



Religion and Social Change among the Ethnic Communities of Assam

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ABSTRACT : Every ethnic group of Assam have some individual cultural characteristics. But in the age of globalisation it is impossible to remain within the boundary of own culture. On the other hand the greater Assamese culture is formed by the contributions of all the ethnic communities. Various socio-cultural processes like acculturation, assimilation, progressive absorption, fusion, aryanisation, sanskritisation etc. has influenced upon almost all ethnic communities.

Religion is one of the important organs of society. It brings new elements to society and culture and a society is depended in large scale on religion in the maintaining of social norms and value. In the present scenario, religion and social change has become a common feature of every society. This is seen in the societies of the ethnic communities of Assam also.

Keywords: Chaturbarna , Deka chhangs ,Neo-Vaishnavite, Society, Thaans.

I. Introduction:

The kings of Kamrupa established the Brahmanas in different parts of the country. Thus Vedic culture spread in ancient Assam. To assimilate the non-Aryans, the Aryans had to change their own cultural outlook. As a result Vedic culture took a new form with both Aryan and non-Aryan elements. Fetishism, animism, cult of fertility, human sacrifice, ancestor worship etc. as elsewhere in India, passed on to Hinduism, and moulded its character which became manifest in new local forms.[1] There were Saivism, Sakti worship, Tantrik Buddhism, Sun worship in the society of the ancient Assam. Such religious practices were followed in medieval Assam also. Elaborate ceremonialism began in religion. Magic, incantation and other left handed practices were common during this period. There were also many superstitions among the people of this period. In such a chaotic situation Sankardeva and his disciple Madhabdeva propagated Neo-Vaishnavite movement in Assam. The Neo-Vaishnavite movement has been



brought many socio-religious changes to the society of Assam. Besides neo-Vaishnavism other elements of social change such as modernisation, acculturation, assimilation, globalisation etc. has been brought different change in the fields of religion and society of the ethnic communities of Assam.

II. Objectives of the Study:

The main objective of this paper is to study the Religion and Social Change among the Ethnic Communities of Assam.

III. Methodology:

Here, both the primary and secondary data has been collected by observation, questionnaire, published books and internet. Descriptive and analytical method has been used to write the paper.

Body of the Text:

The Australoids are taken as the first to come into this land. They were followed by the Mongoloids migrating from Tibet and South China, Dravidians and Aryans from North India.

The anthropologists has divided the whole population of Assam into two units such as-

- a. Caste unit
- b. Tribe unit

The caste unit includes those social or language units who are follower of Hindu Varnashram religion or main religious sect. It includes Brahman, Kshatrya, Baishya and Shudras called as *Chaturbarna* in ancient Hindu religion. Various people of different professions comprise these four varnas such as Bamun or Brahmin- Gosain or dwija, Daibagyas, Kayastha- Kalita, Sudir etc.

The Indian constitution has recognised those ethnic groups as scheduled tribe who are backward in comparison to other caste and ethnic groups and who have abled to keep their old traditions till today. Due to lack of technical, economic and educational development these peoples like to live in an isolated area with their old traditional rites and customs.



The ruling dynasties of medieval Assam such as the Kacharis, the Chutiyas, the Bodo Kacharis, the Morans, the Barahis and the Ahoms are all Mongoloids. The Buddhists Khamtis, Phakials, Aitonias, Turungs, Syams and the Khamjangs have been living mainly in eastern Assam. The Mishings are Mongoloid people. Some Manipuris, Singphos, Adis, Karbis, Garos and Nagas are also included in the population of Assam.

Sheikh, Saiyad, Mughal and Pathan- these four classes of Muslim people are permanent settlers of Assam. Settlement of the Sikh population in Assam dates back to the middle of the 17th century. Marwari and Panjabi traders, Bengali clerks and tea garden labourers penetrated Assam during British rule. A lot of Christian people also have been living in Assam. The Nepalis began to come to Assam since the early part of the 19th century.

IV.Result and Discussion:

Religion and social change of some main ethnic communities of Assam:

The indigenous people of Assam are Mongoloid people and there are many cultural similarities among them. They have their own religion and social traditions. But with the passage of time religion and social change have taken place among them.

The Sonowal Kacharis:

The Mongoloid Sonowal Kacharis are one of the Scheduled tribes of Assam. Their population is found mostly in the districts of Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Lakhimpur and Dhemaji.

