

## **Trend of Social Changes in Sonowal Kacharis' Society of Assam**

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### **Abstract**

*Social change itself is a continuous process and it can be evolved from different sources. Due to the social change, its impact has been seen in the field of socio-political and cultural life. The Sonowal Kacharis of Assam is recognized as an aboriginal tribe and at present, this community is the third-largest plains tribes of Assam. Since the time of Ahom and British rule, the process of social changes has been found in the society of Sonowal Kacharis. Due to these changes, today, in Assam, the Sonowal Kacharis original ethnic identify gradually declined and they become a major part of the Assamese nation. In this paper, an attempt has been made to understand how the social changes bring in the society of Sonowal Kacharis and what are changes coming.*

**Key Words:** *Social Change, Sonowal Kacharis, Cultural Assimilation, Socio-economic Development, Political participation*

### **Introduction**

Social change itself is a continuous process. It can be evolved from different sources such as societal relation, cultural assimilation, demographic change, change of political pattern, technological development, etc. From the anthropological, points of view, racial change can be happened due to socio-cultural change and technological advancement. The socio-cultural relations and assimilations bring a tremendous change in the field of demography, religion, food habit, living pattern, dress and ornament, rituals and traditions, compositions of social institutions, eco-political character, etc. on the other hand, technology brings a change in the field of beliefs, faiths, education, health, transportation and communication, trade and markets, etc. Today, all over the world, every community and nation are habitual with these changes and try to assimilate themselves with this trend. The changing of time and society compelled them to cope up with the changing situation.

Assam is situated in the North-Eastern part of Indian is located in the region between latitudes 24°3' and 27°58' North and longitudes 89°5' and 96°1' East. The state was annexed with British India in 1826 and since then it is a part of the mainland of India. After independence, though there was some opposition by a section of people, still it remained with the Indian nation-state. The present territory of Assam got its shape finally in 1972 according to the re-organisation of the state Act.

Being a part of India it has a constitutional government and the developmental policies and programmes are launched according to the National Development Goals. The Per Capita Income (NSDP) of Assam in the year 2010-11 is Rs.30, 413. Depending on climate and geography, agriculture, forestry, some resources-based industries, tea industry, coal industry, paper mills, natural gas and crude oil industries, petrochemicals, handloom and silks, tourism, etc. have developed. After independence, various developmental programmes and schemes have been introduced to promote agriculture horticulture, animal husbandry, forestry and the mineral and petrochemical industry. These development programmes have also brought changes to the Assamese society.

It is noted that different racial community has contributed a great lot towards the formation of Assamese nation. The history says that Assam is a state of different ethnic and linguistic community and these communities has their own identity. But, due to certain issues of social change, some changes have been noticed in these racial systems. Hence, in the social life of Sonowal Kacharies, some changes have been found.

The Sonowal Kacharis of Assam is recognized as an aboriginal tribe. At present, the people of Sonowal Kacharis are found in the District of Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Lakhimpur and Dhemaji districts of the state and some other parts of Assam. The Sonowal Kacharis are a division of the Kachari. During the Ahom rule in Assam, some Kacharis engaged in gold panning from river sand. It is worth mentioning that the Sonowal Kacharis of Assam is a branch of the great Kachari group of the Indo-Mongoloid family falling. This ethnic community has been identifying in a different place with different names. In Bengal and the lower range of the Himalayas coming within the territory of Nepal, they are known as Meches. In upper Assam, they are identified as Sonowal and Thengal Kacharis, while in the western Assam they are more popularly known as Boro or Boro Kacharis. In the southern districts of Cachar and North Cachar they are designated as Dimasas and Barmans respectively. . According to the history of Assam, it is stated that the Kacharis were the royal family and they were able to establish their kingdom in different parts of the Assam. Demographically the Sonowal Kacharis are the third-largest plain tribal group of Assam.

### **Objective of the Study**

Considering the research question of the study and to understand the trends change in the social life of the Sonowal Kacharis, the following objectives are drowned.

- (1) To find out the originality of the Sonowal Kacharis and their status in a society since historic periods.
- (2) To evaluate governmental schemes which brings a change in the social life of Sonowal Kacharis?
- (3) To find out trends of the changes of Sonowal Kacharies society of Assam.

## Methodology

The approach to the study of the research problem is empirical and besides historical and descriptive character. For the purpose of the study, data has been collected from the primary and secondary source. The data has been collect from historical documents, historical books, journals, published research works, newspapers, and monograph of different periods.

## Changes of Sonowal Kacharies Society:

During Ahom and British rule, the trend of social change of Sonowal Kacharis was started and it has been continuing till today. During Ahom rule the Sonowal Kacharis, (earlier a royal family of this land) converted to subjects of the Ahom dynasty. In this period, the political culture of the Sonowal Kacharis was completely changed. The result that the social status of Sonowal Kacharis was declined. Its impact was also seen in their economic life. The economic condition of the Sonowal Kacharis has deteriorated and they were compelled to fight with food and shelter. Perhaps in this period they lost their language and have therefore accepted Assamese as their mother tongue. During British rule, the economic and political condition of the Sonowal Kacharis remained the same. Due to the assimilating environment and cultural exchange, a tremendous change has happened in the Sonowal Kacharis society. In this phase, the Sonowal Kacharis identify themselves as a part of the Assamese nation and adapt to the changing situation. It is reflected in their present cultural and social life.

