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**FOLKLORE AND NATIONALISM
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
ASSAM**

*A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy*

Baijayanta Keot
Registration No.-106 of 1998



**SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL STUDIES
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July, 200**



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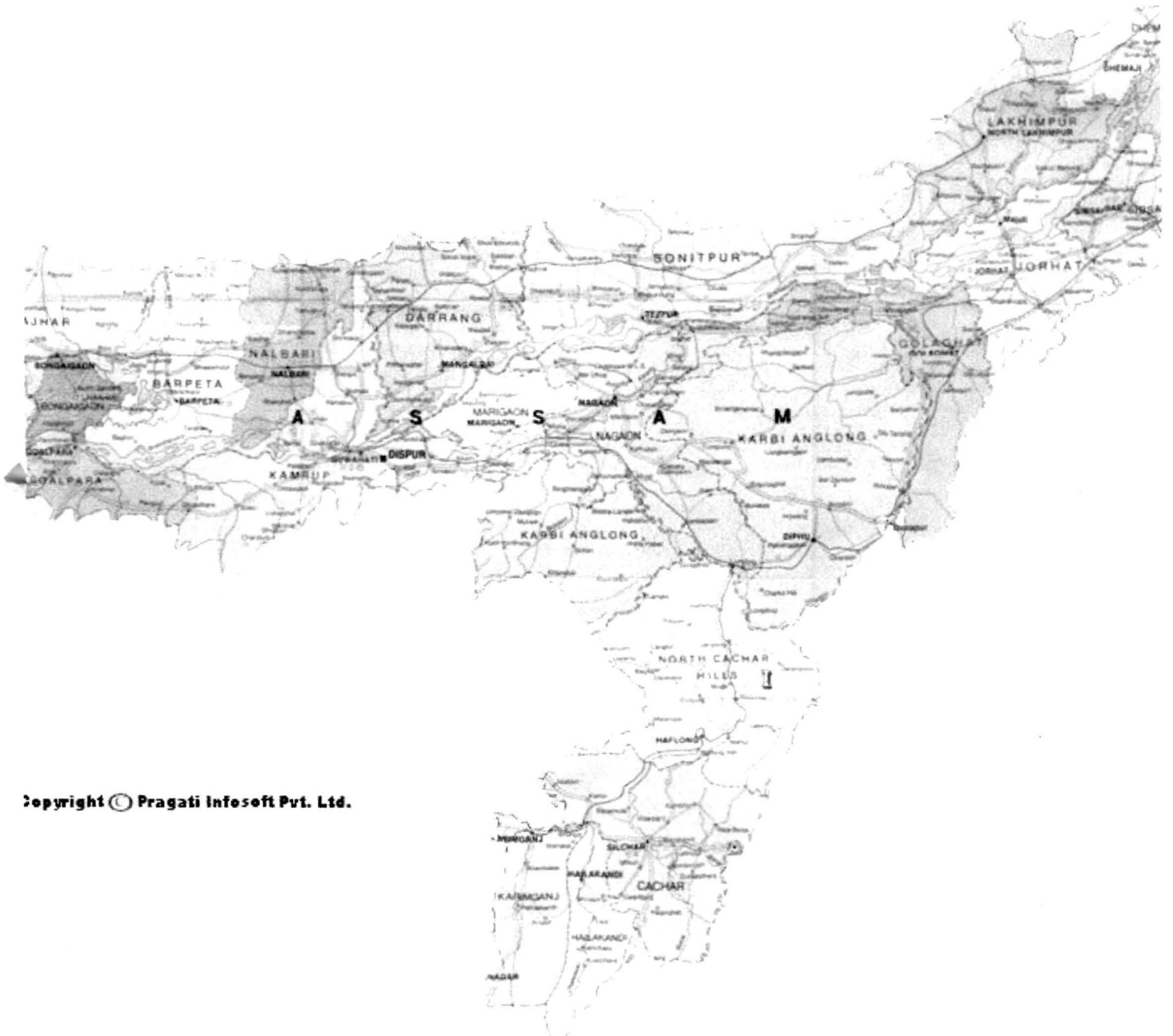
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NORTH- EAST INDIA



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CHAPTER-1

1. INTRODUCTION

The title of this research work is “FOLKLORE AND NATIONALISM with special reference to ASSAM”. In this research work, an effort has been made to explore the relationship between folklore and nationalism in Assam.

In this introductory chapter, Conceptual formulations of Folklore and Nationalism have been cited in the light of ample quotations of eminent scholars. On the eve of the discussion of the term “Nationalism”, related terms like tribe, caste, ethnicity, nations and nationality have been distinguished and also interpreted in an evolutionary way. More over, Folklore and Nationalism in both the world and Indian perspective have been illuminated in chronological order. Socio-cultural set up and History of nationalism in Assam has been mentioned briefly. It also contains the Aims and Objectives of the research work, research methodology, limitations and the legacy of the topic referring research activities in the concerned field in distant countries are

The basic objective of this research programme is to study the exploration and revitalization of folklore materials in the need of nationalistic movements and ethnic assertions of Assam. Moreover, this study is supposed to encompass the universal appeal of folklore items irrespective of caste, class, community and religion. The oral and written continuum is a frequently observed phenomenon here. The concepts, folklorismus and fakelore are also visualized during the course of our study.

For studying the relationship between Folklore and Nationalism in Assam, a few genres of folklore like folksongs, ballads, folktales, legends, myths folk costume, festivals etc have been taken into account. Since Assam is a melting pot of a large number of communities with distinct languages and cultures, it is practically impossible to cover the genres of each community. So, a few genres with nationalistic fragrance of a few dominant communities of Assam

have been drawn to corpus. Again, the history of nationalism in Assam can be traced back after the advent of the British people only.

For having a theoretical background and also for validation of the research topic, a few books like FOLKLORE AND NATIONALISM IN MODERN FINLAND(1976) of William A Wilson, PRINT, FOLKLORE, AND NATIONALISM IN COLONIAL SOUTH INDIA(2003) of Stuart Blackburn, a few research papers and a few reviews on the intimation between folklore and nationalism have been followed. Namely (a) FOLKLORE AND BASQUE NATIONALISM, (b) Narratives of nationalism: Constructing Irish National Identity during the land war, 1879-82, (c) HERDER, FOLKLORE AND ROMANTIC NATIONALISM, (d) The uses of Folklore in Revitalization movement (e) Using Literature as a Strategy for Nation Building: A Case Study from Nigeria - by Csilla Czibalmos (f) Komi Nationalism and Orthodox Christianity in the 19th and early 20th centuries- by Indrek Jaats (g) You don't understand, we are at war! Refashioning Durga in the service of Hindu nationalism - by Anja Kovacs and many papers have been downloaded from the internet.

Out of twelve chapters, two stand as Introductory and Concluding chapters, while the remaining ten involve in acquiring instances and evidences in support of the research topic. These ten chapters from 2nd to 11th are held in chronological order right from the British subjugation in 1826 till today. They contain a brief introduction of the genre, historical background of the events, role of the genre in national upheaval, or, role of nationalism in exploring or reviving the particular genre (duplication or second edition of the genre may be) and ends up with a brief conclusion. Sources of quotations, borrowed ideas and informants are duely acknowledged in the Endnote and Reference section of each chapter.

In 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th chapters; events are strictly distributed in colonial and pre-colonial Assam and glittered during the freedom movement.

Most chapters are started with a theoretical section and is endeavoured to link it with the Assamese material.

In chapter2, “Fragrance of nationalism in the folksongs of Assam”, folksongs from communities like the Bodos, the tea garden workers in Assam, the Santhals, the Morans and the karbis are cited whose backgrounds were the British and the pre-British era. The Bodo folksongs were composed both in their monarchical and in the British administration where the heroic sacrifice of their legendary figures was venerated. The Santhal folksongs were composed on the plot when they congregated themselves feeling hatred towards the British. The Moran and the karbi songs were totally a portrayal of their kingdoms remembering the heroic outfits of their legendary figures.

In Chapter 3, “A Few Assamese Historical ballads of colonial India- A Nationalistic interpretation”, a few Assamese historical ballads were taken whose plots were created during the British regime. The three ballads of the historical events, namely, the hanging of Maniram Dewan in 1858, the battle of Patharughat and the peasant movement of Rangia in 1894 were driving spirits for the later mutineers of the freedom struggle. But ballads of Maniram Dewan were both in his praise and criticism. Yet his hanging drew extraordinary sympathy from the patriotic brand avoiding his aristocracy and personal interest. These three ballads paved ways for mass participation in the anti British campaign because nationalism before those events was confined in papers and petitions especially in the upper middle class.

The 4th chapter, “Seeds of nationalism in the literature of Lakshminath Bezbaroa,” highlights the literature of Lakshminath Bezbaroa (1864-1938), a romantic nationalist, as this personality endeavored extremely to augment patriotic zeal by borrowing and restructuring folk-elements into his creations. The discourse of oral-written continuum obviously comes to the foreground for academicians’ pursuits.

The 5th chapter “Fabricating Myth in National upheaval –Assam in context” has been taken into account to visualize the process of fabrication or

creation of myth and mythic metaphors during the national emergency of a country and also in the assertion of ethnic identity of a community.

The 6th chapter entitled “Legends and Nationality questions---A review on Assam” draws our attention to interpret the mutual alteration of legends and history, and to emphasize the role of legendary figures (some are historical) in the nationality question or ethnic assertion.

The 7th chapter “Gandhi, Spinning and India’s Independence in the folksongs of Assam” reflects the impact of Gandhian ideology on the revolutionary spirit of the people of Assam and on the Assamese folk art and crafts, especially on weaving. Assamese folksongs elevated Gandhi from human to superman and some lore established him as the folk king (*Gandhi Raja*) and messiah of the downtrodden.

The 8th chapter, ‘The Quit India Movement of 1942 in Assamese folksongs,’ depicts a few massacres of 1942 in Sonitpur, Golaghat, Nagaon districts in terms of folksongs which in turn became a source of inspiration for the freedom fighters of the later ages.

The 9th chapter entitled “Folktales and Nationalism in Assam” does not obey any time frame, as the creation and diffusion of folktales are always uncertain. Here three folktales are cited where the most dominant and tyrant one suppresses the huge congregation by tricks and injustice. But after overcoming a few chapters of grievances and troubles, they find out a way of salvation, unify them, kill the tyrant and get rid of the problem.

The chapter 10th (Festivals and Nationalism with special reference to the spring festival of Assam) and 11th (Exploitation of folklore in Bodo national emergence) are basically included to legitimize the current ethno-cultural and socio-political issues in the light of folklore and nationalism. Here ethnic assertion and sub-nationalism are illuminated side by side with nationalism. Likewise, folklorismus (commercialization of folklore) and fake lore (second edition of folklore) also receive a parallel significance with folklore.

Revitalization of Folklore and politics among the Bodo people of Assam covers the 11th chapter, a single chapter entirely on a single dominant community.

In the chapter Conclusion, the over all findings of all the ten chapters tracing the phenomenon 'folklore and nationalism' in the state Assam till this day since the British regime have been taken down in chronological order. Dilution and vulgarization of folklore materials in national emergency, the oral-written nexus etc also receives much significance in the discussion.

While collecting data in the fieldwork, the usual folkloric methods namely- Interview method, Observation method and Participation method are accepted to make the data unbiased and authentic. It becomes too much fruitful in hostile and strange situation.

For the historical and nationalistic phenomena, a few freedom fighters of the Independent movement of India, a few age-old performers and informants were interviewed. Reputed scholars of the neighboring universities were also inexhaustible sources of my interview.

Various performing folk arts and material culture frequently used in protestation and mass mobilization were observed. Text, texture and context have been thoroughly observed and studied to uncover the seeds of nationalism.

More over; libraries, museums and archives are in exhaustible secondary sources to know history to carry on the concerned work in a systematic way.

1.1 CONCEPTUAL FORMULATIONS-

(i) FOLKLORE:

Folklore is the material handed down traditionally either by word or mouth or by custom and practice (Taylor in Dundes 1965; p.34). A more elaborate and inclusive definition says that folklore “comprehends all knowledge that is transmitted by word of mouth and all crafts and technique that are learnt by imitation and example as well as the products of such crafts” By such it encompasses a whole range of material which includes “folk arts, folk craft, folk looks, folk costume, folk belief, folk medicine, folk recipes, folk music, folk dance, folk games, folk gestures and folk speech as well as those verbal forms of expression which have been called folk literature but which are better described as verbal art.” (Bascom).

Debates about how folklore should be defined have been waged continuously ever since the word has coined in 1846 by William Thoms. Most definitions concern the “lore”, but some concern the “folk”. Lore –the materials of folklore rather than the people who use the materials-has been described in terms of origin, form, transmission and function.¹

According to the old orthodox view, folklorists were regarded as a band of antiquarians dealing with “survivals” and bygones” that did not fit in with the modern times. And also, folk society and folklore were believed to be confined only to the backward rural area and the unlettered peasantry. There were, according to this view, no “folk” people in the urban and industrial centers and hence there was no folklore in such places.

According to the new, revised concept, the folk society is not necessarily made up of the rural illiterate peasant mass but many signify “anonymous masses of tradition-oriented people” anywhere. According to Alan Dundes-

“The term “folk” can refer to any group of people what so ever who share at least one common factor. It doesn’t matter what the linking factor is – it could be a common occupation, language or

religion- but what is important is that a group formed for what ever reason will have some traditions which it calls its own –A member of the group may not know all other members, but he will probably know the common core of traditions belonging to the group, traditions which help the group to have a sense of group identity”.²

(ii) NATIONALISM:-

Before discussion of the term “Nationalism”, let us first have some preliminary concepts of its various synonyms or derivatives like Caste, Tribe, Race, Ethnicity, Nations and Nationality etc, absence of which may confuse us to trace back the origin of the core idea.

Caste refers to inequality both in theory and practice. Inequality based on the caste system is a special type of inequality. Ideas and values are considered as basis for knowing actual and observable behaviour of people. Therefore, the idea of the pure and the impure is basic to the understanding of caste. This idea is the basis of hierarchy in Hindu society³.

Caste is a resource where the nature of this resource varies from caste to caste depending upon the status of a given caste in a given area. Caste identity has become a liability for upper and middle castes because a certain percentage of jobs, seats in parliament and state legislatures, and admissions in institutions have been reserved for the other Backward Castes(OBCs), Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes(SCs and STs). Caste in India is mistakenly projected as a system of harmonic relations. Caste inherits numerous problems related to economic domination and subjugation, privileges and deprivations, and conspicuous waste and bare survival⁴

The structural aspect of caste is explained by accepting it as a general principle of stratification. Caste as a cultural system is understood in terms of prominence of the ideas of pollution-purity and notions of hierarchy, segregation and corporateness. Caste is also viewed by Bailey as a ‘classed system’ of stratification, whereas betelle considers caste system as both ‘closed’ and ‘open’. He finds that caste is becoming increasingly ‘segmentary’

because of the emergence of differentiated structures in India. These analytic variations hinder a common definition of caste. However, these variations also explain the fact that caste is like all other systems of stratification in some ways while it is quite unique in some other respects. Although caste is not really a very flexible system, yet a caste permits mobility in certain areas to its members. A given caste is guided by the norms of the caste system regarding inter-caste dependence; but a given caste has also its autonomy in regard to observance of its practices, rituals and rites in relation to other castes.⁵

“Rudolphs observes that caste has responded to changes in its political and economic environment by transforming itself from below and within. Hierarchy, privilege, and moral parochialism no longer exhaust its secular significance. Caste has become a means to level the old order’s inequalities by helping to destroy its moral basis and social structure. Caste attaches its members to the political ideas, processes and institutions”⁶

‘Tribe’ may be distinguished from ‘caste’, but it is not that tribe is a homogenous entity and caste is characterized by complexity and heterogeneity. There are distinctions within a given tribe and between different tribes. Certainly tribes are considerably distinct from the non-tribes. ...Certainly tribes are not ‘organically’ related to each other as castes are under a common principle. But tribes are also not exclusive systems as they are not small in size and bear a great deal of heterogeneity. Historically, a ‘tribal society’ has not been static, and yet it has retained its exclusivity from a ‘caste society’. There are 427 tribes in India and they can be classified on the basis of language, religion, degree of their isolation, the pattern of livelihood. Some of these attributes of tribes often resemble with the non-tribal people in a given region than the tribal people of another region. The tribals are hunters, fishers, shifting cultivators, settled agriculturists, plantation workers and industrial wage-earners, hence some of them resemble with the non-tribal people. The large tribes such as Bhils, Gonds, Santhals, Oraons and Mundas are not only settled agriculturists, some of them are found in modern occupations in which members of caste Hindus are also found⁷

Tribes are not caste or caste like entities, though some of them have followed the path of sanskritisation and conversion to Christianity and Islam. Tribes are highly differentiated lot both ethnically and culturally. Some adhere to 'tribalism', others have converted to Christianity by rejecting tribal pantheon, and some have taken up Hinduism by adopting vegetarianism, teetotalism and other Brahmanic ideals and practice. Tribes are also differentiated based on landholdings, rural-urban background, education, occupation, income and political power. Tribes have been granted special treatment under the Constitution of India. They have also many attributes, practices and 'styles of life' that distinguish them from the non-tribal people.⁸

Now let us discuss the term ethnic and ethnicity. By ethnic, most scholars refer to "A social group which consciously shares some aspects of a common culture and is defined primarily by descent". The element descent is very often assumed, not real and here lies the distinction between race and ethnic. Race refers to biological aspect of group difference whereas ethnic is the combination of the cultural aspect and a putative biological element because of the assumption of common descent. People from unknown past have possessed a tendency to identify themselves with particular cultures through the process of acculturation, integration and assimilation despite of the recent origin of the term "Ethnicity".

The term "ethnic" doesnot give a clear cut definition till now. Although the American connotation refers to the minority group by the term, standard dictionaries use a few representatives like "tribal", "Primitive", "Pagan or heathen", "relating to racial group", " of an exotic esp. peasant culture", of or relating to races or large groups of people classed according to common traits and customs" etc⁹

Barth defined ethnic group as a population which:

1. is largely biologically self perpetuating;
2. shares fundamental cultural values, realized in overt unity in cultural forms;
3. make up a field of communication and interaction;

4. has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order.¹⁰

In general sense, a nation means a self governing nationality. A nation is the home of a nationality. A nation comprises both the state and the nationality. A state in the modern sense is a political organization of a people or peoples occupying permanently a definite portion of territory and having the power of sovereignty. On the other hand, a nationality is a 'primary, a cultural ethnic term,' wherein geographical unity, common racial stock, common culture, common language, common hopes and aspirations etc. are the contributing features to give birth to a nationality. In the seventeenth century the term 'nation' which took the origin from the Latin word 'NATO' (race or birth) was used in respect of racial unity. During the great French Revolution of 1789 the term nation came into great popularity. Patriotism became the integral factor of nationalism. Thereafter, since the nineteenth century nation means the idea of political independence or sovereignty while nationality still remained a non-political concept basing on spiritual and psychological qualities. Thus in a broader sense a nation state is a population of self-governing state, wherein several nationalities may live together. For example the United Kingdom is a nation-state where the different nationalities like English, Scots, Welsh and North Irish are living together. India is also the best example of a nation-state where different nationalities are living under a single national banner and symbols. When a nationality succeeds in obtaining political sovereignty, it itself becomes a nation-state.¹¹

Nationality has been defined as a group of people who are bound together by such common bonds as common race, common language, common religion, common history and even common aspirations, it may sometimes get confused with ethnicity. Nationalism in the modern sense of the term—the individual and group consciousness associated with exclusive political identity.

If nationality implies a sense of unity, its tendency is to seek political manifestation in a nation-state. This one nationality one state ideal led to the emergence of most nation states in Europe. But later on, another development grew on in which the emergence of an independent state with multi- ethnic population leads to the formation of a nation. There are ample evidences in Europe and in the USA where many independent states make attempts to form a single nation out of its diverse populations. By this way an abstract model of national identity is evolved.

It is assumed that nations, nationalism and nationality originated from the feeling of racialism. In ancient Greece there was a feeling of becoming a citizen of an independent city-state. "But the bond of their unity was their pride of becoming a citizen of POLIS, not of a blind racial belief"¹². During the Roman Empire, the emphasis was shifted from the 'Greek Ideals of liberty, democracy and local independence to the Roman ideals of unity, order, universal law and cosmopolitanism'. Several races of Europe belonging to different stocks, speaking different languages and following different modes of life, were compelled to live under a single royal imperial banner and work under a similar political and administrative pattern with the result that the parochial attitude and narrow outlook of the people remained suppressed. The existing situation taught them world citizenship and universal brotherhood. The downfall of Roman Empire again gave rise to racial nationalism as well as feudalism. The Teutonic German races had unshakable faith in the purity and superiority of their blood and established their occupation and authorities on the invaded territories.

With the rise of new human concepts and political vision, feudalism was deeply affected and favourable circumstance was created comprising community belonging to common race, faith and behaviour. Meanwhile, the movements for reformation and renaissance prepared fertile ground for the growth of strong nations and nationalism. Scientific approach to study every aspects of human life had drastically changed their traditional modes of knowledge and attitude. Moreover, the Industrial revolution of Europe opened

the flood gate of wealth to give rise to economic nationalism creating wars among ambitious nations.

Thus we have observed that the erosion of feudal system paved the way for a new type of state based on the bond of nationality (Racialism). Thereafter political thinkers and patriotic authors further strengthened the feeling of nationalism by their writings.

But economic liberties and freedom led the people to realize that not the king but the people are the fountain of political powers. With the discovery of the Natural theory of rights and Individualism, people began to lose their faith in the system of monarchy. Rousseau's philosophy of 'General Will' compelled the people to believe equality, liberty and fraternity as the basis of democratic nationalism.

With the rise of independent nationhood in Europe, rivalry had taken place among different nations for economic competition. The industrial sectors required international market to obtain raw materials and sell out their products. As a result, countries like France, England, Portugal, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Persia to discover new continents and connecting sea routes. By this way, Racial and Economic nationalism gave rise to democratic nationalism and as a consequence, colonialism was started as an offshoot.

Nationalism is a term not easily defined. It is a state of mind, in which the supreme loyalty of the individual is felt to be due to the nation-state. It is a fusion of patriotism with a consciousness of nationality. A nationality is a group of people who speak either the same language or closely related dialects, who cherish common historical tradition, and who constitute or think they constitute a distinct cultural society. In other words, the nation-state to which the patriot owes his allegiance is defined according to ethnographic principles. Both as an inspiration for the idea of nationalism and as a means of winning the minds of men to that idea, folklore have served well.

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“Nationalism is the belief that each nation has both the right and the duty to constitute itself as state. There are many difficulties in specifying what a nation is ---in Europe, for example, the candidates range from the Welsh and the Basques to occitanians and northumbrians but some common culture is indispensable and a shared language highly desirable –Nationalist theory usually attributes conflict to cross national oppression, and thus offers a promise of world peace when self determination has become a global reality.”¹³

Nationalism is a polymorphous concept like ethnicity. It is a conceptual construct and like any other construct it can be put to use as well as abuse. It has played a very important role in integrating diverse and discrete groups thereby accelerating the pace of economic growth and development. The European nation states are standing evidence to it.

India is a plurality of nations, a multinational state. Each ethnic and linguistic community forms a nation or a sub-nation. There is no such thing as Indian nation. The so called Indians are really Indian citizens but at no time they are Indian nationals. For example, a Bihari can rightly be said to have Bihari nationality though he has Indian citizenship.

