



# A Study on the Cultural Resilience and Adaptation by the Sonowal Kacharis of Assam in a Culturally Globalized World

Dr. Juri Saikia

Assistant Professor in History, D.D.R. College, Chabua, Assam

Email - jurisaikiatuktuk12@gmail.com

**Abstract:** The Sonowal Kachari tribe, indigenous to Assam, is a Mongoloid people who belong to the Tibeto-Burman language group. They have been living in Assam since ancient times. Their population is mostly located in upper Assam. They are the third-largest plain tribe in Assam. As an indigenous tribe, the Sonowal Kacharis have a rich culture, including traditional music, dance, and folk songs. They also have their dialect, customs, and rituals. However, they have experienced different new socio-cultural elements from various factors, such as sanskritization, assimilation, and modernization, at different phases of time. Globalization is also an important factor that has created new ideas, knowledge, and opportunities for them. It has opened up new economic opportunities for the Sonowal Kachari community. These opportunities include access to global markets and modern industries. Indeed, their traditional culture is influenced by the elements of cultural globalization, and due to the impact of cultural globalization, the community has been exposed to diverse cultures. However, it is also true that globalisation, despite its impact on them, has not been able to fully grasp their culture due to certain socio-political reasons fully. Although globalization has harmed the traditional culture of the Sonowal Kachari community, the Sonowal Kacharis have managed to preserve their culture from being lost to the effects of globalization. They are trying to preserve and promote their unique tradition of dialect, traditional attire, rituals, and customs, etc., through various ways.

**Key Words:** Assam, the Sonowal Kacharis, cultural globalization.

## Statement of the problem:

Globalization influences the culture of every community, and the Sonowal Kacharis are no different. This influence is a major challenge to their preservation of traditional culture. So, studying the impact of cultural globalization on the Sonowal Kachari culture and what efforts they are taking to preserve their cultural traditions is an important topic to study.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Globalization refers to the increasing interconnectedness of the world's economies, societies, and cultures through trade, investment, technology, and cultural exchange. It has led to increased economic interdependence, cultural diversity, and global cooperation, but also raises concerns about inequality, environmental impact, and cultural homogenization. On the other hand, cultural globalization is characterized by increased interconnectedness and the exchange of cultural elements, such as ideas, values, and practices. This leads to both homogenization or sameness and hybridity or mixing of cultures, driven by factors such as media, travel, and migration. The internet, social media, and mass media are the main factors for spreading information and culture.



Globalization, as well as cultural globalization, destroys local cultures and traditions. Sometimes it brings cultural homogenization. It has also made a blended culture by mixing Western and local cultures. Cultural globalization is closely linked to economic globalization because the exchange of goods and services often carries cultural meanings and influence. Cultural globalization is the transmission of ideas, meanings, and values across the globe.

The Kacharis are the earliest inhabitants of Assam. The indigenous Kacharis of Assam belong to the Tibeto-Burman group and are mongoloid origin. They are Kirata people, and so they have Kirata tradition and culture. S. Endle says that in feature and general appearance, the Kacharis approximate very closely to the Mongolian type, and Tibet and China were their original home. (1) Suniti Kumar Chatterji says about the Mongoloid character, “they appear to be rather credulous, and at times they can be very cruel to both man and beast; and, besides, they lack a depth of thought and possibly also a depth of feeling or emotion.” (2) The Sonowal Kachari is a branch of the Kacharis who mainly live in upper Assam. The Sonowal Kacharis have their traditional culture. They have their traditional religious rites, dialect, dresses, food habits, etc. But cultural globalization has influenced the culture of the Sonowal Kacharis. As a result, the Sonowal Kachari culture and its related ideas, beliefs, attitudes, and norms are influenced by globalization. It has influenced the way of life, thinking, beliefs, etc. But due to some factors, the Sonowal Kachari culture has not completely come to the grip of cultural globalization, and thus, they are in a safe zone where their traditional culture is still surviving.

