

**STATUS OF WOMEN UNDER
THE AHOMS: A HISTORICAL STUDY
(1228 - 1826 A.D.)**

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DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY**

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DECLARATION

I, Nasrin Ara Rahman, hereby declare that the Dissertation entitled "**Status of Women under the Ahoms : A Historical Study (1228 - 1826 A.D.)**" has been prepared by me under guidance Dr. Bijoy Kumar Sarkar, Professor, Department of History, University of North Bengal. No part of this thesis has formed the basis for the award of any degree or fellowship previously.

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ABSTRACT

Women have constituted half of the human dominion throughout the annals of history. Therefore women are called as better half or half of the sky. It is without the share in all types of activities the human civilization can never progress. Therefore the participation of woman in all sectors of works throughout the ages can never be ignored. The participation of woman in house hold activities, social reforms, and political events is the factors that exhibit the status of woman of a country or a society.

Assam is situated in 'one of the greatest routes of migration of mankind'. Throughout the ages she received people of different stains particularly the Indo-Chinese, mongoloids, pouring into who added new elements to the country's population and culture complex. Assam is situated in the extreme north-east frontier of India in between 28^o and 24^o north latitude and borders on the hill states of Bhutan, Arunachal, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya in the vicinity of china and Tibet on the north of Burma on the east and the south and of Bangladesh on the west.

Among the three period of Assam history ancient Assam history roughly covers the period from the days of the epics to the every part of the thirteenth century. Medieval Assam history may be said to have began with coming of the Ahom to this land in the early part of the thirteenth century and covers the entire period of their rule till the formal inauguration of the British rule in 1826 begun the modern Assam covers till India became independent in august 1947 and thereafter.

The medieval Assam was absolutely ruled by the Ahom who hailed from Maulong, established their political supremacy in the year 1228 A.D. gradually they expanded and consolidated their position. The Ahom ruled over the country for a long period of 600 years when they had to subdue in the hands of British East India Company in 1826. The Ahom while hailed to the country did not accompany any woman with them. They made

matrimonial relations with the local people and thus survived their generations. In course of time they assimilated themselves with the local tribes and formed greater Assamese society. The Ahom rulers as well as the Ahom nobles paid high status to the women folk both in political and social matters. History is the evidence that this Ahom dynasty during their whole period of reign paid due honour and status to their women counterparts. Their social status was high, they received important places in the royal court, and they even participated the royal discussions during the time of emergency. Thus women played important role and enjoyed dignified status during the rule of Ahom dynasty. In the present study humble attempt has been taken to explore this unexplored dominion of women during Ahom rule in Assam.

The introductory chapter is the first chapter where the statement of the problem, significance of the study, review of related literature, objectives of the study, period of the study, sources of the study, methodology, hypothesis are mentioned with a short conclusion.

The second chapter deals with the physical phenomenon of the medieval Assam including her location, geographical background, origin of the name of Assam, people of Assam, origin of Ahom, advent of the Ahom in Assam, expansion of Ahom empire, formation of greater Assamese society during Ahom rule, social stratification, administrative system of medieval Assam, political conditions, Koch administration, Ahom administration, the king, mantra-parishad, the local governors, other officials, military administration, revenue administration, law and justice, socio-economic conditions and a short conclusion.

The third chapter deals with the role of women in the politics of medieval Assam with the sun points like, short introduction, participation of Assamese women in the political affairs, women ruler in ancient Assam, political participations of women in the Assamese folk tales, women as queen's regent, woman as Ahom ruler, queen Phuleswari, role of queen Phauching, role of NangabaklaGabharu, political influence of queen mother,

Assamese women in the Burmese court role of common women in politics. Muslim women and politics, political status of tribal women and a conclusion.

Fourth chapter elaborates the status of woman in medieval Assamese society by discussing the condition of early Assamese Society, the brief description of early Assamese society, the caste system in Assamese society, the position of women in Indian society, women and their importance in society, position of women in Assamese society, position of women in family and household women as housewife, women as mother, women as spouse, women in marriage and married life, types of marriage, polygamy in Assamese society, women and the concept of chastity, women and the practice of prostitution, women and the system of Pardah, status of widows, women and the system of sati, niyoga (marriage with the brother of husbands), social status of Muslim women, emergence of the Muslims in Assam, the conditions of women before Islam, Allah (SWT) gave the women their right, rights that Islam gives to women, human rights, civil rights. Muslim women have the right to outside of her home, Islam gives men and women equal rights, the social aspects of women in Islam, as a mother, as a sister in faith (in general), as a daughter, as a wife mahr (dowry), maintenance, good treatment, consideration and companionship, rape, marriage and sexuality, who may be married?, polygamy & polyandry behaviour within marriage, sexuality, both control, divorce, social status of tribal women, social and family structure of the different tribes, women of north eastern states, position of a girl child in a tribal family, job of women in tribal societies, marriage system, practice of exogamy, clan exogamy, cross cousin marriage, parallel cousin marriage, widow marriage, levirate marriage, stepmother marriage, daughter-in-law marriage, marriage with widow mother-in-law, and step daughter marriage forms, marriage by negotiation, marriage by exchange, marriage by service, marriage by elopement, marriage for the poor, marriage by mutual consent, marriage by force or capture, marriage among the matriarchal tribes, marriage by service. Seka or elopement, marriage by capture, marriage by temptation, Marriage by secretly becoming sleeping

partner, marriage by offering food, marriage with nephew or Nokrom, bride price, marriage gifts, polygamy, polyandry, female, chastity, adultery, divorce.

Chapter five discussed the economic status of women during the period of study elaborating the economic status of Assamese women, women in agriculture, women as salves and agricultural labourer, women in the cultivation work, women as salves and agricultural labourer, women in the cultivation work, women in crafts and industries, women in spinning and weaving, women in manufacture of cotton garments, women in embroidery works, property rights of women, economic rights of the wife. Stridhana, right of woman over her Stridhana, economic status of Muslim women, property rights, the right to seek employment, economic position of tribal women, agricultural contribution of women, weaving, inheritance of property.

The next chapter elaborates religious status of women. In the part of religious status Hindu women discussion is made on religious status of women in Vedas, religious cuts and beliefs of Assamese women, Saktism, Saivism, Vaishnavism, solar cult, Buddhism, other sects, religious status of women of ancient Assam, women compared to goddesses. Devadasi system, religious activities of women in medieval Assamese society, women as media and religious heads, temples and tanks by queens, religious zeal of Queen Phuleswari and so on. IN the part of the religious rights of Muslim women discussion is made on the Sufi female mystics and current female religious scholars in chapter is concluded with the religious right of tribal women.

Chapter seven deals with the role of women in the cultural life of Assam. Here discussion is made on the cultural status of Assamese women, cultural status of the tribal women and cultural status of Muslim women with the sub points like education and literature, music and dancing, Art of painting spinning, weaving and embroidery, dress, ornaments and articles of painting, spinning, weaving and embroidery, dress ornaments and articles of luxury used by Assamese women, food and drinks, dress and ornaments, a woman in

Islam has the right to get education, dress code of the Muslim women. The Thesis has been summed up with the concluding chapter. IN the conclusion it has been found that during the medieval period of Assam women enjoyed a life of dignity. They enjoyed proper status in the social matters, political affairs, and cultural events. They played special role in the economy of the Country. In the religious field. Assamese women had enjoyed dignified status. The life of Assamese women was far better than the women of other parts of India.

PREFACE

The History of women in Medieval Assam especially under the Ahoms were events of historical that required special from the deep study of the research scholars. With the aims in view the subject matter had been selected for detailed study of the status of women under the Ahom rule in Assam. Casual references and related study of the facts and figures of Kamrupa, the name of Ancient Assam and other parts of Northern India has been made.

Findings of the Study :

As our study was started with the hypothesis that during Medieval Assam Woman enjoyed very dignified status and Played very important Role in Political, social, economic, religious and cultural affairs in the state.

In the study we have clearly discussed all the relating matters of the women of Assamese Hindu family, Tribal family and the women of Muslim families and found that there are ample examples to prove our assumption. A minute and deep study of the thesis will prove all our hypothesis.

Thus the elaboration of the thesis may be concluded with the conception that the women of Medieval Assam enjoyed dignified life. They had special status in the family matters. In the family women play various play various stages of life. She is a daughter, she is a sister, she is a mother, she is a wife and so on. Women are the key person in the family to maintain all house hold matters. They are the backbone of the family. In agricultural field women play a dominant role. They are main preserver of a family economy. Women are the main source of cultural matters of a society. Women are source of creation of poetry, music, literature and language.

In the political matters of the Country played very high position. The Queen mothers played special role to assist the kings in court matters.

Women enjoy a prestigious place in religious matters. Women are considered as the symbol of Knowledge and Wisdom, they are the central point of Strength and Energy, and they keep the power of destruction. Therefore women are worshiped as the Goddess of Saraswati, Kali and Durga. They are also considered as Lakshmi. All these images signify the status of women in the society.

The status of women in the tribal families was also better and congenial. The Muslim society of Assam gave special position to the women folk in the society. In fact the religion Islam provoked with the message of women emancipation. But unfortunately, due to the lack of proper knowledge and misinterpretation of the religious tenants, some anti social and inhumane events are also seen to have happened against women in Muslim society. But in general the status of women was found good in comparison to other places.

Thus the study may be summed up with the conception that women enjoyed a life of high dignity. The Ahoms could provide the people a life of peace and security where people could lead a life of mutual coexistence with their male counter parts.

The Research work entitled "**Status of Women under the Ahoms : A Historical Study (1228 - 1826 A.D.)**" has done under the guidance of Dr. Bijoy Kumar Sarkar, Professor, History Department, University of North Bengal, North Bengal. I am really indebted and thankful to him for devoting his precious time and efforts sincere guidance and proper supervision that help me to complete this research work.

But the beginning of my thanks giving starts with my Creator, Almighty Allah for giving me strength and energy to work on this vast problem. Next how can I forget my father

Abdur Rahman and mother late Monowara Begum who had been my source of inspiration throughout my whole life for getting higher education.

I must offer my thanks and gratitude to Pro. Yash, Santi Niketan, Dr. Gajendra Adhikari, Principal, D.K. Girls' College, Mirza, Nazneen Ara Rahman, Associate Professor and HOD, Department of History, Dispur College, Dr.Kashmiri Gogoi, Asstt. Professor, K.H.S. College, Dr.MadhuryaChetia, Asstt. Prof., K.H.S. College and Dr. Mir Rizuan, Physician for their positive encouragement and enthusiastic guidance to complete my research study.

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My gratitude are also due for the writers and literatures on the basis of whose writings I have completed my Thesis. How can I forget the assistance of I/Irs. Gitika Das, Librarian, KarmashreeHitesvvarSaikia College, Panjabari, Assam. Moreover my sincere thanks are also due for the Librarians and staff of K.K Handique Library of Guwahati University, District Library, Guwahati, KamrupAnusandhan Samiti, Guwahati. Indian Historical Research Centre, Guwahati fortheir friendly cooperation while I had visited time to time to collect research materials. .

At last, but not least, my love and affection are eventually due for my affectionate Husband Mr. Lutfur Rahman and lovely son Ershadur Rahman (Buman), daughter-in-law Raija Rahman (Richa) and daughter Dr.NiIofar Rahman (Neha) for their continuous help and assistance at the time of my Thesis writing. I also thank all my friends both here and there for their good wishes, co-operation and help at the times of need. I myself will personally be responsible for the mistakes and errors remain in the Thesis.

Date: 16.11.2018

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CONTENTS

Chapters	Particulars	Pages
CHAPTER: I	INTRODUCTION	1
Chapter-II	MEDIAVAL ASSAM: A BRIEF STUDY	5
Chapter-III	ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE POLITICS OF MEDIAVAL ASSAM	40
CHAPTER-IV	STATUS OF WOMEN IN MEDIAVAL ASSAMESE SOCIETY	56
	Social Status of Muslim Women	105
	Social Status of Tribal Women	127
	Women of North Eastern States	137
CHAPTER-V	ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOMEN	180
	Economic Status of Muslim Women	199
CHAPTER—VI	RELIGIOUS STATUS OF WOMEN	209
	RELIGIOUS RIGHTS OF MUSLIM WOMEN	227
CHAPTER- VII	ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CULTURAL LIFE OF ASSAM	
	Cultural Status of Assamese Women	233
	Cultural Status of Tribal Women	259
	Cultural Status of Muslim Women	273
	Bibliography	278

CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

1.1: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Women have constituted half of the human dominion through out the annals of history. Therefore, women are called as better half or half of the sky. It is without the share in all types of activities the human civilization can never progress. Therefore the participation of woman in all sectors of works through out the ages can never be ignored. The participation of woman in house hold activities, social reforms, political events is the factors that exhibit the status of woman of a country or a society.

Assam is situated in "One of the greatest routes of migration of mankind. Throughout the ages she received people of different stains particularly the Indo Chinese, Mongoloids, Pouring into India who added new elements to the country's population and culture complex. Assam is situated in the extreme North-east frontier of India in between 28^o and 24^o North latitude and borders on the hill states of Bhutan, Arunachal, Nagaland, Monipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya in the vicinity of china and Tibet on the north of Burma on the east and the south and of Bangladesh on the West.

Among the three period of Assam history Ancient Assam history roughly covers the period from the days of the epics to the every part of the thirteenth century.

Medieval Assam history may be said to have begun with the coming of the Ahoms to this land in the early part of the thirteenth century and covers the entire period of their rule till the formal inauguration of the British rule in 1826 begun the Modern Assam covers till India became independent in august 1947 and thereafter.

The Medieval Assam was absolutely ruled by the Ahoms who hailed from Maulong, established their political supremacy in the year 1228 A.D. Gradually they expanded and consolidated their position. The Ahoms ruled over the country for a long period of 600 years when they had to subdue in the hands of British East India Company in 1826. The Ahoms while hailed to the Country did not accompany any women with them. They made matrimonial relations with the local people and thus survived their generations. In course of time they assimilated themselves with the local tribes and formed Greater Assamese society. The Ahom rulers as well as the Ahom nobles paid high status to the women folk both in political and social matters.

1.2: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

History is the evidence that this Ahom Dynasty, during their whole period of reign paid due honour and status to their women counterparts. Their social status was high, they received important places in the royal court, they even participated the royal discussions during the time of emergency. Thus Women played important role and enjoyed dignified status during the rule of Ahom dynasty. But unfortunately very few research works has been carried out on this important subject matter, hence the present researcher has undertaken a humble attempt to explore this unexplored zone of the Ahom Dynasty.

1.3: REVIEW LITERATURE

In our period of discussion the objectives of our study is to find out the forces and factors that were at work for which the women of medieval times took part in the socio-political affairs. But no systematic study in this field has yet been done by any scholar. Stray references to our study have been found in the work of certain scholar like U.N. Gohain's

Assam under the Ahoms, E.A. Gait's A History of Assam Published in 1905, N.N. Acharyas "History of Medieval Assam, S.L.Baruah A comprehensive history of Assam, S. Raj Guru's Medieval Assamese Society, N.K. Basu's Assam in the Ahom age (1970), Dr. A Guha's medieval and early colonial Assam (1991) is one of the valuable work in this time. Here an attempt has been made to focus some aspects of Socio-economic life of medieval Assamese society. But he has not covered the entire problem systematically on the wider political scenario of the time. Under such "circumstance, the present project has been undertaken to make a detailed and systematic study of the role of women in medieval politics of Assam.

1.4: OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Our work aims to study the status women during Ahom Rule and how they directly or indirectly played political role in different times, their contribution to the state administration and development of political relation with other states. Besides, how they played role to socio-cultural aspect and their contribution to the society is also most important in this regard. Moreover the socio political status of Woman during Ahom reign will also be studied. .

1.5: PERIOD OF STUDY

The period of the work is confined to the Study of status of women in political, social, religious and economic aspects of Assam of the period from the first half of the 13th century A.D. till 1826, the Treaty of Yandaboo. But casual references have been made on the history of ancient India to understand the contents of the Subject matter in a clear way.

1.6: SOURCES OF STUDY

Major sources of our study has been taken from the contemporary chronicles, biographical and genealogical works of medieval period of Assam a (both Published and unpublished) the contemporary foreign accounts. Besides, we will use a number of British records which were written in the last part of the Ahom rule while collecting our study materials we will approach many of educational institutions like the Universities of Assam, the Department of Historical and Antiquarians studies of Assam, and of the Kamrup Anusandhan Samiti, Guwahati, Assam. With all these sources, best efforts will be made to present our problem as objectively as possible with a forwarding of analytical treatment.

1.7: METHODOLOGY

Taking all relevant and available sources, the Methodology will no doubt be empirical, theoretical and historical. All the sources will be consulted and their authenticity will properly be examined and the problem will also be analyzed.

1.8: HYPOTHESIS

1. It was assumed that during Medieval Assam Woman Played very important Role in Political and Social affairs of the status.
2. It was assumed that Woman of Medieval Assam enjoyed dignified status.
3. It was assumed that during Ahom Rule woman participated in the social-economic, cultural and religious activities of the state.

1.9: CONCLUSION

In this way the study has been completed within a very short period of time. Humble efforts have been made to go to depth of the subject matter, Sometimes beyond the jurisdiction of time framework to understand the contents in a very clear way.

Chapter-II

MEDIAVAL ASSAM: A BRIEF STUDY

2.1: Location

Assam, the beautiful land of the nature, the frontier province of India on the North-East, the boundaries of which lie between latitudes $28^{\circ}18'$ and 24° North and longitudes $89^{\circ}46'$ and $97^{\circ}4'$ East. It contains at present an area of 54,000 square miles, of which a little over 24,000 square miles constitute the plains districts, 19,500 the southern hill tracts and the rest, the trial hill tracts to the north.

On three sides the province is shut in by great mountain ranges, inhabited by people mostly of Mongolian stock. To the north lie the Himalayan regions of Bhutan and Tibet. Below the high mountains is a range of sub-Himalayan hills, inhabited to the west by small races of Bhutia origin, and east-ward by Tibeto-Burman tribes, Akas, Daflas, Miris, Abros and Mishmis. To the north-east lie the Mishmi Rhills, curving round the head of the Brahmaputra Valley. 'Withreference to these northern frontier tracts, it is noteworthy that the international boundary between Assam and Tibet has not been clearly defined. However, in 1914 a tentative agreement was reached. Embodying a line on the map called the McMahon line. Continuing to the east is the Patkai Range, which defines the western boundary of Ava, the intervening ranges being inhabited chiefly by various tribes of Nagas and the native state of Manipur.

¹. Robert Reid: *The excluded area of Assam*, G.J.CIII, PP—18, Mills: *The Assam Burma Frontier*, Idid, LX VIII, pp-289.

Through the Great natural boundary between Assam and Burma consists of a tangled mass of mountains whose summits rise to 12,000 ft., yet the geographical barriers are not insuperable; the passes crossing these mountainous regions are actually not very difficult and inter-communication has been plentiful and constant. To the south lie the Lushai Hills, Hill Tippera and the Bengal Districts of Mymensingh and Rangpur. Here, also is the native state of CoochBehar, which was once an integral part of Kamarupa (Assam).

Assam is therefore, divided physically into two main parts, the high lands of the frontier tracts to the north and east and the plains below. The plains consist of the great river Valley- of the Brahmaputra. The area of the Brahmaputra Valley is 24,283 square miles. Between the Valleys lie the broken hills of the Assam Range comprising the administrative districts of Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the North-Cacher Hills (Sub-division) and the Naga Hills. Cacher was originally an independent state. It came under British possession in 1830 and was subsequently attached to Assam as an administrative unit².

Through the heart of the province runs the great river called in Sanskrit the Brahmaputra or Sri Lauhitya³. In Assamese it is called Lohit or Luit. It enters the North-Eastern corner of Assam through the Mishmi hills and turning nearly due west, passes through all the districts of north Assam. It is the chief artery and highway of Assam. For generations the Assamese have watered their fields with its life- giving floods and drunk of its blessed

2. Galt, P-303 ff Pemberton: *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, pp 189-210.

3. Hamilton: *Geographical, Stastical and Historical Description of Hindustan and the Adjacent Countries*, II pp-741.

water; their whole history and culture are intimately connected with the Brahmaputra.⁴

The Brahmaputra Valley comprises the modern districts of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur and the Frontier Tracts of Balipara and Sadiya. It consists of a wide alluvial plain, about 450 miles in length, with an average breadth of about 50 miles, lying almost east and west in its lower portion, but in its upper half trending somewhat to the north-east. The lower ranges of the Himalayas rise abruptly from the plains; to the south is the elevated plateau or rather succession of plateaus, called the Assam Range, irregularly broken at its eastern and western extremities and along its northern face but in its central portion, from the eastern border of the Garo Hills to the watershed of the Dhansiri forming a region of table-land and rolling uplands. The broadest part of the Valley is where the river divides the districts of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur, below which the isolated block of the Mikir hills on the south (a mass of mountains over 3,000 square miles in area cut off from the main Assam Range by the Valley of the Dhansiri, Langphor and Jamuna rivers). And the projecting group of the Drafla hills to the north, suddenly contract it. Forty miles lower down it widens out. At the lower end of the Nowgong district it is again restricted by the Khasi hills, among the spurs of which the river makes its way through Gauhati. Once again, it is almost completely shut in just to the west of the town, below the temple-crowned hill of Nilachala or Kamakhya, where it is only some 800 yards broad. Beyond this point the hills recede again and the valley widens as far as Goalpara situated on a spur of the Garo hills. Here at its confluence with the 'Manah, between the rocks

4. *The Legandary account of the origin of the Brahmaputru is given at length in the Kalika Purana , Ch-82.*

of Jogighopa and Pagla Tek is the 'Gate of Assam' Immediately beyond this point the valley again widens, and at Dhubri finally opens out into the great delta of Bengal.⁵

As has been pointed out, the Brahmaputra Valley is a compact geographical unit. It will be seen in the next chapter that Assam proper, which at present is conterminous only with the six districts of the great Valley, in early times included the whole of Eastern Bengal down to the sea, as well as a part of Bihar and the rugged mountains of Bhutan.⁶

Assam has always held a distinct and independent political existence, though her political frontiers have advanced or receded according to her prosperity and at times her area varied greatly from what it is today. It must, however, be noted that although the political boundaries of the country have changed from age to age, its geographical limits have been marked out by nature in such a manner as to ensure that it retained its cultural identity through ages. The unbroken units of its history are the result of the geographical unit of the area of the Brahmaputra valley which is the heart of Assam.

It is, therefore, not surprising that Assam should be racially and linguistically homogeneous; that is to say, its inhabitants form a distinct entity among the people of India, united by a common tongue, an Aryan dialect of great antiquity. Even in the early part of the

⁵ Report on the Administration of the Province of Assam, pp-1, ff Lyall: *The province of Assam, J.S.A, LI 1903* pp 612-636.

⁶ *E.R.E. II. P 132.*

seventh century, Hiuen Tsiang was able to report that the language of Assam differed a little from that of Mid-India.⁷

2.2 geographical background

Assam may be divided broadly in to two physical units- the North-Eastern and central hills tracks and the Valley of the Barak and the Brahmaputra. On the North of Assam lies the Eastern Himalaya reaching the highest attitude in the North-East at Namchu Burwa 7,756 meters.

The whole of North-Eastern India can be divided in to three district regions each of which has distinctive physiography and Geomorphology. The North and North-Eastern region is composed of folded and tectonically disturbed metamorphic and sedimentary rocks which were involved during the upheaval of the Himalayas and the Patkai - Bharail range some five million years ago. The Shillong plateau forming the central highlands of the Meghalaya is regarded as an extension of the peninsular India. The Brahmaputra Valley covered by the Pleistocene and recent alluvial deposits comprises the third region and represent the easterly extension of the Indo - Gangetic alluvium.

Geography plays a very important role in moulding the history of the country, it is not only political, but even cultural history is influenced by the Geographical conditions. Assam proper means the Brahmaputra Valley and the great river Brahmaputra enter in to Assam from the North East frontier and flows through from the east to the west traversing a distance of 805 kilometres. Assam's culture and civilization had flourished in the plain lands of the Brahmaputra Valley and all ancient kingdoms of Assam had risen in this Valley. In fact, the importance of the Brahmaputra Valley in the history of Assam cannot be overemphasized.

⁷ Watters: *On Yuan Chwang's Travel in India*, V, p 186.

There are many mountains in Assam and these Mountains are the homelands of different tribes. Assam is surrounded both in the north and the east by lands inhabited by the Mongolian people and both North and east there are passes through which from very early times Mongolian people had entered in to Assam. The Aryans had come to Assam from the west and Assam has become the meeting ground of Aryan and Mongolian culture. The land of Assam was very fertile and this fertility of land had a rather adverse effect on its inhabitants.

Assam is land of numerous rivers and there is a net work of rivers flowing in to the Brahmaputra both from the North and the South. Most of the tributaries of the Brahmaputra become furious during the rainy season. The atmosphere of Assam is surcharged with moisture and all these together with the mountains proved insurmountable barriers to enemies who had invaded Assam from the west. Assam throughout her history remain to a great extent in the background of the political history of India it is mainly due to Assam is a mountainous country.

2.3: Origin of the Name of Assam

The modern name of the province, Assam, is actually of quite recent origin. It is connected with the Shan invaders who entered the Brahmaputra Valley in the beginning of the thirteenth century A.D., and who were known as Ahoms. The tradition of "unequaled" or "peerless". They say that this was the term applied to them at the time of their invasion of the Valley by the local tribes, in token of their admiration of the way in which the Ahom king first conquered and then conciliated them⁸. Kakati suggests that "Asama", "peerless", may be a latterday Sanskritisation of an earlier form,

⁸. Gulf, *History of Assam*, pp 245-246. I

"Acham". In Tai Cham means "to be defeated". With the Assamese prefix, Assam would mean "undefeated", "conquerors".

If this is its origin, from the people the name was subsequently applied to the country.⁹ However, another derivation has been suggested. The name (Assam), observed Baden-Powell, "is most probably traceable to (the Boro) Ha-com the low or level country"¹⁰. In this case, it was the country which gave its name to the people.

2.4: People of Assam

The earliest inhabitants of Assam were the Kiratas, Cinas and other primitive tribes commonly designated as Mlecchas and Asuras. The Mahabharata refers to the army of Bhagadatta composed of Cina and Kirata soldiers who glittered like gold; *tasya cinaih kirataiscakancanairiva samvrtam babhau baJam*¹¹: We have traced the various routes through which these people came to Assam during Vriou times.

Kirata according to the Samhitas is a name applied to a people living in the caves (guha) of mountains as it appears clearly from 'the dedication of the Kirata to the caves in the Vajasaneyi Samhita and from the reference in the Atharvaveda to a Kirata girl (Kairatika).¹² In the Puranas Kiratas are designated "foresters", "barbarians". "Mountaineers"¹³ appellations which are understood as referring to the inhabitants of the mountains of eastern India. In another Purana, they are described as "shepherds living on hills to the

⁹ Barua, B.K: *Assamese: Its Formation and Development*, pp-1-3.

¹⁰ *The Indian Village Community*, p-135.

¹¹ Udyoga, XVIII, 584-5, *The wild Tribes in Indian History*, pp 13-37.

¹² *Vedic Index of names and subjects*, Vol-1, pp—15 7-83.

¹³ *Vishnu Purana* (Tr.) pp—1 75.

north of Bengal".¹⁴ In the Mahabharata the Kiratas are placed around the Brahmaputra. They are undoubtedly the same people mentioned by Periplus, Ptolemy and other early writers as Cirrhadoe. The Kiratas who possess a tract of hilly country in the Morung, the west of Sikkim and situated between Nepal and Bhutan, appear to be descendants of the ancient Kiratas. Lessen takes them to belong to the Bhota tribe¹⁵. In the present context the word appears to denote the entire race with the Mongolian type of features along the eastern limits of India. The Kalika Purana describes these original inhabitants of Assam as Kiratas with shaven heads and yellow skins. They were strong, ferocious, ignorant and addicted to meat and drink¹⁶.

Linguistic evidence¹⁷, popular customs and some of the place names of the province also indicate that the earliest inhabitants of Assam were speakers of the Indo-Chinese language of the Mon-Khamer family¹⁸ which has been characterized by Schemdt as the Austric 'family of languages. The date when the Austric speakers began to filter into Assam is not known, but it must have been several hundred years B.C. and certainly long anterior to the advent of the Aryans from the west¹⁹. It is not easy to say how much the Austric speaking Mongolian peoples contributed to the racial make-up of Assam; but it is evident that their culture still survives in many existing institutions, customs and manners of the Assamese people.

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14. Wilford : *Essay on the Secred Isles of the West, As Res*, Vol. VIII, p—38.
 15. *Ind.AIt.*/pp—185. —
 16. *Mibid* .
 17. Barua, B.K. *Assamese: Its Formation and Development*, pp. 32-47.
 18. *Census Report of India*, 1931. p-443.
 19. *Indi-Aryan and Hindi*, p-39.

A glance at the map of Assam will show how many places and river names bear witness to an Austric substratum.

The next wave of Indo-Chinese invasion is represented by the various peoples speaking tribe to-Bhutan languages. The original home of these speakers was in western China near the Yang-tselkiang and the Hwag-ho rivers. From these they went down the courses of the Brahmaputra and the Chindwin and the Irrawaddy and entered India and Burma. The swarm which came to Assam proceeded down the great bend of the river Brahmaputra near Dhubri. From there some of them went to the south and occupied first the Garo hills and the state of Hill Tipper. Others appear to have ascended the valley of the Kapili and the neighboring streams into the 'hilly country of North Cachar, but the mountainous tract between it and the Garo hills now known as the Khasi and Jaintia hills, they failed to occupy and it ever remained a home of the Mon-Khmer speaking people. Other members of this Tibet-Burman horde halted at the head of the Brahmaputra Valley and turned south. They took possession of the Naga Hills and become the ancestors of that confused sample-bag of tribes whose speeches are classed as the Naga-group. Another of the swarms that settled in the upper basins of the Chindwin and the Irrawaddy gradually advanced towards the south of Assam and colonized in the Lushai, Cachar and even in some parts of Manipur and Naga Hills²⁰. The most important group of tribes of the Tibeto-Burman race known as Bodo forms the numbers and important section of the non-Aryan peoples of Assam. The Bodo group of tribes includes the Koch, the Kachari, the Lalung, the Dimacha, the Garo, the Rabha, the Tipra, the Chutiya and the Maran, the Bodo people who live to the west of

²⁰. *Linguistic Society of India*, Vol- 1

the present Kamrup district are called Mec by their Hindu neighbours .This word is probably a corruption of Sanskriti mleccha. Those of them who live in and to the west of the district of Kamrup are called kachari . Various guesses have been made about the origin of the word kachari but it seems that the word paralleled to Sanskrit kirata.²¹

Linguistic evidence shows that at one time the Bodo people extended over the whole of the present province west of Manipur and the Naga hills, excepting only the Khasi and Jaintia hills. In fact, they have given their own names to many of the most prominent features of the province. The Bodos built their colonies near about streams and so most of the river names in eastern Assam are of Bodo origin. The Bodo equivalent for water is di (in the hills and in Eastern Assam). They even rechristened a river name of earlier Austric origin by prefixing it with their own equivalent for water, e.g. Di-hong, the name of a river where Bodo di was placed before Austric hong (water), perhaps the name of the river in old times.

The Bodos built strong kingdoms and with various fortunes and under various tribal names- the Chutiya, the Kachari, the Koc, etc., held sway over one or another part of Assam during different historical times. During the course of centuries the Bodos suffered much from external pressure. They were hemmed in from the east by the Ahoms of the great Tai race and from the west by the Aryans²².

²¹. Buruu, B.K: *Assamese, Its Formation and development*, P-47.

²². Galt, pp- 46ff

The Tais or Shans ²³ first appeared in history in Yunnan and from thence they migrated into upper Burma. In the 6th century A.D. they migrated from the mountains of Southern Yunnan into the Valley of the Sheweli and the adjacent regions. In the 13th century one of their tribes, the Ahoms overran and conquered Assam itself, giving their name to the country. Other Shan tribes who followed the Ahoms were the Khamtis, Phakiyals, Naras and Aitonyas, whomostly inhabit the eastern part of Assam.

The Tibeto-Burmans and the Shans to-day constitute the bulk of the population of the province, valleys as well as hills. Risley rightly remarks that the Assamese are unmistakably Mongoloid.²⁴ Elwin considers them a rather modified Mongoloid with a dolichocephalic or long head but with the typical flat nose, high cheek bones and oblique slit-eyes.

At what period of history the Aryan speakers came into the valley of the Brahmaputra we cannot say. But there is hardly any doubt that they arrived at a fairly early period either as the result of invasion or by means of peaceful penetration. Assam's early contact with Aryan India is revealed by reference in the Ramayana and Mahabharata. In the Aryanisation of the province the Naraka legend 'also bears significance; In a subsequent chapter it has been shown in the early centuries of the Christian era high class Aryans, such as Brahmanas, Kayashas and Kalitas came and settle in Assam. The Nidhapur Copper Plate grant also records that king Bhutivarman (6th century, A.D.) Granted special Agrahara settlements to more than two hundred Brahmanas in various Agrahara

²³. *The Shans call themselves Dai or Tai, meaning 'ourself/ves', equivalent to the 'we' group in the meaning of Dr. Li Chi's classification of peoples, The Formation of the Chinese People*

²⁴. *The People of India*, P-42.

settlements to more I than two hundred Brahmans of various gotras and vedasakhas for poromotion of Vedic religion and culture. Traces of early Aryan settlements of the kalitas are found in the Sadiya tract of eastern 'Assam. They not only established Aryan settlements with their own people but brought the earlier inhabitants to their fold by giving them Aryan religion, rites and language. In this process of Aryanisation even tribes' name were changed to caste names. Thus the Koo which was originally used to designate a tribe has become in later years the name of a recognized Aryan caste into which are absorbed converts from the Kachari, the Lalung, the Mikir one other original tribes.

The Aryan influence becomes so widespread and penetrating that even minor Vedic customs and rituals become deep-rooted in the life of the common people. For instance, the Vedic customs of worship of Indra by setting up Indradhavaja still survives in Assam in the popular festival of Bhatheli (Bha-sthali).²⁵ The existing practice of animal sacrifice by strangling on the Siva caturdasi day is also a Vedic. survival. It is significant that the Assamese woman's Undergarment mekhela is a phonetic variatiuon of mekahala which was a girdle for woman or Brahmacharia in Vedic times, but the grates cultural influence of the Aryans which also brought munityamong the diverse tribes and races of the province however, was the language. 'Sanskrit.not only became the language of the court, it also becomes the medium of expression for poets, philosophers and preachers. Modern Assamese as an Aryan speech developed out of the Sanskrit as early as the 10th century A.D.

²⁵ S. C. Goswami, *JARS.Vol-K pp- 26-33.*`

It should also be noted that the Aryan speakers migrated to Assam mostly from Madhyadesa or Mid-India. A succession of influences, ideas and cultures entered Assam down to the mediaeval period through Madhyadesa. Tradition bears testimony to the fact that the Brahmans and the Kayasthas came to Assam from Videha (Mithila) and Kanuj. Geographically this had to be so, for in the early times, Assam's western boundary extended to the river Kausika in Bihar and the Kamarupas were included in the list of the Pracya peoples (Easterners) along with Paundras, Odra, Angas, Vangas and Guadas.²⁶

Anthropometric researches have not been carried out in Assam. So nothing can be said about the ethnic affinity of these Aryan speakers. It is nevertheless certain that before their arrival in the valley of the Brahmaputra these speakers had lost the purity of Nordic blood and become almost a mixed race.

Early thirteenth Century becomes important in the pages of history of migration into the province of Assam. The Muslims entered Karnrupa leading an invasion towards Tibet under the leadership of Bakhtiyar uddin Khalji in 1205/06 but on the way the Raje of Karnrupa attacked them, defeated and compelled to return to Bengal. A good number of Muslim war captives remained in Assam and took permanent settlement. They married the local girls and gradually the number of Muslim population increased in the province. The other section of the migrated people was the Ahoms who hailed from Arakan region in around 1228 under the leadership of Choulong Sukafa. They were the successful warrior's able diplomats and by dint of these qualities they could gradually occupy the political suzerainty of the whole province and ruled the Country for a long period of six

²⁶. *Arya Manjuri Mulakalpa*

hundred years. The common phenomenon between both these groups that they did not accompany women in a proportionate way and made matrimonial relations with the women local tribes.

2.5: Origin of the Ahoms

The origin of the Ahoms is a confused matter, just as it is that of the other remote tribes of India. The majority of the scholars and historians are of the opinion that they are the descendants of the Shans or Tais of south East Asia.²⁷

Beyond the opinions of the scholars, the traditions of the Ahoms regarding the origin of their kings tally very closely with those preserved by the Shans of Upper Burma. But there are also some differences in matter of detail and especially in the names of the various rulers and of the places where they reigned.²⁸ Early in thirteenth century a band of hardy hill men wandered into the eastern extremity of the Brahmaputra Valley who was the offshoot of the great Tai or Shan race.²⁹

2.6: Advent of the Ahoms in Assam

Sukapha left his homeland in around 1215 A.D. in search of his fortune. He was accompanied by a few nobles, few hundred followers and a retinue of two elephants and 300 horses³⁰. He had as weapons swords, spears, bows and arrows, besides 10 special swords called 'Hengdang'. On the way towards Kamrupa, Sukapha faced a few obstacles which he reduced to submission with the policy 'blood and repine', finally he reached 'Namruk' (Namrup) in the year 1228 and founded his head quarter at Tipam.

²⁷ Acharyya, N.N, *The History of Mediaval Assam*, P-38

²⁸ *ibid*, P—38.

²⁹ Gait, Sir Adward, *A History of Assam*, P-71.

³⁰ Barua, S.L, *A comprehensive history of Assam*, P—221.

Sukapha reach Brahmaputra valley in 1228 AD and wandered till his settlement at Charaideo in 1253. A.D. Sukapha, by dint of his policy of 'Peace and Conciliation' subjugated the local tribes like Moran and Borahis. Thus Sukapha started the beginning which continued till the Treaty of Yandaboo in the year 1826 A.D. with countless events of historical importance. The successors of Sukapha conquered almost all the local tribes and expanded the geographical boundary of the mighty Ahom Kingdom from the Korotoya River in the West to Arakan Region in the East and from Himalaya in the North to the Bay of Bengal to the south.

2.8: Formation of Greater Assamese Society during Ahom Rule

The Aryans had successfully penetrated to this region and made their settlements but they had failed to Aryanise this land completely. They had to leave some of their customs to adjust themselves with the vast majority of non-Aryan population. They became liberal in their food habits, drink, dress, custom and manner. It is also observed that the interaction and the consequent fusion of the blood of the different racial stocks contributed to the evolution of Assamese society, where in the Aryans and the non-Aryan beliefs, practices and way of living interfuse to form a composite Assamese culture. The composite Assamese culture did not necessarily contain all the disgrading customs and obscurantist practices like sati, child marriage etc., prevalent in other parts of India under the major Aryan influence. So women of this region were not affected by those evil and rigid social customs and practices of the Aryans. It proves that the position of Assamese woman was comparatively better than their sisters living in other parts of India. In the social, religious or political arena of the Assamese culture, women occupied dignified position and were considered in reverence as the pivots of the entire social organism.

2.9: Social Stratification

Social stratification in the form of Caste System is a common picture in the India society and Assam is not an exception in this regard. Traditional Indian society was primarily based on Varnasrama dharma. The Varnasrama principle of categorization of society into four groups viz. Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras and four stages of life viz. Brahmacharyya, Garhasthya, Vanaprastha and Sannyasa existed in the Vedic society. The Rigveda stated that the Brahman was born from the mouth of the Lord, Khatriya from the arms, Vaishya from his stomach and the Sudra sprang from his feet ³¹. In the early stage, the Varna system was not a hereditary institution, but based on occupation. The works of Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and the Sudras are divided according to the qualities (gunas) born of their own inner nature.³² Gradually the Varna System started to be critical. After the Rigvedic period, the Varna was not based on occupation but on birth. P.V. Kane points out that in the period of the Brahmanic literature, all the castes of the Brahmans, Khatriyas and the vaishyas were endorsed as an upper position and crystallised according to birth, while the Sudras had been sanctioned a lower position.³³ The four varnas were mentioned in order of wherein the first three were called *dwana* i.e, twice born while the Sudras occupied the lowest position in the society, and they are expected to serve the other three varnas. This has become the common phenomenon of the rigid Hindu society of India.

But, so far Assam is concern; no concrete evidence either inscriptional or literary is available about the existence of all the four varnas. The social stratification of The Assamese Hindus, though fundamentally allied to that of India, presents picture of

³¹. *Tenth Mandala of RG Veda*, cited in Dr. Sudhakar Chattopadhyaya, *Social We in ancient India*,

³². *Bhagabat Gita*, XVIII—41.

³³. P. V.Kane, *History of the Dharmasastras*, Vol-I, 1931, P-48.

liberalized caste hierarchy. This liberalism was due to the emergence of Neo-Vaishnavism and emergence of Islam, according to which all the castes 'are equal in front of God. Due to the liberal outlook in the caste system and occupation, the Varnasrama dharma were also not properly observed here, as was followed in other parts of India. But as Assam was an adjacent country, Assamese social life was also shaped on the influence of Varnasrama dharma which was provided by ancient epigraphic and literary sources.

In fact some of the epigraphs and literatures give us some impression that the ancient Indian Society was based upon divine social order and the early Kamrupa kings were created for upholding that order, but strictly speaking, existence of the Varnasramadharma in proper order in ancient Assam was absent. The only Varna category, which is referred to in the inscriptions, is the Brahmin caste, the donors of the epigraphs. The epigraphs are completely silent about the intermediary of the two Varnas the Kshatriya and the vaisya. Maniram Dewan in his *Buranji Vivekratna* observed that amongst the four castes of Hindu society, there were only two castes in Assam, the Brahmins and the Sudras, There were no Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas³⁴. Other historians like Dr.P.C. Choudhury and Haliram Dhakia Phukan also support that there were only two groups of people the Brahmins and the Sudras, but they did not completely deny about the existence of the Vaishyas.³⁵ Thus it is clear that the principle of stratification acquired normative significance by legitimizing the overlordship of the Brahmins. The Varnasrama was empirically expressed through various caste groups indicating adjustment to the development needs of the society.

In the medieval society social stratification determined the professions in the society, but it was not so rigid. While mentioning the social system of Assam, William Robinson

³⁴. Maniram Dewan, *Buranji Vivekratna* (MS).

³⁵. P.C. Choudhury, *the history of civilization of the people of Assam*, P-316.

remarks that 'in Assam there seems to have been little or nodistinction of castes from professions and each caste or tribe practiced all thearts which are known in the country. They were farmers, traders, blacksmiths,carpenters, extractors of oil, potters, weavers, dyers etc., but they had no art of» shaving, washing or bleaching, working in leather or of making sweetmeats,butter and ghee.³⁶ The main reason behind the liberal attitude of the Assamese folkmind in the caste based society was the preaching of the great Vaishnava Guru Sankardeva and the Muslim saint Azan Fakir and the associates of them.B.K. Barua says that the way for the social mobility was facilitated by the liberal attitude of the Neo-Vaishnavism who recognized the equality of status for all Vaishnava devotees.³⁷

It is very interesting to note the influence of caste system upon the women folk ofn Assam. The concept of Hypergamous 'anoloma' and hupogamous "pratiloma'Marriagesby definition denigrates women. A marriage where a boy of uppercaste marry a girl of lower caste had been approved and was called 'anu, loma', while marriages of women of ritually pure groups with men of lower ritual status does not receive a similar approval and known as pratiloma marriage. If a man of high class community or caste married a girl from a low class or community orcaste that the man was degraded to the low community or caste of the girl.³⁸ On the other hand, if a man of the low community or caste married a girl of highcaste, then both of them were considered as degraded and impure.³⁹ Maximumpunishment in such inter marriages could be evoked for transgressing the norms. Women as a guardian of purity has not to lower herself but she could be raised high.⁴⁰

³⁵ William Robinson, *A Descriptive Account of Assam*, P-264.

³⁷ B.K.Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam*, P-59. '

³⁸ . *ABGB*, P-253.

³⁹ S. Rajguru, *Mediaval Assamese Society*, P-195.

⁴⁰ Neera Desai and M. Krishnaraj, *Women and Societyin India*, P-29.

Other point of social inequality is the differential status of bride giver and bride-taker where the bride taker was always considered as superior. Even within the same group matter was same and the bride giver had to pay compensation in terms of dowry.⁴¹

2.10: Administrative System of Medieval Assam

2.10.1: Political Conditions

The Political conditions of Assam were more chaotic in the 14th century A.D. Although some minor kings, like Arimmatta (1385-85) had come to power, though he was a powerful king, but did not succeed. The petty Bhuyans asserted their independence in everywhere they settled to establish peace and order. These Bhuyans rulers traced their descent from some Legendary or historical person and entered into reciprocal clash for supremacy in the region. One Niladhvaj, who established the Khan dynasty by uniting several Bhuyans at Kamatapur. Relating their matters Gait observed- "It is said that the founder of the dynasty was a Cowherd, whose master, a Brahmin, is said to have foretold that he would become king and helped him overthrow the last degenerate descendent of the-pala family, on ascending the throne he embraced the Hindu religion, assumed the name Niladhvaj and made his old master his Chief Mantri or Minister." But K.L Barua expressed opposite opinion regarding this matter. According to him, Niladhvaj was a Bhuiya having the surname Khan, and that after the death of Mriganka he forcibly took possession of the throne." Niladhvaj is said to have imported many Brahmans from Mithila and settled them in Assam, and for the purpose of securing he constructed walls encircling the capital Kamatapur. But the reign of Niladhvaj could not long remain peacefully and he was succeeded by his son Chakradhvaj (1460 - 80). In 1458-74 Barbak, sultan of Bengal

⁴¹. Veenu Das, *Indian women; work, Power and status* :1976, P-122

invaded Kamata but his invasion was came to end by-failure. After Chakradhvaj his son Nilambar (14-80-90) ascended the throne of Kamata and taking advantage of the anarchical position in Bengal under the rule of Habshishe occupied the North-Eastern part of Bengal and consolidated his conquest by building a road from his capital to the frontier fortress of Ghoraghat on the Karatoya. In 1493-1519 to recovering the lost possession of Bengal, Alauddin Hussain Shah, Sultan of Bengal, led a campaign against the Kamata, destroyed the Capital city Kamatapur and Nilambar was captured and took him to Gauda, who however, subsequently escaped and fled towards the hills. The invaders the adjoining territory up to Hajo was annexed to the dominion of the Sultan and established Muslims powers. The Sultan appointed his son Daniel as the ruler of Kamata and settled some people around Hajo where they dispossessed the local chiefs and took up to themselves the offices in administration and Hajo made his Head Quarter. In consequence Hajo became an important center of Muslims saint named Giasuddin Awlia who established a Mosque at Hajo and it has acquired fame as a place of pilgrimage.

But the rule of Muslims in Kamrup-Kamata did not last long period of time. The Bhuyans of Goalpara and Kamrup revolted and made a united attack on Daniel, killed Daniel along with his great followers. The reign of Khan dynasty came to an end with overthrow of Nilambar and the power of administration again passed on to the ruler of the Bhuyans and they ruled an independent chief till the rise of the Koch in 1515 A.D.

2.10.2: Koch Administration

About two centuries before the Ahom occupation in 13th century A.D. Assam passed a confused period. The rise of Bisu, an adventurous Koch youth, in the beginning of the 13th century A.D. was the important event in the history of not only Koch Bihar but also in the part of Assam. After foundation of a Koch kingdom Bisu assumed the name -Biswa Singha

(1515-1540). Biswa Singha the founder of the Koch kingdom was a courageous and ambitious man who occupied the territory between the Karotoya and the Bara Nadi ⁴². He was a great patron of Hinduism, worshipped Siva, Durga and Vishnu and was a great devotee of Goddess Kamakhya who rebuilt the Kamakhya Temple on the Nilachal Hill near Guwahati and imported many Brahmins from Kanauj, Varansi and other centers of learning.

Regarding the political relations with the Ahoms there were different versions in the Koch Chronicles and Ahom Buranjis. According to the Koch Chronicles Biswa Singha undertook an invasion of the Ahom kingdom but he had to retreat due to difficulties of Journey. But in the Ahom Buranjis merely relate that in 1537 Biswa Singha paid a friendly Visit to the Ahom king Suhungmung.

From the Ahom Buranjis we come to know that the territorial expansion of the Koches towards the east and that of the Ahoms towards the west was sure to lead a direct confrontation of the two powers, but meanwhile the Muslims launched their expeditions to the Ahom kingdom, so both the Koches and the Ahoms had to be on the alert against the advancing Muslims. There was a serious threat to the kingdom of Biswa Singha which was still in its infancy and contiguous to that of the Muslims. However, the Muslims among whom Bar Uzir paid little heed to the rising Koch power and made the Ahom kingdom its first target but the Ahom army defeated the Muslims in 1529. In 1532-33, there was another invasion by the Muslims on the Ahom under Muslim general Turbak but they were completely defeated and pursued them up to the Karatoya river in the west. In this time Biswa Singh Co-operated with the Ahom, he made submission on promise of becoming

⁴² Baruch, S.L.: *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, PP-180-181

tributary to the Ahoms. According to the Ahom Buranji further states that Biswa Singha along with his brother Siva Singha came to the Ahom Court to offer the annual tribute.

After the death of Biswa Singha in 1540 his eldest son Malladev ascended the throne of Koch Bihar and assumed the name Naranarayan (1540-1584). His younger brother Sukladhvaj better known as Chilarai was his right hand man of his all military activities and also the general of Koch royal army. Soon after his accession to the throne Naranarayan came into conflict with the Ahoms. The Ahom ruler Suklenmung (1539-52) and Khora Raja (1552-1603) were his contemporary.

A war was inevitable between the Koches and the Ahoms and in 1546 a war was fought between them and the Ahoms being severely defeated, they fled away, the Koch armies pursued them and defeated at Kaliabar and Sala. In the course of operations Naranarayan constructed an embanked Road under the supervision of Gohain Kamal, covering a distance of 350 miles from their capital Koch Bihar to Narayanpur in the present Lakshimpur district with a view to keep the flow of provisions to the advanced army regularly towards enemies and this road came to be known as Gohain Kamal road. Naranarayan renewed his attack on the Ahom kingdom in 1562 and the war of 1562 and 1563 the Ahoms were defeated by the Koch forces and entered the Ahom Capital Garhgaon in triumph. The Ahom king Khara Raja signed a treaty with the Koch king with the following provisions:

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1. The Ahom king acknowledged the Koch suzerainty.
 2. Some Ahom Nobles were sent to Koch Capital as hostages.
 3. The Ahom king had to pay an indemnity.
 4. The modern Mangaldai sub-division to the east of Bara Nadi was surrendered to Naranarayan.

Naranarayan not only defeated the Ahom king, but also defeated the Kacharies and the king of Kachari signed a treaty with the Koch king, where the Kacharies accepted the Koch supremacy gave 84 elephants and agreed to pay a heavy annual tribute. The king of Manipur and Jayantia also accepted the supremacy of the Koch king and rulers of Khyram and Dimarua Voluntary paid tributes to Naranarayan. The most important event was the war with Suleiman Kararani, The Sultan of Bengal. In 1564 Kararani's General Kala Pahar, attacked the Kochkingdom, defeated the Koch army destroyed the all Hindu Temples including Kamakhya and Hajo.

The rise of the Koch power under king Naranarayan who sought to build up a powerful Koch kingdom covering a large part of ancient Assam was short lived. The successors of Naranarayan had going to wreak mutual clash among them as a result the mighty Koch kingdom was divided. At that time in the western part of the Koch kingdom, the Mughals became powerful rulers. It led to hostilities between the Ahoms and Mughals. From 1616 to 1639 the present Kamrup changed hands in several times. A treaty was signed in 1639 between Ahoms and the Mughals at Kaliabar and according to this treaty Bar Nadi in the North and Asur Ali in the South was fixed as the boundaries between the Ahoms and the Mughal territories.

The Mughals after their occupation introduced new administrative system in Kamrupa. During the period of their administration they divided their newly occupied area into four Sarkars Viz- Sarkar Kamrup, Sarkar Dhekari, Sarkar Dhakhinkul and Sarkar Bangalbhum. A Sarkar was split up into a numbers of Parganas and Pargana was subdivided into Taluk. Village was the smaller unit of this administration. For civil and Revenue administration

they created new system of administrative divisions as — Choudhury, Patowary, Talukdar and other posts.

Before the coming of the East India Company in 1826 the Brahmaputra Valley was ruled by the Ahoms. Sukapha, founder of the Ahom dynasty, a member of the Shan branch of great Tai or Thai family of South-East. Asia entered into Assam in the beginning of the 13th century A.D. and established the Ahom administration. In the next three centuries the conquerors reduced to submission, the Morans, the Barahis and the Nagas and the original inhabitants of the region and brought under the control of them a greater part of the Assam.

In the early sixteenth century A.D. the growth of the powerful Koch kingdom, the Ahom policy became halt. But the most terrible enemy was the Mughals which challenged the authority of Ahoms in the west, Barphukan, a new post was created with Headquarter at Guwahati to control the lower Assam.⁴³

After 20 yeears later of the treaty of Kaliabar between Ahoms and the Mughals (1639), in 1658 the Ahom king Yaydhaj Singha recovered Kamrup from the hands of the Mughal rulers. The consequence of the occupation of Kamrup by Jaydhaj Singha was the Mughal invision of Assam under Nawab Mirjumala in 1662. In this invision, the Ahom suffered huge defeat at the hands of the Mughal army who later successfully captured the Ahom Capital Garhgaon.

⁴³Dutta, Debobrom: *History of Assam*, PP—54-

A treaty was signed on January, 1663 between Ahoms and the Mughals at Ghilazharighat.

The main terms⁴⁴ of the treaty were;

1. Ahom king and the Tipam Raja would offer their daughters to the Mughal harem.
2. The Assam king would deliver immediately a war indemnity of 20,000 tolas of Gold, 1,20,000 tolas silver and 20 elephants.
3. He would send 30,000 tolas of silver and 90 elephants to the Mughal emperor during the course of one year in three equal instalments as the balance of indemnity.
4. Pending the full payment of indemnity, each of the three Gohains and the Garhgayan Raja Sahur Phukan shall send a son as hostage.
5. The Ahom king would pay a regular annual tribute of 20 elephants.
6. The province of Darrang to the west of the Bharali River on the North Bank of the Brahmaputra and the States of Dimarua, Beltola and Rani to the west of the Kalang river on the South Bank, were to be ceded to the Mughals.
7. All. Prisoners including the family of Baduli Phukan were to be released.

According to the terms of the treaty we find that the Ahoms were compelled to restore Kamrup to the Mughals. But in 1667 Ahom king Chakradhaj Singh arrested back Kamrup from the Mughal and the Ahom retained its possession till 1679 when Laluk Barphukan, viceroy of Ahom king at Guwahati entering into collusion with the Subedar of Bengal, Sultan Azamtara.⁴⁵ But again Kamrup came to the hand to the Ahoms in 1682 after the battle of Itakhull.

⁴⁴ Burpujori , H. K.: *The Comprehensive History of Assam*,. PP- 69-98

⁴⁵ Guit, Sir E : *The History of Assam*, 1992, P-131.

It was the final battle among the Ahoms and the Mughals.⁴⁶ According to Lakshmi Devi, The Ahoms came in complete possession of present Kamrup district only in 1682 A.D. during the reign of Gadadhar Singha (1681-1696 A.D.). From the reign of Gadadhar Singha the position of Kamrup was same till 1824, when the East india Company took over Assam after defeating the Burmses.⁴⁷

From the above discussion it becomes clear that Kamrup was the confflecting place among various races and invaders. In Medieval period it was mainly theI battle field of Ahoms and Mughals. The lay man of Kamrup has confused by the series of various wars. Kamrup has always been a premier place of Assambecause of its advantageous location. Kamrup serves as the gate way to the east from the west, so outsider invaders had an eye on Kamrup. At first the Ahoms was not much interested in occupying Kamrup.

After the occupation of Kamrup the Ahom rulers had classified it as Desh and administration was in trusted to a new High ranking officer, called Barphukan and his Headquarter at Guwahalt. He was assisted by a host of subordinate officers.The Barphukan was the Chief executive officer and he also enjoyed the post of a Chief Judge of Kamrup. The Barphukan was assisted by a group of Phukans (subordinate Barphukan) and other officials. His other important role was that hewas the supervising officer over the vassal states in central and lower Assam. Due to the distance from the Capital, the Barphukan enjoyed greater authority.

From the rest of the Ahom kingdom, the Revenue and land settlement in Desh Kamrup was different. In the directly administered areas of the Ahom kingdom.

⁴⁶ Bhuyon, S. K.: *Anglo-Assamese Relations* , P-5

⁴⁷ Devi, L.: *Ahom-Tribal Relations*, 1992, P-7

The paik system to succeed in its full form. But in Kamrup, the pargana system earlier introduced by the Mughal was to be kept by the Ahom Government. Besides that this allowed the Choudhury, Talukdar, Patowary of the Mughal Days to be continued. The Barphukan has collected the land Revenue from the ryots by his subordinate officers. Another Peculiarity in Kamrup was that a class of landlords existed and the landlords paid Revenue in cash to the Government. A considerable Amount of trade was carried on Kamrup with the neighbouring states and a class of traders existed. As a result of its important trade centers were ground up. At that time Hadira was the western gateway of Assam and all trade with Bengal passed through this border post.

The Ahoms entered into Assam with their own religion and after established contract with the Assamese society they adopted Hindu religion and Jayadvaj Singha (1649-63) was the first Ahom king who accepted Hindu religion. From Jayadvaj Singha to Sulikpha Lara Raja (1679-81) all the Ahom kings were initiated by Vaisnavism.

The advent of the Tunkhungia dynasty with Godadhar Singha, rise of Sakta faith (faith in mother Goddess of Hinduism) in the Ahom Court, in though people prayed religious. They granted land to Brahmins for religious organization in charring temples. There are many existing Hindu Temples in Kamrup which were built under the Patronage of Ahom rulers, for examples Umananda, Sukleswar, Rudreswar and Navagraha in Guwahati. The Ahom rulers had also patronized the Satras in Kamrup. These Vaishnavite religious institutions (Temples, Namghars and Satras) had played a vital role in the social cultural life of the Kamrup people. During the Ahom rule, the Kamrupi people enjoyed peace and prosperity; they were free from the raids of the Hills tribes.

