CHAPTER - I

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The Problem

The phenomenon of change considered in terms of time in a given society has somewhat omnipresent character irrespective of patterns and factors varying from time to time and place to place. Society that exists only as a time sequence offers a variety to the existing observed reality over some period of time. It is becoming, not a being, a process not a product (Miclver and Page 1967). The term **Social Change** may be defined as "a change in the social structure (including changes in the size of a society) or in particular social institutions or in the relationship between institution". Bottomore 1971 – 297), the term **Cultural Change** however "refer to variations in cultural phenomenon such as knowledge and ideas, arts, religions and moral doctrines etc." (Bottomore 1971-297). According to Bottomore Social and cultural changes are linked in many cases and in a given society while analyzing one process its linkages to the other process should also be analyzed. Change as observable difference may be the transformation in the organization of society and in patterns of thought and behavior over time (Macionis 1987; Persell 1987), or the variations over time in the relationships among individuals, groups, organization culture and societies (Ritzer, et al 1987; Farley 1990). A holistic formulation of the concept one finds in the definition as advanced by K.Davis (1966). *By social change is meant only such alterations as secured in social organization, That is, the structure and functions of society. Social change means human changes, since men are human beings.* Thus , it is quite

evident that the definitions are variously given taking view of direction, magnitude, rate and source of change and therefore, one finds different perspectives.

Evolutionary theorists of the 19th century first provided a view of the society constantly growing and developing from simple to complex organization. Comte, Spencer, Marx and Durkheim, to mention the prominent among them, tended to build a view of the society moving toward more and more progress. Their views of the society perceived as an organization moving in linear direction towards progressive social formations, solidarities or thinking hold certain teleological elements. **System theorists** conceived social change as the change occurring within or embracing the social system, more precisely it is the difference between various states of the same system succeeding each other in a span of time (Parsons1951). Thus, the basic concept of social change involves three ideas; namely, (1) the degree of difference (2) a frame of time reference (3) the various states of the same system as referent points. Smelser (1967) views change as variations in any of the four dependent variables; namely, (I) aggregated attributes of social units (II) rates of behaviour in a population over time, (III) social structure or patterns of interactions among individuals and (iv) cultural patterns. Smith (1976) conceiving change as *a succession of temporal differences between and within units* stressed the need to take stock of structural changes or revolution, but revolution disturbs social order whereas change in-the-structure may be going on without affecting it in short run. William F. Ogburn (1950) emphasized the material culture (factories, machines, means of transportation, engineering achievements, clothing, etc.), and non-material culture (values, attitudes customs institutions, etc.) The underlying principle

of his theory & that some parts of culture change more rapidly than others explicitly formulated the theory of cultural lag. Change may originate in either material or non-material culture and change in either one requires change in the other. But most often change originates in material inventions, and this requires change in non-material culture for adjustment. The material culture in modern societies changes more rapidly than the non-material culture. **Marxist theorists** conceived social change as the sudden and total replacement of the existing social structure by the new one in view of the on-going process of conflict (Marx 1848). Dahrendorf (1959) refers to suddenness and violent nature of radical changes in terms of their variability, though suddenness of change depends upon the intensity of conflict in society.

No society remains confined to a single pattern of change as well as causation. More complex is the society, numberous are the forces and patterns of change operating in it. At the same time every society is an ensemble or unique set of material and non-material cultural forces. The nature and patterns of interaction in a society provide certain original content and form to the change. Thus, change is both universal and specific to all societies. It is the specific character of change in the society that provides it identity and demarctes it from other societies in terms of pace, direction, form and character. In the developing societies like India social change generally equated with planned change and considered a socially desired ideology is a much sought-after value being worked out by the governments and other agencies of local, regional national and international levels. India being predominantly a society of rural communities, the vast tradition-bound and gradually changing village life has been in the focus of studies as well as the

pro-change workers. Before one steps in to understand the nature of social change in varied dimensions, it needs to review the village studies in India to know theoretical and methodological trends.

