

CHAPTER VIII

CHAPTER - VIII

THE DYNAMICS OF POWER STRUCTURE

The present chapter is aimed to analyse the dynamics of power structure among the Barmans of Barak Valley. Historically, the political system in the Barman society was in a developed stage. They had been an integral part of Dimasa Kachari Kingdom. The Dimasas are said to be among the earliest inhabitants of the Assam Valley and they ruled over different states under different names in different times in different parts of that valley (Nath, R.M. 1949 : 72). The Assamese sources give some details about their Kingdom at Sadiya (Bhuyan 1936 : XV-VI). Thereafter they shifted to Dimapur (Dimasapur), now in Nagaland. "In the 13th century A.D., when the Ahoms, registered their advent in the Assam valley, the Dimasa Kingdom extended along the south bank of Brahmaputra, from Dikhou to Kallang and also included the Dhansiri valley and the North Cachar Hills" (Bhattacharjee 1978 : 4). After a number of confrontations between Ahoms and Dimasas, Ahoms sacked Dimapur in 1536 A.D. and the Dimasa Capital was shifted to Maibong in the North Cachar Hills. Upto this time, the Dimasa political system was in its early phase of evolution and Dimasa society was less differentiated. It is believed that at that time there were 17 semphongs and 7 julus among the Dimasa. There is no much historical evidence to understand the political structure of the Dimasa either at Sadiya or Dimapur. Upto this point of time, the historical records suggest that the Dimasa rulers had tribal names. It was at Maibong that they entered into crucial phase of political development under the influence of Brahminical Hinduism and the son of

Detsung or Dersongpha who led the Dimasa to Maibong, assumed the name Nirbhoyanarayana and was proclaimed as Raja (Nath 1949 : 73 ; Bhattacharjee 1984 : 7). He also appointed a Brahmin as his political advisor (Dharmadi Guru) and gave him an important position in his court. Under the influence of Brahminical Hinduism the Dimasa state transformed into Monarchical system in the line of Hindu states of precolonial India. In order to understand dynamics of power structure in Dimasa and Barman society, it is necessary to understand the structure of the political system during the period of Dimasa-Kachari Kingship.

Authority Structure During Period of Kings

According to Barman (1978) Kingship, though hereditary, rarely enjoyed continuity. Different clans held sway at different places in different times. More often than not, their stay in power lay dependent upon the approval of their national assembly called *Melma*. The assembly traditionally in vogue since the time of antiquity, consisted of representatives of every clan called *semphong* (N. Barman 1978).

According to Bhattacharjee (1984) in its most developed phase the Dimasa state was a monarchy of the Indian pattern at the head of which was the Raja as supreme authority. He had a divine origin and destined to rule over the people as the 'right hand' of the God. This descent was carefully projected in all documents of the state whether in copper plate in stone and rock inscriptions, or in Bhutia paper. The Hindu symbol and legend were used in such documents where the Rajas claimed themselves as *Herambeswara* or *Herambadhiswara*. Several Sri (sometime 108)

were used before the name of the Raja and suffixed by *Maharajadhiraja*, *Rajendra*, *Nripakuladhimoni* etc. They were also projected as all powerful. The functional authority in the state was vested in the *patra* and *Bhandari*. The Barbandari held the position of the prime minister. The ministers were drawn from the tribal and the Bengali subjects. The Raj Darbar (royal assembly) consisted of two wings *Mel* and *Ul* meant for the subjects in the hills and the plains respectively where the representative of the people decided important issues. (Bhattacharjee 1984 : 9).

So in traditional authority structure the Raja enjoyed the supreme power and he was designated as 'Rihpasgaw' on the basis of clanish line which is followed by 'Rihphapharang' means 'Commander-in-chief'. Law and order of the state was controlled by 'Commander-in-chief'. The assembly was formed in such a way that the forty clans were having representation in the national assembly. Probably during that period there were forty villages under the king and each village was represented through headman or *Khunang*. The heads of these forty villages were supposed to work under the leadership of *Aigya-Khunang* (means head of all *Khunang*). The *Aigya Khunag* was responsible to recruit soldiers for the royal army with the help of these *Khunangs* were then given training under the command of 'Riphapharang'. *Khunang* enjoyed the highest power in the village and the village system or formation was known as *Noblai*. In traditional Noblai system the following position were found in addition to *Khunag*, these are Delik, Daolatho, Habaiskao, Farai, Hangchaobukhu. The village and people were known as *Raji*.