2.10. 3: Ahom Administration

Assam was ruled by the Ahoms from 1228 to 1826 A.D., an uninterrupted period of long six hundred years; The Ahoms established a strong and stable Government, gave peace and prosperity to the subject of Assam and successfully resisted many foreign invasions including mighty Mughals. Lord William Bentinck, the British Governor General of India, referred to the long continuance of Ahom rule in Assam as almost without example in history. He also inferred from the long domination of the Ahoms in Assam that there must have been something intrinsically good in the original constitution or in the administration system of the Ahoms. The Ahoms undoubtedly had a sound administrative system which enabled them to rule for such a long period.

Monarchy was the normal form the Government of Ahoms although it was somewhat peculiar. The very fact that the people were of necessity primarily organized for warfare prompted monarchy rather than other forms of Government.

2.10. 3.1: The King

Under the form of monarchical Government the king was the supreme authority of the administration, but he was assisted by three great councilors of state, called Gohains. All honours, titles, offices, decisions and war measures emanated from him, but he had to act accordingly to the advice of the three Gohains. He was not only the owner of the land but also the master of his subjects. In the early period the succession to the throne was hereditary, but in later days there were irregularities.

The King was the very Pivot of the administration and all efforts were made to create a halo of divinity around him. The people considered him as the God of heaven, which is the equivalent of Ahom chaopha. According to Shan traditions, the patriarchal ancestor by the

Ahoms is said to have been of L.angdon or Indra. He was not a descendant of Indra but a consecrated king attained the very essence of Indra. The Ahom Kings followed the Hindu political ideology and the fundamental duty was the protection of his subjects, to give them security of life, property and belief. The Kings maintained and conduct the foreign policy. Thus the King was the supreme in all departments of the Government.

2.10.3.2: Mantri-Parisad

The King had a Mantri Parisad to assist him, consisted five councilors, known usually as the Patra Mantri— the Bar Gohain, Burha Gohain, Barpatra Gohain, BarBarua and the Barphukan. There were originally two Gohains the Bar Gohain and the Burha Gohain and in the reign of Suhummung the third post Barpatra Gohain was created. The functions of the Gohains were always advisory but the king did not generally disobey their united resolutions. The Gohains occupied an exalted position in Ahom Policy.

The Ahom King Pratap Singha (1603-1641) created two Posts namely Barbarua and Barphukan. In rank and dignity these two officials were next to the three great Gohains. The Barbaruah and the Barphukan along with the three Gohains formed the council of five known usually as Patra-Matri, functioned something like the modern Cabinet. The Barbarua was the commander of forces, looked after the revenue and judicial administration of the Eastern most region. The Barphukan governed as the viceroy of the tract between Nowgong and Goalpara with his seat of Government at Gawahati, and occupied very important position “in the administration of Ahom.

To each of these councillors was assigned a certain number of Paiks or individuals over whom no other officers of the Government had any control. In the event of war or construction of Public works they furnished their portion of militia. According to David Scott, the Gohains had allotted for their own use 10,000 polks which he reckoned to be

equivalent to a grant of Rs. 90,000 per Annum Barbarua control over 14,000 Paiks, but they were also bound to render service to the King.

2.10.3.3: The Local Governors

There were a number of local Governors who were next in power to the fivecouncillors as Sadiyakhowa Gohain, Marrangi Khowa Gohain, Salal Gohain and Kajali Mukhia Gohain. The post of Sadiye Khowa Gohain was created by the Ahom King Suhummung. Sadiya was the capital of the Chutia King, in 1823, Suhummuhg annexed the whole Chutia territory to the Ahom Kingdom and entrusted it under the Supervision of a Gohain, called Sadiya Khowa Gohain.

The post of Marrangi Khowa Gohain was also created by Ahom King Suhummung. Marrangi was an outpost of the Ahoms in lower part of the Dhansiri valley and in 1535, Suhunmung annexed the whole Kachari territory west of the Dhensiri bordering the Naga Hills and entrusted the region under a Gohain who was celled Merrengi Khowa Gohain. To administered a great portion of Nowgong and portion of charduar created a post known as Salal Gohain. The functions and the responsibilities of these Goheins were confined to the provinces of which they were the governors. At Kajeli mukh appointed a Gohain called Kajali Mukhia Gohain; His functions and responsibilities were identical with those of other Governors of the provinces.

2.10.3.4: Other Officials

There were numerous officials, who were generally appointed from respective fertilise end Amongst these officers the highest in rank were the Phukans. The first six were called Ghana Phukan and of these six officials four had special responsibilities. The Naobaicha

Phukan was the head of the Royal Navy, the Bhitara Phukan used to supervise the household affairs, the Dihingia Phukan was posted on the river Dihing and the Pani Phukan was in charge of the waterways. Other two Na Phukan and Deka Phukan, who had no special duties to perform.

There were twelve Rajkhowa in different twelve Provinces of the kingdom and they were administered of their respective Provinces. The Ahom king appointed some ordinary Phukans entrusted with particular duties. The Panvatiya Phukan, the Raidangiya Phukan and the Khangiya Phukan were responsible to look after the Queen, mother and the princesses. The Tamuli Phukan was the supervisor of the royal Garden, Naosaliya Phukan was in charge of the royal navy, the Chola Phukan was in charge of the royal robes and garments. After the Phukans the king appointed some Baruas. Like different categories of Phukans there were several types of Baruas like Bhandari Barua, Duliya Barua, Chaudangliya Barua, Bej Barua, Hati Barua, Ghora Barua etc.

2.10.3.5: Military Administration.

The Ahoms established an independent kingdom of their own in an unknown land testifies to their superb quality of army organization of military invincibility. The extent of the Ahom kingdom was great, to maintain and control of such a vast kingdom they organized a strong and well equipped army department. The Ahom army mostly consisted of Infantry, elephants, Cavalry, Navy, Artillery and spies and one officer in charge was appointed for each department such as- Hatibarua in charge of elephant force, the Ghora Barua for Cavalry force, the Nao-Saliya Phukan for Navy force and the Kharghoria Phukan officer in charge of the artillery, who were exclusively in charge of the various branches of the army. There was a regular system of gradation of officers in the Ahom army.

There was a regular system of gradation of office in the Ahom army. The Paiks, the lowest military unit were supervised by the Borah, the Saikias and the Hazarikas who were commanded by the higher military officials such as the Baruas, the Rajkhowas and the Phukans. Ordinarily the Phukans were the commanded of 6000, the Rajkhowas 3000, the Baruas 2000, the Hazarikas 1000 and Borahs of 20.

The cavalry forces were strong and important force of the Ahom army. The Ahoms were imported large number of Horses from Bhutan and Ghora Barua was the superintendent of this force. In the hills and forests of Assam the elephant force was of great importance for Ahom army and Hati Barua was Presided over this departments. The Naval achievements of the Assamese were high efficiency under the Ahom rulers and every Assamese soldier in expert in rowing boats.

The appointment of spies in times of peace and war was a regular Practice of the Ahom-army. Spies formed an essential instrument of Ahom power whose existence was based on military capability. The main weapons of war were swords, spears, axes, maces, daggers, slings, bows and arrows. Ahom soldiers were trained to stand firm on the battle-field. Besides their numerical strength, Physical vigour, Courage and endurance of the Ahoms were some of the decisive factors for military superiority.

2.10.3.6: Revenue Administration

During the. Ahoms cultivation was the main occupation of the People of Assam. The soil of Assam was very fertile and well-adapted to all kinds of agricultural Purposes. On the arrival to Assam, the Ahoms found three kinds of land such as Kshetra, Khila and Vastu there were also both collective and individual ownership of land.

The Basis of the land tenure in Medieval Assam was the Khel system.- A great portion of area of the country was cultivated mainly by emigrating ryots who paid a plough tax. The hill tribes, who grew cotton, paid at hoe tax. Artisans, smiths, weavers, oil-pressers, fishermen, gold-gathers etc. enjoyed their portion of land for their home-stead and farm free of tax. The rice lands were redistributed from time to time. The other lands which could be regarded as private property were the estates granted to the nobles.

A standard system of land tenure was known to the Ahoms. The chief features of this system were proper system and measurement of land. The Ahom kings granted lands to Temples, Religions institutions and Pious and meritorious persons. Land in Assam was tenured not on the basis of payment of revenue but on the basis of the paik system. In every house one man out of three or four has to render service to the king. Thus in Medieval Assam the subjects were equally A the property of the state and therefore not only the houses and the lands but the cultivators were also assessed.

2.10.3.7: Law and Justice

Justice was the main aims of Ahom administration, the kings regarded speedy administration of justice was one Ahoms followed their original customs and 'tradition as the law of the land. The king wielded the rod of Punishment and was not subjected to it and he was assisted by other officers.

After the Hinduisation of the Ahoms, Hindu law as expounded by the Brahmins seems to have been generally followed. Among the crimes enumerated, theft, robbery, adultery, abduction, the killing of man and treachery, punishable by death; Petty offences in the village seem to have been left to the village judge for disposal.

Ahom administration of justice was the responsibility of the king himself but he was assisted by high officials at the centre. In villages, justice was administered by royal officials with the help of the members of the village council. The criminal law was excessively severe. The chief judicial authorities of the state were the Barbarua and the Barphukan in their own administrative jurisdictions. An appeal could be made to the Barbarua or the Barphukan in case the trials were conducted by their subordinates. In the latter cases, a second appeal lay to the sovereign was assisted by the Nyayakhoda- Phukan. There were a number of assessors attached to every court of justice, whose opinions were regularly consulted before any clear decision was taken by the president of a court. The administration of justice of Ahoms appears to have been efficient, speedy and impartial.

2.10.3.8: Socio-Economic Conditions

Assam is a secure homeland of various races. The composition of various culture and religious elements has reached the Assamese society in a most colourful way. The history of migrated people and their settlement were very interesting and magnificent habitual character. The Alpines Tibet-Burma, Thai-Chinese, Negritos, Dravidas, Mongoloids and above the Aryan came and occupied the entire tract of the Assam Province. The serial waves of migration at different times from different directions viz- China, India, Burma and Tibet since early times made the population of Assam varied with plurality of race, religion and cultural. Although we find the presence of the Aryans group's administered of different castes and Muslims, it may be admitted that a huge majority of the social groups racially belonged to the non-Aryan Mongoloid groups. It has been the important diverse feature of Assam's demography and society since colonies times. It shows that different ethnic groups came and peacefully settlement in these Region.

Thus the history of Mediaval Assam has experienced lots of historical evidences, when people from different gerions hailed and took permanent settlement. Somebody of them become the rules, some of them become their helpers and some of them become their subjects. All these people lived together in a peaceful and congenital situation.

CHAPTER-III

ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE POLITICS OF MEDIAVAL ASSAM

3.1: Introduction

The political status of women both in the ancient and medieval India was trapped in the domestic activities. Making a detailed study through that period, we find that women were mainly confined in the household activities entrusted the responsibility and duties of maintaining good order in the family. According to Prof. Indra, in ancient India, women were never thought fit for any sphere other than the domestic life. The intricate question of administration and government were held to be beyond their comprehension? The only duty they were given was of home management. A hymn on marriage in the RV and AV points out that in the domestic activities, women exercised the supreme authority and ruled over all the members of the family. The other important duty of the married women was to increase her husband's family by producing son. In an unambiguous verse of the AV, the ideal of marriage was stated in as 'God united the couple so that the wife might beget progeny for her lord and multiply the same, remaining always in the house'⁴⁸. Though the main role was limited only inside the four walls of the house, women belonging to the lower strata of the society, besides doing household chores, engaged themselves along with their husbands in the cultivation work and other arts and crafts, in order to maintain the family budget. Women of the upper strata of the society were not allowed to take any tasks outside the boundaries of the house.

⁴⁸. Indra, *The A Status of Women in Ancient India*, P—150.

Therefore, they used to spend their spare time in spinning and weaving, knitting, embroidery, kitchen gardening and household decorations. Spinning and weaving of clothes was one of the oldest industries in the country, which was run successfully by the women folk inside the house, which is indicated in the Rig Veda and Atharva Veda. From the above discussions, we may admit that women were not permitted to go beyond the border of house. They were thought to be incapable of any type of corporate activities, which was monopolized by men only. Women were even unaware of the political situation of the country.⁴⁹ The political upheaval, which was the common feature in the ancient and medieval ages, due to the external attacks and changes of ruling powers, was not their area of concern. They were physically and mentally thought to be too weak to understand and tackle about the political condition of the country. Therefore; one can hardly expect about the women's participation in the political arena in ancient and medieval period.

3.2: Participation of Assamese women in the political affairs

The history of Assam was not different from that of Indian history. Throughout the ancient and medieval period, there was no democratic or representative system of government; naturally the question of arising political rights or adult suffrage for male or female does not arise. Only the village assemblies were democratic but only the men folk who were too aged people were allowed to participate in the discussions about the village matters. However, under the monarchical system of government, generally women were not given any share in the administration of the country. In spite of this, we do get the instances of many Assamese women who were not lagging behind in contributing in the

⁴⁹. Shukra, IV-4-27, cited Indra, *The Status of women in Ancient India*, P-52.

administration by shouldering responsibilities as viceroy, governors, regents and managers of different institutions. Some ambitious women even manipulated political authority. They either ruled the country directly as a ruler or deftly influenced the court politics from behind the curtain. Some of them even fought gallantly at the head of the troops showing their valour in the battlefield. Let us first discuss about the women administrator in ancient Assam.

3.3: Women Ruler in Ancient Assam

In ancient Assamese history, there are references to women who actively participated in political activities with dexterity by sitting on the throne. Mention may be made of Nariraja referred to in the Mhb. The epic stated that Arjuna after performing Ashwamedha Yajna (for extending his sovereignty over the other kingdom) left his horse, which entered Manipur passing through Nariraja. According to some historians, this Nariraja was modern Jaintia hills. Nariraja was also known as Promilarajya or Strirajya that was ruled by the Jaintias in ancient times is referred to in the Jamini Bharata and Rajatarangini. According to Ahmed, this kingdom had a strange system of government wherein the state was ruled over by the womenfolk and the men were engaged in agriculture production and only in case of external dangers, they could come up for protection. But the authors like Madhavananda and RC. Majumdar opined that the kingdom of Strirajya was not ruled by any queen, but it was having a male king. But this statement is unlikely as the name of the state Nariraja or Strirajya itself means the "kingdom of women"⁵⁰. Even some tantrik work of Pag Som Zon Zan, referred to the ancient kingdom of kadali situated in the modern Nowgong district. The place is also associated with the activities of two famous Buddhist tantriks namely Minanatha and Gorakshanatha of a little period than Brahmapala. An elaborate description of the kingdom is found in the Bengali lyrics of Gorakshavijaya

⁵⁰ Altekar, *The position of women in Hindu civilization*, P-187.

and Mainamtir Gaan These works state that in the end of the 'til'" and ttm century AD., a courageous woman named Kamala, with the helpof Aher sister lylangala and ministers, ruled the kingdom, which was popularly knownat that time as Narirajya. The kingdom had a retinue of sixteen hundred femaleswho discharged the function of her ministers, cashiers, clerks, bodyguards etc.the male population was very poor and the females who were prominent in everyaffair of the country carried on business intercourse with the neighbouringcountry of Kamrup. This kingdom of Narirajaya was located by some in Nlanipuror Burma or Cachar or even in the north western frontier, but it is rather to belocated in the kadall, Nowgong ruled probably by a kachari or Jaintia queen,enjoying the liberty accorded to women by the Tantrik-Buddhists. According to P.C. Choudhury, the queen was ruling the kingdom possibly as feudatory of thePalas of Assam. Another women ruler of ancient Assam was one Mayanamati,the queen of Manikchandra of Rangpur (presently situated in Bangladesh, whichwas in ancient period a part of Assam), After the death of the later, king Dharmapala of Dharampura, who married Vanamali, the sister of Mayanamati, dared to take possession of the kingdom of Manikchandra. But queen Mayanamati wanted ti install her son Gopichandra on the throne of his father.Dharmapala was against this proposal.

Therefore, the widowed queen of Manikchandra had no other solution than asserting war against Dharmapala. Before that she formed a conspiracy with the ministers of Dharmapala and won over them on her side. A terrible bsttle on the bank of Tista was fought between queen Mayanamati and Dharmapala, where queen doggedly restored the kingdom of her husband by giving a fitting rebuff to the aggressive Dharmapala and installed her son Gopichandra on the throne with great elan.

3.4: Political participation of women in the Assamese folk tales

The folk-tales and legends also speak of such women who were not only courageous but also sacrificed their life for their welfare of Ahoms. All these kingdoms were always engaged in war to establish their domination by suppressing the others. But ultimately, the Ahoms subjugated most of the setribes and-built a United Kingdom expanding from Sadiya in the east to Manaha River in the west. If we go through this period, we find that the history is full of examples of accomplished women who participated in politics and administration either as a ruler or as a head of their troops in the battlefield. Some of the women, who could not serve the country directly, involved themselves in the political affairs of the other state by giving valuable suggestion to the king. Let us first go through such women who ruled the country as ruler⁵¹.

3.5: Women as Queen's Regent

The first instance we across was of the chief queen of Ahom king Taokhamti (1380-89). After Taokhamti occupied the throne of Ahom kingdoms, his first mission was against the Chutiyas to take avenging action for the death of Ahom king Sutupha (1384-78), who was treacherously killed by Chutiyas during a friendly visit to their kingdom. Before going out for expedition, Taokhamti appointed his chief queen as regent to look after the administration of the kingdom. The barren queen was power loving and jealous of her co-wife (mother of Ahom king Sudangpha). The latter was not only king's favorite queen but also an expectant mother at that time. The chief queen misused the authority entrusted to her by appointing and dismissing officers at her own resolve. The most heinous crime she did was by ordering the execution of her co-wife on charge of an alleged adultery. But the men who were to carry out the orders secretly spared the unfortunate victim of her life.

⁵¹ H. Chokladar, *Social life in Ancient India*, pp-59-60

They set her adrift on the Brahniaputra. A Brahman saved her life and gave shelter in his house at Habung. But her condition was critical. So, in spite of his best effort, the Brahman could not survive the life of the ill-fated queen. She died after giving birth to a son. This son afterwards became the powerful king of the Ahom kingdom namely Sudangpha (1397-1407). Because he was grown up and looked after by the Brahman as his own son, he was also known as Bamuni Konwar.

3.6: WOMEN AS AHOM RULER

3.6.1: Queen Phuleswari

The status of women reflected during the Ahom rule when women received golden opportunity to become the chief ruler of the Country. The instances of few queens, who achieved great success as a ruler. Queen Phuleswari, Queen Ambika and Queen Sarbeswari, the three consorts of Ahom king Siva Singha (1714-44) ruled the kingdom successfully, thus leaving remarkable records to their successors to be inspired with their ideals. These three queens had directly ruled the country successively assuming the title 'Bar—Raja'. King Siva Singha was greatly influenced by Brahman priests and astrologers. In 1722, his spiritual guides and astrologer forecasted that he was under the evil influence of the stars (chatra bhanga yoga). As a result he could be dethroned in the near future. Therefore, to avoid the wrath of the stars, he was advised by the priest and astrologer to hand over the charge of the administration of the kingdom to some convinced person.

The king at the instruction of the Parvatiya Gosain (priest) Krishnaram Bhattacharya, resolved to bestow the supreme vest of his kingdom to his chief queen Phuleswari and assumed the title 'Bar-Raja' or the 'chief-king' and minted coins in the joint names of her and her husband where she used the Persian legend, the first of its kind in Assam. Besides her fair name, the religious intolerance and bigotry of queen Phuleswari brought about a dreadful civil war in the country which continued down for half a century, thereby

disintegrating the strength of the country to such an extent that the once glorious Assamese nation,"who had not bowed the head of submission and obedience, nor had they paid tribute or revenue to the most powerful monarch; but who had curbed the ambition and checked the conquests of the most victorious princes of Hindustan and had baffled the penetration of heroes who had been styled conquerors of the world", became an easy prey to the first touch of Burmesespear. It seems that Phuleswari was more under the influence of the Brahmans, particularly the Pravatiya Gosain, in comparison to her husband. At the initiation of the Gosain, she intended to give Saktism the designation of state religion. To implement her plan fervently, she organized a Durga puja in a Sakta shrine and summoned all the Vaisnava preceptors and Sudra Mahantas.

The Vaisnava creed of Assam enjoyed upon all its followers a rigid avoidance of any association with the worship of Sakti or Durga and the most orthodox among them will not even cast a glance at any image, not to speak of any animal sacrifice made before the goddess of power. But the Gosains had no other alternative but to obey, as the command came from a sovereign to whom they were bound by the customs of the country to display implicit homage and obedience. So the Vaisnava Gosains went to the royal court near the hall of worship. They were obliged to bow their heads before the goddess, have their foreheads be smeared with the blood of the sacrificed animals and accepted nirmali and Prasad. All the vaisnava preceptors and Mahantas were very offended by the act of sacrilege by the queen. More than others, the powerful Mayamara Mahantas considered it as a serious insult to them. As a consequence, this incident began the confrontation of Maomariyas against the Ahom kingdom, which resulted in Mamariya Rebellion in the near future, which was one of the most factors for the collapse of the Ahom monarchy. Queen Phuleswari also changed the age-old burial system of the Ahoms and introduce the system of burning the dead. Queen Phuleswari offered many important titles to her own relatives.

Her brother Harinath was first made Bargohain and later Barpatra Gohain, her uncle Joyananda was made Dekial Barua and three of the maternal uncles subsequently were made Khanikar Barua, Chaudang Barua and Debi-gharar Barua. She also did some construction works. The Gaurisagar tank near the capital city was excavated by her and three temples were constructed on its bank dedicated to Siva, Vishnu and Devi. She was also a great patron of Sanskrit learning and started a Sanskrit school in the palace campus and also donated a number of lands. After the death of queen Phuleswari in 1731, king Siva Singha married her sister Draupadi. She was renamed as Ambika and was replaced in the place of Phulaswari as 'Bar-Raja'. This queen was a great sponsor of learning and education. At her inspiration the composite of the Hasti Vidyarnava, a great work on elephantology of international repute was cracked. Like her sister, some construction works were on her credit.

The Sivasagar tank at Rangpur was excavated by queen Ambika, which is the second biggest tank in Assam. On its bank, she erected the three temples dedicated to Siva, Vishnu and Devi. The siva temple with its large gold covered dome is the biggest and tallest of the temples in Assam. After her death in 1738, she was succeeded as 'Bar-Raja' by another wife of siva singha, named Enadari, who was renamed as Sarveswari. Emulating the senior two 'Bar-Raja' she also built a temple at sivasagar in the honor of her mother in law Keri Rajmao. Thus the three 'Bar-Raja' administered the state in their own style. Though the king helped the queens by giving valuable suggestions, but he did not meddle too much in the activities of the queens. The three consorts of king Siva Singha namely Phuleswari, Ambika and Sanleswari ruled the country successfully except a few instances of the display of feminine indiscretion.

About their success, Charles Rose, who in his edition of the correspondence of Lord Cornwallis wrote about the government of Assam by Queens, " The Assamese were

a most warlike nation, and had for a length of time successfully resisted all foreign invaders. Even Aurangzeb had failed. They never prospered more than when governed by females, as was the case in earlier part of the eighteenth century?

3.6.2: Role of Queen Chauching

Though we do not get any other instances of queens, ruling directly as a ruler, but they influenced the court policies remaining behind the main scene. In this context, we can mention the name of Queen Chauching, the consort of Swargadeo Suklenmung, popularly known as Gargayan Raja (1539-52). She was the combination of brain and beauty. The king often used to take her suggestion in the affairs of the state policies. She diplomatically creates the office of the Barpatra Gohain, the third minister of the Ahom kingdom. The queen attracted the king by giving the logical argument that the administration of the country was like a cooking pot, which was balanced only when it was placed over three supports. In the same way the balance of the government of the Ahom kingdom could not be depend on only two ministers, therefore the creation of the third minister was essential to maintain the balance of the administration. After the post of third minister was created, the Buragohain and Borgohain raised great objection. Then she clarified that, "The creation of the third noble in the king's cabinet is only just and proper. You cannot place the golden vessel of the country's administration on two supports only. A third party support is indispensable, and the king has given you that". The Buranji also recorded that according to her suggestion the king fortified the Ahom capital, which was then called Garhgaon or the city of ramparts and the king achieved the title Gargayan Raja.

3.6.3: Role of Nangabakla Gabharu

Another woman Nangabakla Gabharu, wife of the premier Thaomunglung Bargohain was a very daring lady and set an example of courage and determination. She even did not hesitate to arraign the king and his ministers in the open court when they decided to send

her son as a hostage to the Koch king after their defeat in the hands of the latter. During the reign of Chaopha Sukhampha, alias Khora raja (1553-1603), the Ahoms were terribly defeated by the Koches in the battles fought at the mouths of the Dikhou and Handia River in 1562. The Ahom kong then concluded a treaty with the koch king Naranarayana on most humiliating terms, according to which not only did the former acknowledged the suzerainty of the koches, but also surrendered the whole territory on the bank of the Brahmaputra and promised to pay war indemnity to the koch king. Along with these terms, the Ahom king also agreed to deliver the son of the chief nobles as hostages to the Koch kingdom. When it was decided to send Bargohain Thaomunglung's son along with the son of other nobles as .. hostages, the Bargohain's wife Chaochao Nangbakla invaders appeared on the scene, reducing the once prosperous valley of Assam practically to desert. Though the dream of Badan Chandra to get the power was fulfilled, but the latter will always be-criticized for the exhibition of his narrow self-interest at the cost of the independence of Assam.

3.6.4 : Political influence of Queen mothers

In the Ahom Courts the status of the Queen were also very respectful. They were also not lagging behind in intervening in the matter of politics. Oneisuch queen mother was Numali Rajmao, mother of the Ahom king Kamaleswar Singha (1795-1811) and king Chandrakanta singha (1811-1817) who had a great influence in the administration of Ahom kingdom during the reign of her sons. Lt has been already discussed that during the reign of the above two Ahom kings, the real administration was in the hand Of the premier Purnanda Burhagohain. Though Purnanda was used to govern the country but he was used to take help of Rajmao in the matter of Statecraft. She was very diplomatic and far-sighted in the political affairs of the state. So purnanda sought the advice and guidance of the

Rajmao before implementing any subject of the statecraft. During the reign of Kamleswar singha and Chandrakanta singha the Ahom monarchy was facing a critical situation of internal disturbances and the insurgence of neighboring land. In this difficult situation Rajmao helped Purnanda by consulting and giving valuable suggestions to him in all complicated matters of the state. Along with Purnanda Burhagohain, Rajmao also was fed up by arrogance and atrocities committed by Badan Chandra upon the innocent subjects of kamrup. She was very upset at the death of Purnanda Burhagohain and could not forgive Badan Chandra for his activities. After the first Burmese invasion the latter become the de facto ruler of the Ahom kingdom, which the Rajmao could not tolerate. Therefore, when a quarrel ensued between Badan and Barbaruwa Dhani, the queen mother leaned towards the Barbaruwa and on her instigation Badan Chandra was assassinated by a mercenary soldier Rup singh.

3.6.5: Assamese women in the Burmese Court

Some Assamese women influenced the court policies of Burmese king also. In this connection, we find a daughter of one Ahom prince Bijay Barmura Gohain was presented to the Burmese king Badawpaya in 1797. These princes soon became a concubine of Burmese king and the latter made her his favorite consort. It is said that the people of the entire city celebrated on her arrival at the Burmese capital Ava. The entire town was decorated by unprecedented pomp and magnificence. Many sweepers were appointed to sweep the roads and clear the entire city. The most expensive and stylish articles were exhibited on the shops for the occasion and cannons were accumulated at every corner of the streets. Captain Cox, the British resident at Ava wrote in his diary on June 26, 1797, "In compliance with a request from the king, and with a view to conciliation, I have decorated in my house in honor of the arrival of an Assamese prince for his Majesty". Badawpaya, toward his newly married consort and also to fulfill his imperialistic desire against the British, renewed his attempt to place the father of his Assamese consort on the throne of Assam in August 1797.

Another eminent lady in the harem of Burmese king Badawpaya was Rangili. Badan Chandra was successful in getting aid from the Burmese king Badawpaya due to the influence of Rangili, the Assamese consort of the latter. Rangili, who belonged to the respectable Assamese aristocrat family, was offered by Purnanda Burhagohain to a powerful Singpho Chieftain Bichanong as a peach proposition in 1805. Bichanong in his turn presented Rangili to the Burmese king Badawpaya. The princess soon became a favorite of the Burmese monarch. Her influence on the Burmese king is best illustrated by her ability to persuade the Burmese king to assist a force of Burmese soldiers to Badan Chandra Barphukan, when he was fugitive at Amarapura for 16 months. Badawpaya, conceding to the queen's Pursuit, sent a strong army of 8000 to assist Badan Chandra.

Hemo Aidew was another important Assamese lady, who was presented along with heavy indemnity to the Burmese commanders by Badan Chandra After the first Burmese invasion. Hemo was handed over to the Burmese king Badawpaya. by the Burmese commanders. She influenced the court politics of Ava, the capital of Burmese during the reign of Burmese king Bagyidaw (1819-37), successor of Badawpaya. Her supreme and unrivalled influence in the court of Ava continued till 1835 as is clear from the account of Captain S.F. Hannay, Who went to ' Bhamo about that time, "Bhamo is the Jaghir of the Assamese Raja's sister who is one of the ladies of the king of Ava".

3.7: Role of common women in politics

It was not that only the women of the royal family participated in the politics. The common women of upright moral fiber, valor and patriotism were not rare. In the Ahom Mughal conflict in 1636-38, during the reign of Ahom king Pratap Singha (1603-41), not only the Assamese men but also the women-folk of Assam were interested to join the royal forces of the Ahom king to fight against the Mughal enemy. When the Ahom army, under the leadership of L\lomai-Tamuli Barboruwa, seriously defeated the Mughals in October 1638

on the bank of Bharali, then the defeated Mughal soldiers retreated to Gauhati. According to the Buranjis the Women-folk started beating the fleeing Mughal soldiers with bamboo rods.

During Mir Jumla's invasion of Assam in 1662, when king Jayadvaja Singha failed to defeat his kingdom from the former, Jayadvaja Singha made his escape first to Charaideo and then to Namrup in upper Assam, leaving the charge of the capital to Burhagohain, Bargohain and Barpatra Gohain. On his way to Namrup, a woman of the fisherman community met king Jayadvaja Singha on Dalaugiri road and daringly reprimanded the king saying, "Oh king, you have spent the last fifteen years of your reign in pleasure and luxury only; had you been conscious enough to give at least fifteen sods of soil where it was necessary, in these long fifteen years, why such a state of things should have befallen you. Now leaving us in such a state of affairs where do you want to go?"

During the Moamariya regime in 1769 A.D. the old king Lakshmi Singha was imprisoned and Ramakanta, son of Naharkhora Saikia, was declared king. Taking the opportunity of the dethronement of Lakshmi Singha many of the nobles and princes wanted to usurp the throne. With that view, they organized a series of intrigues called in the buranjis 'Konwar Bidroh'. In these intrigues many of the betrayed princesses, court-ladies, wives of nobles and so also many ligiris participated with a hope of getting power and status or chance to improve their lot. The foremost among the ligiris were Bhakti, Langkoli, Rupohi, Chandmati and Sahita etc. In the second stage of the revolution by the Moamariyans, women were also provided the art of military training by a weaver Harihar tanti on the north bank. When the insurgent defeated the royalist forces sent against them under the leadership of the latter in 1786 at the Garaimari bil and other places, the army not only contained the male soldiers but also a good number of women stalwarts who joined the force with elan.

Thus, we find that Assamese women played a very gallant and significant part with great distinction in shaping the destiny of her country. They did not bind themselves in the four walls of the house but daringly came out of their limited spheres. They participated in the political field along with the men folk by casting aside their traditional customs and native conservatism. They were successful in achieving for themselves the esteem and regard in society. They exercised their influence in the government of the country by engaging themselves in different political activities.

3.8: Muslim Women and politics

Participation of women in politics in a controversial matter in Islam, yet many classical Islamic scholars, such as al-Tabari, supported female leadership⁵². In Wearly Islamic history, women including Aisha, Ume Warqa, and Samra Binte Wahaib took part in political activities⁵³. Other historical Muslim female leaders include Razia Sultana, who ruled the Sultanate of Delhi from 1236 to 1239,⁵⁴ and Shajarat ad-Durr, who ruled Egypt from 1250 to 1257⁵⁵.

In 1988 Pakistan became the first Muslim Majority state with a female Prime Minister. In the past several decades, many countries in which Muslims are majority, including Indonesia⁵⁶, Pakistan,⁵⁷ Bangladesh⁵⁸, and Turkey⁵⁹, and Kyrgyzstan have been led by

⁵² Benazir Bhutto: *Daughter of Tragedy*" by Muhammad Najeeb, Hasan Zaidi, Saurabh Shulka and S. Prasannarajan, *India Today*, January 7, 2008

⁵³ Joved Ahmed Ghamidi, *Religious leadership of women in Islam*, April 24, 2005, *Daily - Times, Pakistan*

⁵⁴ Ahmed, Nazeer. *Islam in Global History: From the Death of Prophet Muhammed to the First World War*. Xlibris (2000), p284—86..

⁵⁵ Shajarat_ (Shaggar, Shagar) *al Durr And her Mausoleum in Cairo*

⁵⁶ Karon, Tony. "Megawati: The Princess Who Settled for the Presidency." *Time* (July 27, 2001).

⁵⁷ Ali A. Mazrui, Pretender to Universalism: *Western Culture in a Globalizing Age*, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Volume 21, Nazeer Ahmed. Number 1, April 2001.

⁵⁸ MacDonald Elizabeth and Chana R. Schoenberger. *"The 100 Most Powerful Women: Khaleda Zia."* *Forbes* (August 30, 2007).

⁵⁹ "Tansu Qiller." *About.com*.

women. Nearly one—third of the Parliament of Egypt also consists of women ⁶⁰. According to Sheikh Zoubir Bouchikhi, Imam of the Islamic Society of Greater Houston's Southeast Mosque, nothing in Islam specifically allows or disallows voting by women.[m] Until recently most Muslim nations were non—democratic, but most today allow their citizens to have some level of voting and control over their government. The disparate time at which women's suffrage was granted in Muslim-majority countries is indicative of the varied traditions and values present within the Muslim world. Azerbaijan has had women's suffrage since 1918. Saudi women have been allowed to vote in some election ⁶¹. But Assam is concerned, during Medieval period any instances of political participation of Muslim Women are not seen. The cause might be that they did not receive any opportunity as the Government was of the Ahoms. But in the modern politics Muslim women are very commonly seen in the active participation of state politics.

3.9: Political Status of Tribal Women

The present political system was unknown to the tribal societies in the beginning. From the time immemorial; the different tribes formed traditional village councils, which dealt with the customary laws that ran the village in a systematic way. Only the males were allowed to become the members of the of the village councils. Women of the tribal community of Northeast India were not permitted to be the members of the village councils. They could not give their opinion in any public affairs whether it was decision making for marriage,

⁶⁰ Shaheen, Jack G. (2003). "Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People". *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 588 (1): 171-193 [184]. doi: 10.1177/0002716203588001011

⁶¹ Saudi women take part in election , " BBC News.

divorce, dispute or planning strategies for war and raids, kidnapping etc. They were thought to be incapable in the process of decision-making and were considered fit only as the in charge of household works and co-worker in the agricultural activities. But the Akasociety was different from the other tribal societies of Arunachal Pradesh. In Akasociety, 'Rani' system was found to be prevalent and even the two important Akavillages jamiri and Hushigaon both still have Ranis⁶². The ancestors of these Ranis used to rule the Aka villages in the past days. As successors of the royal lineage, the Ranis are given high social honour and privilege in the entire Akasociety even in the present days. The Ranis not only captured the respectable position, but also commanded influence in the political life of the village. She used to be present in all the vital meetings of village council and her opinion was also given due weight in any important decision-making process of the village. As inheritor of the ruling dynasty, the Ranis were expected to help the poor and needy people of the village. These reflected their superlative position in the political life of the Aka society in the past days.

3.10: Conclusion:

The Chapter very clearly shows that how women had enjoyed the political status in the Country under the Ahoms. This was possible only due to the liberal and cooperative mentality of the Ahoms as well as the people of the Country.

⁶² Raghuvir Sinha, *The Akas*, 1962, pp. 61-62.

CHAPTER-IV

STATUS OF WOMAN IN MEDIAVAL ASSAMESE SOCIETY

4.1: Introduction

The nature and the mind of human beings both combine to form an organization. This organization is known as society. Society is a group of individuals who have some social relationship among them. These groups have some common bond of interest, which attach its members together. In the words of Maciver and page, "Society is a system of usages and procedures of authority and mutual aid, of many groupings and division, of controls of human behavior and of liberties. This ever changing complex system we call society".

Human life is not static, but it is always changeable. With the changes in human life, changes occur in society too. As T.S. Devadoos observes "Society is a changing medium of creation and expression of his deep seated desires, values and aspirations. It outlines shapes and refines man's social nature, conscience and morals, as he also frequently and insistently projects his own images, values and experiences from the depth of his consciousness where he is unique by himself. In other words, man is thus deeply embedded and moulded in the matrix of society and the society in turn enables him to reveal his true nature".

It is already mentioned that society is a dynamic process. In this changing system, every man and woman has to play his or her distinguished role. In the two different forms of societies, viz., patriarchal and matriarchal society, the status of human beings varies according to their sex. In the former, it is the male member who dominates the society. In the latter, it is

the female member. Moreover, it is clearly observed that the status of men and women and their system of values changes in the process of evolution from time to time.

However it is very interesting to note that, in any form of society, whether it is male dominated patriarchal or female dominated matriarchal society, the women were able to capture a unique position and this has been reflected in the different available sources.

4.2: Condition of Early Assamese Society

Both Early and medieval Assamese Society were predominantly rural society in nature. They also constituted and characterized by powerful sentiments of kinship, locality, caste and community. In the traditional rural Assamese society, despite a subservient status, the Assamese women of various castes suffered less from social disabilities than their counterparts in some other regions of India.⁶³ Some of the strict social customs, like child marriage, Sati did not affect the Assamese women like the women of other parts of India. This was because of the influence of the Mongoloid Culture on the Assamese Society. As among the Mongoloid tribes, women had far greater freedom in marriage, divorce and other matters than we find in orthodox Hindu society⁶⁴. It is a known factor that socio-cultural elements of Assam were different from other parts of Indian society. That is why some writers interpret that 'Assam is a Country, which at most periods of its history has remained outside the India Civilization'⁶⁵. In fact, Assam was the home lands of heterogeneous racial elements were forced to sandwich together to form a strong homogenous Assamese Society.

⁶³ Barooah Jeoti, *Single Women in Assamese Hindu Society*, P-4.

⁶⁴ Chatterjee Suniti Kr (Dr.), *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol-II, P-90.

⁶⁵ Rapson EJ, *Cambridge History of India*, VI-I, pp11-12.

Since the Assamese society had a fusing culture composed of Negrito—Austic, Alpine, Aryan, Mongolian and other elements, therefore, the socio-cultural life in this region was influenced by both, Aryan and non-Aryan elements.

5. A Brief description of early Assamese society

Assamese society, by tradition was a rural society. It was also characterized by powerful sentiments of kinship, locality, cast and community. In the traditional rural Assamese society, despite a subservient status, the Hindu women of various castes suffered less from social disabilities than her counterparts in some other region of India. Some of the strict social customs, like child marriage, sati- dah etc. did not affect the Assamese women like the women of other parts of India. This was because of the influence of the Mongoloid culture on the Assamese society. As Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterji comments: "Among the mongoloid tribes, women had far greater freedom in marriage, divorce, and other matters than we find in orthodox Hindu society". The study of the pre—historic and other remains prove that, though Assam was the part of Indian civilization, but its socio-culture life was different from that of Indian society. That is why, some writers interpret that "Assam is country, which at most periods of its history has remained outside the Indian civilization". In fact Assam was the homeland of heterogeneous racial elements traveling to this land at different periods of its history. These heterogeneous racial elements were forced to sandwich together to form a strong homogeneous Assamese society. Since the Assamese society had a fusing culture composed of Negrito, Austro—Asiatic, Alpine, Aryan, Mongolian and other elements, therefore, the socio-culture life in this region was influenced by both, Aryan and non-Aryan elements.

Through Aryans successfully penetrated in this region and made their settlements but they failed to Aryanise this land completely.

They had to forego some of their rigid customs to adjust themselves with the vast majority of non- Aryan population. The Aryans become liberal in their food, drink, dress, custom and manner. We can also say that the interaction and the consequent fusion of the blood of the different racial stocks contribution to the evolution of assamese society, wherein the Aiyans and non-Aryans beliefs, practices and the way of living interfused to form a composite assamese culture. The composite assamese culture did not necessarily contain all the disgracing customs and obscurantist practices like sati, child marriage etc., prevalent at other part of India under the major influence. So women of this region were also not affected by those evil and rigid social customs and practices of the Aryans. It proves that the position of Assamese women was comparatively better then their sisters in other part of india. In the social, religious or political arena of the Assamese culture, women occupied and dignified position and were considered in reverence as the ,pivots of the entire social organism.

4.4 : Caste system in Assamese Society

In order to properly estimate the position of_women in ancient and medieval Assamese society, a brief reference to the satisfactory system as expressed through Varna and the caste system is necessary. Traditional Indian society was primarily based on Vernasrama dharma. The Vernasrama principal of categorized of society in to four groups, viz. Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and sudras and four stages of life viz. Brahmacharyya, Garhasthya, Vanaprastha and Sannayasa existed in the vedic society. The RV stated that Brahman was born from the month of the lord; Kshatriya from the arm,-Vaisya from his stomach and Sudra sprang from his feet. In the early stage, the Varna system was not a hereditaryinstitution, but based on occupation. According to BG, "The work of Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and sudras are divided according to thequalities (gunas) born of their own inner nature".

Gradually the Varna system started to be critical. After the Rg-Vedic period, the Varna was not based on occupation, but on birth. P.V. Kane points out that in the period of the Brahman literature, all the castes of the Brahmans, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas were endorsed an upper position and crystallized according to birth, while the Sudras had been sanctioned a lower position. The four Varnas were mentioned in order of hierarchy where in the first three were called dwija, i.e., twice born while the Sudras occupied the lowest position in the society, and they are expected to serve the other three Varnas.

But in case of Assam, no concrete evidence either inscriptional or literary is available about the existence of all the four Varnas. The social division of the Assamese Hindus, though fundamentally allied to that of India, presents a picture of liberalized caste hierarchy. This liberalism was due to emergency of Neo- Vaisnavism according to which all the castes are equal in front of God. Due to the liberal outlook in the caste system and occupation, the Varnasrama dharma were also not properly observed here, as was followed in other parts of India. But, being an integral part of India, Assamese social life was also based on Varnasrama dharma, which is proved by ancient epigraphic and literary sources. The KP stated that Naraka, who is describe in the epigraphs as the head of the - Kamarupa kings, killed Ghataka, king of the Kiratas, and sages as well as members of the four castes. The copperplate of Balabarman 3rd mentions Bhagadaatta as the authoritative of all the four Varnas. (Varnasramanam gurukavirah). In the Nidhanpur copperplate, it is stated that the lord (Brahma) created Bhaskara to organize properly the duties of the four castes and stages of life, which were in a confused state at that tim (Avakirna varna sramadharmapravibhagayan Nirimits). In the tezpur grant, it is said that Vanamala gratified the appetite of the people of all the Varnas and the Asramas (praprita-samasta varnasramad). The Gauhati grant of Indrapala mentions that during the region of Indrapala, the laws of the four stages were observed in their proper order (samyagvibhakta- caturasramavarnadharmadharma).

classes and though above mentioned epigraphs and literature give us an impression that the ancient Assamese society was based upon divine social order and the early Kamarupa kings were created for upholding that order, but strictly speaking existence of the Varnasrama in proper order in ancient Assam was absent. The only Varna category, which is referred to in the inscriptions, is the Brahmins caste the donees of the epigraphs. The epigraph are completely silent about the intermediary two Varnas -Kshatriya and Vaisya. Maniram Dewan in his Burnaji Vivekranta observed that "amongst the four castes of the Hindu society, there are only two castes in Assam, viz. the Brahmans and the sudras. There are no kshatriyas and Vaisyas. In the long past, a Kshatriya boy, Jitari by name, came to Assam from the land of the Dravidas and established himself as a king of a small territory. Except him there was no Kshatriyas, there was only Brahmans and Sudras Dr. P.C. Choudhury also broadly divides the Assamese Hindu society into two classes, viz. the Brahmans and the Sudras; but he does not deny the existence of Vaisyas totally, which is supported by Haliram Dhekial Phukan also. So, in general practice the Assamese Hindu can broadly be divided into two categories, the 'Brahmans' and the 'Sudras'. To quote Das, "these are the Bamun (Brahmin) and Sudir. The Sudir group includes several castes of Hierarchical positions However, it is clear that the principal of stratification acquired normative significance, thus legitimizing the over lordship of the Brahmans. The Varna scheme was empirically expressed through various castegroups, indicating the adjustment of the system to the development needs of the society.

In the ancient and medieval Assamese society, the professions determined the caste position. But it never played a dominating role in the formation of caste rigidity in the Assamese society. While mentioning the important castes and profession of Assam, William Robinson makes significant remarks: "In Assam there seems to have been little or

no distinction of caste from professions and each cast or tribe practiced all the arts which are known in the country. They were farmers, traders, blacksmiths, carpenters, extractors of oil, potters, weavers, dyers etc., but they had not the art of shaving, washing or bleaching, working in leather or of making sweetmeats, butter and ghee. It is also important to note that caste or sub-caste differences were never considered an intractable barrier to social harmony and interaction in the Assamese society. According to data, "except in the case of Brahmins and few other higher caste, caste position has not been fairly easy". The main reason behind the liberal attitude of the Assamese folk mind in the caste—based society was the preaching of the great Vaisnava Guru Sankardeva and his associates. B.K. Barua comments, "The way for the social mobility was facilitated by the liberal attitude of the Neo-Vaisnavism who recognized the equality of status for all Vaisnava devotees".

We shall not discuss further in details about the caste system, but will take some of the feature of the caste system, which have direct relevance to women. Srinivas defines caste in the following words: "Caste is a hereditary, endogamous, usually localized group having traditional associations with an occupation and a particular position in the local hierarchy of caste. Relations between castes are governed among other things by the concepts of population and purity and generally maximum commensality occurs within the caste".

The concept of Hypergamous (anuloma) and hypogamous (pratiloma) marriage by definition denigrates women. A marriage where a boy of upper caste marries a girl of lower caste was approved and called anuloma, while marriages of women of ritually pure groups with men of lower ritual status does not receive a similar approval and known as pratiloma marriage. If a man of higher class or community or caste married a girl from the low class or community or caste then the man was degraded to the low community or caste of the

girl. On the other hand, if a man of low community or caste married a higher caste girl, then they were both considered as degraded and impure. Most serious punishment like excommunication could be evoked for transgressing the norms. Women as a guardian of 'purity' has not to lower herself but she could be raised high.

Another symptom of caste inequality is the different status of bride-giver and bride-take where the latter is considered to be always superior. Even within the caste there were groups, which were considered superior and for climbing high in the status ladder, the bride-givers had to give compensation in terms of dowry. Through the evil custom of dowry was not prevalent in the Assamese society, but the social status of the groom's party was always superior in comparison to the bride and her family. But, the system was quite different in the tribal society, where the bride price, which was the reverse of the dowry system, was prevalent. Among some of the tribes, instead of the bride, the groom used to go to the bride's house for permanent stay. Details about the system of tribal society will be discussed in separate chapter of the thesis.

The other very important feature of the system was its control over women's labor. Caste not only determined social division of labor but also sexual division of labor. Certain tasks had to be performed by women while certain other tasks were meant for men. In agriculture for instance, women can engage themselves in water-regulation, transplanting, weeding, reaping, thrashing, but not in ploughing. Women of the upper classes were withdrawn from the outside work. Physical mobility was also restricted through caste norms.

Although women of Assam or any part of India did not constitute a caste by themselves, they naturally took the caste of their husbands. Accordingly they had to follow the rules and restrictions. There were certain prohibitions strictly observed more by the widows of the Brahmins caste than by those of the other castes. Tradition prohibited them from remarrying and eating non-vegetarian things. The Brahmins strictly followed marriage within the same caste, i.e., endogamy. But the rules and prohibition were not too rigid for the women of the low caste. But one thing was common among the women of all castes, either higher or lower, that they were always considered as subordinate to male members.

The linking of women and Sudras together also points towards the low position of women. Recommendation and prohibition for Sudras and women were same on many occasions. The prohibition of the upanayana sanskar i.e. sacred thread ceremony for both women and Sudras, similar punishment for killing a Sudra or a woman, denial of religious privileges etc. are some of the illustrations which indicate how caste and gender get entangled. Let us make a comparative study of the social status of Assamese women with their counterparts in the other parts of India.

4.5 Position of women in Indian society

In Vedic age, women were considered as object of respect and were extolled as the symbols of prosperity. They were honored in the home and respected outside. Commenting on the position of women in Vedic age, D.N. Mitter writes,

"women held an honored position in the Vedic age and were quite competent to take part in every aspect of the social, intellectual and spiritual life of the race. In every sphere of life, they enjoyed equal opportunity, equal rights as that of men. The evil custom of sati, purdah, and child marriage was unknown in the Vedic age. The widow remarriage was

allowed in the society. The girls had an effective voice in the choice of their husbands. Women enjoyed the property rights and had access to the property of her father and husband. They had the privilege of adoption.

The upanayana sanskara (ceremony of wearing the sacred thread before entrance in the Brahmacharya Ashram) was performed in respect of both boys and girls. After this sacred ceremony both boys and girls were sent to their Gurukulas for studies. By the sheer exposition of dormant talent, some of the prominent women with the like of Lopamurda, Apala, Visvavara, Ghosa, Nivavasiet al were able to steal the heart of the scholars. Their indomitable spirit and passion for erudition helped them to ascend to the pinnacle of success with aplomb and command profound respect from the society. Lopamudra had preached 179 hymns of first book of the RV along with the sage Agastya. One of the Brahman literatures mentioned about a lady named Gandhargrihita, who gave lecture on some theological subjects before an enlightened audience. We find that few women scholar like Maitreyi and Gargi Attained eminence in the sphere of philosophy. The women scholars were given the same respect as male scholars. In few occasions the women philosophers even defeated their male competent in philosophical debates. In a philosophical discussion in the court of king Janaka of Videha, Gargi started cross-examining Yajnavalkya by asking some questions, which the latter refused to answer in public. This proved that Gargi was a dialectician and philosopher high order.

But the rights and freedom of women came to be curtailed gradually in the age following the Vedic period. Due to the rigidity of the prevalent social customs and practices, the status of women deteriorated considerably. This position of women continued throughout the Hindu times and the women were completely subjugated by their men folk.

The position of women again started to improve in the age of Buddha. There was no discrimination between a male and female progeny in —a Buddhist family. In the Buddhist society, the son was not essential for performing one's funeral ceremonies and giving oblations. A sonless man could also obtain Nirvana if he could lead a spotless pure life. The adoption of daughter was quite valid in the Buddhist society. Pre—pubescent marriages never exist in the Buddhist society. Marriage was never compulsory in the Buddhist society. Even a maiden was allowed to lead a life of celibacy and devote herself exclusively to other secular or spiritual affairs. During the age of Buddha, polygamy was uncommon and the general practice of marriage was monogamous. Women in the Buddhist society captured important position in the religious and spiritual spheres. Some of them like Sanghamitra were preachers of Holy Scriptures and even traveled to foreign countries like Ceylon for the purpose.

But with the emergence of Muslim invaders, the obscure period for the women began. Some of the prevalent social customs such as Sati, Child marriage, Prohibition of widow remarriage, Polygamy got deep-rooted in the Mughal age which brought about the segregation of girls and degradation in the condition of women during the period. Neera Desai writes, "Ideological women were considered.

4.6: Women and their Importance in Society

The development of civilization depends on the development social structure in different aspects. Women, who are considered as an integral part of social structure, have influenced the society by their dynamic actions and meaningful thoughts. The status and contributions of women in different spheres of life formulate a total picture of any civilized country. But question is that being an integral part and essence in the formation and nurturing of a

society, whether they are given the status equal to that of the other sex or could they achieve the position in a society according to their remarkable role.

Changes are inevitable factor of a society and with the continuous changing process of the society the importance, status and dignity of women also get changes. In the male dominated society, on one hand, women had been idealized and looked upon with reverence and respect; on the other hand they had been subjected to exploitation and ignominy. They were very much dependent on men for their security. But still in the midst of such an unfavourable condition, some of the women could achieve exceptional recognition only because of their creative faculty and sacrifices. Gradually now the overall picture of women society is improving through greater enlightenment and social conscious.⁶⁶It is also correct that women had to face many ups and downs in their position during different periods of history. Sometimes the position of their lots improved and in some period it declined. But one thing is clear that women through out all the generations and in all the countries has their peculiar position and their importance could nowhere been ignored in toto.

The social structure of a civilization to a great extent is based upon the status of women in its various periods. Since the origin of society, women have become an integral part of the social structure because they have influenced, the status and contributions of women in different spheres of life, we cannot have a total picture of any civilized country.

⁶⁶ Bhogabati Bimol, *Sczmajik Krunti Aru Nari*, P-1.

But the question is that being an integral part and essence in the formation and nurturing of a society, whether they were given the status equal to that of the other sex or could they achieve the position in a society according to their remarkable role.

With the changing time, the society also changes and with continuous changes in the society, the position of women also undergoes certain changes. In the male-dominated society, on one hand, women had been idealized and looked upon with reverence and respect; on the other hand they had been subjected to exploitation and ignominy. They were very much dependent on men for their security. But still in the midst of such an unfavorable condition, some of the women could achieve exceptional recognition only because of their creative faculty and sacrifices. Gradually now the overall status of women in society is improving through greater enlightenment and social consciousness.

It has been found that women had to face many ups and downs in their position during the different periods of the history. Some times the position of their lots improved and in some period it declined. Before we describe the position of women in ancient and medieval Assamese society, it would be useful to look at the normative structure and socio-culture life of the Assamese society in their earlier period.

4.7: Position of women in Assamese society

Though women enjoyed a dignified place in the society of ancient and medieval period of Assam history, there is a serious difficulty of locating authentic sources, which can help construct a profile of Assamese women.

But it can be assumed that, as an integral part of the Indian Society, the Assamese womenfolk were also guided by the same Indian beliefs and customs prevalent in other parts of the country. That is why; they had to accept everything like the other Indian

women. But, due to the fusion culture, which we have discussed earlier, in certain respect, the Assamese women occupied a better position in comparison to her counterparts in other parts of the country.

Though principally her main role was trapped in the domestic and agricultural works in this region, but several valiant women epitomized the revolutionary fervor in the political arena at different periods. At same time, none can deny her incredible role as mother, daughter, sister or wife in the social framework in the formation of the great culturally and helplessness, continue the family line, offer oblations to the manes of ancestors for their spiritual benefit, add luster and glory to the good name of the family by noble and brilliant achievements. But, on the other hand, the daughter was the cause of agony for the parents. They had to collect substantial dowry to marry her off. In case of her husband, poverty or death she had to be maintained by her parents .

However, the birth of a girl child was not a source of consternation to the family in the Vedic and Upanishad ages. One of the early Upanishad recommended a certain ritual to a householder for ensuring the birth of a scholarly daughter. In the Vedic period, the girls were initiated in Vedic studies and were entitled to offer sacrifices to gods; the son was not absolutely necessary for this purpose. The Marriage of the daughter was not a difficult problem; the daughter herself often solved it. The dread of a possible widowhood did not very much ponder upon the mind of parents, because levirate and widow remarriage were prevalent in the society during that period.

But, in the later period the circumstances changed gradually the growing pervasiveness of child marriage, exclusion of levirate and widow remarriages brought endless worry and misery to a daughter parent; Inter- caste marriages were discouraged by the society and exogamy became the general rule. Now, Selection of a suitable son-in-law became very

narrow, thus intensifying the anxiety of the daughters father. According to a Brahman literature the son was, the family, while the daughter was a source of trouble to it. The Ramayana stated that a daughter father, even if occupied a position as exalted as that of the king of gods, had to put up with insults not only from his equals but also from his inferiors. Even after making a good selection of a son-in-law, his anxiety did not terminate, because he had to wait anxiously to find out whether she was enabled to lead her life in comfort and happiness. Under these circumstances it was natural that the birth of a girl child was a source of desolation for the parent. Therefore, a son was valued more than a daughter. The parents looked after the girl child as a transient member, a liability to be handed over on marriage to suitable man in her rightful in-law-family. Even though the average householder regarded the daughter as the root of all misery and the source of unending trouble, but the female infanticide never obtained a footing in the Assamese families, which crept into some sections of Hindu society in other parts of India during the medieval period.

4.8: Position of women in family and household

Women play a very significant role in forming and shaping a house. She plays different types of roles in a family such as mother, wife, adviser, cook, and an honorable host for the guest etc. The sanctity of the home also depends on her as a mother, she is chiefly responsible for domestic care and love and the socialization of her children. As a wife, she not only helps her husband in some his work but also provide moral support to her husband during his up-hill struggle for the family's survival. In short, woman is the axis on which the whole family world revolves.

The household and the family was the place where the women enjoyed abundance of honor, affection and sympathy. According to the Sh. Br, the proper place for women was

the home. Therefore, they should be respected in all matters of the household (Grihas way patanye pratishthas) ⁶⁷. In the Vedic age, women in the domestic affairs were given the supreme authority⁶⁸. She was addressed as the queen of the house, who rules over all the members of the family as ocean rules over all the river of the world ⁶⁹. According to Prof. Indra, The words Pati (master) and Patni (mistress) used in RV signified the equality of position of husband and wife in the household".

After the Vedic age, though she was still considered to be supreme in the household life, but her power was curtailed to a certain extent. She was given the authority, only in the domestic activities within the household. She was not given as much importance in the matter of decision—making, even if the matter concerned to her. Men were vested with the power of decisions making and exercise of authority. Women were only indirectly involved in the decisions with respect to family matters. Men could take women's opinions, but it was the decision of men that was used to be implementedm.⁷⁰

The Assamese culture was the part of the Indian civilization. Therefore, women of this region also had to countenance the same Indian beliefs and practices. Although, due to the influence of Mongoloid culture, the Assamese women were free from the rigour of certain social taboos, to which women in other parts of the country had been subjected. Even if they were not subservient to these social taboos, they too suffered from the crippling

⁶⁷Sh. Br. XII-8.26.