The Sonowal Kacharis have their own traditional culture. They have traditional house pattern, food, dress, religion etc. Animist Sonowal Kacharis believe in supernatural powers. They try to appease all benevolent and malevolent deities of their own. They have also several worshipping place called *thaan*. Fowls, ducks, goats, pigeons are sacrificed and offered in these *thaans*. Religious system of the Sonowal Kacharis is of two kinds such as community and household worships. They worship a large number of deities. To maintain peace in the family and wishing good luck they held household deities and for the



welfare of the whole villagers they held community worship. Some religious ceremonies of the Sonowal Kacharis are -*Khiring Khiring Baitho Puja, Baghdeo Puja, Gatigiri Puja, Gajai Puja, Swaragdeo Puja, etc.* But though they have traditional religious rites yet they accepted initiation at Auniati Satra during the rule of Ahom king Gadadhar Singha. Gadadhar Singha took an anti Satra policy for which Keshabdev had to take shelter at Sadiya. During this time the Sonowal Kacharis and the Micimis of this area took initiation from Prabhu Keshabdev.[2]

As a result of the acceptance of Vaishnavism by the Sonowal Kacharis many new socio-religious changes has come to their society. Besides Vaishnavism other social processes such as acculturation, accommodation, diffusion, modernisation etc. also has been influenced the society of the Sonowal Kacharis.

The Mishings:

The Mishings are found mostly in Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Sibsagar, Jorhat and Sonitpur districts. Their main occupation is cultivation. The main characteristics of their society are - joint family, *changghar* or a house of wood or bamboo with a raised platform, boiled natural food habit, drinking of *Apong* or locally brewed rice- beer, weaving, rearing of pig, animism, traditional mode of worship etc. However, changes are noticed in respect of religious beliefs of the Mishings. Hinduism and Christianity have been penetrated into their culture. They also have accepted Vaishnavism.

They observe three Bihus-*Kati, Magh* and *Bohag*. Due to close contact with the non- Mishings the material culture also undergoes changes. They now construct houses of modern styles. Modern dresses are becoming popular among them. The Mishing women now-a-days wear modern clothes, ornaments and use vermilion. Change is noticed in respect of health care and traditional medicine. After initiation at the Kalasanghati they begin to perform some Hindu rites like *Tiloni, satjonia, najania or napurushia, Aai sakam, Gopini sakam* etc.[3] Now a - days they take tea and *jalpan*, milk etc. Joint family system is gradually disappearing. The Mishings had no permanent land and they did not regard land as personal property till the beginning of the second decade of the nineteenth



century. They have accepted the idea of landed wealth and permanent cultivation method from Assamese people. However, they have been able to preserve most of their traditional cultural traits.

Deoris:

The Deoris are mostly concentrated in Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Tinsukia, Sibsagar and Jorhat districts. Cultivation is their main occupation. Traditional simple food habit, *chhangghar*, *dekachhang* or separate residence for unmarried young man, joint family, donation of physical labour, weaving, rearing of pig and cock etc. are some important characteristics of their society. There are four branches of the Deoris such as Dibangia, Tengapania, Borgang and Patorgayan. The Deoris are Sakta people. They are worshipper of Lord Mahadeo and Parvati with sacrificial activity.

Influence of *Manusanghita* and Brahmanism is seen in their social rites. They also follow the Hindu marriage rites. The Hindu gods and goddesses are worshipped by their own traditional rites and names. Three *Bihus* are also observed by them. As a result of social change they also prefer modern house pattern, fashion, medical treatment etc. The *Deka chhangs*, called as Alengor or Alengyan, has become rare today due to the development of modern education.⁶The Tengapania section has lost the language while the Dibangia and Barganya sections have maintained the same.[5]

Karbi, Dimasa, Rengma Naga:

It is known that the Mongoloid Karbis, formerly known as Mikirs, entered Assam from central Asia and their original abode was the eastern portion of the Khasi and Jaintia hills. Karbis are divided into three groups such as Chinthong, Ronghang and Amri. They have own traditional socio- religious rites. Some important characteristics of their society are- patriarchy, *jhum* cultivation, *changghar*, *dekachhang*, use of betel- nut, brewed of rice- beer, sacrifice, prohibition of marriage among same *gotra*, bride price, donation of public physical labour, use of dry fish and meat, wearing of coin's bead etc. The Karbis are generally animists. But Hinduism has great influence in their religious practices. *Sabin Alunor Karbi Ramayan* is a new addition to the Karbi religious belief and the Hindu God Ram occupies a place in the Karbi pantheon.