## **2. Literature review:**

The impact of globalization on the Sonowal Kacharis is an important topic to study. Several writers have studied the impact of globalization on the Sonowal Kacharis in some magazines. Studies are informative about the topic. But this is a re-attempt to study the topic.

## **3. Objectives of the paper:**

There are two objectives of this paper:

1. To study the impact of globalization on the culture of the Sonowal Kachari community.
2. To explore the steps taken by the Sonowal Kacharis for the survival of their culture.

## **4. Research Methodology:**

This paper utilizes a qualitative research method. The Sonowal Kacharis are the third-largest plain tribe of Assam. Their population in Assam is found mostly in the districts of Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Lakhimpur, and Dhemaji. So, these seven districts are taken as the research areas. Questionnaires, interviews, and observations of the community's experiences are the main sources of the study.

## **5. Findings and conclusion:**

After discussing the topic, the following results were found which are as follows-

1. The Sonowal Kacharis are aboriginal people of Assam. They have their own distinct culture. But they have included many other cultural elements from other castes and identify themselves as Assamese people. At the same time, modernization as well as globalization have also influenced their culture, which has led to their culture being exposed to a different cultural environment.
2. Interconnectedness and exchange of cultural elements like ideas, values, practices, etc., are seen among the Sonowal Kacharis also. They have also come to new life habits, behaviours, dresses, food habits, and lifestyles which have come through globalization.



3. The tribal people did not want to keep relations with the upper caste people or the outside world. Generally, they do not mix up with others easily. Now, some of the educated section have been kept in touch with the outside world, which is not the characteristic of their community as a tribal people.

4. As a result of globalization, the socio-economic condition of some Sonowal Kachari people has changed, and some of their traditional characteristics, such as house patterns, dietary habits, dresses, etc., have changed.

5. Cultural globalization has not influenced all the people of the community. Those who live in remote villages have not been influenced by globalization. They mostly live in a traditional lifestyle, accept some little changes.

6. There are still poor people in the society of the Sonowal Kacharis, and they have not come under cultural globalization.

7. The religious rites and rituals of the Sonowal Kacharis have not been influenced by cultural globalization. These are in the same condition as in the ancient period of time.

8. Cultural globalization is related to the economic condition of the community. But it is also true that even good economic condition may not bring their culture totally under cultural globalization, because the Sonowal Kachari people are very religious-minded and they do not want to leave their traditional culture.

## 6. Analysis of the paper:

The socialization, assimilation, modernization, and globalization are the main reasons for the access of the new cultural elements into their culture. Globalization, as well as cultural globalization, is the latest factor which have influenced their culture. Cultural assimilation and cultural changes have become possible due to globalization. Globalization has also offered all societies various facilities, including economic benefits, trade, and commerce. They have opportunities in various private sectors. As a result, it is seen that differences between the non-tribal Assamese Hindus and the Sonowal Kacharis in terms of food, accommodation, dress, housing, etc. are gradually decreasing. They are no longer entirely dependent on agriculture. Different people have taken up different professions. They have been externally influenced by various factors. They have incorporated cultural elements into their communities as needed. As a result, society and culture have changed in various areas such as eating, living, dressing, house building, conversation, behaviour, education, thinking, etc. In the modern era, cultural connections are taking place between different people through the print media, such as books, newspapers, and films. Recently, electronic media such as radio and television have started to fuel this process. The Sonowal Kacharis have not been immune to the influence of such processes. But it is also noticed that despite these constantly occurring processes and factors, the Sonowal Kacharis have preserved some of their traditional characteristics and carry their own identity as a distinct ethnic group. Several socio-cultural and political organizations have tried to protect their culture from the grasp of globalization.

