.171.

21. Idem

Muslim women in general are considered akin to beasts, slaves or bonded labourers. However, fact is that, condition of women was worst in pre-Islamic Arab. Infanticide and child marriage were the common features. Victory of the might of the men used to compel the parents to get their daughters married off in their childhood as otherwise the daughters might be dishonoured.

Islam gave status, security and honour to women. Islam gave them right to property, right to education and right to speak for the just. Unfortunately, the pre-Islamic tradition could not be got rid of with the coming of Islam. But, being supported by Islam, women in Islamic countries are progressing in matters of education, employment (outside the home). Manorama Dewan comments,

there is quite a big number of Arab women who take up a profession before and after marriage in order to have an independent living and financial security. In U.A.R., Iraq and Lebanon the number of working women is steadily increasing. In U.A.R. and Lebanon there are a number of women holding important jobs as directors of big commercial concerns and there are a number of women journalists.\*<sup>22</sup>

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22. Cited in Indu Menon. Status of Muslim Women in India: A Case study of Kerala (Uppal Publishing House, New Delhi. 1981) p.12.

\* U.A.R.: United Arab Republic.

This is so because of the sanction given in Islam. About the condition of women in two phases of history, viz., pre-Islamic and Islamic Arab, Indu Menon has summarised very clearly,

In the pre-Islamic Arab society, the husband was free to divorce his wife whenever he felt doing so. There was no reciprocal right for the wife ... All these reveal the Arab's attitude to and treatment of women as mere chattel or property.

It is thus generally believed that the women in pre-Islamic society were given an inferior position in many ways... Islam improved the status of women by restricting polygamy to four wives, by prohibiting female infanticide, by assigning a share of inheritance to women, by declaring mehr as a gift to the bride, and by reorienting the Arab law of marriage and divorce in favour of women.<sup>23</sup>

The reason for the misunderstanding of the holy Koran is due to as Asghar Ali Engineer observes,

It was the prejudice— a product of the then prevailing social milieu— that induced the Muslim theologians to prohibit women from participating in the public affairs. Even today those who go for theological training generally come from a very conservative lower middle-class social milieu and inject their prejudices into their interpretations of the holy Quran.<sup>24</sup>

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23. Ibid., p.7.

24. Ashghar Ali Engineer. Islam and Muslims: A Critical Reassessment (Printwell Publishers, 1985) p.97.

We come back to our main discussion on Purdah. The women in Dakaidol though are not in Burkha yet they cannot be called disbelievers (Kfir). Charis Waddy says,

The veil has vanished from the life of the majority of Muslim communities. It was never universal, and it is argued that it was not commanded in early Islam. The Prophet urged modesty, and sought to protect women from insult or harassment. But the total restriction of women to their homes prevalent in certain countries and at certain periods is attributed to national custom rather than to law.<sup>25</sup>

Education of girls in the village is 'almost' a neglected phenomenon. Only one girl - daughter of K.Ahmed is matriculate. The door of the college education is closed for her. Religion is not to be blamed for this. Social customs, economic condition, patrilocal system of residence stand as obstacle in their education. According to the scripture, the duty of both men and women is to learn and gather knowledge and know the difference between good, bad.

#### DIVORCE

In the year 1939, the Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act was passed. This was based on the assumption

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25. Charis Waddy. The Muslim Mind (Longman Group Ltd., London, 1976) p.59.

that a man can divorce his wife and the women cannot. K.M. Kapadia comments, "The law of divorce therefore asserted man's domination over his wife; ..."<sup>26</sup> Now, the question arises regarding the misinterpretation of the Koran and taking the behavioural aspect, for the understanding of the ideological notion. In Islam, marriage is a social contract, between two parties. Similarly, dissolution of marriage cannot take place without social approval. Divorce in the village takes place without going to the law court and without the help of the Act of 1939.

It is the God's creation, where a woman is made inferior in strength to man. This is the reason why a woman wants the protection of her husband or of a male. In fact, this natural division has made divorce for the women little difficult, and for the man easier. It is alleged that among the Muslims, even when the couple has quarrel over a cup of tea, the man utter the word Talak (divorce) thrice and can get rid of his wife. The field study has however made it clear that this interpretation cannot explain the questions related to the issue of, viz., (a) the consent of the women, (b) Mehr (dower), (c) third but most important is the decision of the society, (d) fate of the children ; inheritance of their father's property etc.

26. K.M.Kapadia. Marriage and Family in India (Oxford University Press, Calcutta 1966. Third Impression 1972) p.205.

In the village 12 percent cases of divorce were reported. <sup>Four</sup> /percent in case of girls who were married outside the village and left their husbands; 6 percent of divorced men had married outside the village and 2 percent within the village. The modus operandi is thus - When one person of the couple feels utterly dissatisfied with the family tie, expresses his/her willingness to dissolve the contract. Both of them take help of their respective members of the family. Members of both the families try to negotiate the matter through compromises. If they cannot compromise, divorce is the resort. The elderly persons within the community are invited and in the presence of the members of both the families, the husband and the wife ventilate their grievances. They need to keep their 'testimony upright for Allah'.

After listening to both the parties, the Murrabbis (elderly persons) pass their judgement for the break up. Then the other issues are resolved. The husband needs to clear the Mehr - the security money to be given to the wife; amount of which was fixed during the time of the wedding contract. After clearing up, the husband is made to say Talak (divorce) thrice in public and recitation of a small verse from the script follow. This society decides the fate of the children. Thus, the woman

is made free from the husband and she can enter a second marriage if she wishes to do so. One of the women who married in a nearby village and got divorced informed that she had to leave her husband because he had married a second wife. The respondent could not excuse him. She got socially divorced and, with her children, returned home. She employs herself to the traditional occupation and she spent the security money as a capital for her occupation.

It can be commented that divorce in the village takes place in a manner as prescribed in the Koran. It is written, "And if ye fear a breach between them twain (the man and wife), appoint an arbiter from his folk and an arbiter from her folk. If they desire amendment Allah will make them of one mind. Lo ! Allah is ever knower, Aware"<sup>27</sup> (Surah IV:35). The field observation and interview reveal that divorce is not a very simple process as it is commonly thought to be.

#### REMARRIAGE

Divorce and widow remarriage are accepted in Islam. However, in the village, there is no case of remarriage of divorced women. But the 8 percent of the divorced man

27. M.M. Pickthall. *op.cit.*, p.83.

remarried. Two of them married in the Bengali Muslim community, and others married outside the village. The women have expressed their resentment for the second marriage. This is due to two reasons. The first reason is fear of tyranny of the husband and the second reason is due to the rule of Iddat.

Remarriage may be of two types, either remarrying the divorced husband and or marrying another one. No doubt, Islam has given high status to women but rules are very strict for a woman who wants to remarry her divorced husband. She needs to pass through a period of probation known as Iddat. No such case of widow remarriage can be traced in the village. But Iddat is briefly described here, because due to fear of losing prestige and bearing ridicule, they do not think of remarrying the divorced husband.

According to Islamic rule, "a period of probation (iddat) must be observed by the divorced wife before marrying again- three months after divorce, and in the case of a widow, four months and ten days after the death of her husband".<sup>28</sup> (IXV.4). Surah II No.230 says, "And if he hath divorced her (the third time), then she is not lawful

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28. Cited in Jafar Sharif. op.cit., p.87.

unto him thereafter until she hath wedded another husband. Then if he (the other husband) divorce her it is no sin for both of them they come together again if they consider that they are able to observe the limits of Allah..."<sup>29</sup>

When a man wants to remarry, he is not bound by religion to follow any such rule. But the woman needs to pass through an ordeal if she wants to remarry. The religion is certainly biased in this matter and gives the men more strength over the women. The divorced women in the village prefer a life of solitude.

The women try hard to adapt to her husband's family. The study reveals that the women do not want to take a lead and ask for divorce. A question was put to them whether the husband should have the right to divorce or not; and, the wife should have this right or not. The cent percent of the male respondents answered this in their favour and said, 'if the wife is given this right- it may lead to a chaotic condition'. Unfortunately, 86 percent of the female respondents do not want to acknowledge this right. The reason being the domination of male literati who have always spoken in their favour.

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29. M.M. Pickthall. op.cit., p.54.

right and a few have utilized the right in a proper manner.

#### KINSHIP : ITS IMPORTANCE

Kinship is considered as a vehicle for understanding the internal mechanism of social structure. We have already seen that kinship determines marriage - it determines with whom marital ties should be established and with whom it should not. Kinmarriage is popular in the village. Such marriage strengthens social solidarity.

Kinship determines the structure of the family and the pattern of inheritance. Primary kins are knit together in a family. When there is recruitment of secondary kins, division occurs in a family. But kinship determines rights, obligations, status, role, economic structure and so on. In the village the separated brothers have respect for each other. Kinship bond gives the elder brother authority and power to control the youngsters. And the youngsters, due to the similar bond get support and protection from the elders.

A villager addresses himself with other villagers through various kinship terminology. They are related to

one another through three ties. viz., consanguinity, b. affinity and c. fictive relation, locally known as a. Gusti, b. Atmiya, c. Kutum respectively. These network relates all the persons in the village. A man's status is determined by his family background. The Syed residents in the village feel proud to recall their lineage. This is in fact generally true, "A poor family with higher lineage may boast of its hereditary background, and may refer to its bangsa frequently".<sup>30</sup>

Within a family, kinship usages govern kinship relationship. Avoidance, teknonymy, or joking relations to be maintained are determined by kinship. Along with kinship usages, kinship terminology has a very great function towards social unity. The terms of address are determined by cultural norms. The Muslims in Dakaidol use some of the Assamese Kinship terms and some are Islamic. Some of the Kinship terms are examined below : The differences in the uses of the terms between the Muslims in Lower Assam and Upper Assam is also identified. Information on Upper Assam is included from personal experience, without going for a sociological fieldwork.

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30. Md. S. Mashreque. "Structure of Kinship Relations in a Peasant Community of Bangladesh" in The Eastern Anthropologist. April-June 1986 Vol.39 No.2 (Ethnographic and Folk Culture Society) p.95.

Chart No.I KINSHIP TERMS : COMMONLY USED BY EACH GROUP

Sl. No.	English	Assamese Hindus	Assamese Muslims in Dakaidol	Assamese Muslims in Upper Assam
1.	Father	Deota/Pita/ Baba	Baba/Abba/Bajan	Baba/Abba.
2.	Mother	Ma/Ai	Ma/Amma	Ma
3.	Grandmother (Paternal)	Abu/Aita	Dadi	Dadi/Aita
4.	Grandfather (Paternal)	Ata/Koka	Dada	Dada
5.	Grandfather (Maternal)	Ata/Koka	Nana	Nana
6.	Grandmother (Maternal)	Abu/Aita	Nani	Nani/Aita
7.	Brother	Kokai	Bhai	Kokaity
8.	Sister-in-law	Bou	Bhabi/Bhauj	Bou
9.	Brother-in-law	Bhindeo	Bhai/Bhai Shahib	Bhinti
10.	Mother's brother	Mama	Mama	Mama
11.	Father's elder brother	Bor Baba/ Dangar Pita	Jetha	Barbaba
12.	Father's youn- ger brother	Khura/ Sorupita	Chacha	Khura
13.	Father's sister	Pehi	Fufu	Pehi

The above chart makes it evident that the Muslims in the study area use terms of address which are used by their counterparts in West Bengal, Bangladesh, Bihar, U.P. Whereas Muslims in Upper Assam use terms akin to their Hindu neighbours. Reason being, Goalpara, the frontier district of Assam is the oldest district to come into Muslim contact. Hence, Islamic cultural tradition is deep rooted. Secondly, because of the bigger size of the Muslim population, consolidation and stabilization processes have been in operation since an early date. On the other hand, the percentage of Muslim population in Upper Assam to that of the Hindus - is small. Naturally, the majority culturally dominates the minority.

The Kinship terms of address is extended from Primary Kin to Secondary and tertiary kins - establishing a network of relations. Thus, any member in this network gets moral, social and even economic support from the group because each one has obligation for other. In order to know the degree of relationship data were particularly collected on these :

Table No.V NATURE OF RECIPROCAL ASSISTANCE AMONG THE KIN MEMBERS

Sl. No.	Do they get help from relatives:	In Agricultural field	Financial help in need	During rites de passages	In other family crisis
1.	Consanguineous	frequently	Occasionally	always	always
2.	Affinal	occasionally	occasionally	always	always

Both consanguineous and affinal relatives offer reciprocal help to each other when asked for. Blood relatives offer manual labour in the agricultural field when asked for. During family crisis and rites they help each other with man power without payment. Thus, stability is based on mutual understanding in the form of obligation and fellow feeling. However, they hardly remain in a condition to offer financial help. Whenever possible they do it. Mutual understanding and reciprocity existing among affinal kins is not without significance. Sometimes an affine fulfils the expectation, where a blood relative turns unsuccessful. Social consciousness is most marked. A man is more

altruist than egoist.

Lack of infra-structural facilities is the basic reason for compactness. More there will be such facilities, more will be the 'push' to the town; lesser the collective conscience will be. Thus, there will be change in the degree of intimacy but the kinship bond will never perish.

Kinship plays an important role in the property and economic structure in the village. The patrilineal descent defines the succession of inheritance by the persons connected by blood, with the head of the household or with the property holder. According to the Islamic principle the members of the consanguineal kin group - sons and daughters including the wife (affine) automatically get a share. About the importance of kinship Robin Fox says, "A good deal of any legal system, including our own, is concerned with laying down rules about who may succeed ~~whom~~ - to titles of nobility for example, and who may inherit what from whom-usually property of some kind, but also obligations and duties".<sup>31</sup> The property gets divided into Bhag (divisions) on the basis of Kinship relations. Size of the household and pattern of inheritance are described infra.

31. Robin Fox. Kinship and Marriage (Penguin Books Ltd., Middlesex, England 1967) p.16.

BHAG AND THE PATTERN OF INHERITANCE

A marriage produces a family of husband, wife and unmarried children .. this is the nuclear family. In a family, more than these persons live. But, it is unlike the traditional joint family. Following the marriage of the brothers, separation starts in the original family. But, separation does not mean going out of the residential unit. This separation can be considered in terms of Bhag (portion). Bhag simply indicates that land, both residential and agricultural are divided among the brothers. In the physical look Bhag mainly means separating the chula and for that construct a new hut for the kitchen. Gradually, a separate residential hut is also constructed. In the 'Physical feature' we have already observed the household pattern in the village; few huts are there in one compound, housed by the different married brothers of the family. They share a common courtyard and common approach. It is because, they are brothers. The old father or mother or both stay with the elder brother; and ultimately the original hut belongs to the elder brother.

It is significant to note that, brothers-sisters (unmarried), brothers and sister-in-law, and grandchildren- all are answerable to the head of the family i.e. the father (grandfather) then to the elder

brother and mother. So separation is a means to keep the relationship intact. Separation promotes understanding among the brothers rather than misunderstanding. It makes everyone shoulder his own responsibility and not to be a burden on others. Separation is preferred as a precaution or prevention.

It is interesting to see relatives sharing food, cooked in different kitchen. During sickness or crisis kinship bond becomes most pronounced. Thus, Bhag is not aimed towards watertight compartmentalization, it is aimed to achieve happy relations. Multiple relations perpetuate despite the split; reciprocal relation exists in terms of financial and non-financial assistance and psychological support.

Thus, joint living with a common chula discontinues at the cost of the emerging needs, if joint family is understood in the sense as Iravati Karve uses it - "a group of people who generally live under one roof, who eat food cooked in one kitchen, who hold property in common, participate in common worship and are related to one another as some particular type of kindred".<sup>32</sup>

32. Iravati Karve. Kinship Organization in India (Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1965) p.8.

The first property that gets divided is the residential area. The second type of Bhag occurs when the parents pass away or sometimes when one of them is in the death bed. This is done to avoid quarrel among the brothers in future. The paternal property in the local term is known as Paitrick Sampatti. The primary kins have a haque (claim) over this property. But the amount of the share is not equal for both boys and girls. Because, the girls after marriage remain under her husband's protection and she is the legal heir of her husband's property.

In this practical situation, it is seen that girls do not get a share of her father's property. The reason being the smallness of its amount. Only in a few cases where the father died son-less the daughters got a share. Usually, the sisters just want to see their brothers happy. Even the portion of the agricultural field is not claimed by the daughters. Paitrick Sampatti includes clothes, furniture and utensils too. It is found that the daughters get a share of this type of property.