The Dimachas are mainly concentrated in the North Cachar hills and Karbi Anglong. Their society is patriarchal. The most outstanding characteristics of the Dimasa social life is the existence of female clan almost parallel to the male clan.[6] They have traditional festivals, dresses, food habits etc. The Dimasas are non-vegetarian. They construct their houses with timber and bamboo on the ground. Locally prepared rice-beer called *zou* is their most favourite beverage. Their main ancestral gods are- *Waa raja, Ganyung Sibrai, Doorajo, Naikhu, Raja Brayung* and *Hamiadao*. Besides traditional religion they follow Hinduism also.

The Rengma Nagas are also one of the important ethnic groups of Assam. A section of the Rengmas had migrated to the Karbi Anglong district in the recent past and settled in the strip of hills in between Barpathar on the south and Chokihola on the north.[7]The Rengma Nagas of Karbi Anglong are divided into eight exogamous clans and marriage between the members of the same clan is a taboo. Earlier marriage by capture was prevailed but now it is disappeared. Almost all marriages are performed through negotiation between two families. Some common characteristics of their society are-patriarchy, joint family, believe in traditional gods, sacrificial activity, jhum cultivation, spinning, brewing of rice-beer, *chhanghar* etc. All the Rengma Nagas living within the jurisdiction of Karbi Anglong have embraced Christianity.¹¹But before conversion they were animists. They also have traditional dress and ornaments. Though the Rengma Nagas were backward earlier, they now have been accepted the challenges of the new social changes.

These three hill tribes are maintaining their culture more or less intact although the acculturation process among these tribes cannot be underestimated. There are Karbi villages in or near Guwahati extending upto Sonapur who are called Amri Karbis and their hill brethren call them Dumrali. This section has lost most of the traditional traits including the language.[8]The Karbis of plains has more or less been abandoned their traditional house pattern. Though the Dimasas worship a number of traditional deities, at present the people have embraced Christianity and old animistic beliefs are fast dying out.



Tai Khamti, Tai phake, Tai Aitonia etc.:

The Tai Khamti, Tai phake, Tai Aitonia etc. are non - scheduled Buddhist ethnic groups. They are living in the plains districts of upper Assam. They have been maintaining most of their traditional characteristics but they also have accepted changes of modern age. Each of these groups has maintained its languages although Assamese is widely used as contact language. It is seen that some of them now begin to construct *pucca* houses instead of *changghar*.

Boro Kachari:

The mongoloid Boro Kachais has traditional culture. The Boros accepted Hinduism by two ways; either they embraced Hinduism or simply took Saran under the Hindu *Gosain* or *Guru*. [11] Kalicharan Brahma brought about a change in their religious thought and practices. The followers of this religion have identified themselves as perfect monotheists, believing in one, *Brahma* as the ultimate reality, known to them as *Om Sat Guru*, identical with *oblonglaoree* of the traditional *Bathou* religion. The traditional concept of Trinity- *Rongrachi*, *Maithahachi* and *Barigongtham* has been identified with the Hindu Trinity- Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara. Brahma section of the Boro Kachari devotedly follow the teachings of Kalicharan Brahma and they perform *Hom Yojna* in the *Vedic* style. The Christian missionaries, during the British period, provided education and medical facilities and therefore the tribal people were attracted by them. The Roman catholic Missionaries came into contact first (17th- 18th century) with the people of North – east India with small sect of followers.¹⁸ David Scott, then commissioner of Assam had opened a Baptists Mission centre at Guwahati as early as 1829. The Baptist mission opened a school boarding house at Guwahati in 1843. Many a time Missionaries had chosen village headman from the Boro community to convert whole community to the Christianity. Since that time the Boros have been accepting Christianity. During the *kherai puja* they propitiate a Muslim God peer sahib or Nawab Badsha by sacrificing a cock.

Rabha:

The Rabhas came down to Assam from Tibetan region. They settled first at Garo hills. Later they came over to Assam plains. The endogamous division of



the Rabha tribe consists of Rangdania, Pati, Totla, Dahuri, Dhunga, Hana and the Maitori etc. The Rabha, particularly Pati Rabha of Boko and South Goalpara areas are Hinduised and they call themselves as Vaishnavi. The Pati section is more Hinduised and the impact of acculturation is more prominent amongst them. However, a big section of the tribe has converted to Christianity and it hampers in the preservation of the traditional socio- religious rituals. The Pati Rabhas observe *Langapuja* or worship of Lord Mahadeo. Thus in spite of large scale borrowing of non- tribal cultural traits the Pati Rabhas are not distanced by other traditionalists like the Rangdani, Maitori, Ttlia etc. The Rabha language is now confined among the Rangdani and the Maitori group. Efforts have been made to impart education at the primary level through mother tongue. The matriarchal society of the Rabhas has changed into patriarchal society due to cultural contacts with matriarchal to the patriarchal form of family life. The Rabhas have also accepted Christianity and Islam. Yet another development in the field of religion has come to notice with the adoption of Christianity by a section of them. The non- professional Rabhas now –a - days use to begin small businesses. The tradition of wearing *nadeng*, a kind of earrings, and *chengkapat*, a kind of waist cloth, by man is rare in their society.[12]