## The traditional life of the Sonowal Kacharis:

Both in legends and history, Siva worship appears to have been the most popular form of religion in early Assam, both amongst the aboriginals and the Aryanised people. (3) They worship Siva with wine and flesh. They worship Siva with wine and flesh. The Kirata Kacharis worship Baitho, their traditional deity. (4) This Baitho worship or *Baitho puja* is observed in the Assamese month of Phagun/Chat, the English month of February/March. This puja is celebrated every year at a place named Napothar in the district of Tinsukia, Assam. They believe Baitho as the creator of the earth, sky, water, air, and fire. Many of them believe Baitho as Siva. During the Baitho puja, the *Haidang* song is sung. It is a religious song. The *Haidang nritya* is



performed along with this song. The main musical instruments of this song and dance are the flutes, *khutitals*, or small cymbals, and *tokas*, or a musical instrument made of bamboo.

The Sonowal Kachari *Haidang hussori*, a song of the traditional bihu festival, is sung on the last day of the Baitho puja. They believe that this *Haidang hussori* was created by Siva and Parvati. The Sonowal Kacharis have many other socio-religious rites and rituals. They worship their traditional deities in *thaans*. Rice beer and the sacrifice of cock are generally associated with their traditional worship. The Sonowal Kacharis are ancestor worshippers and so perform the ancestor worship like *morak diya*, *burhapuha*, *nopurushia hokam*, *pirdiya* etc.,

The Sonowal Kacharis are essentially agriculturists and, like other Assamese villagers, they also produce Sali and ahu paddy in their fields. (5) The Sonowal Kacharis speak the Assamese language. But the Sonowal Kacharis have a dialect of their own which is gradually disappearing. (6) But some people in some places still speak their dialect. The Sonowal Kachari have their traditional dresses. (7) The traditional Sonowal Kachari house is typically a raised structure made of wood, bamboo, and thatch, featuring a two-sloped, single ridge design suitable for joint families. The Sonowal Kacharis rely on ingredients available in their environment, including wild plants, animals, and seasonal produce. They like roasting, steaming, and smoking food. Easy-going, poor cultivators of the Sonowal Kachari community are religious-minded people. They have deep faith in their religious rites and rituals. They feel that if they do not observe their traditional religious rites and rituals, then they will be harmed by their traditional deities. This notion is in the minds of their community, whether they are educated or not.

### **Socio-political awareness of the Sonowal Kacharis:**

The state of Assam, located in the northeastern part of India, is naturally backward. On the other hand, the indigenous people of Assam were poor and ignorant. They were not given proper and necessary facilities by the government. For this reason, some of the angry and frustrated tribes of Greater Assam have already left the heart of Greater Assam and formed separate states. The dissatisfaction of other ethnic groups has also had long-term consequences. Timely action was not taken to resolve the reasons for the demands and agitation of these communities. As a result, they are demanding new systems to govern themselves.

During the freedom movement of Assam, the Kacharis, as well as the Sonowal Kacharis, participated in the freedom movement. India gained independence. Every ethnic group in Assam dreamed of living like human beings and advancing on the ladder of civilization by preserving their own ethnic political, social, cultural, and intellectual traditions. After the independence movement, the Sonowal Kacharis were again deprived of the benefits of the government. So, gradually, they tried to get their benefits through their efforts. As a result, the Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council was demanded by them. Many tribes in the country are trying to get more constitutional benefits. In addition, the less privileged communities have also launched demands and movements to provide such privileges for them in the Constitution. The ethnic groups of Boro, Miching, Rabha, Hajong, Tiwa, Sonowal Kachari, and Deuri, etc., are not satisfied with the benefits they receive as scheduled tribes and have demanded separate autonomy based on organized oppressive movements. The scheme is being implemented by the Koch Rajbongshi, Maran-Matak, Ahom, Chutia, and Adibasi tea communities. (8)

### **Reasons for the traditional cultural intactness of the Sonowal Kacharis:**

There are some reasons for the traditional cultural intactness of the Sonowal Kacharis. These are as follows-