⁶⁸ Indra, *Status Woman in Ancient india*, P- 24.

⁶⁹AV,XIV-1-43.

⁷⁰ Indta, *Status of Women an Ancient india*, P- 24

effects of lack of the educational facilities, economic dependence and lack of personal freedom. Even in the family matters, their position was subordinate to men.

From the very beginning, man was given the duty to earn bread and butter as livelihood for the family and hence he exercised control over family finances and enjoyed a right to family inheritance. This provided him with power and authority over women. It was laid down in the scriptures that husbands and wife both used to follow Grihasthadharma duties and responsibilities. The wife was *sahadharma-charini* who followed duties of a householder with husband. At the same time, it was stressed that she was inferior to, dependent on, and under subjugation of man. According to *manu*⁷¹, a woman must be kept in subordination day and night, by the males of the family. Not only a girl or a young woman, but even an aged one was not allowed to do anything independently even in her own house. She should be kept under the tutelage of males, first to her father, then to her husband and lastly to her son. She was never fit for independence (*Na stri swatantiyan arahati*). Her whole life rotated around men and within domesticity.

4.8.1: Women as housewife

Women's role was recognized in the domestic sphere within the household. Assamese society was a rural and agricultural society where the main work of the girls was making the cow. And that is why they were named *duhita*- originating from the word *go-dohan*⁷². The detailed account of the household activities of the Assamese women in the ancient and medieval period is not available. However from the observance of the working day of an Assamese housewife in the present days, which surely comes as a tradition from the

⁷¹ *Mani IX-32.*

⁷² *RVVII 101, 15, X.27 AO, 5 P- 24*

previous, a rough can be drawn of the duties and responsibilities of the women in the household and family during the ancient and medieval periods.

The working hour of Assamese women generally begins from the early of the dawn. Her household duties in the early morning include dusting, sweeping and washing the floor, washing and cleansing the cooking pots and utensils. During the Ahom rule, it was compulsory for every woman to husk at least one Don (five seers) of paddy in the dawn⁷³ After cleaning the house and household items, she took her bath. Then, according to her religious faith, she offered jointly with her husband the Morning Prayer and worship to the God and Goddesses in her respective family chapel, known as Gosaigharlor Namghar. After performing the purificatory rites, she entered into the kitchen for cooking. The Assamese people of affluent class were used to take their meals generally four times a day. The principal meals were taken at noon night. At morning and sunset, they were used to take light refreshments⁷⁴

According to Hunter, an Assamese cultivator generally took three meals a day⁷⁵. It is clear from the above statement that an Assamese woman had to spend maximum time of her day in the kitchen. Moreover, she had to take care of the health of the children and family members. Women of the educated section also had to look after the education of her children. Women of the well to do families engaged their leisure hours in knitting embroidery, kitchen garden and household decorations. In comparison to the women of the upper class, women of the peasant and working class had to take lots of burden in their shoulders. Apart from doing the domestic duties, they had to do some outdoor duties also. They helped their husbands in all external pursuits and internal economy. In the external pursuits, women shared their husbands toil in cultivation work by sorting of seeds,

⁷³. S. Rajguru, *Medieval Assamese Society*, P-157

⁷⁴. S. Rajguru, *Medieval Assamese Society*, P-157

⁷⁵. W. Hunter, *Statistical Account of Assam*, 1879, P-250.

uprooting of seedlings, transplanting, harvesting etc. In the internal economy, they engaged themselves along with their husbands in bamboo, cane or wooden works, or in making agricultural implements, hunting and fishing instruments and other things in order to earn an extra income for the maintenance of the family and also to equip their house with domestic necessity. Under the supremacy of the Ahoms, the most important and compulsory work allotted to the women were spinning and weaving⁷⁶. It was necessary for every woman that in the night, before going to the bed they had to complete the spinning of the least forty cocoons. Nobody could neglect their duties, because there was a supervisor in every village to inspect the work of the people; somebody was found neglecting their duties without any reasonable cause, then she was punished⁷⁷. Therefore, it is clear that women did not engage themselves only in the domestic activities, but also spent their spare time in cultivation work and other arts and crafts. Over and above all these duties, the dominant role of a woman was considered to be a faithful wife and a devout mother.

4.8.2: Women as Mother

Motherhood had been the cherished ideal of every Hindu woman. Like her counterparts in the other parts of the country, the birth of a son immediately heightened the status of a mother in the Assamese society. The apotheosis of the mother reached a greater height in India than anywhere else. Motherhood was regarded as an embodiment of divine virtues on earth. Manu said that there is no difference between a mother and Goddess⁷⁸. The other law-giver of ancient India, Apastamba honoured the ideal of motherhood by expressing that a mother does so much for her children without any selfishness, therefore

⁷⁶. Dr.S.K.Bhuyan, *Lachit Burphukan and his times*, p.18.

⁷⁷. B.Sarma, *Durbin*, 1951, p.10

⁷⁸. *Manu*, IV-26

the children should not abandon her and must serve her constantly, even if she was boycotted society and religiously⁷⁹.

The role of a mother is very crucial and significant in a also gave to a powerful king Hajaravarman. The Hayunthul grants also compare her motherhood to Yudhisthira's mother Kunti and Abhimanyu's mother Subhadra.

Some of the king of medieval period built temples tanks in the name or memory of their methods. The most powerful king of the Ahom kingdom, Rudre Singha (1696-1714) had excavated the Jaysagar tank to commemorate his mother Jaymati's name, who sacrificed her life for the great interest of her motherland. Some of the king honoured their mother by naming the capitals in the name of their mother. Santanu, the originator of the Baro Bhuyans named the place of his rule as Lakhipur or Lakshipur after the name of his mother Lakshmi. Lakhipur or Lakshimpur has been identified with present district of Lakhimpur⁸⁰. Though these examples belong to the royal families but these conventional references indicate that women as mothers were highly respected by every Assamese belonging to any strata of the society. Besides playing significant role of a doting mother, a woman had to play the role of a self-sacrificing, self-effacing, virtuous, chaste, truthful and devout wife.

4.8.3: Women as Spouse

In the early Vedic ages, wife enjoyed equal right with husband. The Vedic literatures stated that the wife was the half of man and was equal to her husband in every respect and could equally participate in every religious and social function³⁰⁸. Though supreme authority

⁷⁹. A.D., 1-10-48-9

⁸⁰. K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, P-278, E.A. Gait, *A history of Assam*, PP-38, 39

wife's position was one of honourable subordination. In the Vedic and Epic society, we find that the wife was treated with utmost courtesy and regard. The Vedic stated that the wife was the ornament of the house and the keystone of the husband's happiness⁸¹. PP. stated that, "the house may be full of sons, daughters and daughters-in-law; but it is quite empty to a person if his wife is not there to supervise over it"⁸². According to Raghuvamsa, "Wife alone was the husband's trust friend, counsel and companion"⁸³ Without her he could not go to heaven either, so at the time of the symbolical ascent to heaven in the sacrificial ritual, he had to wait till his wife came to accompany him. In the time of the Ramayana also we observe that no sacrifice was undertaken unless wives were present with their husbands. During the period of the banishment of Sita, Rama performed his rites with the golden image of Sita by his side⁸⁴. The Bbh said that the most sacred duty of a husband was to maintain and support his wife, which must be discharged at all costs; otherwise, have no right at all to be called a husband⁸⁵.

In the Assamese society, indeed we do not get any direct evidence regarding the wives in pre-Ahom period. But mentioning the names of the queens along with their king husband in the inscriptions of ancient Assam indicated that as wives were given the dignified and honourable position. The comeliness of most of the queens such as Nayanadevi, wife of Sthitavarman of Varmandynasty⁸⁶, Srimangala, queen of Harjaravarman of Salastambha dynasty was compared to Goddess Lakshmi, which signified that women were considered as benevolent and bestower of prosperity. The inscriptions state that Devavati, queen of Narayanvarman, Nayanadevi, queen of Sthitavarman of Varmandynasty, Shamayika wife of Devadhara.

⁸¹. RV, BK. V, hymn 61, v. 8

⁸². PP, Uttarakhanda, 223,36-7

⁸³. Raghuvamsa, VIII, 67

⁸⁴. Ramayana, Balakanda, XIII-4

⁸⁵. Mhb, xii, 272,37

⁸⁶. Dubi Copper plate of Bhaskarvarman, vv. 50, 57

Ummoka Brahmin achieved the same status as their God husbands. This indicates that both husband and wife were attached to and complimentary to each other. In that period, the kings did not hesitate to state that wives were equal to them in status. Amba, queen of Jayamala (Virbahu) and Aihavadevi, queen of king Udaykarna were said to be equivalent in status to their respective husbands.

In the Ahom period, we get the reference of royal consorts, who occupied proud positions. We find that the kings were highly influenced by their queens. The queens began to exercise their influence in the politics also. At the instance of Chaoching, the consort of the Ahom King Suklengmung (1539-1552) created the third minister Barpatra Gohain when the Ahom King Siva Singha (1714-1744) came to know that he might lose his throne due to the evil influence of the stars, he handed over the reigns of the government to his Chief Queen Phuleswari who took the title Bar-Raja. Her sister Ambika and Sarbeswari succeeded her as Bar- Raja respectively. These references help us conclude that women of the royal families were given the status equal to their husbands. `

But, the general attitude towards women does not seem to be of such respectful. Generally, they were looked down upon as distrusted and incredulous. All sorts of indignities and insults were heaped on them indiscriminately. About the relegation of women in the by-gone ages, Dr Abinash Chandra Das on his book *Re-Vedic Culture*, comments that Women captured in war from rival clans or otherwise were forced to matrimonial connections, were necessarily kept in subjection and treated more like chattels than human beings. They were virtually treated as slaves, over whose life and liberty their husbands had complete control. This was the lowest form of marriage-if it could be called by that name at all. Even at such later times, as the age of the Epics-we find Draupadi the royal consort of the five Pandavas-pawned by Yudhishtira in a game of dice, which he played with Shakuni. The Kurus for whom the game was won forcibly brought out the queen from her royal

apartment and subjected her to a series of inhuman insults and indignities that made the blood of her royal husbands boil. But they were utterly demoralized and could not raise their voice-or even their little finger- in protest because they had lost in the game. The literary works of medieval Assam do not seem to have lagged behind in vilifying and disgracing the fair name of womanhood.

From some of the medieval works, it was gathered that women were regarded as the most immoral, inconstant, deceit, stupid, greed, impure, cruel and insolent class of people in the society. They were impediment in the path of devotion and liberty. KGC, in one of its statements, minutes that so long everything was made available to a wife, she was candid and virtuous, but as soon as she did not get her desires fulfilled, she began to disregard her husband and act in a way whereby the position of the husband was jeopardized. Another author Ram Charan Thakur in his *Guru Charit* asserts that women were most irreligious and sinful; they know nothing than untruth and were addicted to constant sexual pleasure. Even Sankardeva, who was sometimes regarded as comparatively liberal in his attitude towards women, was not free from such influences. He stated that women were foil of illusion and mesmerism; and even a sudden look at women would destroy all sorts of penances, sacrifices and devotions. According to him therefore, a wise man should the companionship of women as far as possible. Sankardeva himself refused to initiate the omen, as they wereliars, sinners, unchaste and too much attached to wealth and property. There were advocates of celibacy in the Vaisnava cult who compared the married life to that of a pig's life and the women as being doors to hell.

4.8.4: Women in Marriage and Married life

Of all the Hindu Samskaras, Vivaha or the Marriage was one of the most sacred and significant one, because it was the origin and center of all Yajnas performed by a grhastha. Marriage received spiritual significance as indicated in the literary expressions found in the

RV, and the AV. From the very early period, the contribution of the marriage institution was found to be very wide towards building the Hindu society and knitting bondage in it. Marriage was to every Hindu not an act of mere pleasure, not primarily a source of gratification to his sentimental longing or romantic loves, but an act of duty, a matter of moral and religious obligation, absolutely incumbent on him his ancestors. Two types of approval were given to the system by the Hindu society. These approvals were: Social approval and Religious approval; hence the people, who followed the system, had to accept the two fold bindings. Firstly, they had to accept the social rules and regulations and secondly, the marriage should be performed according to the rules laid down in the Hindu scriptures. The Sh. Br asserts that the wife was the half of man and hence as long as he not secure a wife and a son, he was not considered complete. The author of Mhb admires wives in a various ways. She was half body of her husband, so she was called Ardhangini. She was the closet friend of her husband as well she was the source of dharma, artha, Kama for the attainments of the objects human life.

4.8.5: Types of Marriage

Manu recognizes as many as eight kinds of marriage, merely possesses a historical significance. These marriages are:

Brahma (based upon Vedic rites).

Daiva (by which a girl is offered to a priest).

Arsa (marriage by purchase in which the bride's father normally receives from the Bridegroom a pair of oxen)

Kaya or Prajapatya (in which the marriage takes place after the proposal being Made by the would-be bridegroom).

Asura (marriage by purchase).

Gandharva (secret union). .

Raksasa (marriage by force or capture).

Paisa ca (secret elopement).

Manu stated that the first four kinds of marriages according to the order Brahma, Daiva, Arsa, and Prajapatya were lawful for Brahmas, while the three forms i.e., Gandharva, Rakshasa and Paisaca were for Kshatriyas. The Asura and Paisaca Forms of marriage were valid for the Vaisyas and Sudras. In all these forms of marriage, a woman was considered a precious person. The first four forms of marriage seems to be adopted from the customs of the paternal types of family consisting of Aryans who were divided into four varnas, while the last four forms of marriage were adopted from the customs of the maternal type of family³³⁹. It has been already mentioned that the society in North-East India was influenced mostly by the tribal and non-Aryan elements and most of the tribal society was maternal in nature, accordingly they follow the Raksasa, Gandharva, Asura and Paisaca forms of marriages. As it has been pointed out, "marriage amongst the Hindus in Assam was almost invariable by purchase, or as a Hindu would prefer to say, the Asura was prevalent form of marriage. The price paid, for a bride varied considerably; on a general average it might be placed roughly at Rs.60 to Rs.70, but very much larger sums were often paid more especially by the Shahas of Sylhet when they wished to procure a bride from the Kayastha or Vaidyacaste. One result of this practice of buying wives was to rise the age of males at Marriage as they could not take a wife until they could afford for her".

Unfortunately, there is a scarcity of evidences to draw a clear picture of marriage system in ancient Assam. Our predecessors, in their works of ancient period, opined that the traditional secret marriage of Aniruddha with Usa was of the Gandharva or even Paisaca kind. The union of Krishna with Rukmini was similar to the Raksasa type of marriage. Another form of marriage other than the above eight types was Swayambara which was prevalent in ancient Indian as well as Assamese society. This system was a device for bringing about a marriage of a Kshatriya damsel and it is referred to in the Rajtraingini in connection with the marriage of Amiritprabha with Meghavahana, a prince of Kashmir.

On the basis of the records and sources available, it can be assumed that the Brahma and the Prajapatya forms of marriage were widely practiced among the Brahmans of Assamese Hindus. But the Vedic procedure was uniformly followed not only by all the high caste Hindus but almost by all the lower castes also. Though it had been found that the marriage customs were not so rigid in Assam as those were in other parts of India, but it had been observed that some of the customs of later medieval period were largely influenced by the Brahmanical rites and became rigid towards the marriage customs. In one case we find that one Mukunda Gossain was sentenced to death by King Pratapa Singha for replacing the smarta marriage rituals by Nama-kirtana and exchange of garlands. This shows that the breach of traditional marriage customs was not tolerated.

4.8.6: Rituals in Marriage Ceremonies

Regarding the ceremonies given in the marriage hymns of the RV and the AV; one aspect should be observed that the main outlines of the Hindu marriage rituals of today are almost the same as they were in some five thousand years ago. In the beginning the marriage ceremony was performed in a simple way. In the course of time the society became complex and many local and chronological differences came into existence.

Marriage being a spiritual institution was based on the dual pillars of samya and satya, i.e., equality and truth. The Rig Veda exemplifies the statement in the following passages:

Aum Mama Vrata Te Hradyam Dadhatu

Mama Cittan Anucittan Te Astu"

" Yadasti Hradyam Mama

Tadastu Hradyam Tava, I

Yadasti Hradyam Tava

- Tadastu Hradyam Mama".

“Aum May you give your heart to me for my great and holy Vrata or Vow of marriage. May your heart be mine; may my heart be yours.”

The marriage woman in the RV was considered as the sakhi (friends) of her husband. The ideals of the Hindu marriage have come down from Vedic times and are preserved in the various rituals. As Radhakrishnan observes: "The marriage ceremony marks the beginning of the great opportunity for the development of an emotional maturity, in which the sense of justice, of understanding of consideration of, and forbearance for, others are born". The Hindu Sastrakaras had emphasized the importance of vivaha for both man and woman equally. However, to a woman, marriage was the bases of the purusarthas. Her life becomes complete only when she got married. The phenomenon-of old spinsters was not altogether unknown. They lived in their parents home till the hair was white with age.

It has been already mentioned that normally the higher class Hindus followed the formal rites of marriage according to the Prajapatya and Brahma type. The Puspabhadra grant (v.15) seems to throw some focus on the Panigrahana or I marriage. The Assamese Hindus of the plains, whether Brahmans or Sudras, followed in general all the rites of marriages. In a sanctified marriage ceremony) the following Vedic rites were performed :

- 1) Vagdana (settlement of the marriage with the performance of the ringceremony).
- 2) Varavarna (formal reception of the bridegroom by the bride,s party).
- 3) Kanya-dana (Giving away the daughter to the bridegroom)
- 4) Vivahahoma (the oblations offered to the Agni or fire by the bride and thegroom jointly).
- 5) Laja-homa (The sacrifice of the fried grains by the bride clasping the hands of the groom into the fire and the fried grains are poured into her hand by her father or brother)
- 6) Panigrahana (clasping and acceptance of the bride, s hand by thegroom).
- 7) Agni- Parinayana (round around the nuptial fire by the groom and thebride).
- 8) Hrdaya-sparsa (reciting the mantra by the groom touching the heart of thebride).
- 9) Saptapadi (taking of seven steps by the bridegroom and bride jointlybefore the sacred fire).
- 10) Asmarohana (standing on a stone by the bride).
- 11) Dhruvadarshana (looking at the polestar by the bride).

Besides these Vedic rituals, some of the pre nuptial local customs were observed in different parts of Assam. According to B.K. Barua, some of the customs are reminiscent of the primitive society when socially approved marriage system had not evolved.

4.8.7: Marriage custom of Assam

The first popular custom in eastern Assam was Joran-diya, which was known as Telbhardiya in western Assam. The earliest reference in early Assamese literature about this custom was found in IVlankar's P.P where the sage Narada had been shown as the person in charge of carrying articles of Joran from the cottage, of Mahadeva to the palace of

Himalaya. Narayanadeva's PP (17th century) also described this function in connection with the marriage of Behula- Lakhindar. According to this custom, two or three days before the marriage ceremony, on an auspicious day some articles like silken and other clothes, ornaments, oil, parched paddy, cinnabar, gur and two pots of curd, a big fish, a packet of vermilion are sent to the bride's house from bridegroom's house and the vermilion mixed with oil is then applied on the forehead and the hair of the bride amidst ululu sound of women. A part of the articles brought from the groom's house including a pot of curd is sent back to the bridegroom's house with a dress and ring meant for the groom.

Other Popular local function, which was performed two or three days before the actual marriage ceremony, was Panatela ceremony in which sacred water was brought from nearby tank or river by the female relations headed by mother of the bride. A description of this is given from H.C Barua's Marriage systems of the people of Assam.

The mother of the bride along with other female relatives was used to proceed to a nearby tank or river accompanied by singers and drummers. Having reached the tank, they carried a dialogue of set words, the purpose of which was to ensure good fortune for the wedding couple. At the end of the dialogue the mother carrying water-pot threw a few cowrie shells and thuriya-tamol (a piece of areca nut rolled up with betel leaf) into water saying, "oh, sun and moon, winds and clouds, bear witness, I carry water for the marriage of so and so". Then drawing three lines on the surface of water with a knife invoked the rivers Ganga, Yarruna and Saraswati to bless the marriage with their water. Then they returned filling the pot with water. On reaching home they sprinkled some water from the pot on the eaves of the house. After entering the house they placed the water-pot on the madal (mandaia=circle) prepared artistically with coloured powders and adorned with pictures of gods and goddesses a mirror was usually placed in the centre.

The groom or bride was then taken out for a ceremonial bath to the beighar, after giving him or her a ceremonial bath according to the traditional rituals and attiring them with a new dress they are taken, in their respective home, to the modal where they are dressed and decorated with fine where they are dressed and decorated with fine clothes, ornaments and toilets. On the previous evening of the marriage ceremony, gathiyon Kaunda ceremony and adhivasa rituals were celebrated in which a sweet scented aromatic root was pounded with a Muller held by seven married women and the powder of the root was applied to the head of the bride.

On the marriage day at the early morning before the sunrise another local custom was practiced known as the daiyan-diya, where the bride was allowed to sit at the door of her sleeping apartment and the mother or other female relatives knelt down before her with two betel leaves being dipped in some curd, takes one each hand and touches her cheeks, arms and feet with these moistened leaves. Before the departure of the couple, the custom of suvagtola was observed in eastern and central Assam but was generally absent in western Assam. In this ceremony, the mother with other female relatives and guests were used to proceed to the nearby tank or river to bring water in a pot, one of the women carried on her head a bamboo tray 9(data) containing seven lamps and another a winnowing fan (kula) on which were placed a copper coin fastened in a piece of cloth along with rice-powder. The women carrying Kula, called kulabudi, struck the fan with a stick. After observing some rituals, they returned to the home and then the water pot was placed in a medal. There was a peculiar function held on the third day of the principal marriage ceremony known as Khoba and khobi. In this function the evil spirits known as khoba and khobi were

driven away from the person of newly married couple. The local customs of central and eastern Assam are almost same but it is different in western Assam.

The main reason for the uniformity of the local custom of the central eastern Assam was that for a long time, the two regions were ruled by same dynasty whereas the rule of western Assam frequently changed hands. Therefore the local customs also changed with the ruling power. But one common thing was that all the functions were followed amidst ululu sound the folk songs sung by womenfolk besides the local customs mentioned above, some other practices were followed by the Hindu Assamese in the marriage system such as dara- agacha, angathi khela, duaradhara etc. Thus we find that the Assam marriage system was a composite one of Vedic and popular local customs. The womenfolk played major roles in the popular folk practices of the marriage rite.

4.8.8 : pre –Puberty Marriage

Customs of pre-puberty marriage were only prevalent among the upper caste Assamese Hindu. Those were rarely practiced by the castes other than Brahmins and Kayasthas. Brahman youths usually married after the completion of their period of education. Marriage was regarded as a social and religious duty and necessary samskaras in the Hindu system and the snataka was required to enter into matrimony soon after his brahmacyarya⁸⁷. If the Brahman was unable to bear the expense of his marriage, it was the duty of the King to help the poor Brahman to become a grhastha by bearing the expense of the marriage. This is incidentally referred to in the Nowgong grant (v.31). The smriti texts, including those of Assam enjoined upon the Brahmans to follow strictly the rules in respect of their marriage and advised to marry off their daughters before the attainment of puberty. It is not known when the custom of Pre-puberty marriage came into existence, but the worst effect of the customs was that to pre-mature

⁸⁷ Aitkar. *Education in Ancient India*, p.25

age and lack of education, women were completely subjugated by their male members. They were not allowed to participate in any decision –making process including the marriage of their daughter. As regards the causes, which led to the practices of pre-pubescent marriage, it can be said that perseverance on absolute chastity was responsible for it. According to Altekar, “An undue premium came to be placed upon absolute chastity, in order to prevent the theoretical possibility of unchastity in any bride whatsoever, it decreed that marriage should always perform before puberty”.

About the early marriage of the girls, Veena Das remarks, “Women were literally seen as points of entrance, as ‘gateways’ to the caste system. If men of ritually low status were to get sexual access to women of higher status, then not only the purity of the women but that of the entire group would be endangered. Since the main threat to the group came from female sexuality, it becomes vital guard it. Most groups solved this problem by the custom of prepuberty marriage”. Historian Indra also supported the above cause and said that perhaps infant marriage was used as the device to curb on incontinence. In his opinion, “in the early Vedic Indian, marriages were contracted after courtship and were ordinarily dictated by mutual love. But with the admixture of races, the multiplication of castes their iron exclusiveness and decay of morals, the only check to curb the growing desire for license among young men and women was to give them to chance of having a will of their own. Hence the convention, that a girl must be married before she attains puberty”.

We have already mentioned that the custom of pre-puberty marriage was prevalent only among the Brahmin and Kayastha families of Assam. Though the girls were married at an earlier age, but they were sent to their in-laws house permanently after they attained puberty. Sometimes bridegroom’s party escorted the bride for a few hours for the benefit of the relatives, mainly for the womenfolk, who could not accompany the marriage party.

This custom was called ghar-gachakowa, which means stepping into husbands's house. She was sent back to her parents's house after a few hours where she was allowed to stay till she reached puberty. Castes, other than the Brahmins and the Kayasthas, married grown-up girls and therefore carried their brides immediately after the conclusion of the ceremony. In the Brahmin and Kayastha families, when the first menstruation of the girl started, then the girl's family followed some traditional customs. First of all she was confined in a secluded room for a certain period ranging from a few days to a month as prescribed by the astrologer. After the seclusion period was over, the girl was ceremoniously given a bath accompanied with songs sung by assembled women of the village. A bundle was made containing seven wild figs and a few coral and gold beads fastened together in a piece of cloth. This bundle was named as kanai. This kanai was carried by a messenger who conveyed the news of the attainment of puberty of the girl to the entire village. Then the occasion of tolani-biya was performed in which the girl was given a ceremonial bath and kanai was placed on the lap of the girl and other females. After this ceremony on an auspicious day, the final part of the marriage ceremony, i.e., santibiya was held, in which the bridegroom used to sprinkle sacred water on the bride by praying and invoking different deities for the harmony and prosperity of their married life. After the ceremony was over, the bride accompanied her husband to the father-in-law's house. It had been found that majority of Kalitas and Sudras escorted their brides after performing marriage ceremony according to Vedic rites. But, in few cases, it had been that due to the poverty or some other reasons, some of the people of the Kalita and Sudra communities brought their brides with them by giving necessary ornaments to the bride and feeding the members of society without performing marriage according to the Vedic rites.

Such a pair was called Abiyai i. e., Unmarried. In such cases, the married women for good of the unmarried couple performed an auspicious function of ag-chaul-dia. But, such couples were considered as impure, so they were restricted to take part in many social functions. They could perform any function related to god only after making Prayaschitta (expiation). The bridegroom was not allowed to perform the Shradha ceremonies of his unmarried wife according to Vedic rites. Such couple was also banned to take food with their kinsmen and family members sitting on the same line neither were they allowed cooking or distributing food for others. The son of such an unmarried couple could not become the inheritor of his father's properties. But if the couple becomes parents during their unmarried state, then they were required to go through prayaschitta. If the husband of such a couple died without performing the marriage ceremony, either a pacificator function of the wife was performed by marrying her off to the idol salagrama or to one of the holy works, such as gita, Bhagavata or to a plantain tree. In some cases, the wife, in order to purify herself, married second time a person of her own community according to Vedic rites and then departed from him giving some ransom, instead of leading a conjugal life.

A widow, whose marriage was not performed and was kept by a Sudra, such as Keot, Koch etc., without performing marriage, was called Batalu. If she became bereft of husband for the second time and was taken as wife by a third husband, then she was called Dui-ghari Batalu. If she was taken by a fourth husband, then she was called Tin-ghari Batalu. But such cases were observed among the people who had no social status. The Tin-ghari Batalu was considered so wretched that people even considered her sight very inauspicious at the commencement of a certain work. Sometimes, a bride of her own settlement or bridegrooms' of his own agreement respectively went to the bridegrooms' or bride's house, lived as husband and wife. In the first case the bride is called Chapani or Dhemni and in the second case, the bridegroom is called Chapania, Again, sometime, the parents of a girl owing to the desire of having a son or a proper man to look after them at their old age as well as to shield their properties a young man of their old age as well as to shield their properties selected a young man of their community as bridegroom for their daughter, such

bridegroom was also called Chapania or Ghar-jowat. The custom of talking money or other commodities by the parents of the bride from the bridegroom or bridegroom's party was prevalent among some of the Sudra communities. The money was taken as a sort of price for the maintenance of the bride by the parents and was known as Ga-dhan (Ga=body, dhan=money). This form can be identified with the Asura form of marriage resulted in the form of polygamy. Altekar believes that the grooms, when matured, sometimes were not content by the brides of their parents' choice. Wives too were not cultured or educated enough to succeed in riveting their husband's affection and dissuade them from the contemplated second marriage.

4.8.9: Polygamy in Assamese Society

Monogamy was the general rule of the Hindus in the ancient society. The Vedic literature also indicated that the fundamental conception of marriage was monogamous. The words 'Dampati' Jayapati', meant the two joint owners of the household and did not permit the entry of a third partner.

The Vedic rituals too did not permit for the association of more than one wife. The Vedic Gods also were monogamous. In practice, however, polygamy often existed in the aristocratic and ruling sections of the society.

In the early Hindu society, polygamy was commonly practiced by princes or noblemen. Common people were ordinarily monogamous. On the basis of some motivations, polygamy was practiced by the ruling and rich section of the society.

According to Altekar, Polygamy was used as an instrument by the ruling classes to establish and fortify their political supremacy by contracting numerous but Judicious

matrimonial alliances whereas the richer section of the society kept many wives to exhibit their wealth, reputation and social position.

Gradually, polygamy became the common feature of the social system. Even the common people started practicing it. The main reason was their insatiable desire for progeny for the continuance of the family. A son was absolutely necessary to relieve his father from the torments of hell by offering oblations to the ancestors and so lawgiver permitted the husband to marry second time if the first wife was desolate or failed to produce a son. But, the sastras had permitted the practice of polygamy under few exceptional conditions ³⁶⁸.

- 1) If the previous wife was barren up to 8 years.
- 2) In Case, short-lived children were born up to 10 years.
- 3) If the previous wife continuously produce daughters up to 11 years.
- 4) If the previous wife could not perform religious sacrifices due to some incapacity in her.
- 5) If the first wife was found to be imbecile.
- 6) If she was suffering from an incurable disease.
- 7) If she was found to be adulterous.
- 8) If she was quarrelsome.

It appears that in the later ages, the practice of polygamy was not based upon the above conditions but actually treated as a privilege reserved for the twice born classes. Manu approved the practice by laying down that a Brahman could keep four wives, the first one from his own caste and rest three wives from the remaining three castes. Similarly, a Kshatriya could marry three times, the first one from his own caste and the remaining two wives from vaishya and Sudra caste. Likewise a vaishya could keep two wives-one from his own caste and the other one from the Sudra caste. But a Sudra was not allowed to keep more than one wife and therefore was to lead a perfectly monogamous life ³⁶⁹. In the epic literature, we find that men married several women even of the same caste.

The motive behind the practice of polygamy was neither spiritual nor religious. The absence of progeny from the firstwife was not necessarily the cause of marrying second women. A man could have married another woman without being subjected to any social opposition if only he had a latent desire. Arjuna, the hero of the mhb married Draupadi subhadra, Ulupi chitrangada and Uttara one after another, but he was never denied access to his high status, which he accupied throughout his whole life. Several such examples are found in the Mhb. It shows that the practice of polygamy had been very widely prevalent in the Mhb and it carried with it no sense of disapproval, Manu had even propounded that at moment the husband could discard his wife if she was found to be disagreeable to him. The position of wives were so much degraded that even if the wives could produce sons and were fully devoted to their husbands, still they were superseded by their husbands on the pretext of flimsy grounds. However, the practice went on spreading and in the later ages it was in vogue not only amongst the aristocratic classes but also even among the common people.

In early Assamese society also, polygamy was a common practice. The puranas, while relating the stoy of Narakasura, the ancient's ruler of Praggiyotisha-Kamrupa, also mentioned about his harem, where 160000 beautiful damsels were in his possession that were later on recovered and married by Krishna, the ruler of Dwarka after killing Naraka. Through the inscriptional sources of Varman, Salastambha and pala dynasties refer only the names of single queen, But it does not necessarily mean that the kings of ancient Assam were Monogmous, Perhaps the inscriptions only mentioned the names of the chief mother along with their king father in the inscriptions. On the other hand, medieval Assamese society had numerous examples of poly gamy. Durlabh Narayana, the king of Kamata had seven queens. Almost all the Ahom kings had at least two principal queens known as Parbatia kuwari and Raidangia Kuwari and many subordinate queens known as Chamua Kuwari. The nobles and ministers had at least two prinipal queens, known

as Parbatia Kuwari and Raidangia Kowari and many subordinate queens known as Chama Kowari. The nobles and ministers had at least three wives. The Koch king Bisva Singha had forty-eight queens and king Laksmi Narayan had as many as one hundred and twenty queens³⁷⁵. It appears that in the medieval Assam society, polygamy was widely practiced, especially by the members of the royal family. It seems that women were regarded as mere chattels, and could be captured in my number by men after the conquest of a territory. Women were generally used as an instrument for peace treaty. It had been seen that the vanquished king was used to give his daughter or sister in marriage with the victor king. When Nyayapala, king of a small territory got the smell of the attack on his kingdom by the powerful Chutiya king Ratnadhvajpal, he bought peace by offering his daughter to the latter. The Jayantia king married off two of his daughters to the Kachari king Satrudaman after tasting defeat. The Ahom king Sudangpha turned the rebel of the Tipamiyas to peace by entering into the married alliance with the daughter of the Tipamiya chief. The ruler of Gauda made peace with Ahoms by offering two princesses Khanbibi Harmati and Khanbibi Darmati to Suhungmung's (1497-1539) seraglio.

The existence of polygamy undoubtedly proves the low status, which was allotted to women in the earliest and medieval ages. Wife was then regarded as property, which could be staked at dicing and over whose life and liberty husband exercised complete control. The position of co-wives was extremely miserable. Each one naturally craved for the whole-hearted love of her husband and wished to be his favorite wife, but as this was impossible, the neglected co-wife very often took to the performance of secret rites and uttering of incantations with a view to gain her husband's love and put down her rival. The plurality of wives was never considered as contributing to the happiness of domestic life. Sometimes, the neglected wife tried to kill her rival co-wife. We come across one such case in the Ahom kingdom. The queen regent of Taokhamti (1380-1389) was a barren and jealous of co-wife. When the king went for an expedition against the Chutiyas, he

gave the power to the chief queen. She took advantage of the power and sentenced her co-wife, an expectant mother, to death on charge of an alleged adultery. But the men who were to carry out the orders secretly spared the unfortunate victim of her life. They set her adrift on the Bramaputra, and subsequently she got shelter in the house of a Brahman at habung. After some times she died after giving birth to a son.

From the above account it is pretty certain that the status of co-wives was not at all satisfactory. Yet it was expected that wives should be devoted to their husband. According to Manu, though unobservant of approved usage or enamored of another woman or devoid of good qualities, yet a husband must certainly, be revered as a god by a virtuous wife.

4.8.10: Women and the concept of Chastity

Chastity was recognized as the central and most indispensable aspect of a woman's character. The enormous importance of the purity of sexual life was recognized from the Vedic period and all deviations from it were regarded with disfavor. The great epic Mahabharata in one of its statements records Gifted with a good disposition, endowed with sweet speech, sweet conduct and sweet features and always looking at the face of her husband and deriving as much joy from it as she does from looking at the face of her child-that chaste woman who regulates deeds by observing the prescribed restraints comes to be considered as truly righteous in her conduct. Listening to the duties of married life and performing all those sacred duties, that woman who considers virtue as the foremost of all the objects of pursuits, who observes the same vows, which are observed by her husband, who adorned with chastity looks upon her husband as a good as a god, who waits upon and serves him as if he were a god, who surrenders her own will completely to that of her husband-who is cheerful, who observes excellent vows, who is gifted with good features and whose heart is completely devoted to her husband so much so that she never thinks even of any other man,

is considered as truly righteous in conduct. That wife, who even when addressed harshly and looked upon with angry eyes by her husband appears cheerful to him, is said to be truly devoted to her husband. She who does not cast her eyes upon the moon or the sun or a tree that has a masculine name, who is worshipped by her husband and who is gifted with beautiful features, is considered to be truly righteous lady. The woman, who treats her husband with the affection which one, Shows towards her child, even when he happens to be poor or diseased or work or worn-out with the toil of traveling is considered to be as truly righteous in her conduct.”

After the introspection of the inscription of ancient Assam in detail, we came to know that the queens and the Brahmin wives were primarily cherished for their chastity and allegiance towards their husbands. For instance, Dubi copper-plate and Bargaon copper plate respectively stated about the fidelity of suvrata, the queen of king Mahendravarman of varman dynasty and syamayika, the wife of Brahmin sadgangadatta. As the steady luster never failed to subsist with the moon, likewise the queens and the Brahmin wife were also persistently dedicated to their respective husbands. We get the names of other devoted queens and Brahmin wives, like wife of Gabhithira brahmin. Cchepayika, wife of vasudeva Brahmin, saukhyaika, wife of savarpala Brahmin, Anuradha, wife of vasudeva brahmin, Ratna, queen of king Harshapala of Pala dynasty, Pauka, wife of barite brahmin etc. The adherence of the above mentioned wives were compared with Saci, sita, lakshmi, parvati, who were the wives of Indra, Rama, Narayan and Siva respectively and thus portrayed an ideal wifehood or Grhlakshmis.

The medieval soial reformers were not different from suchbackings. The Vaisnava movement had put forward certain other restrictions also, such as women could not talk to any male person other than her close relative, could not laugh loudly, etc. and whoever dare to try to cross these limitations was declared.

Unchaste and inauspicious. Madhavadeva even advised Sankardeva's wife to address her husband as Gosain or God. Sankardeva specifically stated that devotion to husband was the utmost duty of a wife. The medieval literature presented the example of few chaste women who tried to keep their chastity untarnished. It had been recorded that to preserve her chastity from the contemporary. Koch king (Raghudeva), daughter-in-law of Sankardeva and widow of Kamalalochana, who extremely beautiful, her face by removing the teeth with a grinding stone. The KGC records an interesting event of a lady called Radhika santi who could attain glory by remaining a chaste. It was said that when the construction of the dam again and baffled due to the current of the stream, and the problem became inexplicable, then Radhika santi, wife of a fisherman named Purnagiri, took a miraculous action. She by dint of her chastity, brought water from the stream in a Pala (a fishing Instrument) having many big holes in it. When she poured the water of the Pala at the spot where the construction work was going on, surprisingly the stream became mild immediately and the construction of the dam was completed without any difficulty.

One of the chronicles recorded another similar miraculous incidence. When Chilarai, the brother and prime minister of King Naranarayana was suffering from incurable white leprosy, then the wife of an oil man, on the strength of her chastity, succeeded in bringing water in a copper Bessel, having thousand holes on its body, for worshipping the sun god. The sun god was pleased and Chilarai became cured. Since both the above ladies belonged to the lower strata of the social chain, hence these incidences pinpointed towards the importance laid on chastity of women belonging to any state of the society though the Assamese society stressed upon the chastity of the women, but we find another form of women who were known as concubines, courtesans and devodasis, which can be called as prostitution.

4.8.11: Women and the Practice of Prostitution

The term vesya is referred to in the Tezpur grant of Vanamala. The bargaon grant also mentions about besya and varastri, who generally resided in the best streets of the city. The grant of Venamala mentions that they were beautiful and attractive to all minds and they adomed them selves with various ornaments. The kings and nobles patronized these courtesans and they adorned many royal courts by there singing and dancing. According to B.K. Barua, they seem to have lived a life of cultured ease and pleasure. According to P.C. Choudhury, “The institution of vesyas or devodasis is nothing but a sacred prostitution in some form or other in its extreme development, the institution has a parallel in the pre-marital communal life of the bachelors’ quarters of The Assam tribes”. But the besyas were not used as prostitutes like the modern times. They were actually appointed as dancers and courtesans in the Siva temples and the system was in vogue from 3rd century A.D., not only in Assam but in other parts of India also. The institions of vesyas developed in Assam under Tantrik influence as described in the YT. Vanamala in his Tezpur grant made gifts of vesyas to the temple of Hatakesvara Siva. Thus it can be said that prostitution was present, but in a sacred Assam only after the Burmese invasion. After the Burmese invasion, the girls were not safe and to protect them from any awkward situation, the purdah system was introduced in the Assamese society.

4.8.12: Women and the System of Purdah

Purdah system was unknown in the ancient and medieval Assamese society. The Assamese women were free to move and take equal shares in the agricultural works with the men folk in the society without covering their faces. Such literature were found to be absent in the medieval period in the other parts of India. The ancient Assamese society seems to be much liberated comparing to the medieval Assamese society. The Tezpur grant indicates that women even took their bath in the open.

Purdah was not found in the early part of the medieval Assamese society. In the picture of Queen Ambika, we never see her to wear a veil on her head. Purdah system was not found in the Assamese society in the beginning of the medieval period. The reason was that firstly, the Assamese society was highly influenced by the tribal women were given a large degree of freedom in every matter and they never wore veil or covered their heads. Secondly, purdah system was found to be introduced in the Indian society by the Mohammedans and Muslims rulers. The Muslims could not invade Assam for a longer period and that is why the purdah system was unknown for the women of Assam. But after the initiation of the Vaisnavite movement and rigidly practiced among the women of the Assamese Hindu society. The Vaisnavite initiator laid more stress for purdah system. The Vaisnava literature clearly says that the exposure of certain parts of the body of a woman is a sinful action. The KGC mentions that wife of one Harihar Ata crossing a little stream during a journey towards a relative's house drew her mekhela up to the knee in order to protect her dress from being wet. Her husband did not like such an exposure of her leg and as punishment; he did not regret to abandon her 409. According to proverbial saying, the exposition of limbs, face, breasts, etc., by women was considered to be a sign of an unchaste wife. Therefore a certain piece of cloth known as chadar or Khania or Cheleng or Karchipi was used by Assamese Hindu women to cover their whole body leaving only the eyes, the nose and the feet. The stress on purdah in the Assamese society certainly brought degradation in the position of women. The position of widows was much more dilapidated one. They were supposed to be a symbol of misfortune and their remarriage was not only condemned, but was also highly prohibited.

4.8.13: Status of widows

Widowhood was a curse for any Hindu women. After the death of her husband, she had only two paths to track on. One she had to sacrifice her life by immolating on the funeral of her husband by becoming a Sati. Another, she had to lead a life of piety and absolute abstinence. The treatment, which she received from the family and the society, was inhumane and humiliating. She was considered to be inauspicious and was not allowed to participate in any social function. Neither she could remarry nor could she lead a decent, honourable and independent life. She had to spend the rest of her life in a miserable condition. She was regarded as an unnecessary burden both on the family and the society. Burying them alive with their dead husbands was considered as the best way to get rid of their unholy presence.

4.8.14: Women and the System of Sati

The custom of the sacrifice of the widow on the funeral pyre of her husband was widely prevalent in the ancient times. But there was no direct evidence to show that it existed during the Vedic period. Neither Yajnavalkya nor the early Dharmashastra writers referred to the system at all. Schrader had pointed out that it was an Indo-European custom, but it underwent some changes in India in the age of the Vedas. Dr. A.S. Altekar commenting on one of the verses of AV opines that the widows were not burnt along with their dead husbands, but they were to follow some formalities of the archaic custom of Sati during their funeral rituals⁸⁸. The RV says that the widows ascended the funeral pyre, but before the pyre was consigned to flames, the new husband, usually the younger brother of the deceased brought her back from the funeral pyre to lead a new life and a prayer was offered for her to lead a prosperous life with her children. This symbolic Sati is also referred to in the AV. It was only in the latter part of the Mahabharata, which records only a few instances of the practice of self-immolation.

⁸⁸ Dr. A.S. Altekar, *The position of women in Hindu civilization*, p.118

The most important among them was that of Madri, the junior queen of the king Pandu, who cheerfully died with her husband eulogizing the virtues of such an act. But in her case, it was interesting to note that the assembled sages tried their best to dissuade her from her resolve. Madri, however, was impassive by their arguments. She stuck to her point by urging that firstly, she was the cause of the death of her husband. Secondly, she would be unable to control her passions and thirdly since she might find it difficult to treat evenly her sons and stepsons, so it was better to die with her husband⁴¹⁴. Another incident of Sati was recorded in the *Mausala-parvan* of *Mhb*, where Devaki, Bhadra, Rohini and Madira, the four wives of Vasudeva ascended his funeral pyre⁴¹⁵. But, other than a few cases of Sati, there were scores of instances of widows surviving their husbands after the great war of *Mahabharata*. Dr. Altekar points out that the custom was not in vogue up to c. 300 B.C. (except among the few tribes in the Punjab); after this a few stray cases were found to be recorded and from c. 400-700 A.D. the *smritis* began to advocate the practice.

But the custom, however, was not regarded as obligatory for the widows. It was left to the choice of the widows themselves, whether to follow their deceased husbands or to keep living in the world and regard ascetic life. But from about 700 A.D., the custom of Sati or *Anumarana* was regarded as a mandatory duty of the widows. The practice was highly applauded by some of the *Smriti* writers like Sankha, Parashara, Brihaspati, Harita, Angiras and Vyasa etc. according to Sankha a woman who becomes Sati with her dead husband directly enters with their husband in heaven and stays there for as many years as the number of hairs on a human body. Angiras argued that it was an obligatory religious duty of widows to follow her husband after his death. Harita maintained that the wife could purify her husband from the deadliest of sins, if she burns herself with his remains. The two will then happily reside in heaven for three and a half crores of years. The views advocated by these writers gradually began to produce some effect on society.

The insidious practice of Sati had however obtained the status of a Well-recognized practice of Hinduism in the entire India from 1000 A.D. The custom became firmly established by medieval period. It became a religious duty of the widows to ascend the funeral pyre of their husbands. The custom resulted in such a deep-rooted conviction in medieval times that sometimes betrothed but unmarried women insisted on becoming a Sati and burnt themselves at the funeral pyres of their would-be husbands.

But this pernicious practice, which was in vogue in entire India, could not establish its firm footing in the Assamese society. The custom was not much emphasized, so barring a few cases we do not get any evidence of Sati in the ancient and medieval sources. We come across a case of Sati in the ancient period, which was referred to in the Kuttanimatam a work of the eighth century Varman dynasty became Sati after the death of the King. Another instance of Sati was recorded in the Tripura chronicle, which state that the queens of Ratnamanikaya immolated themselves in the funeral pyre of their husbands. Other than these few cases we do not get any date of Sati. It seems that both the women in the above cases became Sati out of deep love for their beloved and they felt their life to be meaningless without their partners. And so it appears that for Assamese society, the practice was never a compulsion and got little importance.

Because Sati was the religion custom in the other parts of Indian, therefore women of the Assam, who were married to the king of their regions of Indian, had to follow the custom. Rukmini, the daughter of king Bhismak of Vidarbha was married to Krishna of Mathura

Kingdom. When the news of the death of her husband reached Hastinapur, she ascended the funeral pyre along with her other five co-wives. At about beginning of the 7th century A.D. a Nepalese queen, named Rajyavati, was also found to become Sati. This Rajyavati seemed to be the daughter of Harsavarman of Salastambha dynasty who was married to Nepal Lichchavi king Jayadeva II. Though the above-mentioned women were the daughters who belonged to the king of Pragyotisha-Kamarua, but they were bound to follow the customs of the land where they were, married off. But the cases of Sati in the land of Assam were very rare to find with.

4.8.15: Niyoga(marriage with the brother of husband)

We have already mentioned that Sati system came in vogue after 300 B.C. Before that a peculiar system known as Niyoga or Levirate was prevalent in ancient Indian society. According to this system, if a woman became widow her husband's brother or any near relative was permitted to go to her and consider her as his wife and perform the duty of her husband by raising children to her. But Niyoga was only permitted if the husband died without leaving any male issue. To die without a son was regarded as a great spiritual catastrophe because it was a general belief that the sonless man goes to hell and his ancestors' ghosts in the absence of a descendant, who could feed them with the pindas at the rites in their honour, were doomed to eternal hunger and misery.

The A Br. gives the same statement by saying that "a father in begetting a son pays off a debt which he owes to his ancestors and thus becomes entitled to the state of immortality. All the enjoyments, pleasures and blessing that exist in the universe, fall to the lot of one who is fortunate to see the face of a son". For this reason, if a man died without leaving any son, it became a sacred duty of the younger brother of the deceased person to beget a son on the wife of the latter to rescue him going to hell.

It should be noticed that the system of Niyoga was a sanctioned social institution and the sons born by the custom resembled a real son and therefore considered as legal heirs to the property of the deceased.

The system of Niyoga was a common practice, not only in the Vedic ages but also in the succeeding ages of the Sutra and Smriti literature. According to Gautama, a woman who desired offspring after the death of her husband could bear a son to her brother-in-law. For this, she must obtain permission of her Gurus and should have cohabited during the proper season only. In the absence of a brother-in-law, she could get offspring by cohabiting with a Sapinda or Sagotra relation. One of the reasons to prefer the younger brother for the purpose was to prevent any outside person to be the claimant of the family property as the widow inherited her husband's properties. Another reason to select the brother of the deceased person was that the son borne this cohabitation would be more blood related in comparison to the son borne from a stranger.

This system was formulated not only on the women after their husband's death but to these women also whose husbands were alive but were incapable of procreating children. In the Mhb, many cases of Niyoga were found during the existence of the husband. The practice was recognized as a legal device in the Mhb to get progeny. Thus Bhisma was requested by Satabhama to beget offspring on her daughter-in-law so as to continue her family lineage, as the son of Satabhama died in this young age.

It was said that due to the system of Niyoga, Jamadagnya Parashurama could not bring to an end of the Kshatriyas in spite of their slaughter. Similarly, Maharshi Vyasa was said to have begotten sons in the wives of Vichitravirya. Pandu, the father famous five Pandavas

of the Mhb himself allowed his wife Kunti to practice Niyoga to borne sons for him as Pandu was destitute of the power of procreation. Though the ancient lawgiver approved the custom of Niyoga but certain rules had to be followed by a woman who was desirous of getting a son by resorting to this expedient. To procure a son by the practice Ahoms after the death of the elder brother, the widow of the latter is kept by the younger brother as his wife. The Ahom king Laksmi Singha married Kuranganayani, the Manipuri queen of his elder brother Rajeswar Singha after the death of the latter. Therefore, it was the case of widow remarriage. Though the ancient lawmarkers legally sanctioned Niyoga but it went out of vogue after 600 A.D. due to the strong opposition of some Hindu refermers. Altekar points out that “it was a relic of barbarism and was quite incongruous and incompatible with higher ideas and ideals of marriage that was held before society”. The Hindu society disapproved the custom and found it to be detrimental for the mortality of both male and female. Therefore, a substitute for Niyoga was introduced in the form of widow remarriage.

In the Vedic society, the conception of marriage for women was considered as very sacred and it was permanent and unbreakable even after the death of the husbands. Manu repeatedly said that “A girl is given in marriage only once”. Yajnavalkya also had taken up exactly the same and believed that there was every danger of social structure being corrupted, if women were allowed to reunite themselves with men after their husbands’ death and opined that a maiden’s marriage could take place only once. Though the ancient lawgiver disapproved the widow remarriage but Manu sanctioned it for those young virgin girls who though formally married but were unknown about the consummation of their marriage.

The references of very few widow remarriages were found in the Vedic literature. The reason was perhaps the prevalence of the custom of Niyoga . We have already discussed that a woman could get as many as three sons by Niyoga. Therefore the Niyoga relationship practically amounted to a remarriage. But in the case of widowers, the rule was contradictory from the widows. The Vedas clearly permitted the men to remarry after the death of his wife. Manu commented, “Having given at the funeral, the sacred fire to his wife, who dies before him he may again and again kindle the fire”. Even the aged men and the father of several children were entitled to remarry. On the other hand, the women whose husband died were not only forbidden to remarry but also had to spend their rest here in rigorous austerity. But after the Vedic period, the society became a little liberal towards the widows, who were subsequently allowed to remarry.

4.9: Social Status Muslim Women

4.9.1: Emergence of the Muslims in Assam

It is during the beginning of the thirteenth century most probably in 1205/6, prior to the entry of the Ahoms in 1228, the Muslims had made their route through Kamrupa, the name of ancient Assam, while they had intended to proceed to Tibet region with the zeal of expansion of their missionary works with the help of military power. As a result of the battle took place with the king of Kamrupa, the Muslim king Bakhtiar uddin Khilji had to return, a good number of them remained in the region. It is a known fact that Muhammad Bakhtiyar uddin Khilji was accompanied by one ‘Ali Mech’⁸⁹, the first converted Muslim in the western part of Kamrupa. This shows that along with the first political contact of Assam with the Muslim powers, the Islamic faith found its way into the land.

⁸⁹ *Ali Mech, a chief of the local Mech tribe, who accepted Islam from Khilji and became his guide towards eastern invasions. This was perhaps the earliest instance of proselytisation which synchronised with their appearance on the border of Assam.*

It is after the defeat of Muhammad Ibn Bakhtiyar uddin Khilji in the hands of Vallavadeva⁹⁰, the 'Rae of kamrupa a good number of Muslim soldiers were captured as war captives. Later the king of Kamrupa paid them due hospitality, appointed them according to their choice and experience, married them to the local women and managed for their permanent settlement⁹¹. Thus with the Muslim invasions, the gateway for the Muslim settlements in Kamrupa was opened which received a deep momentum in course of time.

The Muslims, though could not establish their political supremacy over the region of Kamrupa as well as Assam, they continued their peaceful penetration, congenial interactions and gradually rooted throughout the whole course of time till today. Thus the entrance, growth and settlement of the Muslims ion the soil of Assam has been developed as a result of gradual and continuous process of invasions, conversions through peaceful penetration, infiltration and migration as well⁹², the beginning of which was started from the beginning of thirteenth century and continuing till date.

4.9.2 : The Conditions of Women before Islam

In those days before Islam, women were treated like slaves or property. Their personal consent concerning anything related to their well-being was considered important, to such a degree that they were never even treated as party to a marriage contract.

⁹⁰ Some historian try to identify the King as Prithu, but the exact reality is still a matter of deep research.

⁹¹ S.K.Bhuyan & M.K. Saikia, *Assam Muslim Relatiuons and their cultural significance*, P- 132.

⁹² Dewan, N.Q:, *Glimses of Sufusm in the Brahmaaputra Valley of Assam*, P-30.

Women were used for one purpose, and then discarded. They had no independence, could own no property and were not allowed to inherit. In times of war, women were treated as part of the prize. Simply put, their condition was unspeakable. In addition, the birth of a daughter in a family was not an occasion for rejoicing, but was regarded with humiliation. The practice of killing female children was uncontrolled. With the advent of Islam came the verse from the Quran condemning those who practiced female infanticide:

“And when the news of (the birth of) a female (child) is brought to any of them, his face becomes dark, and he is filled with inward grief! He hides himself from the people because of the evil of that whereof he has been informed. Shall he keep her with dishonor or bury her in the earth? Certainly, evil is their decision.” (An-Nahi 16:58-59)

And as part of a description of various events on the Day of Judgment, the Quran mentions:

“And when the female (infant) buried alive (as the pagan Arabs used to do) shall be questioned. For what sin she was killed? (At-Takwir 81:8-9)

Outside Arabia conditions for women were no better. In India, Egypt, and all European countries in the Dark Ages, women were treated worse than slaves. They were not regarded as human beings but as sort of a sub-species between humans and animals.

4.9.3 : Allah (SWT) Gave the Women Their Rights

The rights of Muslim women were given to us by Allah (SWT), who is All-Compassionate, All-Merciful, All-Just, All-Unbiased, All-Knowing and Most Wise. These rights, which were granted to women more than 1400 years ago, and were taught by the perfect example of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), were given by the one Who created us and Who alone knows what rights are best for our female natures. Allah (SWT) says in the Quran:

“O you who believe! You are forbidden to inherit women against their will, and you should not treat them with harshness, that you may take away part of the Mahr (bridal-money given by the husband to his wife at time of marriage) you have given them, unless they commit open illegal sexual intercourse. And live with them honorably. If you dislike them, it may be that you dislike a thing and Allah brings through it a great deal of good.”(An-Nisa 4:19)

The most basic right of a woman in Islam is the knowledge and recognition that she never has to ask or demand or fight for her rights which are guaranteed to her by Allah (SWT) Himself.

4.9.4 : Rights That Islam Gives to Women

Islam has given numbers of status and rights to both male and female counterparts of the society which are concisely mentioned in this chapter.

4.9.5 : Human Rights

Islam considers a woman to be equal to a man as a human being and as his partner in this life. Women have been created with a soul of the same nature as man's. Allah (SWT) says in the Quran:

“O mankind! Be dutiful to your Lord, Who created you from a single person (Adam), and from him (Adam) He created his wife (Eve), and from them both He created many men and women and fear Allah through Whom you demand your mutual (rights), and (do not cut the relations of) the wombs (kinship). Surely, Allah is Ever and All-Watcher over you.” (Al-Nisa 4:1).

And in the words of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) “Assuredly, women are the twin halves of men.” (Sahih reported by Abu-Dawud (RA) Islam does not blame Eve alone for the First Sin. The Quran makes it very clear that both Adam and Eve were tempted, that they both sinned and were both forgiven after their repentance. Allah (SWT) says in the Quran:

“Then Satan whispered suggestion to them both in order to uncover that which was hidden from them of their private parts (before): he said: “Your Lord did not forbid you this tree save you should become angels or become of the immortals.” And he (Satan) swore by Allah to them both (saying): “Verily, I am one of the sincere well-wishers for you both. “ So he misled them with deception. Then when they tasted of the tree, that which was hidden from them of their shame (privated parts) became manifest to them and they began to stick together the leaves of Paradise over themselves (in order to cover their shame). And their Lord called out to them (saying): “Did I not forbid you that tree and tell you: Verily, Satan is an open enemy unto you?” They said: “Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves. If you forgive us not, and bestow not open us Your Mercy, we shall certainly be of the losers. “ (Allah) said: “Get down, one of you an enemy to the other (i.e.Adam, Eve, and Satan,etc.). On earth will be a dwelling-place for you and an enjoyment, - for a time. “He said: “Therein you shall live, and therein you shall die, and from it you shall be brought out (i.e.resurrected).” (Al-A’raf 7:20-25)

In Islamic law a woman is an independent, unique individual in her own right. She has the same responsibilities towards herself, towards Allah (SWT) and towards other human beings as the male, and will be punished or rewarded in the Hereafter without discrimination towards her female gender.