The Islamic law regarding division and inheritance

of property reads thus,

Unto the men (of a family) belongeth a share of that which parents and near kindred leave, and unto the women a share of that which parents and near kindred leave, whether it be little or much - a legal share.<sup>33</sup> (Surah IV No.7)

And when kinsfolk and orphans and the needy are present at the division (of the heritage), bestow on them therefrom and speak kindly unto them.<sup>34</sup> (Surah IV No.8)

Allah chargeth you concerning (The provision for) your children: to the male the equivalent of the portion of two females, and if there be women more than two, then theirs is two-thirds of the inheritance, and if there be one (only) then the half.<sup>35</sup> (Surah IV No.11)

The girls usually do not get a share of the paternal property, due to the economic constraint, but they are aware of the sanction in religion. This sanction proves most helpful in need. A 22 year old girl, who is now divorced, with her children are back to her natal home. She has inherited a portion of her father's property without any dispute. She can do it without facing any criticism because she has a legal claim over the property.

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33. M.M. Pickthall. op.cit., p.80.

34. Idem

35. Idem

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CHAPTER - V

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## ORDER MAINTENANCE AND ITS MECHANISMS

### RELIGION AND RITUAL

Religion and rituals are the important regulators of human behaviour. Religion enters human social life as a very strong but silent inspiration. Emile Durkhiem explains 'religion' through its practical implication, for which he rejected 'Animism' of Tylor and Spencer and 'Naturism' of Max Muller. His scientific explanation of religion is - 'clan cult' or 'Totemism'- the basic form of religion, not only for the Arunta tribe of Australia, but for the religious world. In his formulation the social role of religion gets prominence. From sociological point of view, religion is found to be a great and strong unifying social force. Religion helps the society to integrate and perpetuate the social order in two ways :

(i) It provides a moral guidance in the form of doctrine, dogma and myth. Koranic doctrine combines religion with individual and social life very closely. When a man takes food, he needs to remember God. He is supposed to make a distinction between Haram (proscribed) and Halal (prescribed). A man does so because religion says so. Religion asks him to share his food with a hungry man. It

is significant to note that, the little religious gesture makes him remember a supernatural force, which ultimately makes him morally and spiritually disciplined. Similarly, when his food is shared, it makes the brotherhood feeling stronger.

(ii) The rites, that is ceremonial actions and ritual prescriptions e.g., occasional congregations for religious prayers, help in bringing or restrengthening integrity. Similarly, there are religious taboos, e.g., females in Islam are not supposed to offer prayers in the mosque together with the men. This taboo ultimately restrengthenens the division of labour and social well being. In Islam, sacred and profane are *one* and the same. Sacred guides the profane and the profane exists within the sacred.

For this study, data were collected at two levels- viz., (a) at the individual personal level and (b) at the societal level.

Analysing the tradition and root of Islam in the village Dakaidol, it is learnt that, till the end of the nineteenth century, Islam could not gain ground. There were more munafic (bad) than momin (good) Muslims. People were

Muslims in name and not in deed. Casteism in those societies is the best evidence of instability of Islam. It was due to the fact that the majority of Muslims were local converts. The literati did not percolate the message of Islam in its original form, because their interest was concentrated in gaining popularity in the newly created society.

In order to go further in this discussion we hark back to the literature, to clearly understand the present as a product of the past. The information, as supplied by the respondents synchronised well with what had already been said by W.W. Hunter in 1879. About the Muslims of Goalpara he says,

The religion of Islám does not appear to be making any further advance among the people ... For large numbers of Muhammadan soldiery who remained behind after the invasion of Assam, accounts for the considerable Musalmán population in the District ... they are not so fanatical as in Eastern Bengal. In the interior of the District a great many have adopted idolatrous practices similar to the Hindus; and the Deputy-Commissioner states that their processions and ceremonies, as well as their worship of village divinities and saints, show that they have practically renounced Islám.<sup>1</sup>

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1. W.W. Hunter. Statistical Account of Assam Vol.II (B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1879, Reprint, 1982) pp.47-48.

Towards the end of the last century and the beginning of the present century large scale immigration of Bengali Muslim peasants took place. Seeing the present religiosity of the Bengali Muslims in the other two hamlets, it appears that, possibly this is one of the important reasons, which has gradually influenced the religiosity of the Assamese Muslims in Dakaidol. The Bengali Muslims are known as the orthodox followers of Islam, about whom Ellickson comments, "Muslims of the rural areas of Bangladesh are concerned with being good Muslims".<sup>2</sup>

Towards the beginning of the present century situations were favourable, It is written in the Provincial Gazetteer of Assam : "The Assam Valley was invaded by the Muhammadans on several occasions, and one general is said to have penetrated as far as Sadiyā; but Goālpāra was the only District which they held for any length of time, and the influences of the faith were not largely felt at the eastern end of the valley".<sup>3</sup> It is necessary that a good

2. Jain Ellickson. "Islamic Institutions, Perception and Practice in a Village in Bangladesh" Art. in T.N. Madan (ed.) Muslim Communities of South Asia : Culture and Society (Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1976) p.53.

3. Provincial Gazetteer of Assam (Cultural Publishing House, Kamala Nagar, Delhi, 1906; Reprint, 1983) p.35.

Muslim has knowledge of Koran and Hadith. His acts should be in conformity with the knowledge of Islam.

In the Census Report for 1881, the Muhammadan peasantry of Assam are described as being extremely ignorant of all that concerned their faith, some of them never even having heard of Muhammad, and others imagining that he corresponded to the Hindu Rama; but during the last twenty years considerable advances have been made, and ignorance as complete as this is no longer common.<sup>4</sup>

Effort of the local leaders to stabilize Islam and spread in the knowledge of Koran help in this direction. Religion as the regulator of human behaviour is a means of social control. 'Islam' and 'Shariat' explain the continuous process of the life cycle, cultural norms, values, social institutions and social solidarity. In their everyday conversation, the Muslims in the area of study take the name of 'Allah', 'Rasul', 'Khoda', 'Malik' and so on. While referring to their future plan, they say 'Inse-Allah' i.e., by the will of God or if God permits. Before getting down in the early morning, before going out, before taking food, before going to bed, it is almost necessary for them to remember Allah and Prophet. By uttering their names step by step, they feel blessed and secure. For whatever they do they say, "Bismillah-hir-Rahmanir-Rahim" i.e. beginning in

4. Cited in Census of India 1901 Vol. IV, Assam Part I Report, p.43.

the name of God. It is so often pronounced that sometimes they say only 'Bismillah'-rest implied. The villagers do it, because it is said in the Koran that, e.g., those who take food without remembering God - He who grants everything, then Devil has a share over that food.<sup>5</sup> The mosque has been playing a significant role in the social formation. It is written by A. Rahman that, - Mosque has always been a locus in the spread of Islam. A holy mosque has been not only a place of worship of Allah, but an educational institution, assembly and court.<sup>6</sup>

Percentage of the performance of prayer is tabulated below :

Table No. I FREQUENCY OF THE PERFORMANCE OF PRAYER

Sl. No.	How many times a day the respondent prays	Percentage
1.	Once/twice a day	6
2.	Five times a day	80
3.	Sometimes only	14
		100

5. Thomas Patrick Hughes. Dictionary of Islam (Cosmos Publication, New Delhi, 1982 first English print 1885) p.103.

6. Janab M.A. Rahman. "Samaj Gathane Masjider stan" Art. Art. in Koraner Prasar (Bengali) (Koram Publication Office, Calcutta 16 January 1963) p.69.

The above table informs us that, prayer is considered very important in Dakaidol. The majority of the respondents i.e., 80 percent in the village perform prayers five times a day and fulfil their duties. A question was put to the male respondents about their frequency of performing prayer in the mosque.

Table No.II PERFORMANCE OF THE PRAYER IN THE MOSQUE

Sl.No.	When do they go to the mosque for prayer	Percentage
1.	For daily prayer	76
2.	For special Friday prayer	100
3.	For the prayer in the day of <u>Idd</u>	100

However, it is recorded that, their participation cannot be accurately tabulated in percentage. Those who do not usually go to the mosque for prayer, do so if they want to go, But prayers in the month of Ramadan are usually performed in the mosque by all the male residents. Friday prayer is attended by the male residents. But, so far the serial number 3 is concerned it is learnt that, prayers are performed either in the mosque or in the Idgah (field). Anyway, cent percent of the respondents participate in the

congregation and thereby renew their 'we-feeling'. Those who are engaged in business, sometimes miss the prayer, due to non-availability of mosque in the nearby area while on travel.

Special emphasis is laid on the performance of Namaj or Salat (Prayer) because it is to be performed by everyone - male and female (five times a day), except minors. It is Farj (compulsory) for everyone. When someone due to his work, cannot perform his prayer right on time, he is allowed to perform the same prayer known as Kaza Namaj (delayed prayer) as soon as he is free from his work. Thus, when need arises Islam gives more importance to work than prayer. Concession is also given to the physically weak and sick persons to sit down or lie down and pray. Prayer is a must. Frederick Mathewson Denny summarises thus,

Muslims are required to perform the Salat five times daily : early morning (salāt al-fajr), noon (salāt al-duhr), mid-afternoon (salāt al-'asr), sunset (salāt al-maghrib), and evening (salāt al-'ishā). In addition, the Friday congregational service (salat al-Jum'a), which features a sermon (khutba), and the salats of funeral and the two eclipses (sun or moon) are also required. Required practices in Islam are known either by fard or wājib, the performance of which is rewarded and its neglect is punished.<sup>7</sup>

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7. F.M. Denny. An Introduction to Islam (Macmillan Publishing Company, New York, 1985) p.106.

It is the duty of the parents to impart religious knowledge and train their children to act according to the Islamic way of life. Majority of the children are taught to read the Koran and to perform the Namaj.

The locality possesses its mosque within. Each prayer begins as soon as Adhan or Ajan is recited in the mosque. It is recited five times daily. Ajan means - 'call to prayer'. It has already been said that, Islam has borrowed much of its ideas from the Jews and Christians. Christians ring the bell in the Church before the prayer starts or they beat a drum to achieve the same. The purpose of all these acts are one and the same - call to prayer. We quote Denny once again, who summarizes it as follows :

As the time for the salat begins, the adhān, "call to prayer", is recited in a loud, clear voice by the mu'adhdhin ("muezzin") from atop a minaret or mosque roof or any appropriate place that will allow the call to carry. The call to prayer is as follows, first in Arabic and then in translation :

1. Allāhu akbar ("God is most grace") four times
2. Ashhadu an lā ilāha illā allāh ("I testify that there is no god but God"), twice.
3. ashhadu anna muhammadan rasūl allāh ("I testify that Muhammad is the messenger of God"), twice.
4. hayya ' alā al salāt ("Hurry to prayer"), twice

5. hayya 'alā-falāh ("Hurry to success  
[sometimes translated as "salvation"] twice
6. Only before the early morning salat : al-salāt  
khayrun minal - naum ("Prayer is better than  
sleep"), twice ..."<sup>8</sup>

Prayer is performed not necessarily in the mosque, but also at home, out of doors, at school, and even in the warfield. It is necessary for prayer that the person should be clean and pray facing west i.e. = qaba in Mecca. He must clean himself through minor abolution called - Wudu. Each villager completes Wudu before standing for prayer. It is completed according to the directions given in the Koran. It is thus :

"... When ye rise up for prayer, wash your faces. and your hands up to the elbows, and lightly rub your heads and (wash) your feet up to the ankles. And if ye are unclean, purify yourselves ...."<sup>9</sup> (Surah: V:6).

Besides congregational prayer during Idd, weekly congregational prayer takes place every Friday - known as Jumma. Every adult villager tries his best to attend the

8. Ibid., pp.106 - 107.

9. M.M. Pickthall. The Meaning of the Glorious Koran  
(The New American Library, New York.1953)  
p.97.

Jumma Namaj. However, this prayer is not prescribed to women. It is found that even those who due to idleness neglect daily prayers, assemble in the mosque on Friday for the special prayer. It is because, prayer and assembly are equally important. The month of Ramadan i.e., the month of fasting is very dear to the respondents. They consider this month, as the month for earning more suab i.e. punya,\* through more religious performance - special prayer, fasting dawn till dusk, alm giving etc.

The Muslims follow the lunar calendar and cycle of the moon is the measure of time. The Muslim Lunar year has twelve months which begins with, Muharram, followed by Safar, Rabi'u al - Awwal, Rabi'al - Akhir, Jumada al-ulā, Jumada al-ukhrā, Rajab, Shabān, Ramadan, Shawwāl, Dhū al-qa'da, and Dhū al-Hijja. Five of them, Muharram, Rajab, Ramadan, Dhū al qada, and Dhū al-Hijja are the sacred months. Ramadan, is the ninth month in the Islamic Lunar year. In this month, day-long fasting is observed not only by adult male and females but children except minors also do it. Besides this, fasting is prescribed any six days in Shawwal and the ninth, tenth and eleventh of Muharram. However, fasting during the two Idd days is a taboo.

\* Suab or Punya : Reward from God.

Besides these, when there is a crisis in family, people fast for rapid recovery.

During the time of crisis and sickness, religion is the first and last resort. When asked the question about the relation of crisis with religion, the respondents emphasised on its importance and they said, - "in times of sickness both Dua and Dawa play an important role and during crisis Dua is the resort".\* It is significant to note that Dua gets prominence over Dawa. In Dakaidol together with Doa and due to unavailability of Medical practitioner or hospital in nearby areas, the villagers take resort to some herbal medicine traditionally known as Kabiraji Dawa. Two ladies in the village sell those herbal medicine at a cheaper rate. While interviewing the ladies, it was found that their knowledge of medicine is acquired mainly for professional interest and on the basis of trial and error method; so no scientific value is involved in them.

Every Muslim has a desire to participate once in the worldwide congregational prayer at Mecca, known as Haji - the third pillar of Islam. Pilgrimage is prescribed to a

\* Dua = Prayer (religious) for blessing.

Dawa = Medicine.

man or woman only when he/she completes the worldly duties. For example, a man who is yet to get his sons or daughters married off is not asked to go for hajj. A man who is financially poor, hajj is not jaej (necessary) for him. Because hajj means, as Waddy puts it :

The spirit of Hajj is the spirit of total sacrifice : sacrifice of personal comforts, worldly pleasures, acquisition of wealth, companionship of relatives and friends, vanities of dress and personal appearance, pride relating to birth, national origin, accomplishments, work or social status.... "Hajj" also signifies the brotherhood of all Muslims, demonstrated in this greatest of all international assemblies .<sup>10</sup>

The Kaba is the navel' of the earth where Muslims of the world meet.

In Dakaidol, no one is a Hajji (one who has completed hajj). This is due to the weak economic condition of the people. There is a touching evidence of this, as reported by some of the villagers. It is observed that the foundation of the mosque is very delicate and it is just a simple hut. A villager reported that the structure of the mosque even today remains standing only because of the contributions made by an old lady. The lady had saved money

10. Waddy Charis. The Muslim Mind (Longman Group Ltd., New York, 1976) pp. 22-23.

to go once to Mecca for haji. But she could not fulfil her wishes due to problems including shortage of money. So contributed the little amount which she had saved, for the repair of the mosque.

The last and most important pillar of Islam is Zakat i.e. alm giving either in cash or in kind. Together with this, it has to be taken into account that, beggary is forbidden in Islam. Thus, only those persons have a haque or claim over Zakat who are either disabled or poor, and not for those who are idle and poor. According to Islam, work is a virtue and everyone must attain this virtue. Zakat is not possible for the Dakaidol Muslims. Moreover, Zakat and the amount is very much determined by one's amount of property and capability to pay. Thus, Islamic doctrine helps and promotes 'we-feeling' among the believers. This is what religion means to Muslims. Asghar Ali Engineer writes, "Religion according to its Latin origin religio mens [sic] consciousness and piety on one hand, and to tie, or to bind, on other. Religion, in other words, can be defined as a set of spiritual and metaphysical doctrines binding together all those who subscribe

to them..."<sup>11</sup> Social integration is the language of Islamic doctrine.

#### THE LOCAL SHRINE

The Dakaidol dargah (shrine) plays an important role in religio-social life of the residents. Whoever faces a serious crisis, either a male or a female, goes to the dargah, meditate there and can get the wishes fulfilled. Thus, the shrine stands as a witness and support to them in times of distress. Because of its significance and spiritual power associated with it, both Muslim and Hindu devotees go there and contribute (sacrifice) either in cash or in kind and get their honest wishes fulfilled.

