

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **THE ASSIMILATION PROCESS AND CHANGE**

#### **6.1 SOCIO - CULTURAL ASSIMILATION AND CHANGE AMONG THE TAI KHAMYANGS OF ASSAM**

Socio-cultural assimilation is quite natural and bound to happen if a migrant community stays with the indigenous population for a long period of time. The Tai Khamyangs migrated to Assam towards the latter half of the eighteenth century. They assimilated with the local populace to a great extent within a short period of time and changes were visible in different aspects of their socio - cultural life. This chapter aims at finding the different aspects of socio-cultural assimilation and changes among the Tai Khamyang community of Assam and it is written mainly with the help of the data and information collected through field study.

##### **6.1.1 Language**

Language can be a good indicator of the level of assimilation. There are only a few people left who can speak the Tai Khamyang language properly. Tai Khamyang language belongs to the Tai-Kadai language family spoken by only a few speakers in some districts of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. According to SIL Ethnologue, it is spoken by about fifty speakers in Pawaoimukh village of the Margherita subdivision. However, the number of fluent speakers is less than ten. The researcher came across only two fluent speaker of Tai-

Khamyang language, one each in Chalapather and Rohon Shyam Gaon. Tai Khamyang has been assigned the ‘dying’ status on the ethnologue EGIDS scale (Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption scale). The dominant language spoken by the Tai Khamyang’s of Assam is Assamese (Centre for Endangered Languages, Tezpur University).

Sources suggest that the Khamyangs were able to preserve their language and culture till the second decade of the nineteenth century A.D. People could interact in Tai language, men and womenfolk wore traditional Khamyang dresses and ornaments and indigenous Tai festivals were celebrated with full fervor. According to Late Ungma Panyok who was born around the 1860’s, the Khamyang could not speak Tai language fluently, though they could understand the language (Bailung, 2014). It thus became eminent that the Khamyangs started to forget their language within a few decades after their arrival to Assam. The assimilation took place to such an extent that within a period of few decades the Tai Khamyang language and culture was on the verge of extinction as the Khamyangs have accepted Assamese as their lingua franca (Chetia, 2005).



Figure 6.1- Researcher with Junbala Shyam, the only Tai Khamyang language speaker from Rohon Shyam Gaon

Inter community marriages can also be one of the reasons for the near about extinction of the Tai Khamyang language. There are about 43.4 percent of inter community marriages in Chalapather Shyam Gaon and 43.7 percent in Rohon Shyam Gaon (Table 5.13 and Table 5.13.1 in Chapter 5). Mothers are generally believed to be the propagator of languages. In such cases Assamese language became the lingua franca of such families as

it was the common language of understanding. *Pali* language is very popular among the Tai Khamyangs of Assam mainly for religious reason. The Tai Khamyangs are Buddhists and as most of the Buddhist scriptures are written in *Pali* language, it is also being taught to the youths. There is a Pali School in Chalapather Shyam Gaon which was established as early as 1948 A.D.



Figure 6.2- Pali School in Chalapather Shyam Gaon

A list prepared by UNESCO has mentioned about forty two languages or dialects in India that are endangered and that are heading towards extinction. Tai Khamyang language is also mentioned in that list (The Hindu, Feb, 18, 2018). However it is listed as *Tai Nora* language as the Tai Khamyangs were also known as Nora in the past. It could thus be said that if appropriate steps are not taken for the preservation and propagation of the Tai Khamyang language then it would go into oblivion within a short period of time. The Tai Khamyang people traditionally use the Tai script for writing. Like the Tai Khamyang language, the Tai script is also going into oblivion as there are only few people who can read and write the Tai script. The researcher came across only two fluent speakers of Tai Khamyang language in both the villages. They are - Meuhum Chowlu (Female, 70) from Chalapather Shyam Gaon and Junbala Shyam (Female, 82) from Rohon Shyam Gaon. Steps are however taken by the Tai Khamyang youth and intelligentsia for the preservation and propagation of the language. The process of revivalism of the Tai Khamyang language has been discussed in details in the Chapter 7.

