CHAPTER-V
CONCLUSION

In different parts of the world, folklore has been used to serve contemporary purposes. The use of traditional cultural material in political or progressive movements by means of reshaping them is also widespread. Folklorists have noticed the use of folklore in the Communist Movement. The IPTA movement in India and Assam is also not exceptional in this regard. The IPTA was a cultural front which developed into a nodal organization of mass movement. It had its roots in social awareness against the anti-social forces all over the world and not only in Communist Movements. The IPTA was not formed just as a cultural association, but was formed to organize a countrywide progressive cultural movement. [Chapter-I]

In the main resolution taken in the Third Provincial Conference of the Assam branch of the IPTA, there was a call to strengthen the fight for peace and freedom, against war and domination through songs, dances and dramas depicting the struggle of the people to save humanity. IPTA realized at the beginning that the muses of art and culture are the offspring of the people struggling for the light and beauty of a better life. To attain this purpose, IPTA tried to build up close links with the organizations of the labouring masses, of peasants, workers and middle class employees, of students and intellectuals.

The IPTA in Assam was born against the backdrop of other movements like the Peasants’ Movement and Progressive Literary Movement. Communist and Democratic ideology inspired some progressive minded artists and intellectuals to form people’s cultural movement in Assam. [Chapter-I]
The IPTA is a continuous movement based on a strong foundation whose approach is still carried forward. The study of folklore in relation to the IPTA becomes meaningful because of the fact that folklore is a periphery that includes the past, the present and the future and can never die out. It is the essence and the life force of folk life. This fact was deeply conceived by the initiators of the collective cultural front. The relation of IPTA and folklore was not superficial. The IPTA in Assam tried to reflect people’s culture that sprouts from folk culture. This pursuit was accomplished by studying their problems and helping them in their righteous struggles by means of innovation in art forms. While doing this they got an opportunity to mingle with the masses, thereby, involving them in the movement. The cultural policy of the IPTA was based on another premise that the worker and peasant community has to lead the cultural movement. But the role of the educated middle class of both urban and rural areas was also not discarded. Even though, except a few, it could not create leaders from the proletariat section, but it has been successful in attracting a great number of people of this section. The IPTA in Assam has been unique and instrumental in creating an atmosphere of linguistic and ethnic harmony between diverse communities of Assam. IPTA’s platform was a meeting ground for different people of different communities. This trait makes the Assam branch of IPTA unique. Therefore, during the peak days of IPTA’s glory, it could pacify chauvinism by spreading message of peace and harmony. This could be possible because of the personality of the pathfinders of this organization who bid momentum to the movement. Cultural tools, songs in particular, were looked upon as an effective medium of organizing the working people. These were the socio-cultural expressions of the artists of the IPTA. The songs were composed on themes of social change, forming of progressive society free from exploitation and rise and accomplishment of the toiling masses. The spirit of rebellion was perfectly communicated
through the songs of protest by different artists like Hemanga Biswas, Jyotiprasad Agarwala, Bishnu Rabha, Bhupen Hazarika and others. New invigorating songs were added to the treasure of Assamese patriotic songs. These songs became so popular that they had made a profound and lasting impact in the minds of the people of Assam. People still take pleasure in listening to them. Therefore, these socialist songs got elevated to the status of *Ganasangeet* (People’s Song) and the singers, *Ganasilpi* (People’s Artist). (Chapter-II, III, IV)

The IPTA in Assam saw a glorious age since its inception till the 1960s. People from all strata of society got attached to the Association in some way or the other. The Assam branch has thus played a remarkable role in intensifying the People’s Theater Movement in India. The pre-eminent artists and writers of Assam got assembled under its parasol. Their individual talents got nourished under skilled organizers like Hemanga Biswas, Nagen Kakati, Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, Bishnu Rabha, Bhupen Hazarika, Keshav Mahanta and many others. They inspired one another and their ideas got channelized in the direction of people’s culture.

But due to lack of proper documentation many of their names and contributions went unrecognized. Even, some chronologies of events are not known due to this fact. Phani Dasgupta, a veteran performer of the IPTA and Dilip Sharma expressed their regrets and exclaimed for not being able to record these events due to non-availability of proper recording facility and scientific means of preserving documents. But a concept of the history of the IPTA in Assam may be formed with the books and sources that are available.

Looking back into the past in the light of the present, various doubts and questions may strike in the minds of the concerned individuals regarding the continuity of the movement. But, an aspect which has evolved from the study is that the IPTA reigned supreme for quite a period of time in the
minds of the common man. The reason was obvious—it could successfully create an atmosphere of mass movement by means of regenerating folk culture into mass culture (people’s culture). [Chapter-II, III, IV]

Hemanga Biswas undoubtedly was the pathfinder of the IPTA in Assam. Trained in the democratic communist ideology, he was deeply involved in the National struggle for freedom movement, not just as a freedom fighter but as a cultural activist. Art and culture was the main weapon of revolution that he propagated. His personality and individual grandeur attracted many individuals towards the Association.

