 CHAPTER V

CHANGING ASPECTS OF BODO-KACHARI AND RABHA
FOLK DANCES

Change in culture is universal phenomena. This being the case changes has also occurred in the case of the study groups in many aspects of their lives.

It was already pointed out in chapter II that various changes are occurring among the Bodo-Kachari and Rabha societies in Goalpara district. It appears that these changes are multidimensional in character. In that, changes are visible in their social, cultural, religious and economic lives. It is also to be noted that adaptation to the Hindu ways of life and assimilation to its culture more particularly by these sections of the tribes a distinct phenomenon of social change noticed during the recent past. Again, conversion of a sizable section to Christianity is another phenomena reacting sharply to the continuation of traditional, social, religious, rituals and socio-cultural trades.

In view of the emerging changes that has been referred to the changing aspects of folk dances of both the study groups have been discussed here.

This chapter discusses the various aspects of continuity along with changes that have emerged in the case of the folk dances of the groups taken for study. It is taken into considerations the various forces and factors that have resulted in the continuity of the traditional dance forms among the study groups. In this context the primary factors that has helped the study groups in continue with their folk dances is the cultural
tradition that has been continuing through the generations. On the other hand the expansions of various media like television, news paper and commercialization of traditional dances have brought about many changes in the case of the folk dances. Along with this the material aspects will also have to be taken into consideration. For example, many of the instruments now-a-days play with folk dance performances in nontraditional settings are not indigenous. Another important aspect in this regard is that at present the commercialization of the numbers of CDs, DVDs of songs and videos are being prepared by different organizations of the Bodo- Kacharis and the Rabhas. These CDs and DVDs have played a very significant role have also gained popularity. Now-a-days due to the use of technology like mobile, internet, folk dances are known to almost everyone, not very popular though. However, increasing industrialization, economic pressures and new media are leading to a new phase.

To this most probably may be added to the emerging pattern of group identity efforts which are visible in the case of many study groups at present. In the recent years in many cases study groups have organized various formal performances of folk dances at a larger scale periodically. This may be consider as an effort to written identity and at the same time to create community consciousness about the glorious past as well as to exhibit cultural strength of the groups in the eyes of others.

From the choreographic point of view changes has occur in case of folk dances as of the need to perform specially in the stages and nontraditional gatherings. When the folk performers perform in the competition they have to abide by various rule and regulations as per the organizers. Therefore, limitation of size of the troupe including dance performers and accompanists are reduced. Thus in the case of compositions of the folk dancer and accompanists are structured according to the need of the situation.
The cultural organizations of the study groups also periodically organize workshops of Folk dances for the folk performances. In these workshops the seniors and expert folk dancers demonstrate the correct and best performances which enable the folk performance to rectify them. One of the important aspects of such workshops is that non-tribal and willing dancers are also welcome to participate. Even in today’s days the non-tribal people are more interested to learn tribal folk dances as well as other dances.

From the last three years the Baykho puja committee has been organizing the beauty contest- ‘Rasong Sini Doray’ (the lucky one) where the committee hire the trainers (models) from outside of the district for the prior cat walk training. In this contest all the young girls (aged 18-25) belong to different caste and community can participate. Many of the folk dancers also participate in this contest. This is one of the major sophisticated change occurred.

Regarding the changes in dress patterns of the artists it is observed that it has been modified. Now both the study groups are very conscious about their costumes. It is seen in recent years that they always add the new bright colour into the old traditionally using dresses of both male and female, keeping the traditional original touch along with. In some dance forms like Bardwishikhla, Baguroumba (Bodo-Kachari dance forms) though the female dress Dokhna should be yellow in colour and the Regeregang should be red coloured but now-a-days it is seen that sometimes the they wear the green coloured Dokhnas along with the multicoloured Regeregang. Even sometimes it is seen that now-a-days the female dancers use to wear both the yellow and green coloured Dokhnas with multicoulsured Regeregang during the performance of a single dance form that may be Bardwishikhla, Baguroumba etc. It looks nice when they dance horizontally and making the circle with the vivid coloured Dokhnas and Regeregans. On the other
hand there are not any fixed colour of Dokhnas are needed in some dance forms like-
Bwisagu. Likewise, in the Farkanti dance of the Rabhas it is seen the dress pattern has
been totally modified of course keeping the originality along with. The traditionally
using Patanis are now modified into bright coloured. But the adorned designs are the
same. They now wear the red, orange coloured Patanis which was formerly maroon
coloured. The Kambung was maroon coloured also but now the Rabha female dancers
use to wear the multicoloured Kambung. Moreover, there are some dance forms where
they use to wear the multicoloured dresses and even there are no any fixed coloured
Patanis, Kambung etc are needed to perform some of the dance forms. The male dancers
of the Bodo-Kacharis and Rabhas though don’t change the colour of the dresses, in fact
there is no any fixed colour for their dresses during performances but sometimes they
use to change the colour of the piece of cloth used as their turbans.

In today’s days everyone knows how to present herself/himself. The artists of
both these groups are also now conscious about their looks while performing. Both the
male and female folks are now always put make-up on the faces for performances either
on a stage or in an open field. The vast changed is observed in regards of the looks of
the artists while peeping through some of the pictures.

Previously the Bodo-Kachari folk dance performers used to wear the paper made
and the seeds of Deowag fruits made garland which are totally vanished now. Likewise
they wore Doula (earring) and Asan (bengle). But due to unavailability now they wear
the locally available market ornaments and the Assamese Junbiri, Dhulpmadoli etc
ornaments.
In the Habajani dance of the Bodo-Kacharis the female folks used to wear only the red coloured Dokhna. But it is not followed in today's days.

