CHAPTER-VI

Conclusion
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Assam is the land of different ethnic tribes. The census of 1991 states that Population of Assam amount to 2,24,14,322. The Schedule Castes of the state are 16 in number while there are 23 Schedule Tribes in Assam. The profile of the Population constitutes a combination of various tribes and other similar ethnic groups.

Located in different hilly regions as well as plain lands, the people of Assam are known to possess various cultural customs that dates back to the historic times of India. The entire population of Assam is divided into many categories. The tribal communities hold a major portion of Assam's total population.

Found in various parts of the state, the prime tribes of Assam include Garos; Hmars, Zeme Nagas, Bodo Kacharis, Dimasas, Lalungs, Jaintias, Rengma Nagas and Khasis. The non-tribal groups of Assam reside in and around the regions of Barak Hills and Brahmaputra River. The people of these communities follow the modern ways of living and are quite deft in adapting to the changing lifestyle trends. The official language of Assam - Assamese - is mostly spoken by the non-tribal sects.
who have also access to educational facilities. Whereas, in case of tribal
groups, Assam is still to go a long way in order to bring them into the
forefront of development.

The ancient archives of Assam support the fact that once
upon a time the land had been inhabited by the rarest of rare human
communities. During archeological surveys, it has been revealed that
Assam was the dwelling place of Caucasoid, Australoids and
Mongoloids. Today, in some remote corners, the population of Assam
constitutes a share of Caucasoid and Mongoloids.

Assam, a northeastern state of India, features a hybrid
culture that has evolved with times. Its culture is a mixing pot where
rituals, customs, heritage, lifestyle, faith & beliefs of various people are
assimilated. Be it dance, cuisine, language, arts & crafts, or fairs &
festivals, Assam has identified itself with a distinctive cultural heritage.
One of the important cultural symbols of the Assamese is Gamocha. It is
an integral part of every socio-religious ceremony. The Gamocha is a
white rectangular piece of cotton hand woven cloth with mainly a red
border on three sides and red woven motifs on the fourth side. It is used
by each person in Assam, irrespective of his/her religious or ethnic

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background. To know other facts of Assamese culture, read on. The people of Assam are known to be very friendly, charming and open-hearted. The state’s population is the result of different ethno-cultural groups that migrated to the land under various politico-economic systems in earlier times. Assam has got a large population of tribals; some of the tribal groups are the Boro-Kacharis, the Deori, the Mising, the Dimasa, the Karbi, the Lalon, the Rabha, etc. People usually reside in hilly areas and plain areas. However, the hilly areas are dominated by more or less by the tribal populace. Vaishnavism, which is sect of Hinduism, is the major religion that is practiced by the majority of Assamese. Besides, the other regions that are ardently followed by people are Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, etc. Some people follow religious practices of the Satras and the Naamghar. Most of the tribals worship their own Gods and follow their distinctive customs & rituals. Since Assam is inhabited by people of diverse regions, many languages are spoken and understood here. However, Assamese or Asamiya is the main language of the state. English is used for administrative purposes though people in cities can speak and understand this language. Bengali is also used for communication by some Hindus and Muslims. The different tribes have their own languages that are commonly used in their own communities. Bihu, which is celebrated in three parts during a year, is the state festival.
of Assam that is observed with great pomp and show by all the Assamese. The Hindus, residing in Assam, celebrate major festivals such as Diwali, Holi, Durga Puja, Swaraswati Puja, Lakshmi Puja, Kalipuja, and Shivaratri with great revelry. Similarly, the Muslims celebrate Id while the Christians commemorate Christmas. Me-dam-me-phi, Ali-aye-ligang, Kherai, Garja, Hapsa, Hatarnai, Awnkham Gwrlwi Janai, Chojun/Swarak, Rongker, Sokk-erroi, Hacha-kekan and Porag are some other festivals celebrated by different ethnic groups in Assam. The Assamese are brilliant at arts and crafts. They are known for their exquisite skills of weaving silks. Moreover, unique products of bamboo and cane are also made here. The craftsmanship of this state appears in its colorful Japi (headgear), terracotta of Gauripur and various decorative items. The graceful Eri, Muga (Assamese silk dresses) and other tribal attires, which are produced here, are really amazing. Dance forms an intrinsic part of Assam Culture; it is associated with merriment. Bihu is the most popular folk dance of Assam that is performed by young boys and girls, especially during the Bihu festivities. Usually most of the dances are accompanied by musical instruments like dhol (dholak), penpa, gagana, banhi (flute) etc. Satriya Nritya is the classic dance form that signifies the Satriya culture of Assam. Jhumur Dance is a synthesized form of dance performed by the tea folks. Bagurumba and Deodhani are other
impressive dance forms of Assam. Though influenced by cuisines of the neighboring regions, the cuisine of Assam has its own luscious taste and flavor. Exotic herbs and vegetables are used to impart a great taste to the dishes. Rice forms a staple diet of the majority of Assamese. Fish curries and pork dishes are the most common and most preferred non-veg food. A typical Assam full course meal starts with Khar and ends with Tenga. At the end of a meal, Paan or betel nut is chewed by people. Pitikas are side dishes, which are prepared from steamed or roasted vegetables.