Village Studies in India

Village studies in India originating at the end of eighteenth century constitute a vast literature in various disciplines like sociology, economics, social anthropology and political science. The studies emerging althrough the course of time reflected varying theoretical, methodological and ideological trends. These trends themselves have been the consequences of social and historical formations in the rural society in India. Looking to their historicity the studies may be broadly divided into two classes; viz., the studies of the colonial period and the studies in the post-Independence period. The studies of Indian village began in the eighteenth century with the intensive survey of land holdings, customary laws and other related issues. The reports of revenue settlements also produced a great of material on the relations of people to the land and the organization of rural society in India. The early systematic studies made particularly by Munro, Charles Metcalfe, Sir Henry Maine and Baden Powell considered the Indian village as **closed** and **isolated** system. This view was refuted in the fifties of the last century in the writings of social anthropologists and sociologists on India's changing villages. These studies moved along two lines; first, finding traces of primitive comminism as done by Sir Henry Maine and, secondly, describing the **little republic** character of Indian villages reflected in the works of Charles Metealfe and others (Chauhan 1974: 2-3). British official view also depicted India as a land of village republics, i.e., the self-sufficient and corporate villages. Indian

national leaders also preferred to call it a **republic, self sufficient and autonomous** due to their ideological predisposition. The studies appearing in the fifties refuted the colonial view that Indian village was static, isolated and homogeneous and asserted that it was **changing, interconnected and highly differentiated.** Thus, the terms like primitive communism and republic did not reflect the proper conceptualization of the reality of Indian villages during the British period. Ethnographic studies of tribes, castes and villages became a pronounced practice in the early twentieth century and continued up to the fifties after Independence. These studies were mostly a response to the administrative concern with regards to rural problems.

The studies in the post-Independence period may be divided into three phases: (i) the studies mainly concerned with the structural composition of village community, (ii) the studies concerned with changes in traditional rural India and (iii) the studies focusing on the processes of change and emerging structures in rural India. On theoretical, methodological and ideological planes these studies in the three phases differed from one another as well as are differentiated from within themselves into a few variants. The studies emerged as intellectual response and societal need in the wake of new social changes and formations. The dominant concern of the studies in the fifties and early sixties was the examination of the interrelationship between different dimensions of social organization. In these studies, numerous conceptual tools were used by the sociologists and social-anthropologists. C. Metcalfe (1832) using the concept of community laid a great emphasis on the economic self-sufficiency of Indian village (little republic). Munro, Metcalfe, Maine (1890) and Baden Powell (1899) considered that Indian village had been an isolated unit. Later on, S.C. Dube (1955), R.D. Singh (1956), and M.N.Srinivas (1960)

discussed various aspects of inter-village ties and unity. S.C. Dube (1960) laid emphasis on the integration of village community through economic, social and ritual patterns in the network of mutual and reciprocal relations sanctioned and sustained generally by accepted conventions. B.R. Chauhan (1967) examined the unity of village and inter-caste relations among the villages. The inter-community relationship and tradition has also been an adequately used concept for the study of social phenomena. Redfield talks about folk culture largely based on the classification of societies put forward by the sociologists like Dukheim and Tonnies. Red field (1955) further formulated the concept of village as the **little community**. Contemporary studies examining the concept of village in the Indian context found a linkage of the village with the larger totality of Indian social organization (Chauhan 1997). Srinivas (1952) discussed the upward mobility of lower castes in the concept of **sanskritization** that refers to the process in which a lower caste or a tribe or some other group tries to follow the behaviour patterns of the higher castes of the Hindu society. Sanskritization as a process of change has its relevance in the fact that the struggle for social change among different caste groups has ever since been going on in the history of Indian society and has accentuated in the contemporary times (Promjit, Judge and Sharma 1997). The village studies in the fifties showed that Indian villages was not an isolated, static and homogenous one but was changing and also interacting with outside world. Particularly the **year 1955** has a remarkable place in the studies of village communities, the studies like, S.C. Dube's, M.N. Srinivas, D. N. Majumder's and Mackim Marriott's covered a vast range of data and experience from different parts of India and even continued in the sixties and

the seventies, but with a shift in emphasis from the single-village holistic studies to the multi-village comperative studies.

From **Methodological** viewpoint the village studies were conducted at three levels; viz., single village study, two village study and Multi village study. Plenty of **single village studies** were conducted by the scholars like, S.C. Dube (1955), G.Chattopadhyaya (1961) and B. R. Chauhan (1967). S. C. Dube (1955) dealt with Shamirpet, a large village in Telegana region and Andre Beteille (1966) studied Sripuram village of Tamilnadu. S. C. Dube (1955) discussed the **situation of two** neighbouring villages in saharanpur district of U. P. His study remains a qualitative study and does not explain differences of two villages. K. S. Mathur (1964) discussed the ritual aspects of caste in a Malwa village. Oscar Lewis made a comparative study between the Mexican village (Tepotzlan) and the Indian village (Ranikhera) from Mexican point of view and found similarity and dissimilarity between the two villages. Yogesh Atal (1968) made an attempt to study one institution in two villages of two states of India. Among the **multi-village studies** Ramkrishna Murkherjee (1957) studied six villages of Bengal and G. S. Ghurye (1963) studied 110 villages of Havelli community in Maharastra. T. B. Naik (1969) dealt with the relationship of education with kinship, marriage, leadership, family and other social institutions in 15 villages from tribal districts of Dhar and Jhabua of M.P. P.C. Goswami (1969) studied the rural life of Assam hills in the four villages inhabited by Mikir, Khasi, Garo and Mizo tribes by discussing demographic and economic characteristics of their villages. He discussed the corresponding changes between the production system and the power structure in the society. During the phase of these studies the phenomenon of change was also mostly dealt with as an aspect of the

