

CHAPTER -VII

ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CULTURAL LIFE IN ASSAM

7.1: Cultural Status of Assamese Women

7.1.1: Education and Literature

In the early vedic period, education was as common for girls as it was for boys. The Upanayana Sanskara or the ceremonial initiation in to vedic studies was performed in respect of both boys and girls . the vedic age held that Brahmacharya discipline and training were as much necessary for girls as it was for boys⁴²¹. Harita apprehended, "if the most important religious sanakara of upanayana was not performed in the case of girls, women would be automatically reduced to the status of Sudras; how then could Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaishya be born of them?" ⁴²². After this upanayana ceremony girls used the follow discipline mare or less similar to that of boy. They were, however, not to follow some of the strict rules from Brahmacharyya such as they were not to grow matted hair, they were not to go out to beg their daily food and as far as possible, they were to be taught by their near relatives like their father, the uncle or the brother; they could discontinue their studies if their marriages were fixed at the age of 16 or 17⁴²³. But some of the girl showed their passion for education and continued their studies for a, longer period and became Brahnavadinis such as Lopamudra, Apala, Visvavara, Ghosa, Nuvavasi etal who were experts in vedic theology and Philosophy⁴²⁴ .

⁴²¹AV.XI.5,18

⁴²² Altekar, *The position of women in Hindu Civilization*, p.200

⁴²³ Altekar, *The position of women in Hindu Civilization*, p.200

⁴²⁴ Altekar, *The position of women in Hindu Civilization*, pp.10-11

Women in those days were highly educated with full knowledge of grammar, logic, lexicon and metres and had power of reasoning⁴²⁵. Some of the talented women exhibited their extraordinary aptitude and self - confidence and were able to mount to the peak of victory and achieved profound admiration from the society. A theologian named Kasakritsana composed a work on Mimamsa called Kasakritsni ⁴²⁶. Lopamudra had preached 179 hymns of first book of the Rg-Veda along with the sage Agastya⁴²⁷. One of Brahma literature mentioned about the lady name Gandhravagrihita, who lectured on some theological subjects before an enlightened audience⁴²⁸. We find that few women scholars like Maitreyi and Gargi attained eminence in the sphere of philosophy. The scholars were given the same respect as male scholars. In few occasions the women philosophers even defeated their male counterparts in philosophical debates. In a philosophical discussion in the court of king Janka of Videha Gargi defeated Yajnavalkya⁴²⁹. Some of the women studied medical science and were specialized in gynecology ⁴³⁰.

In Assam neither epigraphs nor literature supply us with definite information's regarding the education of women. In ancient period, there were gurugrhas⁴³¹, Sanskrit tolas, and village schools provided mainly by the agraharas, created and patronized by the rulers on behalf of and for the maintenance of the Brahmins. But whether the girls were allowed to go to these educational institutions is not clear from the inscriptions or literary sources. Through the inscriptions describe the qualities of the head and heart of the queens, but

⁴²⁵ Bharati Barua, *A study of the socio-religious ceremony of Upanayana (Investiture with sacred threads) in the Sutras and the Dramasutras*, p.101.

⁴²⁶ Altekar, *The position of women in Hindu civilization*, p.11

⁴²⁷ Cited in Indra, *status of women in ancient India*, p, 74

⁴²⁸ A.Br, V-4

⁴²⁹ Br.up, III, 6 & 8 Cited in Altekar. *The status of women in Hindu Civilization*, p.12

⁴³⁰ Altekar, *The position of women in Hindu Civilization*. P.222

⁴³¹ *Grant of Balavarman*. V.31

whether they were educated or not are not clear. Only one reference is made to the appointment of an old lady to take care of the royal harem⁴³². We also find reference to women ruler and her ministers in the kingdom of kadali which was also known as Narirajya, which points towards the education of women, otherwise they could not have run the kingdom. Few instances of educated and learned women were found in the ancient Assamese society, but they belonged to the upper class specially Brahmana class. We find elsewhere that Assam was the main centre of Tantricism and women equally contributed to the Tantrik culture, which is also clear from the term Sahajayogincinta⁴³³. The kamauli grant of Vaidyadeva informs us that Brahma Mohoratha composed its prasasti in conjunction with his wife Padma⁴³⁴. Some women were skilled in the arts of poetry and rhetoric. Some of them employed intellectuals to interpret the contents of popular classics, scriptures, and informative literature of them. The consort of the king of Kamata appointed the son of the royal priest to interpret and explain her Haragaurisamvada and the Bhagavata⁴³⁵.

Through we find only few examples of educated ladies in ancient Assam, but the sources of the medieval period, referred to lots of learned women belonging to royal rich and well to do families and to the class of dancing girls. Chaoching the consort of the Ahom king Suklengmuga, alias Gargayan Raja, who hailed from the neighbouring Nara country, was an accomplished scholar in the Ahom language and it is said that she could write in ahom language with the toes of her feet⁴³⁶.

⁴³² P.C. Choudhury, *The history of the civilization to the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.p.*, 386

⁴³³ P.C. Choudhury, *The History of the civilization to the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.p.*, 386

⁴³⁴ E.I.II.pp.347-58' Gaudalekhmal, pp,127-46,cited in P.C. Choudhury, *The History of the civilization to the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.p.*, 154

⁴³⁵ B.K. Barua, *A culture History of Assam*,p,136

⁴³⁶ *Assam Buranji*, ed.by Dr.S.K. Bhuyan. P.32

The Brht ajvamsaveli points out that the ladies of the Bhuyan families were comparatively wel educated. The daughter of Pratap Bhuyan named Bhanumati, who was married to the Koch King Naranarayan was well educated and had great interest in the sanskrit literature. She become the chief queen of the king after the coronation of the latter and she changed her name from Bhanumati to Ratnamala. On her and her king husband's inspiration, the great Sanskrit scholar purusottam Bhattachary wrote the Sanskrit Grammer in order to make the learning of Sanskrit easy for all classes of people, and named it on the name of queen called "Prayog Ratnamala"⁴³⁷

Queen Phuleswari was a great patron of education. She was the first person who established a Pathsala at the Place campus. Where education was mainly imparted in Sanskrit ⁴³⁸. Many queens used to patronize literatures. During the reig nof a Kachhari king, Suradarpa Narayana (A.D 1708-1721), one Bhbaneswar Bachaspati translated in to Assamese verse. Queen chandraprabha, mother of Suradarpa Narayana and wife of king Tamraddhvaja⁴³⁹. 'Sankhachuda-badha' was written by Kaviraj Chakravarty, the noted litterateur of the Ahom period. One Sukumar Barkaith under the order of the Ahom King Siva Singha and his queen Ambika Devi (A.D.1734) A PROFUSELY ILLUSTRATED VOLUMINIOUS WORK " Hasti Vidyarnava", ⁴⁴⁰ which death in the diseases and treatment of elephants. Ananta Acharyya translated Saundarye- Lahari, the Sanskrit work of great Advaita scholar Sankaracharyya named it " Ananda Lahari on the instance of king Siva Singha and his queen Pramathesvari alias Phuleswari.⁴⁴¹.

⁴³⁷ Bharat Rajvamsavali (MS). Harendra Narayan, Verses 1825-1826

⁴³⁸ S. Rajguru, *The Mediaval Assamese Society*.p., 886

⁴³⁹ S. Rajguru, *Asamia Sahityar Itibritta*, .p., 150-151.

⁴⁴⁰ S. Rajguru, *Asamia Sahityar Itibritta*, .p., 141-146.

⁴⁴¹ S. Rajguru, *Asamia Sahityar Itibritta*, .p., 162.

Another poet Vidya Chandra, Kabi Sekhar rendered the Harivamsa in to Assamese verse at the behest of Charu Singha and his wife Premada⁴⁴². Thus , that during the medieval period, many queens along with the kings supported and patronizes the poets and writers for the advancement and improvement of Sanskrit and Assamese literature and development of other branches of culture in the kingdom.

So that all selection of people could read and understand the religious book of the Vaisnava religion, the Vaisnavite age brought about a renaissance in the field of education. Which put an affect on women too. Women were inspired to become educated. Many of them become conversant in religious discourses by reading religious books. All the queens of King Lakshmi Narayan used to learn the reading of the holly books of Vaisnav religion such as Ghosa, Kirttana, Bhagavata, etc. from Dayal, a female Medhi. Chandari, the nurse of Sankardeva who was quite acquainted with the teachings of the Gita could also take part in theological discussions^{4 43}.Some of the women during his period become so well educated and expert in verse of Bhagavat Gita that they occupied the headship of religious sects or institutions. Mention may be made about Ai-kanaklata and Bhubaneswari. The details of this women were discussed above in the religious part of the chapter.

7.1.2: Music and Dancing

Both literature and epigraphs point to cultivation of the music and dancing by the Assamese women. Evidences of taking part in dancing and music by women both in the early and in the medieval period are available. Manasa Kavya pointa

⁴⁴² S.N. Sarma *Sahityar itibrta*, pp.140

⁴⁴³ KGC, PP, 116.36

Out that the women were expert singers and dancers⁴⁴⁴. Singing accompanied by musical instruments and dancing were a normal phenomena during dramatic performance and religious ceremonies. Both epigraph and early Assamese literature refer to the deferent musical instruments⁴⁴⁵.

The sculptures of the period portray different dancing poses (nrtyamurtis). The earliest dancing scene was recovered in a slab from Tezpur⁴⁴⁶. Another dancing figure of the time was recovered from the Deo Parbat ruins⁴⁴⁷. Before the advent of Vaisnavism, dancing was considered as the exclusive accomplishments of the coutteen class. The custome of appointing women as dancers and courtesans in connection with temple services, which probably came in to vogue in India about the third century A.D.⁴⁴⁸, Become quite common in Assam, Gunabhiram Barua saya that the kings had offered a pair of temple of Hajo, Dubi, Vaisvantha and Dergaon. They had to dance the tune of music accompaind be musical instruments in front of the idol of the temples, three times a day at the times of worship and player⁴⁴⁹, The Tezpur grant also refers to dancing girls presented in a Shiva temple by king Vanamala ⁴⁵⁰. The dancers were known as Nati and Daluhangana⁴⁵¹. In most of Shiva temples, there was a class people known as Nati who provided the temple dancing girls and singers⁴⁵². Other than Siva temples, girls used the dance in front of other idols also. Mention may be made of Deodhani Nritya, which was performed to worship Goddess manasa or in the Festival of Ambubaci in the shrine of Kamakhya by unmarried

⁴⁴⁴ *Manasha kavya*, edit by Dr. B.K. Barua & Dr. S.N. Sarma, p128.