The hut of the shrine possesses a donation box where people contribute generously. However, not a single poor villager dares to lift money from the box. The management of the shrine is in the hand of the village committee. No outsider needs to take any permission to enter the shrine. When asked about it, the care-taker said, "Pak Panjatan do not belong to the people of

11. Engineer Ashgar Ali. Islam and Muslim : A Critical Reassessment (Printwell Publishers, Jaipur, 1985) p.24.

Dakaidol only, but they belong to the Muslims of the world. As every Muslim has the right to pray to Allah, similarly every Muslim has the right to enter the dargah and pray to Allah and the Pak Panjatan. It needs no permission." This statement takes us to another issue - i.e., to the role of Syeds. Once, the Syeds were like the Brahmins in the Hindu society. Thus, they acted as mediators between man and God. This goes against Islamic principle. Today, Islam and Muslim society is stabilized in Dakaidol. Man communicates with God directly - as prescribed in the religion.

In the village, among the youth, there are a few insane persons. No modern scientific treatment is given to them. It is believed by the villagers that they suffer because of the witchcraft. The witches are capable of causing physical sufferings of every sort, including death. Medical treatment yields to no fruitful result. Only witch doctors can cure such patients. Besides this, the society is superstition - ridden. Almost every person, including children and old persons is seen to wear thread tied in their arms or in their waist, where a Tabia i.e. small amulets (one or more) are tied. It is considered as essential as food and drink. Amulets are used for many purposes e.g., to cure diseases, to make fruit trees give

their food, to make husband obey his wife, to cast out devils, to remove fear, to pass in examination and in many such other situations.

#### RITUALS AT BIRTH

Whenever a male child is born, Azan is recited, but this is not done in case of birth of a female baby. It was felt that in this patrilineal society male child is preferred to female child. Females are always considered as the property of others. Girls to some extent are burden to their parents. About such tendency and preference Ja'far Sharif's view fits well in the present study. He says, "Though the desire for male offspring does not influence Musalmāns to the same extent as Hindus, who believe that it is only a son who can perform the funeral rites which admit the spirit of his father into the company of his sainted ancestors, still among Musalmāns the craving for a male heir is often intense."<sup>12</sup>

For forty days after the birth of the child the mother and the child are considered unclean. The village

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12. Ja'far Sharif. Islam in India. (Curzon Press, 1921, Reprint, 1975, London) p.17.

midwife comes to attend delivery cases. Usually, at the completion of one month, hair cutting ceremony of the new born baby takes place. The neighbours, who come to see the new born are supposed to present gifts to it. If a male child is born, happiness of the family is most marked. The procedure of Azan recitation follows thus, as Sharif puts it, "After the child is washed and swaddled he is presented to the friends. The Azān or Bāng, the call to prayer, is uttered into his right ear and the Kalima or Creed in his left".<sup>13</sup> The child is called by a name with a good meaning. There is hardly any name giving ceremony organized. Amulet is tied to his/her body almost since the day the baby comes to the world. The baby is always spotted with black Kazal (mascara) on his forehead in order to cast evil eyes.

Another ritual follows in case of a male child, usually before 10 years of age when he is circumcised. This is known as Sunnat or Musalmani. A milad (congregation) is organized, where the villagers under the leadership of a religious head pray to Allah and wish health of the particular child. This is followed by a feast. All those, who attend the prayer and feast present gifts to the child. In the village, only the obligatory part is performed and  
 13. Ibid., p.24.

they spend less in the feast which follows the rituals. Another ceremony performed for sons and daughters - is Akika - sacrifice for their well-being. Thus, we see that economy determines one's performance of rituals. As money does not permit, so the villagers perform only the most obligatory part of each ceremony.

#### RITUALS AT MARRIAGE

Wedding ceremonies can be divided into two aspects- Religious and non-Religious. Religious aspect of marriage is done according to the Islamic principle. An auspicious marriage day is fixed according to the Islamic calendar, known as 'Panjika'. The Maulavi or the Kazi presides over the 'Nikah'. Marriage is a social contract. The girl's consent over the bond and the amount of Mehr are fixed in the presence of invitees, who thenceforward remain as witness to the contract. No Hindu ritual is followed in the Nikah. The amount of the Mehr is not to be paid immediately.

Marriage is known as Byah, which includes both Nikah and rejoicing accompanying the Nikah. Before the Nikah, several rites take place. One of these is the ring ceremony known as magni or angathi pindhua. Sometimes, this

is done one year or six months before the wedding. Another ceremony which takes place just before the wedding is Aqchuldia where groom's relatives present mirror, hair oil, clothes etc., to the girl. One day prior to the wedding, the bride and the groom in their respective households are anointed with Haldi (turmeric) and mustard oil. Not only the bride and the groom but the other members present in the house, mainly the womenfolk, rub the paste to one another as a playful activity. In the merry-making the feeling of oneness gets restrengthened.

The bride and groom are anointed with mehendi (henna). Right here, it should be mentioned that all these except taking mehendi - are folk customs. These are nowhere mentioned in the religious script of Islam. This is found not only in the study area but in other parts of the country too. While writing about Muslims of South, Jafar Sharif writes, "The second day is known as Mehendi or Hinnabandi, 'the henna day', ... This rubbing with henna, saffron, or turmeric seems to be, partly a form of initiation, partly protective and stimulating or fertilizing, and when the codiment used by one of the pair is sent to be used to anointing the other it is<sup>a</sup> charm to promote union".<sup>14</sup> Citing writers like, L.A. Anantha Krishna

14. Ibid., pp.65-66.

Iyer, he writes, "It is a common rite among the Hindus from whom it was probably borrowed by the Indo-Musalmāns".<sup>15</sup>

A milad is a must to the wedding. Where a Fatiha is said in the name of the Prophet, members of the Muslim community in general, for all who predeceased and members of that family in particular.

The non-religious aspect of the wedding takes an indigenous flavour. Merry-making, organizing feast for the kith and kin, a tea party for neighbours and friends are almost same in the Hindu and Muslim communities. Marriage is a social contract. Scholars have mentioned that the practice of signing the Nikahnama exists in the Lower Assam region. However, I. Ali who conducted a study in some of the Lower Brahmaputra Valley districts (other than Goalpara) writes, "The practice of signing a legal document (nikahnama) to solemnize a marriage is becoming obsolete among the Assamese Muslims".<sup>16</sup> Such situations could not be located in the village. The custom of Ath mongla is also observed by the Muslims. At this occasion, the bride goes back to her natal home and stays there for eight days. And the groom

15. Ibid., p.66.

16. I. Ali. "Kinship in Marriage among the Assamese Muslims". Art. in I. Ahmed. Family Kinship and Marriage among Muslims in India (Monohar Publishers, New Delhi, 1976) p.20.

fetch her to his home. When asked questions about the origin or relevance of many of the non-Islamic practices, the villager could not give any satisfactory answer to these nor could they relate these to Islamic tradition, but relied on indigenous civilization. The indigenous civilization on the other hand is a product of Islamic Great tradition and Indo-Islamic Little tradition.

In the village, marriage is the only ceremony or occasion when friends - Hindus, Garos, Rajbangshis etc., are invited for tea. On other occasions they invite Muslims only. In cases of second marriage i.e., in the cases of widowers, remarriages only those which are obligatory (Nikah) are done. Rejoicings are less in such occasions. Among the Muslims, marriage is the basis of society, whereby human race can be perpetuated only through the procreation of legitimate children. Marriage is a contract and at the same time it is a sacred bond too. Legally, marriage is a contract, rather than a sacrament. Consent of both bride and groom are most important.

While writing about the social aspect of Muslim marriage Charis Waddy points out,

"(i) Islamic law gives to the woman a definitely high status after marriage.

(ii) Restrictions are placed upon the unlimited polygamy of pre-Islamic times.

(iii) The Prophet, both by example and precept, encouraged the status of marriage. He positively enjoined marriage for all those who could afford it".<sup>17</sup>

#### RITUALS AT DEATH

This is the last crisis in the life of a human being. Like the Assamese Hindus, when someone dies in a Muslim family, the kitchen remains closed for three days. The members and paternal relatives of the family of the deceased are forbidden to take non-vegetarian diet. They are supported by the neighbours and affinal relatives with very simple vegetarian diet. They are not allowed to sit on high seats. Following the Hindu custom, they are made to sit on the floor. The widow of the deceased is asked to take off her bangles, necklace, rings and so on. This is a typical local system which has percolated to the Muslim society. They are not even allowed to comb and oil their

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17. Waddy Charis. op.cit., p.63.

hair. All these (which are done by Muslims) are done by Assamese Hindus, among other reasons, as a mark of respect of the departed soul. Since, these non-Islamic customs are borrowed from Hindus, so these are now in the process of wane and every knowledgeable Muslim questions such acts.

The deceased is buried in the nearby graveyard. Burying is locally known as gor. Whenever, there is a case of death in the village, it becomes an obligation of every villager to immediately reach the spot. Because, according to the Islamic social life, an individual is responsible to his family, the family is responsible to the group and the community. Thus, an individual belongs to the community and the community belongs to the individual. After bathing the deceased the rituals follow this - If the husband dies leaving his widow behind, the widow is asked in the presence of the villagers to excuse the deceased from the mehr (which was fixed at the time of wedlock). If she does not excuse him, the qor (the burial) cannot take place. Normally, this never happens. Similarly, if the wife dies, the widowee is asked to excuse her, if she has misbehaved with him in any case. Giving alms to the poor, regular recitation of the Holy Koran for forty days, performing special namaj for the peace of the departed soul follow.

After forty days Jiafat takes place. A milad is followed by a feast. What is socially significant is that, all the villagers are invited in this jiafat. The males, young and old sit separately and women young and old sit separately. The ritual starts with the recitation of verses from the holy Koran and this is followed by a Munajat, where everyone present, raises the unfold hands and pray for peace of the departed soul. It is not without significance that, the congregation prays for all Murda (dead) Muslims - known and unknown, near and distant, friends and foe. Then, the feast follows. No Hindu or non-Muslim is invited to this milad and feast.

Khusbo (otto) has an important place in all the rites de passages. It is almost necessary for the bride and groom, to get it sprayed over the body. In case of death, after bathing, the deceased is sprayed with Khusbo water. Similarly, kazal (mascara) is used by ladies, young boys and girls and used for deceased. The deceased is buried in white clothes.

## RELIGION AT THE SOCIETAL LEVEL

Besides their individual performance of namaj, keeping fast etc., some festivals are communally celebrated. These are Muharram, Akhir-e-chahar Shamba, Milad-e-Nabi, Laylatul-i-Miraj, Shab-e-Barat, Bakar-Idd, Idu-ul-fitr.

Muharram : Muharram is celebrated on the tenth day in the month of Muharram. Imam Hussain, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad was put to death in the dry Karbala on this day. He was not given food to eat and water to drink by the enemies. Thus, Muharram is observed in honour of the martyrs. Tajia, model made of paper is taken out in procession. Inside the model lumps of clay are kept, imagining that as the tomb of the martyr. Usually Sunni Muslims do not play sticks and do not bring out the Tajia in a procession. But it could be gathered that among the youths there is a tendency to participate in the procession. The procession is taken out by the Bengali Muslims from the other hamlets, which passes through this particular hamlet, where the Assamese youths join them. Thus, the occasion is marked by the remembrance of the sad story of the Jehad (war) where Hazarat Ali met with a tragic end. Similarly, communal prayer, marks the occasion of 'Akhir-e-Chahar Shamba', Milad-e-Nabi (Prophet's birthday), 'Laylatul-i-Miraj', and 'Shab-e-Barat'.

Shabe Miraj : On the twenty-sixth day of Rajub, accompanied by an angel, Muhammad is believed to have visited the seven heavens and hell. Later it is said that he had an audience with Allah himself. To celebrate this event, this day is expected to be spent in meditation and prayer. If possible people keep awake for the whole night saying prayers and asking for Allah's blessings.<sup>18</sup>

Shabe-Barat is celebrated on the night of the fourteenth day of Shaban, remembering Prophet's hideout in the Mount Hira. Halua (sweet) and Bread are distributed among the believers remembering Bibi Fatima, who took these food to her father in the hideout in the Mount Hira.

Id-Ul-Fitr : This is locally known as Ramadan Idd, because this follows as soon as the month of Ramadan ends. The significance of this Idd is in the practice of honesty, sincerity, self-control and helping the poor and needy. Title of the Idd is self-explanatory. Fitr means alm giving. Fitr is different from Zakat in the sense that Zakat is determined by the amount of property but fitr is a must for all the persons. It is commonly believed that if fitr is not contributed, Allah does not accept the

18. S.C. Dube. Indian Village (Allied Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Bombay, 1955. Fifth impression 1965) p.109.

prayers and fast performed in the month of Ramadan. However, fitr is to be given to only the poor and needy. The fitr is meant for the disabled, physically handicapped and the destitutes. Thus, it is the duty of every Muslim to find out the really needy person and give him the amount; the amount of which is fixed in the mosque in the last Friday before the Idd, according to the current price rate. So, the amount varies from time to time. Fitr can be given once in a year, but Zakat can be given at any time. Zakat means a poor tax. The essence of these acts is the sharing of one's possession with the fellow members.

Id-uz-Zuha : This is locally known as Bakri Idd or Kurbani Idd. The 'Kurbani' (sacrifice of beast-either cow or goat) has a social significance too. Most important aspect of the sacrifice is - distribution of the meat among all the villagers, friends and relatives. The principle is that more people should get little share of the sacrificial beast rather than few people getting the lot. When more people can be covered through the distribution more Suab (Punya) a person gets. Such religious prescription simply helps in restrengthening solidarity and promoting community feeling. Whatever the reason may be, non-Muslims (when a goat is slaughtered) are not given a share of it. Among Muslims, rich and poor, near and distant are given a share

of it. A domestic and dear animal (pet) is expected to be slain. Sacrifice of this nature is important. Thus, social significance of religion, in the form of unity, cohesiveness and tolerance is most marked in Islam.

Virtues include Farj and Sunnat. Farj is compulsory. It is always believed that in both the Idd days participating in the congregational prayer is Sunnat (virtue of second category) whereas meeting relatives, kith and kin, non-kin and to exchange best wishes are considered as Farj - this leads to social solidarity. Other participating events or village level festivals are the 'urs'- celebrated in the dargah. This is saint day or saint worship.

Out of the five foundation pillars of Islam Ibadat (worship) Namaj (Prayer), Roja (Fasting) Hajj (Pilgrimage) Zakat (alm giving), Muslims of Dakaidol can go for the first three only. Their economic condition does not permit them to fulfil the fourth and fifth pillars or requirement. Whatever it is, they are in the process of being 'good Muslims'. Religion, at the personal level inculcates self-discipline, fear of God and society. Thus, it acts as a strong means of controlling individuals in the society whereby the village social system stands balanced.

Sociologically, this functional aspect of religion is significant.

#### AUTHORITY STRUCTURE AND SOCIAL CONTROL

Stability of a social structure and its dynamics can be understood with the analysis of the forces which are responsible for the maintenance of stability and change. Regarding the importance of social control and orderly management of the social system, MacIver and Page write,

...social control is meant the way in which the entire social order coheres and maintains itself- how it operates as a whole, as a changing equilibrium ... the relation of the social order and the individual being, the relation of the unit and the whole. To study social control we must seek out the ways in which society patterns and regulates individual behaviour and, at the same time, the ways in which patterned and standardized behaviour in turn serves to maintain the social organization.<sup>19</sup>

Society is controlled, stability is maintained and orderly social mutation is possible to achieve, broadly through the following means : (a) Established and sanctioned forms of customs, mores, religion which influence man from

18. MacIver and Page. Society : An Introductory Analysis (MacMillan India Ltd., New Delhi, 1950, Reprint, 1974) p.137.

the cradle to the grave. These values are injected to him actively but slowly and steadily, through the socialization process. Thus, he is taught in an informal manner - group cohesiveness and necessary requirements of being an unit in the whole. He is taught his rights and duties. (b) Secondly, society is controlled through state and Government in a formal way, with deliberate creation of law.

Both these means are inevitable for maintaining social stability. It is the elder generation who socializes the children where submission to religion and social norms is stressed on. In the village, the local shrine has been playing a significant role. An accused is taken either to the mosque or to the shrine for a swearing.

In the early existence of the village, 'Power', 'Authority', 'Influence' and 'Leadership' were intertwined. The Syeds who had a charismatic leadership were landowners too. Power to control the villagers was monopolised by them. The local converts submitted to them. Thus, they had the authority to exert considerable influence in the rural scene. Being the literati in Islamic script and due to the 'foreign blood running in their veins' they acted as leaders. This was more possible because in the economic hierarchy, the non-Syeds were in leased-in land belonging to the Syeds.