Ahoms:

The Mongoloid Tai Ahom peoples have been inhabiting mainly in Sibsagar, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Jorhat, Golaghat, Sonitpur, Nagaon, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts. The Ahoms follow all Hindu rites. However, some of them call themselves as the follower of Buddhism, Phralung, Tao, Tai, Ahom etc. At present some of them have accepted Christianity also. Ancestor worship is their traditional religion like other chin originated ethnic communities. Earlier they constructed *changghar* which is rare at present. Social changes have come by acculturation among them like other ethnic communities. Change has come to the religion and society of the Ahoms. Some Ahom people who have accepted new religious faith are reluctant about the old rites of *chakalang* marriage. [13] Before coming to Hinduism they arranged feast both in the houses of bride and groom by slaughtering buffalo, cow and pig. Influenced by Vaishnavism they used to eat vegetables, fish, duck and goat etc. In the side of language also they forgot to speak Tai language. During the period from 1700 to 1850 they left the use of Tai language mainly for geographical, political and social reason.²⁷ They now wear modern dresses and very few follower of Ahom religion wear *Chapkon*. The



tradition of *changghar* is also very rare and they now build *pucca* houses. The tradition of *urani* or veil, *sindoor* or vermilion etc. has also entered into their society which was not seen in their old life. The *Sankaris* do not rear cow and buffalo. In the cremation rite also they have added Hindu rite. They left the custom of offering man and animal in the *maidams*. They take kneel before the dead body by using incense sticks and flower etc. according to Hindu rite and then go to cremation place.

Konch Rajbanchi:

The Koch Rajbangshis are scattered in whole of Assam. Their ancient places were Goalpara and North Bengal. Koch Rajbangshis are found in two branches - Koch and Rajbangshi. They have their traditional culture. After their initiation at Hinduism they are known by different names like Haru Koch, Borkoch, Heremia or Madahi Koch etc. The Rajbangshis have no especial religious theory. Buddhism spread among them in medieval period. They are also influenced by Vaishnavism and Saivism. Main worships of them are *Purana Thakur*, *Siva puja*, *Manasha*, *Radha Krishna*, *Hudum puja* etc. Many of their traditional worships have disappeared and they newly begin to observe *durga puja*, *laxmi puja*, *saraswati puja*, *kartik* and *ganesh puja* etc. [14]Changes has come to their society also. Inter caste marriage, dowry, modern dress, modern house pattern etc. are some new elements of their society. Some religious worships are disappearing gradually form their society.

Tea Tribes:

The tea tribes came to Assam during British rule to work in the tea gardens. The tea ethnic community follow Hinduism. They observe many traditional worship and festival like *tusu puja*, *karam puja*, *gram devata puja* etc. At present they have been experiencing educational, economic, political and cultural development than before. They have own language and culture. But they have also connective language *Sadani* or *Sadori*, an Assamese like mixed form of Arya- Indian language. But Assamese is their State language. It is seen that both man and women of this community begin to wear Assamese and other modern dresses. Many of them have accepted Vaishnavism. Inter caste marriage is also happened in their society.



Chutiyas:

The Chutiyas are originally Tantric Buddhists. However the kings, officers and aristocratic classes of the Chutiyas accepted Hinduism by the influence of the Brahmanas who were called as Hindu chutiya.[15] Religion and social change have taken place in their society also. Many of them today have accepted initiation in Sankardeva sangha.³¹ Tradition of weaving is disappearing among the Chutiya women in modern age. They now build *pucca* house instead of their traditional two roofed house construction system. Joint family system is also gradually disappearing. The tradition of collective labour is also rare today in their society.

