CHAPTER-VII

CONCLUSION

The Following conclusions can be drawn from our study and discussions:

The Thengal Kacharis are the son of the soil (Bhumiputra) of Assam, North-east India. Racially, they belong to the indo-Mongoloid race. They belong to the eastern branch of the Kachari group. They are very close to another ethnic group of Kachari community known as the Sonowal Kacharis. It is a Scheduled Tribe group of Assam. However, the group is not shown separately in the Scheduled Tribe list of the government till recent time. It posed a threat to the future existence of the group as an independent community in Assam. The question of identity and ethnicity is also related to it. There are earlier government and other records which proves that they are an independent group like the other groups of the Kachari community of Assam. There is no separate census of the community since the independence. Thus, it is not easy to say anything about the exact population of the community. The Thengal Kachari villages are scattered in different districts of Brahmaputra valley of Assam. The major concentration are in the Jorhat, Golaghat and North Lakhimpur district of the state. The Thengal Kachari is an assimilated group. It is one of the ethnic group of Assam, who has undergone assimilation to a great extent. The process started with the conversion of the community into Neo-Vaishnavite religion preached by the great saint scholar, Sankardeva of Assam. The community has adopted the life and culture of the caste Hindu Assamese people. They speak in Assamese
language and never thought to be separate from the Assamese people under any circumstances. But recently from the last decade of the 20th century, they have started a democratic movement to assert a distinct identity. The reason behind this agitation are genuine and obvious. The sense of ethnic consciousness is growing day by day. The study intends to understand the transformation of Thengal Kachari identity in relation to its ‘Assamiyaization’. The focus has been given to development of identity consciousness in the context of adoption of traits of Assamese culture. It also discusses the other issues which led to the development of ethnicity and separateness among the Thengal Kacharis of Assam in the recent time. The role folklore played in the process has also been analyzed. As a result, an attempt towards preservation of tradition has become visible. In recent time, the ethnic communities of north east India are seen to be consciously using folklore in their identity and autonomy movement. Here folklore is being used for asserting an ethnic distinctiveness and a separate identity. No one can deny the role of politics in the process. Thus, it is an attempt to study the case of the Thengal Kacharis of Assam, who in recent decade have started their identity movement. It will help the future researchers to observe the phenomenon among the other ethnic groups of the region. Moreover, this study will be useful for future studies in the area of ethnicity and folklore among various other ethnic groups of the region.

Nothing can be said for certain about the origin and migration of the Thengal Kacharis of Assam. As the group belongs to the Kachari group, the origin and migration about the Kacharis can be used to have an idea about them. The earliest settlement of the group can be gleaned from mythical and historical traditions. There are many legends regarding the origin of the word “Thengal”. The earlier literature of the region never mention the name of the
community. As already discussed, the Thengal Kacharis are the followers of neo-Vaishnavite religion preached by great saint scholar Sankardeva and his disciple Madhavdeva in 15th and 16th century. The followers are now in different branches of the religion. The majority are the disciple of Auniati Satra (Religious institution of neo-Vaishnavism religion). Many Thengal Kacharis are under the Srimanta Sankar Sangha, a branch of the Neo-Vaishnavite religion. The Thengal Kacharis were earlier devotees of Lord Shiva. The Sakti worship was also prevalent among them. Many Thengal Kacharis still worship Shiva and Durga. They also believe in many ghosts and spirits. The Thengal Kachari society is a patriarchal society. Both nuclear and joint family system are seen among them. In general, the son inherits the property of their father. Patrilocal residence is seen among them. The community is divided into 21 exogamous clan. The position of the Thengal Kachari women are also important in the society. Besides the socio-cultural activity, the women also take part in some economic activities. The Thengal Kachari women are the expert silk weavers. Rearing and weaving of silk is a part of the Thengal culture. Namghar is the most important religious institution of the Thengal Kachari villages. The village council is headed by the village headman. There are different positions to conduct the social activity of the villages. In political and administrative matters, the newly formed Autonomous Council also plays an important role. The Thengal Kacharis have a very rich culture. Bihu is the most important festival of the community. The community observes the festival with great pomp and gaiety. Beside this, they have the other traditional festivals as Suwa Uruwa Utsav, Pānītulā Sabāh etc. There are many other ceremonies and rituals of the community. The Khulang Burhi dance is an important dance of the community. Chewing betel nut and vine is a part of their culture. Rice is the staple food of the community.
men folk wear *dhoti* and *pānjābi* (long half sleeve shirt) and the women folk wear *mekhelā* and *chādar*. Agriculture is the main occupation of the people. Rice is the staple food of the community and they are non vegetarian. Each house of the Thengal Kacharis have a courtyard and a backyard. The old Thengal Kachari houses were made of bamboo and thatch. As already discussed, the Thengal Kacharis have recently started their identity movement. It was started from the last decade of the 20th century. The community do not have an independent constitutional status as Thengal Kachari. They write the caste Hindu surnames in general. This stood as a problem in getting their status and benefits in many cases. Moreover, the community is being neglected in economic, social and many other spheres by the government. Under this circumstances, some conscious members of the community formed an organization called “All Assam Thengal Kachari organization” on 25th November, 1990. The basic objective of this organization is to look after the various issues of the community. In the following years, another organizations called, “All Assam Thengal Kachari Student organization”, “All Assam Thengal Kachari Women Organisation” were formed in the context of their identity movement. All this organizations have the primary objective of the inclusion of the name of the Thengal Kacharis in the Scheduled Tribe List of the government independently. The community has got the Autonomous council in the year 2005. It is one of the great political achievement of the community. The proper working of the council in the near future is another challenge for the community in the recent time.