Today, due to the growth of population, spread of the knowledge of the Koran to the non-Syeds, knowledge regarding the principles of equality and individual achievement prescribed, increasing socio-economic differentiation—power, authority, influence and leadership are no longer intertwined. Thus, we see that traditional authority structure attempted to derive sanctions from religion. Because, the Pirs could claim dominance. Max Weber writes, "Authority may be based on rational grounds and anchored in impersonal rules that have been largely enacted or contractually established --- charismatic authority, finally, rests on the appeal of their extraordinary virtuosity, whether ethical, heroic, or religious".<sup>20</sup> Weber used the Greek word charisma, meaning a special gift of power restricted to a selected few, they are divinely inspired and directed in their public undertakings.<sup>21</sup>

In Islam, no one is superior by birth. With the spread and consolidation of Islam, the Koranic version of equality before law became well known to the non-Syeds. The non-Syeds started to show an indifferent attitude

20. Coser Lewis. "Max Weber 1864-1920" in Masters of Sociological Thought (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1971) p.227.

21. Cited in R.M. MacIver and C.H. Page. op.cit., p.149.

towards the claimed superiority of the Syeds. Gradually, the Syeds could not continue their livelihood as priests. Changes occurred side by side with the British annexation. The changing conviction of the non-Syeds towards the power of the Syeds got a support when Law Court and legal administration were established during the British rule. Land-alienation had a serious repercussion on the economic life of the whole community.

Hunter writes, "In 1824 there was but one magisterial and one civil Court in the whole District; in 1850 the number had increased to three magisterial and seven civil and revenue Courts...There are two constabularies European officers stationed in the District in 1860, and one in 1870 .... The regular police was first formed in 1861".<sup>22</sup> The Syeds no longer remained as a dominant group. To Srinivas, "For a caste to be dominant, it should own a sizable amount of the arable land locally available, have strength of numbers, and occupy a high place in the local hierarchy. When a caste has all the attributes of dominance, it may be said to enjoy decisive dominance".<sup>23</sup>

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22. W.W. Hunter. op.cit., p.88

23. M.N. Srinivas. Social Change in Modern India (Orient Loggman Limited. New Delhi 1966, Reprint, 1984) p.10.

## THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION

The study of group formation and leadership pattern get prominence in order to know the functioning of the village social organization. Because, these help in conflict and tension management for strengthening group cohesiveness. While writing about the importance of group formation in his study of Rampur, Oscar Lewis comments, "The study of these small groups takes us to the very heart of village life. It provides us with a key to the communications channels of the society and also reflects many of the values of the people".<sup>24</sup>

Factions and factionalism rule the Indian village organizations. The landownership pattern and caste provided the basis for factions. The village Dakaidol gives us a slightly different picture. It is a faction-free social organization. Conflict gives rise to factionalism. Khadija Gupta, in her study of Ranipur started with the assumptions, regarding the probable causes of the growth of factions. These are as follows : "Conflict between leaders could arise over such important matters as land, women and seeking

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24. Oscar Lewis. Village Life in Northern India (University of Illinois Press Urbana USA 1958) p.113.

influence with officials. An ambitious leader, in the course of enlarging the size of his farm, hurt several persons' interests, and one of the latter could seek the aid of a rival leader to get the wrong righted. Again, two leaders might want the same widow or divorcee..."<sup>25</sup>

In Indian villages 'caste' remains an important criterion for the growth of factions. In the history of Dakaidol, the Syeds (social group) undoubtedly had a considerable influence in the local politics. Gradually, land alienation during the British period occurred, but it did not create factions within the village. As the land was Inam land, so the loss was meant for the whole village. Similarly, the influence of 'caste' gradually faded away. It has already been said that widow remarriage is rare in the village (due to the fear of Iddat). In such a situation, there cannot be conflict over widows. Occupational caste has been non-existent. Each member of the family are trained in all the activities of life. Thus, patron-client relations in the form of Jajmani relation was unknown.

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25. Khadija A. Gupta. Politics of a Small Town : A Sociological Study (Impex India, New Delhi, 1976) p.222.

Conflict arises when there is differentiations, higher aspirations and competition. Mobilization of the masses takes place, when different leaders try to form their groups, in order to achieve a goal. In the country, we have political parties - 'Congress', 'Janata', 'Communist Party of India', 'Lok Dal' and few others and pressure groups too. These parties are formed on the basis of ideology, favouritism and leadership and aspiration to achieve the goal.

Thus, when the goal is clear and aspirants are relatively free from their everyday burden, they think for political participation. But, in the village such a goal is not clear. They are under heavy pressure of their everyday earning and consumption. So, participation in politics has no bearing for them; and thus active participation is rare. However, the main political actor of Dakaidol is located within the framework of the village panchayat. Certain influential persons in the village are located and the base of their influence are traced. These are discussed below.

#### LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENT

With the recommendations of the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee in 1957, three-tier Panchayati Raj systems was introduced in Assam. Assam was the first state in India to

introduce it in all her plains districts. Under Assam Panchayat Act 1959, the three tiers were - Mohakuma Parishad, Anchalik Panchayat, and Gaon Panchayat. "The Anchalik Panchayat was the main agency responsible for the overall development of the area under its jurisdiction".<sup>26</sup>

The act of 1959 was amended in 1961, 1962, 1964 and 1972. It was reduced to a two tier system by Assam Panchayat Act 1972 (Act No.XI of 1973). The most important office of the Anchalik Panchayat which was the intermediary between Government and the villagers was replaced by a Committee. The Act of 1972, thus widen the gap between Government and the villagers, defeating the aims of Panchayati Raj and Community Development Programmes.

The Gaon Panchayat covers a population of fifteen thousand to twenty thousand. The term of the Gaon Panchayat is for four years and consists of elected members not more than 15. The President of the Gaon Panchayat is elected by the voters within the Panchayat. The Vice-President is elected by the elected members (Peoples' Representatives) of the Panchayat.

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26. D.P. Barooah (ed.). Assam District Gazetteers  
GOALPARA DISTRICT (Government of Assam, Gauhati,  
 Assam, 1979) p.433.

The village Dakaidol with a population of 1127 (three hamlets) falls under the Shri Surya Giri Village Panchayat. The Panchayat includes 37 villages within 15 constituencies with a strength of 21805 souls<sup>27</sup> (Map No.III). This Panchayat includes not only the Assamese Muslim village of Dakaidol but many more villages, inhabited by the Hindus, Tribals and settled immigrants. The villagers are conscious of their rights, and they are aware of the modern democratic form of government. This situation minimises the traditional role of the Syeds. Data were collected on their nature of participation in politics; responses recorded are tabulated below :

Table No.III POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF THE RESPONDENTS

Sl.No.	Nature of participation	Percentage
1.	Participation for membership	6
2.	Participation as voters	80
3.	Join a caucus and canvass	10*
4.	Not interested	14
TOTAL		100

\* 10% of the respondents canvass for as well as participate as voters

27. Records compiled by the Office of the Mahakuma Parishad, Goalpara : "Gaon Panchayat and Population Size", signed by Indrajeet Gupta, Office of the Mahakuma Parishad, Goalpara, 1973.

During the field work, out of the 6 percent participants only 2 percent could win the election. K. Ahmed of Dakaidol (middle hamlet) was selected as Vice-President and he had enjoyed the office for four years (During the field work, Panchayat was dissolved for the next election). The females seem to have less interest in these matters. It was realised that the Bengali Muslims join together with the Assamese Muslims to elect a Muslim member. Thus, the Assamese Muslims get support of the immigrant Muslims. This strengthens the inter-group relationship between the two communities.

The respondents were asked to identify five influential persons in the village, and they were asked, why they consider them as influential. The criteria of selection were offered to them. The five persons were influential because of the following qualities. Names of the five persons are given below :

Table No. IV BASES OF INFLUENCE

Sl. No.	Criteria of selection	(A) Syed K. Ahmed	(B) Syed Talib Ali	(C) Rahmat Ali	(D) Syed Islam Shah	(E) Syed Samsuddin
1.	Rich economic background	-	-	-	-	-
2.	Political actor	100%	-	-	-	-
3.	Age	-	-	100%	-	100%
4.	Honesty	-	100%	100%	100%	-
5.	Knowledgeable	-	100%	100%	-	100%
6.	High Caste	-	-	-	-	-
7.	Others	-	-	-	-	-

'A' was selected because, through him the villagers could ventilate their grievances. He was accepted as a person having socio-political interest and the qualities of spokespersonship. Mr. 'B' was selected because of his honesty. He was the care-taker of the local shrine, a knowledgeable person. Similarly, C, D, and E were selected for being honest, aged and knowledgeable.

It is evident that honesty is most desired. It is not necessary that the leader should have a rich economic background. Significantly out of the five persons, four of

them are called Syeds. The responses contradicted with their selections. Because, no one considered someone as influential for being a member of a high 'caste' group. It is because, prefixing the title Syed is a new style. Anyone can call himself as Syed without facing any resentment.

A probe has shown that A and B can trace their descend from the Pirs who came from Islamic country. Traditionally, they have been occupying an important place in social decision. The attitude to hold an office is still strong in their blood. Unlike the others, incidentally these persons try to be leaders. Thus, A is a political actor not because he is a Syed, but because he tries to make it. These persons can influence people not because they have 'authority'. Their personal qualities make them leaders.

Now, the functions, fund and expenditure of the Gaon Panchayat will be analysed. The functions of the Gaon Panchayat can be broadly categorized into nine groups. These are : Sanitation and Health(2) Public Works, (3) Education, (4) Sports and Culture, (5) Self Defence and Village Defence, (6) Administration, (7) Welfare of the people, (8) Agriculture, Forests and Animal Husbandry, (9) Village Industries and other works assigned by the State through the Mahakuma Parishad.

The financial power of the Panchayat is as follows:

- (a) A tax on (i) Private hat or market place,
- (ii) Supply of Water, sale of fire wood, thatch or bamboo, conservancy, lighting and slaughter house.
- (iii) Shops, Pharmacies, Tailoring.
- (iv) Cultivable land lying fallen for two consecutive years without any valid reason at the rate not exceeding fifty paise per standard acre for every year being payable jointly or severally by those who are in possession of such land.
- (b) A fee on (i) Registration of cattle sold within the Gaon Panchayat area.
- (ii) Fishing in the fisheries allotted to the Gaon Panchayat.
- (c) Cess or water rate recovering the cost of minor irrigation works taken up within the Gaon Panchayat area and such levy as may be necessary for the purpose of maintenance and repairs of such works.
- (d) Licence fee (i) for running tea stalls, hotels, restaurants, sweet meat shops and for collection of hides and bones.
- (ii) In respect of cart, carriage, cycles, fairs, confectionary and bakery,
- (iii) On private fisheries used for commercial purpose.<sup>29</sup>

29. D.P. Barooah. op.cit., p.437.

Panchayat Raj was revived to develop rural consciousness and their participation in the country's democracy. Hugh Gray writes, "The main consideration which promoted their introduction seems to have been the need for provoking public co-operation and participation in national construction and development, in view of the slow momentum of economic growth compared with such countries as Israel, Yugoslavia and China".<sup>30</sup>

However, in Dakaidol, though there is active implementation of the institution towards decentralizing political power, yet the basic objective of making the rural mass politically conscious towards nation building efforts still remains a myth. Hugh Gray too observes in his study, "The aim of decentralizing political power, has, to a great extent, been achieved. But the twin aim of arousing popular enthusiasm for community development has been less successful".<sup>31</sup>

For the general backwardness of the village, the villagers blame the inefficient leaders of the Panchayat

30. Hugh Gray. "The Problem" in A.R. Desai. Rural Sociology in India. (Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1969 Reprint, 1984) p.535.

31. Ibid., p.538.

and the State Government. The common feeling is that, due to lack of advocacy the village remains cut off from the Government authorities. In order to have a rapid progress and development the leaders must be far-sighted and enlightened.

In Dakaidol, there are no village level workers. There is no 'gram Sevak' or 'gram Sevika'. As a result of which, there is always a communication gap between the political machinery and the rural masses. With the introduction of the two-tier system, there is only an Advisory Committee at the Block level. Five Gaon Panchayat make the Matia Development Block. These are viz., (i) Shri Surya Giri Gaon Panchayat (2) Dolgoma Gaon Panchayat (3) Sidhabari Gaon Panchayat (4) Jakheli Gaon Panchayat and (5) Krisnai Gaon Panchayat. It consists of 150 villages. Besides these each village is divided into smaller units. It is so wide that, a village is not directly linked with the Block level agency. And here lies the loophole of the Raj. Thus, there is no microscopic understanding of each village in the chain. The village Dakaidol also consists of three hamlets. The villages of the three hamlets are not receiving necessary attention for their development.

So far as the function of sanitation and Health is concerned, we have a poor experience. Their knowledge of health and hygiene is limited. The same river is used for washing clothes, washing animals and as a source of drinking water. Public works has also not made any headway. There is no protected water source and electrification. Education, Sports and Cultural development is insignificant. Nothing has been done for agricultural development and for allied activities. High yielding varieties programme, artificial irrigation etc., do not carry any meaning to them. Similarly, no 'village industry' or agro-based industry is yet planned to be set up.

As per the budget provision of the Mahakuma Parishad is concerned, an amount of Rs.5,000/- less or more is allotted for Special Relief of the sub-divisional area. A few villagers in Dakaidol applying (individually) through the President of the Gaon Panchayat receive Rs.50/- or Rs.100/- for special relief.

Disputes are unavoidable in a community. Dispute over land is most significant. It started during the British rule and the problem reached the peak when land was allotted to the Bengali Muslims in 1953 and 1963. It created

factions within the three hamlets. But, it was tried to solve the dispute with the Government, rather than with the immigrants. Whenever there is a dispute between two persons, it is always tried to solve within the village, by the elderly members. If the disputes are not solved within the village then next possibility is the Goalpara Court. The villagers are not in a position to refer the cases to the Court. Panchayat Act includes a provision for Panchayat Adalat for solving Panchayat level disputes. But unfortunately, this proposal is not implemented.

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CHAPTER - VI

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## INTRA AND INTER - GROUP RELATIONSHIP

### THE CLAIMED HIERARCHY : INTRA- GROUP RELATIONSHIP

Today 4 percent of the respondents return as Syeds and 96 percent of them return as Sheikhs. Such divisions raises curiosity and demands examination of the origin and growth of social inequality in the Muslim society, against the prescribed egalitarianism in Islam. However, such grouping do not seem to regulate any relationship within the structure. These are not the bases of the social organization. Along with Syed and Sheikh another social group i.e., Morias are settled in some parts of Assam, especially in the district of Nowgong, but they could not be found in the area of study.

Syeds : The literary meaning of the word Syed is 'prince'. They claim their descent from Prophet Muhammad, through his daughter, Fatima and son-in-law, Ali. The Syeds in Dakaidol claim their descent from the Muslim Pirs and warriors, who came from the Islamic countries. They originally started their lives as Preachers; claimed respect from non-Syeds and thus occupied the apex of the social ladder. They enjoyed revenue-free land and acted as a dominant group, socially, economically, politically and so on.

According to tradition, it is forbidden to help a Syed, in the name of charity. Ansari finds the same situation in Uttar Pradesh : "According to tradition it is forbidden to help any Sayyad in the name of charity (Khayrat or Zakat)... Thus, whatever is given a Sayyad in order to help him is popularly termed as present (hadiyya) and not charity".<sup>1</sup>

With a sense of humour and lamentation, the present care taker of the dargah (whrine) comments that though he is an actual cultivator, their tradition was different. Today, they are halua Syed (Syeds who cultivate with plough.) unlike their parents and grand parents. Their ancestors never even touched the plough. They were land-owners only. Such a situation could prevail because, they imitated the Brahmins in the Hindu society and considered such acts as lucrative, both in terms of economic earnings and social prestige. To know about the Hindu impact, E.A. Gait is referred here, who writes,

The Musalmans have borrowed the ecclesiastical machinery of the Hindus. They have their Goseins, or spiritual preceptors, to some one of whom every Musalman is bound to attach himself. The names of these personages, originally Arabic or Persians, have usually been corrupted almost beyond recognition ... Occasionally they bear the title of 'Diwan', while their local names are derived

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1. G. Ansari. Muslim Caste in Uttar Pradesh (An ethnographic and folk culture publication, Lucknow, 1960) p.36.

from their places of residence, or from the name of the first saint of the line whose successors are distinguished from him by the appellation 'deka' or 'youth'.... The Musalman Goseins have their own Sattras or establishments of resident disciples (Bhagat), who, however, are not bound to celibacy. They collect their tribute from non-resident disciples by means of village officers of their own, called gaonburas, each of whom is assisted by a barik, or peon".<sup>2</sup>

A superiority - inferiority attitude prevailed among the Syeds and Sheikhs, on the basis of patron-client relation. However, thinkers observe that, till the early part of this century the Syeds were offered meals on a raised platform by non-Syeds, during communal feasts.<sup>3</sup> Such traditions are gradually disappearing. Today, in the village a Syed is no way socially or economically better off than a Sheikh. Gait believes that, Muslims of Assam belonging to the Syed group, are also of local origin and not descendants of the Syeds from Arab. The Syeds of Arab belong to Khandan-i-Nabuat (Prophet's lineage). To E. A. Gait, the tendency of the lower categories of people to raise social status and as the religion also permits mobility - leads to a situation, whereby becoming

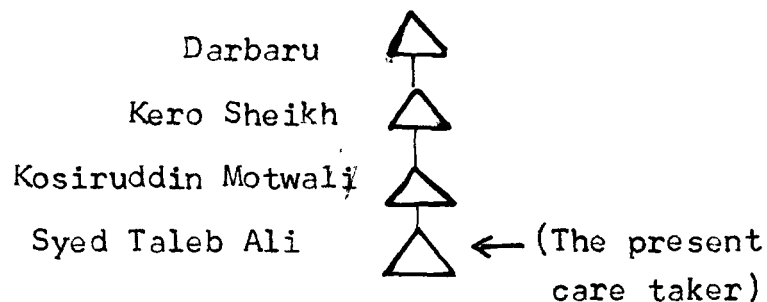
2. Census of India, 1891, Vol. I, Assam. Report (Shillong, 1883) p.86.

