Chapter Eight

CONCLUSION
The study has been conducted in the light of certain theoretical approaches of economic anthropology to understand market and its contingent forces. A market in a rural area is conceived as a multi-dimensional socio-cultural institution. In Chapter One a few propositions are raised on the basis of data collected from thirty-six periodic markets located in three distinct eco-cultural zones covering approximately 3,500 km² field area. Intensive field work was carried out in five market centres located in the tribal majority area for examining the impact of market in the hinterland society and the socio-economic changes brought about by it. Finally, propositions made in Chapter One are analysed in the light of data collected from hinterland villages of these five markets. The periodic market in the field area are termed as 'folk market' for their nature, role and function in the multiethnic tribal and peasant socio-economic setting.

Economists and anthropologists often hold contradictory perceptions of economics which lead them to view market differently.

"The phrase "economic growth" joins together two different kinds of change which go on simultaneously in underdeveloped areas: institutional transformation from indigenous socio-economic forms such as reciprocity and redistribution to market-organised industrialism; and additions to real material output generated by the new economic and technical apparatus. Economists are concerned with inducing real output increases, anthropologists with reducing the social decimation inherent in rapid institutional departure from indigenous forms. Both must understand the nature of the primitive economics which are being dismantled as well as the economic and social characteristics of market industrialism" (Dalton 1961:21).
The debate between the economist and the anthropologist shows that the former has a purely economic perception of market based on commodity transaction, profit generation, money circulation, production augmentation, consumption level and so on. The anthropologist on the other hand looks at the market as a comprehensive socio-economic institution.

During last three decades, several important works on market were carried out within the theoretical premises of anthropology. However, in these works (e.g., Bohannan and Dalton 1962, Dewey 1964, Epstein 1982, Sinha 1968, Skinner 1964), the extent of socio-cultural ramification of marketing and changes in the indigenous society under the impact of market industrialism remained obscure.

Findings from this study illustrate that the concept of folk market can reconcile differences between economists and anthropologists. For example, the hinterland people consider a haat not merely as a profit generating institution of an individual but as part and parcel of their socio-cultural life. Data show that the haat is considered by these people as a property of the entire community living in its hinterland and the profit of a market committee is shared by all. This egalitarian perception makes the folk market distinctive in the regional socio-economic setting. Simultaneously, the folk market induces forces of market mechanism into the tribal society. The tribals now consider labour as a commodity (e.g., labour union at Darrangiri, Khasi and Garo porters at Hahim), produce different market commodities (e.g., cattle hide, silk cocoons, charcoal, bamboo broom sticks, etc.) and cultivate new market crops (e.g., wheat and niger) which have no utility in their society as such. However, the expansive market forces are not able to reduce the growing importance of a market committee for its vital socio-cultural functions in the multiethnic setting. These clearly indicate that the tribals are effectively reoriented in a changed socio-economic situation while their perception of social obligation and co-operation remains unchanged.

Dewey (1962:68-9) in her work on Javanese peasant market postulated that in the predominantly commercial atmosphere at a rural market "Ties of kinship and neighbourhood are of less importance ..... then, perhaps, in any other aspect of traditional peasant life." But Sinha (1968:71-2) in contrast observed ceremonial relationships growing across ethnic boundary at
the central Indian intertribal market place which are of great importance from the point of regional solidarity in a multiethnic rural area. However, Sinha (ibid) did not mentioned the contributions made by such social relationships to the village and regional economy.

In Chapter Two, it is mentioned that the folk market in the region is to be understood in relation to the historical and contingent forces. Data show that the economics of the neo-peasant tribals and Hindu and Muslim peasantry in the region have been in close contact since historical times through the periodic market. It is through such contacts that tribal communities have gradually acquired the character of peasantry. The traditional folk market has now-a-days become a meeting place of two opposite economic forces: Modern market economy and non-market economy. These forces bring together members of different socio-cultural groups. As a consequence elements of culture from one group passes on to another. Empirical data show that after coming into contact with market economy, the traditional system of redistribution and resource allocation have changed radically (e.g., extinction of chaparikgipa and gyasthi-based exchange) amongst the tribesmen. In addition to the vital economic function, the folk market also serves important social, cultural, recreational, political and religious functions.