Multi-Ethnicity is a social-political phenomenon in most civic societies and in the present century inter-ethnic cleavages, competition, and conflict appear to have acquired a marked intensity. In the process, ethnic mobilization has posed varied challenges to many ‘developed’ or ‘developing’ states. The patterns of ethnic group mobilization have been complex and the demands variegated: ‘affirmative discrimination’, autonomy, secession. Affirmative discrimination’ is an articulation of a certain type of inherent inequality in the existing socio-political structures. Affirmative and autonomist measure may be state initiated or sponsored. When such demands emanate from the ethnic groups concerned among the groups and the institutions of power and authority at various levels. Ethnic identity formation is marked by the processes of fission as well as fusion. While the former connotes the contraction of the
group boundary through division and the creation of new groups, the latter refers to its expansion through assimilation which is brought about by incorporation and amalgamation of some groups with others. Ethnicity may be viewed as a device as much as a focus for group mobilization by its leadership through the select use of ethnic symbols for socio-cultural and politico-economic purposes. In the process, it has been the driving force in the emergence of ethnic movements. Ethnic conflict or ethno-nationalism, underdevelopment in economic terms (real or perceived) has a strong emotive component; it can only partially explain the ethnic conflictual phenomena. ‘The cultural division of labour,’ commented Hechter, is a necessary condition for development of ethno regionalism, but it is also an insufficient one’. Alongside the economic denominators, the socio-cultural concern for status and prestige coupled with the stakes of the elites in the political area are equally critical in harmony as much as conflict in ethnic terms. A culture emerges when a set of individuals come together to form a group and consciously or unconsciously make decisions affecting some sort of common enterprise. Culture is most visible as the characteristic behaviors of some particular group of people, but it also exists in the form of the ideas, plans, and common understandings that are acknowledged by the membership. Culture is used as a synonym for such terms as society, socio cultural system,
nation, tribe, or cultural system. Assamese society bears the example of mixed culture, composed of different races, cultures, religions and faith since the time immemorial. The main trait of Assamese society was unity in diversity, but now Assam is torn by many appalling divisive forces like Autonomy, Casteism, communalism. All the ethnic groups gradually become conscious about on their own ethnic identity. This threat to the process of integration. Social inequality, lose of faith, suppression, negligence towards ethnic groups, cultural hegemony raises day by day. The ethnic groups of the regions had accepted the Assamese language, culture once upon a time, but now these groups going to deviate from the greater Assamese society. Assam the land of Srimanta Sankardev and Ajan Peer, is reputed for goodwill, communal harmony, fraternity, amity and unity for ages. But it is a matter of great regret that during last few years different ethnic group become conscious about on their ethnic identity, autonomy question. The ethnic inhabitants have their own living pattern, Social folk customs and cultural elements. Due to the influence and expansion of western language and culture evolved a change in these fields.