⁴⁴⁵ *Grant of vanamala*, v.28 Madhva Kandali, *The Ramayana*; Sankardev, *Rukmini Harana*; Suryakari, Darrang- Raja Vamsavali.

⁴⁴⁶ B.K Barua, *A cultural History of Assam*, p.195

⁴⁴⁷ B.K Barua, *A cultural History of Assam*, p.195

⁴⁴⁸ Altekar, *The position of women in Hindu civilization*, pp182-183.

⁴⁴⁹ *Assam Bandhu*, edit by G.Barua, vol, II, No. 3& 4;p.c.Choudhary, HCPA,P,326.

⁴⁵⁰ *Tezpur Grant of Vanamala*, v.24

⁴⁵¹ B.K. Barua, *A cultural History of Assam*, p.135

⁴⁵² *The Nat is usually a kalita caste, Census of India, 1901*, Assam, part 1,p.141.

girls to the tune of some rough musical instruments like the Drums and cymbalas⁴⁵³.

It seems that devadasis were given protection by the royal court in the Ahom period. The kidnapping of dancer of Visvanath temple by Satrajit, an agent of the Moguls, was one of the reasons to declare war against Moguls by the Ahom king Pratap Singha⁴⁵⁴. Dancing girls also employed as spies in the Ahom court⁴⁵⁵. It appears that Natis in the later part of the Ahom period snatched a privileged position in the society when king Shiva Singha (1714-1744 A.D.) married two Nati sisters Phulmati and Draupadi, who were attached to the Siva temple and consequently made them the Bar Raja or chief queen respectively and struck the coins in the joint names of himself and the queens⁴⁵⁶.

Now singing and dancing came inside the royal harem. Queen Sarbesvari, the third consort of king Siva Singha herself taught a large number of young girls of different communities, the art of singing and dancing within the royal harem under her own supervision⁴⁵⁷. Singing and dancing became more popular during the Vaisnav age. In fact, it was an integral part of the Vaisnava culture.

The Vaisnavite movement not only endowed the culture of music and dancing with new vigour and spirit but also made it available to the people of all categories. P.C. Choudhury comments, "The use of various instruments and playing of tunes, particularly in the period of Vaisnava Reformation point to the regular culture of music, whether in temples or in

⁴⁵³ S.Rajguru, *Medieval Assamese society*, p204.

⁴⁵⁴ PAB, PP. 83F. *Ahom Buranji*, pp,55-56

⁴⁵⁵ *Ahom Buranji*, p,130

⁴⁵⁶ S.K. Bhuyan, *An Assamese Nurjahan*

⁴⁵⁷ TB, P.37

public places" ⁴⁵⁸. Even Sankardeva was a great musician and dancer and taught his followers devotional music, dancing and art of acting in order to spread Vaisnavism in different satras of the province⁴⁵⁹. Afterwards the temple, The Namghare AND ALSO THE Satras become the main centers. Where the intending people were trained by the elderly artisans in the art of singing, playing on musical instruments and Dancing⁴⁶⁰. As a result of the Vaisnavite movement almost every women acquired sort of efficiency in the art of singing celestial song called Namaghosa, Bhatima, Totai etc From KGC, IT is gathered that Kamalapriya, wife of Chilarai was deeply inspired by the tune and gathered that Kamalapriya, wife of Chilarai was deeply inspired by the tune and contents of Bargit composed by Sankardeva and decided to be a disciple of Sankardeva⁴⁶¹.

The ceremonial and some other religious function were accompanied by the songs sung by the women. Even in the present days, Assamese women are found to take part of singing the marriage songs such joranam(upper Assam) or Kaisagit(lower Assam), religious song such as Bargit, Kirtana, Namaghosa, Bhatima, Totai, ballad songs such as Kanyabaramahi-git and also bihu songs as well as flock songs. They are also found to be expert in bihu dance, flock dance and pastoral ballads. The marriage songs are purely the contribution of the women flock, which are found to enhance the beauty and gravity of the function.

⁴⁵⁸ P.C. Choudhury, *the History of the civilization to the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.* p.382

⁴⁵⁹ P.C. Choudhury, *the History of the civilization to the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.* p.382

⁴⁶⁰ S.Rajguru, *Medieval Assamese Society*, pp.418-419

⁴⁶¹ KGC, pp.106-109

7.1.3: Art of Painting

Regarding the efficiency of women in the art of painting, the sources of ancient Assam is silent. But the literary works of medieval period focused towards one reference of women painters in ancient Assam. Which is very significant and pointed out that women of the period were experts in this art. The literary works of Usa Parinaya of Pitambara and Kumara- Harana of Ananta Kandali mentioned about the extra -ordinary Chitravidya of Chitrakha. The latter was the daughter of Kabhandu, minister of king Banasura of Sonitpur. She was also the friend of princess Usa, daughter of Bana. It is said that Usa fell in deep love with Yadav prince Aniruddha by just a glimpse of the letter in a dream. But she did not know about this prince. It was Chitrakha, who by portraying all the youth of the period belonging to Asura, Yaksha, Kinnara, Gandharva, Deva and Manava found out the details of prince Aniruddha.

Other than Chitrakha, we do not find any other reference of women painters in ancient and medieval Assam as some of them had some knowledge regarding painting, Chandari, the nurse of Sankardeva falls in this category. Once when Sankardeva was painting a picture of Celestial Baukunta and could not decide where to place the kalpataru tree, then Chandari, who was noticing the picture helped Sankardeva to locate the exact place of the tree in the Baikuntha Dham⁴⁶².

It seems that some of the queens were also interested in the art of painting and inspired the painters to paint the picture some literary works to make it more interesting and valuable. Sankhacharya Badha, the literary works of Kaviraj Chakrabarty was illustrated with beautiful painting on the instance of King Siva

⁴⁶². KGC,pp

Singha and her queen Phuleswari⁴⁶³. Similarly Hastividya, the famous work of Sukumar Barmah and his illustration of the beautiful pictures of the same work by Dilbar and Disai were patronized by queen Ambika and king Siva Singha.

7.1.4: Spinning Weaving and embroidery:

Assamese women of all classes and status were efficient in the art of spinning and weaving. In fact art was considered as one of the most important accomplishment and qualification of the women of Assam. In the Ancient and Ahom period, one would refuse to marry a girl who does not know weaving. Dr. Bhuyan comments, "The utter worthlessness of Assamese women is indicated by the invariable remark that she cannot even twist a thread. Nothing is considered to be more disgraceful to an Assamese woman than her appearance in society being clad in the garment not woven by herself"⁴⁶⁴. The expertise of the Assamese women in the art of weaving and the universal popularity attained due to that were paid the highest compliments by Mahatma Gandhi when he said- "Every woman born in Assam is a born weaver. No Assamese girl who does not weave can expect to become a wife. And she weaves fairy tales in cloth"⁴⁶⁵.

It was a firm belief in the Assamese society that if women could send their husband warrior to the battlefields by presenting 'Kavach-Kapor' (a kind of garment for warrior) which they had spun and woven within a single night, then their husband would not definitely meet defeat⁴⁶⁶. It is said that Mula Gabharu could not give General Phrasengmung, her husband, the kavach kapor while he was going to the battlefield and so he met a tragic end.

⁴⁶³ Dr. S.N. Sarma, *Asamiya Sahityar Itihas*, pp141,146

⁴⁶⁴ Dr.S.K. Bhuyan, *studies in the History of Assam*, p. 66

⁴⁶⁵ Dr.S.K. Bhuyan, *studies in the History of Assam*, p. 67-68

⁴⁶⁶ *Assam Buranji*, edit by SK Bhuyan, p.21

Under the supremacy of the Ahom, spinning and weaving were included in compulsory list of works allotted to women. It was necessary for every women that in the night, before going to the bed, they had to complete the spinning of at least forty cocoons. Nobody could neglect their duties without any reasonable cases were punished ⁴⁶⁷. Francis Hamilton says. “The women of all castes, from the queens downwards, weave the four kinds of silk that are produced in the country, and with which three-fourths of the people are clothes ⁴⁶⁸.

Some of the expert women weavers were employed in the royal harem of the Ahom kings as in charge of the royal looms, KGC records that Bhavanipuria Gopal Ata’s mother, who was a skilled weaver was made superintendent of the twelve score of looms that were in the royal harm during the reign of the Ahom king Shuhungmung, alias Dhingia Raja ⁴⁶⁹. Even some of the Ahom queens were accomplished weavers and they personally used to give guidance in weaving to the young girls. Sarbeswari alias Anadari, the *Bar-Raja* and consort of king Siva Singha herself guided the girls in the art of spinning and weaving in the royal *harem* ⁴⁷⁰. The quality of the woven clothes was so high that a piece of garment could easily be concealed within the grasp of the fingers of the hand and could be without sunshine ⁴⁷¹.

⁴⁶⁸. B. Sarma, *Durnin*,p.10

⁴⁶⁸. F. Homilton, *An account of Assam*,p.61

⁴⁶⁹. KGC,p.261

⁴⁷⁰ Dr. S.K. Bhuyan, *Buronjir Bani*,p.128

⁴⁷¹ S.Rojguru, *Medieval Assamese society*,p.202,203

Besides spinning and weaving of Assam were efficient in embroidery works also, Embroidery was well known to women of ancient period. Various types of threads such as *Muga*, Gold and Silver were for the embroidery works. Different type of designs embroidered in the clothes. The verses from *Namghosha* and *Kirtana* were woven in the clothes used for religious purpose. The imamate figures and the different activities of Lord Krishna were popular embroidery designs. During a dance performance in the assembly of the gods in heaven. Behula also wore a beautiful sari, which was embroidered with all the incarnating figures of Lord Krishna⁴⁷².