3. A.N.M. Irshad Ali. "Social Groups among the Assamese Muslims" (unpublished paper).

prosperous they claim themselves as Syeds by just prefixing the title. This was proved correct in the field study. Gait has already remarked :

'Sheikh' is the title which is appropriated by new converts and just as the members of Hindu castes try to pass themselves off as something better than they really are when they rise in life, so also do the better class of Mussalmans endeavour to dissociate themselves from the lowly cultivator and in order to do so they appropriate other titles. The most favourite of these is 'Saiad'... The true 'Saiads' are descendants of Ali, the son-in-law of Muhammad, but in Assam the term includes many who are not only descendants from Ali, but have not a particle of Arab blood of any sort in their veins.<sup>4</sup>

Today, those who prefix the title 'Syed, trace their descent from the Pirs. Those pirs did not prefix the title Syed before their names. They were Sabod Ali Darbesh, Akin Shah, Doman Shah and so on. They might be spiritual kin to Prophet and followers of his tenet. They might not belong to the Khandan-e-Nabuwat. The present care taker of the Dargah remembers his three generations.



It becomes evident that prefixing the title Syed is a new style. Because, in the Pir-e-Silsila (chart showing the priesthood chronology) no one prefixed the title Syed. Secondly, a villager resembles his Hindu and tribal neighbours in physical appearance. In height, weight, complexion, nose, ears, eyes, hair, there is no difference between an Assamese Hindu and a Muslim. In such a situation, we can undoubtedly believe that, except in religion, Muslims are a part and parcel of the larger Assamese community.

Sheikh : The literary meaning of the Arabic word 'Sheikh' is 'leader', 'chief' or 'respectable person'. The term 'Sheikh' is used to denote 'pious spiritual guide and religious teacher'. Ansari points out that, though in this sense, the term was used in earlier days, today in India it includes a group, who are said to be the descendants of early settlers of Mecca and Medina'. The two main regional sections are (1) The Ansar- means helper - The Muslim residents of Medina who gave shelter to Prophet Muhammad and his fellow immigrants and (2) (2) Muhajirun, the Muslim settlers of Mecca who migrated with Prophet.<sup>7</sup> However, the Muslims in the area of study are unaware of this tradition of Ansar and Muhajiran. Thus,

7. Ansari, loc. cit.

it can be logically and rationally concluded that, the local converts must enter a group in order to be a Muslim. As they are not Syed so they are Sheikh.

Till the last century, as per the respondents, the so-called Syeds, in order to keep purity of their blood and descent maintained distance from the non-Syeds; the Sheikhs also formed an exogamous group. When members of each group became conscious about their status, this consciousness helped the members of each group to merge with group identity. Social relations were guided by a superiority-inferiority attitude among the members, which in fact goes against Islamic doctrine of equality.

M.K.A. Siddique summerises Islamic doctrine, thus:

As a way of life, Islam envisages a definite pattern of society that has its own mode of social interaction. The principles it lays down are basically egalitarian ... inequality based on birth is supposed to have no relevance to Islamic society and all rankings and stratifications of society, of permanent nature, based on heredity, has no place in the pattern of society woven out of the fibre of Islamic beliefs.<sup>8</sup>

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8. M.K. A. Siddique. Muslims of Calcutta. (Anthropological Survey of India Publication, Calcutta, 1974) p.5.

This is one of the reasons due to which low caste Hindus and aboriginal tribals got converted to Islam. We learn from G. Ansari that, society guided by the principle of equality and democracy was very much possible in the Arabian tribal situation in the seventh century. Society, during that period was based on clan membership and thus the members considered each other as blood relatives. Social grades were unknown in the society. Hence, in those societies, attitude based on superiority and inferiority was out of even remote possibility.

In spite of the controversy about their origin, the Syeds claim themselves superior because they believe that Arabian blood flows in their veins. This is a myth rather than a reality. This, as an impact of Hindu caste system created social division on the lines of 'caste' in the Muslim society.

Islam in the land of caste e.g., in Persia and India was influenced by the caste principles, and thus grades and ranks emerged among the Muslims. In fact, Islamic society does not deny the existence of groups formed on the basis of socio-economic, historical or linguistical background. But these groups are supposed to

be horizontal groups in terms of status and social relations, which are different from the vertical groups of Hindu society. About the relations Srinivas writes, "Caste is undoubtedly an all-India phenomenon in the sense that there are everywhere hereditary, endogamous groups which form a hierarchy, and that each of these groups has a traditional association with one or two occupations. Everywhere there are Brahmins, Untouchables, and peasant, artisan, trading, and service castes. Relations between castes are invariably expressed in terms of pollution and purity".<sup>9</sup>

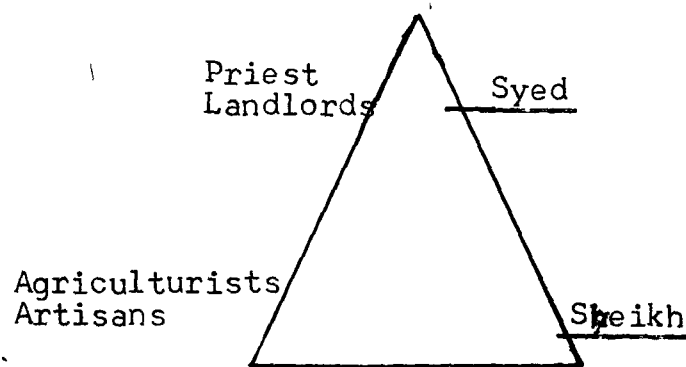
Caste system in India is as old as the Aryan culture is. Purusukta hymn of Rig Veda makes mention of division of society, with division of labour associated with each particular group. Thus, though the caste society is based on the idea of smooth functioning through division of labour, it is internally pyramidically arranged. In India, local converts - who formed the Muslim society were influenced by caste system. Caste is, according to Risley, "a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name; claiming a common descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine; professing to follow the same

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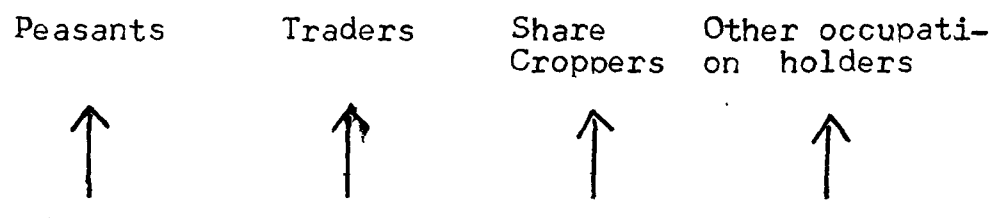
9. Srinivas M.N. Social Change in Modern India (Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1966, Reprint 1984) p.3.

hereditary calling; and regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogenous community'. He goes on to add that the caste name is generally associated with a specific occupation..."<sup>10</sup>

Among Hindus, the high caste members invariably occupy the apex of the social ladder. A Sudra is at the bottom of the hierarchy. In the area of study, the Syeds claimed a higher status in society. Thus, society was graded as -



According to the Hindu Caste model there were vertical groups. But, today in the field one can observe social divisions patterned according to the Islamic model, as :



Socially, all are equal. Achievement is more important than ascription.

10. Cited in J.H. Hutton, Caste in India (Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1946, Reprint 1981)p.47.

The Syeds were spiritual preceptors and Sheikhs were agriculturists and artisans. But the Syeds, as a priestly category could not continue their occupation as priests like the Brahmins in the contemporary Hindu society. Muslims in the study area belong to the Sunni sect of Islam as the Muslims of Assam belong to the Sunni sect.<sup>11</sup> They believe in and accept religious leadership by any good Muslim no matter to which group he belongs. Thus, gradually it so happened that, today a sheikh can also lead a religious congregation.

Thus, we find that in earlier days at the occupational level, the positions of Syeds and non-Syeds respectively were arranged hierarchically from top to bottom. So far, marital relationship was concerned, each group formed an endogamous unit. But, since its beginning, caste principles among them were never rigid. There were no restrictions in regard to interdining, and the questions of untouchability, purity and pollution were unknown. They had equal rights of admittance in the mosque, in the dargah, in the school. Deads were and are buried in the same graveyard and the residents have been using the same river as

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11. Census of India, 1901, Vol.IV. Assam Part-I, Report p.44.

water source. However, the high born attitude of the so-called 'Syeds' who once claimed highest status in society becomes evident in the field from the fact that, they clearly remember the dignified past of their forebears. They pointed out that what they do today, activities particularly relating to agriculture were not performed by their ancestors. Spread of knowledge of the Koranic doctrine of equality to non-Syeds, land alienation which started during the British period and the need for survival have snatched away the glorious past of the Syeds.

Today, the Syeds do not get response to their claim to higher status. Naroll says, "Population which identifies itself and is identified by others as constituting a category is distinguishable from the other category of the same order."<sup>12</sup> The category of self-ascription and ascription by others is the basic identity, which man gets at birth and it is the generalized identity.\* This category is related to origin and background. What a person achieves and what others ascribe becomes a basic category and this is the basic form of organization to which one belongs. Today, the Syeds no longer get their status ascribed by the Sheikh.

12. Cited in Frederik Barth (ed.). Ethnic Groups and Boundaries (The Little Brown Series in Anthropology, Boston, 1969) pp.10-12.

\* Ascription here means, what we judge and what others judge about us.

Sheikhs can be said to have sanskritised their culture.\* According to Srinivas, "Sanskritization is the process by which a "low" Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently, "twice-born" caste. Generally such changes are followed by a claim to a higher position in the caste hierarchy than that traditionally conceded to the claimant caste by the local community".<sup>13</sup>

In the study area the Sheikhs sanskritized their way of life in the direction of the Syeds. Srinivas finds that "mobility associated with Sanskritization results only in positional changes in the system and does not lead to any structural change. That is, a caste moves up, above its neighbours, and another comes down, but all this takes place in an essentially stable hierarchical order. The system itself does not change".<sup>14</sup> In a Hindu caste society, positional and structural changes become distinct due to the fact that caste division, barriers among the caste groups, and closeness of each of these are distinct. But among the Muslims nothing is distinct and there is no religious sanction behind it. The syeds only remember their glorious

13. M.N. Srinivas. op.cit., p.6.

14. Ibid., p.7.

\* The process can be termed, Syedization.

tradition (non-Islamic). Today, if a Syed possesses a tendency to claim superiority over an original Muslim, he is logically, historically and correctly underestimated as a non-Muslim.

Muslim social stratification and power dominance can be differentiated from Hindu social stratification system. Among the Muslims, the principle of stratification is not a heavenly ordained institution; it is nowhere mentioned in the sacred literature, but it takes place due to socio-historical and economic background of each group, as has already been mentioned.

Because of the features mentioned above, social stratification among the Muslims in Dakaidol cannot be categorically termed as, 'Caste system'. So various terms as 'caste-like', 'social-division', 'social category', 'group' or to use Leela Dube's<sup>15</sup> term 'caste-analogue' can be used if it is necessary to denote the social echelon among the Assamese Muslim of Dakaidol. Use of such terms becomes necessary mainly to analyse the traditional history and not the contemporary society and its manifold activities.

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15. Leela Dube. "Caste Analogues among the Laccadive (Lakshadweep) Muslims" in I. Ahmed (ed), Caste and Social Stratification among Muslims in India (Monohar Book Service, Delhi, 1973) p.57.

INTER-GROUP RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ASSAMESE  
MUSLIMS AND THE ASSAMESE HINDUS

The Assamese Muslim society in Dakaidol is the bi-product of the cross-fertilization of the Islamic Great Tradition and the Indo-Islamic Little tradition. Prolonged contacts between Muslims and indigenous population of Assam, in the medieval period of Assam history, resulted in mutual influences and interchanges between those two communities. By and large, Muslim rule was temporary in Assam compared to other north Indian states. Yet preachers, traders, captives and Muslim settlers transmitted elements of material and non-material culture to the Assamese society.

In fact 'political rule' and 'cultural impact' are not casually connected. 'Political control' is not only 'the' determinant factor for cultural impact. While discussing on cultural influences Medini Choudhury argues that, political power and cultural impact can be studied separately. Because, these are not always correlated. He further argues that, had there been a correlation between these two, in Assam we would have felt a strong cultural impact of the 'Tais'. Because, the Ahoms belonging to these groups, ruled Assam for nearly six hundred years and the rule was permanent in nature. To him, in terms of spatial and temporal limit,

Muslim rule was shorter than the Ahom rule. So we can study the cultural impact of the Muslims keeping aloof the political power and rule.<sup>16</sup>

History shows us that no matter whether people come closer as friends or enemies, the interaction leads to development in cultural traits, due to reciprocal imitation. Muslim cultural elements were derived by the indigenous people through the appointment of the Muslim artisans in different departments of the State. Mohini Saikia writes that, a large number of Muslims were employed in guilds of weavers, tailors, drapers and masons. Consequently, different types of dresses, various types of embroidery enriched the native customery. It has been gathered that use of enamelled gold-ornaments, decorated palaces, doors, masonry decorative works of some temples, bear the marks of Muslim type of architectural design. Even the use of metallic spittons, smoking pipes, hookahs, Masala pan, use of paper for writing - are also the result of Muslim impact. Saikia therefore remarks, "Thus the employment of the Muslims in various services in the government helped not only the re-organisation of the country's age-old systems of warfare,

16. Medini Choudhury. Borak, Luit Aru Islam (Assamese, Rhino Books, Gauhati, 1982) p.21.

diplomacy and administration for quick attainment of perfection, but also brought about a gradual change in the Assamese ways of living by introducing new elements to their material culture".<sup>17</sup> From the simple household objects to the regalia of the court - in political, economic, cultural and social structures, Muslim cultural impact is visible.

In this process, Arabic and Urdu words entered in the Assamese vocabulary. Muslims' contributions in non-material culture, as in language, art, music, painting, revenue system - are important. Abdus Sattar writes that, though Shri Devananda Bharali in his book Assamese Phonology and Vocabulary writes that 400 Arabic and Persian words entered in Assamese Vocabulary, yet he assumes the possibility of inclusion of more numbers.<sup>18</sup> Such words entered into history due to interchange of letters in the royal courts, and thus became popular among the Assamese Muslims.<sup>19</sup>

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17. Mohini Saikia. Assam : Muslim Relation and its Cultural Significance (Luit Printers, Golaghat, 1978) p.158.

18. Abdus Sattar. Sanmisranat Ashamiya Sanskriti (Grantha-peeth, Jorhat, Assam 1965) p.Introduction.

19. Leela Gogoi. Asomor Sanskriti (Assamese, Bharati Prakashan, Jorhat, Assam 1982) p.279.

Dakaidol is a typical Assamese Muslim village. In language, dress etc., they are a part and parcel of the larger Assamese community. However, tribal cultural influence is most marked. When the women go for collecting wood for fuel and go to the river for bath and for washing clothes, they dress in a typical tribal (indigenous) way. They have been interacting with the Bengali Muslims, significantly since Independence. However, in the process, the Assamese Muslims in dress and language do not seem to be influenced by the Bengali Muslims.