The tribesmen in the hinterland of the folk markets strive to attain the material standard of the urban people. This attitude also encourages accumulation of cash-capital and reduces the influences of traditional social values in the life of an individual. The wealthy become more powerful in the village social milieu and enjoy a higher status. Although the urban way of life intruded via various avenues (e.g., modern education and salaried jobs), the folk market has played an important role in the transformation process since early period in this region. Moreover, in the present heterogenous socio-cultural setting, the folk market becomes a place of showing distinctiveness of each group and paradoxically, at the same time it becomes a centre of regional solidarity and integration.

The study began with four basic assumptions to examine the role and function of folk market.

It is seen that the folk market in the region encompass a large spatial area as its hinterland and is visited by people of different communities, a significant proportion of which is
The non-tribals are mostly itinerant traders who operate from an urban centre. These traders sell common and non-tribal commodities produced outside. A section among them visit the market as wholesale buyers of local produce. Another group of non-tribal visits a folk market as specialists in different artisan works. A visiting barber, cobbler and tailor is always a non-tribal. Moreover, there are some outside seasonal market visitors who visit the folk market as entertainer, e.g., magician, snake-charmer and performer of animal show. Besides these non-tribal market visitors, the non-tribal astrologer and palmist, religious agent and the local postman also visit the folk market and become agents of transculturation.

The local visitors from the hinterland are mostly tribals who visit a folk market for different purposes (Chapters Four, Five and Six). These visitors are thus exposed to external forces embodied in the outside market visitors. Thus folk market becomes a focal point of interaction of varied types of forces and cultures in the region.

The folk market opens up many new avenues for cash generation, e.g., charcoal selling, cattle hide selling, bamboo sticks for broom and wage labour, to name a few. It also monetises the hinterland societies and changes the perception of value judgement of materials and services.

The tribal people who strive to attain the material standards of the urban way of life find in the somewhat transformed and expanded folk market an important source of inspiration. The folk market becomes instrumental in bringing about these changes. The urban centre-based, outside, wholesale buyers at the folk market are funnelling out the local agricultural produce. At the same time, market-centred interactions are canalizing tribal and rural cultural elements to the non-tribal and urban socio-cultural fold. A folk market thus becomes a vital agency in the rural-urban continua.

It has been discussed that interdependency between tribals and non-tribals exists in the folk market centres (Chapters Four, Five and Six). A considerable number among the non-tribal visitors are outside itinerant traders. A section among them visit the folk market as wholesale buyers of local agricultural and horticultural produce, charcoal, cattle hide and silk cocoons, etc. But most of them are vendors of different common commodities and non-tribal
commodities (Appendix H). They import these commodities from outside region. These imported articles include grocery, oil, cloth, yarns, stationery, footwear, hardware, utensils, earthen ware, fishing nets, etc., to name a few. Many fancy goods and costly items of dress, cosmetics, biscuits, sweets, etc., are not really central to tribal rural life and these are often also beyond the purchasing capacity of the common villagers. But the demand for such goods are on the increase. Basically the new orientation to the material culture has created a new imbalance in the hinterland society.

The local people from the hinterland visit the folk market not merely with economic motives there are other socio-cultural reasons which induce them to visit a market (Chapter Six). These visitors occupy the peripheral area of a market. Some hinterland tribal villages have rest camps in the central part of a market. Such village-based rest camps illustrate strong articulation of a folk market with the tribals helping in its traditional hinterland. These village-based rest camps are also places of socialization. As a result of market-centred interaction among varied entho-linguistic groups, the knowledge of secondary language speakers among the tribals increase. The folk market also transmits new ideas to the traditional societies in the hinterland.

The function of a market committee attached with a market reflects varied roles of the folk market in an area (Chapters Four and Five). It is thus clear that folk market perform varied socio-political and cultural functions over and above the merely economic.

The folk market in a multiethnic, polyglot rural area obviously becomes the focal point of cultural contact for the varied types of market visitors from different socio-cultural background. Data from the markets show that majority of the traders visit these centres with their primary interest in trade and commerce. But there are many market visitors who come not just with economic interest of buying and selling. The majority in the latter group of market visitors are local tribals.

