In the foregoing chapters, we have made an attempt to describe and analyse various folk-elements in the culture of Sonitpur district. The culture of Sonitpur district is a part of Assamese culture having keen relation with the eastern confluence of Assamese culture.

Sonitpur was the dwelling land of the Austric group and then the Mongoloids occupied the land. Later on it becomes the dwelling land of the Mongoloids and the Aryans. Various tribes and castes either of Mongoloid or Aryan origine live here together with cordial relation for which cultural interaction is occurred. As most of the people live here are migrated from the just opposite places on the south bank of the Brahmaputra, so, direct impact of the culture of those places is noticed here. In the eastern part of the district, clear impact of the culture of Sibsagar and in the western part, clear impact of the culture of Nagaon district is noticed.

There is a clear impact of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement of Assam in the culture of Sonitpur district. The movement touched even the tribal people of the area to some extent for which most tribal people choose to mingle with the mainstream of the Assamese nation. But later on due to various adverse political situations and movements, revivalist attitude grewed among some tribal people and it declines to strengthen the process of growing a great Assamese nation.
Sonitpur can boast of its cultural heritage as well as rich folk-tradition. However, now-a-days, various folk cultural aspects are either extinct or in a dying position.

In terms of oral literature of the district, the district is considerably rich. Among the various folk songs, there are some religious songs generally called as nam. Most of the nāms are praisal of lord Vishnu (Krishna or Rāma) though there are some nāms related to praise of Lord Śiva and Goddess Durgā or Lakshmi too. The idea or theme of these songs are borrowed from the early Assamese literature in general and the Assamese neo-Vaishnavite literature in particular. Some of these songs are rich in poetic beauty. Moreover, there are some songs or hymns having ritualistic significance, viz, āinām, bharalinadīr git, dehbichārar git, tokāri git, zikir and so on are not directly associated with any pujā or ritual, but have a high philosophical overtone. Some songs with lyrical composition in a religious or devotional format acquired the popular appellation of kāmrupi lokagit that current in the area seems to be migrated from Kamrup and Darrang; but in the path of migration, the dialect and tune has been changed slightly and fitted to the folk language of the region.

There are some songs related to the rites the passage, of which biyānām (marriage song) is the most significant. There are various types of marriage songs composed by the women folk. These songs generally reflect the mind of the women folk. From the early negotiations to the end of the celebration, viz, jorān divā or tekelidivā, pānitolā, nowā, dayandivā, gāthivān khundā, homargurit bahā, ākhoi divā, āngathi khelā etc., women sing
different types of songs. Some songs are involved with the names of Krishna-Rukmini, Rāma-Sitā or Hara-Gauri, the ideal couples of our legendary and the bride and bridegroom are compared with them. The impact of the neo-Vaishnavite movement of Assam has given a new dimension to the marriage songs, for which oi-rām is common word in most of the songs. Apart from the biyānāms, there are some very interesting songs called jorānāms which are also related to marriage ceremony. After the arrival of the bridegroom's party at the bride’s house, the both party’s namatis exchange some pinching songs to lampoon their opponent. In these songs, extemporization is best observed. Sometimes these songs are almost nonsencial and lack of coherence of thought is observed. Though the objective of these songs is to make fun, sometimes it creates rage and therefore this practice is almost obsolete now-a-days. There are some songs connected with tolani biyā (Ceremony observed in the attainment of puberty of a virgin girl). Though these songs are almost similar to the biyānāms in form, rythm and melody, the content is rather fitted to the context. Through these songs, the girl is advised and alerted to the new stage of life though, there are some humorous songs ridiculing the mother of the girl. As the ceremony, vis-a-vis, the songs are confined only to the women-folk, therefore, women folk-mind is reflected in these songs.