Tiwas:

The Tiwas live mainly in Morigaon, Nagaon and Dhemaji districts. The hill Tiwas have maintained their traditional traits. But the plain Tiwas have lost most of their traditional traits including their language. The plain Tiwa women's dresses are same with the rural Assamese women. Except the Vaishnava converts, the Lalungs are the followers of Sakta religion but their images in the *thaans* and puja paraphernalias are not the same as those used by other non-Lalung saktas. The Deka sangs of them which were like clubs of modern age are disappearing and these are replaced by theatre halls.[16]The marriage rites are same with the Hindus, though they do not perform *Hoom*. They have own language but not in written form. A few villages near Barapujia Brahmaputra and Raha upgraded themselves to the status of *Saru Koch* discarding the habit of taking pork and rice- beer. So, the plains Tiwa cannot be distinguished from those of non- tribals in respect of material culture. *Namghar* is a salient feature of the Tiwa society. However the traditional culture is not defunct and it is reflected in certain socio-religious rites. The institution of Raja or poali raja has been survived among them. The *Jon Bil mela* is arranged every year in January near Jagiraod. Lord Mahadeo is the supreme deity who is worshipped in the *thaans* with sacrifice of fowls and animal. Rice- beer, called as *Zu* by the Tiwas, is an important item in their festivals. The traditional Tiwa society is matriarchal. This tradition is maintained by the hill Tiwas only.

Nepalis:

The Nepalis began to come to Assam since the early part of the 19th century and they have monopolised the dairy industry of the land.[17]Since ancient time



various ethnic groups of the Nepalis have been living in Assam. They came to this land mainly for livelihood. There are both Aryan and non -Aryan people among them. They speak both Nepali and Assamese. The Nepalis are Hindu but there are also Buddhists and Christians among them.[18] A section of them are Saktas. On the other hand another section follows Vaishnavism. There are many superstitions prevails in their society which has been affecting in the development of their society. But social change has occurred among them also like other ethnic groups. It is seen that inter caste marriage is a new social element of the Nepali society.

Hmars:

The original home of the Hmar is north of the Mizo hills. Many scholars regard them as a sub – tribe of the Mizos, while many others regard them as a Kuki tribe.[19] In Assam they are mainly confined to the North Cachar Hills. The traditional house pattern of the Hmar is wooden planks raising the floors one to two feet above the ground. Hmar women are expert in pottery making. They have traditional culture, language and food habit. They have the joint family system. They are traditionally animists. Now most of the Hmars in north Cachar Hills are found to be Christian converts. The number of Hmar people who still follow their traditional religion is found to be negligible in the North Cachar Hills district. The Hmars believe in ancestor worship. Corporate sacrifices are offered once a year for good health and prosperity. Individual sacrifices are offered on behalf of a sick person. Worship of God is performed through chanting of mantras and incantation. The slavery or serfdom was an important practice in their society. At present no serfdom is found to be prevalent among the Hmars of the N.C.Hills.³⁷ The Hmars also have accepted changes brought by modernization. The institution of chieftainship has disappeared from their society. Acceptance of Christianity has given them a modern outlook including education.³⁸ They have left many superstition of earlier society. They are gradually learning the modern methods of cultivation.

Morans:

The Morans are an ethnic group of Mongoloid origin. The Morans dwell in the two easternmost districts of Tinsukia and Dibrugarh. The Morans were



animist but they also later accepted Vaishnavism. They are follower Mayamara faith of Sri Sri Aniruddhadeva. It is a branch of the Vaishnava faith developed by Sankardeva. According to folk sayings they performed sacrificial activities at Kesaikhati than.[20]The jagyaghars preserved in the campus of the Moran namghars give hints of this practice.⁴⁰ one notable characteristic of the mayamara *ekasaramia namdharma* is that they arrange *nam-kirtan* with betel-nut and *mah-prasad* but simultaneously arrangements of *jagya* is done with meat of duck, pigeon, goat etc. The Morans has been worshipping Siva and Parvati in different names. They perform many religious ceremonies and believe in various malevolent spirits like *Jakh, bak, alakhani, bhut* and others. They Morans have deep respect in *Charit Chastras* such as *Sankar charit, Krishna charit, deo charit, dikpal, devipal* etc. The Social change has occurred among them like other ethnic groups of Assam. However, they have maintained their traditional life as far as possible. The Moran young girls wear the *Kalia riha* which is a part and parcel in their religious and cultural functions. Taking of vermilion and wearing bangles were not the Moran tradition but these old customs are very rarely followed at present. [21] The Moran had a common dialect of their own. However it is not used today. They now speak Assamese language.