After adoption of Hinduism , certain changes occurred in administrative setup under the rulership of Raja Krishna Chandra and Govinda Chandra , where *Raj*

Pandit (a Bengali Brahmin) enjoyed the position next to king who was also the chief interpreter of Hindu law. The *Qazi* (a Muslim religious expert) was also included in *Raj* system because during that time a number of Muslim settlers were also inhabited in Cachar. To maintain the rule in Hills i.e. in present N.C. Hills district Raja appointed a governor called *Senapati* to look after the administration of Dimasa population of that area. The *Senapati* was assisted by a *Bhandari*.

During this period the revenue was collected on the basis of 'per family'. Where household was important land size was not. Four cowries equal to one rupee, was collected from each family. But *Khunang* was empowered to allocate equally the cultivable land among all the villagers. The land was determined in terms of '*Puas*' means one acre. Generally five acre was given to each family.

Land settlement was rarely granted individually where joint application of a group of settlers were permitted by the king. After taking permission from the king the land and people were included in *Raj* then they can form either *mel* or *khel*. The revenue of the area were collected jointly on the basis of *khel*.

Raja Krishna Chandra subdivided territorial land into different holdings namely (1) *Khelma* – being the Rajas own manor, (2) *Mahadevi* – being of the chief queen (3) *Vichingchha* – being of the royal deity (4) *Dekajurai* – being of the crown prince (5) *Patrawal* – being of the ministers (6) *Sangjurai* – being of the princes (7) *Brahmattar* – being of the priests and (8) *Shivattor* being of the Siva temple.

The chief sources of revenue of the king was (1) Forest royalty (2) Cattle cess (3) Salt mining (4) Water tax for fisheries (5) Land holding and (6) Home taxes

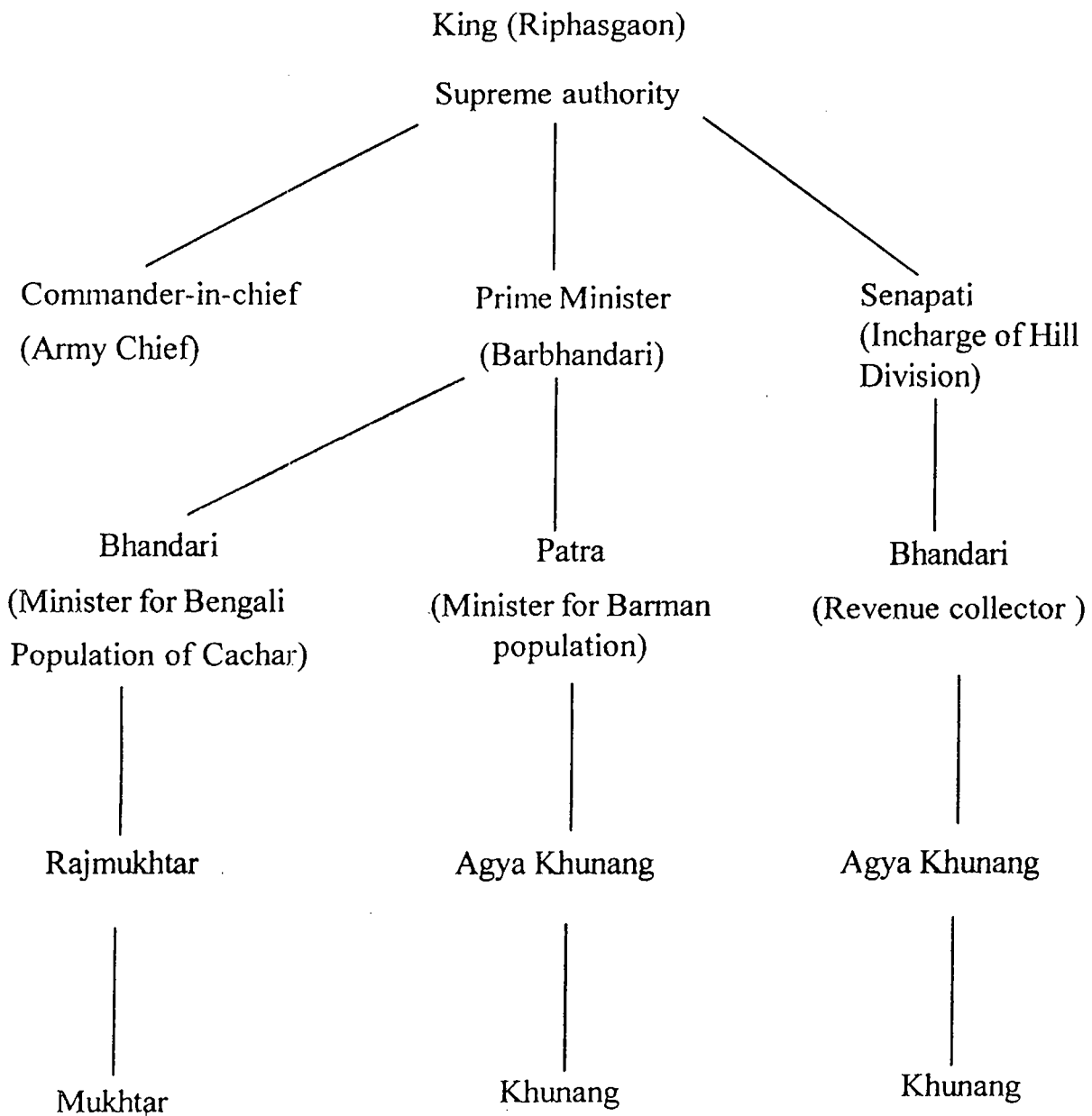
from hilly tracts. (N. Barman, 1978).