7.1.5: Dress, Ornaments and articles of luxury used by Assamese women:

Epigraphs, sculpture and literature throw some light on the type of dresses and ornaments used by the women of ancient period. Generally in ancient Assam, clothes were known by the names of *Vastra* and *acchadana*⁴⁷³ and in medieval Assam as *Kapor* ⁴⁷⁴. People used both stitched (*sucividhan*) and unstitched garments ⁴⁷⁵. Though an Assamese women could weave all sorts of cotton and silk clothes, but she could not all the dresses. They had to maintain the distinction according to their higher or lower status in the society. The dresses indicated one's status in the society. The dress and garments made to *muga* and silk (*pat*) were exclusively for the higher class people. The garments of the upper class women were beautifully embroidery with gold and silver threads. The dresses of upper class Assamese women in earlier days comprised of three garments. They were i) *mekhela*, a girdle worn round the waist, ii) *riha*, worn round the waist and breast and iii) *a cadra*, one end of which was coiled round the waist just over the *riha* and the other end placed across the breast and

⁴⁷² Sannkardeva, *Rukmini Horana*, v.55; *Beula Lakhindor*, p85, pp.210,211,213

⁴⁷³ *KP*, Chop, 69,8

⁴⁷⁴ S. Rajguru, *Medieval Assamese Society*, p,178

⁴⁷⁵ *KP*, Cho, 69.2

Shoulder behind, generally the lower garment was fastened by 'nivibandha'⁴⁷⁶. But the garments of the poor generally consisted of ordinary *mekhela* and *cadara*⁴⁷⁷. Women in the ancient and medieval period used to wear various types of ornaments of various designs made of different metals. The KP gives an exhaustive list of forty ornaments made of gold, silver and other metals used by women from head to foot⁴⁷⁸. The literary works of the medieval period mention the names of different metals used for making ornaments such as gold, silver and other metals used by women from head to foot⁴⁷⁹. The literary works of the medieval period mention the names of different metals used for making ornaments such as gold, silver, diamond, copper, brass, bronze, amber, rhinoceros, horns, ivory etc. and precious stones and jewels, which were set on the ornaments to make it more precious and decorative⁴⁸⁰. The KP regulates some rules followed by women regarding the wearing of ornaments⁴⁸¹. The Purana states that silver ornaments could not be used above the neck. (*Grivondhadese raupyantu na kadacicca bhusabam*); further iron and bell metal ornaments could not be worn and those of other metals could be used only for the lower part of the body P.C. Choudhury doubts that whether these rules were followed in actual life⁴⁸².

⁴⁷⁶ P.C. Choudhury. *The History of the civilization to the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.* p.329

⁴⁷⁷ P.C. Choudhury. *The History of the civilization to the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.* p.329

⁴⁷⁸ K.P. Chop, 69, 33

⁴⁷⁹ K.P. chop, 69, 17, 23

⁴⁸⁰ S. Rajgure, *Medieval Assamese society*, p.183

⁴⁷⁸ K.P. Chop, 69, 33

⁴⁸¹ P.C. Choudhury. *The History of the civilization to the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.* p.331

From the literary sources of ancient and medieval Assam and sculptural remains, we come to know about the different ornaments used by women ⁴⁸³. They wore *hara* (*necklace*) of different metals. Most of the sculptures were found to be wearing long necklaces made of beads and sometimes a pendant was attached to the middle of the necklaces; a flat necklace was called *galpata*, so named because the broad band lies flat on the neck. Another ornament called *Keyura* and *angada* was worn on the upper arms. On the wrists women used to wear *Kankana* (*bracelet*). On their ears, women put on different types of *Kundalas* (*ear-rings*) and on the ankle joints of the feet they wore *nupuras* (*anklets*). *Nupur* with small balls inside making a jingling sound were worn by unmarried girls as appeared from the Tezpur grants of *Vanamala* (*Balakumarikabhiriva kvanat kinkinibhih*). Married women wore a forehead ornament known as *Lalatika*, just below the hair on the top of the forehead.

These ornaments were used in the medieval period also, only the names by which they were known were different. Some of the names of ornaments used by women in the medieval Assam are mentioned here⁴⁸⁴. On the wrist they wore bracelets called *Epatia-bala*, *Dopatia-bala*, *Muthi*, *Sat-juthi*, *Son-khatowa-kharum* *Rupar-kharu*, etc. On the arms of the hands, women wore *Baju*, *Kankan*, *Tar*, *Balaya* etc. The necklaces with bigger beads were known as *Mata-mani* and the pendants put on the middle of the necklaces were known as *Madal* or the common women put on necklace made of ordinary small coloured beads called *Chheo-mani*⁴⁸⁵. Different varieties of ear-rings such as *Chai-Khale*, *Kanthasa*, *Kamaphul*, etc. were on fashion at that time. On the

⁴⁸³ P.C. Choudhury. *The History of the civilization to the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.* p331

⁴⁸⁴ S. Rajguru, *Medieval Assamese society*, pp.182,185

⁴⁸⁵ *Asam Bandhu*, ed. By G. Barua, volII, no1&2, pp.6.7

Nostril women used to put on an ornament called *Nak-phul* made of gold or silver with stones. Finger-rings called *Angathi* of gold and silver with jewels and stones engraved on them were in use in this period. Other than gold and silver, the rhinoceros, horns, the two-anna and four-anna coins were also used to make rings. Besides putting it on the finger of the hands, the rings were also worn on the toes of the feet called Ujanti. Young girls used to put Nepur with small balls inside making tinkling sounds on the ankle of the feet. On the head, women used to put an ornament known as Sirrpes.

The long and the dark cluster of hair remained always a matter of pride for the Assamese women Chilarai married Kamalpriya just being charmed at her cluster of hair⁴⁸⁶. They dressed their hair twisting into a coiffure, called Khopa, of variety of designs. One of the sculptures of ancient period is also seen with this the simple style of coiffure⁴⁸⁷. In another sculpture erected on the wall this the Kamakhya temple, the coiffure is raised to the left side and this method is still in use among the village women of Assam⁴⁸⁸. Though the literary sources of ancient period is silent about the hairdressing of women but the literary sources of medieval Assam throw some light on the hairdressing of women of mythological period. Sankardeva in his epic *Rukminiharana* also mentions about the hair dressing of Rukmini before she was going to the temple of Goddess Durga to tie the nuptial knot. The epic portrays “She beautifully tied the Khopa (coiffure) of her hair, high up, and thrust upon it a bunch of Malati flowers⁴⁸⁹. In the medieval Assam, women made their hairstyle in different ways S. Rajguru comments that the hairstyles of Assamese women of medieval period were most probably influenced by the hairstyle of women of

⁴⁸⁶ *KGC*, p.108

⁴⁸⁷ B.K. Barua, *A cultural History of Assam*, p.147

⁴⁸⁸ B.K. Barua, *A cultural History of Assam*, p.147

⁴⁸⁹ *Rukminiharan Kavya*, VV.254-258

non-Aryan Communities, especially the Khampti women⁴⁹⁰. He further comments that their style of twisting the hair into a knot projection over the forehead had a large number of similarities with the hair dressing of the sculptures of Sanchi, Mathura and Bharhut. As mentioned above, the style of making the knot by the Assamese women was similar to that of Khampti women. Other than this style, women of medieval period knew the various other designs of coiffures such as *Negheri-Khopa*, *Ghila-Khopa*, *Kaldilia-Khopa*, *Kamalijuli-Khopa* etc.⁴⁹¹

Assamese women were very fond of cosmetics and perfumes in the earlier days also. The Tezpur grant records grant records that women used scented oil and anointed their breasts with odorous substances⁴⁹². Oil mixed with limejuice was used in the hair to keep it long and dark and they wash their hair alkaline solution and other herbs, in order to maintain a luxuriant growth⁴⁹³. Women to augment their beauty used variety of perfumes to augment their. The KP mentions types of perfumes, such as *cumikrts* (powder), *ghrsta* (paste), *dehakarsita* (ashes), *sammardaja rasa* (juice), *pranyangodhava* (musk type) that were in use in those days⁴⁹⁴. The same purana reveals about the use of varieties of *Kumkuma*, *Kalaguru*, *Kasturi* and *Karpura*, varieties of Sandal-paste, etc.⁴⁹⁵.

Assamese women were very conscious about the beautification of their face. They used *Anjana* to make their eyes attractive⁴⁹⁶. The tilaka (making of red vermilion) on the forehead between the eyebrows and on the line made by parting

⁴⁹⁰ B.K. Barua, *Asamor Loka Sanskriti*, p.152

⁴⁹¹ B.K. Barua, *A cultural History of Assam*, p.146

⁴⁹² *Grant of Vanamala*, V.30

⁴⁹³ S. Rajguru, *Medieval Assamese society*, p.186

⁴⁹⁴ *K.P. cjan*, 69, v, 53

⁴⁹⁵ P.C. Choudhury, *The History of the civilization to the people of Assam to the Dwelfth century A.D.* p.332

⁴⁹⁶ B.K. Barua, *A cultural History of Assam*, p.139.

The hair on the head indicated the married status of women and their husband as being living. The widows did not make any vermilion marks. The widows of the Brahmanas used to take marks of sandal paste on their foreheads. Gunabhiram remarks that some of the Muslim women also took vermilion marks on their foreheads like the Hindu ⁴⁹⁷. Another favorite practice of Assamese women mentioned in the YT was the colouring of their teeth ⁴⁹⁸. The process of blackening their teeth is still in vogue among some of the women of the villages and women of some of the tribes.

Other articles of luxury used by the Assamese women were hand-fans made of different materials such as bamboo, cane and date palm tree, garlands, footwear made of wood (*Khadam*) and deer hide (*upanaha*) umbrellas, japis (sunhats) prepared from date-plam trees, combs made of elephant task, ivory, wood and bamboo called *Kakoi* (*Kankatika*) and also jeweled mirrors known as *manimaya-darpana* as referred to in the Bargaon grant of Ratnapala⁴⁹⁹. The garland called *Chaki* in the medieval period were made of different flowers but the garlands made of high-quality flowers such as *Juti*, *Malati*, etc. were not allowed to be worn by the common people ⁵⁰⁰. The grant of Vallabhdeva refers to sandals with leather straps and decorated with jewels⁵⁰¹. Umbrellas were made of woven cloth as stated in the KP⁵⁰². It is important to point out that *abhoga* umbrella were used by the rules of ancient Assam ⁵⁰³.

