

Chapter-7

SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

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Chapter-7

SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Social organization may be defined as patterns of human interdependence which supposed to realize through the actions and decisions of a society's members; whereas, social structure is the durable patterns of relations between members of a given society, which are broadly accepted and socially sanctioned. Therefore, social structure may be conceived as a model of social action, and the social organization as reality. Following are the some components of social structure and social organization of Dhimal society.

7.1: Marriage (*Behou*) and Family (*Sako*):

Dhimal as a group are strictly endogamous, marriage outside the group is tabooed, while the clans are strictly exogamous in nature. However, now-a-days in some cases, marriage has been taken place outside the community also; but clan exogamy, even today, strictly followed by them and marriage within the clan is strictly tabooed. In case of breach of taboo they used to punish by traditional village council; and highest punishment may leads to derecognizing from Dhimal society. In many cases they have to renew their membership by way of fine followed by feast.

Little has been changed after Risley (1891) regarding marriage custom except the Hindu influence, which had also reflected on Risley's writing but with minor importance (details on 7.5. Life Cycle- Rites and Rituals). Like Risley's observation infant-marriage is also unknown among Dhimal even today, except a wide range of child marriage. However, Risley examined the age at marriage for boys as sixteen to twenty and for girls twelve to sixteen, which now-a-day may be categorized as child marriage. From this point of observation age at marriage for both sexes have increased.

Now-a-days also courtship is unrestricted and young people settle down their marriage without any interference of their guardians. Parents supposed to be more liberal to allow their offspring to find out their mate. Even the girl may go off with her lover and establish herself in husband's family.

Widow (*Randi*) and widower (*Randra*) re-marriage is socially permitted. Generally they are monogamous; a man used to marry a woman; he (or she) can remarry after the death of the spouse. However, a man can marry more than one woman, as a form of polygamy, but in reality it is rarest of the rare. Bride price (*Chuman*) and non acceptance of a married man as bride by most of the girl and their father can't permit them to have more wives. Even widower finds it difficult to gets a second wife. Polyandry is forbidden like most of the patrilineal and/or patriarchal society.

The type of residence, specially after marriage, is either patrilocal or neolocal. Usually elder son(s) used to set up separate house after marriage, whereas younger supposed to stay with their parent.

Divorce is permissible but seldom practiced by them. The reason for divorce may be mutual misunderstanding between wife and husband and maladjustment with in-laws (not getting well by them). For this the wife supposed to return to her natal house after an informal divorce. In some cases divorce is to be claimed when the woman run away with a man she loves (*Jari Behou*). The ex-husband may claim divorce and supposed to realize the fine from new husband of the woman. However, very few such cases were identified during fieldwork. Even they fail to remember the synonym of Divorce from Dhimal vocabulary.

The family, like any other community is the smallest and fundamental groupings of Dhimal society, the members supposed to unite by a bond of kinship. The structure of family is mostly complete nuclear family (comprised of father, mother and their unmarried children) followed by patrilineal joint family (combination of two or more patrilineally related nuclear families of same residence and commensurable unit). Though, the joint families are regarded as an ideal and economic efficient unit, the increasing number of Nuclear family is more common and popular system among Dhimals of that region. The same is also evident from Chapter-4 of the thesis under 4.7.1. Family types and Household size.

From the view of marriage, most of the families are monogamous with rare cases of polygamous but without any polyandrous type of family. The families are mainly patrilocal in nature (i.e., after marriage the bride supposed to reside in the paternal house of the groom), but sometimes, specially in case of elder brother, he (along with his wife) can form neolocal family after his marriage. According to succession, the Dhimal family is strictly patrilineal in nature i.e., only son (including adopted son) can inherit the property of the family. The authority of the family generally goes to elder male member; even after the death of father elder son can act as a headman of the family. Though in rare cases, if the children are minor, the mother supposed to establish herself as authority until maturation of her son.

All the members of a family live together and share common hearth, except some cases where one or more members supposed to reside outside the village because of their jobs. Family is also the basic unit for production and consumption; the total income by the family members is pooled and expenses supposed to incur as per decision of the head of the family.

Generally it is the duty of female to look after domestic activities and adult male to earn for his family; female can assist in agricultural activities except ploughing and harrowing. Now-a-days female used to engage themselves outside the family activities as laborer, however, whatever the case, they supposed to look after all the domestic activities of her house. Even young girl used to assist their mother; in many cases young boy is engaged outside household work as labourers, with or without his/her education.

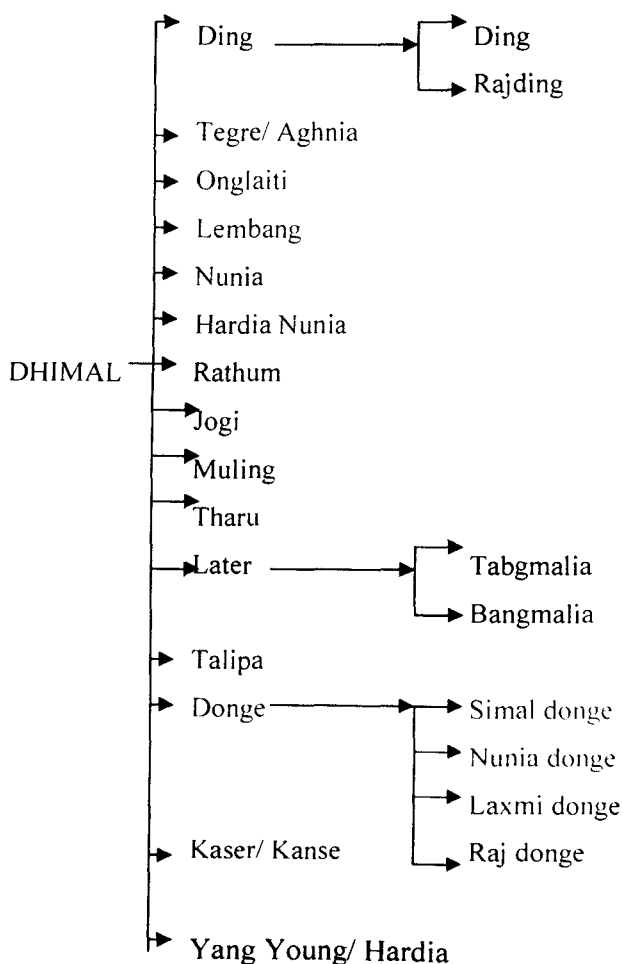
The family is also a basic unit of socialization. It is the duty of parents, grandparents and elders to look after the socialization and other activities of a child. Generally it is the mother who supposed to look after the matter. In many cases the elder sister of a baby (even if the sister is a young girl) used to carry and look after her brother or sister for a long time.

The types of family as per structure, marriage and number have already discussed in chapter 4 as a part of demographic and socio-economic profile of Dhimals under study.

7.2: Clan (*Thar*) Organization:

Little has been changed regarding clan organization of Dhimal throughout their written history started from Hodgson's monograph except some Hindu influence. Risley (1891) had identified three classes viz. *Agnia*, *Later* and *Dongia*, but not strictly endogamous except *Agnia*, who called themselves superior to other two. However, according to old Dhimal, once upon a time they claimed to be superior to other and practiced clan endogamy; but after a marriage with Donge girl they had loose the status. Thereafter, there is no hierarchy among clans and any one from any clan can marry any one of opposite sex from any other clan of the community. Risley is of opinion that they (Dhimal) have four exogamous septs - *C'honga*, *Dauwa*, *Kauwa* and *Ranga*.

Figure 7.1: Clans and Sub-Clans of the Dhimal



However the present study has collected the name of fifteen such patrilineal clans (*Thars*) with sub clans, but unlike Risley these are strictly exogamous in nature, however when clan is divided into number of sub-clan they supposed to follow sub-clan exogamy with clan exogamy. Again unlike Risley, marriage is permissible to member of any clan or sub-clan except within the same clan or sub-clan as they thought to be the descendent of common ancestor. Words like clan and descendant are used for same unit, and used to be the minimal exogamous unit.