Nationalism is an artificial and parochial concept. It is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political end and the national unit should be congruent. It is an ideology consisting of values, symbols, norms and expectations, living in a social collectivity (groups) and based on belief in a common descent and as a consequence a common destiny, strong enough to desire to maintain, strengthen or create a formally and legally organized society.¹⁴

1.2 FOLKLORE AND NATIONALISM: WORLD PERSPECTIVE

“The relationship between folklore and nationalism is both intimate and symbiotic. For James Fernandez this relationship poses serious questions for the ethnographer in search of generalizations about the complexities of folklore dynamics which, all too frequently, have been restricted to the

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comparatively recent phenomenon of national boundaries; that is to say, those borders formed by the constraints of the nation-state, a political community whose development dates from Napoleonic times. Fernandez views folklore as a potential source of strength to acquiescent ethno-nationalist movements, often representatives of communities, which predate nation-states. the formation of Thus folklorists can act as transmitting agents of the ethno nationalist cause (1986: 135). Such is the case with Basque nationalism, which, since the late nineteenth century, has relied heavily on the use of folklore within its ideology. The origins of Basque nationalism may be traced to the challenge of modernization within the region. As new industries emerged and (Spanish) immigrants settled in the Basque Provinces in great numbers, so there was a sense that traditional Basque society was under threat (Ben-Ami 1991: 494). As a consequence, there emerged a need to define precisely what the values of this traditional society were”¹⁵

To assert nationalism, historical background of a particular community or race is a vital ingredient besides the common language, common religion and common aspiration. But most of the historical documents of the past time got confused with royal panegyric or chronicles composed under the royal patronage. As a consequence, modern historians have to depend on folklore to disclose the socio-political, economic, cultural and material part of history. Legends become more approachable for historians to find out historical evolution as well as interpretation. Legendary heroes become the national heroes in the process of sub-nationalism or in the ethnic assertion movements.

“ Indian scholars felt that “ nationalism in India could not be made recognizable only by the deep collective emotions hidden in the hearts of deprived masses; on the other hand it had to be made manifest in the national language , national epics, foods, dress, ancient thought and wisdom, value system, folklore and literature”¹⁶

Folklore has been used to focus the national spirit in many countries. The methodology of judging folklore on national perspective has produced good results in most of the countries of the world. In Latin American countries, the Indian culture, specially the dance, music, tales and customs form a living part

of national folk traditions even today, Japan's Shintoism and Sweden's rural based culture are considered as their national assets.

Folklore is not only an echo of the past. ——— it is also a vigorous voice of the present. The US scholars eulogize the folk heroes of their own like Paul Bunyan, Peks Bill, and Stormorlang etc. as the products of their national vigor. After the October Revolution in the Soviet Union, the have-nots have emphasized folklore as the main weapon of protest.

Far from being an antiquarian hobby, folklore has throughout the history of its study been connected with national issues and concerns. Folklore traditions would help reinforce the sense of national identity provided the intellectuals and policy-makers become aware of their existence. Jacob and Wilhem Grimm clearly associated their work in folklore with the reconstruction of a proved Germanic past. In German, party policy produced peasant schools and institutes seeking to revive German folk consciousness through courses on folklore and history and through encouragement of peasant festival, folk music and folk dance. The party's folk education programme endeavored to instruct the German people in their role as bearers of Germanic culture. Ideology under-scored the special heroic qualities of the fighting German peasants qualities needed to expand Germany's political boundaries in the drive for "living space". The folk spirit was constructed as a martial spirit.

Emphasizing the significant role of folklore in nationalist movements, Osear J. Falness has shown in *National Romanticism in Norway*, the movement for Norwegian independence from Denmark that achieved political success in 1814, but strove for culture independence throughout the nineteenth century, depended mostly on folklore¹⁷.

In Western Europe and America the rise of nationalism in the late eighteenth-century was, at least in the beginning, in line with the liberal and humanitarian philosophies of the enlightenment. It was precipitated in no small degree by Rousseau's doctrine of popular sovereignty and "by his regard for the

common people as the true depository of civilization”—ideas which found their most powerful manifestations in the French and American Revolutions. Adherents of the new nationalistic philosophy looked forward to the day when the entire human community would share in those rights recently won in America and France.

In Central and Eastern Europe, however, a different kind of movement—romantic nationalism—developed. In these areas, where the people were generally socially and politically less developed than in the West, national boundaries seldom coincided with those of existing states. Hence nationalism here becomes a movement not so much to protect the individual against the injustices of an authoritarian state, but rather an attempt to redraw political boundaries to fit the contours of ethnic bodies. To be sure, the adherents of this nationalism took over Rousseau's concept of popular sovereignty, but to it they wedded the idea that each nationality is a distinct organic entity different from all other nations and that the individual can fulfil himself only to the degree that he is true to that national whole of which he is merely a part. Thus individual will become secondary to national will, and service to the nation-state became the highest endeavor of man. In contradiction to liberal nationalism, romantic nationalism emphasized passion and instinct instead of reason, national differences instead of common aspirations, and above all, the building of nations on the traditions and myths of the past—that is, on folklore—instead of on the political realities of the present.

The man most responsible for the creation of romantic nationalism was the German scholar Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803). His philosophy of history not only inspired the German nationalistic movement but also served as the foundation for most such movements since his time. He insisted on building a national culture on native foundations. He formulated a set of principles of nationalism, which are applicable to all nations struggling for independent existence. Herder's philosophy based on two ideas earned from the works of Melchiorre Cesarotti as well as Vico.

The first idea was on the continuity of history i.e. each historic age evolves naturally out of the preceding age. Herder said that the fatherland has descended from our fathers; it arouses the remembrance of all the meritorious who went before us and of all the worthy whose father we shall be. The second concept which Herder took from Vico was that each historical epoch forms an independent cultural entity whose various parts are integrally related to form an organic whole. Applying this Herder argued that each nation being organically different from other nations, is the master of its own destiny. He said, "Every nation contains the center of its happiness within itself".

Having gone through Herder's publications and enthusiasm regarding elevation of oral literature mainly of folk poetry Jacob Grimm wrote:

"Having observed that her language, laws and Antiquities were greatly underrated, I was wishful to exalt my native land."¹⁸

The followers of Herder tried to create mostly a mythical past of a great and noble nation believing that there had once been such a Germany. Believing so, they made it so. Looking back to these days, T. Benfey fifty years later assessed:

"The recognition of the great value of the German folk song awakened an interest in the other creations and expressions of the German folk soul. With equal zeal, legends, fairy tales, manners and customs began to be investigated, collected, and studied. The influence of the folk soul upon the other fields of human development-law, state, religion, all forms of life-was recognized and traced."¹⁹

By this, not only a new concept of the history of civilization arose, but also a reverence and love for the people, a patriotic zeal had been established in Germany. The individual must be rooted in his own people. Each individual nation could contribute to the progress of humanity only by developing on its own cultural foundation – this concept of Herder was accepted by underdeveloped ethnic groups in Central and East Europe.

As soon as the Grimms' tales received proliferation across Europe, Finland got automatically charged with the utility of folklore materials in national upheaval. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century, Finland was a colony of Sweden which underrated the Finnish culture and literature. The educated Finnish people, who had already been introduced with Herder and Grimms, started their movement around the Finnish literature.

In 1820, Elias Lonnrot, a medical student started collecting old Finnish poetry from the Karelia region. After several trips to that region, he collected enough material and in 1835, he published the text as *Kalevala* (the land of the heroes). The narrative centered round the hero Vainamoinen, who protected the land from the attack of supernatural powers. The Finnish people were waiting for such a masterpiece to boost their revolutionary agenda. At that time, Finland was handed over to Russia by Sweden, which threw the Finnish people from the frying pan to the fire. After a series of movement, Finland got independence in 1918.

In 1862, Elias Lonnrot published an abridged version of his *Kalevala* as a school textbook. William A Wilson, an American cultural historian, quotes these events in his work 'Folklore and Nationalism in Modern Finland'.

Later on, the whole culture of Finland has become a *Kalevala* culture. *Kalevala Day* on 28th February is an official flag-raising day with varieties of event. Names of institutions, towns, ships and steamers, tourists's items etc had been given after various characters of the epic *Kalevala*.

'Finnish nationalism as a purposeful doctrine was formulated largely under the inspiration of folklore studies', that 'the Finnish nation was conceived in and born of folklore, that 'the *kalevala* has been and still is the abode of the Finnish national spirit', that it can be called 'the independence book of the Finnish nation'²⁰

Unlike Germany and Finland, the textual tool of nationalism in Scotland was historical novel. Scotland was a British colony in the eighteenth century. Ossian, a bard in the third century mourned the passing of oral tradition which praises the heroes of the past. As soon as Scot language was declined with the advent of the English people, the Scot took resort to absorb in the lost story of

their ancient nation. Though Ossian was welcomed whole heartedly in Scotland, a few Englishmen ridiculed the Ossian creation as improbable fiction. Having gone through such insult, the Scot writers arose nationalism centering the bard, whose loss they lamented in historical novels. Like Scotland, Ireland used nationalist tales as steering in the mission.

We have observed that in Germany, Finland and Scotland, language become the victim of colonization. Folk narratives were ridiculed as traditional improbable fiction. In turn, this ridiculed tradition became the vehicle of nationalism. In this connection, the comment of Stuart Blackburn in his book "Print, Folklore and Nationalism in Colonial South India" is worth mentionable

"Trumpener's analysis of this 'bardic nationalism' is valuable because it sheds light on the link between folklore and the nation.Bardic nationalism, she argues, presents a more complicated psychology of modernity and loss. In particular, she identifies the psychic trigger that is cocked by the suppression of tradition in the rush to modernity: to the extent that cultural traditions are denied or reviled, to that extent they grow into potent symbols of nationalist identity. Although she does not use these terms, this is the process that links folklore to nationalism. As we have seen in the case of Germany, Finland and Scotland, in contexts of cultural and political domination, language is often the object of derision and suppression; and the narrative forms that are ridiculed because they are traditional, such as folktales and epics, become the natural vehicles for nationalism. Indeed, suppression and derision only enhance their status as stories of a lost national past"²¹

Throughout history, folkore have been closely intertwined with national issues and concerns. Folklore traditions have a tremendous potential in reinforcing the sense of national identity. The appearance of the very discipline of folkloristics coincided with the rising of nationalism in a number of countries. The study of folklore deserved a significant height as a part of Nazi literature under the patronage of Hitler. Old German tales were included

in the syllabus for school children in a modernized version with emphasis upon the idealization of fighting, glorification of power etc. With their aim to create a pure German race and culture, the Nazi folklorists engaged themselves in the task of weeding out alien elements from the German culture. With this view, emphasis was laid on the renewal of the pure Nordic-Germanic myths, customs, and rituals. In the sphere of politics too, folklore provided practical opportunities. The Nazi ideology underscored the heroic qualities of the fighting German peasants, qualities required to expand Germany's political boundaries.

Not only the sentiment of nationalism but also a particular nationalistic ideology may derive support from the content and interpretation of folklore. In the erstwhile U.S.S.R., Maxim Gorky, in his keynote address of the first All Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, stressed the values of folklore as an expression of the realities and aspirations of the working classes. From then on government policy strongly supported widespread collection and socialist interpretation of folklore. Y.M.Sokolov (1950 quoted in Dorson: *ibid*) in his standard work on Russian folklore expresses the ideological attitude of the communist party and the then Soviet government toward folklore: 'what a vastly important artistic force this in the propagandizing of the resplendent ideas of Communism, what a great place folklore occupies in the Soviet socialist culture.' And: 'never, in all the history of Russia, has the oral poetic word served the social aims so broadly and powerfully as in the Soviet period. Soviet folkloristics has helped to reveal the agitational and propagandist significance of folklore. And thereby, Soviet folkloristics has firmly allied itself with the practical tasks of our social life.'²²

In the U.S.S.R., folklore materials are not only reinterpreted, but trade-school students collected a whole new corpus of revolutionary and industrial labour lore on collective farms and machine tractor stations. By the 1930's such collectors had recorded a new folklore of Soviet Byliny, laments tales, and new songs called noviny, often glorifying Lenin, Stalin, Voroshilov, and other political and military heroes. Similar treatment was accorded to the folk heroes of new democracy like Davy Crocket, Mike Fink, and Mose and

Bowery b'boy in the U.S. half a century after the American Revolution. The same social forces are operating in different countries to produce folklore reflective of the ideology and ethics of the times.

In the United States, the publication of folklore responds not to official ideology so much as to popular taste, which contains its own latent ideology. In the depression decade of the 1930's leftist folksingers in the U.S. south to arouse the working man to sense of social injustice and a mood of political radicalism through the singing of protest songs. The history of this movement, embracing well-known personalities such as the Almanac Singers, Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Eurl Ives, and others, has been very well described by R. Serge Denisoff in *Great day coming ; folk music and the American left* and Reuss(1971) in "American folklore and left-wing politics:(1927-1957)".²³

Folklore has also served as an important agent of African nationalism. Folk traditions furnish pan-Africanists and new-state Africans with an oral history and references for statements of negritude and African personality.

1.3 FOLKLORE AND NATIONALISM: INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

In ancient and medieval India, nationalism was cultural and spiritual rather than political. Nationalism in the modern sense, an individual and group consciousness with extreme political identity, started appearing in India just after the British subjugation. India was fragmented into many small kingdoms where dauntless courage and heroic acts of rulers and soldiers were exhibited in the battle field with a national and spiritual sentiment. But they fought not for national glory and national pride. Most of them fought for personal gain and prestige. "History bears the testimony that it was the Indian rulers who, being blind to their personal gain, glory and rivalry helped the British to establish their foot firmly in the soil of India. It is an open fact that both Nizam of Hyderabad and the Maratha rulers spared nothing to eliminate two great nationalist and patriotic rulers, Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan, by offering all possible assistance to the East India Company."²⁴ Again, the defeat of the Nawab of Bengal, Suraj-ud-Daula, in the hand of the company rulers was

possible only for the conspiracy done by his Commander-in-Chief. Again, the Marathas were at daggers drawn with the Rajputs and the Sikhs. The Muslims were involved in fighting among themselves and against the Marathas.

In North East India too, there were kingdoms of the Ahoms, the Chutiyas, the Koches, the Kacharis, the Jaintias, the Garos, the Khasis, the Nagas, the Manipuris, the Barahis existed with dominance in medieval era. Besides, many unknown hilly kingdoms prevailed with distinct boundaries and battle strategies. These N. E. kingdoms were not exceptions from the kingdoms of Central and Western India. There were frequently involved in battles among themselves. So “there was no India at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It was mere congeries of states.”²⁵

There were no such unifying factors to bring the entire Indians into a common platform with the help of which Indians could assert nationalism in the modern sense. But Indian Classical texts and great tradition of learning could make some sense of “we feeling”, especially in the light of Sanskritisation and Brahmanization. The etymology of the term Bharata (India) tracing back to the King of Bharata is quite noteworthy. Stories from ancient Sanskrit texts like the Vedas, the Mahabharata, the Ramayana and the Puranas were in both oral and written continuum, in classical and vernacular dialects and inculcated similar ethics and messages across geographical boundaries. Moreover, great saints and scholars from India and abroad were in incessant mission to decipher knowledge and wisdom of universal brotherhood from Ashramas and universities flourished in Nalanda, Taxashila, Ujjain and Bikramshila. Religion is basically the driving wheel of spiritual and cultural nationalism. Next to the great teachings of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism took active initiative to make an end to the parochial outlook of the kings and subjects by deciphering great teachings of spiritism as well as humanism.

Despite of the brutality and self interest of many kings, the Indian history is also sound with charity, fellow- feelings and humanity of a quite considerable number of kings. Knowledgeable and wise kings often

encouraged and attended religious conferences and felt proud to adorn their courts with scholars and tourists. We may cite the names of Ashoka, Bhaskar Barmana, and Harsa vardhana, Akbar, Samudra Gupta etc who pioneered in the mission to form cultural and spiritual nationalism. In the medieval era, religious preachers like Sankaracharya, Ramanuj, Eknath, Tulsidas, Sankardeva, Madhabdeva, Ajan Phakir etc made a herculian effort to bind the Indian mass together.

Nationalism, in the modern sense, started with the establishment of British rule in India. The British administration divided the Indian mass into lots of sub divisions and repressed to the optimum level, made economic drainage to their homeland vacating age old Indian resources, diluted Indian social norms and traditional administration, torn the cultural and spiritual value systems. Yet Indians got a chance to enrich themselves intellectually and India passed from the medieval to modern age within half a century. Exploitation of cultural heritage and contribution of grammars, dictionaries in vernacular languages started heralding a new horizon for the indigenous communities and tribes. But these activities had been carried on by the Indologists or orientologists for their academic pursuits in the initial phase and by the missionaries as a part of their evangelization and by the British officers in India to suit their administrative convenience in the second phase. Local scholars merged in this mission in the third phase when they had become aware of rich Indian heritage of culture and literature. This third phase was the outcome of national consciousness in the later part of nineteenth century. Those Indian intellectuals were generally the administrators who got chance to go and study either in India or abroad and came under the influence of westernization and later on, by the college teachers influenced by modern education. Moreover, a brand from native journalists, pleaders, employees of law courts, readers of newspapers, magazines and periodicals etc also shook their hands in this mission. Folkloric excavation was seemed to be a significant feature in all the above three phases.

The English being the official language in India, Indians were privileged in two major ways. First, it becomes the link language among all Indians to share

their sentiments and common goals. Second, it opens the floodgates of western knowledge to all Indians. The Indian intellectuals in the light of western culture and philosophy saw the deteriorated conditions of Indians who were overwhelmed with evil practices, prejudices and mass illiteracy. They made their minds to enlighten millions of Indians through their writings and to remind about the glorious Indian culture and civilization. Social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Keshav Chandra Sen, Bipin Chandra Pal, and Dayananda Saraswati took bold steps to change the socio-religious outlook of Indian mass by removing the evil practices in the Hindu Society. Women education, widow remarriage were encouraged by discouraging child marriage, bride burning, feticide, casteism, untouchability, Sati etc. The Brahmo Samaj created political consciousness, national feelings and sentiments, made the people to understand the true essence of religion and novel ideas of humanism and nationalism. The Arya Samaj of Dayananda Saraswati tried to bring about a socio-religious revolution all over the country. Rajnarain Bose, another great leader of Brahma Samaj and founder of the "National Promotion Society", tried to promote the feeling of nationalism by writing national literature. Sound western education and unshakable faith on Hindu religion and culture created a distinguished personality in him. He also founded the "Hindu Mela" which sole purpose was to promote patriotism, nationalism and spirit of self help among the Hindus. "During the Annual gathering of the mela a great number of people used to assemble where songs, poems and lectures of national feeling were recited. The great Indian poet Rabindra Nath Tagor, during his teens, used to recite his poems."²⁶

Among the stalwarts of Indian nationalism, Rabindranath Tagore, Natesa Sastri, Swami Vivekananda, Ms Annie Bessant, and Bankim Chandra Chatterji were worth mentioning who emphasized on cultural and literary exposure of ancient India i.e. the wisdom of India, to arise the nationalistic sentiment of India. Those were from the moderate wing in opposition to the extremist brand including Surya Sen, Bhagat Singh, and Subhash Chandra Bose etc.

Among the founders of Indian nationalism the place of Swami Vivekananda, the true disciple of Ramakrishna, is like an immovable star, believed that a nation without a good foundation in cultural behavior and philosophical values couldn't be strong and durable. The speech, which he delivered in Chicago of America, was so pragmatic with Indian ethos and ethics that it begged admiration from all corners of the world.

The revival of ancient philosophy and culture was a turning point in the history of Indian nationalism. It was, in the real sense, the beginning of India's renaissance. Ms. Annie Bessant, a renowned theosophist also emphasized on the ancient wisdom and cultural values of India to raise the nationalistic sentiment. "Ms. Annie Bessant, a renowned theosophist was so much interested in the greatness of India's past that she not only propagated the past Indian wisdom but also decided to help India in achieving its freedom so that it could found ideal principles for peace and prosperity of the world based on it's ancient philosophies."²⁷

We have noticed that Bengal was the pioneer in the overall contribution to the emergence of Indian nationalism and hence, Calcutta was called the Brain of Colonial India. We have already mentioned above that exploitation and revival of cultural and folk heritage were conducted in three phases in India. The third phase conducted by native Indians also received a fertile ground in Bengal.

"Here, Calcutta being the capital of British India, swadeshi was already in the air in 1860s, Bengali intellectuals and writers could enter into the concept of folklore through the Asiatic Society's journal through books like *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (1872) by Dalton. It is not surprising that the first published collection of Indian folktales by an Indian was written by a Bengali (L.B.Day's *Folktales of Bengal*, London, 1883). Looking ahead, the first folklore journal run and edited by an Indian began in Calcutta (*Folklore*, 1956). The linchpin of the connection between the folklore revival and early Indian nationalism, however, was the Tagore family. Throughout the 1870s, they staged melas, which included the display of folk arts and crafts, folk

theatre and popular songs. In Calcutta, as in Europe, folklore was revived and rewritten by intellectuals as an act of restoration, to preserve a national identity in an era of foreign cultural domination.”²⁸

In Madras, unlike in Calcutta or Bombay, two separate constructions of folklore and the nation emerged in the late nineteenth century. The first formulation drew heavily on a feeling of cultural subjugation and emphasized the notion of a ‘buried Dravidian’ culture, attributed not just to British colonialism but to brahminical –Sanskritic domination as well. The Formulation of a folk Dravidian nation, largely built up by British writers over the course of the nineteenth century, resembled the European ideas who resorted to the image of the ‘buried Dravidian’. They believed the Dravidian race as pre-Aryan. It was largely articulated by the European who echoed the earliest European writing about Tamil literature and language.

The second formulation of folklore and the nation invoked the image of the ‘vanishing village’. This formulation was single handedly mastered by Pandit Natesa Sastri (1859-1906), who advanced folklore as a national literature in Madras.

It is said that the first national movement started right from the Sepoy mutiny of 1857. Mass participation paved its way just after this movement and India was handed over to the direct administration of the queen in Britain in 1858. Following this, a series of peasant movement took place in various corners of the country which have been discussed in chapter II and III.

The 1857 struggle failed primarily because of the weak-kneed effort or treacherous role of the Indian feudal ruling class as a whole. The living national experience of the worth of the Indian feudals in the anti-British freedom struggle became the basis for the coming generation of Indian patriots to formulate the correct strategy for the victory of the Indian revolution, that is, that the Indian freedom struggle has to be not only anti-British but also anti-(Indian) feudal. The 1857 folk songs supply valuable historical documentaries to explain the transition.²⁹

In India the folk art forms have been the traditional media for approaching the masses.

There is evidence to show that the organizers of the 1857 uprising plan fully and effectively used this method of mass propaganda to stir the people to revolt. Kaye, the British historian of 1857 stated, "There were two subjects which the *Kathputleewalas* (puppeteers) extremely delighted to illustrate the degradation of the Mughal and the victories of the French over the English, the one intended to excite hatred, the other contempt in the minds of the spectators." Trevelyan, in Kanpur states that festivals and *tamashas* were used for revolutionary propaganda. "The dolls employed in theatres began to speak a strange language and to dance a dangerous dance. *Pamwadas* (ballads) and *Lawaniyas* (folk musical art-form that stir softer emotions) were sung near police stations. Ballad *Alha Udal* (a heroic ballad that stirs the blood) was also employed. From Calcutta to Punjab dangerous *Tamashas* (folk drama) in the night were exhibitedFemale gypsies were also used. *Bhishtis* (water – carriers) refused water; *ayas* (maid-servants) left service." This was a hundred years back and ever since these folksongs on 1857 have helped to nurse patriotism among the common people of India. The earlier panic disappeared with the very experience of the British rule. The revolutionary atmosphere of the 1857 days can be gathered from the song below:

Storm in the river
Far off is Englishtan
Hurry, quit
Perfidious Firingi!³⁰

Laxmi Bai, the Rani of Jhansi, a legendary figure among the leaders of the 1857 uprising, was one of the most popular leaders of the Revolt. A large number of folksongs, ballads, Rasos have been composed in her memory.

How valiantly like a man she fought
The Rani of Jhansi!
On every parapet she set a gun
Raining fire of hell,
How well like a man fought the Rani of Jhansi,
How valiantly and well!³¹

These folk songs on 1857 written by the folk poets of the participants in that great national uprising are in more ways than one a part of our rich national heritage. They are all most important source of historical material on the outlook and aspirations of the Indian people during the 1857 struggle and they are also a source material for studying how this tradition has lived and grown on among our people. Secondly, they are a little known part of our patriotic poetical heritage and their popularization would enrich our national literature. Finally they have been composed in a vast variety of musical art-forms in which our folk music abounds. Their heart warming music stirs patriotic blood as nothing else can.