⁴⁹⁷ *Asam Bandhu*, ed. By G. Barua, Vol ii, No.1 & 2,p.8

⁴⁹⁸ *YT,Parti,chap IX v,15*

⁴⁹⁹ P.C. Choudhury. *The History of the civilization to the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.*pp.329,332

⁵⁰⁰ *Asam Bandhu*, Ibid, pp.5-6

⁵⁰¹ P.C. Choudhury. *The History of the civilization to the people of Assm to the twelfth century A.D.*p.329.

⁵⁰² B.K.Barua, *A cultural History of Assam*,p.139.

⁵⁰³ H.C. Cowell,pp.213-214.

During Ahom period japi was very common. The different types of japes were used by the different people according to the status and rank of person in the society⁵⁰⁴.

7.1.6: Food and Drink:

Regarding food and drink of ancient and medieval Assam, we get the reference from inscription and different literary sources such as YT, KP, Kumar-Harana. Etc. these literature give elaborated descriptions of different varieties of veg. non-veg. and sweet dishes prepared by Assamese woman. According to the traditional food habits of common Assamese people, they generally took food four times a day. The heavy food was taken during noon and night time and at morning and evening people use to take light food. But the poor people or peasant class took food only three times. Hunter says that an Assamese cultivator generally takes three meals a day⁵⁰⁵.

Fasting or food restrictions were observed during a period of penance, shraddha ceremony of forefathers or religious preceptors, on the occasion of amavasya, purnima, ekadasi, astami and sankranti and Ambubachi and other religions festivals. The Brahmin widows were restricted to eat non-vegetarian food and even certain kinds of vegetables and they used to keep fasting during the period of their menstruation and on the occasion of Ambubachi in the month of Asadha⁵⁰⁶. Dietary practice like other parts of India was not so rigid in the Assamese society. The food restriction was liberal even under Vaisnava Reformation⁵⁰⁷ Meat and fish comprised of common articles of diet. Even the

⁵⁰⁴ B.K. Barua, A. *Cultural History of Assam*, pp.139-140

⁵⁰⁵ W. Hunter, *statistical account of Assam*, pp.139-140

⁵⁰⁶ S. Rajguru, *Medieval Assamese society*, p.161

⁵⁰⁷ P.C. Choudhury *the history of the civilization of the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.* pp.326-327.

Brahmans were habituated to the eating of non-vegetarian foods with certain restrictions regarding the meat of a particular animal or fish. As given in the YT, serpent-shaped and scaleless fishes were not taken by the upper classes (matsyamsca salkahinamsca sarpakaramsca varjjayet)⁵⁰⁸. The same work advocated the eating of meats of ducks, pigeons, tortoise and pigs and one who gave up eating these was sure to suffer from distresses (hamsam paravatam bhaksyam kurman varahameva ca kamarupe parityagad durgatistasya sambhavet)⁵⁰⁹. Meats of goats, deer, rhinoceros, etc. were also taken⁵¹⁰. Kumar-Harana mentions about a dish prepared with pork meat and the soft roots of a plantain tree⁵¹¹.

Rice was the staple food of the Assamese people. Two types of rice were extracted from the paddy Ukhua Chaul and Arai chaul. Ukhua chaul was made by boiling and drying the paddy in the sun and then rice was separated by husking the paddy. Arai chaul was made from the paddy simply drying it before husking. The lower section of the people, who were engaged in the physical labor work consumed Ukhua chaul, whereas the Arai chaul was used mainly for the religious purpose and was also consumed by the upper class people. Many varieties of paddies were cultivated in those days. The YT mentions twenty varieties of paddies in connection with the worship of different deities⁵¹². Early Assamese literature described about hundred varieties of paddies such as

⁵⁰⁸ YT, 11/5/275

⁵⁰⁹ YT, 11/9

⁵¹⁰ P.C. Choudhury, *The History of the civilization of the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.* p.327

⁵¹¹ Kumara Harana, V-208

⁵¹² *Yastidhanyam rajadhanyamvrhaddonance somedhanyam sighnadhanyam vairaktasalikam ketaki kalavinkaca dhanyam narayanatatatha madhavanca pradipanca visnudhanyam ca vakkaaabham bhagyadhanyamasakabca nagaksan pancakabtarha, YT chap-II, 5, 289-91*

Kharika-jaha, manikimadhuri, jahinga, Malbhog, bagitara, cakowa, suwagmani, kapau Sali, ranga Sali, maguri Sali, etc.⁵¹³

Rice or rice flour mixed with milk and sugar or molasses was also used to by the woman folk of Assamese society to make any sweet dishes such as payasa⁵¹⁴ and pithas⁵¹⁵ YT mentions about milk of cows, goats and various preparation of curd, ghee and other sweets from buffalo's milk (Mahisam vajjajenmamsam ksiram dadhi ghrtam tatha)⁵¹⁶ KP also refers to various delicious preparations of sweet dishes from milk (ajyamannam payasrica dadhi ksiram tatha madhu)⁵¹⁷.

Not only sweet dishes, but also the Assamese woman used to prepare various delicious curries. The earlier literature make mentioned about twenty-five and fifty kind of special dishes (vyanjana) prepared with vegetables, pulses, fish, meat, etc. and made them appetizing by the use of variety of spices such as ardraka (ginger), jiraka (cumin), Pippaliyaka (long pepper), maricha (pepper), karpura (camphor), sarisa (mustard)⁵¹⁸. The vegetables mentioned in YT are muluka, rajaka, vastuka, palanga, nalika, sunka (cuka), Iapha, Canga (cangeri), dhekiya (a kind of fern), etc.⁵¹⁹, KP mentions masa, mudga, masura, marica, pippali, and jiraka along with annavyanjana⁵²⁰ Curries were prepared with

⁵¹³ B.K.Barua, *A cultural History of Assam*,p.94

⁵¹⁴ Madhava Kandoli, *Ramayana*,w,3291,4122

⁵¹⁵ Madhava Kandoli, *Ramayana*,w,3291,4122

⁵¹⁶ B.K. Barua, *A cultural History of Assam*,p.137

⁵¹⁷ *iavanabcaiva jirakam pippatiyakam YT,11/7,v186, Halidha marica hingaka diys.....Ada lona jani jira machara pabita, Kumara-Harana,v207*

⁵¹⁸ YT,2/9/247-250

⁵¹⁹ KP,chap,70

⁵²⁰ W.W.Hunter, *A statistical account of Assam* ,pp.370-371.

different kinds of pulses and bean also ⁵²¹. Sour curry preparations were made from various fruits such as cakala, thekera, tenteli, au (*dillenia indica*) ⁵²². To increase the taste of the meals, the Assamese women used to make various types of sauce and achar (pickle) from different fruits and vegetable. Therefore it is clear that Assamese women were expert in making different types of delicious dishes. They even prepared dishes from young banana plant as pacala and from green bamboo shoots known as kharica ⁵²³. Another items made by the women, which was the favorite food of the Assamese people, was acid curries and curries slightly seasoned with the alkali (Khar called in Assamese) made from plantain tree ⁵²⁴. The details and variety of dishes can be observed from the Kumara-Harana, which mentions description of different delicious foodstuff cooked by Chitralkha. “After performing the works of the marriage ceremony, Chitralkh. Made arrangements for food. Whatever Chitralkha cooked, cooked with particular care and dexterity. She cooked about fifty varieties of curry with the admixture of various sweet things. She prepared Paramanna and various cakes. She prepared a curry with magu-mah and mahur mixed together, where she gave salt, sugar molasses and ghee and spices, such as Ada, jani, jira and marich. Then she fried the meat of castrated goat giving spices. Another curry, known as Tala, was cooked with the meat of the pigeon. She prepared another variety of curry with the meat of tortoise there a variety of pulse called Barkala. Then she seasoned with asafetida the curry prepared with the root of the plantain tree and the meat of the boar . A variety of dish known as Ghanti with the head of the fish called Barali was prepared and then with the other portion of the fish, she prepared the curry giving the pulse called Machur. She cooked other varieties of curries, such as with the fish called kach vegetables

⁵²¹ B.K. Barua, *A culture History of Assam*, p.137

⁵²² Kumara Horana, v.208, B.K.Barua, *A cultural History of Assam*, p.137; S.Rohguru, *Medieval Society*, p.161.

⁵²³ *YT*, 11/9

⁵²⁴ *YT*, 11/9

called Bach and mustard seed; another the fish called Sol and the vegetables called Mula, another with the meat of bird and bringal and another with the fish called Ari and the green leaves called Palanga. The fishes called IIIih and Kandhuli were roasted on a spit. A curry was cooked with the green vegetables called Lapha by giving a kind of lime called Jamir anda king of citron called Solong. She prepared a soup of honey seasoned with ghee, which is pleasing for its highly fragrant smell, not to speak taking. She prepared soups by mixing sugar in the juice of the Badari fruits by mixing molasses with tarmarind fruits. Thus the cooker made ready about varieties of curries ⁵²⁵.

After meat or tiffin, Assamese women used to serve betel nuts and betel leaves (tambul-pan). Betel nuts and betel leaves play a significant part in the cultural life of the Assamese society. They were offered to the guests as an item of affectionate reception or honor and also used in religious ceremonies and marriages. The abundance of areca nut and betel vine in Assam is evidenced by both epigraphy and literature. The use of these, articles particularly by woman is given in the YT (nasukradarsanam strinam tambulasa sada bhavet)⁵²⁶. Sometimes betel nuts and betel leaves were made delicious by adding lime, tobacco, chhali (bark of a certain tree), chaph, lang, dalcheni, elachi, etc.⁸⁷². The Fathiyah-i-ibriyah states that Assamese chew pan in abundance with unripe supari even unshelled and the practices of chewing unripe betel nut with time is nowhere found in India except in Assam⁵²⁷.