After a detailed group discussion with Dhimals, specially older people, the following figure of clan organization with division and sub-division is constructed. The figure may represent clan organization of both Indian and Nepali Dhimial on the basis of their memory.

It is not unlikely that some of the above said fifteen clan may or may not be actual in the sense that, they have heard of about such clan (or some of the clans), but had never actually seen all of them. Therefore, after a door-to-door household survey, the present study have identified eight such clans with corresponding sub-division viz. Aghnia, Later (Bangmalia, Tangmalia) Donge (Simul Donge, Kesar Donge), Ding (Ding, Rajding), Muling, Rathum, and Nunia. The tabular representation of Dhimial family as per clan is as follows:

Table 7.1: Distribution of Family on the basis of Clan affiliation

Name of the Clan (Sub-Clan)	Number of Family
Aghnia	12
Later (Bangmalia)	14
Later (Tangmalia)	14
Donge (Simul Donge)	15
Donge (Kesar Donge)	4
Ding (Ding)	75
Ding (Raj Ding)	8
Muling	7
Rathum	8
Nunia	1
Total	158

The clan organization, as stated above, is not totemic in nature; rather depend on some folktales and practices. The Dhimals, now-a-days, have no clear idea about their clan, however, according to Regmi (1991) all the Dhimals clan can be distinguished clearly during the time of death ceremony, as different clan have different mortuary rites that has to obeyed by member of the clan. 'Ding' as per older people of Dhimial society may derived from the word 'dihe' which mean west. They might have come from west (or *Kashi*). They used to bury dead body with bark of *Simul* tree. Ding believes that once they used to wear sacred thread, but after consuming 'Yu' (the tradition liquor) and swine, they loose their position and became *Ding*. *Tegre* or *Aghnia* also claimed hierarchy in previous days when they were endogamous but after marrying with 'Donge' girl the rule of endogamy wiped out. 'Onglaiti' (mean fire fly) are those whose forefathers used to collect firefly to lighten the road at night. 'Lembang', according to older village folk, may be derived from Limbu, which they have a close affinity as per their mythology and folklore. 'Nunia' are those who used to leave salt on the way during funeral. 'Rathum' (*Ra* mean winnowing-platter) are those who perform a ceremonial dance during *dewali*, day of the new moon in the month of *Kartika*, in which father-in-law used to beat winnowing-platter and daughter-in-law used to dance with it. 'Jogi' have had duty to drive away evil spirit at night. 'Muling' (mean main pillar of the house) used to set up a post or 'muling' at western corner at the time of making house. 'Tharu' may be derived from 'Tharu', a tribe and next-door neighbor of Dhimial. *Hardia* used to smear turmeric on the body of deceased person. 'Donge' (derived from *donga* mean small boat or canoe) used to carry dead body on special type of coffin called 'donga', and leave it on grave. *Simul Dongia* leaves bark of *Simul* tree, whereas *Nunia donge* used to leave salt with dead body during burial. *Laxmi donge* worship *Laxmi* as their family deity.

For *Later*, *Talipa* and *Kanse* they have folktales regarding origin of clans. The forefathers of *Later* while seeing the shadow of honeycomb on water, getting down, used to collect stool instead of honey and swallow it. Among *Later* a section of them used to worship egg during *Diwali*, and after that they supposed to consume new fruit, and called *Tangmalia*. The other section (called *Bangmalia*) on the same day used to worship the figure of tortoise or Iguana made up of powdered rice at nearby forest or bank of river; but if someone found them they supposed to run away from the place.

The ancestor of *Kanse* after fall in love with elder sister of his wife, somehow manage her (sister in law) to make a trip with him to see her (sister in law) younger sister, declared as ill by her husband. At night they used to construct a hut on jungle and after cohabitation they give birth to a boy from which the '*Kanse*' emerged as a separate clan. The Dhimal once upon a time had planned to catch the moon by long ladder. They asked for to add more ladders, but they made a blunder and cut the ladder. Those responsible for such blunder then termed as *Talipa* (in dhimal language *Talipa* mean moon).

Regmi (1991) opined that, in the past, descent was recognized through the mother's line, which is still found among some specific cases in Nepal, specially for Kochele clan. However, as per data collected from the field of Indian Dhimal, descent is recognized through the father's side.

They have no clear idea about '*Gotra*'. However, sometimes they talks about *Kashi* and *Lasha* gotra, but without any social significance. Those are again, as per Regmi (1991), are very similar to Rai and Limbu concept of gotra. Therefore the influence of later may not be overruled.

7.3: Village Elder's Council (*Diami*):

The migratory habit of Dhimal due to shifting cultivation didn't permit them to have a strong village council system with hereditary functionaries. According to Hodgson, they once dwell in the forest with a numerical strength of ten to forty houses, had been shifting from one place to another. However, he stated, "Each of these communities is, however under a head called *Gra* by them, *Mondol* by their neighbours" (1847:158) The *Gra* had neither office nor any assistant, but was responsible for revenue collection and other administrative activities with a liaison with King's representative- the *Choudri*. "Should a murder or robbery occur the *Choudri* would take cognizance of it, assisted by three or four proximate heads and elders of villages, and report to the *Rajah*, from whom alone in such cases a decision could issue", Hodgson stated (1847:159). However, according to Hodgson, "crimes of a deeper dye are almost unknown, and breaches of the peace very rare" (1847:158-159).

In case of breach of customs (of Dhimals) a jury like tribunal had to call by *Gra* comprised of the village priest and old men of the village. "Those who offend against the customs are admonished, fined, or excommunicated, according to the degree of offence", Hodgson added (1847:159).

Even now-a-days they have a rudimentary Village Elder's Council comprised of important and respectable village elder (men) with its two office bearer '*Jatiya Pradhan*', or the head of the Village Elder's Council and '*Landha*' or the messenger. The posts are not hereditary but selected after raising hand by village '*Panchas*'- the important and respectable elder (men) of the village. The *Jatiya Pradhan* (or sometimes called *Majhi* specially by their Nepali counterpart) supposed to preside over the meeting of the Village Elder's Council and take decision after consultation with his jury. He used to pay respect by way of cash and kind in different ceremonies of the society. The '*Landha*' is the person responsible to inform all sorts of news or information of village council. He is also responsible to inform the relatives and friends of deceased about his/her demise and/or invitation to attend the funeral and obsequial ceremony.

Mr. Rupal Mallick and Mr. Bikash Mallick had selected as *Jatiya Pradhan* of Mallabari and Chengadhari respectively, whereas Mr. Taben Mallick and Mr. Budharu Mallick assist them as *Landha* of two groups repetitively. According to them now-a-days they used to judge the breach of social customs only. *Dhami* also plays an important role in such cases.

The highest punishment they used to pronounce is excommunicated (*Jati sihi*) or social boycott of a person or a family. In such an extreme condition they pronounce excommunication of fifteen families of Chengadhari, including the family of Mr. Bangthu Mallick, who used to bestow his daughter to a Rajbansi family and other fourteen families to attend such ceremonies. Even they recall the case of Mr. Alap Mallick's family (brother of Mr. Rajni Mallick's Grandfather) who used to bestow his daughter to a Mohali family. After nine years boycott, the village council withdraw it after a fine (by cash) and feast (with pork) followed by wash their (*Panchas*) hand over the head of respective head of the family.

During the period of excommunication the member of the family can't attend the '*Salao*' (the permission of *Pancha* before marriage) which is big insulting to a Dhimal. They supposed to apologize to the *Pancha* with liquor, betel leaf and betel nut along

with a fine (by cash). Even they used to wash the leg of *Pancha* and to bow in obeisance after covering his neck with a towel. Then the *Pancha* supposed to forgive and the family may return to the society after a feast.