4.9.6: Civil Rights

There is no compulsion in religion according to the Quran: “There is no compulsion in religion Verily, the Right Path has become distinct from the wrong path.

Whoever disbelieves in taghut [anything worshipped other than the Real God (Allah)] and believes in Allah, then he has grasped the most trustworthy handhold that will never break. And Allah is All-hearer, All-Knower.”⁹³

A Muslim woman is not permitted to change her family name to her husband’s name upon marriage. She is always known by her father’s name, as a mark of her own identity. In choosing a marriage partner, her consent to accept or reject any prospective suitor for marriage must be respected. A Muslim woman has the right to seek divorce, if necessary within the laws of Islam.

4.9.7: Muslim Women Have the Right to Go Outside of Her Home

Muslim women are not forbidden from going out in the community, working, or visiting relatives and female friends, if there is no objection from their guardian/ husband and they are covered and behave and speak according to Islamic guidelines and, if necessary, escorted by their Mahram (a close male relative). However, a woman’s home should be the main base that she works from. Allah (SWT) instructed the wife’s of the Prophet (SAW):

“O wives of the Prophet! You are not like any other women. If you keep your duty (to Allah), then be not soft in speech, lest he is whose heart is a disease (of hypocrisy or evil desire for adultery, etc.) should be moved with desire, but speak in an honorable manner. And stay in your houses, and do not display yourselves like that of the times of ignorance, and offer prayers perfectly (Iqamat-as-Salat), and give Zakat and obey Allah and His Messenger. Allah wishes only to remove Ar-Rijs (evil deeds and sins, etc.) from you, O members of the family [of the Prophet (SAW)], and to purify you with a thorough purification.” (Al-Ahzab 33:32- 33)

⁹³ *Al-Baqarah* 2:256.

4.9.8: Islam Gives Men and Women Equal Rights

In reality, and in Islam, the rights and responsibilities of a woman are equal to those of man, but they are not necessarily identical with them. Equality and sameness are two very different things. I think you'll agree that, for one thing, women and men are physically very different from one another, although they are equal to each other in other important ways.

In the West, women may be doing the same job that men do, but their wages are often less. The rights of Western women in modern times were not created voluntarily, or out of kindness to female. The modern Western woman reached her present position by force, and not through natural processes or mutual consent of Divine teachings. She had to force her way, and various circumstances aided her. Shortage of manpower during wars, pressure of economic needs and requirement of industry forced women to leave their homes to work, struggling for their livelihood, to appear equal to men. Whether all women are sincerely pleased with these circumstances, and whether they are happy and satisfied with the results, is a different matter. But the fact remains that whatever rights modern Western women have, they fall short of those of her Muslim counterpart! Islam has given women what duties her female nature. It gives her full security and protects her against becoming what Western modern women themselves complain against: a "mere sex object."

4.9.10: The Social Aspect of Women in Islam:

4.9.13: As a Mother:

(1) The Quran elevates kindness to parents (especially mothers) to a status second to the worship of God:

Your Lord has commanded that you worship none but Him, and that you be kind to your parents. If one of them or both of them reach old age with you, do not say to them a word of disrespect, or scold them, but say a generous word to them. And act humbly to them in mercy, and say, “ My Lord, have mercy on them, since they cared for me when I was small.”⁹⁴

(2) Naturally, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) specified this behavior for his followers, rendering to mothers an unequalled status in human relationships. A man came to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and said, “O Messenger of God! Who among the people is most worthy of my good companionship?” The Prophet (pbuh) said: {Your mother.} The man said, “Then who?” The Prophet (pbuh) said: {Then your mother.} The man further asked, “Then who?” The Prophet (pbuh) said: {Then your mother.} The man asked again, “Then who?” The Prophet (pbuh) said: {Then your father.}

4.9.12: As a Sister in Faith (In General):

(1) According to the Prophet Muhammad’s (pbuh) sayings: { women are but shaqa’iq (twin halves or sisters) of men.} This saying is a profound statement that directly relates to the issue of human equality between the genders. If the first meaning of the Arabic word shaqa’iq, “twin halves,” is adopted, it means that the male is worth one half (of society), while the female is worth the other half. If the second meaning, “sisters,” is adopted, it implies the same.

(2) The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) taught kindness, care, and respect toward women in general: { I commend you to be good to women.} it is significant that such instruction of the Prophet was among his final instruction and reminders in the farewell pilgrimage address given shortly before his passing away.

⁹⁴ *Quran*, 17:23-24, see also 31:14, 46:15, and 29:8

(3) Modesty and social interaction: The parameters of proper modesty for males and females (dress and behavior) are based on revelatory sources (the Quran and prophetic sayings) and, as such, are regarded by believing men and women as divinely-based guidelines with legitimate aims and divine wisdom behind them. They are not male-imposed or socially imposed restriction. It is interesting to know that even the Bible encourages women to cover their head: If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off: and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head.”

4.9.13: As a Daughter

The Quran ended the cruel practice of female infanticide, which was before Islam. God has said: and when the girl (who was) buried alive is asked, for what sin she was killed⁹⁵. The Quran went further to rebuke the unwelcoming attitude of some parents upon hearing the news of the birth of a baby girl, instead of a baby boy. God has said: and when one of them is informed of (the birth of) a female, his face becomes dark, and he suppresses grief. He hides himself from the people because of the ill of which he has been informed. Should he keep it in humiliation or bury it in the ground? Certainly, evil is what they decide⁹⁶.

Parents are duty-bound to support and show kindness and justice to their daughters. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said: Whosoever supports two daughters until they mature, he and I will come on the Day of Judgment as this (he pointed with his fingers held together). A crucial aspect in the upbringing of daughters that greatly influences their future is education. Education is not only a right but a responsibility for all males and females. The Prophet

⁹⁵ *Quran*, 81:8-9

⁹⁶ *Quran* 16:58-59

Muhammad (pbuh) said: Seeking knowledge is mandatory for every Muslim. The word “Muslim” here is inclusive of both males and females.

Islam neither requires nor encourages female circumcision. And while it is maybe practiced by some Muslims in certain parts of Africa, it is also practiced by other peoples, including Christians, in those places, a reflection merely of the local customs and practices there.

4.9.14: As a Wife

“Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend (to support them) from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient (to Allah and to their husbands), and guard in the husband’s absence what Allah orders them to guard (e.g. their chastity, their husband’s property, etc)...”⁹⁷

4.9.15: Mahr (Dowry)

In Islam the man presents his wife with a dowry they have mutually agreed upon, at the time of marriage. The amount varies according to his means and generosity, and his wife has the right to spend, save or remit any part of it. Allah (SWT) says in the Quran:

“And give to the women (whom you marry) their Mahr (obligatory bridal –money given by the husband to his wife at the time of marriage) with a good heart, but if they, of their own good pleasure, remit any part of it to you, take it, and enjoy it without fear of any harm (as Allah has made it lawful)”⁹⁸.

But unfortunately in the Muslim families of Assam it has been observed that in the marriages the practice of dowry is seen where the girl’s father has to pay dowry to the

⁹⁷ *An-Nisa*’ 4:34.

⁹⁸ *An-Nisa*’4:4.

bride. As per Muhar theoretical existence is there, in every marriage provision of fixing ‘mahr’ is seen but in practice is not paid by the husband to the wife.

4.9.16: Maintenance

Women have been entrusted by Allah (SWT) with the task of providing a peaceful, comfortable home environment for the breadwinner who works for their provisions outside the home all day long.

It is one of extraordinary beauties of Islam that by entrusting the male to the position of protector and provider, it frees the woman, who is burdened with the long cycle of bearing, giving birth to, nursing and raising children, from having to assume the extra burden of her own and her children’s support, which is unjust and a tremendous hardship.

While a woman must obey her husband, as long as he does not ask anything forbidden of her, and guard his possessions while he is away from the house, and handle his money as he wishes, she must also be faithful, trustworthy and honest. A wife is regarded as a source of love, peace and compassion, as stated in the Quran:

“And among His Signs is this, that He created for you wives from among yourselves, that you may find repose in them, and He has put between you affection and mercy. Verily, in that are indeed signs for a people who reflect.”⁹⁹

“...But the father of the child shall bear the cost of the mother’s food and clothing on a reasonable basis. No person shall have a burden laid on him greater than he can bear...”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ *Ar-Rum* 30:21.

¹⁰⁰ *Al-baqarah* 2:233.

“o Messenger of Allah (SAW), what right can a wife demand of her husband?’ He replied, ‘That you should give her food when you eat, clothe her when you clothe yourself, not strike her on the face, and do not insult her or separate from her except in the house.’¹⁰¹

“A woman came to the Prophet (SAW) complaining of her husband, ‘Messenger of Allah (SAW), Abu Sufyan is a niggardly man who does not give me and my son enough; except what I take from him without his knowledge.’ He replied, ‘Take what is enough for you and your son according to what is ma’roof (well-known your society).’¹⁰² In the Muslim families of Assam the provision of maintenance of the spouses were born by the husbands in good condition as they are the centre point of a family.

4.9.17: Good Treatment, Consideration and Companionship

Allah (SWT) instructs men that they must be compassionate and kind to their wives:

“...They are Libas [i.e. body cover, or screen or Sakah, (i.e. you enjoy the pleasure of living with her as in Verse 7:189) Tafsir At-Tabari], for you and your are the same for them”¹⁰³

“It is He Who has created you from a single person (Adam), and (then) He has created from him his wife (Eve), in order that he might enjoy the pleasure of living with her...”¹⁰⁴

This meaning that a wife and a husband are meant for mutual, support, mutual comfort, and mutual protection of each other.

¹⁰¹ Reported by Ahmad, *Ibn Majah and Dawud*.

¹⁰² Reported by *Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

¹⁰³ *Al Baqarah 2:187*.

¹⁰⁴ (*Al-A'raf 7:189*)

The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) also emphasized the importance of this compassionate treatment:

“I command you to treat women kindly. Woman has been created from a rib (the rib is crooked), and the most crooked part of the rib is the upper region. If you try to make it straight you will break it, and if you leave it as it is, it will remain curved. So treat women kindly¹⁰⁵.” Prophet Muhammad (SAW) also said:

“The best of you are those who are best to the women.” (Sahih At-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah and Al-Jami Al-Saker)

The best husband is one who provides her with true leadership without harshness, or laxness, and who does not misuse his authority and strength. Even if the behavior of a wife should become hard to live with (for she may not always be strong health and of cheery disposition), the man is asked to be patient and kind to her. Allah (SWT) says:

“O you who believe! You are forbidden to inherit women against their will, and you should not treat them with harshness, that you may take away part of the mahir (dowry, bridal-money given by the husband to his wife at the time of marriage) you have given them, unless they commit open illegal sexual intercourse. And live with them honorably. If you dislike them, it may be that you dislike a thing and Allah brings through it a great deal of good.”¹⁰⁶

A wife has the right to her husband’s attention, companionship and time. The husband should try to please and make her happy, taking into consideration her needs, wishes, likes and dislikes, and making time for relaxation and recreation together.

¹⁰⁵Reported by *Al-Bukhari*

¹⁰⁶*An-Nisa* 4:19.

Prophet Muhammad (Saw) said, “Among the Muslims, the most perfect as regards his faith is the one whose character is most excellent, and the best among you are those who treat their wives well.”¹⁰⁷

“A believer must not hate a believing woman; if he dislikes one of her characteristics he will be pleased with another.”¹⁰⁸

“Woman has been created from a rib and in no way will be straight for you; so if you enjoy her you will do so while crookedness remains in her; but if you try to straighten her you will break her; breaking her being divorcing her.”¹⁰⁹

In the Muslim societies of Assam, women enjoyed a very congenial treatment. They were not completely guided by the Islamic tenants but they were guided with the local traditions.

4.9.18:Rape

According to the sunnah, a woman should not be punished for having been coerced into having sex ¹¹⁰. This attitude towards rape is discussed in the following hadith:

During the time of Muhammad punishment was inflicted on the rapist on the solitary evidence of the woman who was raped by him. Wa'il ibn Hujr reports of an incident when a woman was raped. Later, when some people came by, she identified and accused the man of raping her. They seized him and brought him to Allah,s messenger, who said to the woman, “Go away, for Allah has forgiven you,” but of the man who had raped her, he said,

¹⁰⁷ *At-Tirmidhi*

¹⁰⁸ *Sahih Muslim*

¹⁰⁹ *Sahih Muslim*

¹¹⁰ *Rape in Islam*”.

Muslimaccess.com.http://muslimaccess.com/articles/women/rape_in_islam.asp.Retrieved 2012-11-07

“Stone him to death.” (Tirmidhi and Abu Dawud)¹¹¹. According to a Sunni hadith, the punishment for committing rape is death, there is no blame attached to the victim¹¹².

According to Al-Mawardi, an 11th century specialist in Islamic jurisprudence (Sharia), if either the victim or a witness kills the perpetrator of rape during the crime, in order to prevent furthering the violence of the act, the killing is permissible and is exempt from the laws of murder and killing¹¹³.

4.9.19: Marriage and sexuality

In contrast to the Western world where divorce was relatively uncommon until modern times, and in contrast to the low rates of divorce in the modern Middle East, divorce was a more common occurrence in certain states of the late medieval Muslim world. In the Mamluk Sultanate and Ottoman Empire, the rate of divorce was higher than it is today in the modern Middle East¹¹⁴. The Quran is explicit in addressing *zawaj al-hall*, or a disrupted marriage, where a man intends to remarry a former wife for a second time; (2:230) indicates that for the second marriage to be lawful for the former husband, the former wife must have been remarried during the intervening time to a second man since the renunciation of the previous marriage. The intention behind this Quran passage was to end abuses of the right to marital renunciation dating from ancient customs¹¹⁵.

In medieval Egypt, Al-Sakhawi recorded the marital history of 500 women, the largest sample of married women in the Middle Ages, and found that at least a

¹¹¹ According to Ibn Qudamah, “*This is the view of Omar*

¹¹² *Sunan Abu Dawud Sunan Abu Dawood*, 38:4366.

¹¹³ *Reliance of the Traveller*, o7.3, p. 595

¹¹⁴ Rapoport, Yossef (2005). *Marriage, Money and Divorce in Medieval Islamic Society*. Cambridge University Press. p.2. ISBN 052184715X

¹¹⁵ Chebel, Malek (2009). *L’islam expliquée par Malek Chabel Perrin*. p.113. ISBN 9782262029821.

Third of all women in the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt and Syria married more than once, with many marrying three or more times. According to Al-Sakhawi, as many as three out of ten marriages in 15th century Cairo ended in divorce¹¹⁶. In the early 20th century, some villages in western Java and the Malay Peninsula had divorce rates as high as 70%.

4.9.20: Who may be married?

Marriage customs vary in Muslim dominated countries. Cultural customs are sometimes implemented under the cover of Islam. However Islamic law allows limited polygyny under certain conditions.

According to Islamic law (sharia), marriage cannot be forced.

Islamic jurists have traditionally held that Muslim women may only enter into marriage with Muslim men¹¹⁷, Evidence for this is the verse 2:221 where it speaks of not marrying Muslim women off to non-Muslim men. Another piece of evidence is a woman at the time of the Prophet Ramla bint Abi Sufyan who's husband converted to Christianity, which made the marriage void. On the other hand, the Quran allows Muslim men to marry women of the People of the Book, a term which includes Jews and Christians, but they must be chaste. However, fiqh law has held that it is makruh (reprehensible, though not outright forbidden) for a Muslim man to marry a non-Muslim woman in a non-Muslim country. Notable scholar Bilal Philips has said the verse that permits Muslim men to marry non-Muslim women is not valid anymore today due to several reasons including its misunderstood interpretation¹¹⁸. One explanation for marriage restrictions that they are pursuant to the principle that Muslims may -

¹¹⁶Rapoport, Yossef (2005). *Marriage, Money and Divorce in Medieval Islamic Society*. Cambridge University Press. pp. 5-6. ISBN 052184715X

¹¹⁷ *On Christian Men marrying Muslim Women*

¹¹⁸ "Marriage to Non Muslim- Contemporary Issues- Bilal Philips". *You tube*. 2006-12-14. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7b0A3baf2dg>. Retrieved 2012-11-07.

Not place themselves in a position inferior to that of the followers of other religions¹¹⁹.

The Caliph Umar, whom Muslims consider one of the ‘rightly guided’, openly banned interfaith marriage to non-Muslim women saying “If everyone were to make use of this provision who would marry Muslim girls?”¹²⁰

Sheikh Ahmad Kutty, a senior scholar from Toronto, has voiced his disapproval of interfaith marriage, citing the Caliph Umar’s statement¹²¹

Marriage within some predominantly Muslim countries still retains practices from pre-Islamic times. Endogamy, virilocality and polygyny are common in some Islamic countries. Everywhere, however, polygamy is outlawed or restricted by new family codes, for example the Moudawwana in Morocco.

4.9.21: Polygamy & polyandry

Polygamy is permitted under restricted condition¹²², but it is not widespread¹²³. However, it is strongly discouraged in the Quran, which says, ‘do justice to them all, but you won’t be able to, so don’t fall for one totally while ignoring other wife(wives)’. This also must be taken in historical context, as this was actually a restriction on the number of wives men of the Arabian tribes can take. Sometimes Pre-Islamic men could have up to eight wives. Women are not allowed to engage in polyandry, whereas men are allowed to engage in polygyny.

¹¹⁹friedmann (2003), p.162

¹²⁰ “*Marriage to a Christian Woman: Unrestrictedly Permitted?- Marriage-counsels*”.

¹²¹<http://www.onislam.net/English/ask-the-scholar/family/marriage/174258-marriage-to-a-christian-woman-unrestrictedly-permitted.html>

¹²² Ghamidi, Mizan, *The Social Law of Islam*.

¹²³ *The New Encyclopedia of Islam* (2002), Alta Mira Press. ISBN 0-7591-0189-2. p.477

A marriage of pleasure, where a man pays a sum of money to a woman or her family in exchange for a temporary spousal relationship, is an ancient practise that has been revived in Iraq in recent years. Its practitioners cite Sharia law as permitting the practice. Women's rights groups have condemned it as a form of legalized prostitution.¹²⁴

4.9.22: Behaviour within marriage

The Quran considers the love between men and women to be a Sign of God¹²⁵. Husbands are asked to be kind to their wives and wives are asked to be kind to their husbands. The Quran also encourages discussion and mutual agreement in family decisions although the man's decision is to be the final one.^[61]

Muslim scholars have adopted differing interpretations of An-Nisa, 34, a Sura of the Quran. In the event where a woman disagrees with her husband's decision "(sometimes referred to using the inherently pejorative word, 'rebel') Muslim scholars disagree on what is prescribed by the Sura. According to most interpretations, physical violence towards the woman is acceptable. This is described as given a right to a husband to "lightly" beat his spouse. This is disputed by a minority of scholars who contend that the expression used alludes to temporary physical separation¹²⁶.

4.9.23: Sexuality

Some scholars hold that Islam enjoins sexual pleasure within marriage; for better understanding Asra Nomani's polemic "Islamic Bill of Rights for Women in the Bedroom". Some examples of this influence are set out below.

¹²⁴ Jervis, Rick. "Pleasure marriages regain popularity in Iraq". USA

Today. http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/Iraq/2005-05-04-pleasure-marriage_x.htm. Retrieved September 3, 2011.

¹²⁵ [Quran 30:21]

¹²⁶ An-Nisa, 34#i.E1.B8.8Drib.C5.ABhunna, Wikipedia page for An-Nisa.

Also (prohibited are) women already married, except those whom your right hands possess: Thus hath Allah ordained (Prohibitions) against you: Except for these, all others are lawful, provided ye seek (them in marriage) with gifts from your Property,-desiring chastity, not lust, seeing that ye derive benefit from them, give them their dowers (at least) as prescribed; but if, after a dower is prescribed, agree Mutually (to vary it),there is no blame on you, and Allah is All-knowing, All- wise¹²⁷.

The Believers must (eventually) win through-those who humble themselves in their prayers; who avoid vain talk; who are active in deeds charity; who abstain from sex; except with those joined to them in the marriage bond, or (the captives) whom their right hands possess---for (in their case) they are free from blame¹²⁸.

Prophet! We have made lawful to thee thy wives to whom thou hast paid their dowers; and those whom thy right hand possesses out of the prisoners of war whom Allah has assigned to thee...¹²⁹

Not so those devoted to Prayer---those who remain steadfast to their prayer; and those in whose wealth is a recognized right for the (needy) who asks and him who is prevented (for some reason from asking); and those who hold to the truth of the Day of Judgement; and those who fear the displeasure of their Lord---for their Lord's displeasure is the opposite of Peace and Tranquillity---and those who guard their chastity, except with their wives and the (captives) whom their right hands possess---for (then) they are not to be blamed. ¹³⁰

A high value is placed on female chastity (not to be confused with celibacy).To protect women from accusations of unchaste behavior, the scripture lays down severe punishments

¹²⁷ (*Quran 4:24*)

¹²⁸(*Quran 23:1-6*)

¹²⁹ (*Quran33:50—O*)

¹³⁰ (*Quran70:22-30*)

towards those who make allegations about a woman's chastity. However, in some societies, an accusation is rarely questioned and the woman is accused rarely has a chance to defend herself in a fair and just manner.

Female genital mutilation has been erroneously associated with Islam. In fact it is practiced predominantly in parts of Africa, the Middle East and Asia where in certain areas it has acquired a religious dimension due to the justification that the practise is used to ensure female chastity¹³¹. A UNICEF study of fourteen African countries found no correlation between religion and prevalence of female genital mutilation¹³². In Mauritania, where "health campaigners estimate that more than 70 percent of Mauritanian girls undergo the partial or total removal of their external genitalia for non-medical reasons". 34 Islamic scholars signed a fatwa banning the practice in January 2010. Their aim was to prevent people from citing religion as a justification for genital mutilation. The authors cited the work of Islamic legal expert Ibn al-Hajj as support for their assertion that "[s]uch practices were not present in the Maghreb countries over the past centuries". FGM is "not an instinctive habit, according to the Malikis; therefore, it was abandoned in northern and western regions of the country." Added the authors¹³³.

4.9.24: Birth control

Islam, as the pre-Islamic Arabic culture before it, is natalist, and promotes the birth of as many children as a Muslim couple can produce. However, under certain circumstances, it is permissible according to Islamic doctrine to limit (tahdid an-nasl) or at least control ('azl)

¹³¹Mohd.Salih al-Munajjid (Hafizullah) (Unknown). *"Is there any saheeh hadith about the circumciusion of females?"*.

¹³²UNICEF. *"Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting:A Statistical Exploration."* Unicef.org,2005..

¹³³"Mauritania fatwa bans female genital mutilation", BBC, January 18, 2010.

reproduction, without seffering the fate of a penalty for the gesture. Limiting the number of children is recommended when a family lacks the resources to provide for them. General opinions among Muslims can sometimes be lenient with women who, being weakened, seek to end an unwanted pregnancy, particularly if her health is endangered or if she has given birth many times. These conditions were supplemented in the writings of Al-Ghazzali (1058-1111), with the clause, “if the woman fears for her beauty” (“ida khafat al-mar’a ‘ala jamaliha”). However, these permissive attitudes are contrary to some teaching of current Islamic theologians. Abortion (isqat al-ham or ijhadh) is not outlawed in itself, on the condition that the embryo is less than 120 days in gestation, the point at which Muslim teaching considers the pregnancy to have progressed too far for an abortion to be permissible¹³⁴.

4.9.25: Divorce

In Islam, in some circumstances, a woman can initiate a divorce. According to Sharia Law, a woman can file a case in the courts for a divorce in a process called Khal’a, meaning “release from”. However, under most Islamic schools of jurisprudence, boh partners must unanimously agree to the divorce in order for it to be granted. To prevent irrational decisions and for the sake of the family’s stability’ Islam enjoins that both parties observe a waiting period (of roughly three months) before the divorce is finalized.¹³⁵

Sharia Law states that divorce has to be confirmed on three separate occasions and not, as is commonly believed, simply three times at once. The first two instances the woman and the man are still in legal marriage. The third occasion of pronouncing divorce in the presence of the woman, the man is no longer legally the husband and therefore has to leave the house. The purpose of this procedure of divorce in Islam is to encourage reconiliation

¹³⁴Chebel, Malek (2009). *L’islam explique par Malek Chabel. Perrin*. pp. 204- 5. ISBN 97822

¹³⁵ *The position of women in Islam* by Dr. Jamal A. Badawi – *Islamic Dawah Centre International* – Page 11

where possible. Even after divorce, the woman should wait three monthly cycles during which her husband remains responsible for her and her children's welfare and maintenance. He is not permitted to drive her out of the house. This process may leave the woman destitute should her family not take her back or the ex-husband fail to support her and possibly his children.

After the third pronouncement they are not allowed to get back together as husband and wife, unless first the wife is divorced in another lawful and fully consummated marriage. This rule was made to discourage men from easily using the verbal declaration of divorce by knowing that after the third time there will be no way to return to the wife and thus encourage men's tolerance and patience.

Usually, assuming her husband demands a divorce, the divorced wife keeps her mahr (dowry), both the original gift and any supplementary property specified in the marriage contract. She is also given child support until the age of weaning, at which point the child's custody will be settled by the couple or by the courts.

In actual practice and outside of Islamic judicial theory, a woman's right to divorce is often extremely limited compared with that of men in the Middle East¹³⁶. While men can divorce their wives easily, women face many legal and financial obstacles. In practice in most of the Muslim world today divorce can be quite involved as there may be separate secular procedures to follow as well.

In some instances, a Sharia court may pronounce a marriage dissolved as a punitive measure against a woman who they have deemed to be haram, or sinful. In a 2005 case in India, a Muslim woman named Imrana turned to a Sharia court to complain of being raped by her father-in-law, Ali Mohammed, and her marriage was dissolved by the court on these grounds. Although India is a secular country, Muslim communities in rural India generally

¹³⁶ Joseph and Najmabadi,p99

make use of the Sharia judicial system rather than the secular one. The Sharia verdict was upheld by the Indian Muslim seminary Darul ul Uloom Madrasa, which issued a *fatwah* in support of it. The All India Muslim personal Law Board, consisting of 41 Muslim scholars, also upheld the verdict. In this instance, Imrana refused to accept the verdict of the Sharia court. Her case was heard in a secular court, which resulted in Ali Mohammed receiving an eight-year sentence and a fine.¹³⁷

4.10: Social Status of Tribal Women

Assam has always been experience as the land heterogeneous racial strains and cultures of both hills and plains people. The land is considered by the anthropologists and sociologist as a paradise from its colourful variety of castes and tribal population¹³⁸. According to Kailas Sharma¹³⁹, Assam is a museum of a large number of human species ever found on earth. Assam is situated in “ one of the great migration routes of mankind¹⁴⁰. Since time immemorial people of different ethnic groups from various parts of the world while migrating through this land at different periods and different routes left their substratum in both the hills and plains of the region. In course of time Assam has become a melting pot where races as diverse as the Indo-Burmese, Indo-Tibetan, Mongolian, Negroid. Aryans et. Drawn from diverse hives at different points of time were blended and shaped into the vivid Assamese people. No wonder, such perfect fusion of culture and heritage of her numerous races, tribes and sub tribes gave birth to Assamese culture rich tapestry woven with multicolored yarns of distinct heritages, traditions, lifestyles, faiths and beliefs. Earlier the name ‘Assam’ represented a vast area.

¹³⁷ “*Muslim women in India seek secular justice*”.

<http://www.womemsnews.org>. <http://www.womensenews.org/story/090116/muslim-women-in-india-seek-secular-justice>. Retrieved September 4, 2011.

¹³⁸ Sipra Sen, *Tribes and castes of Assam*. p.25

¹³⁹ Seminar NEICSSR, August, 1994

¹⁴⁰ J.H. Mills, *Assam Review*, March, 1928, P-24

The area of Assam was almost one-third times bigger of its present area. Till 1962, the entire Northeast India, which now represents seven different states, was known as Assam (except former princely states of Manipur and Tripura). In gigantic area of Assam, a huge number of tribal populations inhabited. These tribes drifted to this region at different intervals of time and settled in various provinces of this land several hundred years ago. It is very difficult at the present juncture to make presumption about the foremost settler of this region. But one thing is clear that the successive immigrant had merged up with the early settlers. The different tribes were discernible from each other. Not only this socio- cultural traditions and dialects, which varied from each other. Not only this the different tribes were secluded from each other for several hundred years due to lack of interaction among them. But one affinity found in the tribal population of Northeast India is that they belong to the similar bigger ethnic group known as Indo-Mongoloid.¹⁴¹ The Indo-Mongoloids were referred to as the Kiratas by the Vedic Aryans.¹⁴² The Mongoloids are characterized¹⁴³ by yellow or yellow brown skin colour, and black stretched or flat wavy and coarse head hair, their eyes are black or dark – brown in colour.

The eye-slit is oblique. One of the typical characteristic of the Mongoloid is the presence of Mongolian fold in their eyes. Their face is broad and zygomatic arches are very prominent. Another important feature is scanty growth of facial and body hairs. It is very important to note that the non-tribal plainsmen of Northeast India are mostly of Caucasoid origin that also migrated to this region long past.

¹⁴¹ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol.2,1977, p-208, cited in P.C. Choudhury, *The history of civilization of the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.* P.83.

¹⁴² B.M. Das. *Some aspects of physical anthropology of the tribes of Northeast India*. In *the Tribes of North East India*, edited by S. Karoteprel.pp.43 – 44.

¹⁴³ B.M Das, *Some aspectsof physical anthropology of the tribes of Northeast India. In the Tribes of North East India*, edited by S. Karoteprel.pp.44.

Therefore undoubtedly, it can be said that certain Caucasoid ethnic strains have mixed into the tribal populations of Northeast India, particularly in those tribes, who are living in the plains and in neighboring areas of the non-tribal populations due to protracted contact between them through intermarriages and assimilation¹⁴⁴. In certain areas the intermingling between the Mongoloid and the Caucasoid populations had taken place to such an extent that it was very difficult to distinguish one from the other. It is said that Indo-Mongoloid tribes of Northeast India were actually the settlers of Northwest China near the Hwang-Ho and the Yangtze Kiang rivers, where from they migrated southward. Somewhere in North Burma the group became diversified. One group migrated westward along the sub-Himalayan ranges. Another group entered the Brshmsputra valley by the North-eastern route, while one more group moved southwards to reach as far as Southeast Asia. Linguistically, the Indo-Mongoloid populations of Northeast India belong to the Sino-Tibetan linguistic family¹⁴⁵. This family has been divided into two broad branches-Tibeto-Burman and Siamese -Chinese. One of the sub-divisions of the Siamese-Chinese branch is Thai.

The Ahom, Khampti, Khamyang, Aiton, Phakial, Turung, etc. living in different parts of Northeast India speak languages belonging to this Thai sub-division. Except the Khasi and the pnar, the other Indo-Mongoloids of Northeast India speak language of Tibeto-Burman branch. Again, the Tiberto- Burman language group is divided into two sub-branches-North Assam and Assam-Burmese branch. The tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and some tribes of Assam speak the languages of North Assam branch. Mention may be made of the tribes

¹⁴⁴B.M Das, 'Some aspects of Physical anthropology of the tribes of Northeast India'. In *the tribes of North East India*, edited by S. Karotemprel p.44

¹⁴⁵ G.A Grierson, *Lingustic Survey of India*, Vol.1. part 1 p-41

like Adi, Aka, Mishng, Nishi (Dafala), Mishmi, Miri and Abar etc. The Assam-Burmese branch, another sub division of Tibeto Burman has been divided into many groups and sub-groups. The are : ; 1) the Naga dialects-Ao, Angami, Sema,, Tangkhul, Sangtam, Konyak, Lotha, Mao and Kabui, etc. ii)the Bodo speeches-Bodo, Mech, Rabha, Garo Kachari, Tipra and few more, iii) the Kuki Chin speeches of Manipur, Tripura and Mizoram, the most important of which is Meitei or Manipur which is quite and advanced literary speech¹⁴⁶. Apart from the other tribes of the region, Khasis with their sub-groups speak dialect of the Mon-Khmer linguistic group of the Austro-Asiatic language family. The present homeland of the Khasis is the state of Meghalaya. The Indo-Mongoloid tribes of Northeast India had been broadly grouped into six categories on the basis of few aspects like linguistic affinities, cultural parit, biological variations and geographical setting¹⁴⁷. These six groups are Arunachal tribes.

- 2) Nagas,
- 3) Bodos,
- 4) Lushai-Kukis
- 5) Khasis and Others.

All these various group of indigenous tribes are presently scattered in the entire northeastern region. A large number of Mongolian tribal population got refuge in Arunachal Pradesh. The major tribal communities are the Monpas, Sherdukpens, Akas, Khowas, Mijis, Bangnis, Hill Miris, Tagins and Nas of Upper and Lower Subansiri Districts; Adis, Membas, Khambas, Bangros, Chakmas, Deoris, Khamptis, Khamiyanges Mishmis, Noctes, Singphos, Tangsas and Wanchos etc. Some of these major tribes are

¹⁴⁶ B.M. Das, *Some aspects of Physical anthropology of the tribes of Northeast India*. In *the Tribes of North East India*, edited by S. Karotempel. P.47.

¹⁴⁷ B.M. Das, *Some aspects of Physical anthropology of the tribes of Northeast India*. In *the Tribes of North East India*, edited by S. Karotempel. P.47.

further divided into sub-tribes mainly on the basis of dialectical differences. Each tribe has a distinctive culture, customs language and traditions of their own.

The cultural similitude is found among the Mishings of Assam plains and the Adi tribes of Arunachal, whereas some of the customs of Naga tribes are found among the Noctes and Wanchos¹⁴⁸. Broadly, the term 'Naga' is a generic name for a group of tribes occupying the land of Nagaland, northern Manipur and bordering districts of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Of the main Naga tribes mention may be made of Angami, Sema, Rengma, Ao, Lotha, Chang, Konyak, Chakesang, Khiangnan, Phom, Sangtam, Yimchungre, Zeliang, Pochury, and Kabul. A large number of cultural and dialectal disparities among the various Naga groups and sub-groups are found to exist. These dissimilarities can be seen in their physical features, culture and dialects¹⁴⁹.

This difference is perhaps due to the geographical condition of the territory, prolonged inbreeding and lack of intermixture within the Naga group of tribes. Many sub-tribes of Nagas have marked affinities with the Bodo tribes¹⁵⁰. The major tribe of the Brahmaputra valley or present Assam is 'Bodo' tribe. The Bodos at one time had formed a solid block of Mongoloid people and ruled over the entire Brahmaputra valley and spread in the west up to North Bengal, and in the south they occupied Cachar, Sylhet and

¹⁴⁸L.J.S. Jaiswal, *Tribes of Northeast India: Ethnic and population aspects*, In *The Tribes of North East India*, edited by S. Karotemprel pp.28,29.

¹⁴⁹L.J.S. Jaiswal, *Tribes of Northeast India: Ethnic and population aspects*, In *The Tribes of North East India*, edited by S. Karotemprel pp.-85.

¹⁵⁰P.C. Choudhury, *The history of the civilization of the people of Assam till twelfth century* n pp.91-92.

Mymensingh districts¹⁵¹. Actually the word 'Boro symbolizes a lingo, but usually it is used to represent a broad ethnic group. The important members of the 'Bodo groups are Kachari, Koch, Mech, Rabha, Chutia, Lalung (Twa), Moran, Hajons, ect, apart from the Bodos themselves. The Garos of Meghalaya, Tripuris (Tipperas) of Tripura and Dimasas of North Cahar hills also speak Bodo language. Before the arrival of the Ahoms in the Brahmaputra valley, Bodos used to rule the greater portion of the region in the form of kingdoms like those of the Kacharis and the Chutiyas. Besides, the Bodo group of tribes, the other major tribal inhabitant of Assam is Mishing, Deori, and Karbi tribes, who had settled in the Mikir hills, which is currently known as the Karbi Anglong district of Assam. According to some scholars, the Karbi language has some similarities with certain Naga dialect on the one hand and Lushai-Kuki dialects on the other¹⁵². Another tribe known as Lushai-Kuki tribes, who are closer to Chittogong and Buma, occupies South Manipur and Mizoram¹⁵³.

The major tribe of Mizoram is the Mizo. Besides the Mizo, some other smaller tribes like Blate. Chakma, Hmar, Lusei, Mara, Pang, Pnar Riang, Tlau, Bawm, Gorkha, Hualngo, Magh, Paite, Pawi Lakher, Thado-kuki, and Ralte are also found in Mizoram. The Meithei of Manipur valley is dominating people of Manipur who shows intermediate characteristic between the Naga and the Lushai-Kuki¹⁵⁴.

Bessides, some Kuki-Chin tribes like the Aimolo, Chothe, Chiru, Kom, Purum, Gangta, Hmar, Paite, Thado, Vaipheis, etc and also Naga tribes like the Kabui, Kacha Naga,

¹⁵¹R.K. Kar, *The Tribes of North-East India: An Overview* in *Tribes of North-East India*, ed. By Sarthak Sengupta, p6.

¹⁵²B.M Das, *Aspects Physical Antropology; In The Tribes of Northeast India*, edited by S. Karotemprel, p.51

¹⁵³B.M Das, *Aspects Physical Antropology; In The Tribes of Northeast India*, edited by S. Karotemprel, p.87

¹⁵⁴ I.J.S jaswal, *Tribes of Northeast India: Ethnic and population aspects* in *The Tribes of Northeast India*, edited by S.Karotemprel, p.-29

Maring Anal, Mao, etc live in the state of Manipur. The most numerically dominant original inhabitants of Tripura are the tripuri (Tippera), Riang, Jamatia, Noatia, Halam, Chakma, Mag and Uchai. The homeland of Khasi Garo and Pnar is Meghalaya. It is also important to note that Khasi society is matrilineal in nature, which indicates that the position and prestige of women were exceptionally high in that society. To know the status of women in different tribal societies in ancient and medieval Assam, we have to go back to the remote past. But unfortunately the history and pre-history of the different tribal societies acquainted to us is not so older.

At the very beginning the tribes, mostly the hill tribes, were not so civilized. Consequently they were unable to inherit their own history. Since several centuries, the tribal population was living an isolated life. They were unaware of the region other than their own inhabitant, and had a spectacular, ingenious style of livelihood. Even the Varman dynasty of Kamrup that ruled the region in the 4th century A.D had little knowledge about the different tribal people living in the neighboring areas. It was only British administrators, military personals and some tourists, who for the first time revealed the existence of the different tribal groups inhabiting the hills and forests of the Northeast region in front of us. The hills or rivers are known by the name of the tribes inhabiting there. The various Indo-Mangoloid tribes of the present Northeast region, used to stay under one common territory known as Assam in ancient and medieval period. We have already mentioned that the earlier physiography of Assam had changed and most of the major tribal populated areas like Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, and And Arunachal Pradesh had already isolated themselves from Assam to get the status of independent states.

These independent states, along with already existent states of Manipur and Tripura in which almost one-third of the populations are tribal, form a common region that is presently known as Northeast India. Each tribe of the region has a distinctive culture, custom, language and traditions of their own. Yet some affinity and assimilation of culture have been observed among many of them. On socio-cultural aspect, tribe endogamy and class/ clan exogamy, bride price are the common principles of marriage. The religious beliefs and practices are governed by some traditional unwritten and non-codified customary laws, which are executed by the village councils. Agriculture with jhum method of cultivation is the traditional means of livelihood for most of the tribes.

Regarding the status of women it can be said that unlike the conservative Hindu Society, womenfolk of tribal societies were given many privileges. They were given liberty in different spheres of life. Women were independent to take part in all the social, religious, and cultural functions. The society sanctioned them to move without restraint within and outside the village. They could profusely mix with the boys and select their life-partner without any social obstacles. In spite of these privileges, they have not been given equal rights in social, political, judicial as well as economic fields. After sharing almost equivalent responsibilities in day-to-day activities right from child rearing, household duties to agriculture activities, the practical utility and gravity of labour they put and share are equally not appreciated. But before we go into the detail about the position of women in tribal society, it would be appropriate to know the social structure of different tribes.

Social and family structure of the different tribes

The Social organization of some of the tribes is found to be patriarchal and some of them are matriarchal and few are both patriarchal and matriarchal. All the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Tripura, Nagaland and Assam except Lalungs and Dimassas follow the patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal structure of society. The hill Lalungs of Assam, Garo, Khasi of Meghalaya follow the matriarchal structure of society, whereas the Dimasaa follows both patriarchal and matriarchal form of society. Let us first observe the social structure of patriarchal tribal societies. In these tribal societies, descent is recognized through male line. Generally father is regarded as the guardian of the family. In the absence of the father the eldest son, if an adult, shoulder the responsibility and takes full charge of the family. The mother is the mistress of the house next to the father and is much respected.

The smallest unit of the society is the family consisting of father, mother and their children. Both joint family and nuclear are prevalent in the different communities of tribal society. In the joint family system, the wife joins her husband after marriage and latter generally lives with his own parents and brothers. Most of the tribes have a traditional custom that the sons set up their independent residence after marriage and that is why the son constructs a house of his own before marriage and after marriage the bride goes straight to her husband's house, and not to her father-in-law's house. Among some tribes like the Adis, Noctes, Wanchos etc. of Arunachal Pradesh. Married girls live with their parents in a joint family till the birth of the first child. After child birth, they constructed their own house with help of the parents and other members of the family. Due to the unitary family system, the boy and the girl generally marry when they become mature to arrange for their own livelihood and handle their own family. When a joint family breaks up, customs demand that either the youngest or the eldest son

Continues living in the parental house to support the family and his old parents. All members of a joint family live in the same household, take their meals from a common hearth, performed rituals and ceremonies together and the expenses are met from the wealth earned or acquired by common efforts.

The authority of all movable and immovable property lies with the father, which is inherited by the eldest or youngest son or by all sons equally after his death. The daughters have no claim over family property, but they share the property of their mother like cloths, ornaments, and utensils etc. Whereas the customs and the social and family organizations of the matriarchal societies of Lalungs of Assam and Garo and Khasi tribes of Meghalaya is quite different from the patriarchal societies. In the matrilineal societies of the Hill Lalungs, Garo and Khasi tribes, the descent is counted through female line and it is women who inherit the immovable parental property like house and lands. The children take the clan name of the mother. In these societies, the son after marriage leaves his parental house and settles either in the wife's village or in her house. Generally one of the daughters, either elder or younger is given the major share and made the inheritor of the property who used to stay with her old parents after her marriage. In the Khasi and Jaintia society the youngest daughter (Ka Khadduh) is made the custodian of the family property. The other daughters were also given share of the parental property to set up their independent home in her parents village. Therefore the matrilineal society of household consists of a father, a mother and a daughter and resident son-in-law known as Gobhia in Lalung society and Nokrom in Garo society and their children. Another tribe, which is neither fully patriarchal nor matriarchal, is Dimassa tribe of Assam.

The Dimassa society has its uniqueness and peculiarities in its clan system. According to Danda, "The Dimassa system of descent is rather unique in this part of India as no other

tribe inhabiting the area has double descent"¹⁵⁵. They follow both patrilineal (Sengfong) and matrilineal (Julu) system of descent. Every man or woman of Dimassa tribe bears allegiance to two clans. A man primarily reckons his descent from his paternal grandfather and inherits his secondary affiliation from his maternal grandmother, whereas a woman primarily reckons her descent through her maternal grandmother and then from paternal grandfather. But her secondary affiliation changes when she gets married. She is transferred to her husband's patrilineal by observing a ceremony called Madai Khilinba but her primary affiliation of matrilineal however remains unchanged. As the Dimasas have double clan system, so the daughters and never daughter-in-laws inherit the properties of mother and sons inherit the properties of father. But there are no such restrictions that forbid the daughters to inherit the properties of parents. In the absence of sons, the properties of father are inherited by daughter. Since the Dimasa custom does not permit women of different matrilineals to live in the same house, therefore, after marriage a boy has to leave his father's house and has to setup a new family life after marriage. So a Dimasa family is of nuclear type consisting of father, mother and their unmarried children.

4.10.2 Women in North Eastern States

The status of woman in a society is recognized by the roles she plays in a family and in a society through different ways in the different states of her life cycle. She contributes her roles in the family from her childhood to womanhood as a daughter, sister, wife, daughter-in-law, mother, mother-in-law and as a widow woman. In every stage of her life there are different responsibilities that a woman has to discharge in a family and society. Therefore, her rights, obligations and duties, authorities and control give her status in her family and in her society by virtue of her rights and duties. Thus, the status and role of

¹⁵⁵ Dipali G. Dande, *Among the Dimasa of Assam*, p-51

women in a family and in a society is governed by their own social norms, values, customs, attitudes and social behaviours etc. as in every society a woman's role and her rights, duties and obligations are related to man. In the same way the different tribal societies of North Eastern India have their own tribal norms and customs according to which women have been given various roles and accordingly vast status is determined.¹⁵⁶ In fact, the status of the women usually centers on her family and society. Let us scrutinize her position in the different role she plays in a family.

4.10.3 : Position of a girl child in a tribal family:

The position of a girl child depends according to the descent and inheritance system of the tribes she belongs to. Among the male dominated and patriarchal societies through the daughter is not neglected and brought up with same affection and love, but son is more preferred because daughter is considered as transient member of the family as she leaves her place of orientation after marriage, where son is regarded as the preserver of the family lineage and support for parents in their older age. But if the parents do not have any son then the tradition has the provision that the youngest daughter could stay at her parents' house along with her husband.

In the matriarchal societies of Garo, Khasi and Jaintia societies, where the descent is traced through female line, but of a female child is preferred rather than the male to continue the family and clan. Inheritance of property also goes to the female. Gassah opines about the Garo custom that, "a female child ensures the continuation of the family tree and saves such a family or clan from being looked down by others as an extinct one."⁹⁰⁵ The girl child is also preferred, as she also becomes the support for the parents

¹⁵⁶ Morial nusa, *Status of women in tribal societies in the tribal woman*, ed. B.C. Bhuyan, P-83

in their old age. In the Khasi and Garo societies, the boy is the temporary member of the family, since after marriage leaves his parental house and goes to stay with his wife either in her house if she is inheritress of her parental property or makes his new residence in the village of her wife. But the custom is quite different in the matriarchal society of Jaintias. The husband after marriage remains member of his own mother's house and does not go to live his mother-in-law's house; he only comes to visit his wife. Gurdon states that "The husband comes to his mother-in-law's house only after dusk and that he does not eat, smoke or even partake of betel nut there, the idea being that none of his earnings go to support this house and therefore, it is not etiquette for him to partake of food or other refreshments but his children will be member of his wife's family. However, it is clear from the fact that in the matrilineal social system, the girl has more important social position in comparison to the position of boy. A girl child in either of the tribal families is it patriarchal or matriarchal, is no way neglected because she is considered as an economic asset for her parents. She not only serves the family in the home but also constitutes the major toil in cultivation; which is the primary resource of subsistence in the tribal society.

Besides, parents of the girls get a substantial amount as bride price during her marriage in most of the patriarchal tribal societies. It is generally seen that a girl from the age of ten onward usually helps her mother in the household and agricultural works. Since mother is found to be so busy in the day-to-day domestic as well as agricultural activities therefore the grown-up female child takes the responsibility of the minor children. Even in the present days, the female child in the hill societies is seen to be carrying her younger brother or sister on her back with the help of a piece of cloth. Hence, we find that in the tribal family, the girls from her childhood begin their contribution of works whereas a boy child is not pressurized by the parents to share the responsibility of the family affairs until he becomes matured. Hence, the girl child is always considered as a valuable asset for the parents and after marriage for her husband.

4.10.4: Job of women in tribal societies:

It had been found that the division of job regarding household duties, home management and family affairs was divided sex wise in the tribal societies. The burden of the domestic chores within the household right from cooking to food gathering from the early morning till late evening apart from helping the malefold in the agricultural works had to be abided by women. The men-fold in the agricultural works had to be abided by women. The men-fold is assigned with some hard work like cutting trees in the jhoom plots, cleaning jungle, hunting, fishing etc, which are not possible on the part of a female. The entire maintenance and earning of livelihood of a family depend upon the male. The latter very seldom helps women in household chores. But in times of need, for e.g. when women fall ill or go out of the village, men are bound to do the household duties. Tribal women play the major role in the daily life than the menfolk. If we compare the daily activities of women of tribal societies and non-tribal societies, we can say that former is much harder worker in comparison to the latter. Their works include a large area. Apart from doing their day-to-day household activities, they go to the cultivating fields and help their men-fold in agricultural activities.

Hence, they do more work than their male counterparts also and get exposed to a good amount of strain in terms of physical work. If we consider the total number of working hours, then it appears that the female force is way ahead of the male force.¹⁵⁷ This can lead us to the conclusion that the female force is the potential pillar and asset for their families,

¹⁵⁷ 906. P.R.T. Gurdon, *The Khasis*, pp 76-79.

who not only gives birth and nurtures the future generation, but also drifts the society towards progress with their sincerity and commitment to both in-house and out field work. Their busy routine begins at the crack of dawn till late hours of the night. Their daily activities begin with husking and pounding of rice and millet, cleaning of attle shed, miling the cows, rearing and feeding of domestic birds and animals, cleaning of house, washing clothes and utensils, fetching of water from water source, burning of firewood, cooking morning and afternoon food for the entire family, preparing of rice-beer. After cooking, she feeds the breakfast to men and children.

After finishing the domestic works, they pack the midday lunch and tubes of beers for their own and their male partners and hasten to the fields. In the agricultural field right from sowing to harvesting, women do the entire work. While returning back to home from agricultural field in the evening they collect basketfuls of vegetables, paddy and fuel from the forest on reaching home, they feed the domestic animals, fetch water and prepare the evening meal, beer and serve the family members. Apart from doing the normal daily domestic activities, women also entertain the guests by making special foods and wine. In the busy schedule of their day-to-day routine, they do not forget the role of mother. They take special care of the health and education of their infants and children. They spend their leisure time in spinning and waving. It is apparent from the preceding deliberations that women of the tribal societies work relentlessly without taking any rest. They neither neglect the domestic activities nor does the agricultural work because both the works are important for them. Therefore, tribal women were regarded as precious assets by their families for their valuable contributions. In spite of doing the major part of work of the family, women are not given rights and respects in same proportion by the society, Dominant and prestigious position in the society is occupied by men. Women are not entitled to play the authoritative role in her family. Her

consultation is taken regarding the family affairs, but the final judgement is vested with men.

Even in matter of family economy or any other serious matters, the male members of the family do not think to take the suggestion of women. But the things are changing fast. With the spread of education and employment opportunities among women of Arunachal Pradesh, the status of women has improved. The attitude of the hill society toward the working women is changing in the previous days, women were regarded as housewives and helper for their husbands in the agriculture. But their work was not provided any economic value. Therefore, they were dependent on men. But in the present days the women also occupied the salaried jobs; therefore they directly supported the family economy. Therefore, the educated working women were able to snatch the equal position in the family and society as those of male. Now they got every right to take decisions regarding the important family affairs like family budget, children's education and marriage etc.

4.10.5: Marriage System

The marriage system is recognized as one of the most vital social institutions among the people of the tribal societies. Marriage is not only the amalgamation of two individuals but also union of two families in a network of social compulsion. For a girl the marriage serves as the base stone in her life because her new roles begin as wife, as daughter-in-law, as sister-in-law and most important of them is as mother. Marriage is a crossroads in the life of an individual because with the marital relationship a girl and a boy enter into a new relationship of a husband and a wife and thus forms an individual family unit. The responsibility of this new unit had to be shared by both of them. The number of member of this new unit increases, when children are born to the couple. The children

stay in the family till they grow into adults and are married in their turn and establish their own family. The different tribes of North-eastern region follow different types of marriage customs, rules and regulations while establishing marital relations.

The tribal marriages are contractual in nature and the ritualistic aspects are somewhat insignificant. The marriage customs are quite simple, the marriage being more social than the religious aspect of the union. About the marriage-rites of the Rings. Tipras and others or Chittagong hill tracts, Lewin remarks that, at marriage there is 1 particular ceremony, but a great deal of drinking and dancing. A pig is killed as a sacrifice to the deities of the wood and stream. Then the girl's mother pours out a glass of liquor and gives it to her daughter, who goes and sits on her lover's knee, drinks half, and gives him the half; they afterwards crook together their little fingers.

Presently Monogamy is generally prevalent among the different tribal communities of Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur, Assam, Nagaland, Tripura and Meghalaya but in the earlier days, polygamy was practiced by different communities or tribal society. Polyandrous families are prevalent among the Monpa tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Clan plays the main role in regulating the marriage or the tribal societies. The communities are expected to follow endogamy but exogamy regarding the clans. Bride price is customarily prevalent among all the patriarchal tribes, which are paid in cash and kind to the brides' parents by the groom. Its price varies from tribes and even differs among the sub-tribes of the same tribe. Marriage is possible with some loose relations under some conditions. Levirate and Sororate are permissible among the tribal population of North-East India. The peculiar custom of marriage with stepmother and stepdaughter is permissible among few tribes. Pre-marital sexual affairs were socially sanctioned among some of the different sub-tribes of Adi, Aka, Nishing, Sulung, Mernba, Wall I and Nocte tribes in

Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Mizoram. Widow remarriage is also prevalent among all the tribes. Let us go in depth regarding the different marriage customs prevalent among the different tribes of North-east.

4.10.5.1: Practice of Exogamy

The tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland strictly adapt the rules of clan exogamy. But few tribes of Manipur and Tripura follow clan endogamy. Clan is counted through male line, which follows the patriarchal system of descent and through female line, which follows the matriarchal system of descent. That is all the members of the same clan in the male line are thought to be descendants from a common ancestor and on the reverse in the female line are considered as descendants from a common ancestress. So, the clan members are considered as brothers and sisters. Therefore, marital relationship within the race would mean the marriage with his or her own blood relation and hence considered as incestuous, immoral and illegal. Therefore these types of marriages were declared unlawful who strictly follow the rules of clan exogamy and if one does this illegal act, he will be liable to serious sin in the eye of religion and socially cut off from their own tribe. Among the matriarchal tribes of Khasis and Jaintias, "The clans are strictly exogamous; marriage within the clan is the worst sin that a Khasi or a Synteng can commit. Both men and women become "Sang" (Taboo) and are excommunicated for this crime".

4.10.5.2: Clan Endogamy

Clan endogamy is widely prevalent among the IVIizos or Lushais. Shakespeare opines,

"A Lushai can practically marry any woman he chooses except his sister or mother"¹⁵⁸. Clan endogamy is mostly practiced among the mizo chief because a chief generally establishes marital relations with another chief who very often belong to the same clan. Kukis of Mizoram and Manipur are also not fully exogamous. Mao, Koireng, Tarao, Gangte, Hmar tribe of Manipur and Reang, Rupini and Mag tribe of Tripura follow clan endogamy though the sub-clans of Tarao and Gangte of Manipur and Mag or Tripura are exogamous. With some kind of preventable relations between parent and child, uncle and niece, aunt and nephew, brother and sister, marriage within the same clan, lineage and even within an extended family is permissible among the Reangs of Tripura¹⁵⁹. Among Nagas, only the Konyak Naga chiefs are not so much strict about the clan exogamy. The reason is that the chiefs considered themselves as sacrosanct and so the principal wife is brought from the same clan though not from the agnates¹⁶⁰.

4.10.5.3: Cross-Cousin marriage

Marriages with one's own cousin are popular and recognized customs among most of the tribes of North-East India. Marriage with the mother's brother's daughter/father's sister's son or father's sister's daughter/mother's brother's son is defined as the matrilineal and patrilineal cross cousin marriage respectively. Among the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, Mikir and Mishing tribe of Assam, Aimol, Kom, Kukis of Manipur, cross-cousin marriage is not only the general rule but also given immense preference. The custom in the past had assumed a prescript form, so refusal to marry a mother's brother's daughter led to the payment of some sort of compensation by the avoiding party. Among the Kukis, sister's son is bound by custom to marry to mother's brother's daughter known as 'Neinu' (i.e. to be married to) and in case he fails to do so, he not only forfeits all his rightful claims

¹⁵⁸ Coinnei I Shakespeare. *The Lushai-Kuki Clans*, p.49

¹⁵⁹ Dr. Jagadish Gan Chaudhuri, *The Riangs of Tripura*, p. 46

¹⁶⁰ I Shakespeare. *The Lushai-Kuki Clans*, Prakash Singh, Nagaland, p.42

and respect, indulgence etc. that he commands from his mother's brother and his daughter but he is also supposed to give fine of one ' Mithuri' to his mother's brother¹⁶¹. Similarly the Mikir custom envisages that a boy must marry his mother's brother's daughter, "and if he does not, the maternal uncle could beat the lad as much as he liked; but now they can do as they please"¹⁶². Most of the tribes of Arunachal, Nagaland, Manipur follow the matrilineal cross-cousin marriage and avoid Patrilineal cross-cousin marriage i.e. marriage with father's sister's daughter/mother's brother's son. Describing about the inclination towards the matrilineal cross cousin marriage among the Tangsa tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, Dutta writes. "In the cross-cousin marriage the mother's brother's daughter is considered to be the potential wife of the father's sister's son. In the absence of the mother's brother's daughter or the Father's sister's son, either party can take partners from outside according to their choice. Marriage with the father's sister's daughter is strictly prohibited"¹⁶³. The matrilineal cross cousin marriage is permitted among the matriarchal societies of Garo and Khasi or Meghalaya. But there is a different rule of cross-cousin marriage in both the societies. A Khasi can marry his maternal spouse as well as their family because they are familiar with each other's behaviour, taste, standard or living as well as each other's family atmosphere. As Dutta said "In cross-cousin marriage considerable socio-economic significance is attached. The prime considerations for such a marriage are mutual help and co-operation and compatibility or temperaments"¹⁶⁴. Similar is the presumption among the Mate tribe of Manipur that "the well-known traditional conflict between mother in law daughter in-law can perpetually avoided because the daughter in-law is mother in-law's brother's daughter.

¹⁶¹ TS. Gante. *The kukis of Manipur*, p. 59

¹⁶² E. Stack ZII, p.4910. C.I Lyall, *The Mikirs*, Sir Charles Lyall ed. *The Kukis*. P.18

¹⁶³ Parul Dutta, *The Tangsas* p. 49.

¹⁶⁴ Parul Dutta. *The Tangsas*, p.49.

Being related so; she will look after the old people of the family without ever deserting them"¹⁶⁵.