Among the drinks, consumption of wine was in practices. Bana says that Bhaskarvarman sent Harsa “cups of ullaka, diffusing a fragrance of sweet wine” The consumption of one of the intoxicant thing, popularly known as Bhang or

⁵²⁵ P.C. Choudhury, *The History of the civilization of the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.* p.328

⁵²⁶ S. Rajguru, *Medieval Assamese society*, pp.168-169

⁵²⁷ P.C. Choudhury. *The History of the civilization of the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.* p.328.

Ghota in Assamese, was in practice in Assam from the remote past and was prepared by mixing the powdered hemp, sugar, powdered Lavanga, Darucini, Elachi and Dhutura-guti in milk. Men and woman consumed this drink especially on the eve of Siva Chaturdasi With great veneration. But after the initiation of Vaisnavism, the drinking of Wine or other intoxicants and even selling it were considered as sinful acts ⁸⁷⁶. The vaisnavite preceptors looked down the people as Candalas who were inured to the intoxicants⁸⁷⁶. Therefore it was prevalent among a section of the society. It was not common among Assamese Hindu people. Mostly the tribal people and some of the religious sects were accustomed to it. Some of the Goddesses were worshipped by wine along with other things. YT stress on worshipping the Goddess Kameswari with meant, wine and blood, i.e. sacrifice of animal. The people, who were adapted to drinking, used to make the liquor in their own indigenous process. The liquor made from rice and other herbs were known as 'laopani or mad'

7.1.7: Festival observed by woman:

The festivals, which, which were observed by Assamese Hindu woman, were the various religious festival and functions as Puja festival of Goddess Durga or Durgotsava, Kali puja, lakshmi puja, annapirna puja, saraswati puja, manasa puja, sitala puja, ambuvachi, Phalgutsava, resotsava, janmastami, ratha-yatra, Jnuian, Siva caturdasi, etc. on the different religious festivals, woman used to keep fasting or eat fruits or vegetarian food with some restrictions. The sakta and saiva puja functions were more or less dominated by Tantrik rites, which mainly consisted of japa (meditation), Homa (oblation) and Tarpana (libation)⁸⁷⁹. The followers of the Saiva and sakta cult showed their devotion by offering animal sacrifices in the names of the Gods or Goddesses. The KP and YT refer to and mention about a large number of animals. Which were considered suitable for sacrifice,

Both the literature also describes the detail procedure of performing the puja ceremony of god Siva and goddess parvati in the temples.

According to Vedic rites, the temples and the tanks, which are either constructed under the order of the Ahom kings or queens, were dedicated to the gods or goddesses. Mention may be made of Gauridagar tank made queen Phulswari and three temples erected on its bank that were dedicated Siva, Vishnu and Devi. Another tank was Sibasagar tank in the capital city at Rangpur, which was dedicated to THREE TEMPLES OF Siva, Vishnu, and Devi, erected on its bank by queen Draupadi, another queen of king Siva Singha. Both the queens mentioned above were devoted to Sakta but they made of Siva and Vishnu along with the Devi.

The religious functions of the Sakta were full of rituals and ceremonials and the Saktaites prayed for health, beauty and wealth etc ⁵²⁸. On the other hand the Vaisnava functions were very simple and affordable for the common people towards god Vishnu and detachment from worldly objects were the main teaching of the Vaisnava cult. Therefore the religious functions of the Vaisnavas were observed without any ostentation. One of the common festivals observed by the Assamese people of all religious, castes and creed was Bihu. The Bihu festival has a special significance in the mind of Assamese people and had been celebrated from the remote past. This festival is still observed with enthusiasm and hilarity. Bihu has close relation with the agriculture. As Assamese people in ancient medieval period were mainly depended upon agriculture, therefore they performed some customs and rites for the happy growth of crops in the field. There are connected with agriculture

⁵²⁸ Dr. B.K. Barua, *Asamar Loka Sanskriti*, pp.179

works. They are also connected with the changing of the seasons. The three Bihu festivals are the Bahag-Bihu, the kati-bihu and the magh-bihu. Before sowing the seeds in the field in the month of Baisakh, the people used to celebrate and this Bihu was named of the month of Chait (Chaitra) and Bahag (baisakha) and continues uninterrupted at least for seven days. This bihu festival is also called as chait bihu or rongali bihu and the new year of the Assamese calendar also begins from this Sankranti. The different community of the people followed different customs rites and rituals. Woman makes varieties of palatable dishes and invites the guests and other kith and kin to celebrate this festival. The Bihu songs and dance performed mainly by the young boys and girls is the integral part of the Bihu festivals. After Bahag Bihu, the kati Bihu is celebrated on the sankranti day of the months of Ahin (asvina) and kati (karttika). This festival is celebrated mainly after the farmers have sown the seeds and for the growth of the crops without any natural calamities. On this day every Hindu Assamese woman worships the Tulsi plant by offering a lamp and Mah-prasad consisting of pulses. Uncooked rice and fruits including banana. Lamps are lighted in front of the granary and in the paddy field. There is a tradition in few places in Kamarupa to chant the holy names of lord Jagannatha in front of a banana tree planted at the gate for the happy growth of crops by the young girls, not attaining puberty⁵²⁹. The third *Bihu festival* celebrated by the Assamese people is *Mah-Bihu* commencing on the *Sankranti* day of the months of *Pub(Pausa)* and *Magh*. This festival is celebrated after harvesting, after offering the various dishes prepared from the new harvest to the fire called *Meji* in Assamese, the people enjoy taking the,. This festival continues for three to four days.

⁵²⁹ S. Rajguru, *Medieval Assamese Society*, p.438

Among other festivals observed was the Lakhimi Sabah, the *Mahoho*, the *Bhatheli* can be mentioned ⁵³⁰. Ahom women performed the *Lakhimi Sabah* festival in the month of *Ahin* (*Asvina*), where they chant the holy names of Goddess Laksmi and offered *Mah-Prasad* to her. Mahoho festival was observed in lower Assam, where young boys and girls used to go from house to house to drive away mosquitoes by singing songs. The *Bhathli* festival was also observed in lower Assam in the month of *Bahag*, where different sizes of bamboos were decorated as bride and groom and people round these bamboos.

Other than these religious festivals, the birth and death anniversaries of the religious preceptor's viz Sankardeva, Madhadeva, Damodardeva etc. were observed extensively as major festivals from the medieval period after the Vaisnava Reformation. Some of the ceremonies and rites and rituals in the individual's families were performed almost like big festivals such as marriage ceremony, Upanayana ceremony and Shraddha ceremony of dead person etc.

If we assess the religious and cultural contribution of Assamese women in ancient and medieval period, we find that in spite of their valuable contribution in the fields of religion and culture, women were not provided much respect by their counterparts in the male dominated society. We find that in the *Vedic* period, women reached the highest point in respect of religion and education and achieved the status, which was not inferior to men. But later on, their rights of *Upanayana Sanskara* and *offering of Ahnihotra*, were snatched away by the male chauvinists and they were demoted to the status of *Sudras* ⁵³¹.

⁵³⁰ S. Rajguru, *Medieval Assamese Society*, pp. 440-441

⁵³¹ Altekar. *The position of women in ancient Hindu Civilization*, p. 204

Even Sankardeva who was in favour of women's religious independence and education, considered women as impediment in the path of devotion and liberation. The reference in the Haramohan chapter of *Kirtana* and KGC concludes that Vaisnavas looked down upon women as evils who could even create illusion and tempt the mind of great sages and therefore the wise people should be aware of their lust and thus avoid their company⁵³². The Neo Vaisnavita went one step further by considering women as impure and banned their entrance into the *Namghars* of some of the *Satras* such as Barpeta and Bardowa Satra⁵³³.

But in spite of all these pessimistic attitude of the society, we find that women from the very beginning of the civilization were more religious minded in comparison to their male counterparts and participated in the religious and cultural affairs of society with full enthusiasm and devotion. The religious contribution of women was even accepted by men also and that is why they were given the opportunity to act as religious heads of different sects and they played their role very successfully.

7.2: Cultural Status of Tribal Women

7.2.1: Festivals:

The main festivals of tribal people aim at fertility corresponding to the different agricultural seasons. The festivals among all the tribes are similar to each other and rest upon a common background of beliefs. Men and women together participate in the festivals. Besides the main festivals. Besides the main festival of three *Bihu*, some of the main festivals of the Mishings of Assam are *Poorag Ali-ai-ligang Taleng Uyu* (festivals concerned with agriculture), *Dabur Ashi Uya*, *Yunrang Uyu* (Pujas for the deceased)

⁵³² Sankardeva, *Kriti Kirta*, p.101-4, KGC, p.221, *Kirtana-Haramohan* chapter

⁵³³ S.N. Sarma, *The Neo-Vaisnavite movement & the Satra institution in Assam*, p.268f

and *Dodgang, Urom, Apin (pujas for ancestors)*⁵³⁴. The most important festival of the Ilong is *Boliag-pisu*, celebrated in the month of April. Before it commences, the women weave new wrappers and stoles. These are presented to their husband, children and near kins of the occasion. The most important festivals of the Dirness tribe is *Basu* the annual harvest festival. There is no fixed date in the Dimasaland for the observance of *basu*. It is observed sometimes between November and March of the following year, depending all the harvest seasons of the particular locality⁵³⁵.

The different tribes of Nagas celebrate the festivals similar to each other that are connected with agricultural activities⁵³⁶. The main festival of Angami Nagas are *Tseikranyi* (seed sowing festival celebrated in February) *Ngonyi* (close of the seed sowing celebrated in April), *Kdrumyi* (transplanting of paddy seedlings during May), *Tanyi* (celebrated in July, or August). *Theyuukimpfu* (children's festival during August), *Chandanyi* (path clearing festival during July), *Thekenyi* (opening of the harvest) *Liekhweny* (reaping of paddy), *Vate or Tekeva Kede* (preservation of grains), *Terhunyi* after the harvest is over in December) and *Sekrenyi* (in February). The main festivals of (Chakhesang Nagas are *Khilunyii* (harvest festival during last week of November). *Therine* (paddy husking) and *Sokrinii* (biggest festival closes during the beginning of the new year). The main festivals of Rengma Nagas are *Ngadah* (harvest festival celebrated in the last week of November) and *Tsichyi* (tilling of the soil at the jhun field in March). The Zeliangrong Naga's main festival is *Mewlengi* (paddy husking celebration) and the Pochuri or Sangtan Naga's main festivals are *Nitsokhu* (burning of Jhums in April), *Nizakhu* (supplications are held to the deities in the May), *Rasa* (ceremonial are held to the deities in the May), *Rasa* (ceremonial plucking of the young crops), *Tsatekhu* (harvest rite in August).