However, after the introduction of statutory three tiers Panchayet, the council (*Diami*) has lost its importance partially specially in administrative measures. The developmental works has to be administered by statutory Panchayet and its members. Downtrodden Dhimal finds it difficult to make themselves in such decision making process. However, other backward neighbours having ST status find themselves in three tiers Panchayet system because of reservation policy. The first steps towards this system may be attributed to Mr. Malabar Mallick of Maniram G.P., who became vice-president of Naxalbari Panchayet Samity. Later on in 1999, Mr. Prasenjit Mallick of Ketu Gabur jot was selected as *Upo- Prodhan* of Hatighisa Gram Panchayet.

7.4: Kinship (*Tai ko diang*):

The Dhimal are patrilineal, i.e., they used to recon descent through fathers line; and unilateral - all the sons inherit father's property but daughter can't inherit the same. Residence pattern is of patrilocal but sometimes elder son used to set up separate family after marriage which is neolocal in nature. However for actual social contacts the kinship system is bilateral; contacts are maintained with relatives of both sides (fathers and mothers) without pronounced discrimination.

Dhimal kinship terminology is of classificatory type i.e., the relatives of same status, sex or age supposed to merged under a single term. Thus the term of address '*boboy*' is used to denote the relatives of father and mother status if reckoned from father side (of either sex) i.e., father's elder brothers, their wives, father's younger brothers and their wives. Cousin (male) irrespective of sex of the person through whom the relationship is established (father or mother) as well as brother is addressed by same term '*Iolla*'. However for term of reference they used to refer father's sister's son as *pisaichan*, maternal uncle's son as *Mamai-ko-chan* and so on. The same is true in case of cousin (female) and sisters where both addressed as *Rime*, but for term of reference fathers sister's daughter is referred as *pisai-ki-chamindi* and maternal uncles daughter as

Mamai-chamindi. A sex differences may have seen in case of term of address to ego's second ascending generation; in case of both the grandfathers (parental or maternal) the term of address is 'Aju', whereas for grandmother (parental or maternal) it is 'Ajai'.

In many cases the kinship terminology is descriptive also. The term of address for parents may differ in sex of relatives as well as between blood relatives and relatives connected by marriage. For father it is 'Aba', for mother it is 'Aai' whereas for father-in-law it is 'Juwa' and for mother in law it is 'Jube'. No differences of term of address are noted for parents due to difference in sex of the speaker. Sometimes they prefix a term to differentiate age levels within the same generation. The term brother is addressed as 'Iolla'; however for elder brother they prefix 'Bakra' (*Barka Iolla*), for younger 'Mihika' (*Mihika Iolla*) and for twin 'Jeuthia' (*Jeuthia Iolla*). Even they supposed to prefix *Oarang* and *Oajan* for old and young husband respectively (i.e., *Oarang ke* and *Oajan ke*); and 'Berang' and 'Bejan' for old and young wife (i.e., *Berang Be* and *Bejan Be*). However kinship terminology is more classificatory than descriptive.

They distinguish the affinal kin 'Maiti' (or kins by marriage) from consanguinal kin 'Harkhun' (or kin by blood). Relation between affinal kins are supposed to be more distant than consanguinal kins of all stages. However, husband and wife, the most notable affinal kins, may be an exception along with some other affinal kins which is of great social interaction. According to Regmi, "relations between affines are permitted by respect and harmony. They are expected to avoid conflict even more than blood relations. There is more restraint, less intimacy and co-operation between affines than between consanguinal kins..... Co-operation is the essence of consanguinal kinship" (1991: 228).

A ceremonial kinship named 'Meetai' relationship is also found among Dhimal society, by which a Dhimal (of either sex) can establish friendship with people from other community after performing a ceremony in presence of village *Panchas*.

They used to adopt a child (boy or girl) from their own community or outside the group after oath and rituals before village *Panchas*, and called 'Poshya chan'. The adopted boy is entitled to get share of the paternal (who adopt or social father) property but not allowed to fulfill any ritual obligation for his biological parent.

The usage of avoidance may have seen among father-in-law with daughter-in-law, mother-in-law and son-in-law, even husband's elder brother and younger brother's wife. Another usage of avoidance may be found among younger sister's husband with his wife's elder sister, as she supposed to pay respect as mother-in-law.

The following are the pair between them joking relationship supposed to maintain with honour or sometimes with vulgar. These are: sister's husband with wife's younger sister and brother; sister's husband's elder brother and his wife with ego's brothers and sisters; brother-in-law and sister-in-law, and between grand parents and grand children.

Following are the kinship terminology as per Dhimial vocabulary:

(i) Ego's Generation:

Husband : <i>Ke</i>	Wife : <i>Be</i>
Elder brother : <i>Barkai Yolla</i>	Younger brother: <i>Mihika Yolla</i>
Elder sister : <i>Bai</i>	Younger sister: <i>Rime/Ane</i>
Cousin (parental or maternal but male): <i>Iolla</i>	Cousin(parental or maternal but female) : <i>Rime</i>
Husbands elder brother: <i>Puju</i>	Husband's elder brother's wife: <i>Bai</i>
Husband younger brother: <i>Hulung</i>	Husband's younger brother's wife: <i>Yare</i>
Elder brother's wife: <i>Bhaujhi</i>	Younger brother's wife: <i>Ane Nama</i>
Wife's elder sister: <i>Anhai</i>	Wife's elder sister's husband: <i>Beisha</i>
Wife's younger sister: <i>Hulme</i>	Wife's younger sister's husband: <i>Beisha</i>
Wife's elder brother: <i>Ane</i>	Wife's elder brother's wife: <i>Bai</i>
Wife's younger brother: <i>Huigo</i>	Wife's younger brother's wife: <i>Hulme</i>
Husband's elder sister : <i>Naju</i>	Husband's elder sister's husband: <i>Dada</i>
Husband's younger sister: <i>Hulme</i>	Husband's younger sister's husband: <i>Iolla</i>
Elder sister's husband: <i>Aanu</i>	Younger sister's husband : <i>Ane Mauya</i>

(ii) Ego's first ascending generation:

Father: <i>Aba</i>	Mother: <i>Aai</i>
Father's brother (elder or younger) : <i>Boboi</i>	Father's brother's(elder or younger)wife: <i>Boboi</i>
Father's sister: <i>Pisai</i>	Father's sister's husband: <i>Piusa</i>
Mother's brother: <i>Mamai</i>	Mother's brother's husband: <i>Mami</i>

Mother's sister: <i>Musi</i>	Mother's sister's husband: <i>Masai</i>
Father-in-law: <i>Jua</i>	Mother-in-law: <i>Jube</i>
Between Ego's father and father-in-law: <i>Samdi</i>	Between Ego's mother and mother-in-law: <i>Samdaini</i>

(iii) Ego's first descending generation:

Son: <i>Chan</i>	Daughter: <i>Chamindi</i>
Son's Wife: <i>Nama</i>	Daughter's Husband: <i>Mhawa</i>
Adopted Son: <i>Poshya chan</i>	Adopted Daughter: <i>Poshya chamindi</i>
Brother's Son: <i>Pue</i>	Sister's Son: <i>Pue</i>
Brother's Daughter: <i>Pue</i>	Sister's Daughter: <i>Pue</i>
Son-in-law: <i>Chan Nahama</i>	Daughter-in-law: <i>Chamindi Mahuya</i>

(iv) Ego's second ascending generation:

Father's Father: <i>Aju</i>	Father's Mother: <i>Ajai</i>
Mother's Father: <i>Aju</i>	Mother's Mother: <i>Ajai</i>

(v) Ego's first ascending generation:

Grandson: <i>Nati</i>	Grandson's Wife: <i>Natni</i>
Granddaughter: <i>Natni</i>	Granddaughter's Husband: <i>Nati</i>

7.5. Life Cycle- Rites and Rituals:

7.5.1. Pregnancy (*Gandita Iehi*) and Birth (*Jonom*):

They have no traditional or modern means to realize about conception. The woman can realize only after her menstruation is stooped for next month. No worship or rituals observed for conception, the few things they (woman) obeyed during conception are debarred from sexual union and should not take liquor, bitter and tea during this period. During pregnancy the *Ojha* supposed to throw *gravaban*, an imaginary arrow to

protect the foetus. In such cases, the pregnant woman can't go alone, specially in jungle or river. Crossing the big river is also tabooed during such special cases.