After Yandaboo treaty of 1826 British imperialism develop in the grip of Assam. The Assamese middle-class families came forward. This people influenced by concept of modern education, culture and
living pattern. The ethnic inhabitant failed to walk parallely along with this class. British provided different facilities to this middle class. They acquired a high status. They earned Government jobs too. This creates an inferiority complex among the mind of tribal groups. The grip of colonial power loosened, ethnic kinship, regional and religious ties both old and new, threatened to demolish the fragile social order lefty in the wake of colonialism. It led to the fragmentation of the state. Inter group conflicts erupted within populations who ostensibly shared elaborate and long established tie. Customs and beliefs, ritualistic behaviour, dances, folk music and other non literary manifestation form part of the larger study of ethnology. It is an essential part in any study dealing with the evolution of people's social emotional and cultural life, and is also an index to their ethical, aesthetic norms and sense of values. Folklore reveals people's ideas, hopes and fears, aspirations and superstitions. Assam is full of folklore, with its age old civilisation; rich legacy is given to us from generations together. In the past decades to the succession of kings and political shifts rather than to the culture, traditions and social beliefs of the common people which form essentially their way of life(?). In this present study it is tried to give reliable and trust worthy index to know the background of the people as it fostered cultural unity and national integration despite its diverse languages, religions, regions and times.

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Assam, the north-eastern most province of India, has got several important aspects to be investigated, particularly in the field of society and literature, Unity in diversity is a characteristic feature of this land for which Assam is called a ‘miniature India’. Assam is the melting point of a variety of races and tribes. From time immemorial several races have come to this region and settled here permanently. So far as linguistic division is concerned the **Austric** speaking people are the earliest inhabitants of this area followed by the Bodos, **Aryans** and **Tai-Ahoms**. Consequently a composite culture of **Aryans** and non **Aryans** has grown up very rightly mentioned about the existence of various kinds of people living in this land. The same composite character can be traced in the Assamese language or literature, too. Elements coming from various **Aryan** and non **Aryan** sources have enriched the language of the people. The study of Assamese, therefore, is a very important topic for the linguists. Though a few clans like the **Ahoms**, the **koches** and the **Kacharies** ruled over here in the mediaeval period, the first one who entered Assam in the beginning of 13th century gained supremacy over others and become a powerful royal family. During the course of their reign for nearly six hundred years (1228-1826) the **Ahoms** could build Assam and the Assamese people most strong and independent. The history of mediaeval Assam is important from several points of view like

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language, literature, culture and so forth. In this period Assamese developed tremendously as a result of spreading of *Neo vaisnavite* movement by Srimanta Sankardeva. The invaluable Sanskrit scriptures were translated into the local language and sometimes their themes were adapted. Surprisingly enough, Assamese prose literature grew up in the far sixteenth century itself. This has been regarded as an important achievement indeed. In the post Sankardeva period, too, the development of literature went almost undisturbed. Unfortunately the ruling Ahom dynasty started suffering from various ailments towards the close of the eighteenth century. Instability appeared in almost all spheres of the society. So far as language and literature are concerned, no product worth mentioning could be cited. Rather the close of 18th and the beginning of 19th century can very rightly be called an ear of distress for the Assamese Society as well as for its language and literature.

Likewise, the nineteenth century is very significant in the history of Assam from several points of view. During this period a few incidents occurred in Assam which had far reaching impact in the modern period of the state. The invasion of Assam by the Burmese soldiers for three consecutive times during the period 1817-1825 and simultaneous of
the state by the erstwhile East India Company as per provisions of the

treaty of Yandaboo signed between the King of Ava and the Company.