1. The Sonowal Kacharis formed the Sonowal Kachari Jatiya Parishad on 12th June, 1994, to demand autonomy. The Sonowal Kacharis achieved the "Sonowal Autonomous Council" in 2005, after twelve years



of continuous struggle since June 1994 by the Sonowal Kachari Chhatra Sanstha, Sonowal Kachari Yuva Parishad, Sonowal Kachari-Nari Sanstha, and Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Demand Committee. (9) The formation of the Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council was subsequently discussed and passed in the Assam Legislative Assembly, and the Government of Assam published the Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council (Act No. XX of 2005) in the Assam Gazette on 11th May. As it was a national movement of the Sonowal Kacharis, the practice of national culture and its restoration and preservation also gained importance. As a result, the movement for political power went hand in hand with the movement for the restoration and establishment of cultural dignity. Till now, the Autonomous Council has been working for the restoration of the traditional culture of the tribe.

2. Still, many families of the Sonowal Kachari tribe are far from higher education. Many unemployed and poor people are still looking for government help, which cannot be called culturally globalized. Though some of them are economically strong, it does not mean the overall development of the community. They still depend on the traditional agricultural system. The tribal people of Assam, including the Sonowal Kacharis, are losing their resources, like land and forest. They are less enterprising and love an easy-going life. Still, many of them have an apathetic attitude towards education. (10)

3. Some educated Sonowal Kacharis have capitalized on globalization. These educated and economically advanced groups have been influenced by certain elements of cultural globalization. Consequently, they have adopted new lifestyles and practices that blend traditional values with modern influences. This cultural exchange has not only enriched their community but also fostered a greater understanding of global perspectives. They have not abandoned their traditional culture; instead, they have found a way to blend modern influences with their rich heritage, creating a unique identity that respects both the past and the present. This synthesis allows them to navigate the complexities of contemporary life while preserving their cultural roots.

4. The *Sonowal Kachari Sahitya Sabha* is a literary organization of the Sonowal Kacharis. It has been working for the Sonowal Kachari literary development. This organization hosts a variety of discussions on the Sonowal Kachari culture. In addition to promoting literature, the Sabha also focuses on preserving traditional practices and fostering a sense of community among its members. Through workshops, cultural events, and publications, they aim to ensure that the rich heritage of the Sonowal Kachari people is celebrated and passed down to future generations. They are trying to sing and speak in their dialect. Additionally, other organizations, such as the All-Assam Sonowal Kachari Students Union, the Sonowal Kachari Women's Association, and the Sonowal Kachari Yuva Parishad, are also working to promote the development of Sonowal Kachari society and culture.

5. The Sonowal Kachari new generation is interested in their traditional culture and contributes writings on their origin and culture. Several Sonowal Kachari writers have been writing on their culture and tradition. Their traditional dialect plays a significant role in their community life. They are trying to keep this dialect alive. They have tried to keep their culture through cultural festivals, seminars, and meetings.

## 7. Conclusion:

The Sonowal Kacharis have taken some new elements from cultural globalization. Some of their traditional cultures have changed as a result of the influence of cultural globalization. But the Sonowal Kachari culture has not completely come under the influence of globalization. They are still in a safe zone from cultural globalization. They have tried to protect their culture from the threat of globalization. The socio-political condition of the community has kept them within the boundaries of traditional life. The Mongolian





characteristics of the Sonowal Kacharis have not disappeared from their minds and bodies. Their socio-political condition and Mongolian characteristics have stood as the protectors of their tradition and culture.

**8. Limitations:** Findings of the study are not a generalization to the Sonowal Kachari community of every place.

## 9. Recommendation:

The indigenous Sonowal Kacharis of Assam possess a rich cultural heritage. While it is essential to preserve this cultural identity from external influences, globalization presents an inescapable reality. Therefore, they must navigate this era with discernment, carefully integrating new cultural elements while maintaining a harmonious balance between the traditional and the contemporary. This involves fostering a blended culture that values both its heritage and modern influences.

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