Birth is a natural phenomenon to Dhimal, no doctor or medicine-man is called unless some severe condition. Generally the childbirth is the duty for neighbouring women and took place at the house of husband; though women from wife's paternal house/ village may come to assist her. They have no concept of midwives or *dhai*. The baby is born normally with a continuous labour pain of mother. During pain, the pregnant woman can sit or lying on bed and others used to rub warm mustard oil (sanctified by *Ojha*) over entire body of pregnant woman. She supposed to drink warm water also. Whenever the pain is excessive or there is a problem of birth, the *Ojha* is called to rescue the situation. They believe that the situation is caused by evil spirit. Therefore *Ojha* used to hang branch (with leaf) of plum tree and fishing net at the door to protect evil spirit. Black mustard seed and garlic after sanctified by *mantra* has been rubbed around abdomen by *Ojha*. He again sanctified a glass of water, which the pregnant woman used to drink and remaining of sanctified water may sprinkle around the pregnant woman. During this, they sometimes promise to offer sacrifice of goat, hen or pigs.

After birth, the umbilical cord is cut-of by sharp blade made of bamboo or broken piece of clay pot. Now-a-days they used to cut the cord by blade of stainless steel also. If there is a problem to come out umbilical cord, the *Dhami* is called to rescue the situation by some magico-religious activities including providing sanctified water to mother. The umbilical cord then placed on a corner of the room after digging the site.

After all these rituals, the mother used to bath with warm water and used to take par-boiled rice with ginger. Later on, the mother is to feed with boiled rice and meat (specially of chicken, prepared with garlic and ginger but without onion and chilies). Green vegetables are forbidden to mother during these days.

The newborn baby is taken special care by way of bath with warm water and rubbing of whole body by warm mustard oil. Baby used to suck after birth, but if the mother cannot breastfeed the baby, then the baby is feed with cow milk. To protect new born baby from evil spirit, '*Bhala*' (one type of wild fruit) is burnt and inhaled the smoke by baby.

The name giving ceremony (*Mingt apika*) is held on 3rd or 7th day after birth and called as '*sutisika*'. The mother used to take bath with warm water and the belongings she has used during these days are packed and thrown outside the house. The house is to clean after the ceremony is over.

Then the name is given to the child by grandfather, father or mother of the child or by influential person of the society. Generally the name is given to the child after analyzing the time of birth, events at the time of birth and so on. After five or seven days the impurity is over.

They do not observe any ceremony or rituals during initial rice feeding to the baby; even no one is invited to join the occasion. There are no clear cut timings about initial rice feeding of the baby. Generally the baby is feed with rice after three to five months after the birth.

'*Venra*' is the ceremony of first shaving of head to a baby of either sex, but not compulsory to all. However it is mandatory for those babies born after abortion or death of previous pregnancy to his/her mother. *Ojha* promises to sacrifice fowl, goat, pigs etc. to the deity at the time of conception. Maternal uncle (mother's brother) is invited to shave the head of the baby, for which he has to pay by cash. In lieu of mother's brother, mother's cousin (male) or even male member of mothers line can perform the duty. They believed that after performing the ritual, evil spirit would not harm the child by any means. The occasion supposed to be followed by a feast where relatives and friends are to be invited.

7.5.2: Puberty (*Whante boish*) and Marriage (*Behou*):

Puberty of girl is reckoned after her menstruation (*Li-ko-chi*). No specific rituals have identified for the purpose. However, during and after the event they supposed to give extra care and it is the responsibility of mother or female folk to educate the girl regarding the event. On the other hand, it indicates that the girl attains her age of marriage.

The marriage, generally takes place at the house of groom's father. Before going out for marriage, '*Dhami*' used to offer worship to the deity, sprinkle mustard oil with

the fingers to bride groom (*Bor*) and his party, and touch a plate (full of grass and light) as well. Musician may hire to play the drum. They used to drink liquor during procession, specially before entering into the house of bride.

The young boys of bride's (*Kaina*) village supposed to stop the procession (*Boirati*) first until they are paid some cash, *bidi* and liquor. After that the older people supposed to come to stop the procession again until they satisfied with above said items along with *huka* (hubble-bubble) from bridegroom's end. The procession then finally reached bride's house after removing of last obstruction made by young village girls by way of giving cash to them. No ornaments or garments are presented to bride by the party but '*daka bona*', a piece of black cloth designed with red stripe in the middle, may be presented during the occasion. The other things including ornaments and garments supposed to be presented after bride is taken to the house of bridegroom.

Marriage can take place after performing ten rites, which is to be paid to the bride's parents and others by the father of bridegroom in presence of village *Panchas* and elders. The cash or kind to be presented should be kept on a banana leaf.

The ten marriage rites (*Bihou paka*) are –

(1) *Chumauni*:

Two bottles of liquor and cash is to be offered to the parent of bride by the bridegroom. This is supposed to be the bride price and the amount of cash used to finalized before marriage.

(2) *Dudhouli*:

This is the gift offered by the bridegroom to his mother-in-law in respect of her breastfeeding to the bride. A sum of rupees two to seven, one *sari* (women's loin cloth), seven number of betel leaf and one bottle of *Yu* (liquor) is to be paid to mother-in-law or elder brother's wife of bride in case of death of former.

(3) *Panchuli*:

The village *Panchas*, elder members of the village is to be honored by offering cash and liquor.

(4) *Dhami*:

In respect of his post he (*Dhami*) is supposed to honour by cash and two bottle of liquor.

(5) *Majhi*:

The village Chief (*Mondal* or *Majhi* or *Jatiya Pradhan*) is also honoured with cash and two bottle of liquor.

(6) *Dhanskori*:

As per this rite sum of rupees seven and seven number of beetle nut supposed to be paid to the youth of the bride's village.

(7) *Gharmaini*:

The rite consists of two bottles of liquor along with some cash to the persons who are responsible for look after the ceremony.

(8) *Chorkasur*:

To sanction the marriage by elopement, two bottles of liquor is given to the bride's father by bridegroom.

(9) *Gharchhekauni*:

This is the gift (cash and liquor *Yu*) offered to young boys, girls or even old people of bride's village, when they obstruct the way of the groom.

(10) *Senkelauni*:

Few bottles of liquor and cash are paid to the elder member of the village, who supposed to enquire the genealogy of the bride and bridegroom to know whether the marriage is within forbidden category (*Chinara*) or not.

The marriage ceremony, as per traditional customs, is been ended after observing ten rites. No Brahmin like Hindu communities or even priest of their own community play a key role except receiving the honour (to the priest called *Dhami*) from bridegroom's party. No other ritual is to be observed, but now-a-days, after the influence of Hindu customs they used to observe '*satpak*' (walk together by bride and bridegroom around the place seven times) and '*sindurdan*' (vermilion is to be given on the forehead of bride by bridegroom).

After observing ten rites they (newly wed couple) are welcomed by paddy-grains and grass as well as putting holy marks (*tika*) on forehead, first by parents followed by relatives and elder village folk. Presentation may offered by bride's side which is called '*Danpika*'. Next day newly wed couple used to visit '*Gram than*', the sacred place, where they supposed to perform some rituals including encircles the

'*Gram than*' seven times after holding two end of a thread. They used to sacrifice hen in honor of deities during the ritual. After that, they used to come out from bride's village.

The same ritual may be followed after attending '*Gram than*' of bridegroom's village. Another feast is to be conducted at bridegroom's house in which relatives and friends are invited, and drinks used to be served by bride. Gifts are given to the couple by invites.

Regmi (1991) had identified two ceremonial fishing followed by feast; first by friends and relatives of bridegroom and next day by women folk of bride's family. Though the same is not evident during fieldwork on Indian Dhimals; even, according to Regmi, the same is also losing by their Nepali counterpart as well.

After one month or so, the couple used to visit bride's natal house and bridegroom supposed to give one bottle of liquor to each in-laws of the house.