There are some songs connected with the seasonal and agricultural festivals. Huchari songs performed in the context of bihu festival generally bears a Vaishnavite flavour. It is observed that in some places of Sonitpur, nāms are performed as huchari songs during the bihu days with dancing like body movements customary for huchari
song. On the occasion of māghbihu, the menfolk perform choral nāms from the neo-Vaishnavite scriptures either in bhelāghar or nāmghar. These evince the impact of the neo-Vaishnavite movement on the folklore of Sonitpur. Though mohoho festival is not familiar in the area, some Boro people celebrate it and songs current among them are almost similar to that of Kamrup region. The mohoho songs current among the Boros of Sonitpur depicts some elements of the Boro social life.

Bihusongs are the songs of youthful exuberance and the area is very much rich in bihu song. There are two aspects of bihu songs - some are meant for the festival and some others are songs of love and yearning. 'They describe beauty, both of nature and of the loved one, express adoration of the sweet heart, glorify youth and speak frastation and sorrow.' Though there were some bihu songs having erotic sentiment, presently those songs are considered as vulgar ones and those songs seem to be obsolete and the songs are sanskritized. However, 'bihu songs are exquisitive love poems; they give glimpse of folk psychology; they prove that even the unlettered people can create superb imagery; they are not crudely erotic, but have refined touches; they throw light on social and domestic relations and occupations' and above all, it often reflects contemporary social and political events for which study of bihu songs may help us in the study of social and cultural history. It is observed that, due to some socio-economic changes like urbanization and industrialization, spreading of modern education system etc., the festival

2 Goswami, P: Folk Literature of Assam, pp.17-18
as well as the songs, too is losing its old functional character.

Āli-āye-liqāng festival of the Mishing tribe and baisāgu festival of the Boro tribe is considered to be relic of a bygone fertility as like as bihu festival and the songs associated with those festivals are also specimens of love poetry having simplicity of mind as well as fine poetic beauty.

As residing at a far place from home was rare among the Assamese speaking people as well as tribal people of the district, so, songs of enduring passion is not common among them. On the contrary, as many Nepalese youth serve in the Army and reside far from their beloved, so, such songs of enduring passion prevails among them.

Nursery rhymes and lullabies like sivāli e nāhībi rāṭī, jonbāi e beji etā diyā etc. are popular in the district as like as the other parts of Assam. However, apart from the popular nisukanigits of Assam, some other nisukani songs are also current in the district viz, āmāre moinā subaloi dharise, rabā lāhari nāpāiso āhari etc. Apart from the nursery rhymes and lullabies, there are some songs associated with childrens' game. These songs are filled with the mention or depiction of birds, beasts and other objects of nature, as well as the social surroundings too. It is observed that, most of the songs are having alliterative effect and the songs are usually fanciful. Most of the songs donot carry a meaning or central idea, but the alliterative sounds and rhymed endings produce a pleasant sansation in the minds of the children participants. Now-a-days, as children are
more interested in the games like cricket etc. and enjoying of T.V. programmes, these folk games and rhymes are losing their popularity gradually.

The rhymes sung by the bahuwās of bahuwagowā, was a part and parcel of a bhāonā performance. The bahuwās recite some poetic compositions, where wit and retort is best observed.

Most of the historical ballads, ballads of wonder tale and ballads of cante fable as well as narrative songs of the Assamese folklore are current in the district though some wordings and the tune of singing slightly differs from place to place. The dhuliyā ojās recite and sing some narrative songs (when they perform ojā with a dhol) called as mālitās. Along with the mālitās, sometimes some satirical compositions are also sung where extempore satire and humour is the core of the songs. These songs are also narrative songs, though, we cannot place these within the sphere of ballad.

There are some songs related with rowing of boatmen, elephant catching, fishing etc. which may be catagorized as 'work song.' Apart from these, there are some rhymes, which are used by the adolescent boys to tease their mates. These nonsensical rhymes are also folk-verse.