With the advent of the East India Company the American Baptist
Missionaries stepped into our land for propagating Christianity at the
patronage of the former. Rev. Nathan Brown and Oliver T. Cutter were
the first missionaries to come over here who arrived at Sadia, the
easternmost corner of the state on 23th March, 1836. The mission at
Sadia was shifted to Jaypur and again to Sibsagar in upper Assam. The
missionaries established the Assam Mission Press, the first ever printing
machine at Sibsagar on 15th November, 1843. The press has contributed a
lot towards the society as well as literature in Assam. The Assam Mission
Press had published books in Assamese one after another. While some of
the books were related to Christianity some others were connected with
the history and literature of the land. The textbooks published by this
press played significant role in reintroducing Assamese in the school and
offices of the province. The publication of books by the Mission Press
continued up to 1880, the year Mission Press was sold to Assam Tea
Company. Over and above the books just cited, the press in question
published the Orunadai, the first ever newspaper cum magazine
Assamese. Though a very few scholars and researchers have studied about
the contribution of the American Beptist Missionaries towards Assam, the
role played by the press mentioned above is yet to be investigated. Therefore, an attempt will be made in this project to highlight the service rendered by it towards literature, language and society as a whole. Assamese society had the characteristics of a folk society. All the ethnic groups are very happy within their own society. In recent time Assamese society is isolated and insulted. Tradition is an important desideratum in the growth process. To change age old tradition and customs is not easy. This state indisputably the richest Indian state in terms of folklore. Now all the ethnic groups become conscious to preserve their own culture and traditions. We know that religion in the abstract can and must be handled dispassionately without prejudice or passion- and we are learning that despite controversy and sectarianism- Religion in the concrete is "a mode of behavior, a system of intellectual beliefs and a system of feelings" held by and current among human beings who form a society, live in a definite part of the world and are therefore to be studied by constant reference to history, geography, social and economic conditions and to the universal facts of psychology. The tribes of India live in different parts of Indian which has its special characteristics and their views as to the nature of Nature, of the world in which and by which they live and more and have their beings, are based upon their experience, personal and communal, of their peculiar environment.
They speak different language. Which belongs to various language family. They are in constant with Hindu and Hinduised groups. There are features in their intellectual beliefs, their traditional beliefs their tacitly assumed and unquestioned beliefs, which apart from resemblance due to the common elements of the universal pattern-are unmistakably borrowed from their tribal and Hindu neighbours. We must endeavour to know why this feature and not another was selected for adoption, and whether or in what direction the features so selected have been modified and adapted.

To understand the main currents in Indian culture, one has to probe the colourful world of the tribal people in different parts of the country who are generally considered the original inhabitants of the land. The legends, literature, customs and traditions, speak volumes about the wealth of splendor and creativity of these people that have, concomitantly, influenced even those in the vicinity who have chosen to don the garb of Sophistication.

There are apparent cultural differences and locational practices between the life styles of the tribal people of India, but historically, there is a basic unity in thought and philosophy among these
people born and brought up in environments of diversity through the length and breadth of country. What these differences are and what threads of fundamental commonness are inherent in the overall tribal system? Can the questions be answered by the study.

Sociolog has waited a hundred years for a full account of the different tribes of India, but Mr. Verrier Elwin has paid the debt as full as any single author who had to work on many tribes after its tribal life and organization had largely gone. Even the tongue the tribal people now speak is not their own, for there seems to be no doubt but the different speech which they carried with them from the plaints to their fastnesses in the hills, and that mixture of their language with Indo-Aryan, Indo-Mongoloid or Dravidian, are the result of linguistic borrowings which have supplanted and effaced an earlier language. Language, of course, is no safe indication of race and the primitive tribes of India, even if the Mongolian fringes be eliminated, show very great variation when examined by the test of the Co-efficient of Racial Likeness is by no means an entirely satisfactory criterion of racial affinity, but one would have expected a greater degree of propinquity, between such tribes as Bhils, Gonds, Gaddis, Pangwals, etc., than is actually found. In any case the tribal people of Indian clearly belong to one of the oldest strata of race (230)
in India. There is much to suggest that these tongues entered India from
the north-west, north and from the south-east and east. Now the time has
come to integrate the hopes and aspirations of the ethnic groups. We
have to take united effort irrespective of caste, community, language,
religion etc. to safeguard our society. The importance of developing
national identity, there is a little panned scientific intervention. The
religious, ethnic and caste identities develop because of persistent
influences of family, the priest, and the cultural tradition. The influences
for inculcating national identity are much weaker. A multi disciplinary
action research can be organised by considering following objectives –

1. Understanding the inter group relations.
2. Study the problems of inter group relations.
3. Educate the mass towards the goal
4. Promote mass media to raise national integration.
5. Government step to understand and solve the problems of mass.