In Dhimal marriage, unlike Hindu and other neighbours, bride price (*chuman*) is playing a key role instead of dowry. Because of bride price and other cash and kind to be offered by a bridegroom, some of them can't afford to go for economical marriage even after a long time of cohabitation.

The present study has identified five different types of marriage, as per older folks of the village, though some of which is not practiced but may have historical value of its own.

Types of Marriage:

***Magi Behou* (or marriage by negotiation):**

In this type of marriage father or guardian of prospective groom used to search bride after the boy is matured to marry. Usually they started to search bride at the age of 16 to 18 years for a boy and 15 to 16 years for a girl.

Usually groom's party supposed to talk with bride's guardians several time, as, according to their view, groom's party may suspect if they (bride's guardian) settled it after first request. In all time groom's party supposed to present betel-leaf, and betel-nut along with '*Yu*'. They have to go several times until girl's father agreed with this relation and the amount of bride price (*chuman*) is finalized. After finalization of the relation, the date and bride-price have to fix. The marriage has been celebrated with above said customs including ten rites of marriage.

***Chori Behou* (or marriage by mutual consent and elopement):**

Because of high demand of bride's parents (*chuman*), sometimes it supposed to difficult for a poor (economically) Dhimal to arrange the same or even arrange all marriage rites. The girl, after fall in love with a boy, may fly off from her paternal house and used to reside on boy's house or elsewhere after a mutual consent. After such a thing the kinsmen of the girl supposed to visit the house of the boy, and enquire whether the girl agreed for marriage or not. Father of the boy, then used to go to the house of girl with betel-leaf, betel-nut and traditional liquor 'Yu'. He has to go several times until girl's father agreed with this relation and the amount of bride price (*chuman*) is finalized. The amount may not paid on spot, but the girl has to go through a period of probation (may extend up to one year or more) during which her competency as a housewife is to be tested, and bride-price is determined and paid followed by formal marriage rituals. If she is rejected, the man supposed to bring up all the support to the girl and their children, if any. Now-a-days the custom of probation has been abolished from Dhimal society, but *Chori Behou* (without probation) is still having its own importance. For a poor Dhimal, who supposed to unable to afford all the rites, the marriage can solemnized without '*chuman*' or even without ten rites of marriage. Sometime he used to arrange a feast and follow ten rites of marriage after a long time, even after five to six years or after the birth of baby. The period may extend several years and supposed to conduct whenever he can afford the same. Even now-a-days this form of marriage is very popular on Dhimal society because of economic hardship they have faced.

***Supari Behou* (or marriage by capture):**

The boy used to feed betel nut to the girl he wants to marry. He has to do the same by hook or cook at the residence of girl or elsewhere specially during festivals or occasions. If he is able to do so, the girl supposed to marry the boy; however, social marriage is to be celebrated after payment of ten rites. Sometimes another person may enter to claim the girl as his wife under marriage by capture. To be stricken with such fear this type of marriage has been banned by the Dhimal society.

***Jabardasti Behou* (or marriage by force):**

If the boy finds it difficult to ready the girl to take betel nut, then he has to abduct the girl from market or other places, with the help of his friends and sometimes in consent of *Dhami* as well. If she agreed, the marriage supposed to celebrate with ten rites. However, if not agreed, the girl supposed to return back to her parental house. The father of the girl then used to call the Village Elder's Council and punishment (including fine) may be imposed to offenders. Like *Supari Behou*, this type of marriage has been abolished after decision taken by Dhimal society. However, a recent case has reported during November 2007, when Mr. Bhotu Mallick (22 years) used to abduct Ms. Malti Mallick (17 years) after refused from girl and her family. A village meeting supposed to call, but meanwhile the girl agreed to marry the boy; and the matter ended with wedding.

***Jari Behou* (marrying others wife):**

When a man elope a married woman, he supposed to marry the woman by way of *Jari Behou*. For that the man who elope the wife of another person, has to pay fine to that person (ex-husband of the woman), which is called '*Nari Jari*' as per Dhimal vocabulary. The system is also abolished from Dhimal society.

7.5.3: Funeral (*Bhonoipika*):

The Dhimal usually bury the dead (*Sika*), though recently some of them, more specifically clan member of *Aughnia* used to burn the dead body. Previously, as per Hodgson, they had neither fixed burial-ground nor artificial tomb because of their migratory habit. "The body being interred, a few stones are piled loosely upon the grave to prevent disturbance by jackals and ratels, rather than to mark the spot", he added (1847:179).

Even now-a-days they have no such fixed burial-ground (*Lipko-chol*); however, they prefer a site near the river. The dead body is carried over by bamboo bed tied with string. The body supposed to cover with white cloth and tied up with coloured string. Relatives and kinsmen are informed; if not, the family member of deceased person may

be punished. On the other hand, if someone after being informed fail to attend without reason, may also punished by the society. It is the duty of 'Landha', the village messenger, to inform all about the incidence. The kinsmen, friends and son-in-law bear the body upon shoulder and funeral procession proceeds towards the burial ground. At the time of Hodgson, he wrote, funeral procession bears the dead in silence to the grave. However, now-a-days, some of them used to scatter paddy, rice, mustard oil or even small coins, probably after the influence of Hindu religion. Women are not allowed to attend the funeral procession. Men folk from other communities may attend but are not allowed to touch the corpse.

A pit of three to four feet deep is to dig and the corpse is laid down within the pit placing the head towards north and face upward. Few belongings of dead person used to bury with corpse. In case of unmarried and young, a banana tree and a flower plant is to be placed beside the head of the dead person. It is believed that the banana tree is to act as husband or wife of the dead person and flower tree is for happiness of this unusual couple. A stone may be placed over chest of the corpse, and two thumbs of the corpse used to tied with thread so that no 'meltang' takes place (*meltang* is such a thing that if a cat used to keep over the corpse, the evil spirit, *Mi nojo*, may penetrate on dead body and will stand up; if two thumbs are tied by thread then he or she can't able to do so). A one-rupee coin may also be placed on forehead; it is believed to be the cost of the land on which he or she buried. Omelet (of hen) used to placed on three number of plates made of banana-leaf. In case of pregnant woman her legs is to be pinned or tied with thread, so that she can't give birth to an evil spirit. However, if the corpse is at last stage of pregnancy, the foetus is to taken away after operating the womb and buried separately.

A lamp and candle used to blaze on north even after burial is over. Kinsmen have the right to offer soil over the corpse. A chicken supposed to be placed beside the pit. After the burial is over, someone supposed to dig the earth in different routes and shout by saying "this is the way for jungle, this is the way for river, this is the way for Naxalbari... and so on". But he never used to point out the way of deceased house.

Sometimes the corpse may burn at burning place (*Du-ko-chol*) after the influence of Hindu religion specially for clan members of *Aghnia*. But even then, if the member is unmarried or pregnant they used to bury their corpse. In some cases (of

Aghnia) they buried the corpse after touching fire to the body specially beard (in case of male) and hair (for both).

The mourner supposed to return home after bath (generally from river). Eldest or youngest son of deceased has to dress with white *dhoti* (loin cloth for men) and white sacred thread, as of Hindu religion, which supposed to be handed over to him by '*Pancha*'. After returning, the mourner supposed to purify by touching sacred basil, fire and a piece of iron specially in the form of *hansua*, a crescent shaped knife with a haft. They used to sprinkle water with leaf of sacred basil over mourners for purification (*Shudhar jehika*). '*Bidi*' and drinks may serve among mourners by deceased family.

After such ritual is over they have to prepared mud floor of house neat and clean, and a winnowing-platter is placed at middle. They supposed to open it after seven or eight hours and examine the footprint within such boundary. If it is print of a kid the deceased supposed to rebirth as man, if it looks like a footprint of bird or animals he or she supposed to rebirth as bird or animal respectively.