Jyotiprasad Agarwala was another such personality to give the creative side a thrust. He inspired the activists of the IPTA to indulge in all kinds of activities. Bishnuprasad Rabha, the profound mass artist and activist took the organization to a certain height and expanded its dimensions. The trio definitely is the tripod upon which the Assam IPTA stood. [Chapter-III]

The IPTA basically was a performance based organization. Hence during its heyday, innumerable performances took place on its platform. It had given a new orientation to cultural activities by addressing the common men in a language spoken and easily understood by them. The IPTA stage provided a rare spectacle of the nation’s multi-lingual, multi-cultural structure. They selected different folk forms with some modifications for presentation before the public. They included songs, plays, shadow plays, ballet, creative dance etc. Most of the performances had its root in tradition and folk culture so as to attract people belonging to all sections of society. The IPTA was successful in drawing common masses ranging from peasantry to workers. They were greatly enthused by seeing the performances as they could easily see a reflection of their lives in it. Artists of great caliber like Hemanga Biswas, Jyotiprasad Agarwala, and Bhupen Hazarika, who emerged as the icons of the music world
produced a great number of songs blending indigenous or folk songs of the peasantry. They also picked up tunes from foreign nations like China, Russia and Poland, thereby enriching the Assamese cultural repertoire, adding to it and also adding to their own accomplished skill of folklore. [Chapter- III, IV]

Apart from artists and activists belonging to the middle class section, the IPTA in Assam could engage folk artists from rural background and the hill tribes. Narahari Burhabhakat, Filkin Laloo, Jes Preter, the poverty-stricken folk artist like Moghai Oja, Anandiram Das are such artists to name a few. In Assam, IPTA’s very success lies in the fact that it could explore and extract the sources of popular expression assigning it due dignity and recognition.

The IPTA organized a broad spectrum of people for the sake of a collective cultural movement which strived for the wellbeing of people and their art. The unrecognized folk artist got focus and country wide acclamation. They were exposed to a greater world. Their inherent talents got an outlet. Due to their exposure to the IPTA, they realized that the art they practiced is not restricted to a limited circle but open to a wider audience. [Chapter- II, IV]

Therefore, conscious efforts were made to create ingrained art and culture in the lives of the people. During the peak days of the activities, it was customary to use all forms of folk expression to enhance rural concern in People’s Theatre. In the main resolution adopted in the Third Conference of the Assam branch of the IPTA, it reclaimed the importance of the traditional arts and the artists. Hence, the IPTA virtually provided a new genre to performing arts. [Chapter-III]

The revival and modification of the folk forms was one of the valuable contributions that the IPTA played in Assam. Folk and traditional culture was employed in the movement with a considerable adaptation and it was the chief attribute of the association. Another aspect of the IPTA in
Assam was observed in the contribution of women artists and activists like Anjali Lahiri, Kamala Mazumdar, Usha Dutta, Sudakshina Sharma, Hena Bora and many others.

The significant cultural movement that created a history in the cultural arena of undivided Assam by integrating people of both the plains and the hills gradually lost its vigour. Various reasons are put forward regarding the causes of waning out of the People’s Theater Movement. It may be summed up in the following points.

- **Government Repression**- After the Naliapul conference of 1949, the ruling party banned almost all activities led by the progressive alliance. Most of the party members and activists were arrested leading to a severe setback for the IPTA.

- **Split in the Communist Party**- The IPTA undeniably was born out of the womb of the Communist Party of India. Most of the artists and activists were also members of the party. They felt secure under the Communist Party’s patronage. But the split in the party in 1964 created confusion and de-motivated the activists of the IPTA. Moreover, there was a tendency of division within the IPTA because some of them adhered to the ideology of one party or the other. Hence, the IPTA was also divided into two segments resulting in weakness of the organization. The motto ‘Unity is Strength’ failed. Therefore, most of the prominent leaders and performers strongly believed that the split in the IPTA was the basic cause of decline.

- **Lack of proper organizer**- After the demise of leading organizers like Hemanga Biswas, Jyotiprasad Agarwala, Bishnu Rabha and others, the IPTA in Assam became like a boat without a rudder. Hemanga Biswas said “People’s Theater Movement has gone beyond the limit of the Peoples’ Theater Association. There is no
dearth of talent in the IPTA, what is lacking is proper political leadership.” (Biswas 1990: 110) [Chapter-II]

- Lack of dedicated volunteers- In the current spell of commercial concern, very few people would venture into the non-profitable sphere of art and culture. The IPTA could not motivate and mobilize the future generations in the name of People’s Culture and it failed to cope with the new tendencies emerging in young minds.