### 6.1.2 Script and Literature

The Tai Khamyangs have their own script and a rich literature. They call their script as *Lik-Tai* or Tai script. Most of their early literary works are written in their own script. The script has thirty five letters out of which seventeen are consonants and eighteen are vowels. They have a very rich literature both oral and written. Their literature can be divided as secular and non-secular categories. The non-secular literature mainly deals with the religious scriptures. Almost all the parts of *Tripitaka* are translated in their script. Apart from this, their non-secular literature also includes scriptures on Tai Khamyang indigenous religion. The secular literature of the Tai Khamyangs includes vast number of subjects such as Astrology and Astronomy, History, Folklores and Folktales, Medicines etcetera.

Though the early Khamyang literature is written in Tai script, most of the present literature is written in Assamese language. There are only a handful of people who can read and write the Tai script. Adoption of Assamese language in Tai Khamyang literature was natural as Assamese became the lingua franca of the Tai Khamyang people in due course of time. This was mainly due to their assimilation with the majority of the Assamese speaking population. Figure 6.3 is *Petang Kenan* or manuscript on Astrology and Astronomy written on *Sanchi* bark written by Late Chow Chew Aikon Tunkhang of Na Shyam village, Titabar of Jorhat district of Assam about hundred years ago. Figure 6.4 showing *Tai Khamyang Buranji* or Tai Khamyang Historical chronicles written in Assamese language. As most of the Buddhist scriptures are written in *Pali* script, they are taught to read and write in Pali too and hence Pali was given more importance in the past.

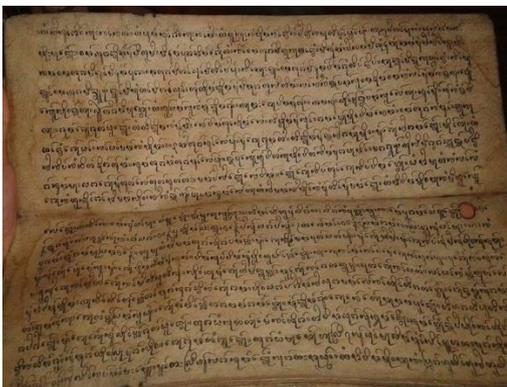


Figure 6.3 Petang Kenan  
Source - Chow Kensan Tunkhang

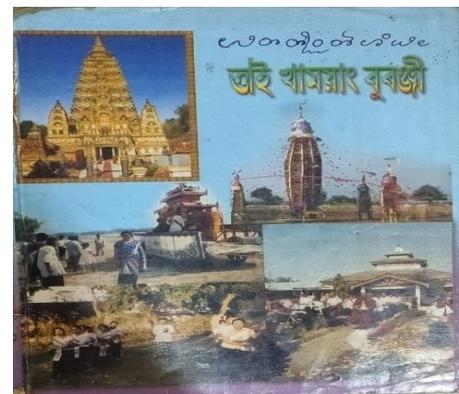


Figure 6. 4 Tai Khamyang Buranji

### 6.1.3 Food Habits

Though the Khamyangs profess Buddhism, religion does not stand in their way of consumption of non-vegetarian food. Drinking is not prohibited though it is not considered good also. Domestication of cattle for milk is seen though not to a great extent. They consume chicken, mutton and pork as well. Rice is the staple foods of the Khamyangs. Traditional food items included steamed rice, sour fish, and sour meat, smoked fermented fish and smoked meat. The specialty of all the meat and fish dishes mentioned above is that they can be preserved for many days. Besides the above mentioned items, the Khamyangs also took different types of vegetables and herbs. They generally preferred to have a boiled or steamed preparation with the help of locally available spices and herbs.

According to many of the informants from Chalapather and Rohon Shyam Gaon, eating beef is not prohibited, but they don't eat beef as their ancestors decided not to take beef to respect their Hindu neighbors', and the practice is still continuing. Traditional Khamyang dishes like *Khao Hai* (steamed rice), Sour fish (Pa Som), and Sour Meat (Lo Sam) etcetera are only cooked on special occasions like marriage, rituals or religious festivities. Food items like rice, pulses, milk, curd, chapattis etcetera which are taken by the natives and other neighboring communities have become a part of the dietary habits of the Tai Khamyangs. Areca nuts have been a part of South East Asian culture. Traditional Tai Khamyang food and delicacies are prepared only on special occasions. They have adopted habits of the native populace like chewing areca nut and betel leaf with lime and tobacco and it has become inevitable part of the Tai Khamyang society of Assam.