The pollution period lasts for four days (for married daughter of dead it is three days), however, in many cases, specially after the influence of Hindu religion, the pollution period may last for eleven to thirteen days also. The obsequial ceremony of Late Misti Mallick, as observed by Investigator himself, used to perform after twelve days of her death. As per Hodgson's writing it happens to be three, the extension is of influence of Hindu religion as well as poor economy that can't permit them to conduct such a ceremony within short period. During which they are not allowed to consume meat, fish, salt and oil, even they debarred themselves to use oil on body. They supposed to eat sun dried rice once daily. They are forbidden to worship household deities and also to get married during pollution period.

An obsequial ceremony is to be held after the pollution period is over or long after that, even after one year, when the poor Dhimal supposed to afford the expenses of the ceremony. All kinsmen, in-laws (specially son-in-law), villagers and friends have to attend the ceremony. The eldest son along with other family member and son-in-law of the deceased used to go burial place to fetch and carry the departed soul before dawn of that day. The team will be accompanied by chicken, bowl of bell-metal, needles and special kind of thread called '*alua*'. The thread then tied with '*manchuli*' (bamboo be which had been left at the time of burial) with the help of needle, and will return by

after beating the bowl and pull the thread to the house. The chicken used to sacrifice in front of door. The ritual is followed by bath and is called '*Chiuka Bhiuka*'. However, now-a-days, after the influence of Hindu religion, a barber may have been employed to shave the head of deceased's sons and other male kinsmen, whereas female members have to cut their nails by the barber.

The tent used to make by banana tree; the pillar is to be made by its trunk and roof by its leaf. Sometimes jute plant may use as wall of the tent. A main pillar is to be placed at the middle of the tent by banana tree again, and invitees (men) used to sit around it. All kinsmen of the deceased or anyone when entering into the tent supposed to salute the entire person sitting there after bending and touching their feet. The invitees then honoured with *Yu*. The feast is performed outside the tent, on the courtyard of deceased house. The invitees will sit around the courtyard and food supposed to offer on plates made of trunk of banana tree. A widow (other than deceased widow) supposed to prepare the dishes and serve seven times in case of man (deceased) and five times in case of woman (deceased). The first one because of kinship, the second one for social reason and the remaining for deceased. The food served during such feast consists of rice, meat and liquor (*gara*). The invitees, during eating, supposed to discuss about deceased and his / her sons. During feast the pollution is going to end by asking all invitees whether they (family member and Kinsmen of deceased) are purified or not. The invitees supposed to response positively, by saying whether the soul is placed on heaven, whether the soul meet with other souls at heaven, and if yes it indicates termination of relation with soul of that ancestor, and proclaim the termination of the period of mourning (*Chua*). Then the member of the house used to eat at room of western side, after closing the door and after offering the same (meal without salt or oil) to their ancestors. After feast is over the villagers and kinsmen again used to sit within tent and offered *Yu* several times. They used to gossip over night during drinking, sometimes the gossip may be followed by noise during which they supposed to expose all hidden word and mental anguish in course of conversation. However, after the night is over, they supposed to forget all the conversation of bitter experiences.

7.6: Magical and Religious (*Nem nishti*) Practices, and major Festivals:

The religion of Dhimal, even now-a-days, may be regarded as 'religion of nature' or rather the 'natural religion of Man' as suggested by Hodgson (1847), but have made a marked advance in the direction of Hinduism even long before Risley's (1891) work. Risley had identified Hindu god and goddess like *Krishna*, *Chaitanya*, *Nityananda*, *Salgram*, *Sacred Basil* or even temples (*Dirko sa*) within the boundary of Dhimal house. "They now insist upon describing themselves as orthodox Hindus", he added. However recent history is of reverse one; like many other communities, they used to come back to some of the religious traditions to identify themselves tribe as of past. The deviation in any stage was not so serious that can mark themselves outside the nature worshipper (with some sort of idolatry).

They believe in supernatural power of no images or shapes. They believe in soul also (Animism). Supernatural power supposed to responsible for all sphere of life including environment. The Dhimal deities and god and goddesses (*Warang- Berang*), as per Regmi (1991), may be classified as household deities, ancestral deities, village deities and gods and goddesses assimilated from Hindu religion; though some of the deities may be worshipped outside the village also. However, the present report, unlike Regmi (1991) have omitted the last one (gods and goddesses assimilated from Hindu religion) as they may have been find out in case of above stated all three cases viz. household deity (or *Sakodir*), ancestral deity (or *Jouragalai*) and village deity (or *Gramdir*).

Gramdir - the Village Deity:

Every village must have a '*Gramdevta*' who supposed to housed at '*Gram than*' or the worship place of village deities. The shrines are constructed by simple technology using bamboo and banana tree. Generally the *jotdar* or influential person of the village used to donate a portion of his land as '*Gram than*'. He himself and his successor, then called as '*Mouja Maria*', and is of great importance in any type of worship performed at '*Gram than*'. In some cases the '*Than*' had been constructed in vested land where no one supposed to act as a *Mouja Maria*. '*Dhami*' or village priest has the right to decide the articles and others to be offered during worship. No idol or images is kept inside the

shrine. They used to worship nature and natural objects without any image of them. 'Danta Oarang' (later merge into 'Shiva' of Hindus), 'Danta Berang' (merge as *Parvati* of Hindus), 'Bura Thakur', 'Chou Majhi' and others have been worshipped by Dhimals. The worship lasts for one day only; goat, pigeon, hen, duck or even swine have to sacrifice (*Hitti*) before 'gram than' and milk, banana, egg and liquor (*Yu*) to be offered. Usually the 'puja' starts at morning. The adult members of the village used to fasting until the puja (worship) is over. For family member of 'Mouja Maria' the fasting is mandatory. After cleaning the place, 'Dhami' used to utter mantras (sacred hymn) and perform the puja which may lasts for an hour. After that, they used to partake of the food (including *Yu*) offered to the deity. They supposed to worship simply for comfort and pleasure (Dhimal proverb: *pujino garam jinkhe aram*).

Beside the deities of *Gram than* sometimes they used to worship nature and natural objects. Among them *Mechi Berang* (Mechi river) *Kankai Berang* (Kankai river) *Dudhia Oarang* (Dudhia river) *Teesta Berang* (Teesta river), *Koshi Berang* (Koshi river), *Balason Oarang* (Balason river), *Brahmaputra Sagar Oarang* (Brahmaputra river) is of important. Beside river they pay homage to tree, animals, mother earth, fire or even dam of their ecology by worshipping them.

Jouragalai- the ancestral deity:

Jouragalai are all the deceased ancestors of the family and worshiped on the next day of the new moon in the month of *Kartika*. The eldest member of the family supposed to fast and will pay homage to all the deceased ancestors after bath. The ancestors is offered by sun dried rice, *Yu* and cock (in case of male ancestor) or hen (in case of female ancestor). Plough, spade, knife, scissors and other utensils used to place on courtyard over leaf of banana tree and worshiped by members of the family (see photograph). The ancestors may be worshiped by members during some other occasion (e.g. obsequial ceremony) also.

Sakodir- the household deity:

As stated earlier, at the time of Risley (1891) Dhimal had made a marked advance in the direction of Hinduism, for which this nature worshipper without having any traditional household deity (or idol) except ancestral deity, have accept many of the

household god and goddess of Hindu neighbour. Even Sannial (1880) observed some family shrines outside the house, which is also deviation from Hodgson's (1847) report that they had no such family shrine tradition at that time. However, now-a-days, they worship *Lord Krishna* (as *Chhawal Thakur*), *Sri Chaitanya*, *Nityananda*, *Kali*, *Laxmi*, *Mahamaya*, *Manasa* (or *Bisahari*), *Ganga Sagar* or even evil spirit *Mashan* with their idol, figures or pictures to family shrine or within main room of the house. In some cases sacred basil may be seen with a platform on courtyard.

Hodgson (1847) had identified three major festivals (*Sika bhos*) among Dhimal society (i) *Harejata*, held in December-January, when cotton crop is ready (ii) *Gavi Puja*, in July-August, when the rice comes to eat and (iii) *Pochima Paka*; worshipping household gods and held in October. "They are (first two) celebrated abroad, not at home (generally on the bank of a river)", and the last one "which is devoted to the household gods, and is celebrated at home", he added (1847:171).

