Chapter XIV

CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters we have tried to shed some light on the different aspects of the folk-culture of Goalpara. It has been our endeavour to describe and analyze the various materials making up the culture of the rural folk of the district. No doubt these materials deserve attention in their own right. But many of them possess an additional significance in that they are of relevance in the proper understanding of the cultural pattern of a much larger area.

It could be said that the culture of Goalpara is like a confluence where several streams have met and their waters have flowed along one channel and yet they have retained their colours to such an extent that it is not impossible to find out each stream and to trace it to its source.

From an analysis of the ethnological and sociological aspects it becomes clear that the folk-culture of Goalpara has a predominantly non-Aryan tribal foundation with a largely Hindu Aryan superstructure. The religious and semi-religious beliefs and practices of the various sections of the people, their seasonal and agricultural rites and ceremonies as well as their social customs amply bring out the mixed character of the culture of the district. While this is largely true of the plains of the whole of north-eastern India, the case of Goalpara seems to be particularly significant. In this district not only is there a larger number of people of the tribal stock visibly in
process of assimilation and integration into the Assamese Hindu society but many of the beliefs and customs of the non-tribal sections of the population also clearly betray signs of their links with a tribal past. Moreover, Islam too has contributed strands dyed in the local colours lending interesting shades and motifs to the cultural fabric of the district.

Again, Goalpara has also been the meeting ground of different cultural trends on another plane. Because of geographical, political and sociological reasons there have been in this region influences, both vertical and horizontal, from contiguous neo-Indian cultural units built mainly around linguistic homogeneity. While certain Eastern Bengali elements—specially in the fields of language and literature—have permeated the cultural set up of the district, Goalpara's folk-culture is mainly modelled on two cultural modes—that of North Bengal in the west and of Kamrup in the east, both of which again conform to the broad pattern of Assamese culture. In fact, it is here that many ingredients of Assamese culture start taking the distinctive Assamese character. It would appear that the key to the proper interpretation of some important elements of Assamese culture lies in the analysis of their natures as obtaining in Goalpara.

Goalpara's rural atmosphere is replete with the wealth of oral literature, music, dance and drama. Delightfully charming and enthralling as many of the individual items are, what is really remarkable is the earthiness of the bulk of the materials, the spontaneity and vigour with which they are presented and the avid gusto with which they are enjoyed by the village folk—all testifying
to the full-bloodedness of the cultural life of the district. Even the contents of many of the items, more often than not centring round the concept of fertility, both human and vegetal, speak of a rare zest for life.

Goalpara's heritage seems to be unusually rich in the field of dramatic and semi-dramatic institutions of a purely folk type and also in that of ritualistic dancing of a mimetic nature. In the cultures of few other regions mimetic acting and dancing seem to have such an important place.

However, of undoubted uniqueness is Goalpara's position in the realm of folk-art—if not for anything else but for the wonderful art of working on pith. The exquisite pith images and paintings of Goalpara possess such outstanding qualities of both craftsmanship and artistic excellence that they can easily rank among the finest specimens of folk art not only of Assam but of the whole of India.

Goalpara also offers an interesting field of study to the student of linguistics. The two principal dialectal variations of the district represent not only morphological but also phonological divergences. And there are the intermediate forms through which they merge into each other. It is most probable that the study of the gradual process of transformation of the dialects of Goalpara from the west to the east will bring to light much fresh information about certain aspects of the formation and development of the Assamese language.