### 6.1.4 Dress and Ornaments

Tai Khamyangs traditionally wore simple and neat dresses. Coarse white cotton garments was more common with them. Men wore white colored long sleeve shirts. As a bottom garment men used to wear sarong of chequered pattern. The women wore a complete black colored sarong on their chest called *Pha-Sin* and a red belt called *Sai-Kap* was worn over it. Perhaps they were influenced from Buddhist culture and both men and women began to cover their body with a white shawl called *Pha-Mai*. Additionally the women wore a white or green piece of cloth over the *Pha-Sin* which is called *Lang-Bat*.

Some Tais in Assam consider *Lang- Bat* as non-indigenous to Tai people. One can find *Lang -Bat* type cloth among Tibeto-Burman tribes of Assam like Singphos, Deoris and Kacharis.

Traditionally both male and female used to keep long hair. The head was wrapped with a white cloth leaving the top hair bun exposed. The present day Khamyang uses a multi purposes chequered pattern of small piece of cloth but more often as a head dress. It is assumed that the original design was lost and the chequered pattern was the only mark of the former headdress which is now influenced by the colors of the Buddhist flag. The women folk used a silver hair pin made in beautiful flower designs called *Kat Kaw*. Terweil mentioned that Khamyangs also used wooden hair pin. A very important hand woven item among the Khamyang is the *Taan - Khwan*, a long handmade rectangular flag of religious purposes, its length varied depending upon the weavers. Various designs depicting the scenes from Buddhist *Jatakas* or religious symbols are woven.

There has been a considerable change in the dressing pattern of the Tai Khamyangs of Assam. Men do not keep long hair these days. Modern day dresses like *Trousers, Shirts, Skirts, Denims* etcetera become very popular. Whereas Indian dresses like *Dhoti, Mekhela Sador, Salwar Kurta, Sarees* etcetera are also very common. Sources also suggested that although the Tai Khamyang men slowly abandoned wearing their traditional dresses, the womenfolk didn't discard it totally. The researcher came to know from many of the informants in both the studied villages that the older generation has started wearing clothes since the past fifteen, twenty years. Figure 6.5 is the photograph of Late Choutang Wailoung from Rohon Shyam Gaon clicked in the year 1982. In the photo he is seen wearing a Shirt and Assamese Dhoti. It suggests that the Tai Khamyang people did not wore traditional dresses till the end of the twentieth century. However, the older generation has started wearing the traditional dresses on a regular basis these days. The early practice of weaving clothes is also going into oblivion. Very few weavers are left who can make a proper *Taan - Khwan*. There are only few weavers left in the villages.



Figure 6.5- Tai Khamyang elderly wearing Dhoti and Kurta in the year 1982  
Source- Shamet Wailoung

Change was seen even in the case of ornaments. Earlier the Tai Khamyang women used to wear ear logs known as *Kenhoo* made of Amber. Gradually the *Kenhoo* changed form and it was made with gold and other precious metals. Traditional ornaments are generally worn by the womenfolk only during religious festivities or rituals like marriage. Tai Khamyang men also don't use ear logs these days. The youth also feel pride in wearing the traditional dresses during religious festivals as well as cultural programmes. The traditional Tai Khamyang ornaments are also not easily available these days. Figure 6.6 shows traditional amber earplugs (*Kenhoo*) which were worn by both women and men. Figure 6.7 shows the present day ear plugs which are mainly made of gold, gem set and enamel and it is very much influenced by the Assamese ear ornament *Thuriya*.



Figure 6.6- Amber Earplugs 'Kenhoo'  
(Old) Source- Anthropological  
Museum of Indigenous People,  
Department of Anthropology,  
Dibrugarh University