⁵³⁴ Jatin Mipun. *The Mishings of Assam*, pp.25-28

⁵³⁵ Dipali G. Danda, *Among the Dimasaland of Assam*, pp.115-117

⁵³⁶ *Gazette, of India Nagaland*, ed. Dr. H. Barch, pp.68-67.

Khuthei (in November), *Kate* (close of the harvest season in November and December), *Alakakhu* (chasing away the epidemic), *Vikhukephru* (a Hunting ceremony), *Khuthe* (celebration of house thatching in January) and *Nazhu* (end day of the year). Ao Nagas observe mainly *Moatsu* (after sowing) and *Tsungrem Mong* (even of harvest in August). The main festival of Letha Nagas is *Takhu Emong* celebrated in first week of November. The festivals celebrated by the Mizos are *{awl Kui, Chapchar Kut and Mim Kut* ⁵³⁷. Pawl kut is celebrated at the end of the harvest when the year ends and new year begins. *Chapchar Kut* is celebrated before the *Jhums* are burnt. *Mim Kut* is performed when the first crop. Other than paddy in the field is reaped and such crop is offered to the manes.

The festivals of Arunachal are connected with agriculture and celebrated with ritualistic gaiety, either to thank God for the providence or to pray for bumper harvest. Some of the important festivals are *Mopin* and *Isolung of the Adis*, *Lessor (new festival)*, *Chaiskar* (celebrated after harvest in the month of September-October) and *Dungyru* of Monpas and Sherdukpens, *Boori Boot* of Hill Miris, *Dree* of Apatanmis, *St-Donyi* of Tagnis, *Nyokum Yallo* (celebrated in February at the advent of new agriculture season) of Nishis, *Rehof Idu* Mishimis. The main festivals of Manipuris are connected with Vaishnavism such as *Doliyatra*, *Rathiyatra*, *Jhulan*, *Janmashtami*, *Durga Puja*, *Diwali*, *Govardhan Puja*, *Ras Purnima* etc.⁵³⁸. Besides, the Meithei tribes celebrate *Chairaoba* (new year festival) in April. The principal festival of Darlong tribe of Tripura is four annual community festivals called *Kut*, which make four different stages of their agricultural processes ⁵³⁹. These are *Ramzu* in or *Chapchar Kut*, which is celebrated after cutting and burning their *Jhum* towards the end of January and beginning of February, *Kangdai Kut* is observed during *jhum* burning in April.

⁵³⁷ L.B. Thanga, *The Mizos*, pp.31-33

⁵³⁸ Sipra Sen, *The Tribes and Castes of Manipur*, p.33

⁵³⁹ Lethuama Darlong, *The Dorlongs of Tripura*, pp.169-171.

Tnluntawi Kut is observed in remembrance of their loved ones who have left the world. *Tharlak or Mini Kut* is observed during the harvest of maize crop after the completion of weeding work in the fields in July and observed in honour and remembrance of the dead and the gods.

7.2.2: Folksongs and Folk dances:

The folk songs and folk dances are the main features of the tribal cultural. All the tribes have their own songs and dances. The folksongs of the Mishings are of eight varieties⁵⁴⁰. They are *A:bengKaban*, *Bi:rik*, *Lupo*, *Midung Nitom* and *Oi-nitam*, *Moman nitom* and *Mo-ninam*. The pure form of Mishing dance is called *Pagso monam*, which is seen only in the festivals like *Ali-ai-ligang* and *Po:rag*⁵⁴¹. Along with expression of musical instruments like *dhol*, *tal pepa*, *dendum*, *tapungs*, the girls express the different stages of nature through their movements. Among the Dimasa tribes, dances are performed during the *busu* festival. The different kinds of *busu* dances are *Madaikhilimba*, *Jaobam*, *Namalaiba*, *Beimuig* along with the war dances⁵⁴². The Garo folk dances in which the women take parts are called *dokru sua*, *amber-rurua*, *kil-pua*, *doregata*, etc.⁵⁴³. The folk dances of Ao Nagas are *tsungsang*, *angokazu* or *anga malu* (fish dance), *Moye yari* (sema dance), *Miri* or *Mechungr tsungsanf* and *yita kazu* or *lata malu* (moon dance)⁵⁴⁴. The Mizos also have their traditional dances. Their most popular dance is the Cheraw (bamboo dance), where twelve girls to participate. There are other dances also, such

⁵⁴⁰ Jatin Mipun, *The Mishings of Assam*, pp.28-29.

⁵⁴¹ Jatin Mipun, *The Mishings of Assam*, p.29

⁵⁴² Dipali G. Dondo, *Among the Dimasa of Assam*, pp.118-120

⁵⁴³ P.C. Kar, *The Garas*, pp.55-56

⁵⁴⁴ J.P. Mills, *The Ao Nagas* (2nd edition), pp.158-159.

as *Chheih l am, Challam, Rallu iaim Solakia, Sarlmkai Pariam and Pawnto*⁵⁴⁵. The Garos have various kinds of folk dances martial and other dances, which are performed during ceremonies like *Gana* or investiture of a *Noknia A' sung Kosi* or annual worship at the site of the sacrificial stones, agriculture, *mangona* or during the post-funereal, etc. Other kinds of dances also are performed during the *Nokdongga* or the inauguration of a new housew, *Nakpante Nokdongga* or the inauguration of a bachelor's of a new houses, *Nokpante Nokdongga* or the inauguration of a bachelor's houses etc.⁵⁴⁶. The dances performed during the Wangala and other festivals are the Do'kru, Sua dances, the *Ambare-ruara* or Shaking *Hog phum* dance, the *Kil pua* or Planting of cotton dance, *Chambil Moa* of the Pumelo dance⁵⁴⁷. The funeral ceremonies consist of a great number of dances like *Matchu-Rodila* or tending the cows. *Delang-Soa* or dancing with the bones of the dead etc.⁵⁴⁸. Besides there are many other dances also among the Garos for different ceremonies and also for their own recreation, such as Gaewang roa. *Do'me gonga, Sipai roa, Nonill Kambe toa, Jik seka Chame mikkang ma, Anibrelong Kola, Chambil Moa, Me'mang mi su 'a Doma Jonga, Salam Ka'a Nomil nipila, Chamo, Changa, Buda ratela, Chu Kanna, Jik sekako tim 'a. Nomil Donnua, Chawari, Nomil do'me sua, Noniiljajong nidoa*⁵⁴⁹.

Different tribes of Arunachal vary from each other. During the *Dungyur* festival, the women and men of Monpa tribe perform various dances such as Jam-Cham, Grei-Chham, Lo, Chham, Ja Pho Mo, Khimdak-Peki, Geychiri-Namsekoe, Damchin-chhoiga, Ara-Khankyo, Ngan-Chham or Kya-chham, Durdak or

⁵⁴⁵ *People of India Mizoram* cdt.K.s.Singh, pp.21-11

⁵⁴⁶ D.S Rougmuthu, *Folktales of the Goros*, p.299 cited in Milton S. Sangma, *History and Culture of the Garos*, p.163.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ployfair, The Garas*, p.SS

⁵⁴⁸ Mitton S. Sangma, *History and culture of the Garas*, p.166

⁵⁴⁹ Mitton S. Sangma *History and culture of the Garas*, pp.167.

Dudodam, Lham Tsokor, Locker-chhungi, Gelong-Chham, Chham-Chin⁵⁵⁰. The Noces and Wanchus perform religious dances dramas of the Buddhists. The Adis have varieties of songs as *ponung*, *Delong*, *bari nitom*, *mopin-songs* and dances such as *popir tegnu*, *nyida-nunam*, *jajin*, etc.⁵⁵¹.

The dances or Manipur are very popular in the rest of India Manipur dances are divided into two categories, classical and folk⁵⁵². *Rasa Nritya* falls into title classical group. Of the folk dances, mention may be made of *Thabalchongba*, *Laiharaoba*, *Khamba Thoibi*, *Kortal Cholom*, *Mridanga*, *Cholomn Naga dance*, etc.

Song and dance are very important parts of the culture of Tripura. The Rianga have various types or songs for different occasions. Their songs were classified by Dr. Chaudhuri in five categories. They are Love songs, work songs, ritual songs, political songs and song describing natural phenomena⁵⁵³. The different tribes have their own dances performed during ceremonies and festivals. The *Garia dance* is very much popular among the Tripuris, Balance-dance by the Riangs and the Chakmas are popular. The *Lebang Boomani group dance* is also enjoy by everyone. *Dailo Mairang Phawrmaw* is the popular dance of the Reangs⁵⁵⁴. *Parkam*, *Cham I am*, *Fahrel inkan*, *Riki Fachawi*, *Pualvachang hem*. *Sate tual infai*, *Arte tual phit*, *Vathu indi*, *Khullam or Thlangrawfe I am*, *Salu I am* and *Silai Iam* are the dances of Drlongs .⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵⁰ T. Lama, Dungyru, A. *Religious festival of towang Monpo in Aspects of culture and customs of Arunachal Pradesh*, cdt. Dr. P.C. Dutta & Dr. D.K. Duarah, pp.165-170

⁵⁵¹ Dr. Tol Nypori, *History and culture of The Adis*, p.253

⁵⁵² Jyotirmoy Roy, *History of Monipur*, pp.208-211

⁵⁵³ Dr. Jagdish Gon Choudhuri, *The Riongs of Tripura*, p.61

⁵⁵⁴ Sipra Sen, *Tribes of Tripura*, p.21

⁵⁵⁵ Letthuama Darlong. *The Dar'ongs of Tripura*, pp.171-177.