In case of prose narration, the folklore of the district is rich. The difference between myths and legends found in the district is very thin. Many legends current in the district
are rather combination of the myths and legends, which have religious and ritualistic significance. Apart from the myth-legends, there are some legends connected with local deities of Assam and shrines, holy men and women, rivers and hills and so on. Legends connected with the neo-Vaishnava saints like Śankaradeva, and historical and semi-historical figures like Ārimatta, Jongāl-balahu, Gadādhar Simgha, Bāmuni konwar, Jaymati etc. are also widely current in the district. Apart from the myths and legends, there are some purely entertaining folktales termed as āmodi sādhya which can be classified as: 1) animal tales, 2) tales of supernatural, 3) jokes or humourous tales., 4) trickster tales and 5) cumulative tales.

There are innumerable proverbs (bhakativā phakarā, yojanā or patantar) and riddles current in the district. Some persons can speak yojanā for every expression. Apart from the phakarās and yojanās, some aphorims (maxims) believed as the sayings of Dāk Purusha are also very popular among the folk. Various types of riddles are also found abundantly in the folklore of the district. Though the people of Sonitpur district generally use the vocabulary of the standard Assamese language, slight differences are observed in some cases. As the area is a tea garden dominant area, so, various words of the languages of the tea-garden community

3 Datta, B. Sarma, N.C. Das, P.C: Op-Cit p.40.

4 Goswami, P: Asamiyā Jana Sāhitya, p.39

5 Goswami, P: Ballads and Tales of Assam, pp 85-113.
The people of Sonitpur district observe the rites according to their religious thought or philosophy. Apart from this 'great tradition', there are some local modes of worship which may be termed as 'little tradition'. The trend of sanskritization of the tribal society began here long before. The Neo-Vaishnavite Movement under the leadership of saint Šankardeva in the 15th-16th century had influenced all the societies and it played a great role in sanskritization. Though the trend of sanskritization erodes various rites and customs, some of them are still alive side by side.

Existance of a good number of spirits and ghosts of different manner and dwellings is believed by the people of Sonitpur. When a person is harmed by a ghost or a spirit, then a bej is called in to treat him to keep away the spirit. However, due to the spreading of scientific knowledge among the people, these beliefs are declining now-a-days; yet, there are some beliefs and superstitions, which are still alive among the folk. There are some rites and rituals, which are still believable for the folk in spite of spreading of modern education, scientific knowledge etc. Āisabāh is believed as the only way to relieve from poxes and skin rashes; pānitolā sabāh (in some particular area) or bhekuli bīvā is believed as compeller of rain.