Figure 6.7- Earplugs 'Kenhoo'  
(New) Source- Chow Kensan  
Tunkhang

### 6.1.5 Religion

Tai Khamyang people practice Theravada Buddhism. They are very religious and Buddhism plays a major role in the Tai-Khamyang society. Each and every Buddhist ritual is performed with full devotion and sincerity. It is however interesting to note that before accepting Buddhism, the Tai Khamyang people used to practice their own indigenous religion. The indigenous religion is a Tai folk religion where spirits of natural phenomena and ancestors are worshipped. They believed in the existence of *Moung Phi* or the place of spirits and Lenglon is considered to be the lord of this place. Along with this they believed in the spirits of natural phenomena like earth, hills, rivers, forests as well as cities, villages, house, paddy fields etcetera. They had the belief that every human being possesses *Khon* or a unit of vitality as well as the country, town, village etcetera. This folk religion was pantheistic and polytheistic in nature and their practice involved Shamans or *Chow Mo*. It could thus be said a combination of animism, nature worship and ancestor worship. They used to practice some sacrificial rituals too to please the spirits where they used to sacrifice fowls, buffaloes, pigs etcetera which is totally prohibited in Buddhism. However due to the influence of Buddhism in place of sacrificing animals, flowers and candles are presented to the spirits.

Since the Tai Khamyangs are living with the Hindu neighbors since ages, they also take part in many festivals like Durga Pooja, Deepawali, Holi, Vishwakarma Pooja etcetera. The Tai Khamyangs take part in Hindu festivals like Durga Pooja, Deepawali or Holi to keep the social harmony with their Hindu neighbors. The three Bihus (Magh, Bohag, and Kati) which recognize the different agricultural cycle are celebrated with full fervor like any other indigenous tribe. Buying new dress during Bihu and Durga Pooja has become a common thing among most of the Tai Khamyang youth as it is for any Hindu youth. The indigenous Tai religious practices are also slowly going into oblivion mainly because of the strong influence of Buddhism.

### 6.1.6 Rituals

**i. Aang** - One of the least known practices amongst the Tai Khamyang was the making of therapeutic tattoos. Tai people are generally known in South East Asia for the art of

making tattoos on their body. This tradition was carried by the Tai Khamyangs and was made for healing illness. The Tai people called it as *Aang* and in olden days these were made for victory in war and to cure illness. Specialists were called from Burma for tattoo making. This practice is not prevalent among the Tai Khamyangs of Assam these days.

**ii. Birth Ritual** - An important practice associated with the birth of a child in the Khamyang society is the cutting of the umbilical cord. The umbilical cord is cut with the help of a sharp sliver of bamboo (*Khaofai*). Soon after the umbilical cord dries up and drops, the father of the child seeks advice from the village monk to select a suitable day to take out the child from confinement so as to show the child worldly objects. On the stipulated day, the child is placed on a small alter (*tumuli*). In case of a boy, articles like spear, sword, axe, knife, bow and arrow and a piece of rock are placed near the alter. In case of a girl, items like, sickle, needle etcetera are placed. The child is taken near those objects to touch the same. The child is then shown the sky and some grains of rice are thrown on the ground and the baby's right foot is made to touch the earth, in case of a girl left foot is made to touch the earth. After that, the baby is brought inside the house and yolk of a boiled egg is smeared all over his/her body. The elders utter blessings by binding a piece of white cotton thread on both the wrists of the baby. The custom is still practiced with some minor changes. For example, some new objects like book, pen, pencil etcetera in case of both the sexes are placed near alter and the baby is made to touch it. The changes are done basically to keep in touch with the need of the hour as the Tai Khamyangs believe that education can bring the desirable change in the society. This is one of the reasons for the high literacy rate among the Khamyangs of Assam. In the two surveyed villages i.e. Chalapather and Rohon Shyam Gaon the literacy rate is 93.5 percent and 91.3 percent respectively. (Tables 5.8 and 5.8.1 in Chapter 5)

**iii. Tun Chap** - *Tun Chap* is a practice prevalent among the Tai Khamyangs of Assam according to which if anyone from some other community wanted to be a part of the Tai Khamyang community then he could be allowed to be a part of the community. *Tun* means Clan and the meaning of *Chap* is 'to add' or 'to include' (Rajkhowa, 2013). So literally it would mean to include someone outside of the clan within the community. However, to include someone into their clan, the family had to take the permission of other members of the community. The newly inducted member to take the clan name of the adoptive family

or he may be given a new clan name. This practice is however not that prevalent these days. According to the informants, this practice is not feasible these days due to economic constraints. As when the adoptive member became the part of the clan, it was the duty of the clan to take care of him like any other family member. Further, since the community is already facing identity issues, they don't find it desirable to allow someone from outside and be a part of their community as he could not offer much to preserve and propagate the old Tai Khamyang rituals and practices.