4.10.5.4: Parallel cousin marriage

Marriage with Gather's brother's children and mother's sister's children is known as parallel cousin marriage. Though this type of marriage is prohibited among most of the tribes but it is permissible among the Sherdukpen and Ramo-Adi tribe or Arunachal Pradesh, Mizo tribes, Halam, and Reang tribe of Tripura. Among the Noatia and Chakma tribe of Tripura, Pailibo of Arunachal, there is a custom or parallel cousin marriage between the children of two sisters, but marriage between the children of two brothers is prohibited.

4.10.5.5: Widow marriage

Custom of widow remarriage is prevalent among all the tribes of North-East. But there are certain rules different tribes. Widows of the Khasi and Jaintia community can not marry before one year of the demise of their husbands. Various forms of widows marriages are prevalent among different tribes such as custom or levirate marriage. Sororate marriage, Stepmother marriage and Daughter-in-law marriage. Let us first go through the custom of Levirate marriage.

4.10.5.6: Levirate marriage

The custom of Levirate marriage is the most common marriage custom still prevalent among all the tribes of Arunachal, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur (except Meithei tribes), and Assam. According to the levirate custom, the widow after the death of her husband is allowed to marry one of the elder or younger brothers of the deceased husband as per

¹⁶⁵ Langsun D. Mate, *The Mate tribe of Manipur*, p. 27.

customs of the tribe to which her deceased husband belongs. The tribes of Mizoram and Assam, Akas, Singphos, Taugasas of Arunachal Pradesh follow only senior levirate i.e. the widow can marry the younger brother of the deceased husband but not the elder brother who is regarded as a rather figure. On the other hand, the tribes of Nagaland follow junior levirate, which means that the widow can inherit only by the elder brother of the deceased husband while marriage with elder brother's widow is prohibited, since she receives the respect of a mother. And most of the tribes of Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh follow both senior and junior levirate i.e., one can inherit the widow of the elder as well as younger brother. Among the Anal and Ivlate tribes of Manipur, the widow may marry her deceased husband's younger brother in case he is unmarried: otherwise she is permitted to marry any other person keeping the rule of exogamy¹⁶⁶. But the custom of Levirate was strictly prohibited among the Meithei tribe of Manipur and Tipperas, Noatia, Uchai tribe of Tripura.

The reason behind the levirate marriage among the tribes seems to be the bride price system. Since she is purchased by her husband from her parents by paying the bride price during her first marriage, therefore she becomes the legal property of her husband. In case or the death of her husband, the brothers of the deceased husband hold a legal claim over her. Among the Kukis, an unmarried man, be a mere child, on curing of his marriageable age is bound to marry the widow of his deceased elder brother, however old the widow may be¹⁶⁷. Mitkong while discussing about the widow inheritance among the Aditribes said. "As per social system, of the Adis, a wife of a man is considered as the property of the clan to which he belongs on the death of the husband the widow has to be inherited by a kin of deceased husband either for her security or for sexual need as per norm laid down by the clansmen"¹⁶⁸. Though the choice is left to the widow.

¹⁶⁶ Longsun O. Mote. *The Mote tribe of Manipur*, p.25.

¹⁶⁷ C.A. Scopitt, *A short account of the Kuki*. p. 15

¹⁶⁸ N. Mitkong. . 'Customs and Laws of widow inheritance of the Adis' in *Aspects of culture and customs of Arunachal Pradesh*, edited by Dr. P.C. Dutta Dr. D.K. pp.223-224.

but she has to accept anyone as her husband from the in-laws family. She can only be free from this bondage, if her parents agree to return back the bride price' to the brother of the deceased husband, which they have taken' during her first marriage. If the parents are not in the position or do not want to return back the bride price; then she is bound to marry one of her brother-in-law after her husband's death. However, Srivastav also mentioned that she could be free to return to her parents or marry someone of her choice only if her brother-in-law does not live to marry her or if the second husband agrees to pay the bride price spent on her marriage along with compensation to her husband's brother. Among the Singpho tribes if the brother disagrees to marry the widow of his deceased brother and also does not want to take the responsibility of the children of the latter, then he has to pay a fine of 140 rupees and a buffalo to the parents of the widow in a ceremony called "Moroang Ro"¹⁶⁹. After this ceremony no marriage can take place between these two families.

4.10.5.7: Sororate

Sororate is another popular marriage custom which is widely followed by the tribal people of Arunachal Pradesh, Kukis of Mizoram, Kacharis of Assam and Garos of Meghalaya. According to the custom, a man can marry any of the unmarried sister or wife only after the death of the latter. Marriage with wife's sister after the death of her husband can also take place. Among some tribes, only junior sororate is practiced and some follow both senior and junior sororate. Normal marriage rituals are generally not performed in such marriage.

¹⁶⁹ Parul Dutta, *The Singphos*, pp. 75.

4.10.5.8: Stepmother marriage

One peculiar form of marriage prevalent among few of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland i.e. marriage with the stepmother after the death of father. This form of marriage is found among the tribes like Singphos, Hill Miris, Idu Mishmis, Mishing-Bangnis, Gallong Adis of Arunachal Pradesh and Semas of Nagaland. But marriage with the stepmother is permitted only after the death of the father. During the lifetime of the father it is never allowed and even sexual relationship is considered as serious crime¹⁷⁰. The marriage with the widow stepmother is performed after payment of a nominal bride price by the proposed groom to the guardian or the stepmother. The bride price varies from tribe to tribe and also according to the age of the stepmother. The previous issues of the stepmother even after marriage are regarded as brothers and sisters though she is considered as wife. The reason for the custom of marrying the stepmother is due to economic cause. As a wife, she can get care and security from her new husband, whom she can not expect as a stepmother and on the other hand the new husband will get experienced and additional helpful hand for his agricultural works¹⁷¹. However, the widowed stepmother or the stepson is not given force for such union. The union also depends upon the age of the stepmother, number of issues from her previous husband and most importantly the wish of the woman as well as the stepson.

4.10.5.11: Daughter-in-law Marriage:

Another peculiar custom of marrying one's daughter-in-law is prevalent only among the Singpho tribe of Arunachal Pradesh¹⁷². This system is activated only if the deceased Son is the only inheritor of the family and if he dies leaving behind no issues.

¹⁷⁰Parul Dutta, *The Singphos*, p. 76.

¹⁷¹BB Pandey, *The Hill Miris* p. 59.

¹⁷²Parul Dutta, *The Singphos*, p. 76.

But when there is an issue, this sort of marriage is not considered legal. In such situation the father-in-law marries the widow daughter-in-law only to keep the generation alive. The children who take birth from such union will be regarded as grand children. The parents or the guardian of the daughter-in-law are informed and the father-in-law pays a nominal bride price.

4.10.5.12: Marriage with widow mother-in-law and step-daughter

This custom is prevalent only among the Garo tribes of Meghalaya. When the household head dies leaving behind his widow, *nokna* (inheritress daughter) and *nokram* (resident son-in-law), the *nokrom* marries the widow, thus assuming the anomalous position of husband to both mother and daughter, where the mother assumes the position of the principal wife (*Jik mongma* or *Jik mamingj* of the *nokrom* and *nokna* i.e., the daughter becomes the co-wife (*Jik-gile*). On the death of mother, the daughter assumes the role of the principal wife. On the other hand, if the household head dies leaving behind his widow and unmarried daughters, the widow is supposed to marry one of the nephews of her deceased husband, who accepts the old widow as his principal wife and her inheritress daughter as a co-wife which may be termed as step-daughter marriage. If the widow refuses to marry the nephew of her deceased husband and marries another man, the nephew may claim compensation from both of them. This custom of marriage among the Garos is governed by the law of 'Worn' according to which once such a marriage is contracted either bride or the groom becomes free to remarry person or another clan, even after the death of either spouses.

4.10.5.13: Marriage Forms

Several forms of marriages were found to be prevalent among the different tribal societies of North-East¹⁷³. These are Marriage by Exchange marriage by Service Marriage by Capture or Elopement Marriage by inheritance, marriage by mutual consent and Marriage by Negotiation. Let us go through these different modes or marriages for the paternal tribal societies for acquiring life partners.

4.10.5.14: Marriage by Negotiation

Negotiation between parents or the two parties is the regular and common rule of marriage of the tribal people of North East India, which of course depends upon the reciprocal choice of the would-be couple. Negotiation is initiated from the boy's side. Marriage proposal comes hardly from the girl's side. The boy usually communicates to his parents about his marital choice through some relatives or friends. The parents, after seeking the approbation of their son's choice from the members of the community, express their desire to the parents of the girl through a mediator. The parents of the girl then consult about this proposal with their relatives and the other villagers and also sound the girl about her own reactions. After taking the approbation of the girl and other people of the community, the parents of the girl then proceed to settle the bride price. Normally, the bride price is to be settled up by the go-between on behalf of the boy's parents with the parents of the girl. Generally after negotiation, the groom visits the bride's house. Marriage through negotiation involves a lengthy procedure with a number of formalities and rituals that vary from tribes to tribes.

¹⁷³ Parimal Chandra Kar, *Garos*, pp. 68-69.

4.10.5.15: Marriage by Exchange

This is one of the most primitive modes of marriage in Arunachal Pradesh. About this form of marriage, Roy gives his opinion, "a boy desirous of marrying a girl undertakes to fill the gap in her family by supplying a suitable girl for a marriageable boy in exchange. By this method, the difficulty sometime felt in paying the are (bride-price) is, solved. In case tile marriage in exchange does not take place on account of unwillingness of the girl, who may run away with someone else, the bride-price that would have been due had there been no exchange, has to be paid"¹⁷⁴.

This system is popular among the Padams and Minyongs, two sub-tribes of Adi, Miri and Singpho tribes. Regarding the marriage customs of the Miris, Hamilton records, "The Miris, for example, never countenance a betrothal, unless at the same time a female belonging to the bridegroom's family is promised for some male member of the brides"¹⁷⁵. It does not necessarily mean that the marriages take place simultaneously. If the groom's family has no female of marriageable age at that time then they had to promise to give female from his own family in future to the bride's family. But problems arise when the family of bride-takers is unable to fulfill their promise due to some reasons. In Such case the bride-giver takes back his married daughter from the groom although she may have children by him, and again marry her off to buy of other family, who promises his sister or some other female relative, in exchange for her. If the second family also fails to fulfill his part of the contract then again the bride's father takes her away from there and gives her to third groom and so on.

¹⁷⁴ Sachin Roy. *Aspects or Padam-Minyong Culture*, in *Aspects of culture and customs of Arunachal Pradesh*, edit by Dr. P.C. Dutta & Dr D.K. Duarah p. 207.

¹⁷⁵ A. Homilton, in *Abors Jungles*, p. 93-94. cited in *marriage in Arunachal Prodesb* pp. 135-136.

4.10.5.16: Carriage by Service

Carriage by Service is an alternative pattern of acquiring mate among the Abor (Adi), Dafla, Sulung, Miji, Sherdukpen, Aka, Khampati and Singpho tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, Letha tribes of Nagaland, Mizo and Kuki tribes of Mizoram as well as also among the Garos of meghalaya. The reason for the system of marriage by service is due to the non-affordable position of the bridegroom to pay the bride price. Sinha while discussing about this system among the Akas opines that when a man is too poor to give even the minimum bride-price, then the boy may get a wife of his choice in conformity by putting up service at his would be father-in-law's house for a couple of years in lieu of the bride-price. He is, however permitted to cohabit with the girl even before Marriage and during his period of service, It may also happen that, by the end of his service period, two or more children are born to him .After the service period is over, after a formal ceremony, he is accepted as the husband of the girl and separates from his inlaws house along his wife and children to find his individual family¹⁷⁶.

Among the Ramos, one of the sub-tribes of Ad is, sometimes when the bridegroom is not able to pay the full amount of the bride price, then the marriage by service converted into marriage by exchange through a girl child born to the couple¹⁷⁷. She is given to the grandparents in lieu of the bride price, which means that the bride price of the girl will not go to her parents but to the maternal grandparents. Among the Sherdukpens, the father of the girl generally adopts this method of marriage when he does not have any boy child or other male relation to help him in his cultivation works. In such situation the would-be son-in-law is asked by the girl's father to provide service for some months in agricultural

¹⁷⁶ Raghbir Singha. *The Akas* p-84

¹⁷⁷ M.M. Dhasmana. *The Ramos of Arunachal*, p. 109

operations during which his potentialities, moral fiber and working ability are cautiously observed¹⁷⁸.

But it is an essential custom and condition of marriage among the Anal, Aimol, Chiru, Chdthe, Kom and Puimei of IVIAnipur, Darlongs, Reangs, Tipras, Naotia, Jamatias, Uchais, Halam, Mags of Tripura, Kacharis and Mikirs of Assam, After the final negotiation of marriage between both the parties, the groom before his marriage has to stay in bride's house for a certain period before his marriage like a son of his would be father-in-law and extends his assistance in agricultural activities as well as attends various duties of that house. After completion of this period, his parents' come to take their son and daughter-in-law¹⁷⁹. Obviously, there are some conditions of the service. If the boy leaves before the completion of the period, he has no right to marry the girl, who is free to marry anybody else but there are some relaxation too, such as some other person can serve on behalf of the groom in the girl's house if bride's father agrees", This service is called Loh and Nuhnicihic respectively among the Chothe and Kom tribes of Manipur, Jamai Khata among the Tripuris and Noatias, Damad Utha among the Halams, Khamatoore among the Mags, Chainarai among the Riangs and Maklut among the Darlongs of Tripura. The period of service varies from tribes to tribes and according to the agreement of the parents of the two parties, Among the tribes of Tripura (except Uchais, where the period of servitude is for three to four years), the period is usually for one-year.

Among Kacharis of Assam, the period of service, which is commonly known as 'Olao ghar-Jiya' is from three or four years to all upward limit of twelve or fifteen

¹⁷⁸ R.R.P Sharma, *The Sherdukpeas* p.55.

¹⁷⁹ "Dr. R.K. Somanto, *The Reangs of Tripura-Their socio-cultural and agro-economic changes*" in *The Tribes of North East India*. Edit by Sebastian Kurotempral p. 202.

years¹⁸⁰ Cohabitation, however is allowed after about twelve or eighteen months' service, and at the conclusion of the full period, the young people are free to depart whithersoever they will. The service of the bridegroom in the bride's house among the Kacharis of Darrang known as 'mal ghar-Jiya' and Kamrup known as Khasrot-Thokagha Jiya', the period of service is life-long, According to Endle, "the prospective bridegroom severs all connection with his own family, and identifies himself completely with that of his bride, in whose house he serves until the death of her parents when with his wife he entitled to the whole or the usual share of their property. On that of his own parents or relatives he relations no claim whatever"¹⁸¹ . Similarly among the Mikirs, if he daughter is the only child or heireass, the groom stays with his father-in-law's house for lifetime¹⁸². But presently the educated youth does not like the custom of marriage by service and bride price is paid in lieu of such service.

4.10.5.17: Marriage by Elopement

Marriage by elopement is considered as the romantic way of acquiring a mate. In other words, it can be said as love marriage. This type of marriage is ill vogue among all the tribes. This mode is Dilly resorted to, when the young lovers meet with parental objection or when there appears a third person ill between the boy and the girl who is likely to stand in their way, because of his being a serious contender to win the hands or the girl ill marriage, or when the economic consideration that involves in the event of all formalities of the marriage are to be fulfilled in the case of either the boy or the girl being in abject poverty, or even when the girl is impregnated by either of the lovers. In all these cases marriage by elopement is resorted to. If, however, the boy is caught, he is made to pay a heavy fine by the village council besides the bride price. The bride price in such marriages is usually higher than in

¹⁸⁰ S. Endle, *The Kacharis* p 45.

¹⁸¹ S. Endle, *The Kacharis* p 45.

¹⁸², Dr. S.T. Das. *Tribal life North-East India*. p208

normal marriages. The Miris used to resort to abduction when the demand of the bride price was exorbitant Hamilton tells, "Where the price demanded for the bride is in excess of what the youthful swain can afford to pay, the girl arranges the red cock before the elder of the village court"¹⁸³

4.10.5.18: Marriage for the poor

There are some less expensive and abbreviated types of marriages, which are taken recourse to by the poor. One such marriage is Joron Biya, which is prevalent among poorer sections of the Lalung society of Assam¹⁸⁴. In this type of marriage, the boy just brings one rice/beer jar, one basketful of rice/rice cakes, two gourds and some betel leaves and nuts to the girl's house and takes away the girl with him to his house. After three or five days, the couple visits the girl's house bringing with them one ohar (two basketful of rice, betel leaves and nuts etc.) and five fowls. During this visit, the elder people of both sides are invited who formally recognize the couple on that day: The two types of marriages that are prevalent among the poorer section of Dimasa Kacharis are known as Habriba and Hablaaba¹⁸⁵. The rites of this type of marriages are limited and take place inside the house. In the former type, the bridegroom is allowed to enter into the kitchen to meet the bride on the marriage day. The latter type of marriage, though rarely occurs is prevalent among the Dimasa Kacharis. When the groom is extremely poor and cannot spend anything for the ceremony, then he simply bows down to the bride's father and pays Rs. 5 as a token of bride price. If the bride's father accepts that money, then the boy and the girl get

¹⁸³ Lethuama Durlong, *The Durlongs of Tripura* pp. 149-150

¹⁸⁴"Dr. G.C. Sarma Thakur, *The Lalungs" in the tribes of Northeast India*, ed. by Sebastian Karotemprel, p. 160

¹⁸⁵ Dipali G. Danda *Among the Dimasa of Assam*, p.55

4.10.5.19: Marriage by mutual consent

This Marriage is very common the hill lalungs. According to this marriage, the boy and the girl decide to get married after long intimacy. Then the boy sleeps with the girl for one night in her house and then both are accepted as husband and wife. The boy also becomes the resident son-in-law and the next day this information is given to the villagers and the parents of the boy¹⁸⁶.

4.10.5.20: Marriage by force or capture

This marriage is though not popular, but is not uncommon among the tribal society. Among the matriarchal society or hill Lalungs, when the boy makes intimacy with the girl and yet not serious about his marriage with the girl, in such cases the villagers of the girl force the boy to enter into the wedlock with the girl and to become a resident son-in-law in the house of the girl ¹⁸⁷. Among the Vaipheis Kukis, this mode of marriage is called Nungaak-Gu or Thepthaak, where the girl is kidnapped by the boy with the help of two or more of his accomplices and the marriage are performed without any prior understanding or agreement¹⁸⁸, of course, the punishment is very heavy, if found guilty. Same is the case with the Khemungan Nagas. When a boy desires to marry a particular girl he narrates his choice to his parents and relatives and they raid the girl's house and abduct her and there after

¹⁸⁶ Birendar Kumar Gohain. *The Hill Lalungs*. pp 43, 44.

¹⁸⁷ Birendar Kumar Gohain. *The Hill Lalungs*. pp 44.

¹⁸⁸ S. Daliand Capvung. *The social instiiluons of the Valphei's in Manipur: past and present, vol. III* ed. By Moorem, Sanajaabap.252.

they start living as husband and wife without any formalities or bride price ¹⁸⁹ .

10.5.21: Marriage among the matriarchal tribes

The matriarchal tribal societies of Northeast are different from the patriarchal tribal societies regarding their various customs of marriage, divorce and inheritance laws. Among the Garos, marriage proposal always comes from girl's side. But among the Khasis and Jaintias, the offer for marriage comes from boy's side. Marriage ceremonies in regard to details and formalities differ from tribe to tribe. The most remarkable feature of the Khasi marriage is that it was customary in the earlier days for the husband to live with his wife in his mother-in-law's house his wife gives birth to one or two children. After that they generally establish their separate household, but if the wife is *ka khadduh* (youngest daughter), then she becomes the inheritress of family property. Among the Khasis, the boy generally goes to the girl's house after the marriage. Similar is the rule among the Garos. Other than the *nokrom* (husband of the inheritress daughter), all other son-in-laws establish their separate household with their wives. But among the Jaintias, the case is different; the husband after marriage does not go to stay with his wife in his mother-in-law's house but visits his wife only in the night. Let us find out the marriage customs and rules of these societies. Various forms of marriages are in vogue among the matriarchal tribes of Garo, Khasi and Jaintia society. In the Garo and Khasi society many types of marriages are prevalent, some of them are legal and some are illegal though they were made official later on. These Marriages are:

¹⁸⁹ Paraksh Singh, *Nagaland*, p.44

4.10.5.22: Marriage by negotiation

It is the recognized and most common and honourable form of marriage among the Garos Khasis. Among the Garos, both the contracting parties assemble in bride's house and the priest consults the omen by killing a hen and a cock and predicts whether the marriage will be happy one or not. This marriage is known as Do'sia (Do - fowl and Sia - die) among the Garos¹⁹⁰.

4.10.5.22: Marriage by service

This custom is prevalent among some of the divisions of the Garos it is the reverse system of the service of the groom in the girl's house, which was in vogue among the Ivlizos and the tribes of Tripura According to the custom of marriage by service, which is known as Cha'senga (Cha- eat and Senga - wait), the girl goes to stay in the house of the boy and helps him and his family in all the household works. If the boy and his parents are satisfied with her performance, marriage is arranged¹⁹¹.

4.10.5.23: Seka or elopement

In this case, the boy and the girl run away from home and after few days they return to the girl's house and live as husband and wife¹⁹².

¹⁹⁰ Milton S. Sangma. *History and culture of the Garos*. Pp 197-199

¹⁹¹ Playfair, *The Garos* p. 67

¹⁹² Jabang marak, *The Garos Law*, p.50.

4.10.5.24: Marriage by capture

This marriage was in vogue among the Garos and Khasis in olden days and is almost extinct presently. Among the Garos, when a girl of marriageable age wished to marry a particular boy, he was suddenly captured by the girl's party, whenever he was found alone and was forcibly confined with the girl for more than one night in the girl's residence. Major Playfair mentions that it was the custom among the A'bengs and the Matabengs Gatos that if the boy indicated his refusal to marry the girl by absconding and concealing himself, then he was again hunted and was forcibly brought back by the girl's party. Now he was kept under strict vigilance, but if the boy would have flown for the second time by applying various tricks, he was again captured for the second time also. But if he would have escaped for the third time, then he would have been released as it pinpointed that he was really not interested to marry the girl¹⁹³. But if the girl was found to be seduced by the boy while they were alone together for two or three nights, then the latter had to give fine of certain amount to the parents of the girl, who shared this amount with Nokma and other relations¹⁹⁴. Marriage by capture was prevalent among the Kongor Khasis. Often the Kongor male was captured by the female syiems (ruler) party and was compelled to enter the marriage ceremony sometimes against his will. But there was a provision that if he was not interested to stay with the girl, he could have released himself by submitting an appropriate fine¹⁹⁵.

4.10.5.25: Marriage by temptation

This custom was prevalent among the Garos. According to this custom known as Chamejike (Chame- friend and Jika - to bait), pairs of boys and girls sing romantic songs

¹⁹³ Playfair, *The Garos* p. 67

¹⁹⁴ B.N. Choudhury. *Some Cultural and linguistic aspects of Garos* .p.34.

¹⁹⁵ Dr. H. Borah. *The History and Culture of the Khasi people* (3rd edition) p.294

to tempt each other and present rice beer, bete I nuts and tobacco or biri to their desirous life partner during certain festivals, such as Wangala, Mangona; etc. This process continues for one night or more until they are satisfied that they are fit for each other as life partner, otherwise they part¹⁹⁶. Among the Atong Garos, the pairs, after the entertainment is permitted for making physical connection, but this does not bind them to marry each other. The young girl never incurs obloquy for going to bed with the boy or on account of her lapses from the path of virtue, unless she is found to be an expectant mother¹⁹⁷. This custom is presently not in practice, as the educated and respectable people do not countenance it.

4.10.5.26: Marriage by secretly becoming sleeping partner

This custom is prevalent among the Garos. According to this custom known as Tunapa (Tu - lie down and Napa - enter secretly)¹⁹⁸, either the girl or the boy whoever is interested for the other becomes sleeping partner for the other at night, when all others in the house are asleep. If the partner is accepted by the other, the couple sleeps together and before the dawn goes to their own house. Marriage is then arranged after negotiation but if the partner is rejected, then the Imachong of the Suitor has to pay fine. Sometimes the funapa is done by the consent of parents and relatives.

4.10.5.27: Marriage by offering food

This custom is prevalent among the Matchis Garos. When the girl is in love with a boy but not sure about the boy's agreement, then she proposed to the boy by sending him a dish

¹⁹⁶ C.R. Marak, *The gores and their customary laws and usages*, pp. 27-28

¹⁹³ Playfair, *The Garos* p. 68

¹⁹³ Jabang Marak, *The Garo law*, pp.50-52

of cooked rice in the nokpanic (Bachelors Barrack) by her sister or any of her female relations. The girl also pursues them but did not come forward to avoid the insult or shame if the boy refuses her offer, but If he started eating the food, which means acceptance of the proposal, then the girl comes out of the hiding place and eats with him. Marriage would then be arranged after negotiations. This form of marriage is known as Chadila (Cha - eat and Dila - to make a start)¹⁹⁹.

4.10.5.28: Marriage with nephew or nokrom

This custom is prevalent among the Garos known as On'sonpa and Onchapa marriage. According to On'songa marriage (provide continuation), when the father expires, it is essential for the nokrom to marry his widowed mother-in-law to assume the full liability of the household, as the mother-in-law is the de Jure owner of the family property and according to 011 On'chapa (additional gift) marriage, if the householder dies, then the nephew of the dead person has to marry the widow, but if the age gap is longer between the nephew and the widow then the nephew is permitted to marry any of the daughters of the widow and become the nokrom of that household. On'songa and On'chapa marriage custom is the privilege only for the nokrom, but not for the other son-in-law.

4.10.5.29: Bride Price

The custom of bride price is in vogue among the patriarchal tribal societies of Northeast India. But there is no custom of bride price among the matriarchal tribes, marriages in

¹⁹⁹ Playfair, *The Garos*, pp. 66.67

²⁰⁰ Milton S. Sangma, *History and culture of the Garos*, pp.201-202.

Patriarchal tribal societies involve an obligation on the part of the bridegroom and his people towards the bride's parents, This obligation he tries to accomplish by making some payment to the parents of the bride, which is known as bride price, The bride price is the guiding factor of a tribal marriage, The bride price is known by varieties of name by the different tribes and sub-tribes. The bride price is compulsory. The payment of the bride price can be postponed in case the boy is not in a position to pay it. But the marriage is not recognized by the society till the bride price is paid, Dutta writes about the bride price of Tangsas, "In Tangsa society, the possibility of a marriage is virtually determined by the amount of bride-price which is demanded by the parents of the girl. The rituals, performed in the marriage. Appear to be of secondary importance, the price is the main factor, and a high price makes a Tangsa father proud of his daughter²⁰¹". The bride price is paid either in cash or in kind, the latter generally includes cattle, clothes and utensils, The bride price depends upon many things such as status or the girl's parents, economic position of the bridegroom, age of the girl, working capacity of the bride in the cultivation work as well as in the household work, from of marriage etc. If the girl belongs to a rich family, the amount of the bride price will be higher. If the girl is young then the parents of the girl expect a high bride price from the groom's party. In case of cross-cousm marriage, the bride price is less than the normal price and in case of levirate and sororate marriage, a nominal bride price is given to the bride's parents. But in case or capture or elopement marriage, the bride price is high comparison to the marriage through negotiations.

The bride price is usually required to be paid at the time of marriage but its amount has to be in any case decided well in advance, and on its settlement only, the marriage is supposed to have been finalized. Marriage negotiations are likely to break off. if the two

²⁰¹ Parul Dutta. *The Tangsas* p-60.

parties cannot reach any agreement with regard to the bride price. In case, a man is not able to pay the whole amount of bride price in one installment. He may be permitted to pay a part of it at marriage and the rest afterwards, if the bride's parents agree to the arrangement. If the boy is too poor and is not in the position to arrange for the required bride price for the girl he wants to marry, then the bride price is paid by the groom through his service towards the bride's parents.

The nature and amount of payment vary from tribe to tribe²⁰². Generally, the bride-price offered by a Kabul Naga consists of 7 buffaloes two daos two spears two strings of hoes and for Tangkhul Nagas it is two dogs and two daos, for a (Vlao Naga, it is a pig and spear, for the Anals and the Purumsoo Manipur, it is a pig and hoe, but the price of a Vaiphei girl of Kuki tribes varies from two to ten IVIithuns whereas a Hmar fixes it within three to seven mithuns, one hoe, a pair of cloth and a jar of rice beer.

The price of a girl belonging to Lamgang tribe of Kuki is fixed for three pigs or buffaloes or cattle, a necklace of conch-shells, one bracelet and a black or blue cloth and the price of a Mate Kuki tribe is ten mithuns, two necklaces, two Mate poundum (Mate tribe traditional cloth) and two gongs. The price of a Thadou Kuki girl is the highest among all other tribes of Manipur It is generally fixed between two and ten mithuns or pigs, two large gongs, two sets of ordinary gongs and two tscds whereas the price of Chiru girl is only a gong, which is considered to be the lowest. Among the Hmar Kukis, the bride price is divided into various shares such as Man-pu/ (lion share of bride price goes to the bride's parents), Panghak (a portion is given to bride's parents kinsmen), Pusum (a portion -given to bride's maternal uncle called Pu). Nisum (a portion given to the bride's father's sister) and

²⁰²Jyotirmoy Roy, *History of Manipur*, 1958 p.221, Langsun D.Mate, *The Mate tribe of Manipur*, p.30

Zuorman (a small portion given to the bride's friends and cousins)²⁰³ Similarly among the Mizos, the bride price is shared in various parts. They are: Manpui (the main price) paid to the father or brothers of the bride, Pushum (given to nearest male relative on the mother's side who is chosen as the bride's 'pu' or protector), Palal (friend of the bride who is expected to look after her interests throughout her whole married life), Niaman (Aunt's price which is equal to Pusham which has to be paid to the bride's aunt on her father's side, in case the aunts are more than one then the eldest niece and the second aunt that of the second niece and so on), Thian (female Palal, but she receives a small sum from Rs. 10/- onwards) and Nau Puan Puak Man (Price of carrying the younger sister in her cloth)²⁰⁴. These sums are not paid at one time, in fact the tradition is that some of the amount remains unpaid for many years, but it is the custom to pay a certain amount of manpu; before the marriage, which is called 'sum hma hrual' i.e., 'the price before taking'. Among the Darlong tribes of Tripura, the bride price is shared among Punrang (the paternal uncle/grand father of the bride), Pu hrang (the mother of the bride), Nu hrang (sister of the bride's father), U hrang (brother/sister of the bride), Palai hman (negotiator) and Cham hman (friend of the bride)²⁰⁵

Among the Naga tribes, the bride price for the Sema Nagas is the highest. Among them also, the bride price is shared by the different relatives of the bride apart from her father. The amount is distributed between three male and three female relatives of the bride. The lion's share i.e. two-third of the price paid for the bride is kept by the latter's father or guardian. The remaining one-third price is shared between bride's elder or younger uncle, elder brother all the male side, eldest sister of the bride, eldest sister of her mother and bride's youngest sister. There is a deep philosophy in Sharing the bride price among the

²⁰³ Lal Dena, *The Humors through the ages' in Manipur. Post and Present*. Vol III .edt, by Noorem Sanjnaba, p.268

²⁰⁴ Lt. Colonel J. Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki clans*,p.51.

²⁰⁵ Letthuama Darlong, *The Darlongs of Tripura* p. 146

relatives, which is explained by Ghosh in the paper 'Sema marriage'. According to him²⁰⁶, the selection of the bride's uncle from father's side who would be given the bride price depends upon uncle's physical and economic condition. The young and economically solvent uncle will be chosen to get the bride price, because he will be able to protect and help with men and money the newly married couple if the son-in-law or girl falls sick or faces danger. Before giving him the amount, the groom accepts him as A/a, that is, father. The same purpose is implicated on the other members of the recipient of the bride price. Thus, with the bride price, the promise of help is purchased.

The bride price is for the reason that daughter is considered as an asset and symbol of affluence for the family, since she is an earning and helping hands to the parents as well as to the whole family. The marriage of a daughter is a loss for her parents and helpful for the groom's party. Adding a female member in the groom's family means an additional hand for cultivation works and increase in the production and consequently the wealth of the family. Hence, the system of bride price is present in the tribal society. It seems that one of the intentions behind the bride price taken by the bride's father from the groom's party is to compensate the loss of service of the girl to her family after her marriage. That is the reason why in the matrimonial market, the would-be bride's working capacity is assessed rather than her chastity²⁰⁷. Due to the bride price, marriage in Arunachal Pradesh is more a display of one's financial status than anything else. The rich, who can afford the bride price, marry off their son at a very early age whereas the poor people, who cannot afford the bride price, remain unmarried for a long period or adopt other substitutes or marriage like marriage by service till they manage bride price. The bride price among most of the tribes is not paid at once but paid in installments. Often it is found that the Son-in-law throughout his life pays the bride price, and even his sons pay it off.

²⁰⁶ "Dr. B.BGhosh, Sema" in *The tribes of northeast India, ed. by Sebastian Karotemprel*, pp.139-140.

²⁰⁷ D.K. Duffa, *Status of women in tribal society Arunachal Pradesh*, ed. by Dr. S.S. Pandey p.322.

This is a kind of social binding for lasting relationship between the two families.

4.10.5.30: Marriage gifts

Like the bride price, the payment of marriage gifts is also compulsory to be given to the girl by her parents during her marriage. The gifts that are given generally consisted of one pig, variety of ornaments, beads of various shapes and sizes, utensils and clothes etc. according to the financial position of the girl's parents. All the marriage gifts are personal property of the girl and so she brings these gifts with her when she comes to her husband's house. The marriage gifts depend upon the bride price. Larger, the amount of bride price, the marriage gifts are also larger and valuable.

4.10.5.31: Polygamy :

Monogamy is the ideal and general practice among most of the tribes of Northeast India but Polygamy is also socially and legally recognized type of marriage. But there are also certain causes, which indulge polygamy, such as if the first wife is barren or if there is no male issue. But the main motivation behind polygamy is one's economic and social status. It is more popular among the rich section of the tribal society because paying the bride price for second time is beyond the capacity of common people. Among the Wancho, Nocte, Singpho tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and Konyak Nagas the privilege of polygamy is restricted to the chiefs only. The first wife, known as Wangsa dong, should be the daughter chief of another village and the others are from commoner's class known as Wangsa nadi or Wangnu ²⁰⁸.

²⁰⁸ Parul Dutta, *The Noctes* p-127

Polygamy enhances a man's status in society since it is indication of his economic strength to afford for more than one wife. But the position, rights and privileges of first wife always remain supreme. Co-wives, however living under the same roof never create any domestic strife or inconvenience in any way. A king of Manipur with three wives must share his company in rotation for five nights with his first wife, for four nights with his second wife and for three nights with his third wife²⁰⁹. But there are such tribes also, where monogamy is practiced strictly. Tangsas (except the and the Lungris) and Sherdukpen tribes of Arunachal Pradesh cannot have two wives at the same time under any circumstances²¹⁰. Apart from these conditions, sororal polygyny also prevails among some of the tribes like the Akas, Singphos, Sulungs, Hill Ivliri, Adi, Apatani, Bangni, Khowa, Memba, Mishng, Monpa, etc²¹¹. But most of the tribes follow sororal polygyny only if the wife is barren.

4.10.5.32: Polyandry

Polyandry is restricted among most of the tribes of Northeast India. But a peculiar custom of Fraternal polyandry is prevalent among the Gallong-Adi tribes and Ramo-Adi tribes, Memba tribes, Hill Ivliri tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. In these tribal societies, the married woman is bound to allow sexual access to all the brothers of her husband. This custom is known as Hego Bonam or Nyame Bonam by the Ramos²¹². The man who actually performed the marriage ceremony is recognized as the father of the children born out of such relations though he may not be the biological father of the said children²¹². The main

²⁰⁹ Jyotirmoy Roy, *History of Manipur* p. 221

²¹⁰ Parul Dutta. *The Tangsas*, p.59 R.R.P. Sharma. *The Sherdukpens*. p 55

²¹¹ *Status of women in Arunachal Pradesh* edited by BB, Pandey

²¹² M.M. Dhasmana, *The Ramos of Arunachal Pradesh*, pp. 120-124.

²¹² P. T. Nair *Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh* pp.54-55

reason for practicing this type of polyandry is lower sex ratio of females and also the economic problem of paying bride price. Because of less number of female in comparison to male members in the society, the demand of female in marital affair is supposed to be high, so the system of polyandry prevails in the society. Due to the lower sex ratio the bride price is high since the real brother's are unable to pay the bride price for individual wives they bring a wife for one brother and other brothers are permitted to get sexual pleasure with the sister-in-law.

4.10.5.32: Female Chastity

Unlike the Assamese Hindu society, premarital chastity is not measured as the indispensable excellence of the bride in most of the tribal society. The tribal people have a very scientific liberal attitude to all matters concerning sex. Unmarried girls and boys are not interfered with in their lovemaking and even the bearing of children out of wedlock before marriage is not strongly frowned upon. Since the grown up girls are not only cramped to the household chores, but also they have to go to the cultivated fields to assist their parents in the agricultural works, therefore it is always not probable for the girls to protect their chastity. Even sometimes when a girl is captured by an enemy, she offers her sex to protect herself from the enemy²¹⁴. Hence, fornication, infidelity, premarital sexual relation etc. are not regarded as serious transgression.

Some of the tribal communities of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram and Tripura are very liberal in allowing a lot of freedom to young boys and girls to mix freely with each other without any restriction. In fact, some of the tribes like different sub-tribes of Adis, Wanchos Tangsas, Singphos, Membas of Arunachal.

214 Jogendra Nath, *Cultural heritage of tribal societies*, p. 59.

Pradesh and Konyyaks and Phoms of Nagaland enter into matrimonial alliance after some amount of premarital understanding and even some amount of cohabitation. Among the Konyaks and Phoms of Nagaland, sexual liberty is given to both the sexes sometimes to prove the child bearing capacity of the boy and the girl, which is a pre-condition of formal marriage¹¹⁵. For these purpose two institutions namely Musup and Raseng, (male and female dormitories) respectively were created among the Padams, Looppong (boys dormitories) and loops or likpyas (girls dormitories) among Tangsas, of Arunachal Pradesh, Longshim (boys dormitories) and Ngalalong (girls dormitories) among the Tangkhul Nagas. The grown-up boys and girls sleep at night in the respective dormitorics. About these two institutions of Arunachal Pradesh, J. Nath comments, "In addition to many other socially important functions performed by these two institutions, these create congenial atmosphere for free pre-nuptial sexual relations between the boys and the girls. The Raseng serve as a place for premarital sexual relationship and mutual understanding and to test each other's potentialuy to produce children¹¹⁶. Sachin Roy while dealing with the courtship (If boys and girls before marriage in the Raseng writes, "After adolescence, a gill really starts her romantic life and in the Raseng, she starts her courtship which leads. Her choose her mate in future life. Young boys from different Musnups come and join the girls in the Raseng in the night. A girl is free to entertain any boy of her choice and there is no reflexion in the character of the girls of the boys for doing so "²¹⁷.

Among the Lushei Kuki tribes, there is no female dormitory but in each house there is a separate sleeping place for the young girls known as kumai, where the young boys are permitted to enter at night Shakespeare narrates, "If a young man is found on khuma/ nothing is said to him.....If a girl becomes pregnant, the man responsible at once surrounded by her relatives, who demand a as the price of his indiscretion.

²¹⁵ *Ibid*, p-80.

²¹⁶ Yogendra Nath, , *Cultural heritage of Tribal Societies*. Vol. I ((The Adis) , p-66

²¹⁷ Sachin Roy, *Aspects of Padam-Minyoung Culture*, pp.197-198

This is called 'sawn man' the price of the bastard This has to be paid even in the case of the child being born dead and in case of premature births, where the legs and arms are complete. When the father has paid the sawn man he can claim the child as soon as it is old enough to leave its mother"²¹⁸.

The Mizo society is also very liberal in the matter of female chastity. There is a peculiar system of *engilgelilent* among them known as *zawl-puan-phan* means preparing the lover's bed among the *Ivlizos*. If the negotiated marriage is postponed for some reasons, the boy and the girl are allowed to make physical relation in the girl's house and surprisingly girl's mother prepares the bed for such relation and if the marriage is cancelled due to some reasons after *zawl-puan-phan*, the boy has to a fine of *rour mifhuns* immediately single installment²¹⁹. Premarital sexual affairs are encouraged in the *Dimasa* society in turn to reduce the bride price. If the boy makes the girl pregnant, then the girl becomes bound to marry the boy and the latter has to pay a nominal bride price besides a fine for the offence imposed by the village council²²⁰.

Among Nagas, all the tribes are not so tolerant to give sexual freedom to the boys and girls. Mutton remarks about the chastity of the Naga girls, "While the Ao girl is bound to admit men to the girls' house at night, chastity before marriage prevails among the *Semas*, where the marriage price of a girl is reduced at least 50 per cent, by the fact of her having had an intrigue. The *Angamis* would seem to fall somewhere between the Ao and the *Semas*, Accurate information about the precise degree of chastity observed by *Angami*

²¹⁸ L.T. Coloneal J. Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki clans*. p52.

²¹⁹ L.B. Thunga, *The Mizos* PP. 18-19 .

²²⁰ Dipali G. Dande. *Among the Dima of Assam*. P. 31.

girls is very difficult to Obtain²²¹. About the premarital chastity of the tribes of Tripura, Captain Lewin remarks, 'great freedom of intercourse is allowed' among the Puran Tippcrahs, Noatias, Jamatias, Riangs and Uchais of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The first state of marriage starts with the sexual affairs developed between a boy and a girl, but this does not necessarily mean that particular couple engaged in the sexual affairs is bound to marry each other. Nath remarks, "In case a particular pair find sexual maladjustment or sexual impotency of one or the other, both the boy and the girl are at liberty to seek other partner²²². If the girl conceives during this probation period she delivers the issue without any social castigation and is free to marry any boy of her choice. The pre-marital child is not seen as illegitimate but is given the name of the father if the child is the boy and of the mother if it is a girl. The child becomes a member of the above family according to its gender. The restriction only given to them is clan exogamy.

4.10.5.33: Adultery

Though pre-marital sexual relation with either sex is allowed in tribal society, but it customarily becomes a punishable offence when someone is found to be involved in sexual affairs after marriage. In case of the husband, the wife may even seek divorce by restoring the bride price paid. In case of the wife, the husband may demand heavy compensation besides the bride price paid by him from the male co-adulterer or the parents of his wife. Among the Nagas, "In the very extreme case of an unfaithful wife, after having deprived of her jewellery and personal property, her hair cut off, her nose clipped or split upon with a spear, she is returned to her parents or relatives"²²³. If this happens within three years of marriage, the husband can even demand the full return of the bride price. The adultery cases are generally solved by the village council.

²²¹ J.H. Hutton, *The Angami Nagas* (2nd Edn.), p. 169.

²²² Captain TH Lewin. *The hill tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers therein* .p.67.

²²³ Asoso Yonuo. *The Rising Nagas*, p. 12.

4.10.5.35: Divorce

Divorce is a rare occurrence among the tribal people of Northeast India. The main reason behind this custom is the bride price. This implies a sort of purchase of the girl by her husband's family /clan . Generally a husband never thinks of divorcing his wife without any reasonable fault because in such case chances of getting back the bride price is very less and many second times means again he has to pay bride price for the 2nd wife, which is very difficult if the groom belongs to a family of feeble economic background. And in case, where the wife asks for divorce without any fault of her husband, she or her parents have to return the bride price to the husband or his family. Usually, the parents, who have exhausted the bride-wealth for their daughter, are not desirous to give that the same. His Mills gives his opinion about the adjustment among the Rengma couple, "He knows that if it makes life intolerable for her he will lose both her then marriage price he has paid, she knows that if it becomes impossible to live with her husband, she can be turned out and her relation made to repay what they receive for her. All these make for reasonable give and take, and so for stability and happiness." Inspire of All these barriers both the husband and wife hold the right to divorce their spouse on certain ²²⁴ specific grounds. The husband can divorce his wife if she is very, notorious, defiant, ill tempered. Argumentative, unskilled in Agriculture operation, sterile or found to have some illicit relation with other man or misbehave him or other members of the family. Similarly the wife is at liberty to divorce her husband if he is not honest to his wife, short-tempered, gambler drunkard, important, deserts his wife, give no security to his wife, torture his wife or have illegal connection with other women. But among all these reasons, adultery is considered to be the main cause of divorce from either side. Among the Kuki-Lushai tribes, divorce is not permissible except for adultery and even it is rarely resorted to if the

²²⁴ J.P. Mill, *The Rangma Nagas*, P-163

couple had children. In such cases the adulterer is given the punishment of heavy fine²²⁵. The barrenness of a woman is not the cause of divorce in all the tribes. According to the custom of the Ramo-Adi tribes, if a woman is not able to procreate any child throughout her life, she cannot be sent back to her father's home and the bride price cannot be reclaimed but the husband can go for second marriage in her presence²²⁶. Among some of the tribes such as Singphos, Sulungs, Buguns of Arunachal Pradesh, if the divorce claim comes from wife's side, the bride price, which the husband has already paid is to be returned to him under any circumstances and the wife can not claim any compensation from her husband for her future life and if the divorce claim comes from husband's side and the wife is found to be guilty then the father of the girl has to pay double of the bride price paid for her²²⁷. But in Miji society of Arunachal Pradesh, if termination of matrimony is initiated by the husband then he has to pay a mithun to his father-in-law as marriage compensation, but on the other hand, if divorce is to be initiated first from the wife's side for the reason of her husband second marriage but without her knowledge and consent then he has to forfeit the bride price, which he has already paid to his father-in-law, but if a wife divorces her husband without assigning any reason, then she is to return the full bride price to her deserted husband. But nothing has to be paid to each other or the couple if divorce takes place with mutual agreement²²⁸. According to Shakespeare, among the Lushai-Kuki tribes of Mizoram, "The bonds of matrimony are extremely loose and are very easily slipped off if a couple disagree they simply separate. The woman returns to her parents and the man renounces all claims to any portion of her price, which he may have paid, unless the woman agrees to its being partially returned. If the man turns the woman out for no fault he must pay up her full price, if he has not already done so. If a woman commits

²²⁵ CA Sopitt. *A short account of the Kuki Lushai tribes* p 15.

²²⁶ M.M. Dhasmono, *The Romas of Arunachal* p.117

²²⁷ Parul Datta. *The Singphos* p 86, R.K. Deuri, *The Sulungs*, P-65

²²⁸ R.K. Deuri, *The marriage system of Miji's in Aspects culture and customs of Arunachal Pradesh*. ed by Or. P.C. Dutta & Dr. D.K. Duarah. p.61

adultery or leaves her husband against his will, however unfaithful he may have been, the whole of her price has to be refunded"²²⁹. The Darlongs of Tripura had some special divorce laws apart from the common ones²³⁰. If inma or inden (divorce) is commenced from husband's side and the wife is 'thisen pal' means has children from her husband, then the husband pays Rs. 70/- as 'Faruang' (share of the children) to retain the children and if he divorces his wife during her pregnancy, the child in the womb belongs to the mother and the husband has to pay Rs.30/- as 'maktha' (fine for divorce); on the other hand.

If the first move of divorce is from wife's side, she has to refund the full bride price to her husband and if there is any children, even the womb one also belongs to her husband, but the wife is not required to pay any "makfha". But nothing has to be paid to each other and divide their property as they wish if divorce takes place by Hlawmbong (mutual agreement). If the divorce occurs through Nupul rawkhal (abandonment of wife and family), then all his properties goes to his wife and in case the husband returns after a long gap, the wife has the right to accept or reject him .Another type of divorce is found among the Darlongs known as 'Ralinna', where either of the lover refuses to marry the other which is known as 'divorce before marriage'. If the man divorces his lover before marriage, he has to pay a fine of Rs. 50/- as 'makfha', whereas if the girl divorces her male lover she is not required to pay any fine. A special provision of divorce is known as 'Thiung Inma', which divorce after the death of husband, if the wife finds it difficult to continue to live with the relatives of her deceased husband, she can be free to return to her parents' house with all her share of property given to her by her husband after paying Rs. 30/- as 'makfha' to her deceased husband's family. If the divorced husband and wife want to marry each other then the husband has to pay Rs. 200/- as "Hmanpui' to the parent or guardian of his wife

²²⁹ J Shakespeare, *The Lushei Kuki clan* p.5i

²³⁰ Letfhumna Darlongs, *The Darlongs of Tnpuro*, pp. 253-255

amongst the Nagas, the marriage system of the Seema, Lotha and Rengma Nagas is based upon bride price. Therefore, the divorce is very subject for them because they not have to return any large amount after divorce. Mills opines about the Ao Nagas. "What marriage price there is very small? This is good in that it prevents parents parents from selling their daughters against their will, but it also ten us to make divorce easy, for the husband has paid little Cor his wife and loses little if he parts with her. Divorce is amazingly common. In fact it is very rare that one meets, an Ao man or woman or any age who has only been married once. Couples part on the least provocation"²³¹. Among the Sema Nagas, if the divorce takes place within three years of marriage on the ground of adultery, the husband can claim the marriage price from her paramour and also some considerable fine from the parents of the girl, but if the divorce takes place for the reason other than adultery within three years of marriage, the husband may claim back a part of the price, but not after that date. Though he can claim it if the wife leaves her husband on her own will but if she leaves her husband's house for maltreatment without cause, the husband docs not get back anything²³². Divorce is easy to be obtained among the matrilineal society of Khasi, Garo and Jaintias of Meghalaya. The Garos and the War Khasis get divorce without the mutual agreement between both the parties. Among the Garos, divorce is allowed almost automatically on payment of the customary dai of sixty rupees or so. And among the Khasis, the party requesting for divorce without his or her consent may get divorce by paying a compensation called ka mynrain or ka thnem which is literally a humiliating compensation to the other side²³³. There is a rule among the Khasi s that the couple once divorced cannot remarry with each other afterwards, but they are permitted to marry in different families”²³⁴

²³¹ , J.P. Mills, *The AO Nagas* (2nd edn.) p. 212.

²³² J.H.Hutton, *The Sema Nagas* (2nd edn.) p. 242.

²³³ P.R.T. Gurdon, *The Khasis*. p. 79 H. Bursh, *The History and culture of the Khasi people* p. 295

²³⁴ P. A T Gurdon, *The Khasis*. p. 79

The children in the matrilineal society belong to the mother's Aw' and therefore, remain under her custody in case of separation. Traditionally, the divorce ceremony is very simple among the Khasis and Garos. The divorce ceremony of the Khasis are performed in the presence of the senior members and some relatives of the community as witness, preferably the Ksiangs (negotiators) from each side who recite the marriage contract and the Kni (maternal uncles) of both the parties. The husband gives five cowries or pices to his wife and the latter returns them adding five more cowries or pices to her husband who throws them on the ground and this completes the divorce after which a crier nong pyrfa sknong) then goes round the village to proclaim the divorce²³⁵. Among the Garos, the divorce ceremony known as Bolseki Den 'a, the husband and the wife each take some dust in their hands and swear by Mane, the Earth, to have no dealings with and claim from each other in future in front of the village assembly. After the oath, the priest takes a sword, chopper or spear provided by the man whose marriage is being annulled, and strikes with it the Bolseki tree and calls upon it as a son of the Earth to be a witness to the oath which has just been taken²³⁶. The divorce cases of the patriarchal tribes are generally settled by the village councils or the respective couples to which they belong. The village council cautiously deliberates on the faults of the partner, who is accused by the other partner and then gives verdict of permission/fine as per their customary laws. Generally in the tribal society, the children of the dissolved marriage stay with the father. But among few tribes such as Digaru Mishmi tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, if it is daughter then during her marriage, one-fourth of the bride price shall have to be given to the mother²³⁷.

²³⁵ Ibid. pp. 79-80; H. Burch, *The History and Culture of the Khasi people* p.295

²³⁶ Milton S.Sangma, *History and culture of the Garos*,p.203.

²³⁷ 'R.K.Deori, *Status; Digaru Mishmi*' in *Status of women in tribal society; Arunachal Pradesh*, ed by Dr.B.B. Pandey,p.87.

Among some other tribes, like Padam, Minyong, Bokar Ad is, Ivlonpas of Arunachal Pradesh, Dimasas of Assam, the rule is that the father has legal right over the male child, whereas mother gets the responsibility of the female children. In Aka society, the right over the children of the dissolved marriage is generally settled through the village council the decision about this depends on the economic status of the husband²³⁸. After divorce the social status of the woman almost remains the same as before due to the provision of remarriage. By separating from her husband, she also loses her claim over the husband's property. But according to the tribal custom of Ivlonpas, the wife gets a share of her husband's property if she is not at fault and the divorce is initiated by the husband²³⁹

²³⁸R.N. Kolcy, *Status of women; Aka in Status of women in tribal Society, Arunachal Pradesh* ed. By B.B Pandey . pondy,p.359.

²³⁹T. T. Norbu *Status of women Monpa in status women in tribal society, Arunachal Pradesh*,p.305.

CHAPTER-V

ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOIVIEN

5.1: Economic Status of Women

Our previous discussion proved that Assamese women in the ancient and medieval society were not only confined to the household chores, but also many of them contributed their large part of share in the political field. In the same way Assamese women played a vital role in socio-economic functioning of the state, which cannot be ignored in any way. They contributed in many ways to the family wealth and income by engaging themselves in different economic activities. We can observed that women contribute their economic share by doing many vital activities such as food preparation, child bearing and caring, family management, fuel and water caring, animal rearing and a host of other activities in the house. Besides, many of them worked in the agricultural field also. It is especially more meaningful in the context of rural areas where women constituted a substantive proportion of work force either in the formal or informal sectors. But unfortunately their works were not accounted as economic share to the family or country. Therefore it becomes very necessary to make a comprehensive and expedient study of the contribution of women in the Assamese society. Due to the scarcity of the availability of the reliable sources it is very difficult to find the actual zconomic status and the economic activities of women in the ancient and medieval Assamese society. To find out the economic contribution of women, let us analyze in brief the economy of Assam in those days and the role of women in it.

5.1.1: Women in Agriculture:

Assamese society was basically a rural and agrarian society where agriculture was the main source of livelihood for the people in general. The economy of Assam was depended mainly on agriculture and cattle rearing. Women were engaged in both the above works. From the very beginning the main work of the girls was milking the cow. Hence they were named as Duhita — originating from the word Go-dohan²⁴⁰.

Agriculture forms the backbone of the economy of Assam till recently. More than 70% of the total population depended upon and hence engaged in agriculture for their livelihood. Both jhuming and ploughing cultivation were known, the former involving the dibbling method was popular among the hill tribes, while the latter, involving hoe and the plough was common among the plainsmen. Cultivation from the very beginning was carried on by the jhuming method, which consists in raising small embankments or terraces for preservation of water at the root of the paddy plants. First, the shrubs and jungles on the land were cleared; holes were made in the land with the help of digging sticks and then seeds were sowed without the use of hoe or plough. The use of hoes and ploughs of course marked an improved state in this method, as it is evident from the various land grants. Even now among most of the tribes, this is the main method employed in cultivation. This method is believed to have been introduced at a very early time. The Chinese traveler Hiuen-tsang informs that the country of Ka-ma-lu-po was low and moist; the crops were regular... there were continuous streams and tanks to the towns.²⁴¹" These prove that proper care was taken for irrigation from the ancient period, which helped in the cultivation of paddy and other agriculture products.

²⁴⁰ *Rigveda VIII,101,15,F-17, 40.5.*

²⁴¹ Waters, on Yuan Chwang's *Travel in India* , ii, p-185.

Rice being the staple food, the major part of the cultivated land was devoted to the cultivation of paddy. Different variants of paddies were cultivated in ancient and medieval Assam. The YT enumerated nearly twenty variants rice²⁴². Besides rice growing, people cultivated other crops like pulses and mustered seeds.²⁴³

Cultivation of sugar canes, pumpkins and gourds in the early period was proved both by epigraphy and literature. Among the presents sent by Bhaskara to harsa, Bana mentioned about guda (molasses) prepared from sugarcane in the earthen pots and pumpkins and gourds, containing painting materials.²⁴⁴ The Bargaon grant refers to "arable land with cluster (hills) of gourds (labukutiksetra)". The cultivation of various kinds of vegetables is mentioned in many works. The other green vegetables and esculents are Ada(ginger), Haladhi (Termeric). Kachu (the arum plant), Lai, Lapha, Chuka, IVIaricha, Dhania, Purai, Lechera-mah, Paleng, Babari, Katari-dabua-mah, Bengena, Jika, Kerola, Kakirol, Tiah, Bangi, Dhunduli, Bhol, etc.

Besides rice and other crops both literature and inscription proved the cultivation of different fruit trees. The epigraphs mention kantaphala (jack fruit), Amra (mango), Jambu (Eugenia jambollana), Sriphala, Dumbari (fig tree), Sakhotaka (the walnut tree), Badari (jujube tree), Lakucha or Amalaka, (a kind of bread fruit tree), Amla, Betasa (gamboze tree), Puga (betel nut), Coraka (a wild palm tree whose nuts are eaten as betel nuts), Rudraska (bead tree) and many sour fruits, such as Au(dillenis indica) Tentali and others. Huien Tsiang mentions that the people of kamarupa cultivated the jackfruit and the coconut. Among the fruits, which this country produces, wrote Quazim, "Are mangoes, plantains, jacks, oranges, citrons, limes, pineapples and punialeh, a species of amleh, which has such an excellence of flavor that every person who tastes it, prefers it to the plum. There are also coconut trees, pepper-vines, area trees and sadij, (malavothrum

²⁴² *YT Chap II 5, pp-293-29&*

²⁴³ F. Hamilton, *An account of Assam*, p-58

²⁴⁴ P.C Choudbury, *The History of the Civilization of the People of Assam*, P-335.

or tezpāt) in great plenty²⁴⁵. The acid fruits of the people are Au-tenga, amara, Jalphai, Katrina, the two kinds of Thekera, viz. Bar-thekera and kuji-thekera, kavja, teteli, Karddai, Jara, Jeneru, Leteku, Robab-tenga, etc. the cultivation of betel nut trees along with the betel vine creeper (Pan-gachh) is found both in the records of the early period as well as of the medieval period. Betel nut and betel leaves were grown almost in every garden²⁴⁶. Spices were also produced in the country. The YT and other literary works mentioned many varieties of spices. The YT mentions of plantations like haridra (turmeric), ardraka (ginger), jiraka (cumin), pippaliyaka (long pepper), marica (pepper), sarisa (mustard), karpura and others. The same reference is found in the KP²⁴⁷, which also mentions a large number of precious trees including sarala, sala, candana and agaru. From the above description it is clear that Assam had a rich agricultural heritage, which is of great economic value.