According to Bhattacharjee (1984) the actual administration of their state was, however, run through autonomous local organisation both in hills and plains. The clan i.e. *semphong* plays very vital role and head of these clan collectively decided important matters. The representatives of the *semphong* constituted the *Mel* system among them. An appeal could of course, be made to the *Raja* about the decision but the latter actually did not interfere in Dimasa affairs, particularly when because of the profession of Hindu faith he moved away from the Dimasa way of life. As a result, the *semphong* enjoyed full authority in local affairs and the *Senapati* of the hills looked after the general administration and the *Bhandari* collected the revenue. Govinda Chandra, the last king of the Barman created three division of this areas each under a *sezwal*.

The Barman king did not even interfere in the affairs of the Bengali subjects, those who lived in the plains of Cachar where *khel* system-an institution peculiar in Cachar - prevailed as an instrument of local administration. When population pressure on the adjoining areas of Bengal mounted up the peasants castes extended their settlement in the Barak valley. They used to select a headman called *Mukhtar*, who was responsible to collect the revenue and maintain law and order in the area. Theoretically the state fixed the revenue to be paid by the *Raj*; the *Raj Mukhtar* for the constituent *khels* and the *khel Mukhtar* for its shares. The *khel Mukhtar* deposited his collection to the *Raj Mukhtar* retaining of course a portion of it towards his commission, and the *Raj Mukhtar* to the *Bhandari* or revenue officer of the state after deduction of his share of the collection (Bhattacharjee 1984).

Thus, during the period of Kachari kings a political hierarchy evolved at different levels of Barman (Dimasa Kachari) society as shown in figure 1 and 2.

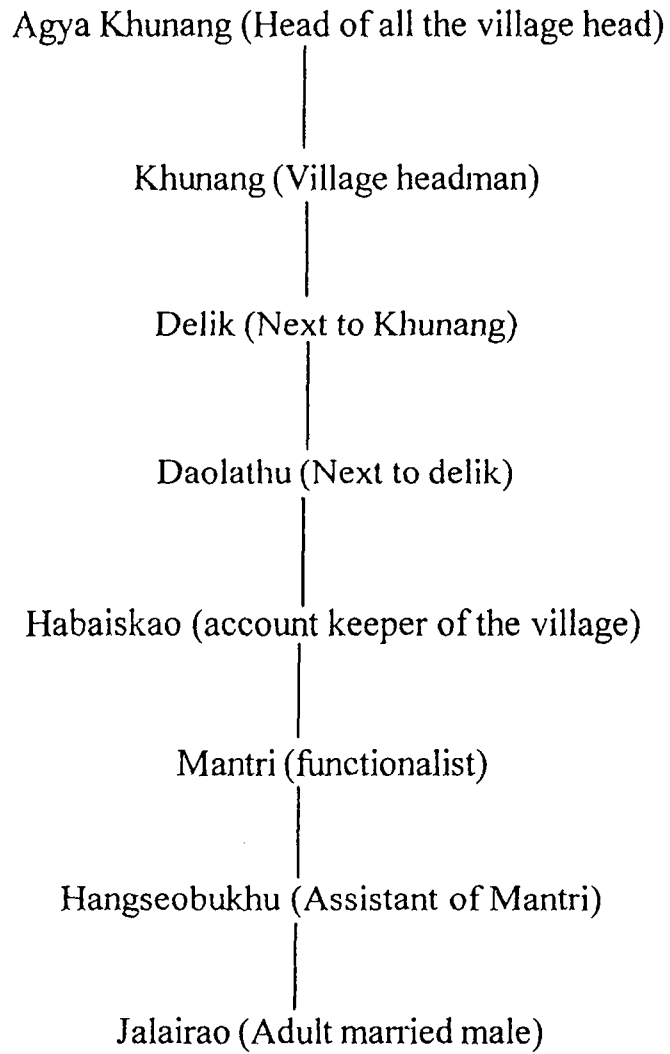
FIGURE 1
POLITICAL HIERARCHY IN STATE LEVEL
(During the period of Dimasa-Kachari King)



