CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

Traditional market is a site where various traditional items and modern objects are sold. Folk medicine is also found as a commodity in traditional markets. Buyers and traders are often enjoy an intimacy and brotherhood. They develop a tie of relationship.

In this endeavour, an attempt has been made to study folk medicine in the context of traditional markets. A study has been completed by exploring systematic data from two Districts of Assam namely, Kamrup and Sonitpur. The data has been collected through fieldwork which facilitated use of observation and interview in ten weekly markets.

In a folk-society, market means both a state of mind and a place to trade. A traditional market is not merely a system of distribution of materials, in the folk society; it is also a multipurpose institution with immense social and cultural value. It has been observed long before by D.P. Sinha (1982) that traditional market has a geographical connotation with an institutionalized locus of exchange where people interact not merely for economic reasons but also for some socio-cultural ones. Such market centres have vital importance in a folk cultural zone.
Folk medicine is an important aspect of traditional knowledge system of a society. It was practiced before the ayurvedic period and is still practiced in the contemporary times. Traces of the use of this medicine are found in ancient manuscripts such as *Arthasastra*, *Atharvaveda* and even in *Ayurvedic Samhitas* of Charaka and Susruta. The folk sector of health care system comprises of both religious and empirical practices. Generally, the folk practitioner are part time, non-registered practitioners functioning within the context of village organisation and locality or region. It is known that medicines made from herbs and shrubs have been helpful in the treatment of human ailments since time immemorial. A medicine man cure a patient by both religious and empirical means (Chapter I & II).

Assam is the multicultural zone of people maintaining traditional belief in religion. It is seen that various gods and goddess are related to diseases. Various socio-religious rites are perform in order to appease these gods and goddess. Moreover, nature has endowed Assam with fertile soil. It has large forest where various medicinal plants grow abundantly (Chapter III).

The collected data in this study has been placed in the background of socio-economic and cultural settings in the two above mentioned districts. The economic life of the people who are agriculturists is not very prosperous. As a result, they cannot afford modern medicine everytime. At the same time folk medicine is used simultaneously with modern medicine. In this respect, medical pluralism is found. Moreover, the belief on traditional knowledge by the members is also one of the reason of adopting folk medicine besides the factors of low cost and lesser side effect.

It is found that market is the place of interaction between buyers and sellers. Markets develop to cater the needs of the people. As mention above, ten markets have been considered for the study: Changsari, Gorchuk, Hahim,
Singra, Tetelia, Bagan, Bedeti, Gohpur, Kauri Pathar and Misamari. Among these markets Changsari is the only bi-weekly market, rest are weekly market. As a commodity, the transaction of folk medicine is observed in different ways. Traditional markets provide the scope for the economic gains in folk medicine. There are many settings that relate the folk and the medicine man. The interaction does not stop in the market. But spills over to surrounding villages even further. The patients meet medicine man in three places: in a market, the medicine man's home and in the patient's home. Therefore traditional market is not limited to weekly market places but expans to the other outlets like medicine man's home and so forth. Some amount of moral judgement is involved in a market. For example the medicine man takes only a token amount in the begining of a treatment and only collects the rest of the amount after recovery. Secrecy is maintained in case of abortion cases. This system is totally different from modern system where payment is not defered till recovery. This quality of reawarding money depends upon the quality of folk medicine. In this regard, it can be said that commodification of folk medicine or traditionalisation of markets are two side of a same process (Chapter IV). When a medicine vendor enters the market with herbs, shrubs, amulets and supporting faiths and beliefs, the market become traditionalised. Another aspect of market place is commodification. The market law of demand and supply come into interplay here. Some objects are procured from far away places, some are locally available herbs, some rituals are held in the house of medicine man and patient.

The people generally suffer from physical and mental diseases. The process of treatment is both medicinal and magico-religious. However, no distinction is made clearly between these two systems. In a traditional system as observed in Assam, there is no dichotomy between magic and medicine. The cognitive system of traditional Assamese people doesn't recognised this binary opposition.
The interesting facet of folk medicine is its power to make people believe. In this regard, the term 'problem' is used to denote those diseases which arise out of mind. These diseases have no treatment in modern medical system. At this particular point of time folks become helpless. It is also seen that for some folk medicine is the last alternative to overcome disease. From the various case studies it is found that the folk healer is successful to cure or sort out their respective diseases and problems. One aspect is to be noted that folk medicine has relationship with spells / chants preserved in manuscripts. Folk medicine man is accustomed with its proper application. However, it is also found that various ingredients are applied as a folk medicine. These ingredients can broadly be classified into biotic and abiotic. The biotic ingredients include both floral and faunal parts. On the other hand, the abiotic ingredients include the other ingredients like salt, sugar, lime, sonavasma, rupavasma and water. It is seen that the various vegetables, fruits and spices items which are part of our day to day diet are applied as folk medicine. They are used as a single item or as a combination with other. It is pertinent to mention here that these items are not sold as a item of folk medicine rather as a item of food. However, in the context of the study, they are ingredients of folk medicine (Chapter VI).

In Assam, it is seen that Dr. Gunaram Khanikar have popularised folk medicine through proper marketing. He has developed various products and has written books on folk medicine. These items are displayed for sale proceed in various fairs held in nook and corner of Assam. An indigenously developed herbal based industry is located at Nalbari District of Assam. The products of the industry is supplied to various retail outlets within Assam. It seems there are others like them door to door vending of these products is also seen (Chapter VII). This trend show the scope of marketing folk medicine. The study was initiated keeping a hypothesis in the mind that there is no marketing or economic aspects of folk medicine in real sense. It is believed that practising of folk medicine is a part time job. It is not a income generating profession.
A particular family cannot be maintained unless a folk healer has other occupation. In the context of present day society, proper and intelligent implication of knowledge provide avenue to generate income in order to survive and maintain a livelihood. This thesis observes that contrary to the hypothesis about income of medicine man, folk medicine man has stable income. However, the pattern of acquiring income is not like modern doctor or medicine sellers. Here, medicine is not sold at the market price immediately but the profit is deferred till the recovery of patient. So, we can conclude that the folk medicine in Assam, may be else where also, has the function of deferral as mentioned above. In the present context, folk medicine doesn't operate independently. He comes from a community, adhere mores and values of that community and continuous interplay between tradition and myriad forces comprising of village society, itinerent sellers and the position of medicine man in that context. It could be surmised that there is a mutual influence between market and tradition. Marketing of tradition is here slightly different then marketing of cottage industries and crafts in the cities of India. Secondly, it is to be noted that folk medicine man have converted traditional medicine into a commodity. Thus there is a remarkable interaction between deferred profit, commodification and marketing. The marketing is not controlled by only economic forces. Apart from the economic value, there is cultural value, beliefs and faiths. Market operates within a ambit of all these forces. Folk medicine in the market means different kinds of medicine and many of them could be described as indigenous knowledge and this include herbs, shrubs, vegetables and spices. Besides there are certain modes of treatment which are very intimately connected with one's sensitivity and modesty. For example, the cases of abortion and infertility are more open to traditional system than to the modern system. The study finally concludes that the context of socio-cultural background of a market and the inter-relationship between sellers & buyers, certain diseases are treated which has not easy access with the modern medicine.