villages. Therefore, the analytical categories like caste, class, tribe, power and tradition were analyzed and the new conceptual frameworks such as sanskritization, westernization, dominant caste and universalization and parochialization emerged to deal with the process of change. Regarding the **methods and techniques** of village studies M. N. Srinivas (1969) felt that holistic data were not accurate and rich and that the intensive field study and participant observation for data collection were necessary. But S.C. Dube criticized the intensive field study and preferred the structural functional approach applied to a specific area. Biplop Dasgupta (1978) classified the village studies into two types; (i) fact finding empirical studies and (ii) problem oriented studies. K Ishwaran (1970) emphasized that in a village study the two views are necessary: (a) there is a need for the analysis of social change in terms of multiple factors rather than in terms of any single factor and (b) to correlate micro-anthropological studies with macro-sociological analyses. In a **comprehensive review** of rural studies in India, Oommen (1985) observed that in the sixties, the village studies were basically concerned with the inter-relationship between different organizations with a view to understand the village social structure. Y Singh (1986) observed that in 1950's and 1960's rural studies were mainly sociographic initiated with an attempt to reconstruct rural social structure from a structural-functional perspective. Oommen (1985) mentioned three major trends in the field of rural studies in India: (i) those which generate basic data about the socio-economic life of people and which are an essential informal input for long term developmental programmes, (ii) those which analyze the social, economic and political processes in the context of measurs of development introduced in society and (iii) those which evaluated the impact of

development programmes including the unanticipated consequences. And most of the recent studies fall in one or the other of the above categories.

A **shift in the base of studies** started in the late fifties in the situation emerging in the wake of the impact of periodic general elections, annual and five year plans, community development programme, special thrust on agriculture, land reforms, Panchayati Raj and democratic decentralization and green revolution. The **second phase** of studies beginning in the mid-sixties examined the role of stratification and particularly that of caste system in maintaining a harmonic and stable social order (Beteille 1966; Sharma 1974). New concepts analyzing social change were used to understand the ongoing process of social change in India. The changes occurring in various arenas of rural life compelled the intellectuals to accept shift in the unit of study, orientation and methodology. Now, issue-based, change oriented and survey-based studies dominated the attempts for understanding the Indian rural society in transition. Rural surveys to generate basic data about socio-economic life and to evaluate impact of development programmes were sponsored by various agencies like the Ministry of Agriculture of India (Sardar Patel University 1970; Brahmbhatt 1974; Bagchi 1970; University of Allahadad 1970; Chandra 1971; Saxena and Charan 1973; Dasgupta 1975,1976), by the planning commission (Venkatarayappa 1973; Commerce Research Bureau 1971 and 1973; Rao 1970; Gaikwad 1970 and 1972) and by the National Institute of Rural Development (Sen 1969; Chandan 1970; Vaishnav 1974; Kakar 1972; Banerji 1973). These studies covered various areas like agricultural programmes, railways, urbanization, employment, communication, education, health and family planning, etc. in rural India. To assess the impact of national, provincial and Panchayati Raj level political