5.1.2: Women as salves and agricultural labourer

Agriculture being the mainstay of the people of Assam, and all the people of the state, rich or poor were directly or indirectly connected with the land in which women played a major part. Rich people did not engage themselves in the agricultural work. They employed male and female laborers for the purpose of ploughing and reaping. Both Brihaspati and Narada were unambiguous on this point. Thus Narada confirmed that among the different kind of paid servants, the "soldiers, agriculturists and porters, the agricultural laborers occupied the second rank in importance and should get one-tenth of the product of the soil in case the pay scale of the hired laborer had not been properly fixed. According to Brihaspati, such a laborer should receive a third or fifth part of the crops. But if a laborer would have neglected his task his payment should be stopped and he

²⁴⁵ *Asiatic Researches, II*, p-173.

²⁴⁶ F. Hamilton *An Account of Assam*, pp-46,55.

²⁴⁷ *YT, II/7*, 183-184, see also *Kumara Harana V-208*

Should be produced in the court and in such a case the king should impose double as much fine as the wages and pay the same as compensation to the owner of the soil.

But in case of Assam the epigraphs at our disposal hardly give us definite light on the above discussed point, but in the Ahom period , we find that wealthy landlords hired servants for the agriculture works and also could ask insolvent borrowers to repay their debts through such services. Parmananda, a monk at Sankara's monastery, was formerly working for others against the loan he had taken of one rupee's worth of cowries. Another person, Balarama of Tapa, was a husband name in other's farms in order to repay a similar Loan. A third man Srirama, a native of the village called Simalwa or Simaliya was a hired hand (munis, munih, duniya bandha) at a rich villager's establishment at the Ahom Kingdom the nobles had a great number of slaves and retainers (bilatiya) working in their private estates while other rich people kept such slaves if they could have afforded them. With reference to the slaves in the Ahom Kingdom, gait writes. "They bought and sold openly, the price ranging from about twenty rupees for an adult male of good caste to three rupees for a low caste girl." ²⁴⁸

Though we do not get any details about the work of the female slaves, but observing the low class females slaves and labourers in the rural society of Assam in the present days, which undoubtedly comes as a tradition from the previous days, we may infer that the girl slaves were not only engaged in the household work but were also occupies in the agriculture works during transplanting the seedling and reaping the crops. Now, days the proportion of women worker in Assam is hiring agriculture then in any other sector and industry.

²⁴⁸ Bhusana, pp-141-f. cited in M. Neog, *Early history of the Vaishanava faith and movement in Assam*, p-77.

5.1.3 : Women in the Cultivation Work

Similarly, in the ancient and medieval Assamese society, women of the peasants and lower classes helped their husbands by engaging themselves in the cultivation work by sorting of seeds, uprooting of seedlings, transplanting harvesting etc. the Raghuvamsa also stated that in kamrupa the wives of cultivators watched their crops ²⁴⁹. By sharing their husbands effort in cultivation works, women along with their husbands, contributed to the economic burdens of the family in their shoulders. But, women of the upper caste were not allowed to work out side the home. Therefore they indirectly took the liability of the family economy by engaging their leisure hours in kitchen gardening contiguous to their houses where they grew different kinds of vegetables, stalks, yarns etc. The YT mentioned many vegetables and other esculents, which are cultivated by the people in their kitchen garden even today. The green vegetables and other esculents mentioned in this work are Mulaka, Rajaka, Bastuka, palanga, Kusmanda etc. other than kitchen gardening they give their contribution in the family economy by doing knitting, embroidery, weaving etc.

5.1.4 : Women in Crafts and industries

The craftsmen of kamrupa played a great role in development of various industries in ancient India. We find references of different professional classes in literature, foreign accounts and epigraphy. The different sources referred to weavers, spinners, goldsmiths, potters, and workers in ivory, metal, wood, cane, bamboo, etc. the ruling kings inspired the different crafts by giving them economic help and as a result the industries of Assam gained a great reputation in the craftsmanship of other parts of contemporary India Society

250

²⁴⁹ Raghuvansa, ix, 20.

²⁵⁰ P.C. Choudhury, the History of Civilization of the People of Assam, P-338.

5.1.5 : Women in Spinning and weaving :

Among the industries, spinning and weaving, were the most popular and common occupations of the people of Assam. From the very early period, spinning and weaving were entrusted to women, which could be observed from the Vedic simile in which night and dawn were compared to two young women engaged in weaving²⁵¹. The words like *Siri* and *Vayitri*, meaning female weaver appeared in the Vedic literature. In the ancient and medieval Assamese society, there was a class of professional weavers; women of every Assamese family were engaged in these occupations, which is still prevalent in the rural society as household industry. Dr. Anuva Saikia points out that in the present rural sectors of Assam, in the industry sector the percentage of female engaged in the households industry is the highest in Assam among the major states of India. From time immemorial, spinning of cotton and cocoons of different kinds of silk worms and also extracting fibers from certain kinds of plants and trees had been in existence.

5.1.6 : Women in Manufacture of cotton garments

In the ancient period cotton shrubs were grown for the manufacture of cotton cloths. The use of *Karpasa* (cotton) garments is also shown by the *kalika Purna* of the 10th century A.D. and the *Harsacarita*²⁵². Cotton was cultivated throughout the whole country. The adjacent hill tribes more extensively cultivated it; but they used it little²⁵³. The hill tribes bartered it for other commodities with the people of the plains who spinned threads out of it. The tribes, who cultivated cotton most, were the Garos, the Nagas and the Mikirs. The cotton cloths of Assam were very famous due to its Excellency in the art of manufacture and so it was in great

²⁵¹ RV,II 38 & AV,V.7.42.

²⁵² H.C.Cowell, *Harscharita*, pp- 2121.

²⁵³ F.B. Hamilton, *An Account of Assam*, p-59.

Demand in and outside the reign. Other than cotton cloths, the KP mentioned about the woolen garments (Kambala), bark cloths(Valka), Silk AND HEMP CLOTHS(SANAVASTRAM), Bark cloths were made of fibers of trees and plants. The process was widely prevalent among most of the tribes of Assam. The hill tribes were expert in spinning or preparing threads from the fibers of the barks of the plants, Even in the present days, Most the tribal's were found to manufacture excellent fabrics of various designs through his process. An early references to a variety of bark cloth known as srnkhalā cloths won by the kiratas, forming the army of Bhagadatta is mentioned in the Mhb.

5.1.7: Women in Manufacture of Silk cloths:

Other than cotton clothes, Assam was very popular for the manufacture of silk clothes in all over the country. The Assamese knew that art of sericulture and the process of rearing cocoons for the manufacture of various silk cloths as early as the Ramayana and the Arthasastra. The former mentioned in one pages about Magadha, Angra, Pandra and the "country of the cocoon-rearers", (Kasa-karanam bhumi)²⁵⁴. This "country of cocoon reares" is believed to be kamarupa lying to the east of Pundra by the historians of the early period. The varieties of silk cloths are mentioned in the Arthasastra, which make an important references to ksauma, dukula and patrorna fabrics from Suvarnakundya is the modern Sonkudiha in the district of kamrupa. The evidence from Arthasastra is also confirmed by Harsacarita, which gives valuable evidence on the industrial resources of Assam during the time of Bhaskara. The presents sent to Harsha by Bhaskaravarman, were "silken cloths (ksaumani), pure as the moons light",

²⁵⁴ *Ramayana*, Kishkindhyakanda, 40

"abhoga umbrella wrapped is dukula cloth" and a "verietiy of silken objects woven out of pattasutra". Dukula is also referred to in the Bargaon grant of Ratnapala 225.

Assam enjoyed a reputation from remote antiquity for producing silk of high degree of perfection. The classical writers, beginning at least with the 1st century A.D., Made important mention of the production of silk and the silk trade in and through Assam. The periplus referred to both raw and manufactured silk. which were brought from China or Assam²⁵⁶. Pliny showed some knowledge of the silk trade that was carried on through Assam. The antiquity of the silk industry in In india is uncertain, but schoff observed, " The weight of evidence seems to be in favour of its importation from china by way of the Brahmaputra valley, Assam, eastern Bangal, early in the Christain era. Hodson states that silk insects were noticed the excellent quality of silk. Quazim wrote that the silk of Assam was very excellent resembling that of the China. Tavernier remarked that the silk of Assam was produced on trees and the stuff made of them was very brilliant.

The different varieties of silk, especially associated with Assam are known as pat (patta), edi (attacus ricine) made from the silk of the worm of the same name; and muga (antheroea Assamoea) from a cocoon of the same name. The terms pat and edi are derived from the Sanskrit words, pattaja and erandi but there is no Sanskrit equivalent for muga, which seems to indicate that muga was an exclusively indigenou product of Assam. The Latin name of muga also indicated that it is chiefly associated with Assam. The Latin name of muga also indicated that it is chiefly associated with Assam, through perhaps a small quantity is produced in Dehra Dun. The rearing of edi cocoons takes a long time before they provide silk which is for spinning. The cocoons are fed as the name indicates,

²⁵⁵ Plate ii, L.38

²⁵⁶ s.rahguru, *Mediaval Assamese Society*, P-293

on castor plants. The edi cloths are usually white with a yellowish tinge, smooth as well as rough and very warm. Used during winter. The muga has many varieties like the chmpa, the cocoons of which are fed on the campa tree (michelia champaka) and the mejankari or adakari, feeding on the plants of the same name. The muga cloths are usually yellowish with the tinge of gold and often dyed red with lae. The pat silk is the product of bombyx textor and bombyx croesi. The cocoons of which are fed on the mulberry trees. Of all the silk cloths the pat fibers are the smoothest and the finest, with a mixture of white and yellowish tinge. The evidence from the Arthasastra, the Harsacarita and the classical writers among others proved that in the art of the rearing of silk cocoons and the weaving of the finest silk textiles, the weavers of kamrupa had a reputation equal to those of China. The traditional has been continued to the present times.

All the above descriptions prove that whether in the art of weaving or in the rearing of silkworms and the manufacture of fine garments, both in cotton and silk . Assam had a great deal of contribution. It is likely that the pre-Aryans, the Bodos and the allied tribes introduced the art of sericulture and weaving in to Assam at an early period. But a new epoch began with the arrival of the Ahoms since they new this art from very times, and in course of time it acquire a national status so much so that every Ahom women was expected to be proficient in weaving irrespective of her birth and rank.

Women in the spinning and weaving industry:

Assamese women contribution a large part of share in the field of spinning and weaving in the from of Handloom industry. This Industry had always been given importance by the Ahom kings. In the Ahom period the professional weavers

²⁵⁷Duarah, *Edi Silk of Assam*,pp-77-111

known as Tantis, occupied important place in the society. The reputed weavers were even employed in the Ahom court for the supply of the royal robes to the Ahom kings and the royal family. In his monograph on cotton fabric of Assam H.F. Samman says. "The Ahom Rajas kept skilful weavers to supply the royal wardrobe with cloths and it is related how in the region of Purandar Rajah, one Madhura Tanti excelled all other weavers of the day and was for his services to the royal family, granted rent free land by the king"²⁵⁸. Besides professional weavers, the handloom industry occupied a significant place in every Assamese household specially among women. Now a day's many women had taken the handloom industry as their profession.

In the Ahom period, spinning and weaving were not just a hobby for the females but it was made compulsory for every women by the royal court during the reign of Ahom king Pratap Singha (1603-1641). The advantage of this compulsion was observed in the near future. By this art of females of the region were able to become self dependent in the worse situation, they could even share the economic responsibilities of the family. Even they contributed their duty towards the country by this art by donating some parts of the home spun yarns regularly to the royal court. The credit goes to Momai Tamuli; the Barborooah of Ahom king Pratap singha (1603-41), for moulding weaving habit of Assamese women into professional form and consequently it became a source of livelihood for many Assamese women. When the region was facing a severe political, social and economic crisis due to the continuous Mahammedan attacks, Momai Tamuli Barborooah was given the responsibility by the Ahom king pratap Singha to reorganize and improve the domestic. Communal and social life of the people of Assam. After touring round the whole region, he observed that each and every people be it man or women, be it rich or poor, contributed some part of their duty.

²⁵⁸ Cited in B.k. Barua, *Asomiya Bhasa and Sanskriti*, p-134

Towards the country to improve the worse situation of the region. Therefore he promulgated an order that every man should weave basket or a sieve and every capable women in the state had to spin at least two cops of yarn every evening and it was obligatory for every Assamese household to contribute to the royal court one seer of homespun silk annually²⁵⁹.

Various examples can be cited to prove that the women of Assam of all status and position were proficient in the art of spinning and weaving. Even queens and ladies of high birth considered these parts of their household duties. To supervise the duties of every man and women, one officer was appointed in each village and anybody found neglecting his or her works without any responsible case was punished. The women were also appointed to supervise the looms in the royal harem. The KO records that the mother of one Bhavaniputra Gopal Ata, was an expert weaver, and was entrusted with the charge of superintending the twice score looms that were in the royal harem during the reign of the Ahom king Suhungmung, alias Dihingia Raja²⁶⁰. Some queens also took keen interest in training the girls as well as looking after the activities of the looms, which were in the royal place campus. Queen Sarveswari, consort of king Siva Singha started a school on the place campus, where under her own supervision the young girls of different communities were taught the art of spinning, weaving and singing and dancing, batch by batch. The Govt. appointed some persons to supply raw materials for the looms of the prominent queens of the Ahom kings. The Raidangia Phukan and the Raidangia Barua were under the Raidangia queen to manage her state as well as to see the activities of the paiks who were in charge of supplying yarns and other raw materials for the looms of the queen and in the same way under the parbatia queen²⁶¹, there were the other officers known as

²⁵⁹ S.K Bhuyan. *An Assamese Nurjahan*, p-28

²⁶⁰ B.Sharma, *Durbin*, p-10.

²⁶¹ S.K. Bhuyan, *Buranjir bani*, 1956,P-28

Parbatia Phukan and Parbatia Barua for such works. Further there were higher officers appointed by the state to supervise the activities of these people. Francis Hamilton remarks, "the native women of all caste from the queen downward weave four kinds of silk that are produced in the country, and with which three fourth of the people are clothed. As the voice of duty heard amidst the crack of drums and the splintering of spear shafts. The literary records and the marriage songs revealed that the threads they spun were so fine and smooth that the clothes, which were made of these threads were so light and soft that could be easily concealed within the grip of the hand and could be dried without sunshine²⁶².

Expertise in the art of weaving and spinning has always been held to be one of the highest abilities of an Assamese woman. Dr. S.K Bhuyan commented about the proficiency of weaving and spinning of an Assamese woman by saying, "Every Assamese woman, be she daughter of a Brahman or a Sudra, a Buddhist or an animist, a Mohammedan or a Christian, a prince or a beggar, is a weaver by birth". Knowledge of weaving was an essential qualification for her in those days to get a ready disposal in the matrimonial market. During a proposal of marriage, the first question asked about the bride was whether she knew bowakata, i.e., whether she was skilled in spinning and weaving. Her other qualities become fruitless if she did not know weaving. She had to face shameless remarks from the society if she would have worn clothes woven by others. As Assamese women in however destitute condition she might be did not have to face economic crisis due to her weaving qualification. She not only earned her own bread and butter but was also used to born a large financial burden of her family. The universal practice of weaving by every Assamese woman led to great Bengali preacher and scholar Pundit Sivanath Sastri to

²⁶² S.raj Guru, *Medieval Assamese Society*, pp-202,304.

Remarks during his visit to Assam in the last century that it was only in Assam that he found justification for the alleged derivation of word wife from weave.

5.1.9: Women in Embroidery Works

Apart from weaving, Assamese women were also make embroidery on the cloth to give a good look. Women of this region knew embroidery from the very early period. The Rukminiharan Kavya discussed about the Sari worn by Behula during her dance performance in heaven in the assembly of gods. The sari was decently embroidered with all the incarnating figures of Lord Krishna. The embroidery work was done by either colored threads, or Muga or God or Silver threads. H.F. Samman in his monograph inform us that, in the Ahom period there were separate artists known Gunakatia using Gold and Silver strings for embroidery. According to Hamilton, the mosquito curtains were also beautifully embroidered. Quazim writes that Assamese people are expert in weaving velvet cloths and embroidery works.²⁶³

Therefore, it is clear from the above discussion that Assamese women, besides doing their regular household duties, took part in different economic activities and share their male counterparts, the family's economic burden on their shoulders. Besides achieving economic power through economic activities, let us find out whether they had any economic rights according to the laws of inheritance.

5.1.10: Property rights of women:

We have already discussed in the previous chapter that in the Vedic ages women was given high and respectable position in certain sphere like education.

²⁶³ P.C. Vhouthury, *The History Civilization of the people of Assam*, pp-306,308.

mitakshara expressly declared that she could spend from the family property only with the concurrence of the husband. The only right she got was the right to get maintenance from her husband. Altekar expresses that the accient Hindu legislator were unable to protect the wife's righ of maintenance²⁶⁶ or a share; she could not invalidate a sale or a mortgage of the family property by the husband, if it was detrimental even to her right of maintenance. Thus the theory of joint ownership of the husband and the wife practically a legal fiction. In effect to the husband was the solitary owner of the family property and the wife had no lawful remedy, even if he proceeded to squander it and defeat her right to maintenance or a share. The joint ownership theory helped the wife only in securing a number of certain minor rights and privileges.

The joint owneship helped the wife in gaining an absolute righ of maintenance against husband. According to one of the verses of Manu, the husband was bound maintain the wife, even if there were no family property. Vasistha stated that even the husband without making adequate arrangement for his wife's maintenance and for the household expenditure could not go on a journey. If he would have married for the second time, he had to provide maintenance expenditur to his first wife. If the wife. If the wife was assaulted, it was the responsibility of the husband to protect and maintain her. The husband was bound to give maintemance to such wife also, who was indulged in some immorality or became unchaste or turned an outcaste. If the wife was unjustly superseded then the husband was compelled to pay one third part of his wealth to the superseded wife. Jurists like Vijnanesvara maintained that if a husband abandoned a virtuous wife, or willfully misappropriated her property and refused to restore it, she could take the help of court of law to get justice. ²⁶⁷ In the matter of partition, however the Mitakshara-law allowed a wife to get an equal share with her own son or sons.

²⁶⁶ Altekar, *The position of women in Hindu Civilization*.

²⁶⁷ Indra, *The Status of Women in Ancient India*, p-159

when the division is made in the lifetime of her husband. In case she had Stridhana from her father in law in her possessio, then she was also entitled to half the share.

5.1.12: Stridhana:

Stridhana was the term used to denote property over which a woman could exercise absolute control. Stridhana might be acquired by a woman through inheritance or partition or in the form of gift from her parents, husband, or relatives. Henry Mine describes Stridhana as: “The settle property of a married woman incapable of alienation by her husband is well-known to the Hindus under the name of Stridhana. It is certainly a remarkable thing that this institution seems to have developed among the Hindus at a period relatively much earlier than among the Romans”.

Stridhana originated through the custom of the bride price obtained by the brides father from the groom, when the marriage was performed according to Asura or Gandharva or Rakshasha or Paishacha forms. It was generally found that parents of the bride used to return a part of sometimes even the whole of the bride price to the bride, which became her separate. She had full liberty to spend it during her life time. After her death, this property went to her children, but if she died childless the property went to her parents or their next of kin. From this it is clear that one of the ingredients of Stridhana consisted of the portion of the bride price, which was gifted to the bride by her father. If the marriage was performed according to Brahma or Daiva or Arsha or Prajapatya forms, no bride price was given. In that case, the Stridhana consisted of the wedding gifts received by the bride. In the Vedic age, these gifts were termed as Parinahya and wife was the owner of these gifts. According to Vasistha, parinahya or nuptial presents constituted Stridhana.

Therefore according to the ancient law, the term Stridhana was used for the gifts and presents received by a woman from others. Ancient Jurists like Gautama, Apastamba, Narada, Vishnu, Vyasa and Devala, acknowledged the right of woman for owning separate property. Devala stated that food and vesture, ornaments, perquisites and wealth received by a woman from a kinsman were her own properties; she might enjoy it herself and her husband had no right over it. If he gave it away on a false consideration or consumed it, he had to repay the value of the Stridhana to the woman with interest. Gradually, the scope of Stridhana was enlarged. It included the gifts given by the husbands subsequent to the marriage. These were often expensive and would sometimes include even the entire property of the husband. In Br. Up, Yajnavalkya is said to have divided his whole property equally between his two wives at the time of his impending retirement.²⁶⁸

In another similar incident, the husband of Dharmadana informed her that she could take away as much of his property as she liked, and retire to her parent's house. The Vedic literature is silent about the precise scope of Stridhana. The idea of its scope was found from the Dharmasastra works. Manu is the earliest writer to give a comprehensive description of Stridhana.²⁶⁹ According to him its consists of six varieties:

- 1) Gifts given by the father,
- 2) Gifts given by the mother,
- 3) Gifts given by the brother,

²⁶⁸ Altekhar, *The position of women in Hindu civilization*, p-217

²⁶⁹ Dr Savita Visnoi, *Economic Status of women in Ancient India*, P- 16.

- 4) the gift or property, which was acquired by her from her husband, subsequent to the marriage,
- 5) presents given by anybody at the time of marriage,
- 6) gifts received by the bride on the bridal procession.

Gifts under most of these categories would consist usually of ornaments and costly apparel, and Manu is very vehement in denouncing those who would deprive woman of these parents after their husbands death. Vishnu adds three more categories to Stridhana :

- 1) Gifts given by the son,
- 2) Gifts given by any other relation, and
- 3) The comensation given to the wife at the time of her suppression on the occasion of her husband's second marriage²⁷⁰.

Apparently it can be concluded from the above description of Stridhana as we find in majority of the accient Hindu Dharmasastras that it mainly consisted of gifts provided by the relatives, either at the time of the marriage of subsequent to it.

5.1.13: Right of woman over her Stridhana :

The Vedic literature did not mention above the extent of legal right of woman over her Stridhana. Early Smriti writers did not accept woman as a legal person and therefore they were not ready to invest full powers to the letter over her Stridhana. Manu for instance declared that a wife should never make any expenditure out of the family property belonging to several or even out of her own Stridhana without her husband's sanction. But Katyayana hold that woman

²⁷⁰ Indra, *The status of women in Ancient India*, p-274

possessed the power of sale and mortgage even over her immoveable property included in their Stridhana. Narada different from him and declared that woman could dispose of only the movables in their Stridhana ²⁷¹.

There were certain rules regarding the husband's right over Stridhana. Manu strictly expressed that a husband could not deprive the wife of her Stridhana, although so many restrictions were put on its free use. Manu said that a husband could temporarily take his wife's Stridhana, if she was inimical to him. However, he did not mention anything regarding the use of wife's property by a husband in times of need. He further stated that her other relatives had no right to use her Stridhana, no matter how direly they needed it. They were to be punished like thieves if they used it. He further remarked, "those relation who live on the property of woman commit sin and sink into hell". They are to be treated as outcastes, if they divided the ornaments of a widow, which she wore during her husband's lifetime.

About the right of husband to use the Stridhana, Kautily mentioned that, "in calamities such as disease and famine, in warding off danger and in charitable acts, the husband too many make use of this property. Neither shall there be any complaint against the enjoyment of this property if it by mutual consent nor there any complaint if this property has been enjoyed be those who are wedded in accordance with the custom of the first four kinds of marriage. But the property enjoyed by the husband in the case of Gandharva and the Asurs forms of marriage, shall be restored otherwise the use of this property by the husband shall be dealt with as a case of theft"²⁷².

²⁷¹ Altekar, *The position of women in Hindu Civilization*, p-224

²²¹ RV, H2-7

Though the Vedas did not permit the widow to inherit the property of her husband, but at the same time, it gave woman the right of inheritance to her father's property²⁷³.

5.2: Economic Status of Muslim Women

5.2.1 : Property Rights

Historically, many scholars maintain that women in Muslim societies had more property rights than in many other parts of the world.²⁷⁴ However, as the world has modernised, women's rights in many Muslim dominated countries are comparatively restricted. As Valentine M. Moghadam argues, "much of the economic modernization [of women] was based on income from oil, and some came from foreign investment and capital inflows. Economic development alters the status of women in different ways across nations and classes."²⁷⁵

Women's in the Quran are based around the marriage contract. A woman, according to Islamic, does not have to give her pre-marriage possessions to her husband and received a *mahr* (dowry) which she is allowed to keep.²⁷⁶ Furthermore, any earnings that a woman receives through employment or business is hers to keep and need not be contributed towards family expenses. This is because the financial responsibility for reasonable housing, food and other household expenses for the family, including the spouse, fall entirely on the husband. In traditional Islamic law, a woman is also not responsible for the

²⁷³ *Arthasastra, II, p-214*

²⁷⁴ *Lewis, what Went Wrong? 2002, pages 82-53*²⁷³

²⁷⁵ *Valentine M. Moghadam. Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East. (Rienner Publishers, USA, 1993)*

²⁷⁶ *Jamal Badawi, The status of women in Islam, p97.*

upkeep of the home and may demand paymand for any work she does in the domestic sphere.²⁷⁷

In Islam, women are entitled to the right of inheritance, Quran 4:7. In general, Islam allows females half the inheritance share available to males who have the same degree of relation to the deceased. Quran 4:11. This difference derives from men's obligations to financially support their families.²⁷⁸

The Quran contains specific and detailed guidance regarding the division of inherited wealth, such as Surah Baqarah, chapter 2 verse 180, chapter 2 verse 240; Surah Nisa, chapter 4 verse 7-9, chapter 4 verse 19, chapter 4 verse 33; and Surah Maidah, chapter 5 verse 106-108. Three verses in the Quran describe the share of close relatives, Surah Nisah chapter 4 verses 11, 12 and 176. However, many Islamic majority countries have allowed inherently unfair (towards women) inheritance law and/or customs to dominate.

5.2.2: The Right to Seek Employment

If you take a look at many societies today, a woman is only valued and considered important if she performs the functions of a man, (while at the same time displaying her feminine attraction to the public). While these women may carry the immense responsibility of bearing and rearing children, you have to admit that they may still be at par with men in nearly area of life. The result is the present-day confusion concerning sex role differentiation, resulting in very large numbers of divorces and emotionally distraught children.

²⁷⁷ Al-Misri, Ahmad. *Reliance of the Traveller*, p-98

²⁷⁸ *The position of women in Islam* by Dr. Jamal A. Badawi - *Islamic Dawah Centre International*-page 13

In Islam, however, the value and importance of women in society and the true measure of their success as human beings, is measured with completely different criteria: their fear of Allah (SWT) and obedience to Him, and fulfillment of the duties He has entrusted them with, particularly that of bearing, rearing and teaching children.

Nevertheless, Islam is a practical religion, and responds to human needs and life situations. Many women need, or wish, to work for various reasons. For example, they may possess a needed skill, such as a teacher or a doctor. While Islam does not prohibit women working outside the home, it does stipulate that the following restrictions be followed to safeguard the dignity and honor of women and the purity and stability of the Islamic society, (the conduct of women, after all, is the “backbone” of any society):

1. Outside employment should not come before, or seriously interfere with her responsibilities as wife and mother.
2. Her work should not be a source of friction within the family, and the husband’s consent is required in order to eliminate later disagreements. If she is not married, she must have her guardian’s consent.
3. Her appearance, manner and tone of speech and overall behavior should follow Islamic guidelines. These include: restraining her glances in relation to any men near the work place, wearing correct Islamic dress avoiding men, not walking in a provocative manner, and not using make-up or perfume in public.
4. Her job should not be one which causes moral corruption in society, or involve any prohibited trade or activity, after her own religion, morals, dignity and good behavior, or subject her to temptations.
5. Her job should not be one which is mixing and associating with men.

6. A woman should try to seek employment in positions which require a woman's special skills, or which relate to the needs of women and children, such as teaching, nursing other women, midwifery with specialization's like pediatric or obstetrics-gynecology.

5.3: Economic Status of Tribal women

The tribal women of Northeast India a vital and fole to build the economic configuration of the family as well as that of society. Their valuable conuibution can be observed by their. Engagement a variety of economic activities to increase the family wealth and income. Their economic share in the family call be scrutonized by their different fundamental and non ending activities of household such as pounding the paddy, food preparation, collection of firewood from the jungle, cleaning and washing clothes and utensils, chid bearing and caring, family management, water carrying, rearing and feeding of domestic birds and animals and a host of other activities associated with the house. Outside the household too, tribal women carry out many tasks such as selling of vegetables and fruits in the market. Besides, they engage a substantive preoportion of their work force in the cultivation work. It is especially more meaningful in the context of agrarian society of the tribes of Northeast India where men and women take equal responsibility of labour in the agricultural work. Therefore, it becomes very necessary to make a comprehensive and expedient study of the contribution of women in the economic activities of their societies. To find out the economic contribution of women, let us analyze in brief the economic structure of tribal society and the role of women on it.

5.3.1 : Agricultural contribution of women

The economic organization of the tribal people of Northeast Inddia center round agriculture and the subsidiary means of livelihood like the collection of forest

Produce, fishing, weaving and hunting. It also includes their trade within their own communities as well as with other people. Agriculture is their primary source of occupation, which keeps them busy throughout the year. In this agricultural society, the role of women is very important. The very success of its operation depends upon women, as they are the one who carry out most of the work from beginning till the time of harvesting. There is no division of labour as such between married and unmarried women and all the tasks are discharged by both married and unmarried women. Since majority of the tribes are hill-dwellers, its people prefer jhum or shifting type of cultivation. Jhum cultivation involves two phases of agriculture activity, the first involving the preparation of a tract of forest land for cultivation after clearing the forest growth and putting them into fire. The second phase of Jhum cultivation comprises of the main cultivation work. Agriculture of this type involves hard labour and thus often necessitates corporate activity. Men and women join together to share the toil. The first phase of jhum cultivation begins with the clearing of the patch of forestland from January and continues till April depending upon the availability of manpower and the size of Jhum-field. The clearing of the forestland is done jointly both by men and women. The nature of work is divided sex-wise. Men do the more arduous tasks and women are assigned with easier but endless work. In the first phase, felling of big trees and removing the logs are done by men whereas women engage themselves in rooting out the medium and small size trees and bushes, setting of fire to dry stem and branches and cleaning of the lower vegetations, etc. the second phase of jhuming starts in the month of April or May with the beginning of the actual cultivation work. In the main cultivation work women, play a significant and major role from sowing of seeds to harvesting and then husking and winnowing of crops all these jobs are primarily entrusted to women. Generally the crops that grow in their jhum cultivation are mustard leaf, maize, millet, paddy, pulses cucumber, pumpkins, beans, chillies, garlic, ginger, onion, potatoes, sweet potatoes, cotton, tobacco etc.

5.3.2: Weaving

Apart from agricultural work, the other economic activity performed by the tribal women is weaving. During the month of December and January, when there is no agricultural work, women devote their spare time in weaving. Weaving is the traditional occupation of tribal women of Northeast India and they are well versed in this art. Their expertise in the art is manifested in the choice or selection of the colour for the fabrication of embroidery and the shape, size as well as designs of their costumes. All the women irrespective of their age except the minor girl know weaving it is also proved as one can find that loom is an essential commodity from every house. In fact, some of the tribes, such as Singphos of Arunachal Pradesh consider their house to be incomplete without the loom in front of it²⁷⁹. Women generally use the indigenous loom for weaving which they make themselves. Normally, their loom is simple, light and portable so there is no fixed place for weaving, nor are fixed structures required. It can be set up in any convenient space of the house. The tribal women manufacture their own as well as beautiful apparels for their own as well as family members. Every wife weaves a shawl for her husband and if someone fails, it becomes a misery for her as the entire community laughs at her incapacity²⁸⁰.

The different tribes and sub-tribes use different objects such as cotton, *muga* yarn, wool, bark of local plant etc. for spinning and weaving. The Singphos grow cotton in their house and spun the yarn themselves. The Sherdukpens obtain yarn from the bark of plants known as hongchong and hongche²⁸¹. The Sulungs use the fibres of a shrubby nettle plant called *Hyek*²⁸². The Idu Mimis

²⁷⁹ Parul Dutta. *The Singphos*, p. 23

²⁸⁰ Krishnushankar Maitra, *Nagaland darling of northeast*, p. 62.

²⁸¹ R.R.P. Sharma. *The Sherdukpens*. Pp 22-23.

²⁸² R.K. Deuri, *The Sulungs*, p.18

Use nettle fibre along with human hair to make the thick coats of men, which also serve as a defensive covering against the thrust of a hostile arrow²⁸³. E.T. Dalton comments about the Idus that. “They were probably the first people on this side of the Himalayas to discover the valuable properties of the *Rhea nivea* and many others of the nettle tribe; with the fibre of one of these nettles these they weave a cloth so strong and stiff that, made into jackets, it is used by themselves and by the Abors as a sort of armour”²⁸⁴. The women not only make the wearing apparels for their family members but they also make woolen blankets and handloom clothes with attractive designs, towels, sarees, dhotis, lungis, shawls, bags, mattresses, carpets etc. Which they sell in good price. Apart from selling the handmade accessories, the tribal women make income by selling milk of cows and buffaloes. Hill Lalung women make subsidiary income by selling home made spirits”²⁸⁵. In this way they contribute their valuable share through agricultural and weaving work in the economy of the family, besides, they inherit some properties also.

5.3.3: Inheritance of Property

Among the Patriarchal tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, Assam and Tripura, the laws of inheritance or property are governed by the customary practices, of each tribes and sub-tribes. The customary laws give incredibly limited rights to women in the ownership and inheritance of the family property. As mentioned earlier, except Garo, Khasis of Meghalaya and the Hill Laungs of Assam, all the tribes of Northeast India are patriarchal, partrilocal and paulinear and hence inheritance descends through male line only. The son gets all the movable and immovable properties, whereas the daughter never inherits any immovable properties like land and house. They are entitled only to make

283. Tapan Kumar M. Baruah, *The Idu Mishmis*, p. 25-26

284. Cites in Tapan Kumar M. Baruah, *The Idu Mishmis*, p. 26-28

285. Birenra Kumar Gohain, *the Hill Lanungs*, p. 25.

use of it. But the customs permit the daughters to inherit the ornaments of mother, which are passed as heirloom from mother to daughter. According to the customary laws of Sherdukpcns, Mijils, Sulungs, Boris, Digaru Mishmis, Padam and Minyong sub-tribes of Adis of Arunachal Pradesh, the lion share of mother's properties are inherited by the eldest daughter²⁸⁶.

Apart from the properties of mother, the unmarried daughter have absolute light over her own earnings derived from different activities such as poultry, piggycry, bead works, weaving, embroidery, etc. but after marriage the ownership of her properties is generally shared also by her husband. But she has the absolute light over the properties that she gets from her parents and relatives as marriage gift. These gifts are in the form of ornaments, utensils clothing's, domestic birds and animals that she reared at her parent's house²⁸⁷.

The custom of inheritance of property by the widows in Arunachal Pradesh differs from tribe to tribe²⁸⁸. According to the customary laws of the tribes of Digaru Mismi, Idu Misluni, Miju Mishmi, Sherdukpen, Apatani, Wancho, Nocte, Nishi, Miji, Aka, Khowan, Nishing, Tangsa, Sulung the inheritance rights of widows in the deceased husband's property is usufructuary. She can inherit the husband's property on behalf of her minor sons i.e., she will only be the custodian of the property for her minor sons provided she remains widow and stays with the family of her in-laws. A Singpho or a Khampti widow

²⁸⁶ R.N. Bagchi, *Family and inheritance of property among tribes of Arunachal Pradesh* Published in *RESARUN, the journal of Directorate of Research. Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh*, Vol. V. No 1,1078 Also published in Dr. P.C. Dutta Dr. K.D. Duarah, *Aspects of culture and customs of Arunachal Pradesh*, pp.4-5.

²⁸⁷ *Status of women in tribal society Arunachal Pradesh*, ed by Dr. B.B. Pandey, Directorate of Research Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh, 1997.

having no male child is Entitled to get a share in her deceased husband's property. Whereas in the society of Monpa and Hill Miri, a widow gets the absolute right over her husband's property she remains unmarried and stays with her in-laws family. But she does not have the right to Transfer the real properties without the approval of her in-laws. Among the Digaru Mishmi and Miju Mishmi tribal societies, if a widow has a male child and she does not want to marry, then her rights over her deceased husband's property is not usufructuary but absolute.

In Nagaland, a widow is entitled to use her husband's lands and house during her lifetime if she does not remarry but in case of remarriage, she has no right over her first husband's property²⁸⁹. Among Rengma Nagas, the cattle are also inherited by the male heirs. Though the cattle remain in the possession of the widow after her husband's death but she cannot sell these animals without the permission of the male heirs. She could sell an animal only if she can prove to the male heirs it is essential for her maintenance and part of the price goes to the male heir²⁹⁰.

Among the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia society of Meghalaya and Hill Lalungs of Assam, inheritance is purely matrilineal in organization. Descent is traced through the mother only, only through the father. All properties belong to the women, and is passed on from mother to daughter. Male children cannot receive or even claim any part of the property, which they themselves may have acquired by their own labour. The Khasi and Jaintia laws of inheritance are almost identical. In Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the inheritance of all real property passes from mother to the youngest daughter (*Ka Khadduh*). The other daughters however, on their mother's death, are entitled to get a share of their mother's

²⁸⁹ M. Hiram, *Social and cultural life of Nagas*, p. 84.

²⁹⁰ J.P. Mills, *The Rengma Nagas*, p. 144.

property, but the youngest daughter gets the lion's share of the family property e.g. the family jewellery and the family house and the greater part of whatever is there in the house. Because it is she, whose duty is to perform the family ceremonies, looking after the property, old aged parents and propitiate the family ancestors. But she cannot dispose or the house without the unanimous consent of her sister²⁹¹. If there is no daughter, then inheritance would pass by the "knight's move" to the sister's youngest daughter, who would be succeeded by the youngest daughter of the latter and so on and failing sister's daughters succession would go to mother's sisters and the their female descendants ²⁹². Similar is the case the Garo inheritance. Among the Garos also, all the daughter's or a family do not equally inherit properties but one of the daughters, not necessarily the youngest one, is selected inheritress (*nokhna*) by the parents. If a couple die without leaving any daughter, the *Charchis* select a Nakna or inheritor for the family²⁹³.

²⁹¹ P.R.T. Gurdon, *The Khasis*, p. 83

²⁹² P.R.T. Gurdon, *The Khasis*, p. 83

²⁹³ Capt, B.S. Rana, *The people of Meghalaya*, p.202.

CHAPTER VI

RELIGIOUS STATUS OF WOMEN

6.1: RELEGIOUS STATUS HINDU WOMEN

6.1.1: Inroduction

Religion is the most sensitive personal matter in every human life. Religious rights and privileges play a dominant role in every person's life, be it man or woman. The religion determines social status of an individual and accordingly gives him or her certain rights and privileges in rituals and rituals and sacrifices. Let us make a comprehensive survey in this chapter to find out the religious status and privileges accorded to women in ancient and medieval Assam. Though the available sources of ancient Assam are silent about the religious rights and privileges accorded to women, but we have tried to depict it through the status provided to the women in the *Vedas and Purans*. But literary and epigraphic sources prove that the Aryan culture and the Brahmanical religion entered Assam in the very earlier period²⁹⁴. P.C. Choudhury rightly points out, "Naraka and Bhagadatta, the ruler of first political dynasty came under the influence of the Aryans and that they were responsible for the establishment of high class Aryans in the land"²⁹⁵. The other literary sources such as the *Arthashastra*²⁹⁶, the *Brahatsamhita*²⁹⁷, and the *Raghuvamsa*²⁹⁸ also pointed

²⁹⁴ KP, Chap. 38: Nowgong grant, v.7 Nidhanpur grant. Lines 34-35; Tezpur grant, v.30, parbatiya plates, line.32

²⁹⁵ PC Choudhury. *The History of civilization of the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.*, p.394.

³⁹⁷ Kern, *Introduction to the Brahatsamhita*, p.32, cited in PC choudhury, *The History of the civilization of the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.*, p.394

²⁹⁸ IV, 81-84

to the Spread of the Aryan culture in ancient Assam. The origin of Aryan culture goes back to Vedas. Since the Aryan culture was established in the ancient Assamese women was no different from the position occupied by the women mentioned in the Vedas. Let us first briefly analyze the religious position provided to the women in the Vedas. It is a matter of fact that in order to understand the religious participation of women during medieval Assam it is mandatory to understand the religious aspects of ancient Assam. Hence efforts have been made to make a through study on the religious matters of ancient Assam which is popularly known as kamrupa.

6.1.2: Religious status of women in Vedas:

According to Hindu Dharmasastra, man and women together form one complet whole. In out Hindu scripture God has been described as half man and half women. (The concept of *Ardhnarishwara*). Wife was called *Ardhangini*, which means that neither the life of man nor the life of women achieves excellence or perfection in a state of isolation. She was the source of dharma, artha, Kama for the attainments of the objects of human life²⁹⁹. Furthermore she was the medium through which man attained salvation. That is why; Wife was given equivalent place with her male counterpart in religious rights and privileges³⁰⁰.

In the Vedic period, there wera no temples and images to worship. Numerous religious and faiths were also not found like the present days. People believed in only one supreme principle of the Holy *Vedas*. In this age, the religion was deeply connected with sacrifices

²⁹⁹ *Mbh, Adiparva,70-40*

³⁰⁰ *R.V., BK, hymn 61,v.8*

because sacrifice was the only popular and Well-established method of worshipping divine powers. Obviously, women could not be prohibited to offer sacrifices after their *upanayana*.

The ceremony of Upanayana was performed in respect of both boys and girls. After this ceremony, girls were permitted to study Vedas and other sacred literature and carry out the *Sandhya* rites. Sita is mentioned as performing *Sandhya rites*³⁰¹. Harita holds that women are of two classes, brahmavadini and *sadyovadhu*³⁰². The former remained unmarried and dedicated themselves to the study of the Vedas and the latter used to continue their studies till their marriage. According to AV, a maiden is entitled to marry a bachelor after the completion of her *Brahmacharya* only³⁰³. The girls who were married at an early age sacrifices in which they had to take an active part after their marriage. Kauslya performed a sacrifice in the morning of Rama's installation as an heir apparent³⁰⁴. Mbh described Kunti, the mother of Pandavas as well versed in the mantras of AV³⁰⁵.

Draupadi, the wife of the Pandavas was addressed by Vyasa, the author the Mbh as Brahmavedini. In the Vedic age we come across many Brahmavadini ladies like Lopa Mudra, Gargi and Maitreyi, who gathered in the religious congregations and participated in the debate of some puzzling questions of philosophy and displayed wonderful knowledge

³⁰¹ *Ramanaya*, 11.87.19

³⁰² Harita, Dvididha Striya Brahnvadiha sadyo Badhvashe. Cf. Indra, *The status of Women in ancient India*, pp.34-35

³⁰³ *AV.XI-3-18*

³⁰⁴ *Ramanaya*, 11.20.15

³⁰⁵ *Mbh.III.305.20*

of the great religious matters. Some of them such as Vishvavara expounded hymns and also performed sacrifices like priests offered oblations to the Gods³⁰⁶.

Marriage was considered as the ultimate and sacred recommendation to society by *Vedic religion*. The woman therefore was given a sanctified position in the path of religion because her presence was absolute necessary for religious rites and ceremonies. It was obligatory for both husband and wife to take part in the sacrifices. There are several references to couples jointly offering prayers and sacrifices³⁰⁷. The Presence and cooperation of wife was indispensable in religious rites and ceremonies. Being one in body and soul, they performed the religious acts together. Though in very religious performance, the husband took the initiative but without the wife. It was incomplete. Man could not become a spiritual whole, unless his wife accompanied him³⁰⁸. Gods did not accept the oblations offered by a bachelor³⁰⁹. It is found in the great epic, Ramanaya, that in the absence of sita, Rama performed the sacrifice by substituting her with her golden effigy.

But from the later Vedic period the status of women in all spheres of life started declining and upanayana sanskara of women was withdrawn. Hence, the later period did not speak much about the lady scholars. Though the study of Vedas was not permitted to women of later period but they were never denuded from believing in certain religious matters and never deprived of offering prayers to the deities.

³⁰⁶ *RV.V.28-1*

³⁰⁷ *RV.V53,15*

³⁰⁸ *Tamatpuruso jaya vitva kritsnatarmivatmanang matyate.A.Br, 1.2.5.*

³⁰⁹ *Ayajnio vais yopatnikah,Sh.Br.,V.1,10*

6.1.3: Religious cuts and beliefs of Assamese women:

In India, Particularly in Assam, either in ancient age or in medieval age, the image of a woman is visualized as Shakti. She was described in all our ancient texts as the force behind creation and divinity. As expressed in Vedas, “Yatra vartasthuu pujoyanthe rananthe tatra Devtah” (Where women are adored, there the gods are pleased)³¹⁰. As per our mythology. “Learning’, “Prosperity” and “Calamity” are worshipped in the feminine forms. Since ancient Assamese society was based on agriculture, therefore our literature, sculpture and mythology considered woman as “Replica” of the universe. She was highly regarded not only symbol of generation and creators of life; but also as the providers of food, and fertility itself that hold the fields with life producing mother being the central figure of religion. “With the transition from food-gathering to food production, the female principle which continued to predominate the cults that had grown up around the mysterious forces of birth and generation was identified with Earth from whose bosom the grains sprout and was imagined as a goddess who might be influenced like women by entreaties and gifts as well as controlled by imitative rites and incantations. The Mother Goddess, thus identified with Mother Earth, Became the womb in which crops were sown”³¹¹

In the history of Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa, Mother Earth was personified as the mother of Narakasura³¹², the ancient ruler of Pragjyotosha. She Played a dominant role in Naraka’s life in the person of nurse katyayani and helped her son to achieve the kindom of pragjyotisha after subjugating the Kirata ruler Ghatakasura. The mother Goddess was also

³¹⁰ Manu,III-56.

³¹¹ N.N.Bhattacharya. Religious Culture of North-Eastern India.p.85

³¹² For on examination of Naraka’s episode, see Mankad: narakasura episode in the K.P., JARS.X,pp. 14-22.; Mistra: Historical notes on Narakasura and Bhagadatta, HArS,xi, PP-3-1

worshipped as Sakti cult under various names and in various forms.

6.1.4: Saktism:

Since early times, Kamarupa was well known as the major centre of Sakti-worship. Some scholars are of the opinion that the origin of Saktism and Tantricism is the North-eastern India, particularly Assam and Bengal³¹³. Scholars believe that because of the predominance of matriarchal civilization among some of the tribal people of ancient Assam, many Gods and Goddesses belonging to the Sakti cult had their origin in ancient *Kamarupa*³¹⁴. Saktism has been defined by Sir Charles Eliot as the worship of “a goddess of many names and forms, who is adored with sexual rites and the sacrifice of animals, or when the law permits of men”³¹⁵. The archeological and literary records show that Saktism occupied a prominent place in the religious history of Assam³¹⁶. Specific reference to the worship of Sakti in Kamarupa occur in the DP, KP and YT. The reference to the temple of Sri Kamesvara-Maha-Gauri is mentioned in the grants of Vanamala Vermadeva³¹⁷ of ninth century and Indrapala³¹⁸ of eleventh century A.D. During the 10th-11th centuries A.D., since the time of the composition of the KP. Saktism became the most potent form in *Kamarupa*³¹⁹. Not only in ancient Assam, but also through the medieval period, even down to the 18th century, the leading religion of Assam, however seemed to be Saktism³²⁰.

³¹³ M.Neog, *Purani Asamiya Samai aru Sanskrit*,p.15;Gail, *A History of Assam*,p59

³¹⁴ B.K.Barua. *Asamiya Bahsa aru Samskrit*,p.180.

³¹⁵ Charles Eliot. *Hinduism and Budhism.I, Intro.*,p.XXXVi.

³¹⁶ P.C.Choudhury. *the History of the civilization of the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.*.pp.418-422.

³¹⁷ *Tezpur Grant of Vanamala.V.30.*

³¹⁸ Guwakuchi grant of Indrapala,VV.49,52.

³¹⁹ K.P,chap.78,-140.

³²⁰ B.K.Baura. *A cultural History of Assam*.p.167.

Traditionally the Skta cult is considered to have its centre in Kamarupa with its chief temple at *Kamakhya* and its worship was associated with Tantricism, complicated rituals, mantras, mudras, mysterious syllables, mystic diagrams, etc³²¹. The temple of *Kamakhya* on the *Nilachala* hill is still considered to be the most sacred of the *Sakta pithas*, being the place where Sati's genital organ is said to have fallen and thus being the center of *yonis worship*. Though the Devi is imagined in her various forms in Sakta cult, it is mother form of incarnation of the Devi, which comes first and in Yogini-rantra, too, goddess *Kamakhya* appears as the mother or as *Bhagavati*, This Mother goddess *Kamakhya* appears as the symbol of the Creative power at the *Kamakhya* temple. According to the KP, when *Narakasura* founded a kingdom in early Assam he established himself as the custodian of this *yonis-goddess* and made her the presiding deity of the state³²². In the KP Goddess *Kamakhya* had been given the super importance among the deities of *pragjyotisha Kamarupa*. A verse in the KP states that “*anyatra virala devi Kamarupa grhe ghre*”³²³ (*Devi rare in other places is a household deity in Kamarupa*). About her influence Dr. *Kakati* writes, “It was under her banner that the first empire in early Assam was built. It was over her emergence and recognition as the presiding deity of the state that the *Saivites* and the *Vaishnavites* went into silent conflict and *Naraka*, the first builder of the state lost his life³²⁴. Even the name *Kamarupa* had been associated with the name of the *Goddess kamakhya*. Late religious history of Assam also centered round her and other Goddesses were recognized as her varied manifestations. It is *Goddess Kamakya* who was worshipped in her virgin form as *Tripura-sundari*³²⁵ dreadful conception known as *Tamresvari* or *kecai-Khat* (eater of raw flesh) in this way all the local and independent deities such as *Ugratara*, *Ekajata*, *Uma*, *Kali*, *Karala*, *Cmunda* etc. came to be regarded as manifestations of

³²¹ Sri Charles Eliot, *Hinduism and Budhis*. Vol III, p.275

³²² *kamakyapujanrato nilakuta mahagirau* (K.P. chap.38.153

³²³ KP.Ch.58.42.

³²⁴ B.K. Kakati, *Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, p.33

³²⁵ Kalicharan Das, ‘*Asamar Dharma aru Darsan*’, *Asam Gaurav*. p.137

Kamakhya in different circumstances³²⁶. In this connection passing reference may here be made to the virgin-worship, Kumara-Pura, which was once so prevalent in the province and is still in existence, which is held during the day of Mahastami of Durga puja.³²⁷

Later on during the days of liberal Vaisnava religion propagated by Sankardeva, though the intensity of Devi worship witnessed much decline, but Saktism has dominated over the mind of people over the ages in such a way that even in the present days people use to worship Shakti in the form of *Durga*, *kali* and *lakshmi* during autumn in a big festive mood and as symbol of the Devi, every household in Assam install a 'ghata' during the period of Dura puja. Other than Saktism, the different faiths existed in the Assamese society were: Savisim, Vaisnavism, Solar cuti, Buddhism, etc.

6.4.5; Saivism:

Saivism prevailed in Kamarupa since the remote period and several scholars suggested that in Assam, Saivism had more ancient roots than *Sakta* religion in Assam. Saivism was popular among the aboriginals and the Aryanized people. The different manifestations of Siva and his worship in ancient *Kamarupa* are evident from mythological literature and inscriptions. The KP states that before the introduction of Devi worship in *Kamarupa* by Narakasura, Siva secretly preserved *Kamrupa* as his own territory and was recognized as the guardian deity of the land³²⁸. Even during the reign of Naraka, Siva was then privately worshipped by the earlier inhabitants of the country³²⁹. After Naraka was Deposed, Saivism again came into prominence. The Parasites of ancient Assam invoked

³²⁶ B.K.Barua, *A cultural history of Assam*.p.168

³²⁷ B.K. Kakati, *Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, chap.iv.pp.35-70

³²⁸ Chap.38.96.*Sa ca desah svarajyarthe purvam guptasca sambhuna.*

³²⁹ KP.chap.38.96.*Sambhu rantargupthah as ma pure.*

Siva by various names such as: Maheswara³³⁰, Adideva³³¹, Mahadeva³³², Mahavaraha³³³, prajadhinatha³³⁴, Sambhy³³⁵, Pasupati³³⁶, Isa³³⁷, Pinakpani³³⁸, Rudra³³⁹, Hetuka-Sulin³⁴⁰, Gauripati³⁴¹, Hara³⁴², kameavara³⁴³, padmanatha³⁴⁴, kitava³⁴⁵, Ardhanrisvara³⁴⁶, Paramamaheavara³⁴⁷, and the like.

People usually worship Siva in his *Linga* form. The *Linga* is a straight pillar of stone erected on a pedestal, symbolic of the female reproductive organ, called yoni. P.C. Choudhury states that the cult of *Linga* worship is associated with the pre-Aryan element and considers that the word *linga* is derived from Austric origin³⁴⁸. The *yogini-tantra*³⁴⁹ states that there were a million *lingas* in *Kamarupa*.

Siva was also worshipped in various tribal customs. It has been found that Kosh Kings of Cooch Behar worshipped Siva by the sacrifices of swine, pigeons, buffaloes, He-goats, ducks and cocks etc. and by offering rice and liquor and the deodhai dance of women³⁵⁰. In certain Siva-temples like those of Umananda, Kamaesvara, Siddhesvara, Amratakesvara,

³³⁰ Doobi grant.v.55,Nidhanpur grant.v.2

³³¹ Subhankarapataka Grant,v.1, Khonamukhi grant, v.1

³³² Grant of Vallabhadeva,v.13

³³³ Gauhati grant of Indrapala,

³³⁴ Gauhati grant of Indrapala

³³⁵ Gauhati grant of Indrapala, v.10.

³³⁶ Gauhati grant of Indrapala, vv.1-2.

³³⁷ Nowgong grant, v.8.

³³⁸ Doobi grant,v.1, Tezpur grant.v.,2

³³⁹ Nowgong grant, v.1

³⁴⁰ Tezpur grant, v.24

³⁴¹ Grant of Vallabhadeva

³⁴² Bargain grant

³⁴³ Tezpur grant, Guakuchi grant.

³⁴⁴ kamauli grant, v.26

³⁴⁵ Gauhati grant, v.1

³⁴⁶ khonamukhi grant, v.1, Subhankarapataka grant, v.1

³⁴⁷ Tezpur Rock Inscription, line-2

³⁴⁸ P.C. Choudhury. *The History of the civilization of the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.C.*, p. 413.

³⁴⁹ *Kotilingasamakirna Kamakhya Kalpavallari*, YT,Bk,1, chap.11.36.

³⁵⁰ Darrang Rajvamsavali,pp.324-28: M.Neog, *Purani Asomiya samaj aru samskriti*,p.10

etc., the practice of animal sacrifice is still in vogue on the occasion of Siva Calurdasi. Though Vaisnavism took the leading seat in Assam in the medieval period and Sankardeva and Madhavdeva was the main person behind the liberal vaisnavism in Assam, but there is enough references and informations about Siva worship in the family of Sankardeva and Madhavdeva³⁵¹.

6.1.6: Vaisnavism:

Assam was a stronghold of Vaishnavism faith, besides Saktism and Saivism. The origin of Vishnu in Assam is uncertain, but the history of Assam begins with the birth of Narakasura through the Boar incarnation of Vishnu and all the ancient rulers of Kamarupa claims to trace their lineage from Vishnu through Naraka. The KP also describes in detail about the worship of Vishnu-Vasudeva with rituals and mentions as many as five incarnation of the deity (Hayagriya, Fish incarnation, Pandunath, the Boar incarnation and Vasudeva-krana) as being worshipped in different places of Assam³⁵².

The worship of Vishnu and his incarnations is also proved by epigraphy. The earliest recorded reference to the worship of Vishnu in Kamarupa occurs in the Badaganga Rock inscription (554 A.D.), where the king Mahabhutivaram had been called as “Parama daivata parama bhagavta”³⁵³.

Evidence based on architectural and sculptural remains also prove the existence of the Valsnava faith during the ancient period.

³⁵¹ KGC pp.16-21, 143; M.Neog, *Purani Asamiya Samaj aru Samskriti* p. 12,13.

³⁵² *K.P*, chap. 78.80.88.

³⁵³ Bordaganga Rock, Inscription, :*Lincet* 1-2

Some of the important sculpture remains are a ninth century A.D. image of Vishnu found near Deopani of Golagaht, an eleventh-twelfth century A.D. bell metal image of Vishnu collected from an old temple from a place adjacent to Dibrugarh, the twelfth century image of Vishnu in his eternal sleep found in Asvakranta temple, the eighth-ninth century image Sukresvara at Suklesvar, the seventh-eighth century image of Venu-Gopala carved in stone in the western entrance to the Kamakhya temple, etc.³⁵⁴.

Vaishnavism was initiated in its new form by Sri Sankardeva and his colleagues based on Bhagavata Purana during 15th-16th centuries. Vaishnavism exerted its influence upon the people to a great extent and became the main cult of Assam during the whole of the medieval period. Sankardeva introduced Vaishnavism in a liberal form, where the people of all castes and social status (place of religious association) sprang throughout the whole region. All the Hindu inhabitants from Brahmana down to the lower caste of the society could enter into the namghars and Satras. In Vaisnava faith, women were seen in high esteem. Morality and chastity were considered as precious ornaments of women. Vaishnavism advised women not to mix with other male persons freely. They should cover their body from head to foot with cloth so that nobody could see any part of their body³⁵⁵.

6.1.7: Solar cult

Sun worship prevailed in Assam from very early times, which is proved by literature and architectural remains. The prevalence of the cult is proved by the existing remains of temples dedicated to the sun and many icons of the deity, found in Dah Parvatia, Gahpur, Sualkuchi, Mangaldoi, Tezpur, Pandu Sadiya,

³⁵⁴ Arunima Bharali, *Assamese culture*, p.19

³⁵⁵ *KGc*, pp.609,610.