1857 FLAG-SONG*¹

To us belongs our Hindustan
and to none else.
Our sacred motherland
dearer than heaven
The world is aglow
with the light of her soul.
How old, how new
and unique of its kind
To us belongs our Hindustan
and to none else.
Ganga and Jamuna making
our lands fertile *
And overhead the snow-clad mountain †
our sentry towering.

Beating against the coasts below
 the trumpets of the seas,
 And gold and diamonds from our mines
 overflow.
 Our pomp and splendour evoking the
 envy of the world.

And then came the Firangi
 and such magic spell he cast
 Pillaging and plundering our motherland
 he ruled.
 The martyrs call you, O countrymen
 do you hear ?

Smash up the chains of slavery
 and pour out fire
 Hindus and Muslims and Sikhs-
 all of us brothers.
 Hail and Salute it,
 Here is our flag of freedom!³²

This flag-song "Quami Tarana" was published in the contemporary, *Payami Azadi*, whose original copy is reported to be in the British Museum. . This folksong is the best testimony to the patriotic ideas of the insurgents in 1857

These folksongs are worth a close study to see how patriotism is born and how it develops within a feudal society and its system of thought and ultimately bursts its bonds, both social and ideological. There runs through all these folksongs a burning hatred of the Firingi, the foreign usurper, for his alien rule, for disrupting the traditional way of Indian life, and making daily life a misery for the common people. The hatred of the Firangi is passionate and undying.....Great confidence is derived from the unity of the various castes and communities that came into being during the struggle. This popular unity is also considered necessary for the success of the struggle. The

experience of this national unity in the fire of struggle led India from feudal disunity towards popular unity and made the building of a modern national movement possible.

In the historical conditions of the nineteenth century when the British conquest was proceeding by subjugating Indian kingdoms and principalities, the Indian people did rally behind their traditional rulers to defend and regain national sovereignty. In these conditions, prevailing these deposed rulers alone could serve as symbols of Indian sovereignty. The contemporary British chroniclers and authorities recognized the phenomenon as such and treated the 1857 uprising as a national rebellion. Though the insurgents were out to place the Mughal Bad Shah on the throne at Delhi and Nawab Wajid Ali Shah at Lucknow, they were far from reviving Indian feudalism or medieval autocracy. These traditional rulers were only treated as symbols while real power lay with the armed insurgent sepoys, drawn from the sturdy peasant stock of India.

The example of Birsa Munda, a tribal hero of the Chotanagpur region of Bihar, and the movement led by him against the British in the last decade of 19th century, demonstrate very well how folklore can play the role of motivator par excellence (Singh 1983). The tribal populace of the region had deep resentment against the usurpation of their land and forestry by the colonial administration. Birsa (1874-1901) spread out the rumour that he had been sent by god to save the Munda race. As a consequence, lots of lore was created to highlight the divinity of Birsa Munda and he was called as *Birsa Bhagawan*. He declared to put an end to the kingdom of Ravana i.e. the British empire and to burn the effigy of Mandodari (Ravana's wife) i.e. Queen Victoria. Birsa taught his followers a kind of invocation:

Sirmare firun Raja jai
Dharatire pudwai Raja jai
(Victory to the Pharaoh?)
In heaven
And to the titled king (Birsa)
On earth)³³

In 1914-15, the Oraons of Chhotanagpur were enjoined by divine commands to give up superstitious practices and animal sacrifices, to stop eating meat and drinking liquor, to cease ploughing their fields, and to withdraw their field labour from non-advansi landowners. Known as Tana Bhagat movement it “spread from village to village till it extended almost all over the Oraon community at one time.” (Roy 1972:251). It took a nationalist turn, with invocations being made to the enemy of the British at that time, the German baba, with obvious reference to Germany.³⁴

Another such movement occurred in 1921 among the Bhumij of Chotanagpur. A rumour was spread that an incarnated king suggested giving up liquor, fish and meat. The Bhumij tried their best to obey His order. Fortunately, there was a bumper crop in the following year. After three or four years of it, they came to know that the incarnated king was Gandhi Mahatma.

Parallels can be drawn from the appearance of the Devi Salabai of Gujrat who in the name of divine utterance tried to give an ideal nationalist thrust from 1921. She was believed to compel the common people to give up meat, fish and liquor, suggested to maintain cleanliness and boycott foreign clothes and weave cotton clothes with Charkha (the spinning wheel).

When peasant movements were in progress, Romantic nationalism crept side by side which contributed many newspapers, magazines, periodicals to the newly educated citizens, made them aware of their rich cultural heritage and filled their minds with national sentiments. These have been discussed in chapter IV and V.

Thereafter, Mahatma Gandhi and his compatriots appeared in the scene who gave India freedom with untold dedication. The Bengal division, The Jaliwanwala bag massacre, the Chauri Chaura incident, the Satyagrah movement, the Non- Co operation movement, and formation of Azad Hind Fauz, Indian National Army, the Quite India Movement etc bear ample testimonies to it. These have been discussed in chapter VII and VIII

1.4 SOCIO-CULTURAL SET UP OF ASSAM:

The juxtaposition of various communities with their distinctive cultural features along with a bit of historical background has been cited briefly.

In many ways the foremost of the seven unites comprising the N.E India, Assam is also more or less centrally located in the region. Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh bound it on the north, Nagaland and Manipur on the south - west, and Bangladesh and West - Bengal on the west. The total area of the state is 78.52 K.M. sq. The long and narrow Brahmaputra valley, also called the Assam Valley, stretches across the states from east and west while the small Barak valley forms its southern adjacent the two hills district - North Cachar and Karbi-Anglong laying in between.

Assam had links with Aryan civilization and culture since ancient times. Known by the names Pragjyotisha and Kamrupa, the total land finds frequent mention in the ancient literature, particularly in the Epics and Puranas. Narakasura, Bhagadatta and Bhaskaravarmana were kings of ancient Assam who are known to have played significant roles in the political and socio-cultural history of India. While there had been migration of hordes of Aryan settlers at different times, the indigenous population had also come under influence of Aryan religio-cultural modes, giving rise in the process to a very interesting synthesis of Aryan and Indigenous strains.

In medieval period, different parts of Assam were under the Chutias, the Barahis, the Bhuyans and other chieftains but later there arose two very strong ruling powers, the Ahoms in the east and the Koches in the west. The Ahoms of Tai-Shan affiliation originally came here as invaders but soon became completely indigenized and their uninterrupted 600 years rule not only gave the land its present name but also played a significant role in foregoing its social and cultural unification. The Koches played a similar role in the western

parts of the land helping not only political consolidation but also in socio-religious and artistic efflorescence.

At present the bulk of the indigenous population is made up of Assamese Hindu among whom the Indo-Mongoloid or Kirata elements is visibly strong in terms of both racial strains and cultural traits, although scholars have also discerned certain Austric and Dravidian ingredients. Various tribal communities - now at different levels of Accultulation, Integration, and Assimilation vis-a-vis the Assamese Hindu society - live in the hills and plains, the chief among them being the Karbis, the Dimasakacharis, the Zemi Nagas, and the Kukis in the hills, and the Bodo-Kacharis, the Mishings, the Tiwas (Lalungs), the Deuris, and the Rabhas in the plains.

Although, Saivism and Saktism (and also Tantrism) have had strong roots here, Neo-Vaishnavism with wonderful spirit liberalization and a synthesis was ushered in under the unique leadership of the great Vaishnavite saint Sankardeva (1449-1568), and its influence on the population has since been both pervasive and abiding. The local Muslim population is also sizable in proportion and their place in, and contributing to, the composite socio-cultural milieu is quite significant and considerable. While there is a small but significant Assamese Sikh community, Christianity has been adopted by a section of the local population, particularly among the tribal groups.³⁵

1.5 POLITICAL HISTORY OF ASSAM:

Assam has a rich legacy of culture and civilization conjured by the name. Assam is in fact peerless judged by the exquisite natural beauty, cultural richness and humane wealth. Being the homeland of various races of men like Austric, Mongolian, Dravidian and Aryan that came to dwell in her hills and valleys at different time since remote antiquity, Assam has developed a composite culture of variegated colour. The word Assam is interpreted by

some scholars as a formation of Sanskrit derivation '*Asama*' meaning peerless or unparalleled.

Assam, the sentinel of the north-east India is most strategically situated, close to India's international borders with as many as four countries, i.e. China, Burma, Bhutan and Bangladesh. It is surrounded on all other sides by pre dominantly hilly or mountainous tract Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh on the north, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh on the east and Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura on the South. The state's climate is of humid tropical type in the plains and sub-alpine in the hills.

Advent of the Ahoms across the eastern hills in 1228 A.D. was the turning point in Assam history. They ruled Assam nearly for six centuries. The Burmese entered through eastern borders and overran the territory at time when court intrigues and dissensions were sapping the vitality of the Ahom royalty. The British appeared soon in 1826 and by the treaty of Yandabu, the Burmese ceded Assam to the British. Under the provisions of the Indian Councils Act, 1861, Assam was tagged with Eastern-Bengal in 1905. The name of the institution was "Legislative Council of Eastern-Bengal and Assam".

In 1909, the council had strength of 40 members out of which Assam was allotted 5 seats, which was later increased to 34. At that time, Shillong played a crucial role as the capital of Assam since 1874.

Under the Government of India Act, 1919, the strength of the Legislative Council was raised to 53 members with effect from 1 April, 1921 (41 were distributed community wise, 7 officials and 5 non-officials).

Under the Government of India Act, 1935, provisions were made for Legislative Government of Assembly in each province and Assam Legislative Assembly gained strength of 108 members (all were elected).

After the partition of India in 1947, Sylhet district of Assam was transferred to the East Pakistan by a referendum and the strength of the Assembly members was reduced to 71. Again after independence, it was

raised to 108(77 for general candidates, 5 for scheduled castes, 7for Plains Tribals and 19 for Hill Tribals).

Nagaland was carved out of Assam in December1963. With the creation of Meghalaya as a full- fledged state and Mizoram, a Union Territory in 1972, the strength of Assam Legislative Assembly was reduced to 117 but was again raised to 126 in 1978 on the basis of the 1971 Census. In 1974, the capital of Assam was shifted formally from Shillong to Dispur

1.6 HISTORY OF NATIONALISM IN ASSAM

Nationalism before the amalgamation of Assam with the Indian Union is a controversial matter as most of the events lacked the primary requisites of nationalism. Just after the great Yandabu Treaty of 1826, 14th February, nationalistic upsurges took places in various forms in Assam.

“.....Assamese nationalism was a post-British phenomenon. As an ideology and movement it took shape only during second half of the 19th century, when such questions, as the preservation and promotion of the mother tongue, jobs for the sons of the soil and concern over colonial constraints on development, began to stir Assamese minds. Maniram Dewan, a representative of the gentry, gave vent to this nationalism. However, for a more positive beginning of the sustained national movement that followed, one has to turn to his contemporary representatives of the new, English educated, nascent- bourgeois and petty-bourgeois strata the middle class that were emerging from Assam's colonial society. Foremost among them was Anandaram Dhekial Phukan (1829-1859)”³⁶

Tea plantation in Assam by the east India Company and importation of cheaper labours from Bengal, Bihar and Orissa was a dominating factor to change the socio-economic domain of Assam. Rising of land revenue in order to bring the Assamese peasants to the tea estates, resulted a series of agrarian revolts from 1861 to the last decade of the 19th century.

The first popular movement of Assam, the battle of Phulaguri of 1861, a peasant movement received statewide support. From the beginning of 1869,

Rajj-mels were frequently held at Govindapur, Hadira and Bajali of Kamrup district. There was a popular uprising at Rangia on 24th December 1893. The trouble prone areas were Rangia, Nalbari, Barama and Bajali. The popular movement was rounded off by the Patharughatar Ran (the battle of Patharughat) of Darrang district on 28th January 1894, where more than one hundred and fifty people laid down their lives.

The hanging of Piyali Barphukan and Jiuram Dulia Barua in Aug. 1830 heralded a new dimension in the mass unrests. The Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 did tremendous impact in Assam too. The revolt under the leadership of Maniram Dewan and his hanging in 1858 were significant events in the over all scenario of Assamese nationalism.

Replacement of the Assamese language from offices schools and courts with the Bengali in 1836 impuled a vigorous jerking among the litterateurs and the intelligentsia.

It was due to the effort of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan and a group of Baptist missionaries with its mouthpiece Orunodoi that the Assamese could reclaim its rightful place in 1873 a.d. A group of young Assamese students established *Asamiya Bhasa Unnati Sadhini Sabha* in 1888. The society's journal *Jonaki* heralded a new era in the history of Assamese literature. Hemchandra Barua, Gunabhiram Barua and Anandaram Dhekial Phukan were the harbingers of this romantic nationalism. Lakshminath Bezbaroa, who tried for the revival of the Mahapurushia cult and the folk treasures, bore fruits in the nationalistic process towards the early part of the twentieth century. Newspapers like the *Assam Bilashini* (1871), the *Mau* (1886) and the *Assam Bandhu* (1885) played a pioneering role in the field of Assamese nationalism as well as journalism.

In the early part of 20th century, Assam went through a series of movements influenced by the Gandhian thoughts. The Satyagraha, the Non cooperation and the Quit India movement witnessed collaborative effort from this region. The conference of Indian National Congress at Pandu in 1926 and the remarkable four times visit of Mahatma Gandhi to Assam accelerated the participation of people. Kanaklata, Mukunda Kakati, Kumali Devi, Kushal Konwar, Bhogeshari Phukanani and many other patriots embraced immature death in the brutal hands of the British in 1942. The writings and speeches of

Jyotiprasad Agarwala and Bishnu Rabha were quite heart rending and thought provoking.

After the independence also, various ethnic movements have been taking place in Assam in the guise of nationalism. But most of them bear the characters of ethnic assertion and sub-nationalism. The conflict between the peoples of this region and the mainland India divides the whole communities into two major divisions: - indigenous and non-indigenous groups. The tribes of Assam, the Ahoms and the Caste Hindus form the first stratum while the Nepalis, the tea workers, the Bengalis, the Marowaris, the Biharis and the immigrant Muslim peasants fall into the second. The second step of tension is between the tribal and the non-tribal groups. In the next step, the intercommunal disputes and anarchies come to the political history of Assam. Ancestral property right, traditional job crisis and the fear of losing one's culture are the basic issues to augment sub-nationalism in this region. In one word, xenophobia has been creeping into the minds of the natives. Neglect by the economic decision makers; land encroachment by immigrants and the feeling of the natives that their culture and identity are in jeopardy by the controlling economic forces- are the factors responsible for this. "One state one nation" thinking and the dominant tendency in "Mainland" India to take the degree of Aryanisation as the measure of Indianisation"³⁷ .Now, each community is absorbed to reconstruct and fabricate its own history and folklore. Ignored is the fact that a nation and a state are two different entities. The tendency is to view the state as a nation and ignore the fact that some communities, especially tribal, have a culture and religion of their own³⁸

Reputed sociologist Walter Fernandes observes in his paper "The impact of Globalization on the North-East" as-

Land and Jobs are the thread linking the conflicts that follow. Many communities of the region react to what they consider attacks on their livelihood and rewrite their history in order to declare themselves the original inhabitants of a given area and lay exclusive claims to its resources. For example, both the Dimasa and the Naga claim Dimapur as a land they once ruled. Alienation of land , culture and identity and the resultant indigenous claims are the bases of the Naga-Kuki conflict in Manipur(Fernandes and

Bharali2002:52-55), the Bodo-Santhal and Dimasa-Hmar tension in Assam(The Telegraph,23rd April 2003), the Tripura tribal demand for a homeland (Bhaumik2003:84) and the Assam Movement that was built around the fear of land and job loss to the immigrants(Behal 2002:147-148)³⁹

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CHAPTER-2

2 FRAGRANCE OF NATIONALISM IN THE FOLKSONGS OF ASSAM

In this chapter, a few folksongs in Assamese, Sadri (Lingua franca among the tea and ex-tea communities), Santhali and Karbi language have been forwarded which are flavoured with patriotic and nationalistic zeal. Sadri and Santhali songs are a total reflection of subjugation by the British rule and witnesses of bitter experience faced by the particular community whereas the Karbis and the Moran songs are from the pre colonial monarchical background venerating the communal legendary figures. But the events of the Assamese folksongs were experienced both in colonial and pre colonial Ahom rule.

Folksongs are pragmatic with social heritage, the environment and the folklife of a particular region. Performer and audience hardly receive so close contact in other genres. It is nourished from age to age by the aesthetic sense of the individual mind and serves the society by educating the younger generation, socialization and by exercising social control in the society. It is the most powerful propaganda of a particular programme, a particular political movement. In this case, we may cite the following quotation made by Deep Punia:

“...Through songs, jokes and proverbs, they show their anger and difficulties caused by injustice, oppression and exploitation. Folksongs can also prove the most powerful propaganda media to direct the attention of the people towards a particular programme. Political parties take help of songs to popularize their party candidate and the manifesto adopted. Vendors also take recourse to this method for selling their articles. The development officials too adopt the oral media to popularize the programmes of planned change”¹

And for this reason the Brothers Grimm in Germany and the collectors of folksongs and ballads in England were inspired and pioneered to intricate the latest dreams of a country with culture and folklife. The role of folklore can be more illuminated if a South African country Malawi is cited where folksongs enabled a person to come back to power by mass mobilization.

Malawi is a small country in Africa South of the Sahara, sandwiched between Zambia and Mozambique. In 1964, led by D. Hastings Kamuzu Banda under the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), the country attained independence from British colonial rule. Banda has returned to Malawi in 1958.

When he arrived, he was handed over the leadership of the National African Congress, a group that had been established in 1940s. But almost immediately after the country gained independence 6years later, Banda scattered into exile the very people who had organized the independence movement and had invited him to lead it. In 1966 Banda banned opposition parties; he became life president in 1971. But Banda carefully appropriated and manipulated oral traditions and history to consolidate and legitimize his power.

Malawi had a rich heritage of songs, poetry and dance. Traditional songs were adapted to advance the idea that Banda was the only person that could lead Malawi. They proposed that God chose Banda before he was born to be the leader of Malawi. For instance, one song sung by the women's league from Rumphi district said:

Ba Ngwazi Wanda bike

Chiuta wakawasola

Kuwa Mulongogzi withu muno m Malawi

(Before Ngwazi was born

God chose him

.....To be the leader in Malawi) ²

In these songs, Banda became the father and founder of the Malawi nation, a God sent messiah much like Moses or Jesus in the Bible.

Folksongs played no fewer roles in Colonial Assam than the Malawi Chapter. When no media was available among the dominated and mostly tortured subject to express agony and to make agenda for a collective upheaval during the colonial regime, the revolutionary mass took resort to folksongs. They expressed their grievances and united themselves with the help of folksongs in the nook and corners of Assam. Where illiteracy and lack of modern communication stood as a barricade among various communities, folksongs delivered the most recommendable service to the laymen to interact and to unite against the British lion.

Now let us absorb in the folksongs of a few dominant communities who had exercised these during their ethnic emergency in monarchial and colonial era to outburst their suffocated experiences and ideas.

During British administration, all communities of Assam irrespective of their racial and cultural distinct features came under one common aspiration. Common agony or hatred to the British Sahibs was the resultant of the equal measures adopted to subordinate all the communities. The Assamese-speaking people did not sit with empty hands. The Bihu songs reflected the folk minds as....

*“The alien, the alien, the shabby alien,
Don’t you give him room
He gets up at midnight and breaks into the house,
In the darkness does he escape”³*

The term *Bangal* has always meant a foreigner or alien. A European is called *Baga bangal* (white Bangal).

Aliens have come into the land of Assam
I have observed their vanity,
Donot go, O dear, to an alien,
There’s no knowing what his love is⁴

The song is against the praise of strangers

Through stream came the tea garden sahib,
 Having drunk he threw away the bottles,
 What is the use of so much wealth?
 All is useless without a woman⁵

The tea garden sahibs remain branded for all time.

The British couldn't settle in Assam without facing disputes. Assamese along with the tribes like Abors, Mishimi of the North-East Frontier prevented the British at Sadiya from entering Assam. British officer Halkan was murdered which was echoed in the folksong...

Horá koi gasare murha samaniya

Horá koi gasare murha

Halkan chahabak abore katile

Bichari nepale mura⁶

(The stump of Horakoi tree, Oh my friend
 the stump of Horakoi tree
 Abors killed Halkan Sahib
 His head was not found)

The terrific battle at Sadiya is again reflected.

Ekara patore jahaj banai diya

Sadiya ranaloi jaon⁷

(Make a ship of the leaves of Ekara tree
 As I am ready to fight the Sadiya battle)

Again, *Kone ani diba lone amlakhi*

Kone ani diba jira

Kone ani diba dhanare batori

Sadiya ranare pora⁸

(Who will fetch salt and *amlakhi*

Who will bring *jira*

Who will give the message of my Dhan

from the battle at Sadiya)

The only traditional historical ballad that is sung sometimes even now-a days is Maniram Dewanar geet(the ballads of Maniram Dewan) associated with the trial and hanging of a patriot in 1858 A.D..The song, which has a melancholic tune, goes like this:

Sonar dhowa khowat khali oi Maniram

Rupar dhowa khowat khali

Kino rojar ghare doroh achorili

Dingit chipejari loli⁹

(you smoked upon a gold hookah, O Maniram
you smoked upon a silver hookah,
what treason did you commit to Royalty
that you got a rope round your neck)

SANTHAL FOLKSONGS

The Santals belong to Munda group, a branch of that aboriginal group which probably entered India from the North-East. They were basically hunters and jungle-dwellers and agriculturists to some extent. Their religion is animistic, spirits (bongas) are everywhere around them. The Santhal Parganas is a district of 4800 sq. miles in area, lying about 150 miles north of Calcutta, was formed into a separate administration after the Santhals had risen in rebellion in 1856. Santhali is a language of great regularity and complexity but when the Santhals come in contact with races speaking an Aryan language it is apt to become corrupted with foreign idioms.

The Santhals of Assam were brought to this region from Jharkhand, Chotanagpur, Chattisgarh and other parts of India by the British people. Siddu and Kanhu, two martyrs of mid nineteenth century, embraced death penalty in the movement against the British policy of land and revenue system and have become a paramount source of inspiration for the followers of later times.

Folksongs were composed after these two freedom fighters and these songs are alive in Assam till now.

(1) *Chadam dada taleme*

Chadam dada lagayem

Chadam dada madane malin. 2

(O brothers, untie your horses

Rush to the battle field

We are with pale faces)

(2) *Chand banga nehrate marang buru joharem*

Chand bhayor sanggete

Chidu Kanhu chadam chetan re 2

(You pray to the god, Marang Buru,
march accompanying the brothers of the Moon dynasty.

Siddu and Kanhu are on the horseback)

(3) *De-ja boyha delaja bakayha*

Hud hud gud gud damanike

Bitish raja lagayeya bon 2

(Come all our brothers

come in groups and gather in the same venue

as we are to drive away the British)

(4) *Hulaban hulah kaban*

Lagah abon lapadh hai

Abowakah disam daban tahadh dahaya 2

(We will revolt

we will revolt in large gatherings

and will fight to save our motherland)

(5) *Relgarhi paiya chetan khirh khirh*

Dah chetan lauka jahaj khad khad

Cherma- re udah jahaj han hanah kan 2

(Trains are running over us with the sound khir khir

Ships are running with the soud Khad khad on the water
Aeroplanes are moving in our sky)

(6)*Ah dada chap-pe*
Char boyha arag pe
Raharh dahou gudau- pe
Hara buru dharti daban dul dulau-wa 2
(Come with bows and arrows
Shoot with arrows
Blow the war trumpets
so that we can quiver our dharti ma)

(7)*Hul boyha lagoyen*
Banduk hou chadeyen
Adi adi mayam dahou bohelen
Sidu Kanhu karham red char-da parayen –hou boyha 2
(Movements have passed over
Guns have roared
Rivers of blood have flowed over us
Arrows penetrated the chests of Sidu and Kanhu)¹⁰

FOLKSONGS IN THE TEA GARDENS OF ASSAM

Discovery of tea plants in 1923 A.D. and the Yandabu treaty in 1826 A.D. were two famous successive events in the history of Assam. In the very outset, the indigenous Assamese labourers shared a significant part in the infant stage of the industry. In the tea-estates of Maniram Dewan and Jagannath Barua and also in those of Assam Company, Assamese labourers raised up to 30-40% of the total workers. As soon as the hegemony transferred to the East India Company, a scarcity of indigenous labourers had been noticed unprecedentedly. A few reasons may be cited in favour of the local laborers' unwillingness.