7.2.3: Food and drinks:

As regards food, the main and staple food is rice among all the tribes. The Garos and the Khasis also eat millet, maize, job's tears and Tapioca. During scarcity, they eat jungle yams and some other jungle roots⁵⁵⁶. The Nagas in the time of scarcity subsist all millet, maize and taro (*kachu*)⁵⁵⁷. Though Rice is the staple food of the Adi tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, but due to the less production of rice in the northern region, the Bodos, Bhamos, Aomos and others eat more food of maize, job's tears and millet. The Garos, the Khasis, the Nagas eat meat of almost all the wild and domestic animals. The Garos even take non-poisonous snakes and lizards, etc.⁵⁵⁸. The Khasis eat field rats and a kind of monkey. The Naga people eat the meat of *mithun*, elephant, tiger, bear, dog, snake, field mouse, cat and vulture⁵⁵⁹. Some of the tribes observe some food taboos. The Khasis abstain from the flesh of the dog. Some of the Synteng Khasis do not take pork and beef due to the influence of Hinduism⁵⁶⁰. The Hill Lalungs and Kacharis avoid beef or buffalo meat. They use to take the meat of pork and chicken. One of the delicate foods of Lalungs, Kacharis and Garos is dried fish, which is called *Na kam* by the latter.

The *Jhum* fields and the forests provide the tribes with a number of vegetables and roots for their curry. Bamboo shoots are esteemed as a delicacy and are eaten as a vegetable or used after special preparation. The tribal people in earlier days did not use oil or ghee to cook the curries or meat or fish. They preferred to take the boiled or roasted food. The Garos used a kind of potash to cook their curries, which is obtained by burning dry pieces of plaintain stems or young bamboos and the ashes of bamboos are dipped in

⁵⁵⁶ Milton S. Sangma, *History and Culture of the Garos*, p.150

⁵⁵⁷ M.M. Dhasmana, *The Bhamos of Arunachal*, p.81

⁵⁵⁸ Milton S. Sangma, *History and Culture of the Garos*, p.157

⁵⁵⁹ B.S. Ghosh, *History of Nagaland*, p.204

⁵⁶⁰ P.P.T. Gurdor, *The Khasis*, p.51

water. This water is called *Katchi* and takes the place of oil⁵⁶¹. The Nagas are very fond of chillies or the fruits, the tribal people produce best kind of banana, pineapples, watermelons, cucumbers, oranges and pumelos. Betel nuts and leaves are common articles among them which they generally offer to any visitor as a kind of hospitality.

The Naga and Mizo women also smoke tobacco and *Bris*. Many of the old men and women are addicted to smoking *Hooka*. In fact, a pipe is must for every man and woman among the Mizos and the pipe used by woman is known as *tuibur*⁵⁶². Even small Mizo children smoke freely in the presence of the elders including their parents. They avoid taking or tea. All the tribes are habituated to consume rice beer, which is known by different names among the different tribes. The Mikirs call it 'Hor', the Khasis call it *ka jad hiar* and *ka iad um*, the Nagas call it *Zutho*, *Ruhi* and *Dzutse*, the Manipur call it *aqs Ju*. This drink is made by boiling rice. It takes at least two to three months for making it ready for consumption.

7.2.4: Dress and Ornaments:

The dress and ornaments of the different tribes and sub-tribes were different from each other. The dresses of hill Lqatungs and Jaintias are similar because of the long association of the hill Latungs with the Jaintias in the past⁵⁶³. The common dress of a Lalung woman is colorful skirt with a border of flowery design. The upper garment is called *phaksai*. In the cold season Lalung women wear thick wrappers. The Mikir women put on a petticoat

⁵⁶¹ Milion S. Sangma, *History and culture of the Garas*, p.157

⁵⁶² Lt. Colonel J. Shakespeare, *The Lushei-kuki clans*, p.11

⁵⁶³ Birendra Kumar Gohain, *The Hill Latungs*, p.24.

known as *peni*, which is fastened round the waist with an ornamental or old silver coins called *vankok*. Another cloth known as *pekok* is used the upper part of the body. This cloth is tied under the arms and drawn tight over the breasts. The hair is combed straight and tied in a knot called *chubi* on the head⁵⁶⁴.

The dress of the Garo woman consists of a piece of cloth eighteen inches long and just broad enough to meet round her waist in the form of a petticoat, which is fastened at the top, on either the right or the left side by two strings of the same material as the garment, which allow it to remain open on the thigh. This garment is known as *riking*⁵⁶⁵. On their shoulders, the woman wears a shawl of blue and white cotton. During dancing and festive occasions, the Garo woman wears a dress named *marang-jasku*, which is worn draped round the body, passing under the right arm and tied in a knot on the left shoulder. It is long as the knees and is open at the left side⁵⁶⁶.

About the dress of the Khasi women in the earlier days. H. Barch writes⁵⁶⁷, the Khasi women wore *ka jainpien*, a single garment girded at the waist, looping downward to the knee which was a cloth of the Jaintias in the past. The common dress of a Jaintia woman is a colourful skirt with a border or flowery design. The upper garment is called *phaksai*. In the cold season Jaintia women wear thick wrappers. The Mikir women put on petticoat known as *peni*, which is fastened round the waist with an ornamental girdle of old silver coins called *vankok*. Another cloth known as *pekok* is used the upper part body. This cloth is tied under the arms and drawn tight over the breasts. The hair is combed straight and tied in a knot called *chubi* on the head.

⁵⁶⁴S.T. Das, *Tribal life of Northeastern India*, pp. 228-229.

⁵⁶⁵P.C. Kar, *The Garos*, p.25.

⁵⁶⁶P.C. Kar, *The Garos*, p.26.

⁵⁶⁷H. Barch, *The History and culture of the Khasi people (3rd edition)*, pp. 312-314.

The dress of the Garo woman consists of a piece of cloth eighteen inches long and just broad enough to meet round her waist in the form of a petticoat, which is fastened at the top, on either the right or the left side by two strings of the same material as the garment, which allow it to remain open on the thigh. This garment is known as riking. On their shoulders, the woman wears a shawl of blue and white cotton. During dancing and festive occasions, the Garo woman wears a dress named marang-jasku, which is worn draped round the body, passing under the right arm and tied in a knot on the left shoulder. It is long as the knees and is open at the left side⁵⁶⁸.

About the dress of the Khasi women in the earlier days, H.Bareh writes ⁵⁶⁹, the Khasi women wore ka jainpien, a single garment girded at the waist, looping downward to the knee which was a cloth of the Jaintias in the past ⁵⁷⁰. The common dress of lalung woman is colourful skirt with a border of flowery design. The upper garment is called phakasi. In the cold season lalung women wear thick wrappers. The Mikir women put on a petticoat known as peni, which is fastened round the waist with an ornamental girdle of old silver coins called vankok. Another cloth known as pekok is used the upper part of the body. This cloth is tied under the arms and drawn light over till the breasts. The hair is combed straight and tied in a knot called chubi on the head ⁵⁷¹.

The dress of the Garo woman consists of a piece of cloth eighteen inches long and just broad enough to meet around her waist in the form of a petticoat, which is fastened at the one side either the right or the left side by two strings of the same garment, which allow it to remain open on the thigh.

⁵⁶⁸ P.C. Kar, *The Garos*, p. 26.

⁵⁶⁹ H.Bareh, *The History and culture of they people (3rd edition)* pp.312-314.

⁵⁷⁰ Birendra Kumar Gohain. *The Hill Lalungs*, p. 24.

⁵⁷¹ G.T. Das, *Tribal life of North eastern India*. Pp.228-229.

This Garment is known as *riking*. On their shoulders, the women wear a shawl of white cotton. During dancing and festive occasions, a dress named *marang-jasku*, which is worn draped round passing under the right arm and tied in a knot on the left side it is long as the knees and is open at the left side⁵⁷². About the dress, Khasi women earlier dress. H. Barel writes, the Khasi women wear *ka*⁵⁷³, a single garment girded at the waist, looping downward was a cloth of *spur* (cotton) or *khyrwang* (*cndi*) variety and no stitching was necessary for this dress. Another cloth called *ka kyishal* (upron); a kind of sheet with coloured (*khyrwang*) of plain (*Iryndia*) type made of *endi* threads was worn over it, which was suspended from the shoulder. For outdoor use, a long piece of cloth known as *Jainsein*, made of *muga* silk was worn by women with its upper ends fastened on both sides of the collar bone crossing one another at the breast portion and stretching down as far as the knee, covering the whole body, but leaving bare the arms. The Pnars used the *Jaintoh khyrwang* in place *jainesm*. There are minor variations in the way of the Synteng wearing or *Jainesm* as one end is tied over one side of the collar bone while another end is fastened below the left arm pit. In addition to the above, women used the *tepmoh* (head and neck cover). Over the whole body, another cloak (*jainkup*) was draped around the body, its two ends were fastened at the chest and it covered the body shoulder to knee, *Jainkup* was not used by the Pnar women. *Salu ion* or *Desu* a kind of black skirt girded at the waist and reaching the ankles were commonly used by the Pnar women in the interior with a *kyrshah sem*, draped over it from the shoulder. During dancing, virgin girls put on treasured costumes, their *jainsem* called *kyrslih dhara* was laid over a grey *mukmur* garment of velvet, of which the part covering the arms was more visible and underneath the *jainsem*, a skirt, *ka jainpien* hung down towards the feet.

⁵⁷²P.C. Kar, *The Garos*, p 26

⁵⁷³H. Carch, *The History and cultural the Khasi people* pp.312-314

Nagas are known for paucity of their wear. Thee Naga women's principal dress is skirt, which is a sheet of cloth that is rolled along the waist, which loops down to cover the legs. A bodice covers *spur* (cotton) or *khyrewang* (endi) variety and no stitching necessary for this dress. Another cloth called *ka kyrsliah* (apron); a kind of sheet with coloured (*khyrwang*) or plain (*ryndia*) type made of endi threads was worn over it, which was suspended from the shoulder. For outdoor use, a long piece of cloth known as *Jainsem*, made of *muga* silk was worn by women with its upper ends fastened on both sides of the collar bone crossing one another at the breast portion and stretching down as far as the knee, covering the whole body, but leaving bare the arms. The Pnars used the *jaintoh khyrwang* in place of *jaunesm*. There are minor variations in the way of the Synteng wearing of *Jainesm* as one end is tied over one side of the collar bone while another end is extended below the left arm pit. In addition to the above, women used by them covered the shoulder to me.