### **6.1.7 Housing Pattern**

A traditional Tai Khamyang house is a wooden or bamboo structure rose on strong pillars. The floors and walls are made of either bamboo or wooden planks depended on the economic condition of the people. The traditional houses are had thatched roofs which are made of locally available leaves. The house was divided as *Houn Haang* or 'the main house' and the *Huen Tang Khao* or the kitchen. In front of the main house a floor was constructed known as 'Chan' or verandah. The main house included the hall where *Sao Phii Nam* or 'pillar of the ancestors' and 'house spirits' are located and the bedroom of parents. The kitchen consisted of a hall where they sit by the fire in winters called *Tii-Phai*. The portion where they cooked food had a Hang Heng or a kind of hanging bamboo shelf which blocks the burning coal and to store necessary stuffs used while cooking. The back door of the kitchen had a floor called Khe- Hong where they wash the utensils.

There has been considerable change in the housing pattern of the Tai Khamyangs of Assam. The modern day Assam type concrete houses, RCC buildings, mud baked (Kutchha) and Semi Pukka (Semi Kuccha) houses have taken place of a traditional Tai Khamyang house. The researcher came across only three traditional Tai Khamyang houses, one in Chalapather and two in Rohon Shyam Gaon during the field study .Traditional houses are generally kept as a part of preserving their heritage and the family members live in an Assam type house or RCC house built nearby. One of the main reasons because of which the traditional Tai Khamyang houses are not preferred these days is because of the paucity of wood and other traditional house building materials. In the past the Tai Khamyangs used to live as a joint family and which required big traditional houses with many rooms.

The researcher found out that there are still a large number of joint families in both the surveyed villages. Chalapather has 48 percent of joint families and 46 percent of nuclear families. Rohon Shyam Gaon has 61 percent of joint families and 30 percent of nuclear families (Tables 5.6 and 5.6.1 in Chapter 5). However this trend is changing and these days the present generation prefers nuclear families and concrete houses. Table 6.1 shows that the percentage of concrete Assam type house is 61.1 and 50 percent in Chalapather and Rohon Shyam Gaon respectively.

Table 6.1 - Types of Houses in Chalapather and Rohon Shyam Gaon

| Sl No | Villages               | Kutchha (Mud Baked) | %    | SemiPukka (Semi Concrete) | %    | Pukka (Concrete) | %    | RC C | %   | Traditional | %   | Total Houses | %   |
|-------|------------------------|---------------------|------|---------------------------|------|------------------|------|------|-----|-------------|-----|--------------|-----|
| 1     | Chalapather Shyam Gaon | 10                  | 9.3  | 25                        | 23.1 | 66               | 61.1 | 06   | 5.6 | 01          | 0.9 | 108          | 100 |
| 2     | Rohon Shyam Gaon       | 06                  | 13.6 | 12                        | 27.3 | 22               | 50.0 | 02   | 4.5 | 02          | 4.5 | 44           | 100 |

Source- Field work 2016-2019

### 6.1.8 Naming of the Child

Naming of the newborn child is an important custom among the Tai Khamyangs of Assam. Traditionally the name of the child was given ceremonially and it was done generally after about a month from the date of birth. The date of naming the child was selected in consultation with the monk of the village monastery. The order of birth and sex of the child was always taken into consideration in choosing the name of the new born. For example, if it is the eldest male child then it will start with the prefix *Chao Ai* and Nang Je would mean the first daughter of the family, the second male child will use the prefix *Chao Yi* and the second female will use the prefix *Nang Ye*. The system continued like this for other children accordingly.

Changes can be seen in the pattern of names of the Tai Khamyang people. The researcher has come across many Hindu names like Rudra, Sabitri, Tuladhar, Padmavati, Indrajit etcetera. One case study that is in her eighties and the only Tai Khamyang

language speaker of Rohon Shyam Gaon was asked the reason behind the Hindu names of the Tai Khamyang people. According to her after the birth of the child, the Khamyang families used to visit the neighboring Hindu astrologers and priests for the naming of the child, who gave them Hindu names and it stayed with them. However there is a change in this trend as the new generations of Khamyang youths are being given proper Tai Khamyang names. More details about the revivalism of naming pattern are being discussed in the 7<sup>th</sup> Chapter.