Frequent market-centred transactions among the visitors often create bonds of friendship across the bounds of ethnic line. For example, the relation between the Assamese Kalita and
the Garo silk cocoon rearer (Chapter Six) cannot be viewed as a merely commercial one; it also exhibits some mutual social obligations toward each other. This type of relationship is regulated by the traditional non-market economic forces.

The fourth postulation in the study is that folk market is bringing about not merely market economy but also certain urban values into peasant and tribal life. It has been found (Chapter Seven) that there is a growing tendency among the tribals to accumulate cash-capital. The folk market provides different avenues for cash generation. It has given rise to a monetised class in the hinterland society and has reduce the importance of traditional socio-economic value and kinship obligation (e.g., extinction of *chaparikgipa* and *gyasthi*-based exchange). The folk market also becomes instrumental in the formation of two distinct classes: the rich *mohajans* and the artisan-labour class. With the formation of classes in the traditional kin-based tribal society, value judgement of material and services have been radically changed.

The whole concept of folk market lies around the interaction of modern market mechanism and traditional economic behaviour combined with wide range of non-economic ones.

The study clearly indicates that there is scope for development of folk market in its existing form. In the non-industrialized tribal belt, the folk market emerges as an important institution for cash generation and economic transaction. These socio-economic institutions contribute considerable amount of revenue to the State exchequer. The Government has taken special measures to improve these market-sites. However, such developmental schemes should be formulated considering the local psyche and necessity of each market. For example, in the year 1994 District Rural Development Agency, Goalpara, constructed a permanent market shed at Rongjuli *haat* at a cost of Rs. 234,000.00. But the shed is not utilized by the market visitors for its proximity to the original *haat* site. There are other examples of such unsuccessful development schemes in the study area.

In the local agriculture-based economy, the folk market is the only outlet for the agricultural surplus and other locally produced goods. These local products are taken out of the region by outside wholesale buyers who exploit the producers to a great extent. Such
exploitation also leads to pauperization and class formation in the hinterland societies. The outside traders take advantage of the ignorance of the producer as to prices as well as absence of storing facilities at the markets to exploit the local producers. Therefore the local producer-sellers of agricultural items have to dispose off their goods on the very day they bring them to the market at low rates.

The itinerant outside sellers also charge high rate for their commodities. There is scope for minimizing exploitation of the local people by establishing information centres interlinked to a market intelligence network at every rural market. Cold storage facilities for perishable goods would also reduce outside exploitation. Auction facilities with minimum bid price for various commodities for the local produce is necessary at the market site to prevent haggling by the wholesale buyers' nexus. These measures would also encourage the local producers to increase their productivity in the hinterland and there is likely to be increasing volume of market supplies.

Periodic folk markets are regularly visited by large number of people from a vast hinterland. This offers several advantages: Added to mobile service units from various departments (e.g., medical, agriculture, veterinary, industry, education) can extend services in the rural areas more widely and effectively.

The market committee is a democratic and secular body constituted by the hinterland people of a market. It is an effective mechanism evolved by the local people to take control over a market which they consider as their own. A market committee also performs varied types of function in a locality. Market related developmental work can be successfully undertaken with the co-operation of a market committee. Considering its importance, a market committee may be provided legal status in the Panchayati Raj system to enhance its efficiency and effectivity. The efficient marketing system in a folk market does not merely link buyers and sellers to interact on trade-ties but also stimulates regional solidarity in a multiethnic area.

Periodic folk markets in the context of Assam, and for that matter in the whole of north-east India, is an institution of great social, cultural and economic importance. Since
historical times, these have served regional populations in the hills and plains of the region. The study has made it clear that even at the present moment of fast economic change and urban industrial development, the folk market continues to be a thriving institution. There is no scope for thinking that folk market would disappear as a consequence of modernisation and economic development of the rural areas. It is for the policy framers and planners to recognize the inherent vitality, efficiency and effectiveness of this age-old institution and augment it further for desirable rural development.