Influence of Bengali culture is assumed to be prominent in Goalpara. In order to understand this issue we need to hark back to the British period. During the British period, Bengali was used in offices, court and also in educational Institutions. To realise their own interest, they imported not only Bengalees but their language too. Many leaders from Assam, notably Anandaram Dhekial Phukan agitated for the restoration of Assamese language. The Baptist Missionaries assisted him in this matter. They said,

By the substitution of the Assamese, we do not mean to suggest that Bengalee should be altogether abolished from the schools. On the contrary, we are of opinion that it should be cultivated as a language indispensable to complete the course of vernacular education, and that the standard Bengalee works should like-wise be introduced in the higher classes. We are only opposed to its exclusive adoption as the medium of instructing the people in literature, science and other useful branches of knowledge.<sup>20</sup>

After overcoming many odds, gradually towards the early part of the twentieth century, through the effort of local leaders and organizations Assamese was restored. During this time Assamese vocabulary got impregnated with Bengali vocabulary. Along with the rest of the state, people in the towns got the benefits of Bengali language and education. The interaction with the imported Babus (gentlemen) also took place. Besides this, Goalpara being the border district always had occasions to mingle with the neighbouring Bengalees. In such interactions, the urban dwellers were most affected.

#### INFLUENCE OF THE LOCAL TRADITION

Because of the association and prolonged residence as neighbours, the Muslims were notably influenced by the local practices. These are manifested in their life style,

20. A.J. Moffat Mills. Report on Assam (Gian Publication, Sakti Nagar, Delhi, 1980, Reprint) p.xii.

customs, languages, dresses, food habits, superstitions etc. The local people developed a 'live and let-live' attitude towards the Muslims. Impact of the local culture was so great during the early periods of their settlement that, some Muslims were even engaged in the worship of idols, trees and snakes.

It is written, "The Muhammedans dressed, shaved and worshipped idols like Hindus. They eschewed beef and declined to kill a cow and in time of sickness and troubles endeavoured to obtain relief by reciting mantras and singing hymns".<sup>21</sup> Such was the conditions of the Muslims in other districts also. Hunter writes about the Muslims of Kamrup in 1879 -

Two sects or classes stand out distinctly from the rest of the Muhammadans. They are the Garias or tailors and Marias or braziers. These both claim to be Muhammadans by religion, but are not circumcised, and are looked upon with detestation by the more orthodox Musalmans. They form a low and degraded class, and appear to be of aboriginal descent. They eat beef and pork indifferently and are much addicted to drinking habits.<sup>22</sup>

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21. Cited in Medini Choudhury. op.cit., p.56.

22. W.W. Hunter. Statistical Account of Assam Vol.I (B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1879) p.39.

Gradually, the Muslims have accepted the local agricultural practices. The immigrant Muslims became expert in the indigenous system of ploughing and cultivation. Today, Muslims as well as Hindus go to the shrine and offer prayer and sacrifices to get their wishes fulfilled. The Hindu friend who accompanied us to the village and to the shrine justifies it. This makes evident, the existing religious tolerance among Hindus and Muslims. While entering the village from the North West side, one needs to cross through Bhatipara, where there is a place of worship of Goddess Kali. Thus Kali Bari of the Hindus, and Dargah of the Muslims are closely located. The members have mutual respect for each other. Degree of participation at each other's family ceremonies becomes evident from the following table :

TABLE NO.I NATURE OF PARTICIPATION

SI. Nos.	Ceremonies at -	Invite non-Muslims	Are invited by non-Muslims
1.	Birth	No	No
2.	Marriage	Yes	Yes
3.	Death	No.	No.

The non-Muslims include Assamese Hindus, Garos and Koches. The above table shows that in the village in the ceremonies following a birth of a child and during death the Muslims do not invite a non-Muslim and vice-versa. However, during marriage ceremony, they invite their non-Muslim friends and they are also invited by the non-Muslim friends. They share some of the kinship terms as 'Ma' for mother, 'Mahi' for mother's sister, 'Jethi' for mother's elder sister and so on. The same kinship terms are used to address members of each other's community.

In the agricultural system, Muslims follow the Hindu customs. For example, during Bihu - the festival relating to harvest, a day is devoted for the care of the bullocks who plough the field - this is known as Goru Bihu. The Muslims also seem to take part in this. Till few years back, they participated in yatra - narration of stories through singing and dancing. Significantly, the stories are related to Hindu theme. These are Bhasan Yatra, Monai Yatra, etc., where Hindus and Muslims participate together. The Bhasan Yatra is also known as Monasa Bhasan. The narration goes that, Lakhindar was the son of a rich merchant. But he passed away due to snake bite, His widow-Behula, accompanied the dead body, floated on the river and

made her way to heaven. Hindus and Muslims participate in the Yatra (Drama) and narrate this touching story. On the other hand, Monai Yatra is related to a Muslim story. Monai was the son of Sultan Badshah Faqir. The Faqir's advice to the son is the theme of this Yatra in which members of both the communities participate.

A Muslim women dresses like her Hindu counterpart and some of the Muslims possess Hindu names too. To focus the past, we read, S.N. Sarma who says that, there was a time when Muslims used to wear 'Dhotis' and 'Chadder' and bore Hindu names like Dhaniram, Sonaram etc. But with the emergence of the Muslim League in the nineteen thirties and forties, religious consciousness among the Muslims became stronger and as a result they gave up Hindu dresses and names in preference to Muslim costumes and personal names.<sup>23</sup> No doubt, the Muslim society has succeeded much in the process towards stabilization. But even today Muslim children are called by Assamese nicknames as 'Madhon', 'Jone' etc.

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23. S.N. Sarma. "Social Changes in Assam (1750 - 1950)"  
in Journal of University of Gauhati Vol.XXVIII-  
XXIX, No.I, Arts., 1977-78, p.120.

It is also known that the Purdah system among the Hindu women percolated from the Muslim society. Abdus Sattar writes that Purdah system (veiling of women) did not remain confined only among the Muslims and it reached to the Hindu families also - mainly to the aristocratic families.<sup>24</sup>

At the level of religion, each group tolerates the other, due to some of the common elements in both the religions - which differ only in manifestation. For example, a Muslim offers prayer while a Hindu offers Puja; a Muslim keeps Roja while a Hindu keeps Brata; a Muslim goes for Hajj while a Hindu goes for Tirtha. Both the societies are patriarchal, patrilocal and patrilineal.

Differences are obvious between the two communities, yet interaction becomes possible due to the mutual assimilation of both the cultures. Local influence has been always more on the cultural side, because of the numerical weakness of the Muslims in the beginning. Thus, both groups never had organized agitation against each other, because

24. Cited in Ibid., p.116.

they partially belong to each other's culture. Muslim Pirs converted locals to Islamic faith. Sankardeva's Vaishnavism also contributed much towards Hindu-Muslim unity, 'whose right hand possessed Muslim devotees too'.

#### ASSAMESE MUSLIMS AND THE BENGALI MUSLIMS

The level of interaction between an Assamese Muslim and a Hindustani Muslim is very limited. On the other hand, the levels of relationship existing between Assamese and Bengali Muslims are many and varied. It has already been said that Dakaidol consists of three hamlets. Demographically, the size of the middle hamlet is smaller, compared to the other two hamlets. The larger size of the Bengali Muslims has significant affect on the life of the Assamese Muslims.

The terms 'Miyan' (pronounced as Mia), 'Mymensinghia' and 'Bhatia' are used by the Assamese Muslims, in a much derogatory sense to denote a Bengali Muslim from Bangladesh, without taking into account his economic condition, educational achievements, manners and habits. But this is an indication of ignorance about the origin of the word 'Miyan'. Abdul Malik clearly points out

the misuse of this term of honour. He summarises that, during the rule of King Akbar, problems crept in the matters of collecting revenue in the zamindari system. A section of Muslims (Syeds and Sheikhs), well versed in Parsi and Arabic literature, well behaved, well educated and because of their sympathetic attitude and catholicity of outlook, were granted revenue-free land and they were rehabilitated in the midst of Hindu zamindars for collecting revenue.

Those group of people were not actual cultivators, Neighbouring Hindus were engaged in the cultivation of those lands. Those Muslim intermediaries were called 'Miyān' (a respectable term of address). Literary meaning of this Parsi word is 'middlemen'. Thus, the use of the word 'Miyān' to denote an illiterate, landless immigrant peasant is nothing but misinterpretation of the word.<sup>25</sup>

The Bengali Muslims of Dakaidol belong to the rural-based agricultural background like the Assamese Muslims. Towards the beginning of the Twentieth century East Bengal experienced pressure on cultivable land due to population explosion and the landless peasants were

25. Syed Abdul Malik. 'Miyān' Art. in Jana Kranti (Assamese Newspaper) August 8, 1983.

mercilessly exploited by the zamindars (In the year 1930, peasants revolted against the zamindars in Bengal). Besides these, the peasants had to suffer a lot, due to natural calamities. On the other hand, there were vast tract of cultivable waste land in Goalpara and Assam - pleasantly fertilized by the river Brahmaputra. This topographical situation coupled with the reluctance of the indigenous people to work for surplus easily attracted the Muslims from East Bengal.

The needy Bengali peasants from erstwhile East Bengal hardly faced any difficulty in crossing the Assam-Bengal boundary, which even today remains ill-guarded. Prior to 1950, the Bengali Muslims in Dakaidol settled on the fertile char (river islets) areas of the river Brahmaputra, away from the localities of the indigenous people. Gradually, some of them were hired as labourers in the field of the original Muslims. The Bengali labourers could win the confidence of the local owners due to their hard work, sincerity, knowledge of agriculture and the knowledge of Koran and Hadith. They were preferred to the indigenous labourers; they used to provide cheap labour too.

This gave an impression in Bengal of the availability of unlimited fertile land in Assam. Mullan comments in 1931 "Where there is waste land thither flock the Mymensinghians".<sup>26</sup> The selfish propensity of the natives is most responsible for such a flow : Most of the Goalpara Zamindars identified themselves with Bengali culture and launched a movement for the transfer of Goalpara to Bengal after World War I. Their agitation persisted throughout the twenties and early thirties. It was then that the demand for containment of further influx of East Bengal Muslim immigrants into Goalpara, and the rest of the Brahmaputra Valley, was increasingly raised as a political issue".<sup>27</sup>

However, our interest is not to identify whether immigration is due to economic or political motivation but to see the level of inter-relations between the groups. The following table gives us the place of birth of the respondents and of their parents, in the Bengali Muslim hamlets.

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26. Census of India 1931. Vol.III Report. Part - I Assam Shillong 1932. p.51.

27. Amalendu Guha. Planter Raj to Swaraj : Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947 (Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi, 1977) p.205.

Table II PLACE OF BIRTH OF THE RESPONDENTS  
AND OF THEIR PARENTS

Sl. No.	Place of Birth	Respondents	Father	Mother
1.	Mymensingh	22%	60%	58%
2.	Mornoi <u>Char</u>	66%	40%	42%
3.	Dakaidol	12%	-	-
		100%	100%	100%

Collection of materials for the above table was a difficult task indeed. All the respondents, below fifty years of age give Dakaidol as their place of birth. When cross-questioned and made confident about the confidential nature of the data there were changes in the responses.

With great reluctance, twenty two percent of the respondents gave their birth place - Mymensingh. 66% percent gave Mornoi char (Map No.III) and rest gave Dakaidol. Majority of the parents were born in Mymensingh. The rest were born in the Mornoi char. The earlier immigrants had marital ties with the new comers. Significantly, the respondents speak Assamese and children are receiving education in Assamese medium schools. By this, they claim

themselves as Assamese. But in their home, parents and children, kith and kin speak Bengali. Only, in their interaction with the Assamese Muslims in the middle hamlet, they communicate in Assamese. Thus, they are in the process of forming the 'Neo-Assamese Muslim Society'.

The residents have patta (document) for their land. A patron-client relation exists even today. The strong unity among the three hamlets was manifested in the first meeting with the villagers. Politically, three hamlets are identified as Dakaidol - constituency No.9 under the Shri Surya Giri Village Panchayat.

Economically, they belong to the same system of production. However, through their hardwork and sincerity, their standard of living is little improved to that of the indigenous Muslims. It is reported that some of the Assamese youths, due to extreme poverty work as wage earners in the Bengali Muslim households and field. But, this is considered as beneath the dignity.

However, there are certain restrictions in their social relationship. Both the societies turned to be watertight compartments in certain matters. The Bengali

Muslims try hard to mingle with the indigenous Muslims. However, the indigenous Muslims maintain considerable distance from the Bengali Muslims. In the family level ceremonies - at birth, marriage and death - all the villagers are invited for prayer and feast. Significantly, the villagers only of the middle hamlet are invited. Villagers from the other two hamlets are not invited. Similarly, when the Bengali Muslims organize ceremonies, they do not ask the Assamese Muslims to participate. Sometimes a Muslim male from the middle hamlet invites his friends from the other hamlets. But, the womenfolk of both the societies, hardly come closer.

The Assamese Muslims express their resentment in freely mixing with the Bengali Muslims. However, this attitude is not guided by any well-defined and well-accepted principles. Free mixing against the notion of superiority-inferiority in terms of purity and pollution, is highly encouraged in Islamic principles. Because of this, the Bengali Muslims always get a support, and these sparks ignite the ethnic 'problem'.

The crisis of identity of the Assamese is not acute. Because as Frederik Barth shows, ethnic group is not a culture bearing unit but an organizational type.<sup>28</sup> An

28. Frederik Barth (ed.). op.cit., p.9

Assamese Muslim does not want to establish affinal relation with the Bengali Muslim. Because, as per the respondents, the Assamese Muslims are monogamous whereas the Bengali Muslims are polygamous. There are a few cases of marital ties established with the Bengali Muslims. As already been discussed, the second wife comes from the Bengali Muslim village.

It is written that Assamese Muslims are strictly monogamous by tradition, though the religion permits polygamy, and divorce is also rare. As against this, the practice of polygamy and divorce are common among the Bangladeshi Muslims.<sup>29</sup> This indicates that, the Bengali Muslims try hard to mingle with the Assamese but not vice-versa. In this process, they do not even hesitate to send their daughter to an Assamese Muslim married man, as a second wife. But an Assamese Muslim usually do not think of getting his daughter married to a groom (Bengali) even who is marrying for the first time.

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29. Illustrated Weekly of India. Art. "Assam : Dirty Hand of RSS" Vol.c.IV.17, May 15, 1983.

About the social interaction between the groups, a social anthropologist writes, "... an analysis of the interactional pattern between the Assamese Muslims and 'Neo-Assamese Muslims' shows that much of the social intercourse, including marriage relations are confined to the respective groups. The Assamese Muslims express their resentment either to marry away girls to 'Neo-Assamese Muslims' or to marry girls belonging to later group".<sup>30</sup>

Their relationship, at the religious level is partially significant and partially limited. The Bengali Muslims are true followers of Islam. This is evident from the following table :

Table No. III RELIGIORITY AMONG THE RESPONDENTS  
(BENGALI MUSLIMS)

Sl. No.	Do the respondents perform 1prayers and 2keep fast	Percentage
1.a.	Once a day	
1.b.	Five times daily	100
2.a.	Keep fast sometimes only	
2.b.	Keep fast throughout the month	100

30. A.N.M. Irshad Ali. "Immigration and Assimilation: The Case of the Immigrant Muslims in Assam". Art. in R. K. Kar (ed.) Cultural and Biological Adaptability of Man with special reference to North-East India (Department of Anthropology, 1978) p.70.

Cent percent of the respondents perform prayers five times a day and keep fast throughout the whole month of Ramadan. Significantly, males, females and children consider these as compulsory. In every family even the small children can recite the Arabic Koran. Generally, their families are larger than that of their neighbours.

So far this religiosity is concerned, the Bengali Muslims remain as reference group to the indigenous Muslims. Through, the reference behaviour the Assamese Muslims seem to be much benefited. They have learned more about the Koran and Hadith from the Bengali Murrubis (Headmen). It is observed that each Bengali Muslim respondent keeps his beard longer, wear Lungi and Shirt and recit Koranic verse quite often. Seeing their extreme devotion to God the Assamese Muslims call some of the Bengali devotees as Sufi.\*

Myron Weiner observes that, Assamese people believe in assimilation. They believe in the possibility of linguistic assimilation. But, the field work refutes this feeling which prevails among the Assamese. Both the

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\* Sufi : A pantheistic Mohammedan mystic.

communities are distinct in their own way. The Assamese Muslims are Thalua (native) or Khilinjia (native), while to identify the Bengali Muslim, the words, Pamua (a non-local), Bhatia (one who has come from places West of Goalpara) are used. The word Bangal is also used to identify the Bengali Muslims.