Festivals and ceremonies are the expressions of social behaviours and most of the societies, whether it is primitive or folk or elite or modern, set aside
portions of time for celebration. Various festivals and ceremonies are classified as: (a) seasonal festivals, (b) calendric festivals, (c) limited participation festivals and (d) sacramental festivals. Bihu festivals, ali-ali-ligāng of the Mishings, domāsi and bisu of the Boros, tusu pujā, garyā-pujā or sahārāi parav of the tea tribes, ambuvāci or sānth, phākuā or dolyātra along with ceremonies like goch-lowā, goch-uthā, āganā, Lakhī-uthā etc. are seasonal as well as agricultural. Durgā pujā, Lakhsmi pujā, kālipujā, dewāli, Śivarātri of the Hindus, Mahārarn, Sābebarāt, Ramzān, Id-Uz-Zuhā etc. of the Muslims and the tithis of the Mahāpurushas like Śankardeva, Mādhavdeva, Dāmodardeva, Harideva, Gopāldeva, Badalā ētā etc. are calendric festivals. Visvakarmā pujā, nām-kirtana of the fishermen in the camp on river island in connection with catching of gharivā fish etc. are festivals of limited participation. Agricultural ceremonies such as Goch lowā, goch uthā, āganā, lakhiuthā etc. are also limited participation ceremonies as well as seasonal. There are some festivals related to the rite of passage. Various celebrations connected with birth rite, e.g., taking of panchāmrit by a pregnant woman, jalpān khuwā etc., tolani biyā, sunnat ceremony of the Muslims, marriage ceremony, death rites, chomāngkān of the Karbis, dahā of the Mishings, me-dām-me-phi of the Ahom community etc. are festivals and celebrations associated with the rites the passage. There are some other festivals connected with fairs. Sonitpur, being a tea-garden dominant district, various pujās are celebrated in the tea gardens in very festive mood and on these occassions, some fairs are organised. Apart from these, some fairs are held on the courtyards of various temples on the occassion of Śiva-rātri, gossāin bihu, rāsh-yāṭrā etc.
Primitive men attributed disease and sufferings to the wrath of God and the malevolent influence of stars and planets. Some occult medical practices began on the basis of this supernatural theory and rudiments of primitive medicine are still prevailing. Apart from these occult medical practices, some natural things are also used as medicine through the ages on the base of the experience of folk and all of these are transmitted orally from generation to generation. This kind of medicine are the folk medicines which can be classified into class : 1) natural folk medicine and 2) magico religious medicine. Natural folk medicines are of three types : (i) floral, (ii) faunal and (iii) mineral. Various practices of natural folk medicine prevails now-a-days too. Powwing was very popular among the folk though popularity of powwing declines now-a-days due to the spreading of modern education and scientific knowledge. However, power of powwing and charms is yet believable for most of the village folk. One never call on a doctor in case of pox; but to perform some rituals only. Hence, though alopathic, homoeopathic, ayurvedic etc. modern medical practices have gained popularity, folk medicines are also kept side by side.

Various indigenous games and sports e.g., dhopkhel, tāng-quti or bhatākhel, gutibhangā, hāugudu, bāgh-garu etc. were very popular upto a few years back. Now-a-days, childrens are more interested in playing games like cricket, football etc. Most of the childrens are more interested in enjoying T.V. programmes than playing the indigenous games and therefore, these folk games are going to be extinct.
Community fishing and hunting was a great source of pleasure on the one hand and an effective means of promoting harmony and unity among the villagers on the other hand. Bāghbheta was an indigenous enthusiastic system of trapping tiger collectively by the people of baresahar. Now-a-days, as tiger is rare in the jungles and killing of wild animal is prohibited by the prevalent law, so, this process is extinct now. An indigenous system of catching gharīyā fish in the river Bharali is an interesting process and is current among the fishermen of some villages of Jamugurihat area. This process also heavily suffers as some professional fishermen trap and kill with modern techniques such as bombblast. However, both the system of bāghbheta and gharīyā dhara bears a good folkloric aspect.

Now-a-days, physical folklife is badly victimized by industrialization, urbanization, westernization and modernization. The changing life style of the people is going to diminish the tradition in such a manner that, most of the products of traditional material culture are becoming the objects of museum.

The folk-culture of Sonitpur is rich in the field of performing arts too. Singing and dancing of bihu is a part a parcel characteristic of bihu festival. In a formal bihu performance, at first the namati sings a urabihu as the preface like rāga in case of classical music which is repeated by the co-singers and then a seo is played beating the dhol. Then singing of lyrical bihu songs with the content of love and yearning and expressions of aspirations and passions of the folk, especially the young men and women is started. Various folk instruments viz. dhol, tāl, takā, pepā, gaganā etc. are used...
in the performance and sometimes clapping with two pieces of small bamboo sticks is also noticed. Though flute playing is not customary, now-a-days sometimes flute is also played in the performances. In case of folk music, we observe that, due to close contact of folk music and classical music and influence of mass media, folk influences on classical and vice-versa. As some popular musicians collect various elements of music from the folk level and they try to polish it in the name of modernization and so called popularization, so, now-a-days some folk music has lost its originality. In case of bihu songs it is best observed perhaps.