Source : J. B. Bhattacharjee (1994)

FIGURE - 2

TRADITIONAL POWER STRUCTURE AT THE VILLAGE LEVEL



Source : D. Danda (1978)

Traditional Authority Structure During the Dimasa-Kachari King

With the development of monarchical polity among the Dimasas a hierarchical structure also developed. Broadly, the Kingdom was divided into two parts, hill division and plains of Cachar. From an administrative point of view the king appointed a governor for hill division having independent charge of it, was called *Senapati*. He was assisted by a minister called *Bhandari*, who was mainly responsible for collecting revenue with the help of a functionary known as *Agya-Khunang* (head of a village head man of the division). At the village level, the administrative and revenue functionary was the *Khunang* (the village headman). The Cachar division was directly under the control of King. Next to the King was commander-in-chief called Riphapharang and prime minister was his main political supervisor, called *Barbhandari* under the *Barbhandari* were *Patra* (ministers) for controlling the tribal population of Cachar division and a *Bhandari* (minister) to control the affairs of non-tribal population inhabited in Cachar division. There is a marked difference in administrative setup for tribal population and non-tribal population. The non-tribal population was mainly constituted by the peasants who, were settled down in Cachar Kingdom and having a system of their own i.e., *Khel* system. "A *khel*, is a kind of agricultural guild, co-operation or common wealth or a voluntary association formed primarily for agriculture. Each *Khel* had a *Muktar*, the *Muktar* of a *Khel* was elected by the members within it. *Muktar* was responsible for the payment of revenue and civil and judicial administration. Raja did not interfere in its administration, the *Khels* were under a *Raj* headed by a functionary both for judicial and administrative purposes known as *Rajmuktar*. Ultimately the *Muktar* of all the *Raj*

constituted a league or union (*Dash Raj*) of which the *Raj Muktar* of Bikrampur was the head as that was the oldest Raj in Cachar. In the course of time, however, the institution became hereditary and the Muktar came to be known as Laskar or Bhuiya. Laskar or Bhuiya later on graded as Barbhuiya, Majarbhuiya, Chote bhuiya and Barlaskar, Majar Laskar, Chote Laskar according to size, revenue and importance of Khel. The titles in all cases subsequently passed off as hereditary for the concerned families" (Bhattacharjee, 1984 : 16-17).

On the other hand, the tribal villages were headed by *Khunang*, who was the headman of the village. He was responsible for maintaining law and order in the village, collection of revenue from villagers and supply of trained youths for the army of the king. The head of all the *Khunang* was known as *Agya-Khunang*, who had to work under the *Bhandari*. At the village level also a hierarchy of positions existed.

According to tradition the oldest member of the village becomes the *Khunang*. No other qualification would be taken into account for filling this post. As it is an ascribed position occupied by the oldest man of the village, his selection was unanimous.

Traditionally, next to the *khunang* was *Delik*, he was in fact the assistant of *Khunang* and may be promoted to *Khunang*. The requisite qualification and selection procedure of *delik* was as like as *Khunang* i.e., seniority of age was the main criterion of selection.

According to traditional custom the position of a *Daolathu* was occupied by a man who was third in the village according to seniority of age. When there was only one position for headman and one for assistant headman in every village the number of

Daolathu varies.

In case of selection of *Habaisgao* (next to *Daolathu*) age was considered as one of the important factor but the tenure of service was not unlimited as like as *Khunang*, *Delik* and *Daolathu*. *Habaisgao* serves in his position for only two years.

Pharai was another traditional official those who also filled up on the basis seniority. *Mantri*, next to Pharai was selected in consideration of their merit, efficiency and wisdom by *Khunang* and others. Usually, the *Mantri* were drawn from the *Nodrang* of the village. The tenure of *Mantri* was four years.

The *Hangseobuku* were assistants of the *Mantri*. They were selected in two batches, there was no limit to the tenure of service of the *Hangseobuku*. *Jalaiorao* was the lowest position in traditional political structure. Any male member who was married, by virtue of his marital status, becomes a member of the *Jalaiorao*, means adult married male members of their society (Danda, 1978 : 99, 100, 101).