The Assamese and Bengali Muslims belong to two different cultural backgrounds. When an Assamese Muslim cites a proverb he cites in Assamese. But, when a Bengali Muslim cites a proverb, he cites in Bengali. Srinivas finds that Sanskritization sometimes results in resentment and even beating up of the members of the group who want to be Sanskritized. In Dakaidol, though it does not lead to any physical coercion yet imitation results in social criticism. It is very difficult to conceal reality and original identity. Reality is bright and hardly remains hidden. A Bengali Muslim may act and speak like an Assamese, but he remains a Bengali. To know the reality, he needs to be cross-questioned, cross-checked and observed with little concentration.

Thus, data collected by a census officer and a sociologist greatly differ. Sociologists start where the census officer completes. There exists a relation between

overt cultural traits and ecological factor. Over a period of time people are not only adapted to environment but they are also constraint by environment. A Bengali Muslim resembles not an Assamese Muslim, but he resembles his counterpart in Bangladesh.

Barth observes that, a change in overt behavioural features from their typical mode of livelihood does not make them different people in a different environment. Self-ascription is always related to ascription by others. No individual is isolated. Each and every respondent of the middle hamlet knows to which stock his neighbours belong. Socially, the Assamese Muslims are never amalgamated with the Bengali Muslims. Both the groups perpetuate in tight confinements. No doubt, due to growth of population and shortage of natural resources members of each 'niche' go to the 'niche' of the other group. And the original Muslim share the resources with the new comers. But, the difference between a Swadeshi and a Bedeshi always remains crystal clear.

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CONCLUSION

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In the above chapters the different aspects of Dakaidol's social structure have been outlined in their historical perspective. Here an attempt is made to understand the nature of coherence which blend the various strands that make the totality. Usually, an Indian village yields to study and analysis through the 'caste' model. The Indian Muslim societies too have been studied by the 'caste' model, because, though Islamic principle prescribes for egalitarianism, yet in the behavioural level Muslims seem to be governed by some of the 'caste' principles. As 'caste' among the Muslims is a borrowed phenomenon so its application is flexible. In Assam, caste had never been rigid due to various humanitarian traditions as Tribalism, Vaishnavism and Islamism etc. As such caste among the Muslims could not be rigid.

Social and economic stratification in the original Assamese Muslim society operated simultaneously. Such divisions synchronized well with the 'class' model. Thus, 'caste' and 'class' were inseparable. In fact, 'caste' model (based on the idea of functional interdependence of the caste groups) was used by the Western thinkers to understand the 'immutable' Indian villages. 'Class' model has been used by them to study Western society which is

viewed as 'changing and progressing'. As a British legacy Indian villages have been studied by many Indian scholars by applying the 'caste' model. But, this is not the proper approach to the study of Indian villages where 'caste' and 'class' are inseparable. K.L. Sarma suggests to go for 'class point of view of caste' and 'caste point of view of class' for the study of Indian villages from the empirical point of view. The Syeds and Sheikhs formed a caste-class hierarchy. Changes generated in the social structure due to the changes in the land relations. Thus, class relation was more important.

The traditional village economy was self-sufficient. Every woman irrespective of social ranking knew the art of spinning and weaving. Members of each family knew the art of fishing, carpentry, animal rearing besides agriculture. Washermen as an occupational caste group also did not exist.

Though initially the Syeds were priests and kept themselves away from actual cultivation yet gradually their claim to occupy this highest social order was questioned by the Sheikhs. Today, the Syeds are plough cultivators.

Syed-Sheikh distinction on the basis of social gradation and economic relation has been bridged beyond recognition. Due to such a socio-economic relation, the Syeds played a dominant role in terms of power relations too. Power, authority and influence were intertwined with their general i.e., social and economic status. The Syeds being the landowners and preachers of Islam could also take an upperhand in the power structure. The Islamic principle of egalitarianism was not transmitted by them to the local converts, that might have affected their claimed superiority. Their claim to superiority was unIslamic.

The British brought a transformation by taking away the land rights of the Syeds. The first serious repercussion was visible in land alienation. This change in the economic relation brought about changes in the socio-political relations too. Gradually, due to the allotment of land to the immigrant Muslims, the land-labour ratio went against the indigenous Muslims. Land alienation coupled with the natural calamities replaced the self-sufficient economy to scarcity and poverty. On the other hand the Government-sponsored developmental measures such as the Community Development Programmes end where the village boundary begins. The visible step taken

for development on behest of the Government was allotment of the village land to the flood affected char dwellers at the cost of the indigenous cultivators.

Poverty has given rise to some non-agricultural occupations. Agriculture remains as a primary occupation for 88 percent of the respondents; whereas petty business like carpentry, tailoring etc., have turned to be the primary occupations for 12 percent of the villagers. A significant feature of this subsistence economy is the existence of uneconomic holdings which are not suitable for paddy cultivation but ideal for kitchen gardens only. The subsistence economy gives rise to various categories of workers but they are devoid of awareness or class consciousness. They are small farmers (Kisans), share-croppers (Adhiars) and landless labourers (Bhumihin Mazdoors). However, this division can be made only at the conceptual level. The boundary of each group cannot be determined for all the time.

The breaking down of the village self-sufficiency has affected the tradition of joint family system. Sub-division starts in every family with the marriage of the second brother. Besides the residential plot the

agricultural fields also get divided. This makes the already smaller holdings even more uneconomic. The kinship bonds are no longer as strong as these were in the past. Undoubtedly, the kins stand together as a first support in any kind of distress. For e.g., marriage of a daughter requires money. Among the Indian states, Assam is honoured because, dowry - the social evil is understood to be non-existent in Assam. But it appears to be not so simple as it is often thought to be. When poverty and nature of indebtedness were studied it was realised that most of the families enter into indebtedness to kins to get their daughters married off. Here dowry takes the form of Joutuk. Each bride's family needs to fulfil the expectation of the groom's family. In certain cases it is demanded too.

Islam is not only a religion but it is a way of life too. Religion enters in every aspect of the believers' activities. This is the significant means of social control. Besides religion, usually in a village order maintenance can be understood by identifying group formation and leadership pattern. The respondents were asked to identify certain influential persons. The Vice-President of the dissolved Panchayat who belongs to the indigenous Muslim community was identified as influential due to his

spokesmanship, while the care taker of the shrine was identified as influential on the ground of his religiosity. By and large this village is a faction-free social organism.

Dakaidol (middle hamlet) is a typical Assamese Muslim village. The residents speak Assamese and use Assamese kinship terminology. Language-wise the erstwhile Goalpara is divided by Hunter into two areas. The language of the people east of the Bhairab - Chura hills on the north bank of the Brahmaputra and the Pagla Tek on the south bank of the river is Assamese. On the west of this boundary Bengali prevails. The first boundary encompasses Dakaidol.

Our field experience supports the observation of B.N. Dutta who finds that this dialect of Assamese have much in common with Western Kamrupi both phonologically and morphologically. Influence of Rajbansi (Koch) language and culture is most visible.

The British imported Bengali babus and Bengali language. Bengali was made the court language, official language and medium of instruction in the educational institutions. However, percolation of Bengali culture was insignificant in the village.

Geographically and politically the three hamlets make the village Dakaidol but there is no social solidarity as a single unit. The indigenous Assamese Muslims express their resentment against freely mixing with the immigrant Muslims. That became evident when it was recorded that only 4 percent of the divorced husbands and widowers had brought their second wives from the immigrant community. The members of the latter group do not hesitate to give their daughters in marriage even to a married man of the middle hamlet. However, such marriages are not appreciated by the residents of the middle hamlet. It may be predicted that the immigrants Muslims will strive to merge with the indigenous Muslims more vigorously. But the Assamese antagonism to the Bhatias (immigrant Muslims) will help in maintaining distance between the two.

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APPENDIXES

## GLOSSARY

Adhan (Ajan) : the call to prayer.

Adhiar : a share-cropper.

Agchuldia : a ceremony which precede a wedding.

Akika (Aqiqa) : hair cutting ceremony which takes place on the seventh day after the birth of a Muslim child. The Indian Muslims do it according to their convenience.

Al-Islam : the surrender to Allah.

Allah : the God in Islam.

Ancathi Pindhua : ring ceremony.

Ansar : the helper.

Atmiya : Affines-relatives through marriage.

Ath mongla : Return of the bride to her natal home eight days after her wedding.

Babu : office goer, clerk.

Bangal : used by the indigenous Assamese to indicate an outsider or foreigner.

Bepari : a businessman.

Bedeshi : foreigner.

Bhatia : People from lower areas.

Bhara : granary.

Bhaq : Portion.

Bhaqat : disciple.

Bhar : a stick used for carrying load on both ends.

Nisoni : fan.

Bihu : the Assamese harvest festival.

Bigha : In land measurement 20 kathas make a bigha.

Bhumihin : landless.

Burkha : the costume which covers a person from top to toe.

Brata : fast.

Cera : flatten rice.

Chula : Hearth.

Chuba : hamlet.

- Char : river islets.
- Dakait : dacoit.
- Dak : post.
- Dakowal : Postman.
- Dalal : Broker.
- Dala : tray made of small pieces of bamboo.
- Dawa : medicine, Kabiraji dawa : herbal medicine given by the local doctors.
- Darbesh : a saint.
- Dargah : shrine.
- Dhoti : a long cloth wrapped on the waist of a man which covers his legs.
- Dhari : wall woven of bamboo.
- Dheki : a wooden mortar.
- Dol : group.
- Dom : fisherman.
- Duars : Doors or passage.
- Dua : prayer for blessing.
- Farj (Fard) : obligatory, duty.
- Fatiha : prayer.
- Gaon : Village.
- Gaon Panchayat : Village Court of the elders.
- Gaz : a length measurement. One gaz nearly makes a meter.
- Gamosa : towel, woven in the family loom.
- Geet : song.
- Ghar : a household.
- Ghar joai : a term used in derogatory sense for a son-in-law who against the rule of patrilocal residence stays with his wife in her house.
- Gor : grave (Gorstan : graveyard).
- Gusti : Consanguinous - blood relatives.
- Hadith : a Report, a literary form that communicates the Sunna of Prophet Muhammad.
- Hajj : pilgrimage to Mecca (the cradle of Islam).
- Hat : market.
- Hajjam : barber.

- Haque due, claim.
- Haram : Proscribed.
- Halal : Prescribed.
- Halua : a plough cultivator.
- Haldi : turmeric.
- Inam : honour.
- Iddat : a period of probation that must be observed by the divorced wife before marrying again - three months after divorce and in case of a widow, four months and ten days after the death of her husband.
- Idd : the Muslim festival.
- Iddgah : The field where the congregational prayer takes place on the Idd days.
- Jiafat : rites performed at the fortieth day of the deceased.
- Jata : a grinder.
- Jaej : sanctioned.
- Jakoi : a fishing tackle.
- Jari : a devotional song.
- Joutuk : Dowry, the articles like furniture, ornaments etc., given with the bride.
- Jumma amaj : the Friday special prayer.
- Koran (Quran) : The holy book in Islam.
- Kalima : creed.
- Kazal : mascara.
- Kaccha : raw (not concrete).
- Kali Bari : the temple of the Hindu Goddess Kali.
- Kisan : a cultivator.
- Kfir : a non-believer.
- Kher : Paddy straw.
- Khutba : the sermon.
- Khusbo : Otto.
- Khandan-in-nabuat : Prophet's lineage.
- Khilinjia : native.
- Kuki : a particular kind of fishing tackle.
- Kula : a tray made of bamboo pieces.
- Kutum : members of the lineage.

Lakhiraj : revenue-free.

Lunqi : dress of a male wrapped on the wrist.

Malik : owner.

Mazdoor : labourer.

Maqni : ring ceremony.

Masala Pan : Spicy betelnut and leaf.

Mauluvi : a religious leader.

Mehandi : henna.

Mehr : dower.

Mekhla-chadder : the costume (in two pieces) of an Assamese women: One piece of cloth (mekhla) is used to cover the lower part of the body and a piece (chadder) is used to cover the upper part of the body.

Milad : festival , a congregation.

Miyan (Mia) : middlemen.

Moria : a section of the Assamese Muslims who are braziers by occupation.

Murid : disciple.

Muri : puffed rice.

Murda : deadbody.

Munazat : Pray to God with hands unfolded.

Muslim : one who surrendered to Allah, Muslima (for females).

Muhajiran : The Muslim settlers of Mecca who migrated with Prophet Muhammad.

Namaj : Prayer.

Nisf-Khiraj : half-assessed tenure.

Nawabi : of the Nawabs (Muslim Raja).

Nikah : marriage and the legal issues related to it.

Nikahnama : the document signed by bride and the groom.

Pahar : hill.

Pak : holy, sacred.

Panjatan : The five : Prophet Muhammad, Bibi Fatima, Prophet's son-in-law Ali, and grand sons Hazarat Hasan and Hazarat Hussain.

Patta : document (land).

Pati : the sheet woven of pieces of bamboo and is used as underlays in bed basically for its cooling effect.

- Pasi : basket woven of bamboo and cane pieces.
- Pamua : a non-local but who possesses a pam or land.
- Paitrick Sampatti : Paternal property.
- Panjika : Calendar.
- Pir : Saint.
- Pir-e-silsila : priesthood chronology.
- Pirpal zami : land granted for settlement of Pirs with their devotees.
- Pitha : Snacks.
- Polo : a fishing tackle.
- Puja : Hindu prayer.
- Purdah (Parda) : Seclusion.
- Punya : heavenly reward.
- Pyjama : a loose pants
- Ramadan : The ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar.
- Roza : Fast.
- Salat : Prayer.
- Satali : Seven-
- Satee : a system where the widow throws herself alive to the of her husband.
- Sariat : Islamic code of life.
- Saree : a long cloth (around 5 meters) wrapped in a particular fashion by the women (dress of a woman).
- Saloni : Seive.
- Shia : a sect (Muslim). The adherents of Ali Prophet Muhammad's son-in-law.
- Sheikh : a religious leader.
- Sunnat : a synonym for circumcision (of a male).
- Sunni : a sect (Muslim). The followers of Prophet Muhammad.
- Sunna : Custom, way of acting of the Prophet Muhammad.
- Surah (Sura) : Chapter of the Koran.
- Sufi : adept of the Islamic mystical path.
- Suab : heavenly reward.
- Swadeshi : native.
- Swaraj : Independence.

Syeds . descendants of Prophet Muhammad.

Talak : divorce.

Tabis : amulet.

Tajia : model made of paper etc., in the Muharram festival.

Tati : weaver.

Thalua : native.

Topi : cap.

Tobarak : eats distributed at the end of a prayer.

Tirtha : pilgrimage.

Ural : a wooden mortar.

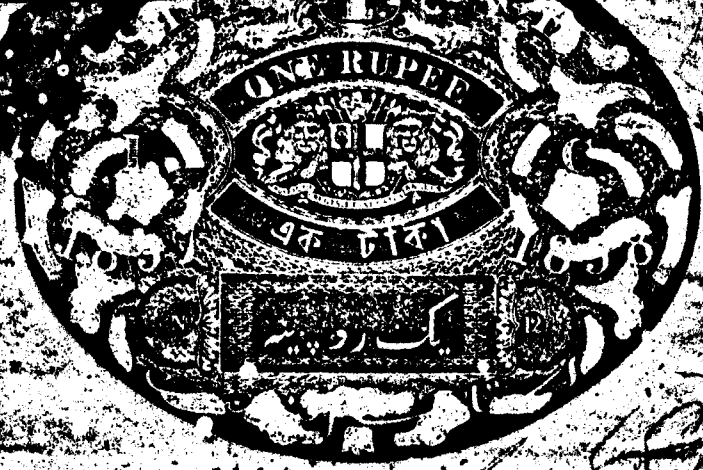
Wudu : the minor ablution necessary before certain religious activities as before prayer or Koran recitation etc.

Yatra: dance drama.

Zakat : alm giving to the poor and needy.

Zikir : religious song composed by the Pirs.

....