An apron is worn by fastening either on both sides or the collarbone or one end is fastened along one side and the other is suspended below an armpit. Women girdle a shawl by suspending it from one of the shoulders. The Zeliangrong skirt is blue or white but during dancing they wear a ceremonial custom of multifarious colours ⁵⁷⁴.

⁵⁷⁴*Gazetteer of India*; Nagaland, ed. H. Barch, p.85.

The Mizo women in earlier days used to wear the only apparel, which was a kind of skirt called. *siasuap*, a small piece of cloth, woven from the reeds or bark of trees and more than one piece would be worn together, tied round the waist reaching only above the knee⁵⁷⁵. Later on dowlrem kawr and *kawppui zikzial*, a piee a lack colour cloth of greater breadth and length with embroidery using when thread was added to the women's attire. *Zikzial* was a dress of honour, and any Mizo mother would be proud to bequeath it to her daughter⁵⁷⁶.

The dresses of the women of different community the of Arunachal Pradesh vary from each other in pattern, design. The Singphos make their dresses themselves. The dresses of the Arunachal women consists or *Pukang* (skirt) or various colours and designs, a beautiful designed scarf, a waistband, and a turban⁵⁷⁸. The Adi women wear two items namely *Omekedung* and *japang*. *Omekedung* is a small coat-like garment made of wool, which is beautifully designed by red and blue woolen stripes. These coats cover the body from neck to waist and are half sleeved and open in the front. *Japong* is a wrapping cloth woven in the home. Formerly it was made of wool. It covers the lower part of the body from waist to knees of may come down a little lower. The Sherdukpen women⁵⁷⁹ dress themselves in loose, collarless and sleeveless shirts.

⁵⁷⁵L.B. Thanga, *The Mizos*, p. 15.

⁵⁷⁶L.B. Thanga, *The Mizos*, p. 16.

⁵⁷⁷Lt. Colonel J. Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki clane*, p.11

⁵⁷⁹R.R.P. Sharma, *The Sherdukpens*, p.19.

The Manipuri woman's traditional dress is *choli*, which is used to cover the upper portion of the body and a skirt type garment called *Janek*, which is wrapped around waist up to the ankles⁵⁸². Dress of mate or *Pukans* (skirt) or various colours and designs, a beautiful seurf, a waistband, and turban. The Adi women wear two items namely *Omekedung* and *Japing*. *Omekedung* is a small coat-like garment made of wool, which is beautifully designed by red and blue woolen stripes. These coats cover the body from to waist and are half sleeved and open in the front. *Japong* is a wrapping cloth woven in the home, Formerly it was of wool. It covers the part of the body from waist to knees or may come down a little lower. The Sherdukpen women, dress themselves in loose, collarless and sleeveless shirts, which cover the body from shoulders to knees. Over it, they sometimes wear small full-sleeved coats made of mill-cloth. round their known as *mukhak*. They also wear round their neck a white cloth about 20 inches long and 12 inches wide.

⁵⁸⁰Parul Dutta, *The Noctes*, -p.60

⁵⁸¹Raghuvir Sinha, *The Akas*, p.27.

⁵⁸²Chander Shekhar Panchani, *Manipur : Religion, Culture and Society*. p. 44

Its upper end is tied below the knee with thread of various type of drings and lower end hangs loose up to the ankle. The Nocte women general dress wear hanging from wrest is a skirt hanging from waist to the knee. Cover the upper body cloth or about two yards in length is worn as a shawl to cover them.

7.3: Cultural Status of Muslim Women

In the cultural field of Women Islam has restricted the right, still it is permitted to sing and dance in Islam, but these activities are allowed only in a gathering of the women where no male audience will be present. Hence during the mediavel period we have foiund very limited evidances of cultural participation Muslim women as well.

7.3.1: A Woman in Islam Has the Right to Get Education

In the words of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) : “To seek knoledge is obligatory on every Muslim.” (Declared Authentic By Shaikh Muhammad Naasir-ud-Deen Al-Albaani), Muslim here means male and female Muslims, as women are the twin halves of men. The Prophet (SAW) also said:

“Whoever follows a way to seek knowledge, Allah will make easy for him a way to paradise.” (Declared Authentic By Shalkh Muhammad Nassir-ud-Deen Al-Albaani).

A woman in Islam has the right to knowledge and edication. Allah (SWT) encourages women to read and keep up the learning process. He also bestows His mercy upon all who seek knowledge, and gives them high status:

“Is one who is obedient to Allah, prostrating of standing (in prayer) during the hours of the night, fearing the Hereafter and hoping for the Mercy of his Lord (like one who disbelieves)? Say : “Are those who know equal to those who know not?” It is only men of understanding who will remember (i.e. get a lesson from Allah’s Signs and Verses). (Az-Zumar 39:9)

“O you who believe! When you are told to make room in the assemblies, (spread out and) make room. Allah will give you (ample His Mercy). And when you are told to rise up (for prayers, Jihad, or for any other good deed), rise up. Allah will exalt in degree those of you who believe and those who have been granted knowledge. And Allah is well-Acquainted with what you do⁵⁸³. This is referring to religious knowledge. In the first place, and to any other kind of knowledge, in the second place, where one has the intention of benefiting herself, her family and the Islamic society, a husband should not forbid his wife from going out of the house to seek basic religious knowledge, unless he is teaching her at home. The Quran advises mankind to pray:

“Then High above all be Allah, the True King. And be not in haste [O Muhammad (SAW) with the Quran before its revelation is completed to you, and say: My Lord! Increase me in knowledge⁵⁸⁴.

But in medieval Assam Muslim women received rare opportunity to acquire education. Now the situation is being changed and Muslim women have started going to Schools and College for religious, formal and higher education as well.

7.3.2: Dress code of the Muslims

Hijab is the Quranic requirement that Muslims, both male and female, dress and behave modestly. The most important Quranic verse relating to *hijab* is *sura* 24:31, which says, “And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their private parts and not to display their adornment except that which ordinarily appears thereof and to draw their

⁵⁸³(*Al-Mujadilah* 58:11)

⁵⁸⁴(*Ta-Ha* 20:114)

headcovers over their chests and not to display their adornment except to their [maharim]...”

There are regional and sectarian variations of the veil associated with *hijab*. Depending upon local views regarding female modesty, they may or may not cover the face or the eyes, or the entire body. These variations include:

- Hajib - A scarf covering the hair.
- Chador - A cloak covering the head and body, but leaving the face uncovered; worn by many women in Iran when outside the home.
- Shayla - A long rectangular scarf, pinned or tucked at the shoulder, leaving the face uncovered; worn by many women in the Persian Gulf region.
- Khimar - A long rectangular scarf, covering the head, neck and shoulders, but leaving the face uncovered.
- Burka - Covers the entire head and body, including the eyes; the wearer sees through a cloth mesh eye veil sewn into the burka.
- Al-Amira - A two-piece veil that includes a close-fitting cap and a tubeshaped scarf covering the head neck, but leaving the face uncovered.
- Niqab - A Veil that leaves the eye clear (although it may be worn with an eye veil), and worn with a headscarf.⁵⁸⁵

The *hijab*, and the veil in particular, have often been viewed by many as a sign of oppression of Muslim women⁵⁸⁶. The wearing of the *hijab* has become controversial in countries in countries where Muslims are a minority, and where majority secular opinions regard the *hijab* as violating women's freedom, especially in Europe a mid

⁵⁸⁵ Women inn face veils detained as France enforces

ban. <http://www.bbc.co.uk>.<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-13031397>. Retrieved September 3, 2011.

⁵⁸⁶Mc Goldrick, Dominic. *Human Rights and Religion: The Islamic Headscarf Debate in Europe*. Hart publishing (2006), p13. ISBN 1-84113-652-2.

increasing immigration of Muslims⁵⁸⁷. The 2006 United Kingdom debate over veils and the 2004 French law on secularity and conspicuous religious symbols in schools are two notable examples. However, it is argued that if it acceptable for a Christian Nun to cover her head and body for religious reasons, then why is it not for a Muslim woman⁵⁸⁸? In France, the law banning the wearing of a face veil in public is being enforced. Sentencing includes a 150 euro fine and a citizenship course. Two women were detained in April 2011 when the law came into force.

In some countries where Muslims are a minority, there is much less public opposition to the practise, although concerns about it are discussed. Canadian media, for example, have covered controversies where concerns have been raised over the veil being a possible security risk, as in cases where Muslim women have refused to remove their *niqab* or *burka* veil for voter identification at polls. In 2007, the federal government of Canada a bill to ban face coverings for voter identification, but this bill was dropped as not required:

It was pointed out that thousands of Canadians have no photo ID. Requiring them to show their faces would be meaningless without photo identification against which to verify their identities. The Elections Act gives voters three ways to prove their identification in order to cast a ballot: provide a government photo ID, provide two pieces of approved ID, at least one of which must state their address (but neither of which must contain a photo); a have another voter registered in the same district vouch for them⁵⁸⁹.

⁵⁸⁷ Alam, Fareena. "Beyond the Veil." [dead link] *Newsweek* (November 26, 2006).

⁵⁸⁸ "No Such Custom" : *An Exposition of I Corinthians 11:2-16*".

Ovc.edu.<http://www.ovc.edu/terry/articles/headcovr.htm>. Retrieved 2012-11-07

⁵⁸⁹ "Government drops plan to ban veiled voting".

<http://www.cbc.ca.http://www.cbc/news/canada/story/2009/06/26/veil-vote-legislation026.html>. Retrieved September 3, 2011.

In Mediaval Assam is concerned, in case of the dress code, no clearcut instructions were followed. Because most of the Muslim families of those days were the convered local people who followed the local dress code orther than the Islamic one.