Sukresvara. Suryyapahar and other places of this ancient land³⁵⁶. The antiquity of the cult is indicated by the very name 'Pragjyotisha'. The earliest reference to *Pragjyotisha* as a centre of sun worship is found in the *Grha Sutras* and some *Puranas* and further provides evidence for it³⁵⁷. The KP mentions that the Sri *Suryya pahar*. In Goalpara was the perpetual abode of the sun: (*yatra deva adityah satatam stitah*). It also refers to the *Citrasaila* where the *navagrahas* or nine planets were worshipped³⁵⁸. According to Taranatn, the people of *Kamrupa* were formerly worshippers of the sun prior to the introduction of Buddhism by Dhritika, who had to convert the people from sun worship to Buddhism under the pretence that he was a follower of the solar cult³⁵⁹.

6.1.8: Buddhism:

Buddhism flourished in *Kamarupa* at some previous period of its history. P.C. Choudhury also remarks, "Long before Yuan Chwanh's visit, there were traces of the faith in the land"³⁶⁰. He further remarks that Ynanbhadra, Jinayadas and Yasogupta, the three Buddhist monks who worked in China in 6th century B.C. were from Eastern India, probably from *Kamarupa*³⁶¹. Kalhana mentions about Amritaprabha, who was the daughter of the *kamarupa* king of probably 5th century A.D. She was married to maghavahana of Kashmir, She took to Kashmir a tibeta Buddhist guru of her father, called Stunpa and the latter

³⁵⁶ P.C, Choudhury, *The History of the civilization of the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.*, p.407.

³⁵⁷ P.C. Choudhury, *the History of the civilization of the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.*,p.406.

³⁵⁸ KP,78/42;79/142.

³⁵⁹ Cited in B.K. Barua. *A cultural History of Assam*,p. 182; P.C. Choudhury. *The History of the civilization of the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.,D.*,p,407

³⁶⁰ P.C. Choudhury, *The History of the civilization of the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.*, p.400.

³⁶¹ P.C. Choudhury., *The History of the civilization of the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.*, p.402

erected a Vihara in Kashmir known as Lo Stunpa³⁶². P.C. Choudhury rightly points out. “This evidence not only points to cultural relations between Kamarupa, Tibet and Kashmir, but also seems to establish the fact that about that time Buddhism was prevalent in *Kamarupa* and was patronized by its rulers”³⁶³. Amritaprabha also erected in Kashmir a lofty vihara for the benefit of the foreign monks called Amritabhavan³⁶⁴, corrupted into Amitabhavan or Antabhavan. Other than these evidences, we find that Bhaskarvarman had a special attachment for the faith. Bhaskara’s devotion to faith becomes evident from his last request to the pilgrim Yuan Chwang to stay in his kingdom and accompany the letter to attend the Buddhist assembly at Kanauj and Prayaga³⁶⁵. The existing ruins of temples and icons of the Buddha also support the prevalence of the faith. Among the remains, there are traces of Buddhist temples only at Hajo, but also at Nilacala, Singri, Tezpur and Goalpara³⁶⁶.

6.1.9: Other Sects

Besides these major faiths other minor deities were also worshipped in Assam, but due to lack of followers, they could not represent district seats, Such Goda and Goddesses were Ganes, kartikeya, Indra, Agni Kuvera, Manasa, Brahma, etc. The existence of these seats was indicated by epigraphs and sculptures³⁶⁷. In spite of being the land of number of faiths, religious tolerance was present among the adherents of different sects. It is proved by the ruins spread in the different places of Assam, where images of different deities and

³⁶² Kalhana’s *Rajatarangni*, BK III, pp.9-10.

³⁶³ P.C.Choudhury, *The History of the civilization of the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.*,p.402

³⁶⁴ *Rajatarangini*, BK III, p.9.

³⁶⁵ P.C. Choudhury, *The History of the civilization of the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.* p403.

³⁶⁶ P.C. Choudhury, *The History of the civilization of the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.*, p.403

³⁶⁷ P.C. Choudhury, *The History of the civilization of the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.*,p428

temples dedicated to deities of different sects were erected at a single site³⁶⁸. Therefore, we can illustrate that religious harmony was present among different sects and people could freely worship the sect they believed. The religious festivals of different sects were celebrated and all the people used to participate especially women, who also put in their helpful assistance in making these festivals successful, thus contributing their share in building up the composite socio-religious fabric of ancient and medieval Assam.

6.1.10: Religious status of women of ancient Assam

From the very beginning of the civilization Assamese women were deeply religious minded and worshipped many deities. But they did not have any distinct faith or religious belief. All the religious duties and activities performed by the husband were equally shared by his wife. In the Assamese society, we do not get any direct evidence regarding the religious position of women. But comparison of the queens with different goddesses as found in the inscriptions of ancient Assam indicate that women were not only highly respected but were also sometimes given the equal status to Goddesses. Women were seen in the form of Devi from the mythological period. The KP quotes. “Every women in Kamarupa is miniature incarnation of the goddess”³⁶⁹.

6.1.11: Women compared to Goddesses:

The different inscriptions of ancient Assam compared the queens to the different Goddesses. The comeliness of most of the queens such as Dhruva-lakhmi, wile of

³⁶⁸ P.C. Choudhury, *The History of civilization of the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.*,pp.431-443

³⁶⁹ KP,60,41

Susthitavarman of Varman dynasty³⁷⁰. Rajyadevi, wife of Indrapara of Pala dynasty³⁷¹ was compared to Goddess Lakhmi, which signified that women were considered as benevolent and bestower of prosperity. The inscriptions also praised the queens as basis of inspiration for her king husband. As in the *Vedic* period, every God was closely associated with her female counterpart and was acclaimed in different appearance, in the similar way most of the queens were admired as being the strength and the source of bringing prosperity and goodness by her fortune to the kingdoms of different kings of Varman, Salastambha and Pala dynasty. That is why in the inscriptions we find that the queens achieved the same honorable and equal status to their husbands as different Goddesses were to their God husbands. Some of the examples are: Suvrata, the queen of King Mahendravarman of varman dynasty was compared to Saci, the consort of India³⁷². Devamati, queen of king Narayanavarma of Carman dynasty was given the same status by her husband as Goddess Lakhmi was given by her husband God Narayana³⁷³. Nayanadevi, the queen of Sthitavarman of Varman dynasty was as important and beloved to her king husband as Saci was to Indra and Goddess Durga was to Lord Siva³⁷⁴. Durlabha was said to be suitable consort for king Purandarapala of Pala dynasty as Saci was to Indra, Parvati was o Siva, Rati was to kamadeva, Lakshmi was to Vishnu and Rohini was to Moon³⁷⁵. Status of Ratna fir her king husband Harsapala of Pala dynasty was similar to the status of lord Siva's wife Parvati³⁷⁶. As Guri was a beloved wife to Sambhu and Lakshmi was to Visnu, likewise Monorama was adorable and virtuous to her Brahmin husband named Vishnu³⁷⁷. The merit,

³⁷⁰ *KP*,v,60

³⁷¹ *Hayunthul copper plate of Harijaravarman, last line;Tezpur copper plate of Vanamala, vv, 13,15; Prbatiya copperplates of Harjaravarman, vv.13-15*

³⁷² *Dubi Copper plate of Bhaskarvarman, v.24.*

³⁷³ *Dubi Copper plate of Bhaskarvarman, v.27.*

³⁷⁴ *Dubi Copper plate of Bhaskarvarman, v.50.51*

³⁷⁵ *Dubi Copper plate of Bhaskarvarman, v.14*

³⁷⁶ *Khonamukhi copperplate of Dharmapala, v11*

³⁷⁷ *Khonamukhi copperplate of Dharmapala, v20*

Chastity and character of Pauka, the wife of Barata Brahmin were compared to Rohini, consort of Moon and Parvati, consort of Siva³⁷⁸.

The inscriptions of ancient Assam also points towards the high regard the high regard paid to the women as mother. The principle of motherhood was firmly belived in ancient and medieval Assam and she was worshiooed in the form of Goddess. The exceptional degree of reverence paid to motherhood can be seen in the inscriptions. Where mothers were regarded as the source of inspiration for their sons. For instance, yajnavati was described as sacrificial fire for her son Mahendravarman of Varman dynasty³⁷⁹. Motherhood of Survata, mother of King narayanavarma of Varman dynasty was compare to Aditi, mother of Indra³⁸⁰. Mothers were praised for giving birth to brave sons. Like Parvati who gave birth to karttikeya, Queen Devamti gave birth and brought up king Mahabhutivarma of Varman dynasty who was compared to Parvati (mother ofKarttikeya, destroyer of the enemies), Aditi (mother of protector of the three wolds, i.e., Visnu) and Devaki (mother of lord Krishna, the enemy of the demons)³⁸¹. Motherhood of Anuradha, wife of Vasudeva Brahmin and that of mother of devadeva Brahmin was compared to motherhood of Devaki, mother of Lord Krishna³⁸². It is clear from the inscriptions that women were not only considered as equal half of their husbands but also highly regarder as images of different Goddesses.

6.1.12: Devadasi System

We get references from inscriptions and literary sources that some of the virgin women dedicated their whole life in the name of God by becoming devadasis. An early reference to *devadesis* is made by the Tezpur grant of Vanamala (V.24).

³⁷⁸ *Subhankarpataka copperplate of Dharmapala*, v.19

³⁷⁹ *Nidhanpur Copper plate of Bhaskarman*, v.12

³⁸⁰ *Dubi Copper plate of Bhaskarmarman*, v.16

³⁸¹ *Dubi Copper plate of Bhaskarmarman*, v.227,28,29

³⁸² *Guwakuchi copperplate of Indrapala*,v.24

6.1.14: Women as Medhi and religious heads

Women in the medieval period became aware in religious discourses, by reading the religious books. Chandari, the nurse of Sankardeva was quite acquainted with the teachings of the *Gita* and could also take part in theological discussions³⁸⁸. Dayal, wife of Teli-Krsna Atai was a favourite disciple of Badula Ata, one of the prominent Vaisnavita preceptors of the latter part of Vaisnavita movement³⁸⁹. The wife of Narayan Thakur, popularly known as Thakur Ata was a dedicated Vaisnava supporter with a great religious bent of mind and women of great intelligence³⁹⁰. Some of the women rose to such a height of learning and devotion that they succeeded in acquiring the *Medhi* and headship of religious sects of institutions. Amongst such women, mention may be made of Dayal who was appointed as *Medhi* or instructor to teach all the one hundred and twenty queens of the King Laksmi Narayana the procedure of recital of God's name at different intervals of the day and the reading of the holy books such as Ghosa, Krittana, Bhaggavata etc.³⁹¹. Some of the women such as Ai-Kanaklata, the grand daughter of Harideva, guided the destiny of their respective sub-sects with considerable success and efficiency³⁹². Before his death, Harideva, the founder preceptor of the Haridevi sect bestowed the duty of incharge of his Satra and Dharma-mala on his learned daughter Bhubaneswari. She was the first woman to lead a religious sect in Assam and since then women began to exercise their influence in the domain of religion in Assam³⁹³. The religious fervor of some of the queens resulted in construction of temples.

³⁸⁸ KGC, pp.116,36

³⁸⁹ KGC, pp.523,585

³⁹⁰ KGC, pp.425-426

³⁹¹ KGC, pp.523,585

³⁹² S.B.Sarma, The New-Vaisnavite movement and Satra institution of Assam, p.89

³⁹³ N.N.Basu, Social History of Kamrupa, Vol,II, pp.148-149

6.1.15: Temples and tanks by Queens

Queen Phuleswari excavated a tank called Gaurisagar tank near the capital city and on its bank, she erected three temples dedicated to Siva. Vishnu and Devi. Siva Singha's second queen Draupadi, who was also Phuleswari's sister, excavated the biggest tank called Suvasagar tank in the capital city at Rangpur and she also constructed three temples dedicated to Siva. Vishnu and Devi on its bank. This Siva temple with its large gold-covered dome is the biggest and the tallest of the temples in Assam, Queens not only constructed temples and sacred tanks, but their authority could be noticed over the religion of the kingdom.

6.1.12: Religious Zeal of Queen Phuleswari:

Queen Phuleswari was a great devotee of Saktism and tried to make it the state religion. But her passion as Saktism created great danger for the existence of the Ahom kingdom. She forced the *Dudra Mahantas* to bow down their heads before the goddess Durga in a *Sakta* shrine and compelled them to besmear their foreheads with the blood of the sacrificed animals and made them accept nirmali and prasad³⁹⁴. The Maomariyas, especially the powerful Mayamara Mahanta considered it as great insult³⁹⁵, and from that day Maomariya turned into enemies of the Ahom kingdom, which resulted in Maomariya rebellion, which was the most important factor for the downfall of Ahom kingdom. Nevertheless. She could guess that her interference in the matter of religion had caused such a detrimental effect to the interest to the state. However, queen Phuleswari was a great patron of literature and Sanskrit education. She started a Sanskrit school within the palace campus³⁹⁶.

³⁹⁴ ABHB.p.71

³⁹⁵ ABHB.p.71

³⁹⁶ S.L. Baruah, *A comprehensive history of Assam*,p.295

Queens and upper class women of Assamese Society were educated and they showed their interest in the field of education by patronizing poets and writers.

6.2: RELIGIOUS RIGHTS OF MUSLIM WOMEN

In Islam, there is no difference between men and women's relationship to God; they receive identical rewards and punishments for their conduct³⁹⁷.

According to saying attributed to Muhammad, women are allowed to go to mosques.³⁹⁸ However, as Islam spread, it became unusual for women to worship in mosques because of fears of unchastity caused by interaction between sexes; this condition persisted until the late 1960s³⁹⁹. Since then, women have become increasingly involved in the mosque, though men and women generally worship separately⁴⁰⁰. (Muslims explain this by citing the need to avoid distraction during prayer prostrations that raise the buttocks while the forehead touches the ground. Separation between sexes ranges from men and women on opposite sides of an aisle, to men in front of women (as was the case in the time of Muhammad), to women in second-floor balconies or separate rooms accessible by a door for women only⁴⁰¹.

In Islam's earlier history, female religious scholars were relatively common. Mohammad Akram Nadwi, a Sunni religious scholar, has compiled biographies of 8,000 female jurists, and orientalist Ignaz Goldziher earlier

³⁹⁷ *Equality of Men and women in all Three Levels of Islam.*

³⁹⁸ "Do not stop Allah's women-slave from going to Allah's Mosques." (Sahih al-Bukhari, 2:13:23.)

³⁹⁹ Mattson, Ingrid, "Women, Islam, and Mosques." In *Encyclopedia of Women And Religion in North America* (Rosemary Skinner Keller, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Marie Cantlon, ed.). Indiana university Press (2006), p616. ISBN 0-253-34688-6.

⁴⁰⁰ Mattson, Ingrid, "Women, Islam, and Mosques." In *Encyclopedia of Women And Religion in North America* (Rosemary Skinner Keller, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Marie Cantlon, ed.). Indiana university Press (2006), p616-17. ISBN 0-253-34688-6.

⁴⁰¹ Smith, Jane L. *Islam in America*. Columbia University Press (2000): p111. ISBN 0-231-10967-9.

estimated that 15 percent of medieval habit scholars were women. After the 16th century, however, female scholars became fewer⁴⁰². And today - while female activists and writers are relatively common - there has not been a significant female jurist in over 200 years⁴⁰³. Opportunists for women's religious education exist, but cultural barriers often keep women from pursuing such a vocation.

Women's right to become imams, however, is disputed by many. A fundamental role of an imam (religious leader) in a mosque is to lead the salah (congregational prayers). Generally, women are not allowed to lead mixed prayers. However, some argue that Muhammad gave permission to Ume Warqa to lead a mixed prayer at the mosque of Dar⁴⁰⁴.

Hui women are self-aware of their relative freedom and Chinese women in the context of the status of Arab women in countries like Saudi Arabia where Arab women are restricted and forced to wear encompassing clothing. Hui women point out these restrictions as "low status", and feel better to be Chinese than to be Arab, claiming that it is Chinese women's advanced knowledge of the Quran which enables them to have equality between men and women.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰² Power, Carla, "A Secret History." *New York Times* (February 25, 2007)

⁴⁰³ Khaled Abou El Fadl. "In Recognition of women." *The modern religion.com*. Originally Published (in a slightly different form) in the *Mainaret* (July/Aug 1991)

⁴⁰⁴ Javed Ahmed Ghamidi, *Religious leadership of women in Islam*, April 24, *Daily Times*, Pakistan

⁴⁰⁵ Maria Jaschok, Jingjun Shui (Routledge, 2000) *The history of women's mosques in Chinese Islam: a mosque of their own*.

6.2.1: Sufi female mystics

The Islamic mystic movement known as Sufism is believed to have been created by a female holy woman, Rabiah al- Basri (d.801). She created the doctrine of "disinterested love of God"⁴⁰⁶.

Sufi Islam teaches the doctrine of tariqa, meaning following a spiritual path in daily living habits, To support followers of this concept, separate institutions for men(ta'ifa, hizb, rabita) and women (khanqa, rabita, derga) were created. Initiates to these groups pursued a progression of seven stages of spiritual discipline, called makamat(stations) or ahwal(spiritual states) ⁴⁰⁷.

6.2.3: Current female religious scholars

There are a number of prominent female Islamic scholars. They generally focus on questioning gender -based interpretations of the Quran, the traditions of the prophet and early Islamic history. Some notable Muslim women scholars are Azizah al Hilbri, Anima Wadud-Muhsin, Fatima Mernissi, Fiffat Hassan, Laila Ahmed, Aisha Abdul-Rahman and Merryal Wyn Davies⁴⁰⁸.

But this a matter of fact that in Mediaval Assam Though the Muslim women had enjoyed the religious right to make them pious, to preapare them for going to Zannat, they did not received the right to go to the mosques. It was due to the lack of proper knowledge on islam and more predominantly due to the social Nature of patriachiacal domination.

⁴⁰⁶ Ziauddin Sardar Zafar Abbas Malik (2009) Islam: graphic guide. Totem. P 93. ISBN 9781848310841.

⁴⁰⁷ Chebel Malek (2009) L'islam explique par Malek Chabel. Perrin. p. 138. ISBN 978226029821.

⁴⁰⁸ Ziauddin Sardar and Zafar Abbas Malik (2009) Islam: A graphic guied. Totem. Pp.160-2. ISBN 9781848310841.

No women sufi saints are seen in Assam so far. Still in the family and society Muslim women enjoyed peaceful religious life.

6.3: RELIGIOUS RIGHT OF TRIBAL WOMEN

In the tribal society of Northeast India. The traditional religious is Animism, spirits of ancestors and nature. They believe in one supreme God is known in different tribes by different names such as Pathian among the Mizos, Raagung among the Nagas, Pantheon among the Garos, U Blei Nong- Thaw among the khasi's pala konwar among the hill Lalungs. The tribal people do not have any idol or place of worship. They believe in good and evil spirits and other godheads dwelling in the rocks, forest, groves, streams and rivers. They have fear of the infinite and have respect for nature. From this arose the practice of ceremonial offerings and sacrifices. The tribal people worship evil spirit also in order to save themselves for certain sickness like mania, ill luck and variety of other calamities. There are also other rituals, ceremonies, prayers, incantations, taboos, genus that are performed by the different tribes to have religious, moral and philosophical life, to prolong life, to ward off evil, to obtain children and to destroy or harass sworn enemies. In earlier days, the tribal people use to please their gods and goddesses by offering human sacrifices. Nowadays, however, fowls or other animals take the place of human victim⁴⁰⁹. The hill lalungs has thans (shrines) for the gods. Other deities are Botolmaji, Moraniuji, Rungshu Konwari, Sumai, Mora, Lukhumu (Goddess Lakshmi). In addition, each clan has its clan gods called khul devata⁴¹⁰. The household deities of the Kacharis are Bathaubrai or old Bathu, Mainao or Bhulli Buri, Asu Mainao, Sali Mainao, Song Raja, Song Brai, Bura Bagh Raja, etc and the village deities of the Kacharis are Mero raja,

⁴⁰⁹ *Playfair, the Garos*, p. 103: Birendra Kumar Gohain, *The Hill Lulungs*. P61

⁴¹⁰ Birendra Kumar Gohain. *The Hill Lalungs*, p.61

Bura Mahadeo, Bura's gosain, Jal kuber, Thal Kuber, Bih Kuber, Kuber Brui, Sila Rai etc.⁴¹¹. The main religion of the Mishings of the Assam as Kewalia or Kalhanghati or Nishamila.

They are mainly worshippers of Uyu or spirit and their main god is Donyee-Po: lo(The sun and the Moon)⁴¹². The dimasas worship six goods. They are Shivrey, Alufaja, Naikhurraja, Woaraja, Gunyung, Braiyung and Hamiadao⁴¹³. They also worship the evil spirit during any disease or when a misfortune befalls them. The Garos believe in the existence of benevolent and malevolent spirits, commonly called Mite⁴¹⁴, The principal Mites, who are worshipped by the (Jaros, are 'Tatara-Rabunga, Saljong, Nostu- Nopantu, Chrabodi, Goera, Kalkame, Susime, Asima-Dingsima, Jimgengma and Nowang. Besides they also worship the sun and Moon. The spirits worshipped by the khasis and Syntengs are U'lei muluk , U'lei Umtong, U'lei longspah, U Ryngkew or U Basu shnong, U phun U Kyrpad, Ka Rih, Ka, Khlam, Ka, Duba, ka taroh ,etc⁴¹⁵. Besides they also worship natural beings and ancestors. The Mizos mainly worship supernatural beings. The most important ones are Pu Vana (God of nature) Vanchuung Nula (Goddess of rains) , Vanhrika(God of science and learning) khua-nu(mother of nature, Ramhuai or Phung(Ghosts) Lasi (Angels), etc⁴¹⁶ .

The tribes of Arunachal are divided in to three Zones on the basis of socio-religious afinities⁴¹⁷. The first group of tribes professes Buddhism. They are the Monpas, Sherdukpens, Members, Khambas, Khamptis and Singphos.

⁴¹¹ S Endle, *the Kacharis*. pp.35-39

⁴¹² Jatin Mipun, *The Mishings of Assam*. Pp 25-26

⁴¹³ Dipali G. Dunda, *Among the Dimasas of Assam* ,pp126-131

⁴¹⁴ Playfair, *The Garos*, p 80.

⁴¹⁵ P.R.T. Gurdon, *The Mizos*, pp 26-27

⁴¹⁷ L.B. Thanga, *The Mizos*, pp 26-27

⁴¹⁸ N.N. Osik, *A brief History of Arunachal Pradesh*, pp.7-8

The second group consists of tribes like the Akas, Khowas, Mijis, Bangnis, Solungs, Nishis, Aptanis, Hill Miri's, Tagins, Adis, Mishmis, etc., who worship the sun and Moon God, namely Donyi Polo. The third group comprises the Wanchos and the Notes, who are associated with the cut of head hunting. The religious rituals of all the tribes largely coincide with the phases of agriculture cycles. They also invoke natural deities and make animal sacrifices. Except among the Miji Wancho, Nocte and Aka tribes, women of all other tribes, of Arunachal Pradesh are allowed to act even as priests provided they have sufficient knowledge of the procedure of the different religious ceremonies⁴¹⁸. The Manipurians are presently Hindu Vaishnavas. But before the introduction of Vaishnavism, they had a separate religion of their own called "Maiba, the maibas used to worship many kinds of gods. The main gods were Lamlai, Umanglai and Imunglai and ancestors of each tribe. Other deities were Panthoibi, Sanamahi, Noongshabu, Yunuhailai, etc⁴¹⁹. At present the Manipurians are found to be the followers of Gaudiya Vaishnavism, which was preached till the time of Jai Singha⁴²⁰.

6.4: Conclusion

Thus it has been observed that women enjoyed a good position in respect to the religious matters in the history of Medieval Assam.

⁴¹⁸ Status of women in tribal society : Arunachal Pradesh, by B.B. Pandey.

⁴¹⁹ Jyotirmoy Roy, History of Manipur, pp107

⁴²⁰ Sipra Sen, tribes and Castes p.28

CHAPTER -VII

ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CULTURAL LIFE IN ASSAM

7.1: Cultural Status of Assamese Women

7.1.1: Education and Literature

In the early vedic period, education was as common for girls as it was for boys. The Upanayana Sanskara or the ceremonial initiation in to vedic studies was performed in respect of both boys and girls . the vedic age held that Brahmacharya discipline and training were as much necessary for girls as it was for boys⁴²¹. Harita apprehended, "if the most important religious sanakara of upanayana was not performed in the case of girls, women would be automatically reduced to the status of Sudras; how then could Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaishya be born of them?" ⁴²². After this upanayana ceremony girls used the follow discipline mare or less similar to that of boya. They were, however, not to follow some of the strict rules from Brahmacharyya such as they were not to grow matted hair, they were not to go out to beg their daily food and as far as possible, they were to be taught by their near relatives like their father, the uncle or the brother; they could discontinue their studies if their marriages were fixed at the age of 16 or 17⁴²³. But some of the girl showed their passion for education and continued their studies for a, longer period and became Brahmavadinis such as Lopamudra, Apala, Visvavara, Ghosa, Nuvavasi etal who were experts in vedic theology and Philosopy⁴²⁴ .

⁴²¹AV.XI.5,18

⁴²² Altekar, *The position of women in Hindu Civilization*, p.200

⁴²³ Altekar, *The position of women in Hindu Civilization*, p.200

⁴²⁴ Altekar, *The position of women in Hindu Civilization*, pp.10-11

Women in those days were highly educated with full knowledge of grammar, logic, lexicon and metres and had power of reasoning⁴²⁵. Some of the talented women exhibited their extraordinary aptitude and self - confidence and were able to mount to the peak of victory and achieved profound admiration from the society. A theologian named Kasakritsana composed a work on Mimamsa called Kasakritsni⁴²⁶. Lopamudra had preached 179 hymns of first book of the Rg-Veda along with the sage Agastya⁴²⁷. One of Brahma literature mentioned about the lady name Gandhravagrihita, who lectured on some theological subjects before an enlightened audience⁴²⁸. We find that few women scholars like Maitreyi and Gargi attained eminence in the sphere of philosophy. The scholars were given the same respect as male scholars. In few occasions the women philosophers even defeated their male counterparts in philosophical debates. In a philosophical discussion in the court of king Janka of Videha Gargi defeated Yajnavalkya⁴²⁹. Some of the women studied medical science and were specialized in gynecology⁴³⁰.

In Assam neither epigraphs nor literature supply us with definite information's regarding the education of women. In ancient period, there were gurugrhas⁴³¹, Sanskrit tolas, and village schools provided mainly by the agraharas, created and patronized by the rulers on behalf of and for the maintenance of the Brahmins. But whether the girls were allowed to go to these educational institutions is not clear from the inscriptions or literary sources. Through the inscriptions describe the qualities of the head and heart of the queens, but

⁴²⁵ Bharati Barua, *A study of the socio-religious ceremony of Upanayana (Investiture with sacred threads) in the Sutras and the Dramasutras*, p.101.

⁴²⁶ Altekar, *The position of women in Hindu civilization*, p.11

⁴²⁷ Cited in Indra, *status of women in ancient India*, p, 74

⁴²⁸ A.Br, V-4

⁴²⁹ Br.up, III, 6 & 8 Cited in Altekar. *The status of women in Hindu Civilization*,p.12

⁴³⁰ Altekar, *The position of women in Hindu Civilization*. P.222

⁴³¹ *Grant of Balavarman*. V.31

whether they were educated or not are not clear. Only one reference is made to the appointment of an old lady to take care of the royal harem⁴³². We also find reference to women ruler and her ministers in the kingdom of kadali which was also known as Narirajya, which points towards the education of women, otherwise they could not had run the kingdom. Few instances of educated and learned women were found in the ancient Assamese society, but they belonged to the upper class specially Brahmana class. We find elsewhere that Assam was the main centre of Tantricism and women equally contributed to the Tantrik culture, which is also clear from the term Sahajayogincinta⁴³³. The kamauli grant of Vaidyadeva informs us that Brahma Mohoratha composed its prasasti in conjunction with his wife Padma⁴³⁴. Some women were skilled in the arts of poetry and rhetoric. Some of them employed intellectuals to interpret the contents of popular classics, scriptures, and informative literature of them. The consort of the king of Kamata appointed the son of the royal priest to interpret and explain her Haragaurisamvada and the Bhagavata⁴³⁵.

Through we find only few examples of educated ladies in ancient Assam, but the sources of the medieval period, referred to lots of learned women belonging to royal rich and well to do families and to the class of dancing girls. Chaoching the consort of the Ahom king Suklengmuga, alias Gargayan Raja, who hailed from the neighbouring Nara country, was an accomplished scholar in the Ahom language and it is said that she could write in ahom language with the toes of her feet⁴³⁶.

⁴³² P.C. Choudhury, *The history of the civilization to the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.*, 386

⁴³³ P.C. Choudhury, *The History of the civilization to the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.*, 386

⁴³⁴ E.I.II.pp.347-58' Gaudalekhmala, pp,127-46,cited in P.C. Choudhury, *The History of the civilization to the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.*, 154

⁴³⁵ B.K. Barua, *A culture History of Assam*,p,136

⁴³⁶ *Assam Buranji*, ed.by Dr.S.K. Bhuyan. P.32

The Brht ajvamsaveli points out that the ladies of the Bhuyan families were comparatively wel educated. The daughter of Pratap Bhuyan named Bhanumati, who was married to the Koch King Naranarayan was well educated and had great interest in the sanskrit literature. She become the chief queen of the king after the coronation of the latter and she changed her name from Bhanumati to Ratnamala. On her and her king husband's inspiration, the great Sanskrit scholar purusottam Bhattachary wrote the Sanskrit Grammer in order to make the learning of Sanskrit easy for all classes of people, and named it on the name of queen called "Prayog Ratnamala"⁴³⁷

Queen Phuleswari was a great patron of education. She was the first person who established a Pathsala at the Place campus. Where education was mainly imparted in Sanskrit ⁴³⁸. Many queens used to patronize literatures. During the reig nof a Kachhari king, Suradarpa Narayana (A.D 1708-1721), one Bhbaneswar Bachaspati translated in to Assamese verse. Queen chandraprabha, mother of Suradarpa Narayana and wife of king Tamraddhvaja⁴³⁹. 'Sankhachuda-badha' was written by Kaviraj Chakravarty, the noted litterateur of the Ahom period. One Sukumar Barkaith under the order of the Ahom King Siva Singha and his queen Ambika Devi (A.D.1734) A PROFUSELY ILLUSTRATED VOLUMINIOUS WORK " Hasti Vidyarnava", ⁴⁴⁰ which death in the diseases and treatment of elephants. Ananta Acharyya translated Saundarye- Lahari, the Sanskrit work of great Advaita scholar Sankaracharyya named it " Ananda Lahari on the instance of king Siva Singha and his queen Pramathesvari alias Phuleswari.⁴⁴¹.

⁴³⁷ Bharat Rajvamsavali (MS). Harendra Narayan, Verses 1825-1826

⁴³⁸ S. Rajguru, *The Mediaval Assamese Society*.p., 886

⁴³⁹ S. Rajguru, *Asamia Sahityar Itibritta*, .p., 150-151.

⁴⁴⁰ S. Rajguru, *Asamia Sahityar Itibritta*, .p., 141-146.

⁴⁴¹ S. Rajguru, *Asamia Sahityar Itibritta*, .p., 162.

Another poet Vidya Chandra, Kabi Sekhar rendered the Harivamsa in to Assamese verse at the behast of Charu Singha and his wife Premada⁴⁴². Thus , that during the medieval period, many queens along with the kings supported and patronizes the poets and writers for the advancement and improvement of Sanskrit and Assamese literature and development of other branches of culture in the kingdom.

So that all selection of people could read and understand the religious book of the Vaisnava religion, the Vaisnavite age brought about a renaissance in the field of education. Which put an affect on women too. Women were inspired to become educated. Many of them become conversant in religious discourses by reading religious books. All the queens of King Lakshmi Narayan used to learn the reading of the holly books of Vaisnav religion such as Ghosa, Kirttana, Bhagavata, etc. from Dayal, a female Medhi. Chandari, the nurse of Sankardeva who was quite acquainted with the teachings of the Gita could also take part in theological discussions^{4 43}.Some of the women during his period become so well educated and expert in verse of Bhagavat Gita that they occupied the headship of religious sects or institutions. Mention may be made about Ai-kanaklata and Bhubaneswari. The details of this women were discussed above in the religious part of the chapter.

7.1.2: Music and Dancing

Both literature and epigraphs point to cultivation of the music and dancing by the Assamese women. Evidences of taking part in dancing and music by women both in the early and in the medieval period are available. Manasa Kavya pointa

⁴⁴² S.N. Sarma *Sahityar itibrta*, pp.140

⁴⁴³ KGC, PP, 116.36

Out that the women were expert singers and dancers⁴⁴⁴. Singing accompanied by musical instruments and dancing were a normal phenomena during dramatic performance and religious ceremonies. Both epigraph and early Assamese literature refer to the deferent musical instruments⁴⁴⁵.

The sculptures of the period portray different dancing poses (nrtyamurtis). The earliest dancing scene was recovered in a slab from Tezpur⁴⁴⁶. Another dancing figure of the time was recovered from the Deo Parbat ruins⁴⁴⁷. Before the advent of Vaisnavism, dancing was considered as the exclusive accomplishments of the coutteen class. The custome of appointing women as dancers and courtesans in connection with temple services, which probably came in to vogue in India about the third century A.D.⁴⁴⁸, Become quite common in Assam, Gunabhiram Barua saya that the kings had offered a pair of temple of Hajo, Dubi, Vaisvantha and Dergaon. They had to dance the tune of music accompaigned be musical instruments in front of the idol of the temples, three times a day at the times of worship and player⁴⁴⁹, The Tezpur grant also refers to dancing girls presented in a Shiva temple by king Vanamala ⁴⁵⁰. The dancers were known as Nati and Daluhangana⁴⁵¹. In most of Shiva temples, there was a class people known as Nati who provided the temple dancing girls and singers⁴⁵². Other than Siva temples, girls used the dance in front of other idols also. Mention may be made of Deodhani Nritya, which was performed to worship Goddess manasa or in the Festival of Ambubaci in the shrine of Kamakhya by unmarried

⁴⁴⁴ *Manasha kavya*, edit by Dr. B.K. Barua & Dr. S.N. Sarma, p128.

⁴⁴⁵ *Grant of vanamala*, v.28 Madhva Kandali, *The Ramayana*; Sankardev, *Rukmini Harana*; Suryakari, Darrang- Raja Vamsavali.

⁴⁴⁶ B.K Barua, *A cultural History of Assam*, p.195

⁴⁴⁷ B.K Barua, *A cultural History of Assam*, p.195

⁴⁴⁸ Altekar, *The position of women in Hindu civilization*, pp182-183.

⁴⁴⁹ *Assam Bandhu*, edit by G.Barua, vol, II, No. 3& 4;p.c.Choudhary, HCPA,P,326.

⁴⁵⁰ *Tezpur Grant of Vanamala*, v.24

⁴⁵¹ B.K. Barua, *A cultural History of Assam*, p.135

⁴⁵² *The Nat is usually a kalita caste, Census of India, 1901*, Assam, part 1,p.141.

girls to the tune of some rough musical instruments like the Drums and cymbals⁴⁵³.

It seems that devadasis were given protection by the royal court in the Ahom period. The kidnapping of dancer of Visvanath temple by Satrajit, an agent of the Moguls, was one of the reasons to declare war against Moguls by the Ahom king Pratap Singha⁴⁵⁴. Dancing girls were also employed as spies in the Ahom court⁴⁵⁵. It appears that Natis in the later part of the Ahom period snatched a privileged position in the society when king Shiva Singha (1714-1744 A.D.) married two Nati sisters Phulmati and Draupadi, who were attached to the Siva temple and consequently made them the Bar Raja or chief queen respectively and struck the coins in the joint names of himself and the queens⁴⁵⁶.

Now singing and dancing came inside the royal harem. Queen Sarbesvari, the third consort of king Siva Singha herself taught a large number of young girls of different communities, the art of singing and dancing within the royal harem under her own supervision⁴⁵⁷. Singing and dancing became more popular during the Vaisnav age. In fact, it was an integral part of the Vaisnava culture.

The Vaisnavite movement not only endowed the culture of music and dancing with new vigour and spirit but also made it available to the people of all categories. P.C. Choudhury comments, "The use of various instruments and playing of tunes, particularly in the period of Vaisnava Reformation point to the regular culture of music, whether in temples or in

⁴⁵³ S.Rajguru, *Medieval Assamese society*, p204.

⁴⁵⁴ PAB, PP. 83F. *Ahom Buranji*, pp,55-56

⁴⁵⁵ *Ahom Buranji*, p,130

⁴⁵⁶ S.K. Bhuyan, *An Assamese Nurjahan*

⁴⁵⁷ TB, P.37

public places" ⁴⁵⁸. Even Sankardeva was a great musician and dancer and taught his followers devotional music, dancing and art of acting in order to spread Vaisnavism in different satras of the province⁴⁵⁹. Afterwards the temple, The Namghare AND ALSO THE Satras become the main centers. Where the intending people were trained by the elderly artisans in the art of singing, playing on musical instruments and Dancing⁴⁶⁰. As a result of the Vaisnavite movement almost every women acquired sort of efficiency in the art of singing celestial song called Namaghosa, Bhatima, Totai etc From KGC, IT is gathered that Kamalapriya, wife of Chilarai was deeply inspired by the tune and gathered that Kamalapriya, wife of Chilarai was deeply inspired by the tune and contents of Bargit composed by Sankardeva and decided to be a disciple of Sankardeva⁴⁶¹.

The ceremonial and some other religious function were accompanied by the songs sung by the women. Even in the present days, Assamese women are found to take part of singing the marriage songs such joranam(upper Assam) or Kaisagit(lower Assam), religious song such as Bargit, Kirtana, Namaghosa, Bhatima, Totai, ballad songs such as Kanyabaramahi-git and also bihu songs as well as flock songs. They are also found to be expert in bihu dance, flock dance and pastoral ballads. The marriage songs are purely the contribution of the women flock, which are found to enhance the beauty and gravity of the function.

⁴⁵⁸ P.C. Choudhury, *the History of the civilization to the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.*p.382

⁴⁵⁹ P.C. Choudhury, *the History of the civilization to the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.*p.382

⁴⁶⁰ S.Rajguru, *Medieval Assamese Society*, pp.418-419

⁴⁶¹ KGC, pp.106-109

7.1.3: Art of Painting

Regarding the efficiency of women in the art of painting, the sources of ancient Assam is silent. But the literary works of medieval period focused towards one reference of women painters in ancient Assam. Which is very significant and pointed out that women of the period were experts in this art. The literary works of Usa Parinaya of Pitambara and Kumara- Harana of Ananta Kandali mentioned about the extra -ordinary Chitridaya of Chitrakha. The latter was the daughter of Kabhandu, minister of king Banasura of Sonitpur. She was also the friend of princess Usa, daughter of Bana. It is said that Usa fell in deep love with Yadav prince Aniruddha by just a glimpse of the letter in a dream. But she did not know about this prince. It was Chitrakha, who by portraying all the youth of the period belonging to Asura, Yaksha, Kinnara, Gandharva, Deva and Manava found out the details of prince Aniruddha.

Other than Chitrakha, we do not find any other reference of women painters in ancient and medieval Assam at some of them had some knowledge regarding painting, Chandari, the nurse of Sankardeva falls in this category. Once when Sankardeva was painting a picture of Celestial Baikuntha and could not decide where the place the kalpataru tree, then Chandari, who was noticing the picture helped Sankardeva to locate the exact place of the tree in the Baikuntha Dham⁴⁶².

It seems that some of the queens were also interested in the art of painting and inspired the painters to paint the picture some literary works to make it more interesting and valuable. Sankhachura badha, the literary works of Kaviraj Chakrabarty was illustrated with beautiful painting on the instance of King Siva

⁴⁶². KGC,pp

Singha and her queen Phuleswari⁴⁶³. Similarly Hastividya, the famous work of Sukumar Borkar and his illustration of the beautiful pictures of the same work by Dilbar and Disai were patronized by queen Ambika and king Siva Singha.

7.1.4: Spinning Weaving and embroidery:

Assamese women of all classes and status were efficient in the art of spinning and weaving. In fact art was considered as one of the most important accomplishment and qualification of the women of Assam. In the Ancient and Ahom period, one would refuse to marry a girl who does not know weaving. Dr. Bhuyan comments, "The utter worthlessness of Assamese women is indicated by the invariable remark that she cannot even twist a thread. Nothing is considered to be more disgraceful to an Assamese woman than her appearance in society being clad in the garment not woven by herself"⁴⁶⁴. The expertise of the Assamese women in the art of weaving and the universal popularity attained due to that were paid the highest compliments by Mahatma Gandhi when he said- "Every woman born in Assam is a born weaver. No Assamese girl who does not weave can expect to become a wife. And she weaves fairy tales in cloth"⁴⁶⁵.

It was a firm belief in the Assamese society that if women could send their husband warrior to the battlefields by presenting 'Kavach-Kapor'(a kind of garment for warrior) which they had spin and weave within a single night, then their husband would not definitely meet defeat⁴⁶⁶. It is said that Mula Gabharu could not give General Phrasengmung, her husband, the kavach kapor while he was going to the battlefield and so he met a tragic end.

⁴⁶³ Dr. S.N. Sarma, *Asamiya Sahityar Anubhava*, pp141,146

⁴⁶⁴ Dr.S.K. Bhuyan, *studies in the History of Assam*, p. 66

⁴⁶⁵ Dr.S.K. Bhuyan, *studies in the History of Assam*, p. 67-68

⁴⁶⁶ *Assam Buranji*, edit by SK Bhuyan, p.21

Under the supremacy of the Ahom, spinning and weaving were included in compulsory list of works allotted to women. It was necessary for every women that in the night, before going to the bed, they had to complete the spinning of at least forty cocoons. Nobody could neglect their duties without any reasonable cases were punished ⁴⁶⁷. Francis Hamilton says. “The women of all castes, from the queens downwards, weave the four kinds of silk that are produced in the country, and with which three-fourths of the people are clothes ⁴⁶⁸.

Some of the expert women weavers were employed in the royal harem of the Ahom kings as in charge of the royal looms, KGC records that Bhavanipuria Gopal Ata’s mother, who was a skilled weaver was made superintendent of the twelve score of looms that were in the royal harm during the reign of the Ahom king Shuhungmung, alias Dhingia Raja ⁴⁶⁹. Even some of the Ahom queens were accomplished weavers and they personally used to give guidance in weaving to the young girls. Sarbeswari alias Anadari, the *Bar-Raja* and consort of king Siva Singha herself guided the girls in the art of spinning and weaving in the royal *harem* ⁴⁷⁰. The quality of the woven clothes was so high that a piece of garment could easily be concealed within the grasp of the fingers of the hand and could be without sunshine ⁴⁷¹.

⁴⁶⁸ B. Sarma, *Durnin*,p.10

⁴⁶⁸ F. Homilton, *An account of Assam*,p.61

⁴⁶⁹ KGC,p.261

⁴⁷⁰ Dr. S.K. Bhuyan, *Buronjir Bani*,p.128

⁴⁷¹ S.Rojguru, *Medieval Assamese society*,p.202,203

Besides spinning and weaving of Assam were efficient in embroidery works also, Embroidery was well known to women of ancient period. Various types of threads such as *Muga*, God and Silver were for the embroidery works. Different type of designs embroidered in the clothes. The verses from *Namghosha* and *Kirtana* were woven in the clothes used for religious purpose. The imamate figures and the different activities of Lord Krishna were popular embroidery designs. During a dance performance in the assembly of the gods in heaven. Behula also wore a beautiful sari, which was embroidered with all the incarnating figures of Lord Krishna⁴⁷².

7.1.5: Dress, Ornaments and articles of luxury used by Assamese women:

Epigraphs, sculpture and literature throw some light on the type of dresses and ornaments used by the women of ancient period. Generally in ancient Assam, clothes were known by the names of *Vastra* and *acchadana*⁴⁷³ and in medieval Assam as *Kapor* ⁴⁷⁴. People used both stitched (*sucividhan*) and unstitched garments ⁴⁷⁵. Though an Assamese women could weave all sorts of cotton and silk clothes, but she could not all the dresses. They had to maintain the distinction according to their higher or lower status in the society. The dresses indicated one's status in the society. The dress and garments made to *muga* and silk (*pat*) were exclusively for the higher class people. The garments of the upper class women were beautifully embroidery with gold and silver threads. The dresses of upper class Assamese women in earlier days comprised of three garments. They were i) *mekhela*, a girdle worn round the waist, ii) *riha*, worn round the waist and breast and iii) *a cadra*, one end of which was coiled round the waist just over the *riha* and the other end placed across the breast and

⁴⁷² Sannkardeva, *Rukmini Horana*, v.55; *Beula Lakhindor*,p85,pp,210,211,213

⁴⁷³ *KP*, Chop,69,8

⁴⁷⁴ S. Rajguru, *Medieval Assamese Society*,p,178

⁴⁷⁵ *KP*,Cho,69.2

Shoulder behind, generally the lower garment was fastened by 'nivibandha'⁴⁷⁶. But the garments of the poor generally consisted of ordinary *mekhela* and *cadara*⁴⁷⁷. Women in the ancient and medieval period used to wear various types of ornaments of various designs made of different metals. The KP gives an exhaustive list of forty ornaments made of gold, silver and other metals used by women from head to foot⁴⁷⁸. The literary works of the medieval period mention the names of different metals used for making ornaments such as gold, silver and other metals used by women from head to foot⁴⁷⁹. The literary works of the medieval period mention the names of different metals used for making ornaments such as gold, silver, diamond, copper, brass, bronze, amber, rhino ceros, horns, ivory etc. and precious stones and jewels, which were set on the ornaments to make it more precious and decorative⁴⁸⁰. The KP regulates some rules followed by women regarding the wearing of ornaments⁴⁸¹. The Purana states that silver ornaments could not be used above the neck. (*Grivondhadese raupyntu na kadacicca bhusabam*); further iron and bell metal ornaments could not be worn and those of other metals could be used only for the lower part of the body P.C. Choudhury doubts that whether these rules were followed in actual life⁴⁸².

⁴⁷⁶ P.C. Choudhury. *The History of the civilization to the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.* p.329

⁴⁷⁷ P.C. Choudhury. *The History of the civilization to the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.* p.329

⁴⁷⁸ K.P. Chop, 69,33

⁴⁷⁹ K.P. chop, 69,17,23

⁴⁸⁰ S. Rajgure, *Medieval Assamese society*, p.183

⁴⁷⁸ K.P. Chop, 69,33

⁴⁸¹ P.C. Choudhury. *The History of the civilization to the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.* p.331

From the literary sources of ancient and medieval Assam and sculptural remains, we come to know about the different ornaments used by women ⁴⁸³. They were *hara* (*necklace*) of different metals. Most of the sculptures were found to be wearing long necklaces made of beads and sometimes a pendant was attached to the middle of the necklaces; a flat necklace was called *galpata*, so named because the broad band lies flat on the neck. Another ornament called *Keyura* and *angada* was worn on the upper arms. On the wrists women used to wear *Kankana* (*bracelet*). On their ears, women put on different types of *Kundalas* (*ear-rings*) and on the ankle joints of the feet they wore *nupuras* (*anklets*). *Nupur* with small balls inside making a jingling sound were worn by unmarried girls as appeared from the Tezpur grants of *Vanamala* (*Balakumarikabhiriva kvanat kinkinibhih*). Married women wore a forehead ornament known as *Lalatika*, just below the hair on the top of the forehead.

These ornaments were used in the medieval period also, only the names by which they were known were different. Some of the names of ornaments used by women in the medieval Assam are mentioned here⁴⁸⁴. On the wrist they wore bracelets called *Epatia-bala*, *Dopatia-bala*, *Muthi*, *Sat-juthi*, *Son-khatowa-kharum* *Rupar-kharu*, etc. On the arms of the hands, women wore *Baju*, *Kankan*, *Tar*, *Balaya* etc. The necklaces with bigger beads were known as *Mata-mani* and the pendants put on the middle of the necklaces were known as *Madal* or the common women put on necklace made of ordinary small coloured beads called *Chheo-mani*⁴⁸⁵. Different varieties of ear-rings such as *Chai-Khale*, *Kanthasa*, *Kamaphul*, etc. were on fashion at that time. On the

⁴⁸³ P.C. Choudhury. *The History of the civilization to the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.* p331

⁴⁸⁴ S. Rajguru, *Medieval Assamese society*, pp.182,185

⁴⁸⁵ *Asam Bandhu*, ed. By G. Barua, volII, no1&2, pp.6.7

Nostril women used to put on an ornament called *Nak-phul* made of gold or silver with stones. Finger-rings called *Angathi* of gold and silver with jewels and stones engraved on them were in use in this period. Other than gold and silver, the rhinoceros, horns, the two-anna and four-anna coins were also used to make rings. Besides putting it on the finger of the hands, the rings were also worn on the toes of the feet called Ujanti. Young girls used to put Nepur with small balls inside making tinkling sounds on the ankle of the feet. On the head, women used to put an ornament known as Sirkpes.

The long and the dark cluster of hair remained always a matter of pride for the Assamese women Chilarai married Kamalpriya just being charmed at her cluster of hair⁴⁸⁶. They dressed their hair twisting into a coiffure, called Khopa, of variety of designs. One of the sculptures of ancient period is also seen with this the simple style of coiffure⁴⁸⁷. In another sculpture erected on the wall this the Kamakhya temple, the coiffure is raised to the left side and this method is still in use among the village women of Assam⁴⁸⁸. Though the literary sources of ancient period is silent about the hairdressing of women but the literary sources of medieval Assam throw some light on the hairdressing of women of mythological period. Sankardeva in his epic *Rukminiharana* also mentions about the hair dressing of Rukmini before she was going to the temple of Goddess Durga to tie the nuptial knot. The epic portrays “She beautifully tied the Khopa (coiffure) of her hair, high up, and thrust upon it a bunch of Malati flowers⁴⁸⁹. In the medieval Assam, women made their hairstyle in different ways S. Rajguru comments that the hairstyles of Assamese women of medieval period were most probably influenced by the hairstyle of women of

⁴⁸⁶ *KGC*, p.108

⁴⁸⁷ B.K. Barua, *A cultural History of Assam*, p.147

⁴⁸⁸ B.K. Barua, *A cultural History of Assam*, p.147

⁴⁸⁹ *Rukminiharan Kavya*, VV.254-258

non-Aryan Communities, especially the Khampti women⁴⁹⁰. He further comments that their style of twisting the hair into a knot projection over the forehead had a large number of similarities with the hair dressing of the sculptures of Sanchi, Mathura and Bharhut. As mentioned above, the style of making the knot by the Assamese women was similar to that of Khampti women. Other than this style, women of medieval period knew the various other designs of coiffures such as *Negheri-Khopa*, *Ghila-Khopa*, *Kaldilia-Khopa*, *Kamalijuli-Khopa* etc.⁴⁹¹

Assamese women were very fond of cosmetics and perfumes in the earlier days also. The Tezpur grant records grant records that women used scented oil and anointed their breasts with odorous substances⁴⁹². Oil mixed with limejuice was used in the hair to keep it long and dark and they wash their hair alkaline solution and other herbs, in order to maintain a luxuriant growth⁴⁹³. Women to augment their beauty used variety of perfumes to augment their. The KP mentions types of perfumes, such as *cumikrts (powder)*, *ghrsta (paste)*, *dehakarsita (ashes)*, *sammardaja rasa (juice)*, *pranyangodhava (musk type)* that were in use in those days⁴⁹⁴. The same purana reveals about the use of varieties of *Kumkuma*, *Kalaguru*, *Kasturi* and *Karpura*, varieties of Sandal-paste, etc.⁴⁹⁵.

Assamese women were very conscious about the beautification of their face. They used *Anjana* to make their eyes attractive⁴⁹⁶. The tilaka (making of red vermilion) on the forehead between the eyebrows and on the line made by parting

⁴⁹⁰ B.K. Barua, *Asamor Loka Sanskriti*, p.152

⁴⁹¹ B.K. Barua, *A cultural History of Assam*, p.146

⁴⁹² *Grant of Vanamala*, V.30

⁴⁹³ S. Rajguru, *Medieval Assamese society*, p.186

⁴⁹⁴ *K.P. cjan*, 69, v, 53

⁴⁹⁵ P.C. Choudhury, *The History of the civilization to the people of Assam to the Dwelfth century A.D.* p.332

⁴⁹⁶ B.K. Barua, *A cultural History of Assam*, p.139.

The hair on the head indicated the married status of women and their husband as being living. The widows did not make any vermilion marks. The widows of the Brahmanas used to take marks of sandal paste on their foreheads. Gunabhiram remarks that some of the Muslim women also took vermilion marks on their foreheads like the Hindu ⁴⁹⁷. Another favorite practice of Assamese women mentioned in the YT was the colouring of their teeth ⁴⁹⁸. The process of blackening their teeth is still in vogue among some of the women of the villages and women of some of the tribes.

Other articles of luxury used by the Assamese women were hand-fans made of different materials such as bamboo, cane and date palm tree, garlands, footwear made of wood (*Khadam*) and deer hide (*upanaha*) umbrellas, japis (sunhats) prepared from date-plam trees, combs made of elephant tusk, ivory, wood and bamboo called *Kakoi* (*Kankatika*) and also jeweled mirrors known as *manimaya-darpana* as referred to in the Bargaon grant of Ratnapala⁴⁹⁹. The garland called *Chaki* in the medieval period were made of different flowers but the garlands made of high-quality flowers such as *Juti*, *Malati*, etc. were not allowed to be worn by the common people ⁵⁰⁰. The grant of Vallabhdeva refers to sandals with leather straps and decorated with jewels⁵⁰¹. Umbrellas were made of woven cloth as stated in the KP⁵⁰². It is important to point out that *abhoga* umbrella were used by the rulers of ancient Assam ⁵⁰³.

⁴⁹⁷ *Asam Bandhu*, ed. By G. Barua, Vol ii, No.1 & 2,p.8

⁴⁹⁸ *YT,Parti,chap IX v,15*

⁴⁹⁹ P.C. Choudhury. *The History of the civilization to the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.*pp.329,332

⁵⁰⁰ *Asam Bandhu*, Ibid, pp.5-6

⁵⁰¹ P.C. Choudhury. *The History of the civilization to the people of Assm to the twelfth century A.D.*p.329.

⁵⁰² B.K.Barua, *A cultural History of Assam*,p.139.

⁵⁰³ H.C. Cowell,pp.213-214.

During Ahom period japi was very common. The different types of japes were used by the different people according to the status and rank of person in the society⁵⁰⁴.

7.1.6: Food and Drink:

Regarding food and drink of ancient and medieval Assam, we get the reference from inscription and different literary sources such as YT, KP, Kumar-Harana. Etc. these literature give elaborated descriptions of different varieties of veg. non-veg. and sweet dishes prepared by Assamese woman. According to the traditional food habits of common Assamese people, they generally took food four times a day. The heavy food was taken during noon and night time and at morning and evening people use to take light food. But the poor people or peasant class took food only three times. Hunter says that an Assamese cultivator generally takes three meals a day⁵⁰⁵.

Fasting or food restrictions were observed during a period of penance, shraddha ceremony of forefathers or religious preceptors, on the occasion of amavasya, purnima, ekadasi, astami and sankranti and Ambubachi and other religions festivals. The Brahmin widows were restricted to eat non-vegetarian food and even certain kinds of vegetables and they used to keep fasting during the period of their menstruation and on the occasion of Ambubachi in the month of Asadha⁵⁰⁶. Dietary practice like other parts of India was not so rigid in the Assamese society. The food restriction was liberal even under Vaisnava Reformation⁵⁰⁷ Meat and fish comprised of common articles of diet. Even the

⁵⁰⁴ B.K. Barua, A. *Cultural History of Assam*, pp.139-140

⁵⁰⁵ W. Hunter, *stotistical account of of Assam*, pp.139-140

⁵⁰⁶ S. Rajguru, *Medieval Assamese society*, p.161

⁵⁰⁷ P.C. Choudhury *the history of the civilization of the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.* pp.326-327.

Brahmans were habituated to the eating of non-vegetarian foods with certain restrictions regarding the meat of a particular animal or fish. As given in the YT, serpent-shaped and scaleless fishes were not taken by the upper classes (*matsyamsca salkahinamsca sarpakaramsca varjjayet*)⁵⁰⁸. The same work advocated the eating of meats of ducks, pigeons, tortoise and pigs and one who gave up eating these was sure to suffer from distresses (*hamsam paravatam bhaksyam kurman varahameva ca kamarupe parityagad durgatistasya sambhavet*)⁵⁰⁹. Meats of goats, deer, rhinoceros, etc. were also taken⁵¹⁰. Kumar-Harana mentions about a dish prepared with pork meat and the soft roots of a plantain tree⁵¹¹.

Rice was the staple food of the Assamese people. Two types of rice were extracted from the paddy Ukhuwa Chaul and Arai chaul. Ukhuwa chaul was made by boiling and drying the paddy in the sun and then rice was separated by husking the paddy. Arai chaul was made from the paddy simply drying it before husking. The lower section of the people, who were engaged in the physical labor work consumed Ukhuwa chaul, whereas the Arai chaul was used mainly for the religious purpose and was also consumed by the upper class people. Many varieties of paddies were cultivated in those days. The YT mentions twenty varieties of paddies in connection with the worship of different deities⁵¹². Early Assamese literature described about hundred varieties of paddies such as

⁵⁰⁸ YT, 11/5/275

⁵⁰⁹ YT, 11/9

⁵¹⁰ P.C. Choudhury, *The History of the civilization of the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.* p.327

⁵¹¹ Kumara Horana, V-208

⁵¹² *Yastidhanyam rajadhanyamvrhaddonance somedhanyam sighthadhanyam vairaktasalikam ketaki kalavinkaca dhanyam narayananatatha madhavanca pradipanca visnudhanyam ca vakkaaabham bhagyadhanyamasakabca nagaksan pancakabtarha, YT chap-II,5,289-91*

Kharika-jaha, manikimadhuri, jahinga, Malbhog, bagitara, cakowa, suwagmani, kapau Sali, ranga Sali, maguri Sali, etc.⁵¹³

Rice or rice flour mixed with milk and sugar or molasses was also used to by the woman folk of Assamese society to make any sweet dishes such as payasa⁵¹⁴ and pithas⁵¹⁵ YT mentions about milk of cows, goats and various preparation of curd, ghee and other sweets from buffalo's milk (Mahisam vajjayenmamsam ksiram dadhi ghrtam tatha)⁵¹⁶ KP also refers to various delicious preparations of sweet dishes from milk (ajyamannam payasrica dadhi ksiram tatha madhu)⁵¹⁷.