In the third chapter of the thesis, the concept of ethnicity has been analyzed from the point of view of various scholars. A good number of theories have been discussed. Ethnicity, which is one of the most widely discussed topics of the world has attracted the scholars from the various disciplines of social science
and humanities. The uncertainty in meaning and the definition of the term is an important feature of the term ethnicity. In general it implies common actions, behavior, attitudes and features which result from the tendency of maintaining a difference by any group or people from some other groups or people in a plural and heterogeneous society. It is not an isolated phenomenon. It depends upon the social, economic and political conditions of a community. Culture is also an important factor that gives rise to the sense of ethnicity. The context of the society where it is being studied is one of the important points to be considered always. Following Fredrik Barth, it can be said that the boundary maintenance is an important factor for ethnicity. It is seen that ethnicity is particularly important for the maintenance of the social and political boundaries between groups. Sometimes, it develops into social discrimination and stratification in the society. Also, the study reveals the limitations of the word 'ethnicity' and "ethnic group" in many cases. The chapter also covers the basic concepts of folklore in order to establish its relationship with ethnicity. In order to understand the relationship between ethnicity and folklore, the concepts like "ethnic folklore", "Folklore of ethnicity", "identity and folklore" are being discussed. Folklore is an important area to consolidate the ideology of ethnicity. In any type of ethnic movement, folklore materials are used extensively. The ethnic groups draws a lot from folklore in the process of their ethnic movements. Many a time, many new folklore gets generated in the process. Folklore is a great source of inspiration for those groups. Folklore is no longer concerned with only survivalist views. It is to be noted that folklore studies in Europe began with study of the minority groups. Immigration of various groups to United States of America in different times drew the attention of many scholars for study of ethnic folklore in that country. Immigration, migration are the universal problems and these processes are making all groups to maintain a distinct sense of ethnicity all over the world.
It is true for those groups who move from one part to the other and also for the indigenous populations of a place. The fact is true for India and the other common wealth countries. According to Stephen Stern (1977:10-32), the studies of ethnicity and folklore fall under the following heads:

1. Folklore as a Survival of past Ethnic Heritage
2. Folklore as an Index of the Acculturative Process of Ethnic Groups.
4. Functions of ethnic folklore.
5. Ethnic Folklore as a response to New Social Experiences.

All genres of Folklore are used in the ethnicity and identity discourses. Myths and legends, Plays and folksongs, the language practices, cultural practices and dress practices play a very important role. Ethnic festivals, ethnic food, ethnic dress and other ethnic items are symbols of identity and ethnicity. In recent time, various ethnic and identity movements have paralyzed the normal life in North-east India. The demands are logical in many cases. But due to lack of proper strategy and steps by the government, the situations are becoming worse and worse. Economic backwardness, unemployment are the basic problems. There are immigration problems. All the groups are looking for more political benefits. The demand of more autonomy by all the groups are some of the basic political issues. There are even examples of ethnic cleansings. This type of situations is separating all the groups from each other. Late globalization and modernization are also some of the other reasons for the situations. Thus, ethnicity and identity of the ethnic groups are a grave social issue in North east India. In this context, the use of folklore in the identity movements is a very important area of study.
The chapter -III also deal with the identity problem of the Thengal Kacharis of Assam. The issue of the constitutional status is one of the greatest political question for them. The community is deprived of their rights in all spheres. They are lagging behind socially, economically and also politically. To consolidate the idea of ethnicity, an extensive use of folklore is being seen in the process of their identity formation. It has been observed that folklore is very important for the community to assert a distinct identity. In the absence of a distinct language of their own, folklore is the only source through which they can articulate their identity. The folklore materials are a great symbol of ethnic identity for the community.