NODRANG (Bachelor dormitory)

Bachelors dormitory, among the Barman was an organisation of unmarried youth males. The main concern of the *Nodrang* were to protect the village from outside enemies, to protect the food grains from wild animals and to help headman (*Khunang*) in every respect to maintain the law and order in the village. The members of *Nodrang* were supposed to spend their night at certain places to look after the village from outside attack during the night. This *Nodrang* was generally built up in the middle of the village, from where they could easily cover the whole village. In case of any crisis they used to beat the drums to make aware the villagers about the

strangers. This *Nodrang* acted as a force of integration among the village youth. The chief of the *Nodrang* was known as *Nagahoja*. In Barak Valley *Nodrang* continued upto the last part of the 19th century, after that the *Nodrang* discontinued among the Barman, it continued upto 1950's among the Dimasas of N.C. Hills district and till today among the Dimasas *Nodrang* is found in some interior villages of the district. The major factor for the discontinuity of the *Nodrang* among the Barman is political stability, which came into the region during the British rule. During this period there was a peaceful co-existence among different tribes of the region and there was an end to tribal warfare in the region, therefore, these *Nodrangs* became defunct. Moreover, in the plains of Cachar the Barman were heavily influenced by the Hindu way of life and *Nodrang* was not serving any purpose in the villages of Cachar. However, in N.C.Hills there was no much exposure to *Hindu* way of life and they retained their traditional institution *Nodrang* after their segregation from Barmans of Cachar plains.

During British period, new form of administration was introduced by declaring it as a district with its head quarter at Silchar, Captain Fisher was appointed as superentendent of Cachar and in 1836 the headquarter was transfered to Ducca division. But they didnt interfere in tribal affairs as they were mainly interested in collection of revinue through *Khunang*. Therefore, political structure of the village remain intact during the British rule.

Major changes in the village political structure had taken place in post-Independance period. In this period along with tribal political institution, the institution of *Panchayati Raj* was introduced at the village level . The *Gaon*

Pachayat is the lowest unit of Panchayati Raj system. It was introduced with an aim to inculcate democratic values among the rural masses and to ensure their active participation in developmental activities (Singh 1986, 1994).

Panchayati Raj

Panchayati Raj is an evolved version of rural local self Government, existed in India from time immemorial. Even during British rule in India steps were taken to recognise the system of self government e.g. Lord Ripon's historic resolution of 1882 was a step in this regard.

Later on, legislations were enacted after Montague – Chemsford reforms of 1919. After independence, our constitution also recognised village Panchayats. Article 40 of the constitution which deals with directive principles has stated “state shall take steps to organise village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self Government.”

In Assam the *Panchayati Raj* Act was enacted in the year 1948 and then in 1959, 1972, 1986 and 1994. Acts were enacted by making some changes in the Panchayati Raj system. (Chatterjee 1997).

In 1948 the *Panchayati Raj* has two tier system in Assam, that is, Rural Panchayat and Primary Panchayat. In 1959 three tier system of Panchayati Raj was introduced, namely, Mahakuma Parishad, Anchalik Panchayat and Gaon Panchayat. Then again in 1972 two tier system of *Panchayati Raj* was introduced where only

Mahakuma Parishad and Gaon Panchayat included. But later on in 1986 and 1994 it was observed that again three tier system of Panchayati Raj introduced and Mahkuma Parishad is replaced by Zilla Parishad in 1994.

In all the three study villages the body of Gaon Panchayat of 1994 continuing upto 1998. After completion of this body there is no election held in Assam till 2000. Here the structure and nature of village committee and gaon panchayat is discussed.

Gaon Panchayat

At present the Gaon Panchayat enjoys the higher status in comparison to village committee, because all the Governmental schemes and programmes are introduced in the village through Gaon Panchayat. The village Nikama belongs to Ganaganagar Gaon Panchayat

Like other villages after introduction of Panchayati Raj the political power is shifted from traditional authority to modern authority i.e., from *Khunang* to member of Gaon Panchayat. The village *Nikama* has one representative from the village to Gaon Panchayat. But at present the Gaon Panchayat is not functioning in the village because in Assam after 1994 election there was no election held till 2000.

In case of present authority structure it is important to examine the trend of participation in national politics through gaon panchayat election and assembly election secondly, the analysis of data on the basis of membership to any political party gives additional information on this line. Due to this an outside interaction held for

the purpose mainly with the Bengali officials those who are either government officials engaged in election work (census and other purposive work related to election) or political leader those who generally belongs to Bengali community. For election purpose the headmans are contacted by the political party and assurance can be given. In Kumacherra the village headman do such type of work but in case of Nikama and Dormikhal the headman are not so powerful that to motivate the own people.

But a changing trend is observed that due to identity crisis different type of movement started among the Barman where headman play very vital role to aware their own people. And in such a condition it is not impossible to choose a leader of their own community and may he rise as a regional leader.