Huchari song is another kind of song associated with the bihu festival. In the performance of huchari, usually the instruments associated with the bihu songs except pepă and gagană are played. Due to the impact of the neo-Vaishnavite movement, samkirtana is also played as huchari in some areas and in this case, khol is used instead of dhol. In the performance of huchari songs, the padas are sung from the Vaishnavite scripture in the same rhythm and melody of the ghosă (refrain). From the text of the songs, it can be assessed that, these are songs of Late Ahom period fruited from the impact of the neo-Vaishnavite movement.

In a bihu team, though there are some particular male and female dancers, the nāmati, the drummers, the cymblers, bamboo clappers, hornist and the co-singers, one to all of the group take part in dancing with rhythmic body movements. Dancing under a big āhat tree in the midst of a field is the most common stage of the bihu dance
performers characterised in the district. The bihu dance is characterised by brisk steppips, slinging of the hands and vigorous hip movements—symbolising mirth and yearing for union. Different gestures and postures of bihu dance are invariably of a sex-appealing type. As now-a-days, various competetions of bihu dance are held both in a mukali pathār (mukali bihu) and on a modern stage, so, the performers try to systematize and polish the dance with sophisticated costumes, music and dance composition etc. for which it is gradually losing its' folk nature and gaining elite character. However, the courtyard performance remains out and out at folk level.

Huchari dance is also another type of folk dance that prevails in the district. This dance form is also related with the bihu festival. In a huchari party, there is no particular dancer, but all of the party take part in dancing in a moving circle with slow steppings and expressive hand movements.

The Visvanath temple of Sonitpur district is one of the very few temples that associated with natinritya, the local version of devadāsi form of dance. This form should be called as traditional than folk. Now-a-days, this dance form is extinct.

Among the various folk dances of the tribes in the district, boisāgu, bāgurumbā and kherāi dances of the Borogroup, gumrāk dance of the Mishings, ihumur, damkac and kathinac of tea tribes etc. are still current with full of vivicity.

---

In the field of folk drama too, the district is not poor. The most popular and significant traditional drama form of the district is bhaona. Of course, bhaona is not purely folk, but from various points of view, it seems to be more inclined towards folk than to classical. Various changes in the bhaona performance are observed, which occurred due to the impact of television and cinema, as well as modern theatrical performances. On the other hand, as now-a-days, there are many sources of entertainment, so, it is gradually losing its popularity as well as sacredness.

Bārecahariya bhaona is a kind of very festive bhaona performance, where as many as twenty to twenty four bhaonas are staged simultaneously in the same pandal by the villagers taking part from different villages. This familiar bhaona is still alive at Jamugurihat area of the district.

Bahuwāgowā is a popular folk performance having dramatic element and often associated with a bhaona performance. Bahuwās (clowns) create humour with nonsensical dialogues and hillarious action.

Dhuivā oja performance is another kind of dramatic performance in which drummer (dhuivā) called oja alongwith one or more cymbler (tāliyā) called sangi (associate) perform drum and exchange humorous conversation for the enjoyment of the folk generally in a marriage party.
Boka bhaona and pachati, two folk dramatic performances in the context of birth anniversary celebration of Lord Srikrishna, also prevails in some places of the district.

Oia-pali of the form biyāhar oia-pāli prevailed at Visvanath temple and Šingari Šiva temple in the medieval period; but now-a-days it is extinct.

Bālun or bālan is a folk dramatic performance, almost similar with oia-pāli was current among the Nepalese of the district; but now-a-days, it is extinct among them. However, quasidramatic institution called dausi rām which is performed in the context of bhātri dwitiyā festival prevails among the Nepalese of the district. On the otherhand, ahirā which is performed in the context of kālipujā among some tea tribes, still prevails in the district.

It seems that, the magnitude of change among the tribes is slower than the non-tribes. Modernization, industrialization and westernization seriously wounds the folklore of the district. Various branches of folk culture perhaps would not survive as folklore but would survive as art form in future in their second existence.