Among them *Harejata* had been losing its importance since they used to stop the cultivation of cotton because of deforestation around their eco-system. The ritual indicates a great importance of cotton cultivation beside their traditional shifting cultivation, among Dhimals of this region. However, now-a-days the *Harejata* supposed to be a closed chapter to them.

Gavi puja used to held in July-August (Bengali *Ashar-Shraban*) when paddy is almost ready to consume, for which the cow is worshipped by them to protect the crops from evil eye of nature. They used to perform *Ashare Puja* (or *Ashare-Ghasari Puja* after the influence of Rajbansi and *Sirijat* for Nepali counterpart) during June-July (*Ashar* in Bengali) to start sowing the seed of paddy. The festival may start from May-June by performing *Jeth-Puja* and supposed to continue up to July (*Ashar* in Bengali). This is a community festival for which subscription is collected from all household of the village. Every male member of the village (from Dhimal household) supposed to take part on the occasion, otherwise they have to fine in cash or kind. The relatives and friends outside the village may also be invited to join the celebration. Generally women are not allowed to take part during worship, as male members used to consume liquor excessively and can misbehave during the ceremony. However, they used to get *Prasad*, the food-offered to the deity. In some cases (specially in Nepal) the worship may

followed by village fair, where Dhimal girls supposed to present with full dress, decoration and make up, as it is customary to select bride during the fair.

On the morning, *Dhami* along with other member of the society, used to worship the deity at *Gram than*. Figures of clay elephants are offered to the deity. The worship supposed to end with sprinkling of holy water followed by eating (of sacrificed animal) and excessive drinking of liquor (*Yu* as well as other from of village made liquor). In Nepal, the worship may followed by a competition of instrumentalists by way of beating the drum. This type of *Gram Puja*, at present, supposed to be the biggest celebration for a Dhimal.

Pochima Paka is not a village festival, it is confined to household and Dhimals worshipped it to pray to deity to save them from disease (*Tuuka*), illness or any kind of danger. As stated earlier, the worship is to be conducted by elder member of the house; the presence of *Dhami* is not essential to perform the worship.

They have some other form of festive day related with agriculture and is performed during harvesting, probably as a part or continuation of great festival *Ashare puja*. The series of festivals supposed to be started by said *Gram-Puja* before sowing the paddy. *Um-che-ka* is the festive day to reap paddy crop. Generally womenfolk from each family used to pay homage to 'Laxmi Berang' at paddy-field by offering banana and milk with incense sticks, sacrificial fire and vermilion. She will return back with four numbers of paddy-crop, after that they supposed to start to reap paddy-crop.

Um-punji is to be performed after storing the paddy-crop to the house. This is again supposed to be the duty of womenfolk to pay homage by way to vermilion and blazing of lamp. They used to worship *Oarang-Berang* at the time of husking the grain. They worshipped them with incense sticks, sacrificial fire, vermilion, banana and blazing light which supposed to be placed on leaf of banana tree before stored paddy. Two bundle of paddy is to be tied at two side of woody stalk of a jute plant and placed on shoulder of a young boy. A young girl used to carry a bundle of paddy on her head and another with hand and supposed to round five times to the stored paddy. During which the girl used to throw the paddy to the boy and the boy used to run to escape. The boy supposed to be act as *Danta Oarang* whereas the girl as *Danta Berang*.

Um-dongka bela is to be performed at the time of measuring of grain. The old man of the family will measure the grain, one handful each time, to measure 'pura

bishi' (twenty times or 80kg). After weighing, the grain is to be stored within granary after pay homage by vermilion, blazing light and offering (as well as consuming) liquor (*Yu*).

Naya-umchaka is the festive day when boiled rice (of new grain) along with meat is to be offered to all the ancestors of the family by family members.

Beside these, they used to worship respective deities during hunting and fishing. Some other sort of gods and goddesses in the form of *Maioli* (during small pox), *Pavan Thakur* (or *Hanuman Thakur* during rainstorm) and *Ganga Mai* (during flood) may have found among Dhimal society, and supposed to be borrowed from Hindu religion.

***Dhami* - the priest:**

Hodgson (1847) had identified three important personalities related to Dhimal magic and religion, they are *Dhami*, *Deoshi* and *Ojha*. "The *Dhami* is the district priest, the *Deoshi* the village priest and the *Ojha* the village exorcist. The *Deoshi* has under him are servitor, called *Phantwal*. There is a *Deoshi* in nearly every village," he added (1847:176). However, now-a-days, as because of negligible numerical strength and after forming two major division only (Mallabari and Chengadhari) the *Dhami* supposed to shortened his territory (one for Mallabari another for Chengadhari) from district to a village (or some small villages). This may abolish the post of *Deoshi* from Dhimal society, as now *Dhami* used to act as village priest.

He (*Dhami*) is not marked by any external sign (including dress and others) or subjects no special restraints during or outside worship. Even he is not supposed to consider special on any day other than worship, festivals and ceremonies. He used to pay respect by offering cash and kind during such days. Remaining days he can engage on manual work as other Dhimals do. The post of *Dhami* is not hereditary; one may be placed as *Dhami* after the demise of 'former *Dhami*' if he is able to perform the duties of *Dhami* after informal training during the lifetime of former. Sometimes *Dhami* used to exorcise, then he is supposed to act as *Ojha* also. The present *Dhami* of Chengadhari Mr. Bikash Mallick used to act as *Ojha* also beside his ritual position as *Dhami*. No such position (*Dhami*) is seen among Dhimal society of Mallabari, after the death of former *Dhami* Mr. Jitlal Mallick. Therefore, they have to rely upon *Dhami* of other villages (generally from Nepal).

***Ojha* – the exorcist:**

In Dhimal society the post of *Dhami* and *Ojha* may interchangeably. The *Dhami* as stated earlier may act as *Ojha* if he used to apply his knowledge to exorcise, otherwise he can limit his activities as village worshipper. Even the word *Dhami* supposed to be derived from Nepali language literally means *Ojha* (the exorcist). Mr. Bikash Mallick, the *Dhami* of Chengadhari, is also a reputed *Ojha* of Dhimal society, though instead of having the prestigious post 'Jatiya Pradhan' Mr. Ruplal Mallick (*Ojha* of Mallabari) is not allowed to perform the duty of *Dhami*.

Ojha supposed to call when someone became ill due to evil look of evil spirit. The *Ojha*, then, trying to understand the reason by stalk of jute plant sanctified by *mantras*. Some used to identify the reason after hanging a stone, sanctified by *mantras*, to his fingers. After find out the reason (including evil spirit or angry deity), he used to command order by charmed water and clarified butter or sometimes prescribe plants and herbs of medicinal importance.

Even today, the Dhimals prefer *Ojha* during their illness or complication during pregnancy as well. The recent changes happen to occur among youth, who prefer to use modern medicines, though even, the importance of *Ojha* from Dhimal society may not wiped out.

7.7: Witch (*Dhain*) and Witchcraft (*Dhain paka*):

The Dhimals still believe in witch and witchcraft. Witch is a living person of either sex who supposed to use their magical power to harm other people. Witches have been projected such a manner that he/ she used to perform black magic with the help of some supernatural power or evil spirits to whom they have a command over them. Witchcraft can refer to the use of such powers of witch in order to inflict harm or damage to any persons or their property. As they are not conscious about such unscientific thinking and can't find the answer of some sudden death or unexplained illness or unhappiness, they supposed to rely on the belief of witch and witchcraft.

According to them, some of the death is because of the result of witchcraft. Any type of illness, according to them, is the product by gods, evil spirits or witches. Witch of Dhimal society is supposed to be specialist on both the imitative and contagious magic. Witches used to collect body parts or used things of the victim (contagious magic) or piercing, burning or doing any kind of harm to the image of victim (contagious), which supposed to cause similar injury to the victim. After such incidence, it is the duty of Dhimi to identify the witch; sometimes the villagers used to suspect a person or persons as witch. In such cases the matter may followed by witch-hunt by the mob. In recent past, the Dhimal can recall such witch killing by mob, when they killed Mr. Motia Mallick of Mallabari after accused him as a witch. However, now-a-days, many of them realize the superstition and used to call traditional council for judgment.