Mataks:

The Mataks of upper Assam are disciples of Mayamara satra. In the pre-Sankari age the indigenous Mattacks worshipped various gods and goddesses. The *namghars* are salient feature of their society. The village headman is the main authority of their *namghars*. Other important religious rites of the Mayamara Vaishnava society are - *gurur tithi, borsabah, phagunar borkirtan, chalikhowa, chaulkhowa, bhagabat mela* etc. They also have accepted changes of society.

Every change of human society such as change of idea, fashion, food, religion, house pattern, language etc. brings a new structure to society. It reset the social relationships. A society can be benefitted by social change because it brings many developments in the fields of technology, economy, education etc. But all change may not be advantageous. However, there found some results of religion and social change of the ethnic communities of Assam.



1. The ethnic communities of Mongoloid origin had their traditional religious practices. But with the coming of the non –Aryans they assimilated themselves by accepting Hinduism. Later they also accepted Vaishnava rites from the Neo- Vaishnavite movement of Srimanta Sankardeva. The Satra institution has been giving them initiation. However religion and social changes has given them better lifestyles. Besides Vaishnavism some of them have accepted other religions like Buddhism and Christianity. All these religions have given them a disciplined socio- religious life.
2. Modernisation, globalisation, development of education, assimilation etc. also has influenced on the societies of the ethnic communities. All these factors have given a new look to the societies of the ethnic communities. Social superstitions are disappearing. Literacy is increasing even among women also which was not seen earlier. As a result of technological development many people have been able to take employment. Establishment of hospitals and nursing homes are also very positive sides for the welfare of human health. Acculturation and Assimilation among different communities also has brought a sound social life.
3. Sometimes it is seen that there are followers of different religions within same society. But there is no any religious dispute among them regarding their religious practices. The societies of the ethnic communities are liberal in religious matter.
4. Some of the social changes are depended on economy. Those people who are financially sound, easily has accepted new modern lifestyles like construction of modern houses, modern sanitation system, medical facilities, electronic facilities, electricity, furniture, food habit etc. But people who are in poverty have not able to adapt themselves with new social changes.
5. Some families of the ethnic communities who are not sound in economy have faced problems in the change of society. People, who were living on traditional way of lifestyle, now are unable to accustom themselves with the new environment due to the expensiveness of necessary articles.



6. Despite religious change the ethnic communities of Assam still have been practising their old traditional religious practices. In the social sides also traditional lifestyles are not disappearing totally though new social elements are entering into the society.
7. Modernisation, globalisation, development of education, assimilation etc. has given a new outlook to the societies of the ethnic communities. Especially the tribal people have got the opportunity to assimilate with non-tribal people. The tribal peoples are generally backward and they like to remain isolated. But as a result of religion and social change many of them have left such characteristics.
8. The ethnic communities want to revive their traditional social patterns despite their new socio- cultural elements. It may be mentioned that Mikirs prefer to call themselves Karbis while the Miris and Lalungs prefer the names Mishings and Tiwas respectively as the people consider that Mikir, Miri and Lalung were the names given by the Assamese people and they do not carry the real meaning of their ethnic origin.⁴² Moreover, there are quite a good number of ethnic groups who are demanding scheduled tribe status as they claim to possess the ethnic characteristics. Among these mention may be made of the claims of Tai Ahom, Chutia, Moran, Matak, Koch Rajbangshi and Tea garden groups.
9. All members of the ethnic societies have not taken the advantages of social change. Many ethnic communities still depend on traditional practices in health care instead of modern medical facility. They use various natural herbs as medicines. Before taking modern medical facilities most of them first try to satisfy their traditional deities during illness.
10. In the age of science and technology also many social superstitions like witch hunting and *tantra- mantra* remains in the societies of the ethnic communities. The superstitious practice of witch hunting is seen mainly among the Bodos and Tea tribes.

V.Conclusion:



Religion is the most important organ of society. Society and religion are inter related. So, religion tends to change when social changes take place. On the other hand social change will occur when changes in religion take place. At present religion has become a very sensitive subject. Violence has taken a common form in the name of religion. At the same time many social ill practices, crimes etc. are happening at the daily life of people. In such a troubled society religion has to play an important role in the establishment of peace and security in a society. On the other hand people should also notice the bad sides of social changes so that these may not harm the social norms and values. Since ancient period the ethnic communities of Assam have been taking new elements in the fields of religion. Indeed the religious system of the ethnic communities of Assam is an evolutionary process which has included different religious elements in different periods. The ethnic societies have been changed in the present time in new environment of human life. But the change of religion and social life should also maintain the social norms and value.

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