It is noteworthy that the dynamics of non-violence for
resolving crucial problems facing a nation requires certain basic human
values. For tumately, the Indian Constitution provides a precise and
valuable Preamble as its introductory section which enunciates human
values like justice, equality, liberty and fraternity. Later, principles like
socialism, secularism and integrity have been added to the Preamble by an act of amendment to the Constitution in 1976. The addition of the word "integrity" to the Preamble was considered to be significant and, therefore, the Constitution (Forty second Amendment) Act, 1976, introduced Article 5A in Part IV-A to the text of the Constitution entitled "Fundamental Duties" and one of the duties is to "uphold and protect sovereignty, unity and integrity of Indian". Further, the Preamble of the Constitution aptly refers to the operational dynamics of the word "fraternity": "Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the (unity and integrity of the nation)". It signifies that the Indian Constitution aspires to maintain a balance between the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation. Obviously, the value-concept of "fraternity" specifically mentioned in the Preamble of the Constitution can subserve the cohesive spirit of the nation. The application of the value-concept in terms of policy measures cannot be the responsibility of political leaders alone. In fact, the value-concept like "fraternity" touches the culture of the people living in different parts of our country. Promoting "fraternity" in the framework of culture is a delicate task and this can be fulfilled by social reformers, intellectuals and artists who have a wider vision. The decision of the Government of India to set up seven cultural centres in different zones of the country

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seems to be in the right direction to promote the culture of each and every area. In a way this leads to demetropolization of culture and thereby artist in particular and people in general living in different parts of the country will be able to appreciate the cultural dynamics of human existence.

The overview of ethnic groups and communities in Assam indicates that objective differences among the people *per se* need not lead to ethnic tensions but to the awareness of such differentiation *vis-à-vis* the reference group. In such an awareness internal values and the processes of social change facilitate group mobilization through ethnic networks in the constellation of a pool of symbols to underline the form and content of ethnicity, groups operate at the central as well as local levels, and depending upon the situation, the group leadership selects and standardizes the group symbols. If the symbol pool provides flexibility to the boundary of a group, the process of symbol selection reflects the variable nature of such a boundary in differing contexts. It may be pointed out here that the larger the coincidence of cleavages among two ethnic communities, the greater is the propensity for inter-group conflict. Looking at the various cases of conflict in Assam, Asia, one does perceive a persistent effort to emphasize differences and to project them as cumulative cleavages. However, such cumulativeness has its
overlappings, too. For instance, the Tamils in Sri Lanka have their distinctiveness vis-à-vis the Sinhalese which can be emphasized in racial and linguistic terms but not fully in religious terms because a small segment of the Tamils have been converted to Christianity, as is the case with the Sinhalese. Therefore under the general rubric of cultural distinctiveness of the group, a core symbol is often projected signifying the primary cleavage and other cleavage being made congruent to it. However, such a process of symbol selection and its manipulation is done by the dominant ethnic group as much as by others, with the objective being the status quo ante in the case of some and change in others. Such a perspective on the part of the group leadership may not be all that clear as it seems in print. Spontaneity of decisions in any context is as important as the broad perspective which guides them. It is in this respect that the capability and the will of leadership become critical in mobilization of groups, providing it a direction and also obtaining its feedback. More so, the extent of its clout in the power structure is also closely related to the inheritance contexts- particularly in the case of new states. Whatever be the label -ethnic non-ethnic, political-economic, social- cultural- the issue of leadership is central. As regards ethnic groups, the overview of their similarities and diversities, whether this be size, number, structure or scale of group differentiation, the locus of their
interaction finally converges in the centrality of politics: Who gets what, when and how (?) Thus, whether one is referring to dispersed ethnic systems or ethnically central systems of Assam most of them have had the recurrence of ethnic nationalism of various hues and intensity. While attributes in terms of the nature and extent of ethnic-heterogeneity have bearings on inter-ethnic interactions, the perspectives and strategies of leadership is a crucial factor in this respect.

Today India needs a policy on culture with peoples participation at different levels of policy for socio-economic transformation of the entire nation. For national integration a renaissance is essential and it would be relevant if the people at the periphery of the country come forward for evolving indigenous symbols which will promote cultural unity. The heroes, folklore art an culture of certain peripheral groups and regions should be recorded in major languages an attempts be made to identify new symbols for nation building purposes.