- (i) Regimentation of tea gardens, hard and fast rules accompanying atrocities did not match with the local laborer's (especially Bodos and allied groups) passion. Moreover, serving in the tea gardens was their part time business as they had possessed their farms and fields besides natural resources.
- (ii) Hanging of several local patriots and upsurge of the sepoy mutiny led the local workers to feel the British as antagonist.
- (iii) The strange and to some extent disgraceful codes of behaviour of the British Sahib were considered as a threat to their and religion.
- (iv) Partial may be, the dethronement of Assamese language from the schools and offices from 1836 to 1873A.D. gave a new fillip to this event.

When all efforts of the British people to remove the indigenous detachment turned in vain, they increased the land revenue beyond imagination. It is reflected in the Dali Pūran as -

*Bhabi Chinti Chahabe upay napay
Bagichaloi kuli bicharibo jay
Gaon dhani hol , kuli paboloī nai
Bhabi bhabi chahabe ulale upay
Sonkale dukhiya hok khajana besi karo
Kuli paboloī aru kihar bhoy karo¹¹*

(The Sahib's operation for kulis did not bore fruits as the villagers are in the verge of enrichment. As revenge, he enhanced the land revenue so that they would not have any alternative except the tea gardens)

Lots of riot sabhas, raijmels and mutinies appeared in the scene as a protestation against the enhanced amount of revenues resulting massacre, lathicharge and gun fire. The Doli Pūran depicts the Patharughat trajedy where hundreds of poor peasants embraced bullets of the British gun in 1894.

Later the tea planters began to import uneducated scrupulous labourers with the help of local agents from Orrisa, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Tamil Nadu etc..motivating by various means.

*Assam desher chahpata, pani boli bar mitha
Chal sakhi, chal jaba bagane , tulaba pata ananda mane¹²*

(The tea leaves and water of Assam are heard to be sweet.

Let us go to the garden, Oh friend, we would pluck cheerfully)

The laymen acknowledged that the backbone of the nation invariably depends on the socio-economic foundation of the common people. The insolvent mass experienced severe atrocities by the estate owners despite of their optimum sacrifice for the welfare of the industry. The division of India and Pakistan grieved them much. The following song reflects their political awareness, valour and patriotism.

*Ki agun jalitre ei sunar bharate
Diba nishi bhabire upay na dekhiya
Bhaire hindustane pakistane
Desh bibhakta oiya
Desh ma boin sab chute-el.
Bhat rutir lagiare
Bhaire bhai mantrigane ghure beray
Aeroplane chariare bhai aeroplane chariya
Desh netara sab sukhe ache gadir achan paiya re
Diba nishi bhabi upay na dekhiya¹³*

(We are unable to extinguish the fire lit up in India, which divides India and Pakistan. Our mothers and sisters have passed away for the sack of bread. It is amazing how the ministers are roaming by aeroplane after enthronement)

The workers were pressurized heavily in the all round development of the industry. But the entire credit and benefit went to the owners. They hardly found time to take care of their house conditions, diets and sanitation.

*Dhan kati go narakati , narakati ghar bandhi
Sei ghar jal pare go , boise sararat kandi,*

*Ki bolobo go machi pichi , ki bolobo dukher katha
Kacha bache ghun dharse , temoni amar durdasha*¹⁴

(We go on harvesting paddy, making house out of the paddy thatch.

But rain penetrates causing misery to us.

How I can depict our grievances

Resembling a green bamboo infected by insect!)

The British people did not merely pave the drainage of wealth to their homeland and exploited the laborers economically, but abused the opposite genders with lust. It is reflected in the Bihu song as---

Ujai ahile bagichar chahabti

Cherap khai pelale chichi

Atek dhan bastu kelei lagiche

*Chowali nahole misa*¹⁵

(the sahib of the tea gardens came against the current of the Brahmaputra,

Threw away the glasses of wine

Why they require so much wealth

when girls are thought to be the pleasure).

The workers had to confine themselves to the hard and fast rules of the company and faced uncountable atrocities which is reflected in the song-----

Desh gela jamin gela

Taito amara kandina

Manush le golam holi

*Manastape mori go*¹⁶

(Our homeland is no more, lands are no more

We do not weep even then.

. But it extremely pains us

that our people have been converted to slaves)

chardar bale kam kam

babu bale dhare aan

chaheb bale liba pither cham

re nithur shyam

phaki diye anali assam

(The British supervisor doesn't know anything
except commanding us
for hard work and whiplashes
Oh! Heartless almighty,
we have been played false).

The agitating workers were well aware of the exploitation of the British Sahibs. The economic drainage caused by the British to their homeland at the cost of the workers' hard work did not pain them so much. But inhumane behaviour bestowing the poorest living standard was a matter of great regret to them. Even tea was also not served them according their requirement.

"Now it is said that where the tea grows, that is yours but when we made sacrifice we require tea for our funerals, we therefore perceive that you have taken all the country and if we, the old and respectable can't get tea to drink, we are not well satisfied"¹⁷

The press of those days entitled the conflicts in the tea garden as the conflicts between labourers and aristocrats.

*Chand kande suraj kande
Kande go swarger tara
Patale basuki kande
Bahego sosaner dhara
Nadi kande, nala kande
Kande go gulsi phul
Iniye biniye kande
Praner dhadki phul.*¹⁸

(The sun weeps, the moon weeps
the stars of the heaven weep
the basuki(the king snake)weeps
under the ground
the heart weeps with deepest grief

as the current of repression is quite inhumane)

“The primary object of the British rule in India is to benefit the European capitalist and merchant, even if necessary, at the sacrifice of justice and humanity.”¹⁹

They had dedicated themselves for the welfare of the tea gardens with a desperate mood for their disability to go to their homelands and the appeal of the hearts to meet their dearest ultimately turned to a cry in the wilderness.

Chuit geloi rajpat

Chutloi dewaniya

Chuit geloi mor jila garbaria

Chuit geloi

Chuit geloi maibap

Chuitloi swajaniya

Chuit geloi more golake jhumoria

*Chuit geloi*²⁰

(Our crown has been` lost

Suzerainty has been lost,

Nostalgic villages have fled away

Parents have been detached

Kinsmen are no more

Intimate jhumoir companions are no more)

When the British sahibs harassed the tea workers physically, culturally and economically, they wanted to search a way to escape from these compulsions. It echoed in the song of their Tusu Puja also.

Cal sarda cal barda

Asame barha dukh re

Rele cade desh jaba

Ar ekhane thakba na

Chandpure ticket kate

Ag chale jaba guwalande

Chahab shyalader chah bagane

*Aru kadam rakhaba na*²¹

(lets go charda and barda
 too much grievances in Assam
 we wil go to our land by train
 and willnot stay here anymore
 we will book ticket at chandpur
 and move to Guwalande
 In the tea gardens of the Sahib
 We wil not step any more)

KARBI FOLKSONGS

The Karbis are one of the peace-loving tribes of the Assam province. A voice of protest was raised against the British people and their policy of divide and rule in the Karbi society.

Tawai achan karbimar

Tawai achan rangrangmar

Phereyek tharangek

*Ibi ipun chinam nang*²²

(Karbi brothers, if we want to maintain our unity, integrity, then we have to forsake our fears)

The Karbi community was rescued by Tumung Mahar and Klengmekar pe. A gratitude to them is found in...

Kon Pa-tumung mekar plang wang bilma

*Kon Pa-Álangri achan nangching thur ma?*²³

(Who are Tumung Mahar and Kleng Mekar, our saviour?

Where had our community been fragmented?)

MORAN FOLKSONGS

The Morans are one of the Indo-Mongoloid groups of the great Bodo fold. Once there occurred a great battle between the Morans and the rulers of Ahom Kingdom. Cruelty and suppression on the Vaishnava Gurus were the main causes of the great Moamaria rebellion in 1769A.D. Ultimate result was the death of Ramakanta and Ragha Moran, two leaders. Radha and Rukmini, two courageous ladies committed unincidental sacrifice which is reflected in the song

Bartupar guliboor kus pati dharili
Ahom roja bhangili moran roja patili
Kaloloike khiyati thoi oi
Radha rukmini
Yuddha kari kari
*Bartupar guliboor kus pati dharili*²⁴

(You embraced the bullets of bartop,
 broke the Ahome tyranny and established the king of our Morans.
 You created glamour forever.
 Oh Radha and Rukmini, you embraced the bullets
 after prolonged fighting).

This kind of legends arise race consciousness and become unavoidable element in ethnic assertion , integrity or group cohesiveness derived from such folksongs leads to the formation of nationalism where antagonists may be a government, or imperialists or a neighbouring country. For instance, the Morans who increased group cohesiveness by making the Ahom ruler their chief antagonist, again composed panegyric on behalf of Ahom hero Gadapani and consort Joymoti during British administration.

Godapani oi paharat goi lukali oi
Lora rojai pabohi buli
Lai lesai oi kande enai binai oi
Jerenga potharote bohi
Joymoti oi jatona je bhugili oi

*Dekhar oi rakhili nam*²⁵

(Godapani, you hide yourself
 for the fear of Lora roja.
 Lai and Lesai are crying in a pathetic mood.
 Oh Joimoti, you had suffered boundless grief.
 Yet you maintained the glorious chapter of our country)

It has been observed that folksongs played a matchless role in the aforesaid communities during the colonial period. When all the means of liberation and self expression seemed to be in jeopardy, basic human rights and needs had been snatched away, folksongs stood as the healing agent to mould their long cherished dreams. In a few songs above, the plot in their pre colonial suzerainties or kingdoms offered a very appreciable contribution to boost their communal harmony against the British suppression. Similar is the case in other communities also. Unfortunately, most of the songs or other oral treasure faced immature death for illiteracy and carelessness. Yet, we may have some pictures or facts unnoticed in conventional history from the surviving ones and may come to the conclusion-

Folksongs played as a healing agent by outbursting the latent emotions and grievances besides the pleasant moments of the suffocated mass.

Folksongs served as propaganda of political agenda and innovated novel ideas of the scattered mass.

Folksongs stood as the unifying bond among various communities or among various members of a single community.

Folksongs are strong catalysts of ethnicity and nationalism.

Folksongs are unwritten charters composed spontaneously.

Nationalism provides the most fertile breeding ground for reviving and recirculating folksongs.

Hence both folksongs and nationalism can be compared to the two sides of a coin and launches each other during emergency. “Folklore in revitalization movements is often used to reinforce the new ideas, and in this way it can be seen as performing a similar function to folklore in stable situation”²⁶

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CHAPTER-3

3 FEW ASSAMESE HISTORICAL BALLADS OF COLONIAL INDIA

Defined minimally as a stanzaic narrative poem or song the ballad was one of the earliest forms of material to interest folklorists. Their interest was exclusively in these exemplars that were orally transmitted, that reflected a small homogeneous community that used recurrent phrases lines denominated "Commonplaces", that focused mostly on the tragic familial and love relations, and that told the story without analysis or interpretative embellishment.

Nationalists and Romanticists both have been attracted to the ballad for ideological reasons. It was perhaps something similar that led to William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*, which references the ballad as a conceptual model even though the individually authored poems seem far removed from the oral progenitors and may well have owed more to the thriving broad side press.¹

There are various sub-classes of ballads. (a) Mythical ballad, (b) Etiological ballad, (c) Historical ballad, (d) Legendary ballad, (e) Magical or Wonderous or Supernatural ballad, (f) Satirical ballad, (g) Realistic ballad etc

Among these, the Historical and Legendary ballads are vital catalysts in the nationalistic upsurge. Here, we want to focus the historical ballads of Assam to a greater degree.

The story or the contents of Historical ballads are based on some historical events. Historical ballads help to compose history in a specific way. The valiant character of the hero or the heroine is the main concern in historical ballads. So, historical ballads are very often entitled as Heroic poetries. It plays a significant role in the uprising of national consciousness. The historical ballads also supply ample materials in the composition of

creative literature like poetry, drama, novel etc. In those nations lacking written history, the historical ballads serve as the oral history there. The Assamese Historical ballads composed and collected till now includes “*Barphukanar geet*”, “*Padma Kumarir geet*”, “*Moniram Dewanar geet*”, “*Joymoti Kunwarir geet*”, “*Ajan Phakirar geet*”, “*Bakhar Borar geet*”, “*Patharughatar ran*”, “*Phulagurir Dhewa*”, “*Rangiar Krishak Bidroh*”, “*Gandhir geet*” etc.

Assam, a northeast Indian state, is a melting pot of various linguistic communities having distinct cultural background. Before the Yandaboo Treaty of 1826 a.d. with the East India Company, many small territories prevailed which witnessed successive invasions of the Burmese. The history of Nationalism of Assam can be traced back after British annexation only. The Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 which later took the form of freedom movement can be cited to be a nationwide nationalistic phenomenon for the first time. Here, three ballads namely *Maniram Dewanar geet* (ballads of Maniram Dewan), ballads of “*Patharughatar ran* (the battle of Patharughat) and *Rangiar Krishak Bidroh* (Peasant movement of Rangia) are taken into account to justify how ballads and nationalism inspire each other.

(a) RANGIAR KRISHAK BIDROH (THE PEASANT MOVEMENT OF RANGIA):

Before the arrival of the British people, Assam had been depopulated due to the Burmese invasions and internal turmoil. The Assamese people, in general, were not accustomed to paying taxes or tolls to any authority except delivering physical labour as “paik” to the king. Due to the reluctance of the Assamese folk to serve as “Kuli” in the tea estates and uprising difficulties in importing Kulis from outside, the British people wanted to play an unfair game with the local inhabitants. They wanted to augment income by hiking the rates of land revenue, imposing fresh taxes, duties and tolls. The peasants after prolonged struggle against invaders and internal chaos, again fell between the devil and the deep sea.

“Against this backdrop, a new revenue settlement was made in Kamrup and Darrang districts. Immediately after that, land revenue was hiked to 50-70%, even, in some cases, upto 100%.The very people who had expressed gratitude to the Company-Raj when the Burmese marauders were expelled and driven out from Assam, now felt they had jumped from the frying pan to the fire.”²

All classes of people – from the upper strata to peasants, tribals, Hindu and Muslims alike came to gether, through Raj-mels, and ryot-sabhas to put up a united peasant front. Phulaguri of present day Nowgaon district witnessed the peasant movement (Public movement) for the first time in the history of Assam in 1861. It was followed by the Patharughat in Darrang in 1894, Rangiya, Lachima, Pati-Darrang, Nalbari, Barama and Bajali in Kamrup district during 1892-94.

There was a popular uprising at Rangia on 24th December 1893 where both Hindus and Muslims protested against the enhanced rates of land revenue. There is a popular ballad in this region depicting the massacre in a pathetic way.

Ki mote banchibo hari Kompany shasane!

Buddhi kari lawe mari praja gane!!

Kembel chahabe purat pas adhali loi!

Chari taka lowe ebe natun chahab hoi!!

Chari taka nedeo buli raije ojar dila!

Tathapito kompanir daya najanmila!!—

Pache raije khajana nedi ache theh pati!

Kompanir chahabganar harila churuti!!

Hena dekhi pache ahi chahab deputi!

Ojar suno buli raijak rangiak nila mati!!

Gnani guni pandit mahanta ache jaia!

Chahabar agat sabe hoila upasthita!!

Mukhya mukhya prajaganar ojar sunila!

Jane jane raijak chahabe biday dila!!

Hena dekhi rajie tatha alochiya roila!
Dhawa diba buli chahabar moha bhoi hoila!!
Tara pache chahabe chipahi pathai dila!
Suda banduk uruwai rajjak pariksha karila!!
Pache rajie banduk urua dekha pai!
*Ghar motka mari sabè bhuku dhallek jai!'*³

(Oh god, how will we get rid of the rule of the East India Company who exploits the laymen by tricks? Campbell took Rs. Two and fifty paia as revenue in one pura (3.) of land. But the new officer enhances it to four rupees. The peasants complained against it. But the company paid a deaf ear. The officers of the company were horrified at the deliberate refusal of the peasants in paying the revenue. The deputy collector arranged a peasants' congregation to have their voice. He listened to the verdicts of the knowledgeable, wise and chiefs of the subjects and gave farewell to them. But the offended mob remained there discussing the burning question. The deputy collector being shocked at their behaviour, sent a troupe of soldiers armed with guns. Then the angry peasants jumped over them with furious sentiments.

(b) DALI PURAN ASSOCIATED WITH PATHARUGHATAR RAN (THE BATTLE OF PATHARUGHAT):-

The popular movements of the period began with the Phulaguri Dhewa and were rounded off, as it were, by the Patharughatar Ran (battle of Patharughat), also called the Dali Ran because of the use of clods of earth (dali) as weapons against the British on 28 January 1894. Patharughat is under the Mangaldoi sub-division of the Darrang district. Bamboo sticks and clods of earth were no match for the volleys of British gun-fire. While official figures put the number of dead at 15 and the injuries at 37, according to unofficial later estimates, 140 persons died and 150 persons sustained injuries when the police fired along the Mangaldoi road "The Patharughat tragedy was invested with popular glory and it came to be remembered as the Dali Ran. Such was its hold on the people's mind that several verses, commemorating the incident, came to be composed and these became very popular as the Dali Puran, the work of folk poets, in the classic manner of the Puranas"⁴

The Dali Purana collected by Dr. Nabin Chandra Sarma, an eminent folklorist of Assam, has been quoted as below -----

*Namo Namu narayan nitya niranyan
Brahma Hare chinte jar Aruna charan
Namo namo narayan charan jugal
Jahaka sebile pai moksha pada phal
Sadhu mahantak moi karo namaskar
Dali puranar pad karibo prachar
Taju nabhi kamalata brahma bhaila jata
Kaleigaonar bar bagichat hoila hata*

.....
*Gaone gaone dhani hol kuli anba naro
Jenke tenke dukhiya hok khajana bechi karo
Ei buli maharanik repot dila likhi
Muharani hukum dila kagaz khan dekhi*

.....
*raiije uti hujur khajana diba naro
pahhtakia bole khajna ami kenke aday karo*

*Pachsikia khajanake dibar upay nai!
ei buli raiije koy agbarhi jai!!*

.....
*Sakal raiije ojar kurei chahabat jai!!
Raiije uti bole hujur khajna dibu naro!
Pachtokia khajna kenke aday karo!!*

.....
chahabak theli raj agbarhi goila!!

.....
*ei buli chahabe katha koy bhedi!
Chipahiye rajjak pache nila khedi!!
Kheda howa rajjar gat nai uli!
Dheki thora loi gel ujar karo buli!!
Hena dekhi chahabar gut tat nai!*

Chipahik hukum dila banduk diya jai!!

.....

rangai mare dali chapara layane marei khari!

Pharbat pari chahabar tupi gel uri!!

Tetikshane chipahiye banduk marila!

Bandukar chotat kato bagori parila!!

Prathamate shishu mari galat pari guli!

Raijsakal lar marei dhawa dila buli!!

Pranhari mori gel bukut pari guli!

Sakal raj lor dila manuh mare buli!!⁵

(I am paying homage to Lord Narayana who is even worshipped by Brahma and Shiva Saluting-the wise and nobles; I am explaining the verses of Dali Purana. A big market (hat) was held at that time at kaleigaon of Darrang district.

.....The British people felt the need of increasing the land revenue in order to compel the peasants to work as kuli in the teagardens. They reported it to the Empress Victoria and the latter consented it withThe furious peasants refused to pay the enhanced revenue from Rs. 1.25toRs.5.People from all walks protested to the officer against the unprecedented enhancement of land revenue.The agitating peasants proceeded forward keeping a side the officerThen at the command of the officer the British soldiers chased after the mob armed with guns. Then the peasants went mad with anger and jumped over them. The officer ordered the soldiers to tire.

.....

.....The ignited mass lacking sophisticated battle crafts, attempted to attack with pieces of fuel sticks, pebbles and soils. The well armed soldiers fired left and right and created a heap of dead bodies including innocent children.)

but none has sympathy for him).

Deshare karone

marano barile

Dukhiyar dukhaloi chai

Hera moniram

swargaloi gola goi

*Pichaloi chaonta nai.*⁸

(Oh Maniram! You embraced death for the cause of nation,

to remove misery of the poverty stricken people.

You have set out for the heaven

and none to look behind)

Atikoi chenehor

mugare mohura

Tatokoi chenehor mako

Tatokoi chenehor

maniram dewan oi

*Nekandi kenekoi thako*⁹

(So dear is the spinning wheel

Dearer is the shuttle.

Dearest is Maniram Dewan

Is it possible to stop weeping).

Man aniboloi

goichili maniram

Batot kati khale jara

Maniram dewanar

amangal milil oi

*Olal nejloga tora*¹⁰

(Maniram went to earn fame

and had taken jara (a specis of lemon) on the way

curse (ill fates) accompanied him

as tailed stars had started twinkiling).

Chalat malangile

chaldoi komora

Tekelit malangil lon,

Matit malangile

maniram dewan oi

*Nekandi thakiba kon.*¹¹

(The chaldoi gourd (a specis of gourd) melts on the roof

most probably would have lesser appeal in human sentiment. As a consequent, it would be confined to the written script only or would have distorted or would be restricted to a small pocket of people. The peasant movements of Rangia or of Patharughat, no doubt, have a wider proliferation for the mass involvement for a genuine cause. But Maniram Dewan who was designated as Bar bhandar Barua by Purandar Singha, the then Ahom King and later as Dewan by the East India Company, deserves no uniform popularity among all sections of people. He was blamed for welcoming the company in the initial phase for instance,

Kelei enekuwa *holi oi Maniram*

Kelei enekuwa holi

Desh pati bore

nahal charidine

*Raijar dorohi holi*¹⁴

(Why have you become such a fellow?

Oh; Maniram! Why have you become so?

Reconstruction of the motherland has just been completed

And you have been turned to a foe of the subject)

Again,

Maniramak marili

Bhalake karili

*Piyolik marili kiya*¹⁵

(You have done nice by killing Maniram

But why piyoli was killed ?)

However, people sighed in grief in his hanging as he wanted to augment the fire of the Sepoy mutiny (the first freedom movement in India in 1857) to liberate the motherland from the hegemony of the British. Verses of his ballad are so well fabricated with sense and native imagery that any movement for the sake of nation would take sufficient nutrients in further course of action.

The ballads of Rangia and Patharughat start with panegyric to Lord Krishna (Narayan). This adds a feeling of divinity which indicates to perform these in auspicious occasions like Myths. Malinowski, the anthropologist though addressed the myths as charter and warrant of the society for the cultural conformity and control of the society by the myths by displaying

divine or human characters to appreciate the valiant and benevolent and to curse the demoniac and irreligious figures. But a scarcity of unification of various people possessing different professions is realized in Myths. Ballads are extra-ordinary in this sense. In the Ballads of the peasant movements, insolvent persons residing in a remote corner movements, of the district could feel the strength of unity and so ventured to rush towards the gun-fire with a fuel stick or a piece of soil. Books are published, movies are produced and initiative has been taken by government institutions and non-government organizations to encourage the present-day youths by the lessons of those martyrs.

Before creation of the above ballads, these were merely historical events, critical points or turning points of history. But these events were so heartrending and thought provoking that the pathos sprinkles in the form of melodious tunes. Later, harbingers of nationalism took resort to it for propagating the affairs of mass mobilization. They had regenerated and sprade the ballads being overwhelmed with nationalistic sentiments. So it can be concluded that ---

1. Historical Ballads are created and proliferated for Nationalistic craze.
2. Nationalism is fabricated and highlighted by historical ballads.