The situation of ethnicity of the Thengal Kacharis has been discussed in the international context. As I happened to visit Estonia under the DORA Programme of European Union, I got an opportunity to make a study about the Setu Community of South East Estonia. The study was made to give a comparative idea of situation of ethnicity in Asia and Europe, especially North east India and Eastern Europe. The understanding of the situation of ethnicity in different parts of the world is indeed very important in order to draw any conclusion about any ethnic movements. The Setu community is a minority group of South east Estonia. The area inhabited by the Setu people is known as Setumaa (also called as Petserimaa). The Setus are now Greek Orthodox or Russian orthodox people. It is a border community and a small population of the community still lives in Russia. This border issue is one of the basic reason for the rising ethnic consciousness among the Setu community. In their identity movement also, an extensive use of folklore can be seen. However, noticeable difference and similarity can be seen regarding the situation of ethnicity between the Thengal Kacharis of Assam and the Setu community of Estonia. At the
abstract level, the problem of ethnicity is same all over the world. But when we consider the different social, economic and political conditions, the situation seems to be very different. Whatever the goals and reasons, the use of folklore is extensive for consolidating the idea of ethnicity among both the communities. The political, economic and the social issues of the two communities are not same. However, it is seen that cultural autonomy and political representations are equally true for both the communities. It was observed that in the present time, the Setu community is being paid a good attention by the Estonian government as it is border community. The situation is not same for the Thengal Kacharis of Assam. Lately, the community has been paid little attention by the government due to their identity movement. The identity movement of both the community is seen to be very peaceful. In the case of the preservation of the folklore materials, the Setus are seem to be far ahead of the Thengal Kacharis of Assam. Both the communities attached a great importance for their folklore materials as a symbol of identity. A great political use of folklore is seen among both the communities. The revivalist tendencies of various folklore materials is equally true for both the communities. In this process, the tendency of inventing some of the traditions is also seen. Both the communities have a great emotional and sentimental attachment towards their folklore materials. Both the communities are trying to reintroduce many of their traditions and customs. But in this case also, the Thengal Kacharis are lagging behind as compared to the Setus. A great difference is seen regarding the celebration of festivals among the two communities in the context of ethnicity and identity. Many a time, culture is used by the community to draw the attention of the government. However, the issues seem to be different for both the communities. The Setus have a distinct language. It is not true for the Thengal Kacharis of
Assam. So, one community has both the language and cultural identity and the other has only the cultural identity. Finally, it can be concluded that folklore is very important for both the communities to assert a distinct ethnic identity. The study gives a very vivid idea about the “ethnicity and folklore” in two different parts of the world.

Customs and traditions are one of the important areas of folklore. In the process of any identity formation, a great importance is always being stressed in this area of folklore. The customs and traditions always consolidate the idea of ethnicity. The field of customs and traditions of the Thengal Kacharis of Assam is very rich and diverse. A detail discussion of the customs and traditions of the Thengal Kacharis is being made in this chapter. The revival of many customs and traditions and its use in the light of their identity movement has been also discussed. *Suwa Utuwa Utsav* (immersion of the impurities into river) and *Panitulā Sabāh* (Festival of ceremonious fetching of water) are two distinct ceremonies of the community. Āi sabāh, apesari sabāh, Lakhimi sabāh, gopini sabāh, pir-diya, guhālit diyā, Bharālat diyā etc are some of the ceremonies of Thengal Kacharis associated with folkbelief. The ceremonies associated with belief in ghosts and spirits are *Jakh-Jakhini pujā, Gā Dāngariā pujā, Bhitar sakā m, Sani grahar sāul khuā, jal debatā pujā* etc. There are numerous ceremonies associated with agriculture. As already discussed, the community was earlier the worshippers of Lord Shiva. There are many ceremonies associated with the worship of Lord Shiva among the community. They also used to do Sakti worship. In the present time also, they worship the goddess. The traditional worship of Goddess Durga is being also seen in many places. There are many customs and ceremonies associated with the passages of life as birth, marriage and death. The Thengal Kacharis are now the followers of Neo-Vaishnavism.
A great influence of the caste Hindus is seen in their life. Due to this assimilation, the community has adopted many of caste Assamese customs and traditions. The community celebrates the anniversaries of the saint Shankardeva and Madhavdeva. They also celebrate the birthday of Lord Sri Krishna. The traits of traditional culture is seen among a small section of the community. However, in the light of their identity movement, the community members are seen to pay more and more attention to their age old customs and traditions. They are trying to revive many of their customs and traditions. In the process, there are also "Invention of Tradition". One of the basic reason is also political for these tendencies. For a Scheduled Tribe Status in India, beside the other criterias, the constitution of India has advocated for a distinct culture. To arouse the consciousness, the educated section and the political leaders of the community are playing the leading role. For them, preservation of customs and traditions is very important for the future existence of the community. The process of revivalism of the customs and traditions among the community is very recent in origin. The community members are now playing importance for the documentation and preservation of various customs and traditions. There are tendencies of writing about various customs and traditions in newspapers, journals etc. The *Thengal Darpan*, a biennial souvenir is playing a very important role in this regard. There are revivalism of many festivals. *Torā-chirā Bihu, Suwa Uțuwa Utsav, Panitulă Sabăh*, etc are Worth mentioning. There are plans of their organizations to organize seminars in the places inhabited by Thengal Kacharis on their distinct culture. There are the documentations of many other customs and traditions. The traditional customs are presented in various conferences, meetings etc as a symbol of identity. The leaflets published on the occasions stressed the importance of customs. The leaders attach a great importance to customs and traditions in their speeches. For them, customs and
traditions are means of identity marker. The Thengal Kacharis also have a great contribution towards the Assamese culture. It is to be noted that there are some distinct elements and traits of the community in many customs and traditions. However, the influence of the Neo-Vaishnavism religion is to a great extent among them. In recent time, there are changes due to the impact of modernization and globalization. But the recent identity and autonomy movement has aroused a great consciousness for their indigenous customs and traditions. The community members are paying utmost importance to revive and preserve their age old customs and traditions.