After independence, the community development programme was introduced by the government of India for the development of the socio-economic condition of the people. Simultaneously, tribal development and welfare programmes were also undertaken by the government. With the measures taken by the government for all-round development of the communities and the introduction of the democratic system, the Sonowal Kacharis along with the other community come forward to avail the benefits of the governmental programmes. Rapid industrial development and the acquisition of new political rights have also made a prominent impact on their life. One aspect of the social changes of Sonowal Kacharis society in the contemporary period is the change in the role and status of men and women. Under the changing, political-economic and socio-cultural systems, they are also gradually coming out of their traditional role in different spheres of life and accordingly their status has been changing.

The people prepare to build modern type buildings and houses. Traditionally they were living in temporary *Kasha* house made by local resources that are available in the locality. With economic empowerment, now, they construct permanent buildings in a well-organised manner. From the residential point of view, today, it is not possible to distinguish the Sonowal Kacharis from Assamese main streams.

Changes are also noticed in the material culture including dress and food habits. They have given up wearing their traditional dresses and ornaments. The young boys like to wear pant-shirt, trouser, *Kurta*, Coats, etc. Girls like to wear *Salwar-Kamij*, pant-Shirt etc. The habit of *Saj* or rice beer drinking is fast disappearing more or less in numbers from Sonowal Kacharis society. Only on festive occasions, rice-beer is prepared. Changes are visualized in the field of religion also. A section of the people of Sonowal Kacharis accepts Vaisnavism tradition. The other section still believes in their traditional gods and goddesses. Despite the dual religious tradition, the Sonowal Kacharis try to assimilate with main streams.

Changes have also been noticed in the village administration. The *Gaon Burha*, as the village headman, plays the most important role in administering law and justice. But with the introduction of the Panchayat system, the influence of Gaon Burha has been gradually decreasing. The Sonowal Kacharis people, both male and female, today, take participate in the process of administration and political culture. Many numbers of people of the communities have been elected as people's representative at different levels. The educated youth of the same are recruited in different departments of the government and they performing as neutral administrator.

The family composition pattern of the Sonowal Kacharis was also changed. The traditional joint family pattern is changed. The young generation prefers a small family rather than a big family. The family planning policy of the government is popularizing in the society of Sonowal Kacharis. Due to this programme, the birth ratio gradually decline. In the earlier phase, a family generally birth more than two Childs. But, today it is too rare in the society of the Sonowal Kacharis. But, the habit of child marriage is still prevailing in Sonowal Kacharis society in the rural area.

In the case of the marriage system also changes are marked. The boys and girls of this community organize marriages not only among their own community but also prefer to marry with another caste also. Inter caste marriage today acceptable for this community. In earlier time the widow remarriage and divorce system was not common in this society, but today the younger generation accepts widow remarriage without any hesitation. Like in earlier days, women do not like to keep themselves busy in weaving and other household work such as the rearing of cattle, gardening etc. because at present due to the spread of education, the lifestyle of the women also has changed. They prefer to go outside of their homes to engage themselves in different activities. In recent years, embroidery knitting cutting etc. have made a room among the girls of the community. Same way in the field of politics, educated Sonowal girls also accepting challenging task or representing the community in the Legislative Assembly also. But, in the traditional society, women were not allowed to join formally even in the 'Mel' (Village council).

Due to modernization, some challenges are noticed among the young generation. Through their main occupation is agriculture with modern methods for the good production of crops, yet they are interested forward other salaried jobs. Regarding household work also changes can be seen. Husking was also done by most rural women in the past. But with the introduction of the rice mill in the rural area, they have almost given up husking with the help of '*dheki*' (wooden husking instrument with the help of feet). Now a day's different institutions like 'Clubs', 'Libraries', '*Mahila Samitees*' etc. are established almost in every village as a social institution. These institutions play some important roles to help the villages to develop their social, economic and cultural life.

### **Conclusion**

From the above discussion, it is clear for us that rapid changes are made in the Sonowal Kachari Society. Our study observed the following change in the society of Sonowals Kacharies society.

1. Rapid changes are made in the field of the social, political, economic, cultural life of the Sonowals Kacharies society.
2. The community development and tribal welfare programme play an important role in the process of social change of Sonowals Kacharies society.
3. Most of the youth of the Sonowals community is educated by formal education and the parents of the family are also interested to send their children's to the school.
4. Political awareness grows in the mind of the people of Sonowals Kacharies and hence, participation in the same also increases at every level.
5. For the all-round development of the community the Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council (SKAC) was created by the state government in which the people of the same empowered to rule and developed themselves.
6. As an indigenous community the development of the Sonowal Kacharis still not reach a certain destination.

Therefore, the government of Assam as like the Central government needs to be taken more development and welfare programme for them so that the dignity and status of the Sonowal Kachari in Assamese society advance.

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