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CHAPTER-4

4 SEEDS OF NATIONALISM IN THE LITERATURE OF BEZBAROA

Lakshminath Bezbaroa (1864-1938) was the most outstanding literary figure in pre independent India who was the leading personality of *Asomiya bhasa Unnati Sadhini sabha* (1888), *Jonaki* (1889) and founder editor of *Banhi* (1909). He also became the president of *Asom Sahitya Sabha* (Assam Literary Association) of the Guwahati session in 1924. The literary association congratulated him and conferred the title *Rasaraj* in 1931 at Sibsagar. His contributions are *Litikai* (1889-90), *Kamat Krititva Lovibar sanket* (1905), *Kripabor Baruar Obhatani*, *Dinanath Bezbaruar samkshipta jiban charit*, *Surobhi* (1909), *Sadhukathar Kuki* (1910), *Sankardeva*, *Burhi Air Sadhu* (1912), *Kakadewta aru natilora* (1912), *Kadamkali*, *Jonbiri*, *Junuka*, *Pachani*, *Nomal*, *Chikarpati Nikarpati* (1913), *Bakhar*, *Sri Sankardeva aru Sri Madhabdeva* (1914), *Bhagabat Katha*, *Chakradhaj Singha*, *Belimar*, *Joymati* (1915), *Bharatbarsar Buranji*, *History of Vaishnavism in India*, *Rasalila of Sri Krishna*, *Baroda State Lectures* (1934), *Mor Jivan sowaran* (1944), *Kripabar Baruar Bhabar Burburani* (1951), *Tattva-Katha* (1963), *Kripabar Barbaruar bulani* (1964), *Sri Krishna-Katha*, *Religion of love and devotion*, *Bezbarua Granthawali*, *Asomiya Bhasa aru Sahitya*, *Patralekha*, *Dinlekha*, *Kehokali* (1969) etc.

The crucial role played by literature in the social phenomena, may be catastrophe or renaissance in the world history, doesnot require wide illustration. In nationalism also, its importance knows no bound which has been discussed in the introductory chapter. Dissemination of English language and literature among the Indians doesnot merely created a class of office workers in the British regime, but arose a revivalistic sense to their language,

culture and heritage. As soon as the natives introduced with the world history, economics and political scenario around the globe through the English books, a tendency to trace back their past through the mother tongue started crippling in their minds. In India, the literary renaissance based on folklore grew up in three metropolitan cities-Calcutta, Bombay and Madras in the second half of 19th century. A brand of young Assamese scholars settled in Calcutta to meet their academic challenges, were influenced by those ideals. Moreover, Assamese language was temporarily banished from 1836 to 1873. Among those Calcutta based young stars; Lakshminath Bezbaroa was one whose folkloric fabrication in literature hurt both the above two challenges in the right time in right way. He was resembled to a great deal with folklorists like Natesa Sastri and their formulations. Bezbaroa's plight to achieve the same has been remembered in this chapter.

NATIONALISM IN ASSAMESE LITERATURE

Among the two formulations of folklore and nationalism mentioned in the Introduction chapter, first formulation of folklore and nationalism was upperhanded by the European scholars in Madras to give Tamil its rightful status against the North Indian Brahmanic –Sanskritic domination. Likewise, same role had been played by the Missionaries in Assam when they had discovered that the Bengali was imposed only, when Assamese had been unique with distinct literary features. "Assam was engaged in an unfortunate struggle for identity and existence for nearly half a century of the initial period of British..."¹

A few service holders and officers from Bengal persuaded their boss that Assamese was only a dialect or corrupted form of Bengali and prayed to dislodge the same from schools and offices. Moreover, large quantities of native Assamese people hardly understood the Bengali, the then official language of Assam. When the Missionaries started collecting folklore materials in Assam, they found it quite amazing that the so called old language had hardly any direct bearing with the Bengali. Many ancient Assamese literary texts on folkore, Vaishnavism, Shaktism, Saivism and on Ayurveda were collected and most of them received prompt recognition through the print

media. As soon as the first printing press was established at Sibsagar in 1846 and published a journal 'Orunodoi', literary materials advocating the authenticity of the dislodged language found expression. Yet, the missionaries had to appear in a long marathon accompanying a band of native writers till the enthronement on its deserved position in 1873. Like the writers of the first formulation in the Madras episode, a band of writers, basically young Assamese students settled in Calcutta for education including Lakshminath Bezbaroa, Manik Chandra baroa, Hemchandra Goswami and Chandra Kumar Agarwala dedicated whole heartedly to write and to do something for the betterment of the language. Assam Literary Society was formed in 1872 and *Asomiya bhasa unnati sadhini sabha* was established in 1888 by them. The society's journal *Jonaki* heralded a new era in the history of Assamese literature. Hemchandra Barbuda, Gunabhiram Barua and Anandaram Dhekial Phukan were the harbingers of this romantic nationalism. Newspapers like the *Assam Bilashini* (1871), *Assam Mihir*(1872), *Assam Darpan*(1874), the *Mau* (1886) and the *Assam Bandhu*(1885) played a pioneering role in the field of Assamese nationalism as well as journalism.

The three men most responsible for the rethronement of the banished language were Dr. Nathan Brown, Dr. Miles Bronson and one native Assamese Nidhi Levi Farwell. Dr. Brown's contribution includes the Assamese translation of the New Testament, composition of the Assamese grammar 'Grammatical Notes on the Assamese language' next (second to write Assamese grammar next to Robinson), publication of lots of prayers, old Assamese texts and history in collaboration with his consort Eliza Brown etc. Dr. Bronson wrote Assamese dictionary in 1867 and lost his wife and daughter in such a literary expedition. Nidhi Levi Farwell (A converted name of Nidhiram Keot, a native Assamese) was a regular writer in the journal *Orunodoi* and a writer of a few books on Assamese literature. Other native Assamese non Christian writers were Anandaram Dhekial Phukan. Dutiram Hazarika, Harakanta Sadaramin, Dinanath Bezbaroa, Lalit Chandra Goswami etc

Local scholars and enthusiasts started collecting and publishing books (specially on folklore) of Assam in the later period of the nineteenth century. Significantly, some of Assamese works include Bhadrasen Bora's *Ramcharit* (1899), a collection of riddles, and *Phulkonwar* (1903) and *Manikonwar* (1903) both ballad texts; Gopal Chandra Das's *Asomiya Patantarmala* (1900), a collection of proverbs; Lakshminath Bezbaroa's *Burhi Air Sadhu* (1911), and *Kakadeuta aru Natilora* (1912), both collections of tales; and Jogesh Chandra Tamuli's *Nichukani* (1916), a collection of folksongs. The three earlier notable English publications by Assamese scholars are: Hem Chandra Barua's *Marriage Customs of the People of Assam* (1892) and Benudhar Rajkhowa's *Assamese Demonology* (1905) and *Assamese Popular Superstitions* (1920)" (Datta, 1999, p.2)²

Lakshminath Bezbaroa, who tried for the revival of the Mahapurushia cult and the folk treasures, bore fruits in the nationalistic process towards the early part of the twentieth century. He is said to be the torch bearer because of his deliberate refusal to nurture the Bengali language and appeal for the mother tongue although he was the son in law of the great Tagore family of Calcutta, the founderstone of Bengali literature and nationalism. Timber business in Sambalpur and his stay outside the home state scarcely allowed him to write and move freely which most writers generally deserved. Yet his nostalgic childhood full with orthodox Vaishnavite paraphernalia and sound folk heritage hardly excuse him from paying a deaf ear to these appeals. There might be some other reasons for which this person felt a deep allegiance to his nation and to the reservoir of folk heritage despite of his status and occupation.

First, as soon as he got married with a Bengali girl ignoring parents' warning, he became outcast and a person of insignificant status in the eyes of his orthodox society. Perhaps, his emotion and nostalgic past arose and tried to console his broken mind by doing something genuine for the society as well as the nation. More over, the period was too much crucial, Assamese language had just been reinstated in its proper place and the newly educated youths had already become accustomed with the air of Romantic nationalism in Europe.

At that time Calcutta was the capital of British India and could be addressed as the brain of India. Besides, Bezbaroa made marital relationship to such a family of Calcutta which for the first time attempted to interlink folklore with the nation as mentioned in the previous heading.

Despite of literary talents in almost all the literary sectors practised generally by the romanticists of his era, people very often like to welcome him as a folktale collector. His magnum opus bearing this very fact are "*Burhi Air Sadhu*" (Grandmother's tale, 1911) and "*kakadeuta aru Natilora*" (Grand father and grandson, 1912) where he admitted that some of these collected tales had been coloured and rearranged keeping the functions of the characters remain unchanged. But the spirit of Bezbaroa behind these collections draws more significance in context of the present topic concerned. The introduction of *Burhi Air Sadhu* contains a short history of folklore at international level, description of origin of folktales and its role in nationalism.

"No any race or nation has imposed so high status to folktales like the Assamese who name it as Sadhukatha i.e lore of the honest or honest sayings. The European call it "folktale", the Bengalis as "Rupkatha" "Asare galpa". Literature and folktales are the bones and brains of the nation. The language is called the mother and the folktales as the "lore of the pious" by the Assamese people. Yet it is ironical that the Assamese and the Bengali language are considered as symmetrical"³

In this context, eminent folklorist Prof. Birendranath Datta opines-

".....the preface contains an oblique reference to Assamese being an independent language with its own genius and not being in any way subordinate to Bengali. Later collections of folklore material were similarly prompted by the urge to find out and give proper value to such objects of "national wealth " as well as to inspire the young generations with the consciousness about their rich folk heritage. We have thus the national spirit working at the regional or sub-national level quite early in Assam"

Bezbaroa's "*Sadhukathar Kuki*" (A basket of folktales) bears a literary style, midway between the folktales and infancy of Assamese short stories. There are thirty seven stories entitled- *Bhadari, Swargarohan, Nakaon, Amaloi nepahoribo, Ratan Munda, Kanya, Putraban pita, Shivaprasad, Chor, Dhowa khowa, Bhemppuria Mouzadar, Seuti, Amar sanchar, Jayanti, Malati, Dactorbabu, Mulakhowa burha, Gharpota Koka* etc. where maladies and ill temper of the newly educated Assamese society are jeered at, the superstitions and prejudices of the Brahmonical orthodox society are placed in the laughing stock, cultural exploitation and economic subjugation by the outsiders are threatened. His few dramas based on folktales were *Litikai, Sikorpoti Nikorpoti, Pachoni* and *Gadadhar roja* filled with humorous sense like the "Guru Simpleton" of Natesa Sastri.

His remaining folktale collections namely *Surabhi (1909), Jonbiri (1913)* and *Junuka (1913)* are sound testimonials of his folkloric excavation to the nationality formation. *Surabhi* was published in the sweet memory of his deceased daughter Surabhi. His own business institution, "Timber and store agency" published *Junuka* to entertain the children where tales from *Hitopadesh, Panchatantra* and oral sources were expressed with a moral diction at the end of each tale. A few tales along with the moral dictions are written in verse so that children can swallow easily.

His poetic excellence venerating the past glory of Assam as well as India also scores no less mark when compared with his championship in folktale collection. He was definitely a people's poet who has given national pride some of its highest expression.

He is the composer of the noted Assamese patriotic song "*O Mor Aponar Desh*". This is a voluntarily exile's dream of his motherland from a distant place. The past glory of Assam was a matter of pride for Lakshminath Bezbaroa and on the basis of that he cultivated the national spirit in the hearts of the Assamese people.

Asomar jatiya sangeet*O mor aponar desh**O mor chikuni desh**Anekhan suwala anekhan suphala**Anekhan moromor desh**O mor suria mat**O mor suwadi mat**Prithibir kato bichari janamto**Nopowa karileo pat**O mor opaja thai**O mor asomi ai**Chai lown ebar**Mukhani tomar**Hepah mor palowa nai***Bezbaroa**

(O my native land, you are so lovely to me with your uniqueness, faithfulness and enrichment. O my melodious mother tongue, you are precious all over the world. O my birthplace let me have a sight of your lovely face to come down my thirst)

He also composed another patriotic song “*Asom sangeet*” (1915) where he tried to draw the nationalistic (sub-nationalistic) sentiment of Assamese people by citing the glorious chapter of the history of Assam. Here he highlights spiritual colossus Sankardeva; the legendary hero Lachit Barphukan; the symbol of tolerance and dedication, Joymoti; Bhaskarvarman, the pride of North-East India, the wise king with literary and artistic excellence, who greeted the Chinese scholar Hiun Tsang; occupies a stanza in this poem. At last, he suggests singing the glory of Assam with traditional instruments like drum.

Asom sangeet

Aami asomiya nahao dukhia kihar dukhiya hom
Sakalo achil sakalo ache muguno nalao gam
Sankare dile bisuddha dharam lachite bahut bal
Sati joymotir satittva tejere asom sati prabal
Bajak daba bajak sankha
Bajak mridong khol
Asom akou unnati pathat
Joy ai asom bol
Bhaskar jeuti bhaskar barma
Pragjyotishar roja
Bharatar rojar agsari lole
Nahay e katha soja
Bajak daba bajak sankha
Bajak mridong khol
Asom akou unnati pathat
Joy ai asom bol

Bezbaroa

(We, the Assamese never become insolvent, as we possess everything in the name of nation; countless, but we are apathetic to it. Assam is already sanctified by the pure monotheistic faith preached by Sankardeva, by the enormous strength on the shoulders gifted by the legendary hero Lachit Barphukan and by the chastised blood of Ahom heroine Joymoti.

Sing the glory of victorious Assam accompanying the traditional instruments as the motherland is again in the wake of upliftment.

It is not a funny matter that Bhaskaravarman, the valiant king of ancient kamrupa occupied a dignified position in the list of Indian kings)

His another most outstanding patriotic poem is *Bin Boragi* (the troubadour) where he portrays various mythical, legendary and historical figures and their pathetic life-styles but boastful activities to raise the nationalistic (regional/sub-national) zeal.

Suna oi boragi
Ananda kahini
Asamar jash rashi,
Hiya mor her
Balabanta hok,
Paran uthak ulashi
*Ban^{*1}, Bhagadatta^{*2}*
Narakasurar ,
*Vismaka^{*3} r gun ga*
*Bhaskar barmar^{*4}*
Kiriti sundar
Suna her bin, ba
 †*Sankar^{*5} madhab^{*6}*

† ^{*1}Ban: Ancient king of Sonitpur, an earnest devotee of Lord Shiva who fought a marvelous battle with Lord Krishna and was defeated

^{*2} Bhagadatta: Kirata king of ancient Pragjyotishpur who joined the great Kurukshetra battle on behalf of Kauravas and died at the hands of Arjuna.

^{*3} Vismaka: Mythical king of Sadiya whose daughter Rukmini was eloped by Lord Krishna.

^{*4} Bhaskarvarmana: Historical king of Kamrupa who was well known for his literary and artistic skills and patronage to the Chinese scholar Hiuen Tsang.

^{*5} Sankardeva (1449-1568): Great saint, artist, litterateur and religious preacher of medieval Assam.

^{*6} Madhabdeva: Disciple of Sankardeva and poet, philosopher and musician of the medieval in 16th century Assam.

Kandali sakale
Ki karile bin ka
*Rudrasingha^{*7} swargadeve*
Ki karile,
Ka bin, kiya ra?
Bardoichila hen
*Chilaray^{*8} dewane*
*Naranarayan^{*9} roja*
Ki kirti rakhile,
Ga oi boragi
Boja, aru bar boja⁵

(Oh troubadar, sing the glory of Assam highlighting the activities of king Ban, Bhagadatta, Narakasura, Vismaka and Bhaskarvarman. You also appreciate saints like Sankardeva, Madhabdeva and the noble king Rudrasingha to raise my lost spirit. You don't forget to admire the two Koch heroes Chilaraya and Naranarayana)

A die hard lover of Assam, Assamese language, culture and tradition he was at the same time a proud Indian too, always aware of the past glories of India. It is reflected in the Bin- Boragi (1912) as.

*Sita^{*10} air batori*

^{*7}. Rudra Singha: Great Ahom ruler and social workers. He was son of the legendary heroine Joymoti.

^{*8}. Chilaray: Koch lieutenant general and brother of king Naranarayana. He married the daughter of Sankardeva's brother and showed uncommon generosity to Sankardeva.

^{*9}. Naranarayana: Great Koch king and scholar who looked after Sankardeva in preaching Vaishnavism and literary practice.

† ^{*10}. Sita: The consort of Lord Rama in the epic Ramayana, who had to suffer untold grievances to console Rama as well as the subjects

Jadihe kaisa
Nakobi aru oi mok!
Janam-dukhuni
Ai sita santi
Sunile barhiba shok!
Jadihe gaisa
*Nalar^{*11} kahini,*
Nagabi boragi aru;
*Damayanti^{*12} -dukhe*
Hiya bhangı nıba,
Nalage alapo baru!
*§Chinta_sribatsar^{*13}*
Nagabi – kahini,
*Draupadir^{*14} nagabi katha;*
*Sati joymoti^{*15}*
Ayati dukhunir
Dukhat lagiba byatha! 6

(Donot sing, O troubadour; don't sing the tragic story of Sita, Nal-Damayanti, Chinta-Sribatsa and the legend of Joymoti. Otherwise, I would be drowning in the sea of spiritlessness).

Again the poet is overwhelmed with grief by remembering the ili rates or Assam and warns the troubadour not to play the concert of those events.

*¹¹. Nal: A pious king of a story of the epic the Mahabharata who underwent union and separation with his lover for the wrath of deities.

*¹². Damayanti: The beloved of king Nal

*¹³ Chinta-Sribatsa: A mythical couple who are memorable for their eternal love.

§ *¹⁴ Draupadi: A chaste queen of five princes who had to sacrifice tremendously for the welfare of the subjects.

*¹⁵. Jaymati: A legendary lady who was put to death for her patriotic zeal and affinity to her husband Gadapani by the royal house.

Jadihe gaisa
Badan phukane^{*16}
Kenekai anile man,
Kenekai morane^{*17}
Asam dangkhile
Jadihe gaisa gan,
Maniram piyolir^{*18**}

Maran -batori
Jadi tor bine bay
Mana kar tak
Boragi kakai oi,
*Sok mor uthalay*⁷

(Donot sing how Badan Barphukan invited the Burmese to invade Assam; don't narrate the devastation caused by the Morans in the heart of Assam. Let your instrument be not allowed to play the pathetic events of Maniram Dewan and Piyoli Phukan, the two patriots, who were hung brutally by the British people)

Another significant contribution of Lakshminath Bezbaroa is his "Sankardeva"(1912) and "Mahapurush Sri Sankardeva and Sri Madhabdeva"(1916) two biographical works on the two saints of Assam. He focussed their poetic, dramatic excellences and established them as social reformers. Thereby he drew a line of difference between them and other religious preachers of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement. "He shows in the

*¹⁶. Badan Barphukan: History depicts him as a traitor, who welcomed the Maan to invade Assam, his homeland.

*¹⁷. Moran: A mongoloid race who was engaged in a series of struggle with the then Ahom monarchy.

*¹⁸ Maniram -Piyoli: Two revolutionists of Colonial India who were hung brutally and drew public sympathy heavily.

process of uniqueness of the Assamese sub-nation which is linked in history with the larger Indian nation”⁸

Bezbaroa, keeping the view of nationalism (sub-nationalism), contributed dramas like “*Belimar*”, “*Chakradhaj Singha*” and “*Joymoti Kumwari*” (1915). The hidden motive behind these compositions was to inspire a subjugated nation and to give them self-confidence. His drama “*Belimar*” (sun-set, 1915) shows the reasons why the Ahoms had to lose their freedom to the British, internal chaos among the royal officers; their narrow visions and selfishness were the historical causes for the downfall of the Ahom Kingdom. *Chakradhaj Singha* (1915) were written to remind the Assamese people about the glorious chapters of the Ahom period so that they would not bow down to other nations (invaders). His drama *Joymoti Kumwari* (1915) highlights the tragic story of a couple where the husband (Gadapani) sacrificed his beloved for the sake of the kingdom and his beloved (Joymoti) sacrificed her life to safeguard the husband as well as the kingdom. This became the ultimate source of inspiration to get freedom.

His only novel “*Padum Kumwari*”(1905) is also a reflection of patriotism (regionalism) where the heroic activities of two brothers Haradatta and Birdatta are vividly described.

At the introduction of the drama “*Joymoti Kumwari*” Bezbaroa comments... “Only the characters and the dialogues are borrowed from the period when the event was committed. But the chief object of the drama is to enlighten the universal truth and the noble instincts which are common asset in all countries”

In the short stories *Milaramar atma jiboni*, *Molok guin guin* and *Nangalu Chandra Das*, he jeered at the newly educated Assamese youth who had possessed a passive mentality towards the native language, culture and tradition.

If we peep into the profession and passion, he did not run on the smooth mosaic which most scholars of his time deserved. Having completed his academic life in 1895 in Calcutta and being a bridegroom of the same city, Bezbaroa couldnot motivate himself to return to his homeland Assam. Although he was offered the job of Extra Assistant Commissionar for two times, he refused to do that as he never had dreamt of becoming an armed chaired gentleman. He started timber business with a reputed Assamese businessman Bholanath Baroa whose only job became to supply Sal timbers to the Railway Company. In 1903-04, he launched it separately but left with a desperate mood. In 1916, he again joined in a new company and went to Sambalpur in connection with his duty in 1917. After a few years, he started again his previous timber business. In 1937, He returned to his homeland Assam to relieve his broken health and breathed his last in 1938.

Bezbaroa comes to this discussion not for his personal and professional status, but for his service to the mother tongue. His collection of folktales, portray of mythical and legendary stories in the literary pieces like dramas and poetry, drawing of folk imagery in his other contributions added necessary nutrients to the paralysed language. Resembling Madras, two constructions on intimation between folklore and nationalism appeared in Assam also. In Madras, the first formulation was in favour of the folk Dravidian culture against the Tamil aggression, while in Assam, it was advocating for the Assamese language against the Bengali.

Here, the remarkable point is that the Assamese language was offered rightful status in 1872, when Bezbaroa was four, as he was born in 1868. So he had nothing to do in the campaigning for the language. But the official calendre seldom coincided with the practical happenings. The Bengali was not dislodged as soon as the notification of the government was found. The Assamese had to wait upto the last decade of the century to come round which allowed teenaged Lakshminath a scope to do something. But his effort delimited his age limit. So Lakshminath was definitely among the connoisseurs of the first formulations. Again, his nostalgia for the past glory of Assam echoed in his writings, especially his preface of the book "*Burhi Air*

Sadhu" (Grand mother's tale) embodied the second formulation of Vanishing village leading to national literature.

All his writings were the outcome of his deep love to the motherland and its assets. Dr. Grierson is of the opinion that "Assamese literature is essentially a national product. It always has been national and it is so still". Bezbaroa's literature is not a deviation from it.

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CHAPTER –5

5. FABRICATING MYTH IN NATIONAL UPHEAVAL ASSAM IN CONTEXT

Assamese culture as well as literature underwent a remarkable change through the advent of the British imperialism, as a result, for the exposure of local scholars to the western philosophy, ideology of romanticism and nationalism. However, the nationalism experienced in Assam resembles with the Basque nationalism. Myth is expressed through language i.e. in terms of story, folktales, folk-poetry, and folksongs and through other forms of folk literature. History is also reconstructed through various forms of folkloric genres. Folk heroes and legendary figures are brought under the periphery of history during the rise of nationalism. Mythical heroes and their ideology sometimes come to be the *elan vital* for an uprising. For example, Mahatma Gandhi dreamt for “Ramrajya” (the kingdom of Ramchandra) i.e. an ideal nation and the various movements led by him were enriched immensely by Ramkatha (lore about Ramchandra). Similarly, Assamese writers like Lakshminath Bezbaroa, Jyotiprasad Agarwala and Bishnu Rabha considered the mythical hero Sri Krishna (His virtues and activities) as their sole source of inspiration for writing as well as for preaching nationalistic ethos. They let the workers remembered about their Kshatriya dharma i.e. to fight like a hero in the battle field either to defeat the enemies or to embrace a heroic death.