### 6.1.9 Marriage

A typical Tai Khamyang marriage is conducted with an admixture of Buddhist and indigenous rituals. However changes have been observed with regards to the ornaments or even the dress worn by a bride during a Tai Khamyang marriage. In some cases bride is seen wearing a traditional Assamese *Mekhela Sador* and ornaments. Brides also apply mehendi (henna) on their hands and feet. This practice is generally common among the Assamese as well as the North Indian community. Earlier the Tai Khamyangs used to marry within the community. As time went by inter-caste marriages became prevalent. Although the Tai Khamyangs prefer to marry Tai Buddhists, yet they have established matrimonial relations with the Tai Ahoms, Baruah Buddhists, Khamtis and other Tai Buddhist communities.

Traditionally, the Tai Khamyangs could marry the daughter of the maternal uncle and maternal aunt. However this practice is not seen these days. One of the reason for this is because it is not prevalent among their Assamese and other neighboring communities. Earlier there was a practice that before three, four days of the marriage, the bride's family and relatives were invited by the groom's family for a feast which was known as *Khao Lom Som Kin* or *Petpura*. However, this practice is going into oblivion. Earlier the practice of bride price or *Phul Pani Bech* was prevalent in their marriages. But this practice is not that prevalent to that extent these days. Earlier there was a practice that after the marriage was fixed, the groom used to visit the bride's house and used to assist her in household chores. By doing this he wanted to become familiar with the groom's family and come in their good books. This practice is however not prevalent these days (Rajkhowa, 2013).

### 6.1.10 Economic Changes

Changes are visible in the economic sphere as well. There is change in the occupational structure among the Tai Khamyangs of Assam. In the early days agriculture was their main occupation. The field study suggests that agriculture is still the main occupation of the people. 31.7 percent and 35.8 percent people are engaged in agriculture in Chalapther and Rohon Shyam Gaon respectively. However agriculture is not done in large scale these days. It is mainly done for consumption purpose only. Commercialization of agriculture is seen with regards to the establishment of small private tea plantations particularly in Rohon Shyam Gaon. 6.7 percent people own small tea plantations in Rohon Shyam Gaon. Education can be considered as one of the main reasons for occupational changes as the literacy rate is pretty high in both the villages (above 90 percent). 20.5 percent and 10.8 percent people are engaged in government sector jobs and 6 percent and 7.5 percent people are engaged in private sector jobs in Chalapather and Rohon Shyam Gaon respectively. Many of them are engaged in Oil Sector jobs due to the presence of companies like Oil India Limited and Indian Oil Corporation. The percentage of pensioners is also pretty high with 6 and 4.2 in both the studied villages. (Table 5.10, 5.10.1, Chapter 5).

### 6.1.11 Traditional Tai Khamyang Practices and Skills

1. **Ethno - Medicine** - Ethno- medicine is a study of the traditional medicine practiced by various ethnic groups. Since ancient times, the Tai Khamyang people are using medicinal herbs which can treat kidney stones, blood pressure, joint pains, intermittent fever, dysentery, leprosy, gastric ulcer, piles, bronchitis etc. The use of different medicinal herbs while preparing certain dishes is also prevalent. The Tai Khamyang ethno medicinal practices also included magico religious-spiritual practices. Such practices were performed during child birth and other health issues. However ethno medicine (both herbal medicine and magico religious- spiritual practices) is slowly losing its popularity mainly because of the use of allopathic and other modern medicines. Modern healthcare system is also a reason for that as there is government primary healthcare facility in almost every village.

2. **Astrology/Astronomy**-The Tai Khamyangs had good knowledge of astrology. According to Sen (1999) the Tai Khamyangs were employed as astronomers, astrologers and writers during the Ahom rule. However this knowledge of astrology is fading day by day. There are very few Tai Khamyang astronomers left and this knowledge is also going into oblivion day by day. According to the informants it was mainly due to the paucity of good astrologers within the community, the people had to visit the nearby Assamese Hindu astrologers to prepare horoscope for their newly born child. That is one of the main reasons that the older generation of the Tai Khamyang people has Hindu names.
3. **Elephant Rearing**- As discussed in Chapter 4 Elephant rearing was one of the important occupations of the Khamyangs of Assam. Rohon Shyam Gaon in Charaideo district was the hub of elephant rearing. Almost every house in Rohon Shyam Gaon had an elephant in the past. Elephant rearing was done mainly for wood logging business. Sources suggest that when the elephant rearing business was at its peak, elephants were exported outside India too. Elephant rearing is done in almost all the countries of South East Asia. Elephants have religious significance too. The Tai Khamyangs are Buddhists and elephants are considered very sacred in Buddhism. However this practice is not prevalent among the Tai Khamyangs of Assam these days. The practice discontinued from the nineties of the twentieth century when it was stopped by the passing of the wildlife act by the government which prohibited rearing of wild animals.