- Lack of performances- Performances of various kinds were the driving force of the IPTA movement which took it to the cities, hills and villages. They carried the message of progressive mass culture. But it seems, after 1960, very few consistent performances had taken place.

- Temptation of some members towards rewards or government sponsorship- When the Government of India established three bodies for promoting art and culture, viz. Lalit Kala, Sahitya and Sangeet Natak Academy in the country, many artists from the IPTA origin were picked up for different positions. As a result, the IPTA began to lose its original vision.

- Narrow nationalism- Critics have observed that leading personalities who once stood for internationalism and propagated it through song, drama and poems were later seen to have digressed to extreme nationalism. This was against the IPTA’s ideology which strongly rejected chauvinism of all kinds. Hemanga Biswas sharply criticized extreme regionalism but many of his followers seem to have surrendered to it.

It so appears from the above discussion that the IPTA no more has the past glory. It certainly has digressed from its original status as an organization. The very foundation, upon which the IPTA stood, has shaken. Break-ups in place of unity, vested interest in place of dedication and devotion, lack of activities in place of performance have got
manifested in the inactiveness as regards to the organizational activities of the IPTA. As the study is based on IPTA’s interplay with folklore, the section of the Manifesto of the IPTA dealing with folklore and folk artists has been brought under notice. The manifesto pointed towards the upliftment of folk artists. It has been observed that although one of IPTA’s avowed aim was to uplift folk artists’ socio-economic condition, it has not been successful in doing so. Hence, the organization has failed to attract the youth. The IPTA needs a strategic plan in order to attract new people to vie with new socio-political situation. But it has been observed even from the interviews taken for the purpose of this study that most of the senior artists (former activists) themselves are demoralized and have surrendered to the prevailing situation. A change in their mindset could be observed.

The main contributions of the IPTA in Assam in respect to folklore material may be summed up in following words -

- The IPTA has been able to create communal and ethnic harmony by singing and composing songs based on tunes and dialects of folk songs of Assamese, Bengali and other tribal communities which was the first of its kind.

- Various forms of performing arts have been modified or transformed for creating greater appeal. As the IPTA was conformed to socio-political reality they believed in the doctrine of ‘art for people’s sake’. Hence, they dealt with issue oriented plays depicting contemporary subjects.

- Folk song of a particular community has been taken to the wider society by converting it to mass songs or people’s songs because its aim was to make people socially conscious and to recognize creativity and talent and furthermore to groom them up as sentinels of equality.
They experimented with interesting presentations like shadow plays, ballet performances and chorus singing drawing heavily on folk and traditional art forms. The Assam branch of the IPTA was a trendsetter for many such performing arts.

Another important dimension of the IPTA’s role in Assam was observed in women’s considerable participation in the cultural movement. It brought forth women artists and activists into the public sphere. The IPTA in Assam had produced bold women activists like Kamala Mazumdar, Anjali Lahiri, Hena Bora, Anurupa Biswas and prolific women artists like Usha Dutta, Gunada Kaur, Sudakshina Sharma and others. [Chapter-II]

Thus, the IPTA movement in Assam has modified folklore artifacts by infusing contemporary issues or current affairs to reach out to the masses. Apart from innovation in theatrical patterns, the Association in this part of the region experimented a great deal with music. This was due to the fact that most of the pioneers of the Association in Assam happened to be accomplished musicians. The Assam branch of the IPTA could, therefore, excel in proliferation of mass songs to a great extent. People at large got enthralled by those songs and responded to the appeal that these songs created. The contribution of the movement can also be perceived in creation of conditions of communal harmony and social consciousness. Finally, this movement was rooted in folklore and the songs that it produced had become endemic of folk life. Consequently, the array of mass songs has acquired the spirit of folksongs in the course of time. These are time-honored treasures adopted from folklore repertoire. The enthusiasm that the IPTA generated, the attacks it launched on exploitative structures, and the expectations it aroused were indicative of the initiation of a process that could help the people conceptualize the transformation of the socio-cultural world around them. And the participation of the people as spectators, as donors of money became a seal of their approval of executing
a collective action. Their attendance and applause were testimony that the
events on stage, the acting out of history, had gone beyond the stage itself
to the hundreds of people to whom the IPTA had intended to carry its
message. The movement introduced concepts previously unknown to
people. Therefore, the songs and other thrust areas such as theatre,
popularized by the IPTA still lingers in the minds of the people of
Assam. The dialogue with tradition that the IPTA perpetuated still
continues and the vision that it emulated with a mission has remained. The
movement created a spirit and approach towards society that persists even
now. Hence, the approach of the movement is still carried forward by its
successors although with a lesser vigour.