processes a large number of studies were undertaken (Chaturvedi and Shah 1970; Carras 1972; Sharma 1974; Patnaik and Lakshminarayan 1969; Somjee 1970 & 1971; Ishwaran 1970; Atal 1971; Rao 1970 & 1972; Panini 1972; Sirsikar 1970, Mehta 1972; Carter 1974; Inamdar 1970; Ram Reddy 1970; Aggrawal 1969; Oommen 1969 and 1970). They covered political aspects processes, ideology, leadership and role of structural factors in rural society. A number of studies evaluated the mechanism and impacts of community development, land ceiling, land reforms, green revolution, development of classes and new stratification system (Desai 1969; Myers 1967 and 1970; Oommen 1972; Mencher 1975; Joshi 1975; Alaxender 1973; Beteille 1972; Jaunzi Wood 1973; Rudra 1970 and 1971; Utsa Patnaik 1971 and 1972; Chattopadhyaya 1972; Banaji1972, 1973 and 1975; Sau 1973; Alvi 1975 Bhaduri 1973; Sharma 1974). Agrarian movements also figured as the focus of several studies (Kelkar 1975; Brown 1974; Oomen 1972; Dhanagare 1974; Sundarayya 1973; Breman 1974; Kulkarni 1975; Naidu 1972). The Social institutions such as family, kinship, religion and caste were analysed in various dimensions of change, i.e., industrialization and urbanization, communication, values education politicalization and socio-economic development (Sharma 1971; Gupta 1971; Orenstein 1970; Epstein 1973; Berreman 1970; Singh 1970 ; Danda and Danda 1970; Mencher 1970; Beals 1970 and 1974, Wiser and Wiser 1977; Kolenda 1970; Cenklim 1969). During the second phase of studies up to the seventies several factors like green revolution, nationalization of banks, emergence of intermediate castes and classes in politics, increasing political consciousness and vehemence in national politics led to the broadening of rural studies as well as to the

consolidation of the processes of social change in rural India which became perceptible in the eighties and nineties.

Village Studies in the North East India

North East India is in habited by different ethnic groups having distinct structural, cultural and linguistic identities, though the age old process of social interaction has been going on among these groups and the long course of development and dynamism has brought them together either into conflict or into mutual goodwill and contact. The region studied by administrators, social historians, ethnographers and anthropologists and others from different disciplines such as sociology, economics political science and psychology received scant focus on social interaction, economic processes, political behaviour, individual actions and group situations as emerged under the influence of ecology and normative patterns of the people.

The **British administration** paid special attention to the study of the ethnic groups, tribes, communities and their cultures, social structures, economy and political organization. But these notes, descriptions, memoirs and daries of the British officials, travellers and missionaries are of tremendous importance in understanding the social organization of the region. The **19th century studies** of villages may be classified into two categories firstly, some of the works dealing with Assam or the North East **Frontier areas** and secondly the works dealing with a particular **tribe or community.** The former category particularly comprises accounts and reports of Welsh (1794), Hamilton (1807-14), Wilcox (1832), Pemberton (1835), Stevens (1836), Robinson (1841), Butler (1847), Dalton (1872), Beresford (1881), Michell (1883) and Machenzin (1884). The tradition of preparing general

monographs and reparts of a tribe or community continued into the 20th century. The notes, reports and history of Kennedy (1914), Shakespeare (1914), Canning (1923), Callaghan (1923), Reid (1932), Bailey (1945) and Bower (1953) may specially be mentioned. In the first four decades of the **20th century**, monographs on the various tribes were systematically and carefully prepared covering the important tribes such as Meitei (Hodson-1908), Mikir (Scat and Lyatt 1908), Garo (Playfair 1909), Kachari (Endle-1911), the Naga Tribes of Manipur (Hodson 1911), Lushai-Kuki (Shakespeare 1912), Khasi (Gurden 1921), Lhotha Naga (Mills 1922), Ao-Naga (Mills 1926), Lakher (Parry-1932), The Naked Nagas-Konyak (Haimendorf-1932) and Rengma Naga (Mills1937). Besides, hundreds of reports, notes, papers and articles are scattered in the old volumes of the Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal, Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, Asiatic Researches, Calcutta Review, Journal of the Ethnological Society, But, undoubtedly, there is an impressive record of ethnographic study in this region and these pioneering works set the pace for further researches. Whatever these reports are the products of a particular time which was dominated by certain attitudes, political and religious ideologies and lack of geographical, historical, anthropological and sociological informations (S.M. Dubey 1977).

The important **vital aspects** of the society in the region comprises is that the social organization (tribal) is superimposed with the Hindu caste system. The process of social mobility among the different castes and tribes has been going on alongwith the adaptation to the Hindu faith and customs under the waves of migration, political changes and natural calamities and even the tribal structure has been undergoing change (Dubey 1977). Mostly,

the **traditional economy** of North East India has been agrarian economy of the tribes and peasantry. But the development of tea, coal and oil industries during the British period was the beginning of modern education, roads, railways in some areas, though the agriculture is still dominating the source of livelihood among the people of North East India. Undoubtedly, the people here are also striving hard to achieve better standard of life. Modern institutions and organizational networks have been developed. There are traditional as well as modern social bases of political and social structure. Except Assam in all other political units the functioning of modern political institutions started only in the post-Independence period. Moreover, new political, administrative and business elites have emerged. There is gradual shift of power in the valley from the upper castes and urbanized professional groups to middle castes, tribal communities and small landholders. In the hills, it is from the traditional hereditary elites to the modern educated, elected and young elites (Dubey 1977).