Generally while performing the Farkanti dance the artists are not allowed to have the smiling faces since this dance depicts on sad story based on deceased persons. But now a day due to arrangement for the stage performances to look good and attract at the stages they always remain in smiling faces during performances.

It has been gathered from the elderly folk dancers that in early time the dancers, excepting a few did not have structured presentation. In the same manner less of musical instrument were used along with the dances.

Mention may be made here that various modern instruments are also used in the folk dances of both the groups. Although there are some taboos regarding the playing instruments (as mentioned in previous chapter III) but these taboos are not strictly followed in today's days these are all restricted taboos and customary rules/laws though.

In older days, the female folks were considered as bad or spoiled ones if they go to learn/perform the dance, song and drama. But still some female folks were too interested that they ignored the back biting those awful words and set their minds to dedicate in learning and achieving knowledge in folk culture (including music and dance). There are still some elderly persons who are not in favor of entering the female folks into music, dance and all.

It can be stated that the changes which have came in the field of folk dances of the study groups have created a change of awareness among the respective groups about the tradition and culture. This awareness has also influenced them in organizing both the groups in respect of their various cultural activities.
According to Shri Mukul Rabha (54), an exponent of tribal culture

Change is time bound, it is accepted. Hence our folk dances are also now time bound. We can see the changes in regards of musical instruments, dress patterns, ornaments, choreography. In some performances we see the dress patterns which are totally modified leaving all its traditional touch aside. He said the Kambung always should be orange colored or maroon colored (in Hamjhar dance). Likewise, the dress of Farkanti dance should be reddish or maroon colored. But in many cases it is not followed. Hence he added ‘Change is good but should be in proper way keeping in mind about our culture and tradition.

THE RABHA CULTURAL MUSEUM

Rabha Dwrsan Dam Amguri is the name of the Rabha Nidorshan Khsetra (Cultural Museum). This museum was established in 2004 at Amguri village of Ronchai area, Goalpara. The All Rabha Student Union (ARSU) had donated money to open this museum during its Silver Jubilee Celebration. It was one of the consorted efforts of ARSU done for the Rabha people of Goalpara. Certainly this museum brought a change among the villagers of the Amguri village and among the nearby people as well.

Shri Prakash Rabha, is an active socio-cultural activist, dramatist, playwright, actor, litterateur, and poet, the patron of the Rabha culture is the in-charge of this museum. He has tried to do his level best for this museum. He is very dedicated towards collecting and preserving the objects relating to Rabha culture. Many of the Rabha cultural antique pieces are there in this museum. The Rabha dancing implements
like- sword & shield, basket, hoe etc are kept well. Some of the rare pictures of the Rabha folk dances are also preserved there. Those photos are the witness of how the Rabhas originally used to perform their folk dances in such ambiences.

During the eight days festival, 'Spirit of North East, 2009' held in Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi these objects of this museum were displayed along with the other cultural objects from different parts of Assam to represent the culture of Assam. The Assam chapter was organized under the supervision of Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra Society which is the cultural hub of Assam.

This simple but talented ma is headed a dance troupe in Rongchai and under his supervision this troupe has performed in many places of Assam.

**JONOJATI KRISTI SOMAROH**

The celebration of such event like Jono Kristi Somaroh has brought a new phase to the folk culture of Goalpara district. For the first time the Doordarshan Kendra, Guwahati has chosen Dudhnoi, Goalpara to celebrate and organize this 'Jonojati Kristi Somaroh' (on 15th Feb, 2014) and it is certainly a positive sign that have taken such step towards the folk culture.

It was an extra ordinary day where the Director of Doordarshan Kendra Guwahati, and Sri Tankeshwar Rabha CEC (RHAC) were the chief guests. Many of the eminent literatures, singers, actors, dancers were present there to witness that event. Besides, it was one of the communications to acquaintance the folk dance troupes to the
unaware ones through the live telecast from 3.pm on Doordarshan Kendra Guwahati on the day of the Samaroh.

Since it was a Kristi Somaroh (Folk dance group festival) hence the Doordarshan Kendra invited only the folk dance troupes from Goalpara and Kamrup districts. There was one Bodo-Kachari dance troupe from Amjonga, under the leadership of Shri Ajoy Boro (43) (mentioned about the troupe in previous Chapter, IV). This troupe performed the welcoming dance Baguroumba. One Rabha dance troupe was from Deliapara, Boko (Kamrup District), the troupe leader is Shri Amalajan Rabha (33), this troupe performed the Girkay dance and another Rabha dance troupe was from Baida (Goalpara district) under the leadership of Shri Biren Rabha (54), Shri Biren Rabha’s troupe performed the Hamjar dance and the one Rabha dance troupe was from Boko, Kamrup district, they performed the Hanaghora dance, this Hanaghora dance form is not practiced in Goalpara district. Even many of the dance artists of Goalpara district don’t know this dance form. The Garo and Hajong troupes were from Goalpara district. All the troupes performed their respective dances and captivated everyone present there.

The above discussion indicates that certain new forms are borrowed and incorporated to which have added new dimensions in relation to the wider social framework. But at the same time the addition to new forms has not resulted in much change in the original cultural aspects including folkdances. In many a cases new forms have been accepted by sections of the study groups and they have tried to achieve ability in this context. It should be also noted here that some cultural forms had come and lost their utility value. Various interests have resulted in welcoming many of the new forms added to the folk dances.
Despite all these traditional cultural norms are continuing in the case of the study groups which are modifications of the older forms. Apart from cultural contact also, exposures to various forces and factors have brought about the visible changes in the realm of folk dances of Bodo-Kachari and Rabha.