*[Handwritten signature and illegible text in the upper right quadrant.]*

আসাম প্রদেশের সীমানা কমিশনার দেওয়ানী আদালত ১৮৬২ ই  
সালের ২২ আগস্ট-সেং ১২৩৯ বারান্দা আদালত ৯ বৈশাখ

১৮৬২ ইং ৬ষ্ঠ মাসের  
২২ তারিখ উপস্থিত

বকস আমান মাহ ও আমন মাহ  
আদেম পশুতম পীর সাকিন  
আবাই মগ

আদালত  
খান

পবনদে হাকড়া আচের আমদার  
ও রাণী আচের খাবর উত্তরাধ কার  
আজা মুমদ নারায়ন নাবানগের  
আই রাণী কান্তেশ্বর ও সব কাছকার  
কাম গোচন সরকার

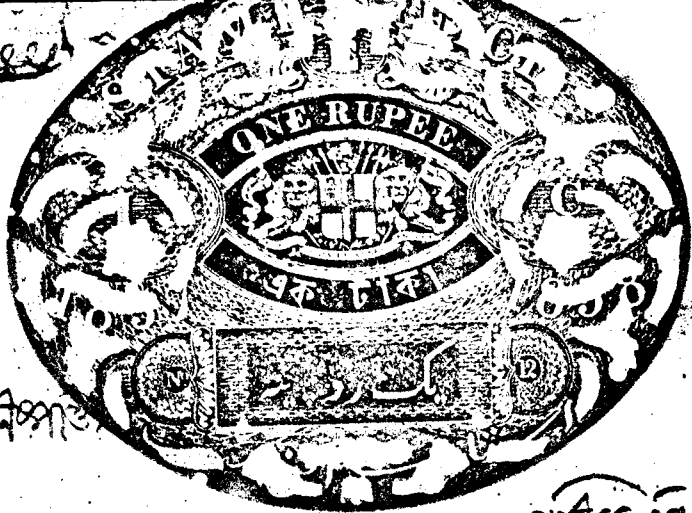
বেঙ্গাল  
প্রতিবাদ

জেনা গোডাম পাড়ার  
মাহেব ১৮৬১ ইং  
গামন পীর সাকিন  
দাতা ডিবি মগ করা  
অসম্মতি মগে

ত্রিপুরা কমিশনার  
৯ ডিসেম্বর ১৮৬৫ দিওয়ান  
মিলে দুমগ পাড়ার  
কো গোই হুসু মেম  
১৮৬৬ ইং পীর মাম

আদালতের উকিল সরকারী আদালতের বাহু বাহু মগ করা ও অন্যান্য





মিঃ প্যাট

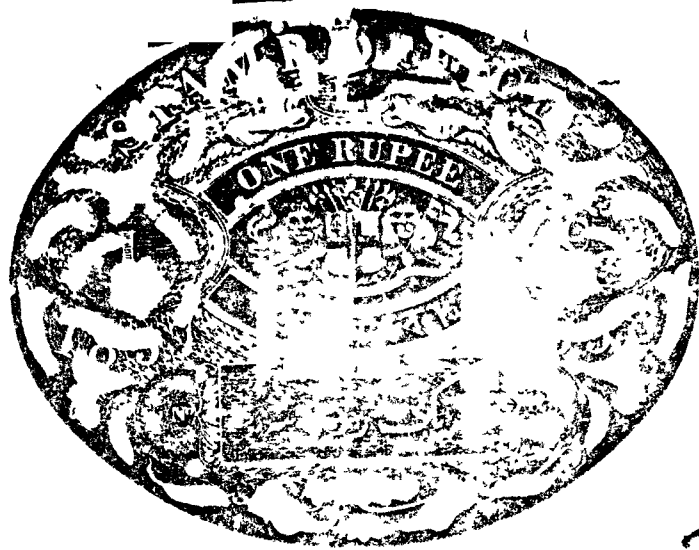
বিদিত হইল যেনা গোড়াগ পাড়ার সার্বজন বিজ্ঞানবি  
 বাজার আমদারি হাফড়া খাট পরগনার মন্ডি ডাকাই  
 দণ মেচলা আপীলপট বাদিদিগের পীবপান হয়  
 এই মোজার কয়েক আমনি বিবান্ডি কার্য কারক দিগের  
 বন্দবস্তবাজ আশু হুস্তান্তে আপীলপট বাদিগন দাবি  
 উপাস্ত করে, ও প্রকাশিত সাতের তাহা ডিবি মিষ্টি  
 করেন, আপীলে এই কন্মার বিচার করার আবশ্যক  
 বিবেচি আমনে আপীলপট বাদি দিগের  
 শ্রাবণ বিষয় প্রধান হইয়াছে কিনা আপীলপট  
 বাদিগন মুখ্য দাবি প্রকারে হইবে তা কন্মার  
 সন্দ দামগ কন্মার তাহা প্রধান কন্মার  
 মহম্মদ বেজামীর কন্মার ও তাহা কন্মার  
 ব্যয় কন্মার কন্মার কন্মার  
 কন্মার কন্মার কন্মার কন্মার  
 জাত কন্মার কন্মার কন্মার  
 কন্মার কন্মার কন্মার  
 কন্মার কন্মার কন্মার

মোরদা





. অদ্বৈত শিখানা হই, ডাহাহদগ মোজা পীরপান দেওয়া  
 গান এই মাম শিখায়াছে ইহাতে সনদে পুরে দেহাদি  
 শিখা নামাকার আমাকে হেবোর ভগ্নে চোহাদির বিশ্বয়  
 আপীনষ্ট বাদিগন বিশিষ্ট প্রমান দিতে পারে নাই  
 কেবন আপাতি করে তো ২০ বৎসর ইহা গাভাণ  
 পাডার কাচারি দগ্ন হুতয়াতে আশা সনদ  
 প্রকাশ নষ্ট পাইয়াছে কোন মোকদ্দমায় এই  
 সনদ দাখল করিয়াছিল জিজ্ঞাসার উত্তরে  
 তাহার নিদ্রষ্ট কহিতে পারিলেক ন. যদি  
 আশা সনদ নষ্ট পাইয়াছিল তবে তাহার  
 প্রথম নকল দাখল করা আপীনষ্ট বাদি  
 দিলের বস্তব্য কর্ম বটে নকলের নকল সনদ  
 দাখল করাতে তাহা আমার বিবেচনায়  
 মাতবর জ্ঞান হইতে পারে না <sup>কেননা</sup> নকলের  
 নকলে কারনী আইনেট টুকাকি  
 ডবলিউ এগানিউ কেশবম্ভর এই



নকশে দৃষ্ট যত মাঝে সমস্ত কারনি আনি  
 নকশে গন ব্রহ্মসম নকশে দামিনী নকরা ও  
 আশন সনদ দামিনী করিতে নাপারিবার  
 বিশীষ্ট কারন নাদে মান প্রদত্ত নকশের  
 নকশে প্রতি কি প্রকার বিস্তার হইতে পারে  
 তজন্য আমি চোহাদির বিষয় উক্ত সনদ  
 অপ্রাহু করি, কিন্তু ডাকহাঙ্গল যে অপ্রাহু  
 দিগের পুস্তক পুরাতনের সীরপান অপ্রাহু  
 হইতে পারে কারন বেঙ্গাল নকশে  
 কোন আশক্তি করে নাই বরং আশক্তি দক্ষিণ  
 আপী নকশে গন ব্রহ্মসম নকশে দামিনী  
 আপী নকশে গন মিশ্রণ সীরপান করি  
 করার কোন সন্দেহ নাই কোন বিবরণ  
 আমলে হিন্দুর  
 আশে মতরাং



THE ASSAMESE MUSLIM SOCIAL STRUCTURE : STUDY  
IN A GOALPARA VILLAGE

Sl.No. \_\_\_\_\_ Place of Interview \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

Interview schedule

Respondent : the household head

A. GENERAL BACKGROUND

1. a. Name \_\_\_\_\_ b. Age \_\_\_\_\_ c. Sex: M/F d. Sect: Shia/Sunni.
2. Caste : Syed/Sheikh/Moria/Mughal/Pathan/Any other.
3. Place of birth : Village/Town(name) distance from Dakaidol.
  - a. Respondent
  - b. Father's
  - c. Mother's
4. If you were born elsewhere state the reason why and how did you migrate here ?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
5. Since when have you been staying here ? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What terms do you use to address the following kins ?
 

Mother _____	Father's father _____	Father's brother (elder) _____
Mother _____	Father's mother _____	Father's sister-in-law(elder) _____
Brother _____	Mother's father _____	Father's brother (younger) _____
Sister-in-law _____	Mother's mother _____	Father's sister-in-law(younger) _____

## B. MARRIAGE FAMILY AND KINSHIP

## 1. Size of the family and particulars of the members :

Nos.	Relation with the respondents	Sect/ caste	Age	Sex M/F	Marital Status	Quali- ficat- ions	Occup- ations
------	----------------------------------	----------------	-----	------------	-------------------	--------------------------	------------------

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

## 2. (a) What type of marriage do you prefer ?

(a) One wife (b) Two wives (c) more than two wives.

(b) Usually what type of marriage is prevalent in your family and why ?

## 3. At what age did you get married ?

1st \_\_\_\_\_ 2nd \_\_\_\_\_

## 4. Your spouse comes from :

(a) Your extended family (b) Same hamlet (c) Same village (d) other villages (e) \_\_\_\_\_

5. How were you related to your spouse before getting married ?

(a) known to you/unknown

(b) blood relative : Yes/No

(c) Any other \_\_\_\_\_

6. (a) Do you prefer kin marriage : Yes/No

(b) Is there any case of marriage in your family : Yes/No

7. A few particulars about your (a) sons-in-law; and

(b) daughter-in-law

Village		District		Sect		Caste	
(a)	(b)	(a)	(b)	(a)	(b)	(a)	(b)

8. At what age you get your sons and daughters married off ?

<u>sons</u>	<u>daughters</u>
below - 21	below - 18
22 - 25	19 - 22
26 - 29	23 - 26
30 - 33	27 - 30
34 - 37	31 - above
38 - above	

9. What type of assistance do you get from your spouse's primary kin ?

(a) in the agricultural field

(b) during family crisis

(c) financial assistance in need

(d) any other \_\_\_\_\_

(e) Neither of the above.

10. Who presides over the Nikah ?

Maulavi/Kazi/Court/Any other \_\_\_\_\_

11. (a) Do you expect dowry (joutuk) in your son's marriage ?  
Yes/No. Claim/do not claim.

(b) Do you need to get the daughters married off with  
dowry (joutuk) ?  
Yes/No. According to your choice/according to claim.

12. Of the following what do you look for in the selection  
of a partner for your offspring ?

- |                                   |                      |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|
| a. Qualified                      | h. Occupation(groom) |
| b. Caste                          | as:Office goer       |
| c. Hard working                   | Teacher              |
| d. With rich economic background  | Shop keeper          |
| e. from cultured family           | Businessmen          |
| f. Health and physical appearance | Mauluvi              |
| g. a bread winner (bride)         | Agriculturist        |
|                                   | Any other_____       |

13. (a) Should the husband have the right to divorce ?  
Yes/No

(b) Should the wife have the right to divorce ? Yes/No

(c) Is there any case of divorce in your family ? Yes/No  
If yes, State the reasons for it.

### C. ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

1. Primary occupation\_\_\_\_\_ Secondary occupation\_\_\_\_\_

2. Income from both the sources ?

Annually (in Rs.)

- 3600
- 3601 - 6600
- 6601 - 9600
- 9601 - 12600
- 12601- above

3. What is/was the primary occupation of your father ? \_\_\_\_\_

4. How did you get related to the present occupation :

- a. from the family                      d. just like that  
 b. own interest                          e. lucrative  
 c. opportunity                          f. any other.

5. Are you satisfied in your present occupation ?

Yes/No.            If not, why ?

6. Do you need help from the following occupation holders ?

Yes/No.            If no, how such works are performed. If yes, in what ways -

Service	Society	their address	distance from your residence
---------	---------	---------------	------------------------------

Barber

Butcher

Fuel supplier

Cobbler

Washerman

Oil pressure

Brass ware maker

Weaver

Carpenter

Crockery maker

Blacksmith

Goldsmith

Milkman

Any other

7. How do you pay their wages ? Cash/kind/both

If in kind, how do you decide the amount

When do you give it \_\_\_\_\_

What are the objects \_\_\_\_\_

8. Do you belong to any of the above occupational group ?  
Yes/No.

9. What is the size of your land ?

Residential plot \_\_\_\_\_ Agricultural field \_\_\_\_\_  
Value in Rs. \_\_\_\_\_ Value in Rs. \_\_\_\_\_

10. i. What in your relation to the agricultural field :

- |  |                                |
|--|--------------------------------|
| a. absentee landlord                     | d. <u>Adiar</u> (sharecropper) |
| b. owner cultivator<br>(in own plot)     | e. Landless labourer           |
| c. Partially cultivator<br>(in own plot) | f. Any other _____             |

Partially sharecropper  
(in other's plot)

ii If No.a, whom do you employ in your field and on what basis \_\_\_\_\_

iii. If No.d, and e, who is your employer ? Particulars about them \_\_\_\_\_

economic background \_\_\_\_\_ residence \_\_\_\_\_

social background \_\_\_\_\_ How the wages are paid \_\_\_\_\_

11. The female members of your family are engaged in which of the following work :

- |                                   |                    |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|
| a. Weaving                        | e. Rope making     |
| b. Sewing                         | f. Working outside |
| c. Cattle rearing                 | g. any other _____ |
| d. Handicraft<br>(cane work etc.) |                    |

## D. RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES AND INSTITUTIONS

1. How many times do you pray daily : Once/five times/  
not performed.
2. Do you go to mosque for prayer ? Yes/No  
For : daily prayer/Friday prayer/Idd prayer.
3. After the Friday special prayer usually what discussion  
takes place among the members present ?
4. During sickness and crisis how do you get the support  
of religion ?
5. Do you keep fast ?/ Do your children and wife keep fast ?
6. Can you recite the Koran ? Yes/No  
which one do you read :  
Arabic Koran/the Assamese translation.  
when do you recite ?
7. (a) Is there any ritual performed in the following  
occasion ?  
birth of child/marriage/death:  
b. Do you invite any non-Muslim to such occasion ? \_\_\_  
Who are they ?
8. How is your society influenced by the local customs ? \_
9. What is the /popular festival of this village ?  
Idd-Milad  
Muharram  
Urs  
Any other
10. a. Do you participate in the following ?  
Bhasan Yatra/Rupban Yatra/Rajbala Yatra etc.  
b. Who else participate in the above \_\_\_\_\_

11. Are you invited by the non-Muslims in the family level ceremonies ?

Religious ceremonies/non-religious ceremonies.

#### E. SOCIAL DIVISIONS

1. Do you maintain distance from the other social groups in your own society ?  
Yes/No : On which of the following -
- In marital relation
  - Interdining
  - Equal access to the mosque
  - right over the same graveyard
  - any other \_\_\_\_\_
2. Place yourself in the 'caste' hierarchy - upper/middle/lower
3. What is your opinion regarding the caste system among the Muslims ? \_\_\_\_\_

#### F. ORDER MAINTENANCE

1. How do you participate in the village Panchayat ?
- as a Voter
  - as a candidate
  - join a caucus for a candidate
  - offer financial help to the candidate
  - participate in the public functions
  - not interested
  - Any other \_\_\_\_\_
2. Are you satisfied at the workings of the Gaon Panchayat ?  
Yes/No. If No, Why ? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Do you know the names of the President and Vice-President of the Panchayats ? Yes/No.

4. Identify five influential persons of your village and mention why do you consider them

<u>influential names</u>	<u>Because -</u>	
1.	a Rich	e.High caste
2.	b.Landowner	f.Political actor
3.	c.Qualified	g.Any other____
4.	d.Honest	
5.		

5. How the village level disputes are settled ? \_\_\_\_\_

#### G. EDUCATION ETC.

1. Qualification \_\_\_\_\_
2. Is there any educated unemployed in your family ? Yes/No.  
Have they received any grant from the Government \_\_\_\_\_
3. Has any member of your family joined any social movement ? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, like \_\_\_\_\_
4. Mention some of the folksongs of your society \_\_\_\_\_
5. Do the boys and girls have the right to education ?  
Yes/No. If No, state the reasons \_\_\_\_\_
6. Do you sell any goods in the market ? Yes/No.  
If Yes - which is the market \_\_\_\_\_  
What are the commodities \_\_\_\_\_
7. What problems do you face in transportation ? \_\_\_\_\_  
and in the transaction ? \_\_\_\_\_
8. (a) What type of chemical fertilizer do you use in your field ? ash/cowdung/chemical fertilizer/any other  
(b) Do you use any machines in your field ? \_\_\_\_\_  
(d) Have you received any financial assistance from the Government for your field ? Yes/No. If Yes, what are they \_\_\_\_\_

- 9.(a) Do you own a Radio ? Yes/No.
- (b) Do you/your children see movie ? Yes/No. Where and  
When \_\_\_\_\_
- (c) Do you/your children get newspapers to read ? Yes/No  
Where and When \_\_\_\_\_
10. Any other information regarding your village \_\_\_\_\_.

signature \_\_\_\_\_

Note : The Interview Schedules were translated into  
Assamese .

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