Therefore tremendous change has taken place in the political, economic, social and technological spheres of the people in the wake of new experiences of development. A demanding task is to develop in-depth studies over the earlier works and to give a new direction to the ethno-sociological studies. Even increasing impact of mass media specially of television, communication system, education, urbanization, commercial and marketing inroads, liberalization and globalization have necessitated for the prime focus on processes of social change in rural India. This new perspective requires to first focus on the ongoing process of change in rural society and then construct a structure emerging out of the dynamics of rural life. To start with this perspective in the rural context, it will be a proper way to identify process

of social change in the context of a village. But the important point to note is that in North East India sociologist and social anthropologists have concentrated more on the study of **tribal life** rather than the non-tribal village life and given little attention to this area of study. Moreover, as most of the tribal populations inhabited the hill areas and the plain areas of North East have not been properly focused upon to study processes of change.

The present study is an attempt to understand the dimensions of social change of a multi-ethnic and multi-caste village in the Barak Valley of Cachar district of Assam.

Traditionally, majority of the villagers have been agriculturists but the present occupational profile becomes of multiplicity of occupations generating various social processes in social life of the village. The major question addressed to in the study is: **What patterns of change are perceived to be emerging in various structural dimensions in rural India, particularly in North East India ?**

Objectives

In view of the research problem, the study set the following objectives

1. To identify the processes of change in various dimensions of social structure of the village.
2. To comprehend and construct the interrelated social patterns perceived to be emerging out of various processes of change in the village.
3. To understand the social and historical conditions which are responsible for the origin of processes of change and influencing the course of events.

4. To analyze the nature of continuity of traditional social institutions and their relationship with the emerging structure.

The Methodology

The study is designed to analyse social change in systemic parameters. Therefore, social, cultural, economic and power dimensions have been analysed to understand processes, patterns and factors of change. The two points of reference to derive the structural difference are the time of Independence and the time at the turn of the century. The period for occurrence of change is 50 years of post - Independence.

Universe

The study was conducted in Narsingpur Part-I of Cachar district in the Barak Valley of Assam. The village situated 17 km away from Silchar, the district headquarter, flanks the National Highway No. 54 (Silchar to Aizawl). It is a multi-caste and multi-ethnic village of **380** households; 1920 persons; 1012 males and 908 females ; 1483 Bengalis, 360 Manipuris, 71 Hindustanis and 06 Barmans ; and 381 General castes, 1261 OBCs, 105 SCs and 06 STs. Traditionally, the villagers have been settled agriculturists but the contemporary occupational profile is that of multiplicity of primary, secondary and tertiary occupations. It has the long-established schools, the headquarters of Narsingpur Gaon Panchayat and Narsingpur Ancholik Panchayat (Block Development), the office of Integrated Development Scheme, the offices of postal and telephone services, hospital, a branch of State Bank of India (agricultural), Nutan Bazar and other infrastructures. Physically, the village is divided into three parts; viz., the main part consists

of shop, temples, schools hospital, offices and shops lies in the middle on both sides of the Highway; the Nutan Bazar in the north consists of a portion of the Part-I alongwith those from the other parts of Narsingpur in the north and the Kumarpatty in the South consists of blacksmiths' households.

Data Sources, Units of Analysis and Tools of Data Collection

The data were collected from the **documents** such as historical documents, census reports, statistical records, panchayat records etc. and from the **field** of study. The documentary data were collected through inventories constructed for institutional data and the field data were collected through a **structured interview schedule** during the period from October 1999 to December 2000. For the collection of data the schedule was administered to all the **households** considering them as the **units of study**. For analysis of the data, **multi-variate** tables were prepared to have comparative understanding of various structures within the **village system**. Briefly, the study has applied **system approach**, census method, and **comparative and multi-variate analysis** to unraval the structural realities.

The Implications

The study implies that an Indian village may be multi-ethnic and multi-lingual along with multi-caste and multi-religious character. Such a composite character is obviously found in Narsingpur. The study also sheds a fresh light on the concept of **dominant caste**. Here, the Nath qualify to be a dominant caste in respect of numerical strength, landed property, hold in other

occupations, gaon panchayat, co-oprative society and education. But, in the caste hierarchy the Nath is presently a non-dwija/ Backward Caste. Basically, they are the casteless hermits differentiated into several sects having settled in the caste situation. They have become integral part of the local caste structure. Till date they have only one gotra i.e., Shiva gotra and they observe no clan exogamy. This evidence points to the accumulating contradictions of the caste structure at the wider level.

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