7.8: Dynamics of Dhimal Identity:

Dhimal identity has been changed over time, from a tribe of pre-independence India to Other Backward Classes of West Bengal. However, in between these two, there was a long non-recognition phase, where they supposed to identify as general caste of Hindu communities.

Hodgson (1847) identified them as tribe exercising nature worship with no temple or idol and confined to dense forest between Konki and Dhorla. Dalton (1872) and Hunter (1876) also opined in favour of their tribal identity, and identified Dhimals as nomadic cultivators of wilds, passed beyond the savage or hunter state and also beyond the herdsman's state. Risley (1891) categorized them as non-Aryan tribe, but also noticed that they rapidly losing their tribal identity by absorption into Rajbansi caste of Hindu religion. They also dislike their tribal name Dhimal, prefer to identify themselves as Maulik, Hodgson added. However, instead of such Hindu method of tribal absorption, first couple of Indian census classified them as forest and hill tribes, aboriginal tribes and so on. The 1901 census stated that they often call themselves as Rajbansis. The process of detribalization was so serious that O'Malley (1907) in his

district gazetteers stated that they might be defined as non-Hinduized Koch or Rajbansi among and beside them.

Dash (1947), during the year of Independence, suggested their cultivation as jhum cultivation by methods of nomadic husbandry. However, during and after 1941 census, they are apparently no longer recorded as such. This non recognition by post-Independence censuses along with absorption into Rajbansi caste groups, make it difficult to categorized them as Scheduled Tribe under Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe list Order 1950 or subsequent modifications. At that time, because of illiteracy, ignorance and desire of higher status as a part of wider society, they abstain from any movement for lost identity.

It is because of awareness and literacy as well as writings of post-Independence scholars (specially on vernacular writings) that supposed to make a movement in favour of ST status. The process is reverse; they are trying to revive many of the lost cultures through the process of re-tribalization. Those scholars and Dhimal themselves working hard to established them as Scheduled Tribe, specially after citation from pre-Independence scholars and census reports. After a prolonged non recognition period, recently they have classified as Other Backward Classes (OBCs) of West Bengal. However, it is worth mentioning that, the competition within OBCs is much more than ST, hence, they might find it difficult to cope with such recent phenomenon. Therefore, they expedite their movement within (retain and revive own culture) and outside (as a pressure group to mobilize the government) for ST status.

The process of Hindu method of tribal absorption may act for detribalization of this ethnic group. Though, the deviation was not so serious that once nature worshiper may not find their position under Scheduled Tribe list of the government.

7.9: Hopes and Aspirations of the Community:

Like other underprivileged communities of India they are also in hope of better socio-economic status, educational attainment as well as good infrastructure for health including sanitation and water supply. They are also look forward to superior physical infrastructure including road connectivity, transportation; local market, storage and

reasonable price for their goods. The infrastructure also includes educational institutions, health centers, bank, post office and so on. As a member of a diminutive community, many of them, specially educated youth and older peoples, want to preserve their cultural traits including material culture, music, dance, folklore, language and other such types of traits within social structure and social organization. They are also aware regarding their diminutive state and want to overcome the situation.

However, unlike many of such underprivileged communities, they have a demand of Scheduled Tribe status instead of Other Backward Classes. For that in 1980 they constituted their association '*Dhimal Sangha*', and later on in 1989 they modified it as '*Dhimal Astitwa Raksha Samity*' (Dhimals' Existence Preservation Committee). However, the objectives of the association are not only to demand ST status but also to protect and preserve their traditional culture and population as a whole. For that, they organized several cultural programmes, movements and long arguments with both Central and State authorities. Many of their movements have been favoured by local and national newspapers and scholars (Uttar Banga Sambad, 3rd May, 1997; Janasatwa, 17th July, 1997; The Telegraph, 11th April, 2003; The Hindu, 27th April 2008), but it turn a deafear to by authority except recognition of OBC status instead of ST status. However, by heart and soul, they are trying their best to communicate with Government, so that they (Government) reconsider the same.

On the other hand, when they compare to their Nepali counterpart, it makes them distress. According to scholars, launching of malaria eradication campaign as well as construction of east-west highway has positively affected the live of Nepali Dhimal; and population of that area almost doubled after that.

7.10: Findings:

Unlike material culture, the social organization of the population has changed little over time. The present study has identified fifteen such exogamous patrilineal clans with eight sub-clans (of three clans). The clans (or sub-clans) are derived from some folktales and practices of the groups. Marriage is permitted to member of any clan

except his/her own clan. However, in reality, eight clans with six sub-clans (of three clans) have identified all over the population.

The families are mostly nuclear in nature, however, some patrilineal joint family may have seen. Most of the families comprised of parents with unmarried children; in some cases the unit may join with married son's family. According to marriage, most of the families are monogamous and patrilocal, according to succession it is patrilineal and as per authority it is patriarchal in nature. Kinship is again patrilineal and kinship terminology mainly is of classificatory type though descriptive terminology may also have seen. The traditional village elder's council is not a strong and hereditary in nature, rather all the village elder (men) collectively decide and also elect office bearer of the council. Relation between affinal kins is more distant than consanguinal in all stage. Joking relationship as well as usage of avoidance may have seen in specific relations.

Generally womenfolk of the village attended the pregnant women at the time of birth. Doctor or medicine man is called if the condition is severe. Sometimes during birth the *Ojha* perform some ritual duties, specially if it is complicated. After birth name giving ceremony of the child is held and if the child is followed by abortion or death of previous, they supposed to perform special ceremony called *Venra*.

Regarding marriage they strictly follow clan exogamy; however, regarding group endogamy, in some cases (23.6%) they breach the rule after marrying Rajbansi, Nepali or others but after some social punishment they supposed to accept the couple. Mean age at marriage of women is 17.42 years compared to 22.18 years of men. Usually they used to find mates within Indian Dhimals (within district) but in many cases they cross the border to find the same. Marriage takes place at groom's house in presence of village elders and after following ten rites of marriage. The ten rites are nothing but cash or kind (specially traditional liquor *Yu*) payment to important persons of groom's house as well as villagers as token of honour. No Brahmin or priest is required for the marriage. *Magi Behou* or marriage by negotiation is common, however, in many cases *Chori Behou* or marriage by mutual consent and elopement may also found. However other types of marriage such as *Supari Behou* or marriage by capture and *Jabardasti Behou* or marriage by force has been abolished or banned by Dhimal society. Widow Remarriage is permitted. In all cases *Chuman* or bride price has to pay

to groom's family by bridegroom. Divorce is also permitted but rarely practiced by them.

Dhimals usually bury the corpse, but in some cases, specially members of *Aghnia* used to burn the dead body as Hindus. They have no such fixed burial grounds. All the male members of family, kinsmen, villagers and friends supposed to attend funeral party. The obsequial ceremony is to be held after pollution period is over or long after that, when the family is ready to afford the expenses.

The Dhimal religion may be regarded as 'religion of nature', though some Hindu influences may have seen in some cases. They believe in supernatural power and soul, which, as per Dhimal, responsible for all sphere of life and environment. The deities are mainly divided into *Gramdir* or the village deity, *Jouragalai* or the ancestral deity and *Sakodir* or the household deity. Every village must have a worship place called *Gramthan* and deity called *Gramdevta*. Their festivals are related with different phases of cultivation. They worship deities without any priest; however, sometimes *Dhami* supposed to act as a priest specially for village deity. The post of *Dhami* or village priest is not hereditary; one can act as a *Dhami* after the demise of former, if he is knowledgeable enough for the post. The *Ojha* or exorcist usually called when someone became ill due to evil spirit. Dhimal still believe in witch and witchcraft who supposed to do harm by way of contagious magic.