The peoples participation in election is analysed here in such a way that it gives datas about the consciousness of population regarding both national and gaon panchayat election. Here three catagorisation of the mode of participation in election is considered i.e. in panchayat election only, in assembly election only and those who participate in both election in the table 8.1.

TABLE 8.1.
MODE OF PARTICIPATION IN ELECTION

| Sl. No | Mode of Participation | Kumacherra Total Household (111) | Percentage | Dormikkhal Total Households (62) | Percentage | Nikama Total Households (58) | Percentage | Total | Percentage |
|--------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|------------|----------------------------------|------------|------------------------------|------------|-------|------------|
| 1 | In Panchayat Only | 2 | 1.80 | - | - | - | - | 2 | 0.87 |
| 2 | In Assembly Only | 14 | 12.61 | 25 | 40.32 | 3 | 5.17 | 39 | 16.88 |
| 3 | In Both | 89 | 80.18 | 37 | 59.68 | 55 | 94.83 | 181 | 78.35 |

The data reveal that in case of panchayat and assembly election the mode of participation indicate varied facts. That is in case of only panchayat election the participation is negligible with 1.80 percent in Kumacherra village. In case of other two villages the population is not found in this category. In case of only assembly election the percentage is 12.61 in case Kumacherra village where it is 40.32 percent and 5.17 percent in case of Dormikhal and Nikama which indicate that there is a striking differences in between the Dormikhal with Nikama and Kumacherra.

In case of all the three village it is found that in both panchayat and assembly election they participate most, the percentage is 80.18, 59.68 and 94.83 percent in case of Kumacherra, Dormikhal and Nikama respectively. It suggest that they are much more interested in assembly election in comparison to panchayat election.

The membership to political party is another important parameter to examine the nature and trend of authority structure. At present situation relationship with political party reveal that how much they are aware about politics. Here data is collected on this line and it is shown in the table 8.2.

TABLE 8.2.

MEMBERSHIP TO POLITICAL PARTY

| Sl. No. | Name of the village | Mode of response | | Percentage |
|---------|------------------------|------------------|----|------------|
| | | Yes | No | |
| 1. | Kumacherra | 13 | | 11.71 |
| | (Total III Households) | 98 | | 88.29 |
| 2. | Dormikhal | 19 | | 30.65 |
| | (Total 62 Households) | 43 | | 69.35 |
| 3. | Nikama | 21 | | 36.21 |
| | (Total 58 Households) | 37 | | 63.79 |
| 4. | Total | 53 | | 22.94 |
| | (231 Households) | 178 | | 77.06 |

The data reveal that in case of Kumacherra village 11.71 percent are related to any political party and it is 88.29 percent those who are not related to any political party. In case of village Dormikhal 30.65 percent are directly related with any political party where 69.35 percent are not. In Nikama the percentage is 36.21 in case of active participation and 63.79 percent in case of population those who are not related with any political party.

It suggests that in case of all the three study villages the percentage of active participation is very poor. However, among the three study villages the percentage is highest in case of village Nikama having 36.21 percent.

Apart from the *Gaon Panchayat*, traditional authority structure of the Barman still continuing but in a modified form from the traditional structure some of the position have been abolished such as Pharai, Mantri and Hangseob. The traditional authority structure sustained in form of village committee locally known as *Noblai*. The *Noblai* is headed by the *Khunang* who is elected by the villagers. The position of *Delik* is also continuing and he is also elected by the villagers. Next to *Delik* is *Habaiska* account keeper and *Daolathu* (information officer). Earlier the married members of the village were called *Jalairao* as they were involved in the selection process of village functionaries but after the abolishment of *Noblai* all villagers were included into this category. Therefore, every adult male members of the village is called *Jalairao*. They are also elected by the villagers, the term of elected office bearers is two years. The patterns of *Noblai* in the study villages are as follows.

Kumacherra

It is difficult here to mention the date of establishment of Kumacherra (village committee) *Noblai*, but Promode Ch. Barman, the present *Khunang* of the village mention that the village committee was formed probably in 18th century when their forefather came from Maibong side of N.C. Hills district. The first *Khunang* was *Kakong* Barman in Kumacherra village.

This committee plays very important role in village politics. Committee undertakes a number of developmental works, namely, establishment of schools, roads etc. The committee also arrange the *Bushu* festival and other occasion of their own. The functionaries of the committee are namely *Khunang* (headman),

case of Kumacherra village, the headman is not formally elected but the villagers select their own *Khunang*. In addition to this there is no fixed duration for this posts. Generally after the death of *Khunang*, a new *Khunang* can be selected but in rare cases in presence of former *Khunang*, a new *Khunang* can be selected, for instance due to old age and so on. Normally, an aged, rich intelligent person of the village can be selected for the post of *Khunang*. The other officials are selected in a similar way after consulting the *Khunang*.