In any ethnic movements of North east India, the role of oral tradition is immense and important. The oral sources are very helpful in the present situation of ethnic uprisings among various communities. For Thengal Kacharis also, oral traditions are an important area to assert their ethnicity and identity. They glorify their past by using the oral traditions. The oral traditions show the origin, migration, history and many other facts about them. Thus, one can see the emotional and sentimental attachment of the community members towards it. In their ethnic movement, the leaders and educated sections are basically drawing facts from the oral traditions to inspire and unite the group. The common masses are also very much aware of it. In general it is very difficult to distinguish the oral traditions of the community from the Assamese society. It has to be admitted that all the important genres of oral traditions as myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, riddles etc are prevalent among them. The Thengal Kacharis have their own myth and legends which show how they migrated and settled in different parts of Assam. There are many folksongs associated with the rearing and weaving of silk which expresses a distinct identity of the community. There are numerous marriage songs, devotional songs, songs related to various
ceremonies etc that are still in wide circulations in their oral traditions. In the light of their identity movement, there are tendencies of composing many new songs, legends etc to inspire the people. The community is seen to celebrate many new festivals day by day based on their oral traditions. The ideological use of oral tradition in their autonomy movements is seen. The use of the mythical past and the bravery of the mythical heroes induced a new hope among the community members. The great use of oral narratives can be seen in the Thengal Kachari identity movements. To collect and document the scattered oral traditions is not at all an easy task for the community members. In all the community conferences, meetings, one can see the influence of their oral traditions. The common masses can tell about their myths, legends, proverbs etc spontaneously. The conscious and educated section of their community are trying to collect and document those oral traditions. These oral sources prove their past histories. The legends focus how the name Then gal Kacharis was originated. There are numerous songs, proverbs etc which show their experience of the past and the contemporary situations. Many a times, one can also find the oral sources to be remixed with new and modern ideology too. The Thengal Kacharis glorify the name of Tularam Senapati, the last Kachari ruler in their songs and legends. Thus, they are trying to preserve their scattered oral traditions, which is indeed a positive step for any community. In the absence of an authentic written literature, the oral traditions are treasure for the community. They are also helping to strengthen their identity movement. The chapter-VI on oral traditions reveals the above facts very vividly.

In the conclusion, it can be said that the study of folklore in the context of the identity movements of the ethnic groups of North east India is a new dimension of the discipline. The sense of ethnicity consolidate the situation.
The Thengal Kacharis of Assam is an indigenous community with its rich cultural and historical past. Due to assimilation and in the process of formation of a greater Assamese society, the group have adopted Caste Assamese life and culture. In the recent time, due to deprivation in social, economic, political and other spheres, the group has started their identity movement. The sense of separateness is growing day by day. The independent inclusion of the name of the community in the Scheduled Tribe list of government of India is a great political challenge for the community. To assert its ethnicity and identity, a great use of the folklore can be seen. The identity movement of the Thengal Kacharis is very peaceful in nature. Use of folklore for the purpose of ethnicity and identity is a universal issue. The field of folklore helps to unite a group. The ethnic folklore is a symbol of identity and ethnicity. In the recent identity formation process of the Thengal Kacharis of Assam, folklore is playing the most important role. It is a source of great inspiration for the community to assert themselves as a distinct community. Folklore is playing a great role in the process of the identity formation of the community.

###