The freedom fighters for India's independence carried on their movements by charging their minds with the teaching of the Mahabharata., specially from the Gita. They considered the British as *Atatayi* (a religious term to denote an interloper who is accused of stealing of women, giving poison, setting fire at home and other three major crimes for which he is eligible for death penalty). The revolutionary subjects become *Sthitaprajna* (A state of mind when an individual is not overwhelmed with well and woes) following the verses of the Gita. One martyr of 1942-1943 Assam, Kushal Konwar recited the Gita in his cell of the jail on the eve of his hanging.

So myth and history often coincide with each other. So identity of a nation is rooted in primordial ties. "Language as a transmission of myth has continued to serve the political agenda or ideology of the nationalist cause. The agents of this transmission are varied: folktales, improvised verses, literary discourse, art and performance have all played their roles ...the culture invented by language and ethnography becomes primary identity(Zulaika,1992:13)"¹

The mythic and epic metaphors have been in great use in a state of crisis of identity or in a nation of political turmoil. Though the bhakti poets of India used tremendously these ancient myths to reshape the fragmented society, they were succeeded partially as they had not manipulated these metaphors rationally and contextually. But when these were rationalized and legitimized to suit the modern political and national contexts, it was rewarded. There are lots of political, religious and other social factors to popularize and to develop an epic basically on mythic theme. During political upheaval of a nation, the growth of ballads (mainly historical, legendary and mythical ballads) and epics (mainly on mythical theme) are observed by the scholars.

"One factor is very clear that both the stories of Rama and Krishna must have become Ramayana and Mahabharata respectively when India's cultural identity, nationalism, value system, social structure, and the norm of kingship might have been threatened; even if temporarily; and when India, perhaps, needed strong cultural heroes who could re-establish the traditionally conceived and accepted ideal social norm threatened temporarily."²

Bhagavadgita, the most reverend treatise on Indian values, morality, life-styles reminds that

*Yada yada hi dharmasya
Glanirbhabati bharata
Abhyutthanam adharmasya
Tadatmanam srijamyaham
Binasayesya duskritam
Sambhabami yuge yuge*

(Whenever there is a corruption in value system,

rise of inhumanity is in this world,
 Then I reincarnate to recreate,
 to dominate the evil one and
 to safeguard the honest)

Hence it is assumed that epics and metaphors are encapsulated during national crisis and disorder to reconstruct the cultural identity and to remind the lost glory of the nation. The Ramayana is more approachable than the Mahabharata during national emergency as the ideal kingship, ideal kinship, fellow feelings, sibling relation to generate a positive force against a greater hierarchy of injustice is more vivid in Ramayana than the Mahabharata. Ram, an ideal cultural hero, pious king, kind hearted for the subjects, is rare in the Mahabharata. On the other hand, the Mahabharata is full with sibling rivalries for enthronement.

On this basis, Mahatma Gandhi dreamt of a Ramrajya (an ideal nation like the kingdom of Rama) where the king is obedient to his people, ruthless for the culprits and kind hearted for the loyal (Ramchandra banished his pregnant wife Sita according to the will of the people) after putting an end to the British rule. He wanted to preach this Ramayana myth to all classes of people, to all religions in a secular way.

“He used all the good attributes of Rama and his institution of kingship to legitimize the freedom struggle, and new nationalism. Ram and Ramrajya became the epitome of Indian nationalism and cultural reconstruction so much so that Gandhi himself used to sing a praise song of Rama every morning.”³

He adds the word Allah in this song to make it secular in sense.

Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram,

Patit Pawan Sita Ram

Ishwar Allah tere nam

Sobako sumati de bhagawan

(Head of the Raghu dynasty, Raghav, is the king Ram

He is also known as the pure and the sacred Sita-Ram

You are also known as Ishwar and Allah

Hence give noble sense to all of us, Oh Bhagawan)

THE NORTH EASTERN SCENE:

Myths have been in use now by various communities in North-east India. Myths are also created to show their cultural richness and to enroot them in the great dynasty in the mythic past. For example, the Koches in Assam claimed their descendance from Lord Shiva; because they have widespread the story that the founder king Viswasingha was born out of the union of Siva with Hira, the wife of a Koch headman. Similarly, the Kacharis, a dominant tribe of Assam claim their affiliation with the Pandava dynasty of Mahabharata as they think themselves as the kinsmen of Ghatotkavha, the hero born out of the union of Bhima, the second Pandava, with Hidimba, a local Kirata beauty. The Ahoms claim their lineage to the heaven as they believe in the story that they had come down to this earth by a golden ladder. And it was only the chief cause why the Ahom kings bore the forename Swargadeu (the priest of the heaven). Most of the tribes of North-east India perceive the creation myth that out of seven eggs (for some it is six only) seven communities were born. It is easily comprehensible that such type of myths were created to realize a sense of cohesiveness or commonness among the seven states of N.E. India or it may be due to their racial nearness of the Mongoloid fold.

The exploitation of folklore material in mobilizing some tribal movements are quite obvious in this region. For example the Karbis, a plain tribe of Assam, have their organisations and institutions after such mythical and legendary figures as Rangsina (the divine singer who taught the arts of poetry and music to the karbis), Thong Nokbe (the celebrated Karbi general under a Khasi king) and Rongpharpi (the legendary heroine who resisted Kachari oppression).

In Meghalaya, the use of folklore material especially the creation myth in the Student movement in revitalizing their traditions is enormous. To fabricate the degenerated Khasi traditional culture i.e. the Khasi religion from the invasion of Christianity, the Seng Khasi movement was launched in 1899. The leaders of the movement made use of the creation myth of the Khasi mythology:

Like most people all over the world, the Khasis believe that the world in the beginning was a good place where only peace, beauty and justice dwelt. Good relationship prevailed among men and beasts. So good was the world in fact that the sky people (the sixteenth "nest" or "huts" or families) used to come down to earth everyday to till the land or to enjoy its fruits, descending and ascending at will by means of a cord that grew on top of the Sohpetbneng Hills linking heaven and earth....The idyllic state of existence might have continued had not the Evil One contrived to get the cord severed, thus cutting off all communication between earth and sky, and isolating the seven families (the "seven Huts" or "Hynniew Trep") who happened to be here on earth when the wicked deed was done. The seven families became the progenitors of the Khasi race of people who are known to this day, at least among the Khasis themselves, as the Children of the Seven Huts⁴

It is worth mentioning that not only the Khasi Khasis (followers the traditional Khasi religion) are now concerned with the preservation of Khasi myths and legends, but also the Christian Khasis, the modern and sophisticated are also inclined to hold it to gear up their ethnic assertion and solidarity promotion. The Khasi and Garo youths have started an extremist outfit abbreviated as HALC (Hynniewtrep Achik Liberation Council) which reminds us a utopian hark-back to the golden Age of Khasi mythology.

Similarly the Donyi-Polo cult among the Tani group of tribes comprising the Adis, the Nishis, the Apatanis and few others, has recently been giving a new dimension to the socio-political issues of them. Donyi (sun) and Polo (moon) are two highly venerated and badly dreaded divine figures. But overcoming the shorting of ritualistic hymns, they are now campaigning for a

common platform for all the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh by rescheduling many social activities like establishing schools and hospitals, organizing medical and other camps, and by attaching some philosophy and codes of conduct therein.

“Apart from striving to cement the religious bond between the Tani group of tribes, the further aim of the movement is to make Donyi-Poloism the rallying point for the unity of all the different ethnic groups of Arunachal Pradesh and thus to consolidate the newly emergent Arunachali identity seeking wider recognition”⁵

Myths are created; myths are generated and fabricated in national crisis. Jomo Kinyatta of Kenya created “The Origin of Kikuyu”, a myth in order to defend the European domination and exploitation of the Kikuyu tribe. The Manipuris are the suitable example to create a non -Sanskritic myths and legends to establish the link of their Hinduisation with the Brahmanical legends.

THE CASE OF ASSAM;

The synchronization of the Romantic period of Assamese literature (1890-1940) with the rise of Indian nationalism resulted a numerous writing concentrating the plot Assam whether it is poetry, drama, fiction and other literary pieces. Though an anti-British campaign was going on in this plot of land roughly after the Sepoy mutiny in 1857, the boundary of nativity hardly overcame Assam or hardly touched the concept of Bharatbarasa. It is also reflected in the literary achievements of the native writers of Assam. It was probably Gandhi's Visit to Assam in 1921 after which the idea of motherland had been shifting gradually from Assam to Bharat.

Among the various genres of Assamese literature of the Romantic period, dramas played a very much crucial role in invoking nationalistic aspiration in the minds of the populace. Because dramas are the most effective medium for conveying ideas and messages, even for the illiterate mass that can

immediately draw inference, what the dramatist really wants to say. This is the reason why folk-dramas are still prevalent wearing new looks. It is to educate the unaware mass, to entertain them, to serve as a health care campaign, sometimes a voice of protest against the ruling class and even as a political propaganda in some societies. Sankardeva chose the *Ankiya Nats* (medieval folk drama on mythical theme) both as a means of amusement and as a media to glorify the greatness of god. Shakespeare and Kalidas (called as the Shakespeare of India) are so popular among all classes of people of all regions.

Assamese dramatists of the romantic period began to borrow mythological and historical themes to augment nationalistic and patriotic zeal to their dramas.

“The first expression of the nationalist ethos in Assamese drama is seen in mythological and historical plays which began to be written towards the close of the nineteenth century and came out in good numbers during the first decades of the twentieth.”⁶

Padmanath Gohain Barua wrote *Joymoti* (1900) on a great lady during the Ahom monarchy who sacrificed her life for the sake of her husband as well as the motherland. *Baidahi Bicched*(1901) by Devanath Bordoloi, paved the way for the mythological play incorporating subject matter from the Ramayana. Both were characterized by nationalistic and patriotic sentiments. Chandradhar Barua’s *Meghnad Badh*(1904) is another play where the hero is ready to do anything to defend his country from the attack of foreigners. In *Partha Parajay*(1909), Durgeswar Sarma presents *Babrubahana* as an invincible patriot who murdered his father *Arjuna* , an invading outsider. In *Meghnad Badh*(1904), *Meghnad*, the patriot said,

To let Raghava smash the glories of my dynasty.

To let him besmear the golden Lanka with the taint of infamy ,

And to see it all done with my own eyes:

Fie, Fie: Fie, fie:

Hundred thousand times better it is to die

Than not to enter into the battlefield for fear of death.

Indrajit am I
 And will I fight my enemy
 To the last drop of my blood.

Meghnad Vadh,III,(2)⁷

Similarly in *Baidahi Bicched*(1901), *Taranisen* said to his father *Bibhisana* when the later decided to take side of his enemy, *Sri Ramchandra*,

You know your faith best
 And you are bound to follow it;
 But father; if worshipping a foreigner be religion
 The sons of Lanka shall never pursue it.
 My mother country, the land that gave me birth,
 Is greater than heaven,
 And to serve that country in life and through death
 Is my only religion.(Sri-Ramchandra,II,2)⁸

Not only the dramatists but also the poets of the Romantic period(1890-1940) added mythical impression in their poems to give a new thrust in the national movement.Lakshminath Bezbaroa included mythical figures like *Narak*, *the King Bhisma*,*King Ban* and *Bhagadatta* in the poem “*Bin Boragi*” to highlight the glorious chapters of Assam.

Ban, Bhagadatta
Narakasurar,
Vismakar gun ga
Bhaskar barmar
Kirti sundar /
Suna her bin, ba(Bezbaroa)

(You Troubadour, sing the glory of *Ban, Bhagadatta, and Narakasur* and of *Bhisma*
 Play on your *Bin* (traditional musical instrument) to highlight the fame of *Bhaskarbarman*)

In the same poem admiration to the mythical heroines has been done by the poet-

Jadihe gaisa
Nalar kahini,
Nagabi boragi aru;
Damayanti -dukhe
Hiya bhangi niba,
Nalage alapo baru!
Chinta sribatsar
Nagabi kahini,
Draupadir nakabi katha;
Sati joymoti
Ayati dukhunir
Dukhat lagiba byatha! (Bezbaroa)

(Donot sing, troubadour; donot sing the tragic story of *Sita*, *Nal-Damayanti*, *Chinta- Sribatsa* and the legend of *Joymoti*. Otherwise, I would be drowning in the sea of spiritlessness).

The *Bhaona*, a performing art of the *Vaishnava* cult innovated by Sankardeva, has been teaching the Assamese mind to protest against any injustice in and around them. The main part of the *Ankiya nats* (one act plays) of Sankardevas are based on *Lord Krishna's* appearance in the scene to dominate the tyrant one and to restore peace among the devotees. Later on, the imposition of secular character and manifold division of the performing art to suit some occasions gave it a nationalistic grace, as most of the nationalist writers were expert in this art. The initiation taken by most of the *Satra* institutions in the freedom movement was quite praiseworthy. *Badhakavyas* composed by the *Vaishnava* poets were of great help to infuse the heroic sentiment in the public mind and to take yarns by the litterateurs of the later periods. Either by the performing arts or by the literary pieces in folk and elite

level, or by the Gandhian Philosophy the Assamese mind acknowledged the mythical fact in a proverbial form that

Anyay ji kare aru anyay ji sahe

Agni sama pape tak treena sam dahe

(One who does injustice and one who tolerates injustice,
both are burnt in the fire of sin)

Gandhi's *Sarkha* (the spinning wheel) was believed to be a second edition of *Sudarshan Chakra* (an invincible and omnipotent war craft) of *Lord Krishna*.

In this way, Myths have been serving the society during the period of national emergency.

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CHAPTER-6

6 LEGENDS AND NATIONALITY QUESTION A REVIEW ON ASSAM

Legend is conversational narrative whose reported events are set in historical (as opposed to myth's cosmological) time and whose twelling makes possible debate concerning the "real world" occurrence, and/or efficacy of the events, characters, folk beliefs, and/or folk customs described.....Deriving from the Latin word *legenda* (to read), legends were originally narratives about the lives of saints and were read aloud during medieval Christian church services. ¹

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK (NIGERIA AS A ROLE MODEL):

The movement to keep a community together under a political system is called nationalism. Smith defines nationalism "an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential nation" (1991:73). We noted that nations have a specific mode of being and coming into existence. Similarly, nationalisms are patterned according to the model of the nation. A distinction can be made between what might be characterized as rational Western nationalism and organic, mystical Eastern nationalism. Following this line, Smith distinguishes between:

1. Territorial nationalism, with the following historical reference points:
 - a. Pre-independence movements: anti-colonial nationalism;
 - b. post independence movement; integration nationalism ;
2. Ethnic nationalism, with the following historical reference points:
 - a. pre-independence movements; secession and Diaspora nationalism;
 - b. Post-independence: irredentist and "pan" nationalism.

After closer examination, it can be discovered that the elements of ethnic nationalism strongly rooted in an anti-colonial, territorial nationalism. Anti – colonial nationalism begins as a movement directed against the colonial rule, attempting to replace colonial rule with a new state –nation. The concept of the nation is first defined in civic and territorial terms, opposing the foreign rule. Later on, this nationalism transforms into ethnic nationalism on account of the numerous different ethnic groups struggling for political and economic supremacy. Nigeria is the burning evidence in support of this type of nationalism where construction of a Nigerian cultural and political identity became an extremely difficult task due to the absence of recognized dominant ethnic and severely competitive relations between the ethnic groups.

Legends play a very much decisive role in ethnic as well as national assertion.

“What is more important in connection with legends is the fact that they are stories of liminality, stories at the border of a historical time, a time lost in the mist of a history. Legends also stress the importance of continuity within a group and of handing down wisdom from generation to generation. These stories are the intermediaries as much between the ancestors and the characters in the novel as between the ancestors and the readers of the novel.”²

Recognizing the tremendous role that the educated have in disseminating nationalist ideals among the common people, Miroslav Hroch distinguished three main phases of any nationalist movement according to the character and role of the persons involved. Phase A is characterised by the work of activists in scholarly inquiry into and dissemination of an awareness of cultural, social, and sometimes historical attributes of the non- dominant group-but without specifically formulating any national claims and demands. The second period, phase B, is characterised by the emergence of a new type of activist who carries on the struggle for cultural awareness within the ethnic group to which they belonged. The aim of this type of activist is to gather as many supporters

as possible for the creation of the new nation. It is in this stage that cultural awareness comes to be translated into national awareness. The last period, phase C, represents the mass movement set in motion by the emergent national consciousness that has been created³

We may cite Nigeria for implementation of the above theoretical framework. Nigeria is a union of states and a nation. It has 36 states and one capital territory. It became a very much complicated matter to determine the cohesive factor to stand Nigeria as a unified nation. Because there are 250 to 400 ethnic groups, many having subgroups with considerable social and political importance. Languages also could not be placed as the means of unity for identity as there are 350-400 estimated languages. Religion is also not a strong indicator for strengthening the national identity as 47% of the population is Muslim, about 35% is Christian, and more than 18% of the population adheres to indigenous religions.

But there were few influential ethnic groups like Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa and Fulani. The Nigerian found out that emergence of ethnic consciousness (especially Igbo and Yoruba) was more important before the emergence of Nigerian Nationalism. Several types of association became engaged over emphasized on the education in regional spheres as they had conceived the idea that the role of educated in disseminating and spreading the ideals of nation and nationalism through writing is very much encouraging. One Achebe, a Nigerian writer from Igbo community used commemorative narratives describing the colonial exploitation and references to stories, folktales, legends and sayings particular to his own Igbo culture. His novel "Things Fall Apart" shares some of the narratives with sufficient fabrication and symbolization. The contributions made by Achebe surrounding the Igbo society does not imply his Igbo superiority over the other ethnic groups in Nigeria but it is a process of purging the African soul of Years of denigration.

"By holding it up as an example of recovery from the obliterated past, Achebe hopes to bring about a similar process of change in the cultures of the other ethnic groups. "Here then is an adequate

revolution to espouse – to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement. And it is essentially a question of education”⁴

Like Nigerian nationalism analysed in three phases by Miroslav Hroch according to the character and roles played by the persons, we may also classify Indian nationalism in three categories. This has been mentioned in the first chapter. The interest and emphasis laid by the Indologist, Academicians, and Missionaries in India for cultural awakening, for uncovering the oral treasures in print undoubtedly receive phase A. Indigenous leaders, teachers and scholars' dive in the sea of ethnicity with their intellectual and literary contribution, who by their effort, reminded each community about its nostalgic past, made them aware of their racial and cultural identity, can be categorized in phase B. Mass participation in the freedom struggle under the bold leadership of M. K. Gandhi following a series of peasant riots can be recognized as phase C.

THE CASE OF ASSAM:

Similar is the case of Colonial Assam, when the native writers of B category of the above theoretical framework by Smith, tried to build the Indian nationalism by raising first the Assamese ethnic nationalism by discovering and fabricating the past history, myths and legends.

The same Nigerian model can be implemented in Assam too. The first phase was not crowded with philologists and linguists in NE India as no field data from NE India was found to be included in their contribution like the remaining part. The Phase “A” in Assam includes basically the American Missionaries (as a part of their evangelization process), and the British administrators and their family members (to serve their administrative purpose), who collected oral resources and cultural heritage, wrote grammars

and dictionaries in the vernacular languages. In that undivided Assam, G. H. Damant's "Two Manipuri Tales" in the *Indian Antiquary* as early as 1875 and 1877, C.A. Soppitt's "A Historical and Descriptive Account of the Kachari Tribes of North Cachar Hills", with specimens of Tales and Folklore in 1835, A.J. Primrose's "A Manipuri Grammar"- to which are added some Manipuri proverbs, J.D. Anderson's "Kachari Folktales and Rhymes" in 1895, P. R. T. Gurdon's "Assamese Proverbs" in 1896, J. Shakespear's "Mizo le Vai Thawntu", a collection of Mizo tales in 1898, Mrs. Rafy's "khasi Folktales" in 1920 etc were worth notable.

The second phase "B" was characterized by the Romantic litterateurs of Assam where the luminaries were Lakshminath Bezbaroa, Manik Chandra Baroa, Bhadrasen Bora, Gopal Chandra das, Jogesh Chandra Tamuli, Hem Chandra Barua, and Benudhar Rajkhowa etc. This phase has been discussed in chapter IV.

The phase C is found to be identical with the Indian scenario.

The synchronization of the Romantic period of Assamese literature (1890-1940) with the rise of Indian nationalism resulted a numerous writing concentrating the plot Assam whether it was poetry, drama, fiction and other literary pieces. Though an anti-British campaign was going on in this plot of land roughly after the Sepoy mutiny in 1857, the boundary of nativity hardly overcame Assam or hardly touched the concept of Bharatbarsa. It is also reflected in the literary achievements of the native writers of Assam. It was probably Gandhi's Visit to Assam in 1921 after which the idea of motherland had been shifting gradually from Assam to Bharat.

Among the various genres of Assamese literature of the Romantic period, dramas played a very much crucial role in invoking nationalistic aspiration in the minds of the populace. Because dramas are the most effective medium for conveying ideas and messages, even for the illiterate mass that can immediately draw inference, what the dramatist really wants to say. This is the reason why folk-dramas are still prevalent wearing new looks. It is to educate the unaware mass, to entertain them, to serve as a health care campaign,

sometimes a voice of protest against the ruling class and even as a political propaganda in some societies. Sankardeva chose the *Ankiya Nats* (medieval folk drama on mythical theme) both as a means of amusement and as a media to glorify the greatness of god. Shakespeare and Kalidas (called as the Shakespeare of India) are so popular among all classes of people of all regions.

But Legends come to this discussion for the fact that most dramas composed and staged by the Romantic litterateurs were on legends and legendary figures of pre colonial Assam. Numerous ballads were also created after these heroes or heroines. Figures like Joymoti, Mula Gabharu, Lachit Barphukan, Gadadhar Singha, Chandrakanta Singha etc were the common themes of the dramas, ballads and songs of the writers of that period.

FEW ASSAMESE LEGENDARY FIGURES OF THE AHOM PERIOD

(a) MULA GABHARU:

In 1532, the Turbak, a lieutenant general of the Sultan of Banga, invaded Assam. The Ahom General Phrachenmung Bargohain breathed his last in the battle of Pichaliparia at the hands of Turbak. Having heard this pathetic news, Mulagabharu, the consort of late Phrachenmung set out to the battle field on elephants' back accompanying other five valiant ladies. They fought bravely and sacrificed their lives.

(b)JOYMOTI:

Joymoti secures a reverend position among the legendery heroines of Assam who became a victim of political terrorism created by few bureaucrats after the great battle of Saraighat (1671 a.d.). Lalukkhola Barphukan, a tyrant adviser of an immature king Loraroja, expedited to cut some limbs of the eligible young lads to refrain from the norm that non injured youths are preferred to for enthronement. Gadapani(1680-1696), a much debated popular youth hide himself to escape from this expedition. The soldiers of the

expedition tortured his wife Joymoti till her death when she refused to tell her husband's location. It is said that she had embraced inhumane atrocities deliberately in a place called Jerenga. Later on, her husband Gadapani enthroned bearing the name Gadadhar Singha putting an end to the anarchy created by his former oppressors. Lots of lore have been created regarding her heroic sacrifice in later ages, specially, during the freedom movement of India.

(c) LACHIT BARPHUDAN:

This Ahom lieutenant general is known for his valour, patriotism and promptness. He fell back the Mughal army under the general Ramsingha at a place called Saraighat in 1671 a.d. He beheaded his maternal uncle for the latter's lapses to erect a bank for their convenience. There is a lore to glorify him that he uttered like "*deshatkoī momai danggor nohoy*" (the maternal uncle is not greater than the motherland) in the battlefield to make the soldiers swift and panicky.