Function of the Kumacherra village Committee

The village committee has certain functions and it look after the following activities.

- (i) Different types of developmental works
- (ii) Arrange religious and cultural occasion namely, *Gerba*, *Bushu* etc.
- (iii) All types of disputes.
- (iv) Inter-caste marriage.

The committee has its fund and in certain occasion committee can use the fund. In case of *prayaschitta* (Purification function) ceremony, the committee arrange the occasion on behalf of concerned person.

The Present Village Committee

1. *Khunang* - Promode Ch. Barman. (Headman) 2. *Delik* - Gopesh Ch. Barman (Asstt. Headman) 3. *Daolathu* - Pratap Ch. Barman (Informer) 4. *Habaiskao* -

Rajkumar Barman & Birendra Barman (Treasurer).

Out of this five representatives of the village committee all the adult male of each family be the member of the committee and named as *Jalaorao*. Before taking any decision *Khunang* called all the members of the committee at his residence or any suitable place where they finalise the matter. All the members possesses equal right and status. Economic condition of the member is not taken into consideration at this context.

In 1998 Mrs. Nilima Barman was Gaon Panchayat President and she deserve the post as a women candidate because the post is reserve for women candidate. The Kumacherra village belongs to Harinagar Gaon Panchayat. From Kumacherra village at the beginning Lakhamoni Barman was the member of Gaon Panchayat and during that time till today in comparison to traditional village committee and village headman, the Secretary, President and Members of Gaon Panchayat possesses higher status and power. However, village committee is only confined to look after the internal affairs of the village and as well as tribal aspects are concerned. But all the Governments developmental works are implemented through the Gaon Panchayat.

Dormikhal

In Dormikhal the political system of the village is found in the form of both Gaon Panchayat and as well tribal village committee. Dormikhal village committee is not very old one as the village is a new formation. The committee is formed after 19th century, but the exact date of the formation of the committee could not be traced. The committee looks after all the disputes within the village namely case of

robbery, harassment etc. This committee also organise the religious and cultural activities in the village.

The committee has *Khunang* (headman), Assistant *Khunang (Delik)*, *Daolathu* (informer) and one *Habaiskao* (treasurer) In addition to this there are other fourteen general members of the committee. The term of this committee is two years, after completion of two year new office bearers are to be elected for the post of headman but in exceptional cases the term may be extended for another two years and committee extend its services.

Function of the committee

The main function of the committee is confined for (i) maintainance of law and order in the village (ii) to organise the community festival and (iii) confined for any type of developmental work.

The decision of headman is finalised after taking consent from all the members. They also settle negotiation between husband and wives in case of marital disputes. The intercaste marriage is another concern of the committee, where after giving *prayschitta* one can allow to enter in any community festival. In addition to this 'Dormikhal Youth Club' also perform religious and cultural activities in the village. But here also after introduction of Panchayati Raj the political power of the village committee is shifted on the hand of Gaon Panchayat members. The village Dormikhal belongs to Rukni Gaon Panchayat and general members of the Gaon Panchayat represent the village. Mr S. Barman of the village was most powerful earlier as a member of Gaon Panchayat. Gaon Panchayat members are treated as

more powerful in companion to village headman because political power was shifted to the member after introduction of Panchayati Raj. And through Gaon Panchayat all the governmental development scheme and programme can be applied and installed.

Nikama

In case of village Nikama, two types of authority structure are found traditional village committee and Gaon Panchayat. The village committee was formed probably during early part of 19th century, when village was first established by Ganga Ram and Seva Ram of N.C. Hills. The date of establishment of committee could not be traced. This committee looks after all the dispute of their own society and its members, but its area confined within the village territory. Mainly the case of theft, harassment, household problem, marital disputes, intercaste marriage are the concern of the committee. And in addition to this it arrange all the religious festival of their own as well as main Bengali festival i.e Durga Puja.

The Nikama village committee has *Khunag, Delik, Daolathu* and *Habaiskao*. There are some post of general member in the committee. The term of the committee is two year but there is a provision of extension of its duration. And like committee, the same duration is confined for its members.