Figure 6.8- Old photo (early 1980's) showing Elephant rearing in Rohon Shyam Gaon

Source- Shamet Shyam Wailoung

4. **Dye/Colour Making-** Gogoi (1999) has made special reference to the practice of colour making among the Khamyangs with the help of a special herb. The Tai Khamyang people used to dye their clothes themselves. This colour was also sold commercially till recent past .However traditional practice of colour making is going into oblivion due to easy availability of chemical colours. Also the easy availability of readymade clothes contributed to it.
5. **Weaving-**Traditionally, the Tai Khamyang women were expert weavers and they used to weave their own clothes. Special spinning wheel known as *Kong* or *Jotor* was used for spinning cotton and other fine fibers in the olden days. There are only a few traditional *Kongs* left in the Tai Khamyang villages. There were looms (*Key Hok* ) present in almost all the Tai Khamyang houses in the past. It was traditionally a two-foot special handloom, with one end tied to the weaver's waists and the other to a pole, to weave clothes. However, due to modernization and easy availability of readymade clothes, this practice is going into oblivion day by day. The researcher came across only a few looms in the two surveyed villages during field study. Even though there are only few looms left in the villagers, the Khamyang women still weave the traditional dresses themselves. One of the main reasons because of which the art of weaving is going into oblivion is that it is traditionally done by the womenfolk. Due to the spread of education a large number of Tai Khamyang women are pursuing higher studies because of which they have to go out of the village. Many of them are doing different government and private sector jobs as well. Assimilation can also be considered as a reason as they have adopted western dresses like *Trousers, Shirts, Denims, Skirts* etcetera and Indian dresses like *Sarees, Dhoti, Kurta, Mekhela Sador* etcetera. Also the readymade clothes are cheaper and easily available.



Figure 6.9- Traditional loom *Key Hok*



Figure 6.10- Traditional spinning wheel *Kong*

6. **Bamboo, Cane Work and Pottery** -The Tai Khamyang people are very skilled artisans. They use a variety of cane and bamboo products such as flower basket or *Saa- Mokya Paak* or a conical basket, *Paan* or flower tray, *Kup* or a wicker hat etcetera. The traditional bamboo and cane products included the *Oup - Khao*, a huge tray with a pagoda shaped cover, the *Yeip* or lacquered cane basket is not made by them and but are brought from Myanmar. In ancient times the Tai Khamyangs also worked as potters. The *Mo- Khao* or the steam rice maker is the finest example of pottery. They used to make their own papers and inks or sometimes wrote in a bark of a special tree. The beautiful cane and bamboo artwork discussed above were kept in the houses and monasteries .Plastic items have taken the place of these baskets and tumblers and very few cane and bamboo items are visible in the houses and monasteries these days. Pottery is also a dying skill these days. There are very few potters left among them. The art of making ink is also nonexistent. One of the important reasons for this is modernization and easy availability of cheap alternatives.

From the above discussion it has become evident that most of the traits of the Tai Khamyang people are already extinct or going into oblivion. One of the major reasons for this is too much of assimilation with the native populace. They adopted many of the customs and practices of the native populace, be it in language, dress, food habits, economy and many other traits. Some of their traditional practices people like astronomy, cane and bamboo craft, colour making etcetera are also nearing extinction mainly because of assimilation, modernization and because it was not passed on from one generation to other. It is because of these reasons that most of their customs and rituals became nearly extinct. It was then that they started facing crisis with regards to their ethnicity and identity. This resulted in a sense of revivalist tendency among them. The next Chapter i.e. Chapter 7 discusses how the issues of ethnic consciousness and identity crisis has led to revivalism among the Tai Khamyangs of Assam.