A notable aspect of early twentieth-century Assamese drama is that some of the leading playwrights have dug into Assam's glorious past to find out materials for drama through which the people can be made aware by contrast of their country's plight. The historical figures of Joymoti, Gadapani and Lachit Borphukan are held in high esteem by the people of Assam for their almost miraculous heroism and self sacrifice for the cause of their motherland. Padmanath Gohain Barua wrote *Joymoti* (1900), *Gadadhar* (1907) and *Lachit Borphukan* (1915) and Lakshminath Bezbaroa wrote *Joymati Kumwari*, *Chakradhvaj Simha* and *Belimer* (1915). Patriotism and nationalism are the driving spirit of all these dramas. Nakul Chandra Bhuyan portrayed the devastation of the six hundred year old Ahom kingdom, the betrayal of Badan Barphukan by inviting the Burmese to the native land and Purnananda, the prime minister, as the full moon in a clouded sky, in his drama *Badan Barphukan* (1927). He also wrote another drama *Chandrakanta Simha* (1931) where *Chandrakantasimha*, once a weak ruler, has been presented as a brave soldier to defend his country. Another two plays based on legendary figures are

Mulagabharu(1924) by Radhakanta Handique and *Chatrapati Shivaji*(1927) by Atulchandra Hazarika.

“Handique expressly tells us in his preface that his aim in writing this play is to inspire ‘patriotism and love of national life’. Dramatizing the story of Mulagabharu who, along with her husband, gave up her life for the sake of her motherland’s independence, this play, through its action, characters and dialogue aims at inspiring nationalist and patriotic feelings in the audience. The playwright’s pining for freedom from foreign domination echoes in such lines as:

What’s there in this life

If freedom is lost?

.....

There is no happiness even in heaven

When the noose of servitude is around your neck”⁵

Jyotiprasad Agarwala, a nationalist writer of the Romantic period borrowed both mythical and legendary figures to his poem “*Asomiya deka lorar Ukti*” (statement of the Assamese youth)

Moye asomar

Moye bharatar

Moye deka lora agnimoy

Moye bharatar nabin surya

Purbachalat bajao turjya

.....

Moye asomiya

Pragjyotishar,

Moye asomiya sonitpurar,

Nabin jugar

Kumar bhaskar moi

Moye asomiya sharaighatar

Choka tarowal lao lachitar,

Momai tamuli garh

Durjay agnigarh moyei

*Nai mor samasar*⁶

(From Assam
and Bharat
The fiery youth am I.
The newly rising sun
Blow trumpet in the eastern hilly regions.

.....
Assamese am I
From Pragjyotishpur,
And Sonitpur,
Of new era
Kumar Bhaskar I am,
I am Assamese from Sharaighat
Bearing the sharp sword of Hero Lachit at my hand,
The huge Momai Tamuli bank
The invincible Agnigarh I am
None to compete with me)

Jyotiprasad also used the patriotic zeal of Lachit Barphukan and
Joymoti in the song composed in the early twentieth century—

*Luitor parore ami deka
lora moribole bhoy nai
Tahani lacite
eri thoy joware
pora janani tor
Laghu lanchana
dukhe bezare
ajio je napare ore⁷*

(, we, the youth from the bank of the river Luit, fearless for death
From the very moment of the departure of Lachit, the motherland

is overwhelmed with disgrace, grievances till now)

Again,

Luitore pani jabi o boi
Sandhiya luitor pani sonowali
Chahare nagare jabi o boi
Joyare kiriti deshe bideshe
Chahare nagare phuribi koi

Matire dehati eri joymoti
Jyotire dehati loi
Jautijugia kiriti rakhila
Chaneki jagataloi
 †

Etupi dutupi teje tini tupi
Deshar hoke joyai gole bilai
Asomar jiyari asomar bowari
Etupi chakulu jowa pelai⁸

(Go on flowing, the water of Luit
 The yellowish water of evening Luit
 Keep on flowing through towns and villages
 Tell the glamour of Joymoti far and abroad

She adorned herself with light
 forshaking the temporal body and leaving
 glamour for ever

Go on flowing, the water of Luit
 One, two, three drops of blood
 Joiya gave for the motherland
 You, the daughter and daughter in law
 Shed a drop of tear)

LEGENDS FROM THE KARBI SOCIETY

The legendary heroes deserve a reverend position in the Karbi society; an Indomogoloid tribe of Assam. One such figure is Thongteron who was the chief lieutenant general during the reign of the Jayantia king Brichungkoida Timung. Thongteron became very much popular for his victory over the neighbouring kingdoms and non-Karbi heroes. His valour and heroism resembles with that of Lachit Borphukan, the legendary Ahom hero of seventeenth century Assam. But he had been killed brutally by his own jealous officers and soldiers in conspiracy like the miraculous death of Julius Caesar.

In the ups and downs of the Karbi history, they had to live like servants many times even under the monarchy of the Kachari people. This can be discovered by the folk history of Rongpharpi Rongbe, a Karbi legendary heroine. When a person of the Kachari king supplied milk to a domesticated tiger from the breast of Rongpharpi Rongbe, the former was cut into pieces by the latter. After that she escaped from the field with other Karbi fellows.

CONCLUSION

These legendary figures, once historical figures with patriotic overlapping and who served as the most reverend statues for the patriots during the British regime, have still been serving the province as well as the country in national and ethnic elevation. Movies were made on their biographies highlighting unprecedented sacrifice, Huge statues have been erected in the doorway of the cities, institutions have been named after the legendary figures, further research aptitude have been generated on their lives and works. Slogans were manipulated in various protests and in voice for the rightful and justified one. For example, during the six years long Student's movement to deport the

illegal migrants from the state , slogans like---- *kone kole Lachit nai? Hazar Lachit aguaai* (who says there is no Lachit now? Thousand Lachits march ahead) were uttered. The same slogan was shouted by the women wing substituting Lachit for Mula Gabharu. Similarly, the Karbis also started naming their institutions and organizations after their communal legendary figures like Rangina, Thong Nikbe etc. Historical figures with heroic self sacrifice for a greater cause or extra-ordinary commitment for the sake of the community or for the province , are revitalized as legendary figures when the country or the community falls in jeopardy whether genuine or artificial. Here, literature shares the upper hand by borrowing their exaggerated activities through ballads, folksongs and fiery slogans. Contraction and expansion of space to glorify the hero/heroine vary according to the need of the hour. For example, Rangina, Thong Nikbe, Gambari Sikhla etc were communal heroes who could not think beyond their respective communities, but their ethos had been utilized for a much greater cause i.e. to drive away the British from India. Reverse is also true when Mahatma Gandhi or Subhas Chandra Bose is interpreted for a group interest.

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CHAPTER 7
7 GANDHI, SPINNING AND INDIA'S INDEPENDENCE
IN THE FOLKSONGS OF ASSAM

Mahtma Gandhi, early name Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, was born at Porbandar in Gujrat on 2nd October, 1869. His father was kaba Gandhi, a dewan of Rajkot state and mother was Putoli Bai, a pious housewife. After passing the entrance examination in 1887, he went to England and came back as a barrister. He started practice in South Africa. There he made struggle seeking justice for the Indian inhabitants and for the blacks. After placing them in rightful status; he returned India and started Satyagraha movement with the policy of non violence. He was imprisoned by the British rulers for several times. At last, India got independence on 15th Aug. 1947. Gandhi was addressed as the father of nation after his unprecedented sacrifice for the nation. He was assassinated on 30th January, 1948.

The history of India is full of the names of bravemen and women who have sacrificed for the freedom of the country unconditionally. But Mahatma Gandhi is extra-ordinary who by the example of his life and by the policy of non-violence, gav India independence. Weaving deserved uncommon emphasis in the Gandhian Philosophy to boycott the British hegemony and later it has become a prime criterion to expose the indegenous textile of a particular community on the eve of their ethnic assertion.

“.....Every woman of Assam is a born weaver. No Assamese girl who doesnot weave can expect to become a wife. And she weaves fairy tales in cloth. Some of the old patterns that our host, Mr. Phukan, showed me were of matchless beauty. And as I saw these beautiful patterns, I couldnot help shedding a silent tear over India's past glory and her lost work.

.....Assam has plenty of wood, sound and durable, just the kind for making spinning wheels. Let us hope that Assam will rise to its full height in the matter of Swadeshi¹

A piece of statement, the first impression of Gandhi in his first article on the Assamese weavers published in his paper Young India: entitled LOVELY ASSAM.

In 1908, Gandhi expressed in the Hind Swaraj, "I described it as the panacea (universal medicine) for the growing pauperism of India." Gandhi established Sabarmati Ashram in Guwahati where all the members of the Ashram resolved to wear hand-woven cloth made from Indian yarn only. According to Gandhi, "We become impatient to be able to spin our own yarn". In the initial phase, a Gujrati widow named as Gangabhin Majumdar helped Gandhi in the search of weaves and spinning wheel." She found out weavers to weave the yarn that was spun in Vijapur gained a name for itself²

Gandhi in later years, learnt to spin yarn and weave khadi for himself. He created a revolution regarding the art of weaving, assimilated this with the ideology of freedom and folksongs invariably depict it. Some folksongs containing the image and ideology of Gandhi and the art of weaving in the folkmind of Assam have been illustrated below

Phukanar nangalat Gandhi meeting kare

Bileti kapoor nila

Jayaddhani tuli Gandhir joy buli

Kaporate jui dila³

[Gandhi held meeting at the gate of Phukan and the furious people added fire to the foreign clothes heralding the victory of Gandhi]

Acceptance of native or indigenous and defiance of foreign are propagated through this song.

The freedom movement took vigorous outlook in the Barak valley of undivided Assam. The song witnesses the exploitation experienced during the British domination.

Tora dekhasni bharatbasi chaiya

Achanak phiringi aiche

Desh nite lutiya⁴

[The phiringis (the British) has entered India for plundering but the Indians are counting the stars]

How the ideology of Gandhi used to impact the Phiringi-exploited area is reflected in the song-

Gandhi raja ailo deshe
Swadeshi mantra loiya
Balya briddha juba-nari
Chalre sab jand⁵

[Gandhi has come to our land with the dream of independence. Let all male and female, young and old villagers proceed to join him]

Gandhi suta kato, gandhi suta katu,
*Shalakathir^{*1} ar lagchi volunterok matu*
Gandhi suta katu⁶

[Let us weave the threads of Gandhi .But the shalakathi is intertwined.Hence call the volunteer]

The folk mind did not hesitate to enthrone the patriotic salts of the earth in the divine status. People started addressing Gandhi as 'Gandhi raja' (i.e. he can pass command according to his will) for his unprecedented sacrifice for the motherland.

†† People even believed that India's swaraj (independence) depends On Gandhi's will. They become so respectful to Gandhi that they even shed tars to hear the grievances of him

: *Gandhi ole , miting karle , rajje achil chai*

Voluntere phatek khate gandhio phatakok jai

*1 Salakathi: A thin, long and round slip of bamboo or wood, an iron wire.

*Raijsakale uthi bole eten habo ki ?
 Chapat kari gandhi raja swaraj kari di
 Phatak gharor kase kase kalar poli bahe
 Gandhirajar katha shuni chakhur pani ahe 7*

[Gandhi appeared in the scene and held meetings crowded with laymen. Gandhi also faced imprisonment along with the volunteers. The crowd shouted, "What will happen now, King Gandhi? Let us free instantly". The plantain saplings grow surrounding the jail. Tears come out to hear the grief of Gandhi]

This song was very popular during the British rule in Assam. The boat "Gandhi" represents the ideology of non-violence. The folk minds acknowledged that the freedom of India was possible only if the citizens would absorb in hardwork overwhelmed by the ideology of Gandhi and firmness of Jawaharlal Nehru

*Gandhir namar naukakhani
 Jahallar bautha
 Swadhin lage jedi bhogni
 Suta kati utha⁸*

[Gandhi is the boat and Jawaharlal is the oarsman. Complete your weaving as we have to assert independence]

*mahatma gandhiye andolan chalale
 dukhiyar mukhaloi chai
 raijok bujale raijok sikale
 swaraj nalole jai
 mohammad ali chaukat ali
 gandhi tini bhai
 kapah kati kapor lole
 gandhiye swaraj pai⁹*

[Mahatma Gandhi carried on movements for the downtrodden, convinced them, taught them but did not suck the pleasure of freedom. Gandhi, Choukat Ali and Mohammad Ali, these three brothers wore clothes spinning by themselves and hence deserved freedom]

patar mugar bileti kapur
japat nathabi bhare
*phukanak*² uile di*
*nabinak*³ uile di*
chàlot jui di pure
pator mugar bileti kapur
bhalentare nila
gandhir aigat volentare
jui lagei dila
pator kapur bileti
mugar kapur bileti
chamje di nabin-dolek mati¹⁰

^{††}[Donot put the foreign made silk, pat and muga , in the box. Give it to Phukan and Nabin to burn in the courtyard. The volunteers took the foreign made pat and muga and burnt in front of Gandhi. Submit those to Nabin Chandra Bardoloi]

Assam from unknown past has a glorious history of weaving. As the aborigines here are of Mongoloid origin, they carried this skill from China and maintained trade relations with the distant countries. It is believed that the art of sericulture was introduced into North -East India many centuries before the advents of the Vedic Aryans, by the fore fathers of the Bodos. According to Sir George Watt, the practice of rearing mulberry silkworm was introduced into Assam and Bengal across the Chinese frontier.

According to the Arthashastra of Kautilya, Assam had produced a semi-wild silk of two varieties-muga and eri and sprade it throughout Northern India by the trade centre, Suvarnakudya (modern Sonkudiha). The Arthashastra mentions this fact also that the Bodos of Assam manufactured garments from

^{*2}Phukan:-Tarun Ram Phukan, a leader and freedom fighter of Assam.

^{*3}Nabin:- Nabin Chandra Bordoloi, a leader and freedom fighter of Assam.

grasses Khaupra and Virana. More over the Harsacharit of Banabhata depicts the items of gift to Harsabardhana by the Kamarupa king Bhaskarvarman which reflect the extreme development of Assamese textile and artefacts.

As soon as Gandhi visited Assam with the ethics of self-dependence especially in the field of clothing and burning of foreign clothes, the revolutionary folkminds of Assam accepted it with rejoice as weaving is their identity, expression and specialization. Girls here are considered to be eligible for wedding if they excel in weaving, and the glamour goes to their mothers also.

Lots of folksongs were created regarding the art of weaving, and lovely Assam with heavenly beauty. This three have no parallel and used as metaphor in literature

Kapah katiba dhuniba tula
Nohowa thupari rupahi hola
Eri kapore epurush chaliba
Chalani kapore keidin jaba
Dhanya ei asom desh rachaki sundari besh
Khata khat chali jaok tat chirantam¹¹

[You go on spinning the cotton thread. By doing this , you will be magnetic instead of a laughing stock. The endi cloth lasts for generations. What is the longevity of imported clothes? Thankful this beautiful piece of land (Assam) by practising looms traditionally]

gandhi kino swaraj kalli
itar dinor jiagilakok
murat kubei malli

[Gandhi ,what kind of freedom you have ushered ! Girls have been killed by hammering on the head]

*kapahi sutar seleng^{*4} khani
boi diya sarubhani¹²*

[Weave out a cheleng of cotton thread, oh youngest sister. I will not wrape a foreign cloth]

*Luitor ghatote oh naoria
bandhili dingara tor
parat bhari di ebar chabihi
sonar asom mor*

§§

*Dekhibi banat keteki^{*5} kusum
barit nanan phul
gabharur hatote makoti dekhibi
galot rangoli bol¹³*

[Oh stranger boatman, take your boat to the shore and enjoy the scenic beauty of my golden Assam. You can have a look of keteki kusum° in the forest and a varities of flower in the garden .You will also see shuttles with the hands of girls, the pink beauty]

Mahatma Gandhi visited Assam for four times (1922, 1926, 1934 and 1946) and instigated burning foreign clothes at open places as a part of non-violence movment. He suggested the congress volunteers to fight against the use of opium. He convicted the indegenous Assamese people for their laziness and blamed for the illegal migration in the name of tea-industry

In 1926, Gandhi attended the conference of Indian National Congress held at Pandu of Guwahati in Assam. Having seen the heavy rainfall and abundance

*⁴.Seleng:- A thin cloth wrapped round the body or thrown over the shoulder.

*⁵.Keteki:- A fragrant flower (Pandamus odoratissimus), Kusum: flower, blossom.

of natural resources, he commented that there is no possibility of becoming insolvent if the Assamese proceed with valour and industry

When he arrived in 1934, Gandhi called for a war against untouchability in Assam. He warned the Satyagrahis not to violate the rules at any cost.

Lastly, Gandhi reached Assam on 9th August of 1946. He established the Kasturba Ashram this time at Guwahati and added in his inaugural speech that the women power is more important in his non-violent movement and the feminine power in Assam is more vigorous.

Bol bol bol bol o bol
Bahut shakti dehat bhakti
Bol aguwai bol
Gumori ahise kaliya andhar
Bhoi karibor nai
British singha khediba lagiba
Jak pati ah bhai
Guli lathiloi kerep nakaro
Buku pati lom ami
Ahingsa juddhar ahban ahise
Mahatma hoba sakshi¹⁴

[March forward, march forward, with strength in shoulder and devotion in figure .Darkness comes roaring .Afraid not and come in a gang to drive away the British lion. We are not afraid of sticks and bullets but ready to embrace it. Call of non-violence is blowing where Mahatma stands as witness.]

dalit bharatar ashar pradip
joy mahatma gandhi
mohan rupere jagat muhila
ardhahari krisak rupere
alap bastrahari
shanta soumya kshin dadhisi
kam krodh lobh tyagi
sarba dharmare artha bujila

prachari amrit bani
manabatar gathi mahan
*sarba dharmake lovi*¹⁵

[Mahatma Gandhi, the triumphant, is the sole lamp of expectation for suppressed India. You bound together the universe by your magnetic personality. You look like a half fed half clad peasant. You are free from lust, anger and full of charities like the saint Dadhisi. You understood the essence of all faiths, preached heart-melting speech and sewed a garland of humanism comprising all isms]

It is a historical fact that self-dependence assumed unprecedented importance during the movement for India's independence. As soon as Gandhi took the leadership of the freedom movement he wanted to stop importing foreign commodities and cultivated the practice of weaving among the freedom seekers to symbolize self dependence . Assamese were no exception to it.

Jatarate bhakti amar jatarate mukti amar
*Jatarate gaon jaygan*¹⁶

[Our devotion and salvation merge in the spinning wheel .Our chorus of victory surrounds the spinning wheel]

The spinning wheel was considered as the lamp of Allauddin i.e. nothing is left undone by it. Some folkpoets even dared to compare it with the Sudarshan Chakra(a weapon always invincible) of Lord Krishna.

Jatar amar bhatar put
Jatar amar nati
Jatarar doulatat amı
Duwarat bandhong hati
Jatar amar tej mangsa
Jatar amar hiya

*Jatarar doulatat amar**Sat betar biya¹⁷*

[The spinning wheel is like our pretty dish and dearer as the grandson because we can even tame elephant with it. The spinning wheel is our flesh and blood, our heart, as we are in a position to celebrate the wedding of our seven sons with it]

Hard work and honest means of livelihood are the panacea for all types of suffocation--this very mantra was sown in the folkmind by the rapid circulation of the spinning wheel

The folksociety is so conscious that they stand as the conscience of the illiterate mass, sometimes as the teacher of the nation and sometimes as the newspaper. They decipher knowledge and latest information through the folksongs, dance and drama.

The performers of Oja- pali in Darrang district perform the activities of the freedom movement, Mahatma Gandhi, volunteers and the British government. The following songs are taken into the corpus of the performers.

Diha:-swaraj lou bol bande mataram

Pad:-koi bole congress committee thane thane

Khoi bole khaddar lowa swarajar karane

Gai bole gujratat Gandhi abatar... ..

.....

.....

Ahinsha mantra gowa hate kara kam

Bharat swadhin hobo bola ram ram¹⁸

(Refrain: take freedom, shout bande mataram.

Verse: ka tells that the congress committee is in all places

Kha tells to wear khaddar for independence

.....

.....

Recite the mantra of non-violence and activate the hands in work
 Recite the holy name Ram, Ram to herald India's freedom

GANDHIR GEET

(1)

Madan mohan malabya
Enraj jati asabhya
Lathi dangi juddha kare
Gandhire uparat
Kagaj ache uttarat
*Cithi lekho duparat*¹⁹
Nathurame guli kare
Gandhire oparat

(Savage is the British
 Who keep Gandhi under the stick
 The paper is in answer
 We write at noon
 Nathuram shoots
 At Gandhi)

(2)

Chando lorei suruj lorei
Loril basumati ai ae
Charuta konae kapiba lagiche
*Gandhir baktita pai ae*²⁰
 (The moon moves, the sun moves
 Movable is the mother earth
 All corners shook
 receiving Gandhi's speech)

The ballads of Gandhi are sung in *Diha nam* or *nagara nam*, a folk performing art. The following ballad is sung

(1)

*Diha: oi ahare oi ahare joy joy Gandhi avatar
Paradhin bharat karila uddhar*

(Refrain: -Gandhi incarnated in the month of Asar (Jun/July)
Brought salvation to depended India)

*Pad: satyat harirup tretat sriram
Dwaparat Krishna avatar
Kalit mahatma Gandhi satyakami satyabadi
Nararupi iswar sabar*

(Verse; -Hari in the Satya Sri Ram in the Treta
Lord Krishna incarnated in dwapar
In Kaliyuga, Mahatma, the truthful truth seeker
Is the universal god in the guise of man)?

*Kalira prabhabe ghor satya nasta bhailadur
Manabaka manabe ghinai
Jata ache narānari samanya sobhita kari
Kare prati daya maya nai²¹*

(For deep influence of kali truth moves far away
Hatred of man for man
All men and womenfolk being avoid of fellow feelings
Show no sympathy for others)

(2)

*Diha: mahatmar abirbhab hol
Dukhuni bharat matar ananda hol
Mahatmar much chai harse bisade ai
Muktir kamana pari rol*

(Refrain:-Mahatma appeared in the scene
And joy prevails in the lips of mother India
The urge for salvation has been postponed
As Gandhi's face mesmerized the lamented mother)

Pad: *otharasa unsattar enraji chanat*
Mahatmar janma hol porbandarat
Tera bachar bayasat kasturi bair sate
Biya hol mahatmar sisu kalate
Otharasa athasi enraji chanat
*Prabesika pas kari jay bilatot*²²
 (Verse:-In 1869,the English year
 Gandhi took birth at Porbandar
 At the age of thirteen
 Married Kasturibai
 In 1887, the English year
 Set out for London after matriculation)

(3)

diha: *mohan das bilatok gol*
mad mangsa bidi churat
sakalo pari rol
 (Refrain:-Mohandas left for foreign land
 Cigarette, wine and meat
 had been left here)

pad: *pratigya karia jai matrir agat*
Mad mangsa nakhao moi satya bilatot
Otharasa ekannaboi engraji chanat
*Beristari pass kari ahe bharatar*²³
 (Verse:He promised in front of his mother
 not to take wine and meat in abroad
 In 1891, the English year
 Landed in India as a lawyer.)

(4)

diha: *deshar abastha chai mahatmai bole hai oi*
hari hari ki hol mor deshar bilai

janambhumik mor bideshi sason kare oi

(Refrain: Mahatma sighed having seen the status of the country

Oh god, what a pathetic downfall of my land
that foreigners dominate my motherland)

Pad: bilatar pora ahi ingraji jaban

Janmabhumi bharatak karaya mochan

Bharat basik kare asprisyata jnan

Tak dhekhi mahatmar mile apaman

Esaba durniti gusaibaka kari man

Africa deshaka Gandhi karila gaman

Africa deshat ache bharatiya bhai

Engraj sakale chui panio nakhay

Tar hake satyagrah kari africac

Pulisar khunda khai saru ala dat ²⁴

(verse:-The English people, from foreign land
enslaved mother India

They considered the Indians as untouchable
which disgraced Gandhi's sentiment.