Function of the committee

The Nikama village committee has certain functions viz. to look after all the disputes of their own society members living in the village. And secondly to organise



Dormikhal National club



Making of cloth in their own loom is an additional economic activity of the Barman Women.

religious and cultural festival. All the decision can be finalised by the Khunang after discussion with the members of the committee. All the developmental activity of the village is also looked after by the committee. The present headman (*Khunang*) of the committee is Shri Sudhir Barman, Rakesh Barman is Delik and Daolathu is Anjan Barman. There are ten general member of the committee those who are identified as Jalaorao.

The Barmans are infact a part of the greater Dimasa Kachari group of N.C. Hills as far as their identity is concern. But with the course of time Dimasa king accepted Hinduism with his followman and migrated to this region of South Assam and settle there. This group of Hinduised section was than known as Barman and recognised as plain tribes where as the Dimasa of N.C. Hills, availing the Hill tribe status. The Barmans claim themselves to be Kshatriya, the second status of four-fold caste structure and also bear sacred thread. A single caste community is formed by them of endogamous group. While the marital relation is not found with the surrounding Hindu communities, even in multi-caste villages. But due to long term distances with their Dimasa counterparts in N.C. Hills make a social distance to each other. The long term cohabitation with the non-tribal group the Barman attain some special characters those which are against the tribal identity.

In this condition they found themselves as economically backward isolated minority group in the area. The section of elite group among the Barman are well aware to this condition and in response to this condition they made conscious attempt. In this context they tried to consolidate their social solidarity in respect to

retain and to uphold their sociocultural identity and stable their economic backbone (pattern) where as at the same time it is not directed against the interest of any community, Govt. or not intensifying any risk against integrity of the country.

It is about 100 years that Barman was totally separated from the peoples of N.C. Hills district but now an attempt has been made by both the Dimasas and Barmans to aware the people of their own. As a hill tribe the Dimasas of N.C. Hills availing more facilities in comparison to Barman of this zone where as this two tribes originated from same root. The present Dimaraji movement is the out come of such awareness, this movement claim for their separate state and they tried to organise the *Dimasa, Hojai, Kachari, Barman, Tangmi* or *Rukhni Barman and Kachari* those who are originated from same root but due to some historical, geographical and political reason they were separated from each other. They think that such type of discrimination is not fare and it is responsible for disintegration of two tribes. Here mention of *Nikhil Cachar Hairambo Barman Samity* is relevant because this organisation tried to integrate the tribe socially and culturally.

Thus, the political system of the Barman society has passed through a process of evolution and transformation. In its initial stage it might have been a tribal polity in which the chieftain or Raja was selected on the basis of his ability to provide effective leadership to the tribe. Although, some elements of ascriptive elements of inheritance of the position were also present. But if the heir of king was not able to provide leadership or the king was child-less the assembly constituted by the representatives of semphongs had to select their chief. But gradually Dimasa-Kachari polity evolved into a monarchial kingship on the line of the Indian Political

system of pre-colonial period, particularly after the shifting of capital from Dimapur to Maibong where the process of Hinduisation of royal family started. It is clear from the genealogy of kings that the power was mainly confined between three semphongs for a period of about 3 centuries. Although there were certain occasions where the king was selected by assembly but generally the transfer of power was hereditary basis. The process was further strengthened when Dimasa-Kachari ruler shifted from Maibong to Khashpur and became the champion of new faith i.e. Hinduism. After the decline of Kachari rule in 1830 British took over the state and finally it was annexed to the British in 1832. The *Dimasa-kachari* polity developed into a hierarchical system of power and authority, which was abolished by the Britishers and a new administrative setup was introduced in the region. However, the village level structure continued as they had a policy of non-interference in tribal affairs. They had legitimised the authority of *khunang* at village level and allocated him the task of revenue collection from the villagers. Thus this system continued till the country got independence. In post independence era, with the introduction of Panchayati Raj, some of functions of *Noblai* were shifted to Gaon Panchayat and judicial and administrative power of *Khunang* reduced to a great extent but in community affairs he continued to be a prominent figure and traditional authority structure of the Barman society sustained with some modification. The institution of *Nodrang* also became defunct during the British rule and gradually disappeared. The functions of *Nodrang* were transferred to *Noblai*, which extended its membership to the village youth in the course of time. Another important change in the political structure and culture of the *Noblai* was in the form of democratization of this institution. It is clear

from the field evidence that in Kumacherra village the *Khunang* still has a term of unlimited period on the traditional line but in other two villages namely, Nikama and Dormikhal the degree of democratization has increased to a great extent and then the term of the *Khunang* is fixed for a term of two years. Thus it can be said that the first under the influence of Hinduism the tribal polity moved towards traditionalism but after independence the forces of modernization not only paved their way into the village polity in the form of Gaon-Panchayat but also transformed the traditional authority structure of the village by introducing democratic values in its structure and function.