Not only sweet dishes, but also the Assamese woman used to prepare various delicious curries. The earlier literature make mentioned about twenty-five and fifty kind of special dishes (vyanjana) prepared with vegetables, pulses, fish, meat, etc. and made them appetizing by the use of variety of spices such as ardraka (ginger), jiraka (cumin), Pippaliyaka (long pepper), maricha (pepper), karpura (camphor), sarisa (mustard)⁵¹⁸. The vegetables mentioned in YT are muluka, rajaka, vastuka, palanga, nalika, sunka (cuka), Iapha, Canga (cangeri), dhekiya (a kind of fern), etc.⁵¹⁹, KP mentions masa, mudga, masura, marica, pippali, and jiraka along with annavyanjana⁵²⁰ Curries were prepared with

⁵¹³ B.K.Barua, *A cultural History of Assam*,p.94

⁵¹⁴ *Madhava Kandoli, Ramayana*,w,3291,4122

⁵¹⁵ *Madhava Kandoli, Ramayana*,w,3291,4122

⁵¹⁶ B.K. Barua, *A cultural History of Assam*,p.137

⁵¹⁷ *iavanabcaiva jirakam pippatiyakam YT,11/7,v186, Halidha marica hingaka diys.....Ada lona jani jira machara pabita, Kumara-Harana*,v207

⁵¹⁸ *YT*,2/9/247-250

⁵¹⁹ *KP*,chap,70

⁵²⁰ W.W.Hunter, *A statistical account of Assam* ,pp.370-371.

different kinds of pulses and bean also ⁵²¹. Sour curry preparations were made from various fruits such as cakala, thekera, tenteli, au (dillenis indica) ⁵²². To increase the taste of the meals, the Assamese women used to make various types of sauce and achar (pickle) from different fruits and vegetable. Therefore it is clear that Assamese women were expert in making different types of delicious dishes. They even prepared dishes from young banana plant as pacala and from green bamboo shoots known as kharica ⁵²³. Another items made by the women, which was the favorite food of the Assamese people, was acid curries and curries slightly seasoned with the alkali (Khar called in Assamese) made from plantain tree ⁵²⁴. The details and variety of dishes can be observed from the Kumara-Harana, which mentions description of different delicious foodstuff cooked by Chitralkha. “After performing the works of the marriage ceremony, Chitralkh. Made arrangements for food. Whatever Chitralkha cooked, cooked with particular care and dexterity. She cooked about fifty varieties of curry with the admixture of various sweet things. She prepared Paramanna and various cakes. She prepared a curry with magu-mah and mahur mixed together, where she gave salt, sugar molasses and ghee and spices, such as Ada, jani, jira and marich. Then she fried the meat of castrated goat giving spices. Another curry, known as Tala, was cooked with the meat of the pigeon. She prepared another variety of curry with the meat of tortoise there a variety of pulse called Barkala. Then she seasoned with asafetida the curry prepared with the root of the plantain tree and the meat of the boar . A variety of dish known as Ghanti with the head of the fish called Barali was prepared and then with the other portion of the fish, she prepared the curry giving the pulse called Machur. She cooked other varieties of curries, such as with the fish called kach vegetables

⁵²¹ B.K. Barua, *A culture History of Assam*,p.137

⁵²² Kumara Horana,v.208, B.K.Barua, *A cultural History of Assam*,p.137;S.Rohguru, *Medieval Society*,p.161.

⁵²³ *YT,11/9*

⁵²⁴ *YT,11/9*

called Bach and mustard seed; another the fish called Sol and the vegetables called Mula, another with the meat of bird and bringal and another with the fish called Ari and the green leaves called Palanga. The fishes called IIIih and Kandhuli were roasted on a spit. A curry was cooked with the green vegetables called Lapha by giving a kind of lime called Jamir anda king of citron called Solong. She prepared a soup of honey seasoned with ghee, which is pleasing for its highly fragrant smell, not to speak taking. She prepared soups by mixing sugar in the juice of the Badari fruits by mixing molasses with tamarind fruits. Thus the cooker made ready about varieties of curries ⁵²⁵.

After meat or tiffin, Assamese women used to serve betel nuts and betel leaves (tambulpan). Betel nuts and betel leaves play a significant part in the cultural life of the Assamese society. They were offered to the guests as an item of affectionate reception or honor and also used in religious ceremonies and marriages. The abundance of areca nut and betel vine in Assam is evidenced by both epigraphy and literature. The use of these, articles particularly by woman is given in the YT (nasukradarsanam strinam tambulasa sada bhavet)⁵²⁶. Sometimes betel nuts and betel leaves were made delicious by adding lime, tobacco, chhali (bark of a certain tree), chaph, lang, dalcheni, elachi, etc.⁸⁷². The Fathiyah-i-ibriyah states that Assamese chew pan in abundance with unripe supari even unshelled and the practices of chewing unripe betel nut with time is nowhere found in India except in Assam⁵²⁷.

Among the drinks, consumption of wine was in practices. Bana says that Bhaskarvarman sent Harsa “cups of ullaka, diffusing a fragrance of sweet wine” The consumption of one of the intoxicant thing, popularly known as Bhang or

⁵²⁵ P.C. Choudhury, *The History of the civilization of the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.*, p.328

⁵²⁶ S. Rajguru, *Medieval Assamese society*, pp.168-169

⁵²⁷ P.C. Choudhury. *The History of the civilization of the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.*, p.328.

Ghota in Assamese, was in practice in Assam from the remote past and was prepared by mixing the powdered hemp, sugar, powdered Lavanga, Darucini, Elachi and Dhutura-guti in milk. Men and woman consumed this drink especially on the eve of Siva Chaturdasi with great veneration. But after the initiation of Vaisnavism, the drinking of Wine or other intoxicants and even selling it were considered as sinful acts⁸⁷⁶. The vaisnavite preceptors looked down the people as Candalas who were inured to the intoxicants⁸⁷⁶. Therefore it was prevalent among a section of the society. It was not common among Assamese Hindu people. Mostly the tribal people and some of the religious sects were accustomed to it. Some of the Goddesses were worshipped by wine along with other things. YT stress on worshipping the Goddess Kameswari with meat, wine and blood, i.e. sacrifice of animal. The people, who were adapted to drinking, used to make the liquor in their own indigenous process. The liquor made from rice and other herbs were known as 'laopani or mad'

7.1.7: Festival observed by woman:

The festivals, which, which were observed by Assamese Hindu woman, were the various religious festival and functions as Puja festival of Goddess Durga or Durgotsava, Kali puja, lakshmi puja, annapurna puja, saraswati puja, manasa puja, sitala puja, ambuvachi, Phalgutsava, resotsava, janmastami, ratha-yatra, Jnuian, Siva caturdasi, etc. on the different religious festivals, woman used to keep fasting or eat fruits or vegetarian food with some restrictions. The sakta and saiva puja functions were more or less dominated by Tantrik rites, which mainly consisted of japa (meditation), Homa (oblation) and Tarpana (libation)⁸⁷⁹. The followers of the Saiva and sakta cult showed their devotion by offering animal sacrifices in the names of the Gods or Goddesses. The KP and YT refer to and mention about a large number of animals. Which were considered suitable for sacrifice,

Both the literature also describes the detail procedure of performing the puja ceremony of god Siva and goddess parvati in the temples.

According to Vedic rites, the temples and the tanks, which are either constructed under the order of the Ahom kings or queens, were dedicated to the gods or goddesses. Mention may be made of Gauridagar tank made queen Phulswari and three temples erected on its bank that were dedicated Siva, Vishnu and Devi. Another tank was Sibasagar tank in the capital city at Rangpur, which was dedicated to THREE TEMPLES OF Siva, Vishnu, and Devi, erected on its bank by queen Draupadi, another queen of king Siva Singha. Both the queens mentioned above were devoted to Sakta but they made of Siva and Vishnu along with the Devi.

The religious functions of the Sakta were full of rituals and ceremonies and the Saktaites prayed for health, beauty and wealth etc ⁵²⁸. On the other hand the Vaisnava functions were very simple and affordable for the common people towards god Vishnu and detachment from worldly objects were the main teaching of the Vaisnava cult. Therefore the religious functions of the Vaisnavas were observed without any ostentation. One of the common festivals observed by the Assamese people of all religions, castes and creeds was Bihu. The Bihu festival has a special significance in the mind of Assamese people and had been celebrated from the remote past. This festival is still observed with enthusiasm and hilarity. Bihu has close relation with the agriculture. As Assamese people in ancient medieval period were mainly dependent upon agriculture, therefore they performed some customs and rites for the happy growth of crops in the field. They are connected with agriculture

⁵²⁸ Dr. B.K. Barua, *Asamar Loka Sanskriti*, pp.179

works. They are also connected with the changing of the seasons. The three Bihu festivals are the Bahag-Bihu, the kati-bihu and the magh-bihu. Before sowing the seeds in the field in the month of Baisakh, the people used to celebrate and this Bihu was named of the month of Chait (Chaitra) and Bahag (baisakha) and continues uninterrupted at least for seven days. This bihu festival is also called as chait bihu or rongali bihu and the new year of the Assamese calendar also begins from this Sankranti. The different community of the people followed different customs rites and rituals. Woman makes varieties of palatable dishes and invites the guests and other kith and kin to celebrate this festival. The Bihu songs and dance performed mainly by the young boys and girls is the integral part of the Bihu festivals. After Bahag Bihu, the kati Bihu is celebrated on the sankranti day of the months of Ahin (asvina) and kati (karttika). This festival is celebrated mainly after the farmers have sown the seeds and for the growth of the crops without any natural calamities. On this day every Hindu Assamese woman worships the Tulsi plant by offering a lamp and Mah-prasad consisting of pulses, uncooked rice and fruits including banana. Lamps are lighted in front of the granary and in the paddy field. There is a tradition in few places in Kamarupa to chant the holy names of Lord Jagannatha in front of a banana tree planted at the gate for the happy growth of crops by the young girls, not attaining puberty⁵²⁹. The third *Bihu festival* celebrated by the Assamese people is *Mah-Bihu* commencing on the *Sankranti* day of the months of *Pub(Pausa)* and *Magh*. This festival is celebrated after harvesting, after offering the various dishes prepared from the new harvest to the fire called *Meji* in Assamese, the people enjoy taking the, . This festival continues for three to four days.

⁵²⁹ S. Rajguru, *Medieval Assamese Society*, p.438

Among other festivals observed was the Lakhimi Sabah, the *Mahoho*, the *Bhatheli* can be mentioned ⁵³⁰. Ahom women performed the *Lakhimi Sabah* festival in the month of *Ahin* (*Asvina*), where they chant the holy names of Goddess Laksmi and offered *Mah-Prasad* to her. Mahoho festival was observed in lower Assam, where young boys and girls used to go from house to house to drive away mosquitoes by singing songs. The *Bhathli* festival was also observed in lower Assam in the month of *Bahag*, where different sizes of bamboos were decorated as bride and groom and people round these bamboos.

Other than these religious festivals, the birth and death anniversaries of the religious preceptor's viz Sankardeva, Madhadeva, Damodardeva etc. were observed extensively as major festivals from the medieval period after the Vaisnava Reformation. Some of the ceremonies and rites and rituals in the individual's families were performed almost like big festivals such as marriage ceremony, Upanayana ceremony and Shraddha ceremony of dead person etc.

If we assess the religious and cultural contribution of Assamese women in ancient and medieval period, we find that in spite of their valuable contribution in the fields of religion and culture, women were not provided much respect by their counterparts in the male dominated society. We find that in the *Vehic* period, women reached the highest point in respect of religion and education and achieved the status, which was not inferior to men. But later on, their rights of *Upanayana Sanskara* and *offering of Ahnihotra*, were snatched away by the male chauvinists and they were demoted to the status of *Sudras* ⁵³¹.

⁵³⁰ S. Rajguru, *Medieval Assamese Society*, pp. 440-441

⁵³¹ Altekar. *The position of women in ancient Hindu Civilization*, p. 204

Even Sankardeva who was in favour of women's religious independence and education, considered women as impediment in the path of devotion and liberation. The reference in the Haramohan chapter of *Kirtana* and KGC concludes that Vaisnavas looked down upon women as evils who could even create illusion and tempt the mind of great sages and therefore the wise people should be aware of their lust and thus avoid their company⁵³². The Neo Vaisnavita went one step further by considering women as impure and banned their entrance into the *Namghars* of some of the *Satras* such as Barpeta and Bardowa Satra⁵³³.

But in spite of all these pessimistic attitude of the society, we find that women from the very beginning of the civilization were more religious minded in comparison to their male counterparts and participated in the religious and cultural affairs of society with full enthusiasm and devotion. The religious contribution of women was even accepted by men also and that is why they were given the opportunity to act as religious heads of different sects and they played their role very successfully.

7.2: Cultural Status of Tribal Women

7.2.1: Festivals:

The main festivals of tribal people aim at fertility corresponding to the different agricultural seasons. The festivals among all the tribes are similar to each other and rest upon a common background of beliefs. Men and women together participate in the festivals. Besides the main festivals. Besides the main festival of three *Bihu*, some of the main festivals of the Mishings of Assam are *Poorag Ali-ai-ligang Taleng Uyu* (festivals concerned with agriculture), *Dabur Ashi Uya*, *Yunrang Uyu* (Pujas for the deceased)

⁵³² Sankardeva, *Kriti Kirtita*, p.101-4, KGC, p.221, Kirtana-Haramohan chapter

⁵³³ S.N. Sarma, *The Neo-Vaisnavite movement & the Satra institution in Assam*, p.268f

and *Dodgang, Urom, Apin (pujas for ancestors)*⁵³⁴. The most important festival of the lulung is *Boliag-pisu*, celebrate in the month of April Before it commences, the women weave new wrappers and stoles. These are presented to their husband, children and near kins of the occasion. The most important festivals of the Dirness tribe is *Basu* the annual harvest festival. There is no fixed date in the Dimasa calendar for the observance of *basu*. It is observed sometimes between November and March of the following year, depending all the harvest seasons of the particular locality⁵³⁵.

The different tribes of Nagas celebrate the festivals similar to each other that are connected with agricultural activities⁵³⁶. The main festival of Angami Nagas are *Tseikranyi* (seed sowing festival celebrated in February) *Ngonyi* (close of the seed sowing celebrated in April), *Kdrumyi* (transplanting of paddy seedlings during May), *Tanyi* (celebrated in July, or August). *Theyuukimpfu* (children's festival during August), *Chandanyi* (path clearing festival during July), *Thekenyi* (opening of the harvest) *Liekhweny* (reaping of paddy), *Vate or Tekeva Kede* (preservation of grains), *Terhunyi* after the harvest is over in December) and *Sekrenyi* (in February). The main festivals of (Chakhesang Nagas are *Khilunyii* (harvest festivals during last week of November). *Therine* (paddy husking) and *Sokrinii* (biggest festival closes during the beginning of the new year). The main festivals of Rengma Nagas are *Ngadah* (harvest festival celebrated in the last week or November) and *Tsichyi* (tilling of the soil at the jhun field in March). The Zeliangground Naga's main festival is *Mewlengi* (paddy husking celebration) and the Pochuri or Sangtan Naga's main festivals are *Nitsokhu* (burning of Jhums in April), *Nizakhu* (supplications are held to the deities in the May), *Rasa* (ceremonial are held to the deities in the May), *Rasa* (ceremonial plucking of the young crops), *Tsatekhu* (harvest rite in August).

⁵³⁴ Jatin Mipun. *The Mishings of Assam*, pp.25-28

⁵³⁵ Dipali G. Danda, *Among the Dimasa of Assam*, pp.115-117

⁵³⁶ *Gazette, of India Nagaland*, cdt.Dr.H.barch.pp.68-67.

Khuthei (in November), *Kate* (close of the harvest season in November and December), *Alakakhu* (chasing away the epidemic), *Vikhukephru* (a Hunting ceremony), *Khuthe* (celebration of house thatching in January) and *Nazhu* (end day of the year). Ao Nagas observe mainly *Moatsu* (after sowing) and *Tsungrem Mong* (even of harvest in August). The main festival of Letha Nagas is *Takhu Emong* celebrated in first week of November. The festivals celebrated by the Mizos are *{awl Kui, Chapchar Kut and Mim Kut* ⁵³⁷. Pawl kut is celebrated at the end of the harvest when the year ends and new year begins. *Chapchar Kut* is celebrated before the *Jhums* are burnt. *Mim Kut* is performed when the first crop. Other than paddy in the field is reaped and such crop is offered to the manes.

The festivals of Arunachal are connected with agriculture and celebrated with ritualistic gaiety, either to thank God for the providence or to pray for bumper harvest. Some of the important festivals are *Mopin* and *Isolung of the Adis*, *Lessor (new festival)*, *Chaiskar* (celebrated after harvest in the month of September-October) and *Dungyru* of Monpas and Sherdukpens, *Boori Boot of Hill Miris*, *Dree of Apatanmis* *St-Donyi* of Tagnis, *Nyokum Yallo* (celebrated in February at the advent of new agriculture season) of Nishis, *Rehof Idu* *Mishimis*. The main festivals of Manipuris are connected with Vaishnavism such as *Doliyatra*, *Rathyatra*, *Jhulan*, *Janmashtami*, *Durga Puja*, *Diwali*, *Govardhan Puja*, *Ras Purnima etc.* ⁵³⁸. Besides, the Meithei tribes celebrate *Chairaoba* (new year festival) in April. The principal festival of Darlong tribe of Tripura is four annual community festivals called *Kut*, which make four different stages of their agricultural processes ⁵³⁹. These are *Ramzu in or Chapchar Kut*, which is celebrated after cutting and burning their *Jhum* towards the end of January and beginning of February, *Kangdai Kut* is observed during *jhum* burning in April.

⁵³⁷ L.B. Thanga, *The Mizos*, pp.31-33

⁵³⁸ Sipra Sen, *The Tribes and Castes of Manipur*, p.33

⁵³⁹ Lethuama Darlong, *The Dorlongs of Tripura*, pp.169-171.

Tnluntawi Kut is observed in remembrance of their loved ones who have left the world. *Tharlak or Mini Kut* is observed during the harvest of maize crop after the completion of weeding work in the fields in July and observed in honour and remembrance of the dead and the gods.

7.2.2: Folksongs and Folk dances:

The folk songs and folk dances are the main features of the tribal cultural. All the tribes have their own songs and dances. The folksongs of the Mishings are of eight varieties⁵⁴⁰. They are *A:bengKaban, Bi:rik, Lupo, Midung Nitom and Oi-nitam, Moman nitom and Mo-ninam*. The pure form of Mishing dance is called *Pagso monam*, which is seen only in the festivals like *Ali-ai-ligang and Po:rag*⁵⁴¹. Along with expression of musical instruments like *dhol, tal pepa, dendum, tapungs*, the girls express the different stages of nature through their movements. Among the Dimasa tribes, dances are performed during the *busu festival*. The different kinds of *busu* dances are *Madaikhilimba, Jaobam, Namalaiba, Beimuing* along with the war dances⁵⁴². The Garo folk dances in which the women take parts are called *dokru sua, amber-rurua, kil-pua, doregata*, etc.⁵⁴³. The folk dances of Ao Nagas are *tsungsang, angokazu or anga malu* (fish dance), *Moye yari* (sema dance), *Miri or Mechungr tsungsanf* and *yita kazu or lata malu* (moon dance)⁵⁴⁴. The Mizos also have their traditional dances. Their most popular dance is the *Cheraw* (bamboo dance), where twelve girls participate. There are other dances also, such

⁵⁴⁰ Jatin Mipun, *The Mishings of Assam*, pp.28-29.

⁵⁴¹ Jatin Mipun, *The Mishings of Assam*, p.29

⁵⁴² Dipali G. Dondo, *Among the Dimasa of Assam*, pp.118-120

⁵⁴³ P.C. Kar, *The Garas*, pp.55-56

⁵⁴⁴ J.P. Mills, *The Ao Nagas* (2nd edition), pp.158-159.

as *Chheih l am, Challam, Rallu iaim Solakia, Sarlmkai Pariam and Pawnto*⁵⁴⁵. The Garos have various kinds of folk dances martial and other dances, which are performed during ceremonies like *Gana* or investiture of a *Noknia A' sung Kosi* or annual worship at the site of the sacrificial stones, agriculture, *mangona* or during the post-funereal, etc. Other kinds of dances also are performed during the *Nokdongga* or the inauguration of a new housew, *Nakpante Nokdongga* or the inauguration of a bachelor's of a new houses, *Nokpante Nokdongga* or the inauguration of a bachelor's houses etc.⁵⁴⁶. The dances performed during the Wangala and other festivals are the Do'kru, Sua dances, the *Ambare-ruara* or Shaking *Hog phum* dance, the *Kil pua* or Planting of cotton dance, *Chambil Moa* of the Pumelo dance⁵⁴⁷. The funeral ceremonies consist of a great number of dances like *Matchu-Rodila* or tending the cows. *Delang-Soa* or dancing with the bones of the dead etc.⁵⁴⁸. Besides there are many other dances also among the Garos for different ceremonies and also for their own recreation, such as Gaewang roa. *Do'me gonga, Sipai roa, Nonill Kambe toa, Jik seka Chame mikkang ma, Anibrelong Kola, Chambil Moa, Me'mang mi su 'a Doma Jonga, Salam Ka'a Nomil nipila, Chamo, Changa, Buda ratela, Chu Kanna, Jik sekako tim 'a. Nomil Donnua, Chawari, Nomil do'me sua, Noniiljajong nidoa*⁵⁴⁹.

Different tribes of Arunachal vary from each other. During the *Dungyur* festival, the women and men of Monpa tribe perform various dances such as Jam-Cham, Grei-Chham, Lo, Chham, Ja Pho Mo, Khimdak-Peki, Geychiri-Namsekoe, Damchin-chhoiga, Ara-Khanky, Ngan-Chham or Kya-chham, Durdak or

⁵⁴⁵ *People of India Mizoram* cdt.K.s.Singh,pp.21-11

⁵⁴⁶ D.S Rougmuthu, *Folktales of the Goros*,p.299 cited in Milton S. Sangma, *History and Culture of the Garos*,p.163.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ployfair, The Garas*,p.SS

⁵⁴⁸ Mitition S. Sangma, *History and culture of the Garas*,p.166

⁵⁴⁹ Mitition S. Sangma *History and culture of the Garas*,pp.167.

Dudodam, Lham Tsokor, Locker-chhungi, Gelong-Chham, Chham-Chin⁵⁵⁰. The Nocles and Wanchus perform religious dances dramas of the Buddhists. The Adis have varieties of songs as *ponung, Delong, bari nitom, mopin-songs* and dances such as *popir tegnu, nyidanunam, jajin, etc.*⁵⁵¹.

The dances or Manipur are very popular in the rest of India Manipur dances are divided into two categories, classical and folk⁵⁵². *Rasa Nritya* falls into title classical group. Of the folk dances, mention may be made of *Thabalchongba, Laiharaoba, Khamba Thoibi, Kortal Cholom, Mridanga, Cholomn Naga dance, etc.*

Song and dance are very important parts of the culture of Tripura. The Rianga have various types or songs for different occasions. Their songs were classified by Dr. Chaudhuri in five categories. They are Love songs, work songs, ritual songs, political songs and song describing natural phenomena⁵⁵³. The different tribes have their own dances performed during ceremonies and festivals. The *Garia dance* is very much popular among the Tripuris, Balance-dance by the Riangs and the Chakmas are popular. The *Lebang Boomani group dance* is also enjoy by everyone. *Dailo Mairang Phawrmaw* is the popular dance of the Reangs⁵⁵⁴. *Parkam, Cham I am, Fahrel inkan, Riki Fachawi, Pualvachang hem. Sate tual infai, Arte tual phit, Vathu indi, Khullam or Thlangrawfe I am, Salu I am and Silai Iam* are the dances of Drlongs .⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵⁰ T. Lama, Dungyru, A. *Religious festival of towang Monpo in Aspects of culture and customs of Arunachal Pradesh*, cdt. Dr. P.C. Dutta & Dr. D.K. Duarah, pp.165-170

⁵⁵¹ Dr. Tol Nypori, *History and culture of The Adis*, p.253

⁵⁵² Jyotirmoy Roy, *History of Monipur*, pp.208-211

⁵⁵³ Dr. Jagdish Gon Choudhuri, *The Riongs of Tripura*, p.61

⁵⁵⁴ Sipra Sen, *Tribes of Tripura*, p.21

⁵⁵⁵ Letthuama Darlong. *The Dar'ongs of Tripura*, pp.171-177.

7.2.3: Food and drinks:

As regards food, the main and staple food is rice among all the tribes. The Garos and the Khasis also eat millet, maize, job's tears and Tapioca. During scarcity, they eat jungle yams and some other jungle roots⁵⁵⁶. The Nagas in the time of scarcity subsist all millet, maize and taro (*kachu*)⁵⁵⁷. Though Rice is the staple food of the Adi tribes or Arunachal Pradesh Pradesh, but due to the less production of rice in the northern region, the Bokars, Ramos, Ashings and other eat more food of maize, job's tears and millet. The Garos, the Khasis, the Nagas eat meat of almost all the wild and domestic animals. The Garos even take non-poisonous snakes and lizards, etc.⁵⁵⁸. The Khasis eat field rats and a kind of monkey. The Naga people eat the meat or *mithun*, elephant, tiger, bear, dog, snake, field mouse, cat and vulture⁵⁵⁹. Some of the tribes observe some food taboos. The Khasis abstain from the flesh of the dog. Some of the syteng Khasis do not take pork and beef due to the influence of Hinduism⁵⁶⁰. The Hill Lalungs and Kacharis avoid beef or buffalo meat. They use to take the meat of prok and chicken. One of the delicate foods of Lalungs, Kacharis and Garos is dried fish, which is called *Na kam* by the latter.

The *Jhum* fields and the forests provide the tribes with a number of vegetables and roots for their curry. Bamboo shoots are esteemed as against delicacy and are eaten as a vegetable or used after special preparation. The tribal people in earlier days did not use oil or ghee to cook the curries or meat or fish. They preferred to take the boiled or roasted food. The Garos used a kind of potash to cook, their curries, which is obtained by burning dry pieces of plaintain stems or young bamboos and the ashes of bamboos are dipped in

⁵⁵⁶ Milton S. Sangma, *History and Culture of the Garos*, p.150

⁵⁵⁷ M.M. Dhasmana, *The Ramos of Arunachal*, p.81

⁵⁵⁸ Milton S. Sangma, *History and Culture of the Garos*, p.157

⁵⁵⁹ B.S. Ghosh, *History of Nagaland*, p.204

⁵⁶⁰ P.P.T. Gurdor, *The Khasis*, p.51

water. This water is called *Katchi* and takes the place of oil⁵⁶¹. The Nagas are very fond of chillies or the fruits, the tribal people produce best kind of banana, pineapples, watermelons, cucumbers, oranges and pumelos. Betel nuts and leaves are common articles among them which they generally offer to any visitor as a kind of hospitality.

The Naga and Mizo women also smoke tobacco and *Bris*. Many of the old men and women are addicted to smoking *Hooka*. In fact, a pipe is must for every man and woman among the Mizos and the pipe used by woman is known as *tuibur*⁵⁶². Even small Mizo children smoke freely in the presence of the elders including their parents. They avoid taking or tea. All the tribes are habituated to consume rice beer, which is known by different names among the different tribes. The Mikirs call it 'Hor', the khasis call it *ka jad hiar* and *ka iad um*, the Nagas call it *Zutho, Ruhi and Dzutse*, the Manipur call it aqs *Ju*. This drink is made by boiling rice. It takes at least two to three months for making it ready for consumption.

7.2.4: Dress and Ornaments:

The dress and ornaments of the different tribes and sub-tribes were different from each other. The dresses of hill Lqatungs and Jaintias are similar because of the long association of the hill Latungs with the Jaintias in the past⁵⁶³. The common dress of a lalung woman is colorful skirt with a border of flowery design. The upper garment is called *phaksai*. In the cold season lalung women wear thick wrappers. The Mikir women put on a petticoat

⁵⁶¹ Milion S. Sangma, *History and culture of the Garas*, p.157

⁵⁶² Lt. Colonel J. Shakespeare, *The Lushei-kuki clans*, p.11

⁵⁶³ Birendra Kumar Gohain, *The Hill Latungs*, p.24.

known as *peni*, which is fastened round the waist with an ornamental or old silver coins called *vankok*. Another cloth known as *pekok* is used the upper part of the body. This cloth is tied under the arms and drawn tight over the breasts. The hair is combed straight and tied in a knot called *chubi* on the head⁵⁶⁴.

The dress of the Garo woman consists of a piece of cloth eighteen inches long and just broad enough to meet round her waist in the form of a petticoat, which is fastened at the top, on either the right or the left side by two strings of the same material as the garment, which allow it to remain open on the thigh. This garment is known as *riking*⁵⁶⁵. On their shoulders, the woman wears a shawl of blue and white cotton. During dancing and festive occasions, the Garo woman wears a dress named *marang-jasku*, which is worn draped round the body, passing under the right arm and tied in a knot on the left shoulder. It is long as the knees and is open at the left side⁵⁶⁶.

About the dress of the Khasi women in the earlier days. H. Barch writes⁵⁶⁷, the Khasi women wore *ka jainpien*, a single garment girded at the waist, looping downward to the knee which was a cloth of the Jaintias in the past. The common dress of a Lalung woman is a colourful skirt with a border or flowery design. The upper garment is called *phaksai*. In the cold season Lalung women wear thick wrappers. The Mikir women put on petticoat known as *peni*, which is fastened round the waist with an ornamental girdle of old silver coins called *vankok*. Another cloth known as *pekok* is used the upper part of the body. This cloth is tied under the arms and drawn tight over the breasts. The hair is combed straight and tied in a knot called *chubi* on the head.

⁵⁶⁴S.T. Das, *Tribal life of Northeastern India*, pp. 228-229.

⁵⁶⁵P.C. Kar, *The Garos*, p.25.

⁵⁶⁶P.C. Kar, *The Garos*, p.26.

⁵⁶⁷H. Barch, *The History and culture of the Khasi people (3rd edition)*, pp. 312-314.

The dress of the Garo woman consists of a piece of cloth eighteen inches long and just broad enough to meet round her waist in the form of a petticoat, which is fastened at the top, on either the right or the left side by two strings of the same material as the garment, which allow it to remain open on the thigh. This garment is known as riking. On their shoulders, the woman wears a shawl of blue and white cotton. During dancing and festive occasions, the Garo woman wears a dress named marang-jasku, which is worn draped round the body, passing under the right arm and tied in a knot on the left shoulder. It is long as the knees and is open at the left side⁵⁶⁸.

About the dress of the Khasi women in the earlier days, H.Bareh writes ⁵⁶⁹, the Khasi women wore ka jainpien, a single garment girded at the waist, looping downward to the knee which was a cloth of the Jaintias in the past ⁵⁷⁰. The common dress of lalung woman is colourful skirt with a border of flowery design. The upper garment is called phakasi. In the cold season lalung women wear thick wrappers. The Mikir women put on a petticoat known as peni, which is fastened round the waist with an ornamental girdle of old silver coins called vankok. Another cloth known as pekok is used the upper part of the body. This cloth is tied under the arms and drawn tight over till the breasts. The hair is combed straight and tied in a knot called chubi on the head ⁵⁷¹.

The dress of the Garo woman consists a piece of cloth eighteen inches long and just broad enough to meet around her waist in the form of a petticoat, which is fastened at the one side either the right or the left side by two strings of the same garment, which allow it to remain open on the thigh.

⁵⁶⁸ P.C. Kar, *The Garos*, p. 26.

⁵⁶⁹ H.Bareh, *The History and culture of they people (3rd edition)* pp.312-314.

⁵⁷⁰ Birendra Kumar Gohain. *The Hill Lalungs*, p. 24.

⁵⁷¹ G.T. Das, *Tribal life of North eastern India*. Pp.228-229.

This Garment is known as riking. On their shoulders, the women wear a shawl of white cotton. During dancing and festive occasions, a dress named marang-jasku, which is worn draped round passing under the right arm and tied in a knot on the left side it is long as the knees and is open at the left side⁵⁷². About the dress, Khasi women earlier dress. H. Barel writes, the Khasi women wear ka⁵⁷³, a single garment girded at the waist, looping downward was a cloth of spur (cotton) or khyrwang (cndi) variety and no stitching was necessary for this dress. Another cloth called ka *kyishal* (upron); a kind of sheet with coloured (khyrwang) of plain (Iryndia) type made of endi threads was worn over it, which was suspended from the shoulder. For outdoor use, a long piece of cloth known as *Jainsein*, made of *muga* silk was worn by women with its upper ends fastened on both sides of the collar bone crossing one another at the breast portion and stretching down as far as the knee, covering the whole body, but leaving bare the arms. The Pnars used the *Jaintoh khyrwang* in place *jainesm*. There are minor variations in the way of the Synteng wearing or *Jainesm* as one end is tied over one side of the collar bone while another end is fastened below the left arm pit. In addition to the above, women used the *tepmoh* (head and neck cover). Over the whole body, another cloak (*jainkup*) was draped around the body, its two ends were fastened at the chest and it covered the body shoulder to knee, *Jainkup* was not used by the Pnar women. *Salu ion* or *Desu* a kind of black skirt girded at the waist and reaching the ankles were commonly used by the Pnar women in the interior with a *kyrshah sem*, draped over it from the shoulder. During dancing, virgin girls put on treasured costumes, their *jainsem* called *kyrsliah dhara* was laid over a grey *mukmur* garment of velvet, of which the part covering the arms was more visible and underneath the *jainsem*, a skirt, *ka jainpien* hanged down towards the feet.

⁵⁷²P.C. Kar, *The Garos*, p 26

⁵⁷³H. Carch, *The History and cultural the Khasi people* pp.312-314

Nagas are known for paucity of their wear. Thee Naga women's principal dress is skirt, which is a sheet of cloth that is rolled along tile waist, which loops down to cover the legs. A bodice covers *spur* (cotton) or *khyrewang* (endi) variety and no stitching necessary for this dress. Another cloth called *ka kyrsliah* (apron); a kind or sheet with coloured (*khyrwang*) or plain (*ryndia*) type made of endi threads was worn over it, which was suspended from the shoulder. For outdoor use, a long piece of cloth known as *Jainsem*, made of *muga* silk was worn by women with its upper ends fastened on both sides of the collar bone crossing one another at the breast portion and stretching down as far as the knee, covering the whole body, but leaving bare the arms. The Pnars used the *jaintoh khywang* in place of *jaunesm*. There are minor variations in the way of the Synteng wearing of *Jainesm* as one end is tied over one side of the collar bone while another end is exten below the left arm pit. In addition to the above, women used by them covered the shoulder to me.

An apron is worn by fastewning either on both sides or the collarbone or one end is fastened along one side and the other is suspended below an armpit. Women girdle a shawl by suspending it from one of the shoulders. The Zeliangroung skirt is blue or white but during dancing they wear a ceremonial custom of multifarious colours⁵⁷⁴.

⁵⁷⁴*Gazetteer of India*; Nagaland, cdt. H. Barch, p.85.

The Mizo women in earlier days used to wear the only apparel, which was a kind of skirt called. *siasuap*, a small piece of cloth, woven from the reeds or bark of trees and more than one piece would be worn together, tied round the waist reaching only above the knee⁵⁷⁵. Later on dowlrem kawr and *kawppui zikzial*, a piece a lack colour cloth of greater breadth and length with embroidery using when thread was added to the women's attire. *Zikzial* was a dress of honour, and any Mizo mother would be proud to bequeath it to her daughter⁵⁷⁶.

The dresses of the women of different community the of Arunachal Pradesh vary from each other in pattern, design. The Singphos make their dresses themselves. The dresses of the Arunachal women consists or *Pukang* (skirt) or various colours and designs, a beautiful designed scarf, a waistband, and a turban⁵⁷⁸. The Adi women wear two items namely *Omekedung* and *japang*. *Omekedung* is a small coat-like garment made of wool, which is beautifully designed by red and blue woolen stripes. These coats cover the body from neck to waist and are half sleeved and open in the front. *Japong* is a wrapping cloth woven in the home. Formerly it was made of wool. It covers the lower part of the body from waist to knees of may come down a little lower. The Sherdukpen women⁵⁷⁹ dress themselves in loose, collarless and sleeveless shirts.

⁵⁷⁵L.B. Thanga, *The Mizos*, p. 15.

⁵⁷⁶L.B. Thanga, *The Mizos*, p. 16.

⁵⁷⁷Lt. Colonel J. Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki clane*, p.11

⁵⁷⁹R.R.P. Sharma, *The Sherdukpens*, p.19.

The Manipuri woman's traditional dress is *choli*, which is used to cover the upper portion of the body and a skirt type garment called *Janek*, which is wrapped around waist up to the ankles⁵⁸². Dress of mate or *Pukans* (skirt) or various colours and designs, a beautiful seurf, a waistband, and turban. The Adi women wear two items namely *Omekedung* and *Japing*. *Omekedung* is a small coat-like garment made of wool, which is beautifully designed by red and blue woolen stripes. These coats cover the body from to waist and are half sleeved and open in the front. *Japong* is a wrapping cloth woven in the home, Formerly it was of wool. It covers the part or the body from waist to knees or may come down a little lower. The Sherdukpen women, dress themselves in loose, collarless and sleeveless shirts, which cover the body from shoulders to knees. Over it, they sometimes wear small full-sleeved coats made of mill-cloth. round their known as *mukhak*. They also wear round their neck a white cloth about 20 inches long and 12 inches wide.

⁵⁸⁰Parul Dutta, *The Noctes*, -p.60

⁵⁸¹Raghuvir Sinha, *The Akas*, p.27.

⁵⁸²Chander Shekhar Panchani, *Manipur : Religion, Culture and Society*. p. 44

Its upper end is tied below the knee with thread of various type of drings and lower end hangs loose up to the ankle. The Nocte women general dress wear hanging from wrest is a skirt hanging from waist to the knee. Cover the upper body cloth or about two yards in length is worn as a shawl to cover them.

7.3: Cultural Status of Muslim Women

In the cultural field of Women Islam has restricted the right, still it is permitted to sing and dance in Islam, but these activities are allowed only in a gathering of the women where no male audience will be present. Hence during the mediavel period we have foind very limited evidances of cultural participation Muslim women as well.

7.3.1: A Woman in Islam Has the Right to Get Education

In the words of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) : “To seek knowledge is obligatory on every Muslim.” (Declared Authentic By Shaikh Muhammad Naasir-ud-Deen Al-Albaani), Muslim here means male and female Muslims, as women are the twin halves of men. The Prophet (SAW) also said:

“Whoever follows a way to seek knowledge, Allah will make easy for him a way to paradise.” (Declared Authentic By Shalkh Muhammad Nassir-ud-Deen Al-Albaani).

A woman in Islam has the right to knowledge and edication. Allah (SWT) encourages women to read and keep up the learning process. He also bestows His mercy upon all who seek knowledge, and gives them high status:

“Is one who is obedient to Allah, prostrating of standing (in prayer) during the hours of the night, fearing the Hereafter and hoping for the Mercy of his Lord (like one who disbelieves)? Say : “Are those who know equal to those who know not?” It is only men of understanding who will remember (i.e. get a lesson from Allah’s Signs and Verses). (Az-Zumar 39:9)

“O you who believe! When you are told to make room in the assemblies, (spread out and) make room. Allah will give you (ample His Mercy). And when you are told to rise up (for prayers, Jihad, or for any other good deed), rise up. Allah will exalt in degree those of you who believe and those who have been granted knowledge. And Allah is well-Acquainted with what you do⁵⁸³. This is referring to religious knowledge. In the first place, and to any other kind of knowledge, in the second place, where one has the intention of benefiting herself, her family and the Islamic society, a husband should not forbid his wife from going out of the house to seek basic religious knowledge, unless he is teaching her at home. The Quran advises mankind to pray:

“Then High above all be Allah, the True King. And be not in haste [O Muhammad (SAW) with the Quran before its revelation is completed to you, and say: My Lord! Increase me in knowledge⁵⁸⁴.

But in medieval Assam Muslim women received rare opportunity to acquire education. Now the situation is being changed and Muslim women have started going to Schools and College for religious, formal and higher education as well.

7.3.2: Dress code of the Muslims

Hijab is the Quranic requirement that Muslims, both male and female, dress and behave modestly. The most important Quranic verse relating to *hijab* is *sura* 24:31, which says, “And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their private parts and not to display their adornment except that which ordinarily appears thereof and to draw their

⁵⁸³(*Al-Mujadilah* 58:11)

⁵⁸⁴(*Ta-Ha* 20:114)

headcovers over their chests and not to display their adornment except to their [maharim]...”

There are regional and sectarian variations of the veil associated with *hijab*. Depending upon local views regarding female modesty, they may or may not cover the face or the eyes, or the entire body. These variations include:

- Hajib - A scarf covering the hair.
- Chador - A cloak covering the head and body, but leaving the face uncovered; worn by many women in Iran when outside the home.
- Shayla - A long rectangular scarf, pinned or tucked at the shoulder, leaving the face uncovered; worn by many women in the Persian Gulf region.
- Khimar - A long rectangular scarf, covering the head, neck and shoulders, but leaving the face uncovered.
- Burka - Covers the entire head and body, including the eyes; the wearer sees through a cloth mesh eye veil sewn into the burka.
- Al-Amira - A two-piece veil that includes a close-fitting cap and a tubeshaped scarf covering the head neck, but leaving the face uncovered.
- Niqab - A Veil that leaves the eye clear (although it may be worn with an eye veil), and worn with a headscarf.⁵⁸⁵

The *hijab*, and the veil in particular, have often been viewed by many as a sign of oppression of Muslim women⁵⁸⁶. The wearing of the *hijab* has become controversial in countries in countries where Muslims are are a minority, and where majority secular opinions regard the *hijab* as violating women’s freedom, especially in Europe a mid

⁵⁸⁵ *Women inn face veils detained as France enforces* ban. <http://www.bbc.co.uk>.<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-13031397>. Retrieved September 3, 2011.

⁵⁸⁶Mc Goldrick, Dominic. *Human Rights and Religion: The Islamic Headscarf Debate in Europe*. Hart publishing (2006), p13. ISBN 1-84113-652-2.

increasing immigration of Muslims⁵⁸⁷. The 2006 United Kingdom debate over veils and the 2004 French law on secularity and conspicuous religious symbols in schools are two notable examples. However, it is argued that if it acceptable for a Christian Nun to cover her head and body for religious reasons, then why is it not for a Muslim woman⁵⁸⁸? In France, the law banning the wearing of a face veil in public is being enforced. Sentencing includes a 150 euro fine and a citizenship course. Two women were detained in April 2011 when the law came into force.

In some countries where Muslims are a minority, there is much less public opposition to the practise, although concerns about it are discussed. Canadian media, for example, have covered controversies where concerns have been raised over the veil being a possible security risk, as in cases where Muslim women have refused to remove their *niqab* or *burka* veil for voter identification at polls. In 2007, the federal government of Canada a bill to ban face coverings for voter identification, but this bill was dropped as not required:

It was pointed out that thousands of Canadians have no photo ID. Requiring them to show their faces would be meaningless without photo identification against which to verify their identities. The Elections Act gives voters three ways to prove their identification in order to cast a ballot: provide a government photo ID, provide two pieces of approved ID, at least one of which must state their address (but neither of which must contain a photo); a have another voter registered in the same district vouch for them⁵⁸⁹.

⁵⁸⁷Alam, Fareena. "Beyond the Veil." [dead link] *Newsweek* (November 26, 2006).

⁵⁸⁸"No Such Custom" : *An Exposition of I Corinthians 11:2-16*".

Ovc.edu.<http://www.ovc.edu/terry/articles/headcovr.htm>.Retrieved 2012-11-07

⁵⁸⁹"Government drops plan to ban veiled voting".

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In Mediaval Assam is concerned, in case of the dress code, no clearcut instructions were followed. Because most of the Muslim families of those days were the converted local people who followed the local dress code orther than the Islamic one.

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Banhi
Mou
Orunodoi
Dainik Asom (Assam)
Azir Asom (Assam)
Amar (Assam)
Agradoot (Assam)

INDEX

A

Agriculture contribution , 63, 134, 181;

Art , 241;

Administration, 32;

Assamese folk tales, 44;

Aryans, 10;

B

British Rule, 1, 2;

Birth Control, 124;

Buddhism, 220;

Behavior within marriage, 122;

Bride price, 63;

C

Caste System, 20;

Chinese, 12, 13;

Civil Rights, 109;

Cultural status, 273;

Chastity, 94;

D

Dowry, 114;

Divorce, 57, 125;

Dress Code , 274, 277;

Dress and Ornaments, 244;

Devdasi System, 224, 239;

E

Education, 233, 273, 274;

Economic Status, 168, 199;

Embroidery works, 193, 204;

F

Faith, 112, 222;

Female Chastity , 87, 123, 124, 172, 227;

Festivals, 255, 259;

Food and Drink, 250;

Female mystics , 229;

G

Geographical background, 9;

Government, 32, 41, 77;

Gargi, 211, 234;

Gargayan Raja, 48, 235;

Gabharu, 48;

H

Hengdans, 18;

Hypergamous, 22;

Hindu Women, 58;

Housewife, 72;

Household, 70, 136, 202;

I

Inheritance, 138, 148, 152, 200, 205;

Inter Caste, 69;

Inter faith, 121;

Invasion, 10, 13, 17, 25, 106;

Islamic History, 53;

J

Jayadvaja Singha, 31, 52;

Justice, 37;

Jamuna River, 7;

Jaintia Hills, 12, 14;

Joyananda, 47;

K

Khora Raja – 26;

Kamakhya, 8;

Koch Administration, 24;

Kamrup, 14;

Kiratas, 11;

L

Linguistic evidence , 14;

Lushai, 6, 13, 130, 132, 145, 174, 175;

Literature, 2;

Lalung, 13, 135, 136, 157;

Laluk Barphukan, 29;

M

Maniram Dewan, 21, 61;

Mikir, 16, 132, 145, 146, 155;

Mantri Parisad, 33;

Marriage system, 142;

Muslim Women and Politics, 53;

N

Niladhvaj, 23;

Nawab Mirjumla, 28;

Niyoga, 102;

Narakasura, 92, 215, 218;

Nokrom, 163;

O

Occupation, 36, 59, 186, 203;

Origin, 10, 18;

P

Political Affair, 41;

Polygamy, 90, 168;

Polyandry, 121, 169;

Property rights, 193, 199;

Purdah, 64, 97, 98;

Q

Queen Phuleshwari, 45, 226;

Queen Chauching, 48;

Queen's Regent, 44;

Quran, 109;

R

Revenue Administration, 36;

Rituals in marriage, 81;

Religious status, 209, 210, 222;

Religious scholars, 229;

Rajkhowa, 35, 36;

S

Social Stratification, 20;

Sati, 19, 57, 66, 99, 100;

Social status, 105, 127;

Saktism, 214;

Siva Singha, 45, 77, 191, 243

T

Types of marriage, 157;

Tipam Raja, 29;

Tais, 15, 18, 28;

Tibeto Burman, 5, 13, 15, 129, 130;

Tribes, 14, 15;

U

Ume Warqa, 53, 228;

Upanayana, 64, 65, 211, 233;

Upanishad, 69;

Upper Burma, 15, 18;

V

Vaisnava, 46, 62, 78, 95, 216;

Vedic, 64, 69, 90;

Vanaprasta, 59;

Vernasrama, 89;

Vasudeva, 95, 100, 224;

W

William Bentinck, 32;

William Robinson, 21;

Widow Remarriage , 69;

Women Ahom Ruler, 45;

Women in politics, 40;

Z

Zakat, 110;

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Contents

1. Liberty, Equality and Fraternity As The Main Theme in The Works of P. B. Shelley
Dr. Asim 1
2. The Problem of Refugee and its Manifestation : An Overview
Bikash Kumar Bora 8
3. Role of Electronic Media In Guwahati City : A Study on Different Social Standpoints
Amaresh Baruah 21
4. Participation of Women in The Politics and Administration of Medieval Assam
Tripti Rekha Baruah 28
5. A Study on Awareness About Natural Disasters Among The Secondary School Students in Some Selected Schools of Morigaon District, Assam
Mitali Baishya 32
6. Impact of Integrated Child Development Services on Cognitive Development of Pre-School Children in Rural Areas
Shikhamoni Das / Dr. Sima Pal 39
7. Problems and Prospects of Human Impact on Environment with Special Reference to Assam
Pritom Sutradhar / Dipali Bezboruah 47
8. Impact of Urbanization in Rabha Culture With Special Reference to Goalpara District
Rumi Nath 51
9. Importance of Room / Space in Women's Life
Chayanika Barman 55
10. Deodhani of Kamakhya Temple
Nayanjyoti Goswami 59
11. A Study on The "Issue and Recovery of Loans & Advances of The State Government of Meghalaya"
Dr. Hemanta Kalita / Prof. Saiful Haque 61
12. A Study into The Challenges Faced By Women Entrepreneurs in Assam
Marjina Ahmed 72
13. The Study of Teaching Present Perfect Through Activities : An Action Research
Subhashree Panda 78
14. A Study of Biodiversity in Kachugaon Forest Reserve of Kokrajhar District, Assam
Rinay Basumatary 84
15. The Economics of Labour Exploitation and Trafficking - India and North-East
Dhrupad Kashyap 87

16. Seasonal Variation of Degree of Crystallinity of "Muga and Eri Silk" (Undegummed Condition)	<i>Chandrama Kalita / Dr. Arup JD. Sarma</i>	93
17. Musical Journey Over Time	<i>Tanuja Tamuli Phukan</i>	96
18. A comparative study of General Mental Alertness between Tribal and Non-tribal Students of Higher Secondary School of East Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya	<i>Dr. Ibanylla .S. Syiem</i>	100
19. Environmental Noise Pollution in Colleges of Guwahati City, Assam, India	<i>Biswajit Goswami / Dr. Yamin Hassan / Dr. Arup JD Sarma</i>	106
20. Terrorism in Ethnic Demography of North-East India : A Historical Study	<i>Dr. Nayan Kalita</i>	112
21. Obstacles Behind Empowerment of Muslim Women in Assam : A Critical Study	<i>Nasrin Ara Rahman</i>	120
22. Role of IQAC in Ensuring Quality Higher Education in the Colleges of Assam	<i>Mr. Champak Deuri</i>	124
23. Politicisation of Immigration Issue in Assam	<i>Amulya Kalita</i>	127
24. Role of the Sixth Schedule in protection of customary rights of the tribals in North-East India : A study of the Chakmas in Mizoram	<i>Suparna Nandy (Kar)/ Dr. K.C. Das</i>	135
25. অসমীয়া লোক গীত- এক অধ্যয়ন	<i>ডা° সত্যজিত কলিতা</i>	143
26. आदिवासियों का विद्रोह	<i>ডা° নুৰজাহান রহমানুল্লাহ</i>	150
27. गोदान फँसालि फावथायाव बेरखांनाय समाजारि सावगारि	<i>सुनिता बर</i>	154
28. খাচীসকলৰ নংক্ৰেম নৃত্য উৎসব	<i>ড° পবাগ নাথ</i>	161
29. বিশ্বায়নৰ প্ৰভাৱত মিচিং লোকসাহিত্যৰ পৰিৱৰ্তন	<i>মুনমী মৰাং</i>	165
30. অসমীয়া লোকসংস্কৃতিত বিশ্বায়ন : বিহুৰ জা-জলপানৰ বিশেষ উল্লিখনসহ	<i>ত্ৰিবেণী শইকীয়া</i>	176
31. প্ৰব্ৰজনেৰে সমৃদ্ধ অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ শব্দভাণ্ডাৰ	<i>জ্যোতিবেখা কেওট</i>	183
32. ভট্টদেৱৰ গদ্যত ৰূপতাত্ত্বিক বৈশিষ্ট্য : এটি অধ্যয়ন	<i>বনলতা দাস</i>	189

Obstacles Behind Empowerment of Muslim Women in Assam : A Critical Study

Nasrin Ara Rahman

Abstract : Muslim of Assam have constituted one fourth of total population of the state and women occupied half of their male counterparts. They are being suppressed and oppressed in the name of religion by their male counter put. Muslims are majority in almost 9 districts in Assam according to 2011 census. Indian Muslim Communities follow four different Shariats. The Hanfi, The Sharfi The Hambali and The Malik. India is a multi religious society in which Muslim comprise 11.67%, Assamese Muslims practice of the family planning in the lowest due to their inadequate knowledge. In Muslim marriage groom paid to the bride at the time of marriage some amount of money as mahr. Talaq Sunah Commonly known as Triple Talaq which allow a men to divorce his wife. Khula which is another type of divorce in Muslims where the women makes an offer of Divorce to her husband.

Key words : Muslim, Assam, Census, India, Marriage, Talaq Sunah, Divorce, Khula.

INTRODUCTION :

The Muslims of Assam have constituted one forth of total population of the state and women have occupied half of their male counterparts. However amongst the Muslims of Assam, the status of the female counterparts is very pathetic and deplorable.

The Muslim women are encircled with religious misunderstanding and wrong interpretation of Islamic tenants. They are being suppressed and oppressed in the name of religion by their male counterparts. In the name of "Purdah" the tradition of Arabian culture has been imposed upon a larger section of them and thus they have been compelled to be a behind. They are not given the rights of property. They are being utilized as the machine for human reproduction, a tool for movement and to look after their household affairs. Most of the Muslim women are still steeped in ignorance. Their literacy rate is very negligible. The code of their rights is negatively interpreted, misunderstood and they are seriously encircled by social obstacles of patriarchic society.

The irony of fact is that the Religion "Islam" is always being vlated for the backwardness of women in the Muslim world. But how far the fact is correct? Infect, Islam is the first religion

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that had advocated for the rights and status of women in the world. If somebody studies the history and process of Prophetic revelation with an unprejudiced mind, he will understand that the Mission of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was equally important with the elements of women emancipation and women empowerment. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) fought for the rescue of the whole human civilization of the world till the Day of Judgment.

The study of women in Islam investigates the role of women within the religion of Islam. The complex relationship between women and Islam is defined by Islamic texts. The history and culture of the Muslim World The Qur'an states that both men and women are equal spiritually, but also as in 4:34 that "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women because God has given the one more (strength) than the other and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient and guard in (the husband's) absence what God would have them guard".

Sharia (Islamic law) provides for complementarianism" differences between women's and men's roles, rights and obligations. However neither the Quran nor Hadithes mention women have to be housewives. Majority Muslim Courtiers given women varying degrees of rights with regards to marriage, divorce, civil rights legal status dress code and education based on different interpretations. Scholars and other commentators vary as to whether they are a correct interpretation of religious comparatives.

Muslims are majority in almost of 9 districts according to 2011 census, in Assam. Although Indian women live under the Hindu code bill that gives equal rights to women, most Muslim women are restricted under the Muslim personal Law. Muslims who are ignorant of the Quran are unwire of the allowances in the shariat for social adjustment change, and accommodation, In fact, Indian Muslim Communicates follow four different Shariats. The Hanifi, the Shaafi, the Hambali, and the Maliki. Islamic scholars state that the Shariat is not unchangeable. There is also disparity between the actual practices which have been manipulated to suit male interests. Indian Muslim are either Asurafs or non ashrafs. Ashrafs are the upper social class and are made up of the Sayyads, the Sheikhs, the Mughals, and the pathans, in descending order of hierarchy. There are differences in the treatment of women within this stratification. For instance, many non-ashraf women do not observe purdah, but the tendency among the Ashraf is to impose purdah.

India is a multi religious society in which Hindus comprise 82.41% of the population; Muslims, 11.67% Christians, 2.32% and Sikhs, 1.99%, Data collected in the third. All India survey of family planning practices in India indicate a growing acceptance of family planning in the country 33.8% of Muslim couples, 45.5% of Hindu couples, 61.6% of Christian couples and 63.2% of Sikh couples practice family planning. India is home to almost 105 million Muslims. It has been suggested that Indian Muslims as well as assamese Muslims practice of family planning is the lowest due to their inadequate knowledge of Islam socio economic and cultural backwardness of (Muslim Women) and the multi religious context of Assamese society . Low levels of education particularly among Muslim women is one of the major reasons behind high fertility in India Among the Muslims). It is recommended that research be conducted to analyze

the fears and apprehensions of Muslims, an invention strategy in developing a family planning communication strategy, issue to consider when communication program are presented (between Muslim women, Because a small family is good for their economic condition and also for the their health Mahra a marriage dowry of gift; in that it is mandatory for Muslim marriage and it paid by the groom to the bride. The amount of money or possessions of the mahr is paid by the groom at the time of marriage for her exclusive use. This is the actual wedding ceremony, usually officiated by an "Imam; Although a Nikah can be done anywhere including the brides home or reception hall also it is preferable and usually may be done in a mosque also Muslims women have right to give her consent during this marriage process like Kabul or yes or no. This is the right given to women of Islam not only India, Assam but all over world.

Nikah is acontract laid down in a Nikahnam " drawn between a man and a women. This contract can have condition and a mandatory ther to be paid by the husband's family to the wife at the time of marriage. This is an inclusive property of the wife . Everything in Islam is followed according to sunah (Deeds of the prophet) and the Quranic dictation, Most Muslim women who oppose triple talaq, to grant divorce Talaque- Swannah, and Talaque-e- Biddah, commonly known as " Triple Talaq' which allow a man to instantaneously divorce his wife. But this is the tradition to giving talaq to a wife in anger is strictly prohibited. Also prophet always considered Talaq as evil) Triple. Khula which is another type of Divorce in Muslim in all over world that is at the request of the wife, where the women makes an after if Divorce to her husband. The man has to accept the after with considerations, which after requires the wife to give back her Mehr taken during the marriage. Women after approach a Qazi-Court to demand a Khula from her husband. Incidentally, in both cases women can only request for a divorce and it remains at the behalf of the husband to draw up the contract to give the wife a chance to divorce him. Therefore in actually 'a' women does not really have the power to divorce her husband. Family, Society and ultimately the whole of mankind is treated by Islam on an ethical.

Differentiation in sex is neither a credit nor a drawback for the sexes. Therefore when we talk about status of woman in Islam it should not lead us to think that Islam has no specific guidelines, limitations, responsibilities and obligations for men. What makes one valuable and respectable in the eyes of Allah the Creator of mankind and the universe, is neither one's prosperity, position, intelligence, physical strength nor beauty, but only one's Allah-consciousness and awareness (taqwa). However since in the Western culture and in cultures influenced by it there exists a disparity between men and women there is more need for stating Islam's position on important issues in a dear way. Alike this in the scenario of Assam all such differences should be removed.

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