With an intention to rub this discrimination

Gandhi marched to Africa

Indian brothers are there

With whom water is also not shared

For that reason, he launched Satyagrah

And lost tooth by the big blows of police)

VOLUNTEERS' SONGS IN THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT

(1)

Bola bhai bola bhai bola bir darpe aguwai

Bola, bola bhai bola aguwai jananir joy gan gai

Souje maniram souje khudiram ache bimanote roi

UdGANI dise jananir honte amak phasi loboloi

Napaharo ami hatyar kahini patharu ghatare oi

Prajak chal kari mati ani badhile banduk loi
-Souje drishya ati bhayankar bhai
Nidarun charkare darun prahare Marile rajpat rai
Panjabote sei britichar senaniyemarile sa sa bhai
Ajio antar dahiba lagiche numabore thai nai
Asom jananir ati chenehor phulaguri khani thai,
Asankhya bhatrir jiban nasile karile bilapar thai²⁵

(March forward, march forward , a heroic march
 March forward singing the victorious chorus of the motherland
 Maniram and Kshudiram are staring in the airplane
 Instigate us to be hung for the motherland
 We never forget the massacre of patharughat
 Where innocent mass were shot down by persuasion
 The scene is too much heart rending that
 Lala Lajpat Ray was beaten unto death by the rude government
 The British soldiers killed hundreds of Punjabi brothers
 This still pains us
 Dearest is Phulaguri of our land
 A place of lamentation for the immature death of the brothers)

(2)

sou je urise swaraj nichan
o bhai , unnat shire howa aguwani²⁶
 (The flag of independence is flying
 Hence march forward with high head)

(3)

hate hate dhari balla hindu muchalman
valanteer hoi ki kam kare
ali mure mure miting kare²⁷
 (Hindu and Muslim, go hand in hand
 What else the volunteers have done
 except commencing meeting at the road heads)

It has been noticed that folksongs encompassing weaving and Gandhi were nothing but a propaganda to disseminate the political happenings, proceeding and motivation of the Congress Party. Mahatma was thought to believe as an incarnation of god like Ram and Krishna. Insufficiency of media and a common thread to tie the entire mass ideologically, volunteers started generating folksongs canvassing Swadeshi movement. Gandhi and his volunteers were well aware of the credulous nature of the natives of Assam and also with Karlmarx's saying 'Religion is the opium of people'. Their campaigning accelerated twice for the feasibility and healing effect of folksongs.

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CHAPTER –8

8 1942 QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT IN ASSAMESE FOLKSONGS

*When you go home
tell them of us and say
for your tomorrow
we gave our today*

Kohima war cemetery

This heart moving epitaph on bronze plaque in the memory of the martyrs in the Japanese invasion during the Second World War is an inexhaustible source of inspiration for the patriots of all the ages.

Let us now have a glimpse over the Indian scenario regarding the Quit India Movement.

QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT: BACKGROUND

The invasion of Great Britain on Germany involved India in the Second World War indirectly. Germany's Nazism broke the backbone of Europe. On 22nd June of 1941, Germany invaded Russia. On 7th December of 1941 Japan blew out Pearl Harbour of America. These very two events invited Russia and America to the fighting ground of the 2nd World War. After that Japan fought a series of war and occupied Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Myanmar and soon reached the North-East Frontier of India.

The British government was greatly shocked and soon sent a mission on 22nd March of 1942 under Sir Stafford Cripps to mitigate the inner disputes of India. But the leaders of Indian national congress, Horijon sabha, Muslim league and Akali dall could not find a solution as the proposals of the mission were self contradictory.

Indian leaders were horrified as they thought that the British people would give up the responsibility in this war affected moment and the imminent anarchism would pave the way for certain devastation in front of Japanese bullet.

As an outcome of this fear, congress working committee took a grand proposal "Quit India" in Wardha on 14th July, 1942. Yet they waited few months in the obvious hope of winning the favour of the British people. But the later was quite apathetic to their well and woes. So on 8th August of 1942, Nation Congress accepted the "Quit India" Proposal in Bombay session – where Mahatma Gandhi illustrated the significance of the movement and augmented the patriotic spirit with the slogan *do or die*."

Dramatically, the British army arrested all the harbingers of the movement including M.K. Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Ballav bhai Patel, Sarojini Naidu, Kripalani, Rajendra Prasad at the late night of 8th August. Consequently, hartals, processions, protestation were carried on from 9th August. Lathi Charge, Jailing and other in humane measures were taken in the name of suppression of the movement.

Gandhiji's movement became no longer nonviolent. Jayprakash Narayan, Ram Manohar Lohiya, Aruna Asaf Ali led an underground movement where Subhash Bose's ideology *Delhi Chalo, Give me blood, I will give you freedom*. formation of Indian National Army (Azad Hind Fauz) enhanced the violent manifestation twice. The British government adopted every measure to put down the rebellion. Even firing from the sky was witnessed over Patna, Bhagalpur, Munger, Nadia and Talser.

ASSAM IN 1942:

Assam witnessed an unmatched game of tears and blood in this affair. At Gohpur, Kanaklata, a teenaged girl and Mukunda kakati embraced immatured death. In Golaghat, Kushal Konwar, president of the local congress committee was roped around the neck on the false charge of derailment of a train.

The British flag "Union Jack" was flying boldly in the courts and police stations. The revolutionists decided to hoist the Indian national flag by throwing away the British one.

As the thought prevailed in their minds, the revolutionists formed two squads-one is *Shanti Bahini* (peace squad) and the other is *Mrityu Bahini* (death squad). Any native with good temperament can join the *Shanti*

Bahini. But only determined, courageous and dedicated members are allowed to have an entry in the *Mrityu Bahini*.

“We decided to have two *bahinies* (*Shanti Bahini* and *Mrittu Bahini*). *Shanti Bahini* would try to keep peace in the area (because at that time military atrocities were going on the innocent people) and *Mrittu Bahini* would prepare themselves to face death if death comes while hoisting the national flag in thana-because thanas are the symbol of power”¹

GOHPUR EPISODE:

On 20th September of 1942, the revolutionary camps of the Gohpur region of undivided Darrang district decided to hoist the national flag in the local police station. Hundreds of youth joined the *Mrityu Bahini* who had already crossed eighteen years as per the committee rule. But one seventeen years old Assamese beauty, Kanaklata Barua, an orphan, begged excuse to the leaders to make an entry into it. The existing committee could not help violating the rule being overwhelmed with her irresistible urge.

The congregated agitators, not less than five hundreds, designed themselves into two parallel lines for males and females. The patriotic songs of Jyotiprasad Agarwala, Ambikagiri Raychoudhuri and blended sounds of *Dhol-Khol* (Assamese drums), *sankha* (conch shell), *ghanta* (bell) etc created an environment to be gone mad with optimum patriotic zeal and a loss of self identity.

Kanaklata became the captain of the women cadre and proceeded towards the Gohpur Police Station. Rebati Mohan Som, the officer in charge of the station warned her not to proceed a single step. Kanaklata replied, "We must proceed, what else may happen...you do your duty and let us do the same." Saying this, she marched with the tri-coloured flag. The police fired at her and she fell dead on the spot. One Mukunda Kakati snatched the flag from her before touching the ground and he too faced the same consequence. Yet the rebellious mass hoisted the Indian national flag replacing the Union Jack in the station premises overcoming the British gun.

Just after her departure, lots of folksongs and ballads were generated depicting the tragic massacre to ensure stimuli to the freedom seekers. India

received independence on 15th August of 1947. Indian nationalism for freedom was immensely effected by the folklore created in the name of her.

One popular ballad circulated in the Assam valley is-

Gandhijir banire o Kanaklata
Loichila ashirbad , o kanaklata
Karia M.V. passe , kanaklata
Jhanda uraote pranti erila
 (You took the blessings
 by the sermons of Gandhi
 You passed M.V, oh Kanaklata
 Embraced death while hoisting).

"42 chanate, o kanaklata
Dhopabar kempote, o kanaklata
Jhanda uraote pranti erila
 (In the year1942
 you embraced death while hoisting
 at the Dhopabar camp)

- Ai naikia, o kanaklata
Bopai naikia, o kanaklata
Dodaideur alasar laru kanaklata
Deshare karane pranti erila
 (Your father was dead
 Also mother was dead
 You were the apple of your uncle's eyes
 But gave up your life for the sake of the motherland)

Jetia ahil, o kanaklata
Oparar nirdesh o kanaklata
Uraboloipotaka thanat kanaklata
Jhanda uraote pranti erila
 (When came ,oh Kanaklata
 the command from the upper hand

to hoist flag at the station premises
 You embraced death)

Buku bhedi gol, o kanaklata
Pulichore guli o kanaklata
Bagari parila dholi, kanaklata
Deshare karane pranti erila
 (Your heart was penetrated
 by the bullets of the police
 You fell down on the ground
 And took farewell for the country)

Tezere biringi, o kanaklata
Tezere rangoli, o kanaklata
Tezere prithibi bure, kanaklata
Jhanda uraote pranti erila
 (It was bleeding, oh Kanaklata
 You turned red, oh Kanaklata
 The earth was drowning in the sea of blood
 Dedicated your life while hoisting)

Somadhi kora hol , o kanaklata
Barangabarite o kanaklata
Dodaideu, kokaideu thaki kanaklata
Deshare karane pranti erila²
 (You was cremated, oh Kanaklata
 at Barangabari
 You had to give up life for the motherland
 In the presence of your uncles and brothers)

SARUPATHAR EPISODE:

A special army train was derailed, in Sarupathar Railway Station, on 10th October, 1942, killing three American Officers and sizeable number of soldiers. A folksong depicting the incident of the hanging of Kushal Konwar is heard in the following shape-

Jati-drohi mahapapi

Naraki puline ahi

Misakoi sakshi dile

Hampfreyr agat

Binadosi kushalak

Dharai niyai hai

Tulilegoi nirmom

Phachir kathat³

(Pulin , the traitor of the nation, great sinner,
gave false witness to Hamfrey.
Innocent Kushal was caught
and hanged brutally)

Jorhat ranga hol

Golaghat suda hol

kushalar batari pai

phachir kathate

kushale kandile

asomir mukhaloi chat⁴

(To hear the news of kushal

Jorhat turned red

Golaghat was deserted

Kushal wept on the hanging device

Looking to the heart of mother Assam)

BARAHAMPUR EPISODE:

The peace squad safeguarded the freedom fighters in many occasions specially by rescuing the camps from the British police. On 18th September of 1942, the freedom fighters and the revolutionary people arranged a feast at Barahampur of Nagaon district to celebrate their victory over a camp. At the end of the meeting they sat down in lines for feasting spreading plaintain leaves in front of them. All on a sudden, British captain Flinish appeared in the scene with armed troupe. The feasting party though promised to go back to their homes after the feast, the captain ordered lathi charge and beating with shoes and guns. Eleven members were arrested and sent in a military van. Valuable food items were destroyed.

The congregated mass lost their patience and filled the sky with slogans, " *Bande Mataram*", " *Bharatmata ki joy*", *Mahatma Gandhi ki joy*" etc. The neighbouring villagers also rushed to them and joined in the mission. Ratnabala, one twelve years old girl, led a huge group of participants with tri-coloured flag. Her fifty seven years old mother, Bhogeswari Phukanani also joined them. When captain Flinish tried to snatch the flag from her, Bhogeswari gave a big blow on his mouth with the bamboo stick of the flag. As a revenge , Flinish shot her dead and made firing order. Lakshiram Hazarika, Thagiram Sut and Baloram Sut were shot dead and hundreds were injured. The following ballad cites the incident briefly-

O asomiya saju hobore hol

O bharatbasi saju hobore hol

(Oh Assamese ,it is right time to be cautious

Oh Indians, it is right time to be cautious)

Barahampur shibirat brahmabhoj patile

Howa bhat patote rol

Lora deka burah nirastra janatak

Engraje dekhale bal

(A grand feast was arranged at th Barahampur camp

But couldnot be celebrated

The British showed their prowess

over the unarmed youths and olds).

Commander chahabe bandukar kundare

Shibirat somale kal

Katar hiya bhage chati phuti kare

Sanginar bajale tal

(The commanding officer ushered omens

by their guns in the camp

Many hearts were broken

As they blew the war trumpet)

Epahi dupahi phule tinipahi

Lagate sambal lole

Ai Bhogeswari loge tini biri

Saragar alahi hole

(Three flowers were

taken as the wealth

Mother Bhogeswari became the guest of the heaven

Accompanying the three heroes)

Lakshmi Hazarika thogi balo sut

Nedekha dhamoloi gol

Ai Bhogeswari chariti swahid

Saragar alahi hol^s

✓(Lakhmi Hazarika, Thagi Sut and Balo Sut

departed to the unseen world

Mother Bhogeswari became the fourth martyr

in the cluster of guests to the heaven)

DHEKIAJULI EPISODE:

But the Dhekiajuli episode was second to none in its overall sacrifices. Sarunath Chutia, Manbar Nath, Mahidhar Koch, Mangal Kurku, Dayal Das Panika, Ratan Kachari, Habang Kachari, Tileswari Barua, Kumali

Devi and Khahuli Devi created an epoch making chapter by giving up their lives in the altar of India's independence.

“During the Quit India Movement the Boro – Kacharis suffered most in Bargaon Barpukhuri area near Thelamara, a few kilometers away from Dhekiajuli.....More than two hundred tribal people went to participate in that programme, at Dhekiajuli Police Station. They wanted to raise the Congress (national) flag by removing the Union Jack from the top of the police station building”⁶

Freedom fighters late Phanidhar Das and Kamala Das, the two leaders assembled the members of the death squad, Mrityu Bahini, at the present day campus of Jugal High School, ten kilometers from Dhekiajuli. It was Sunday. The weather was quite gloomy. Plantation was just over only. But the poor peasants could not enjoy harvestation.

The members of the death squad marched with tri-coloured flag. There ensued a scuffle between the processionists and the police and their hired guns. Police ultimately opened fire and lathi charged the un armed people. Moniram Kachari, Ratan Kachari and Lerela Kachari died on the spot. Swargeswar Kachari, who had got married only a fortnight earlier, (he was from Barpukhuri) and Lerela Kachari of Bargaon Chapori fell dead at a little distance from the police station. Jaluki Kachari, Chakuli Kachari and Bamuni Kachari – all of Barpukhuri village, were wounded severely in the police action. The former two died on their way to the village. Bamuni died in about two months as she did not get medical treatment. Maila Kachari and Kandu Kachari, of Hojai Siporia, received bullet injuries and died after a few days. Mangal Kurku and Dayal Panika also died on the spot. Regarding this area Medini Choudhuri said, “This area was under the Bargaon Mauza Congress, which had been established in 1921. Madhu Das, a leading Kachari man was its founder secretary. He mobilized the local people to take part in the movement. They had participated in the freedom movement since 1921.”⁷

A folksong rendering veneration to all the martyrs of Quit India Movement experienced in Assam has been discovered like the below-

O asomiya, o somonia

Tor juj arambha hol

Mahatma gandhiye deshare jujaloi

Chinyori koi thoi gol
Gaonwar deka burha jiwari bowari
Hengdang lobore hol
Barhampur shibirat brahmabhoj patile
Pator bhat patote rol
Aidew kanakar bukur tejere
Rangin karile rakshar hat
Paradhin bharatar kalima dhuboloi
Mukundeo tej karile pat
Jananir manaloi chai oi Ratane
Bhangale sharirar har
Bogakoi bongale mukhat loi hanhi
Morake marise mar
Mitiror salere shatoru shalile
Bukur tej karile pan
Gowa Asomiya gowa samaniya
Gowa swarajare gan⁸
 (Oh Assamese, my companions
 Your battle has been started
 Mahatma Gandhi shouted you
 To the battle ground
 The young and old, damsels and consorts
 Prepared with your hengdang^{*1}
 A grand feast was arranged at the camp of Barhampur
 But ended in smoke
 With the blood of kanaklata
 Devil's hands were reddened
 To wash away the scars of dependent India
 Mukunda also shed blood
 To keep the honour of the motherland
 Ratan broke his bones
 The white bangals^{*2} with smiles in lips,
 attempted to kill the dead one
 They treated us as enemies in the guise of relatives

Drank blood of the heart
 You sing Oh Assamese, my companions
 Sing the glory of the nativeland)

CONCLUSION:

A very frequent shout on the Dhekiajuli episode is “It is second Jallianabag”(a massacre on 19th April.1919 at Jallianabag of Punjab causing hundreds of death and many injuries by British general Dyre when mass agitation was going on against the imprisonment and lathi charge on a few pioneer leaders) from no definite source. But the episode is quite peculiar and second to none for two or more reasons ¹

At that time, the Indian National Congress was addressed as the league of caste-Hindus because lower caste (Schedule tribe and schedule caste mainly) were hardly welcomed to share the party affairs. Ironically almost all martyrs and wounded persons in this episode belonged to the lower strata.

The second remarkable point is that half of the martyrs in this incident were women. It is quite amazing to think that how these poverty stricken illiterate women persuaded themselves for this grater cause amidst the four walls of the kitchen where the surrounding was totally male dominated. Assamese society underwent semi feudalism at that time in the fertile ground of imperialism.

The most thought provoking scene in the 1942 movement was that almost all martyrs were from the strata of peasantry and daily wagers-half fed, half cled. Landlords, Mauzadars, Chirastadars and other government employees played a very much discouraging and repulsive role in the movement. Establishment of school and other infrastructures were greatly

*1, Hengdang: A long sword used in battles during the Ahom monarchy.

*2. White bangals: The British were called as white bangals (boga bangals in Assamese) in India.

discouraged by the Upper middle class. If we have a glance at the hanging of Kushal Konwar, we see that the local gaonburah Bhimgram and other two Assamese police inspectors enlisted the name of Kushal Konwar on suspicion amidst forty two victims in the event of derailment of a train. Kushal Konwar was the president of the local congress committee. In the Patharughat massacre (1894), the Phulaguri Dhewa (1861), the raj mels of Barama, Lachima and Rangia, protestations were raised by the peasants for the unbearable enhancement of land revenue. The discussion would become more passionate if it is revealed that one servant Manbar Nath from the Jahamari region came out of the bondage of the owner to join "the Death Squad" and became a martyr in the Dhekiajuli episode of 1942.

Since then, 20th September has been celebrated each year as "Swahid Divas" (Martyrs Day) in Assam to pay them homage and performances imitating those heartrending events are exhibited in the sweet memory of them

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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2. Jibakanta Gogoi, *Swadhinata sangramar geet*, (Guwahati: Express Publications, 1999), 114-115
3. *ibid*, 132
4. *ibid*, 132
5. *ibid*, 124
6. Medini Choudhuri, "Tribals' participation in the nationalist upsurge" in Arun Bhuyan, *op.cit*, 300
7. *ibid*, 300
8. Jibakanta Gogoi ,*op.cit*, 126

CHAPTER-9

9 FOLKTALES AND NATIONALISM WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ASSAM

(i) FOLKTALE, A RADICAL MIRROR:

A folktale is a traditional fictional narrative told primarily for entertainment. Sadhukatha is the Assamese equivalent of folklore. The word Sadhu means “the righteous”, it is also same as Saud or Saudagar, a merchant. So Sadhukatha means a moral story like an Aesop’s fable or a Biblical parable or a narrative of wonderful events by merchants who return home from abroad after a long stay in distant lands.

Bascom points out “Even folktales that are regarded as fiction are recognized by African as important in the education of children” (Bascom1972)¹

According to Zype the fairy-tales act “as a radical mirror to reflect what was wrong with the general discourse on manners, modes and norms in society..... (Zypes 1988, p.98-99)”²

(ii) FOLKTALES IN INDIA AND ASSAM IN PARTICULAR:

Indian folktales often do not end with a exhortation on moral virtue as European ones frequently do. Loyalty, honesty, hospitality and selfless generosity are key issues that appear again and again. For great rulers, the virtues of tolerance and fairness are important in matters of state policy, too. Loyalty is a central issue for close-friends and work associates where it is found violated we see the influence of economic or political stratification. The bond between a king and his minister, similarly, requires a diffuse sense of trust. Yet such mutuality can be easily threatened by differences in perspective due to their unequal social rank. Honesty and generosity also have great importance in contexts where superiors interact with subordinates. Hospitality provides the reverse side of this coin.

Assamese tales are not exceptions but present an atmosphere peculiar to Assam expressed in the simple folk-idiom and emit a feeling that is entirely Assamese. Superstition, wild imagination, basic wit and intelligence etc. are woven in to the folktales. Mythical tales, tales of humour and intelligence, animal tales or cante-fables are widely circulated in the Assamese society. Among these, Animal tales are quite influential with symbolic manifestation. For example, the fox and the cow always clever and wicked; the tiger strong, ferocious but idiotic; the cat greedy ; the monkey tricky etc.

(iii)FOLKTALE, A WEAPON AGAINST INJUSTICE AND OPPRESSION,
A NATIONALISTIC LESSON:

The folk society has never tolerated tyranny, injustice and autocracy. Those kinds of rulers were made fool and even crucified. In the folktale "*Dabangabhusan Bastra*" (in Bezbaroa's *kakadeuta aru Natilora*, 1912), the furious subjects made the king the laughing stock who was apathetic towards the well and woe of the people and made days and nights reverse. The intelligent daughter in law of the minister converted the wild king to a fool and crucified him by the persuasion of becoming the king of the heaven. This is the suitable instance of mass mobilization at the end of extreme suppression.

We can also cite the famous Assamese folktale "*Tejimala*", a collection of Lakshminath Bezbaroa. Tejimala has been adopted by modern writers to delineate human character of narrow-mindedness that goes to harm society at large; she has been portrayed as a rebel who refused to die at the oppressor's hands.

(iv)VIEWS OF WORLD RENOWNED FOLKLORISTS:

This time, we are going to scale the outlook of the scholars of international standard on the impact of folktale in the formation of nationalism. In the book "Folktales of India" edited by Brenda E.F. Beck, Peter J. Claus, Prafulladatta Goswami and Jawaharlal Handoo, a tale from Manipur "The story of Pebet" has been explained. The summary goes like this-

The Pebet is a small bird. A cat resides by her. The cat feigned adopting sainthood and hatred for flesh. It gave frequent visit to the Pebet's nest with greed but sounded Kinkarmala, Kinkarmala and carried a chain of devotional beads.

The mother pebet was very clever and waited till the capacity of her sons to fly. She went on flattering the cat in favour of the question of the cat if he was beautiful. But this time, the pebet gave an emphatic 'No' as a reply of the previous question concerning the cats beauty. With this reply the pebet signaled her sons to fly away. The youngest one was caught suddenly by the cat.

Then the pebet suggested the cat to bathe and to dry the son on the palm of his foot. As soon as the cat executed the lesson, the youngest son of the pebet flew away very high. Being frustrated, the cat began to lick his paw saying "oh ! how much more tasty would the flesh of the bird itself have been when what it defecated was, itself, such a treat !"

The internationally acclaimed folklorists including Claus, Goswami, Handoo and Brinda E.F. Beck exclaimed it as-

" In tale 66, however, a guest surreptitiously steals his host's youngest child, hoping to eat it. The mother of the infant then uses her own tricks to prevent this outcome. The guest is now a cat (disguised as a human ascetic), while the host is a female bird. The collector further mentions that this cat story is used politically, providing a metaphor for the Hindus who tried to colonize the Meities of Monipur during the early eighteenth century. Feeling about this domination by outsiders remains strong today. It is easy to imagine how the other animal tales..... could also be used in politically inspired ways" ³

(v) BACKGROUND IN ASSAM:

Assam underwent a series of movements during the British administration which were augmented by the wings of language and literature. The Assamese language was exiled for few decades sneering at the national identity of Assam. Three most outstanding personalities of this period are

Lakshminath Bezbarua, Hemchandra Goswami and Chandra Kumar Agarwala. The introduction of this famous collection of folktale, Burhi Air Sadhu (1911) contains a short history of folklore at international level, described the origin of folktales and its role in nationalism.

“No any nation or race has imposed so high status to folktales like the Assamese who name it as Sadhukatha i.e. lore of the honest or honest sayings..... Literature and folktales are the bones and brains of the nation. The language is called mother and folktales as the “lore of the pious” by the Assamese people.”⁴

Now a folktale is quoted from *Burhi Air Sadhu* (1911), a collection of folktales by Lakshminath Bezbaroa.

THE RAVEN AND THE WIGTAIL

Once upon a time, a raven and a wig tail made friendship. One day, they saw an old lady spreading paddy in the sun. The raven proposed the wig tail “friend, let us arrange a competition who can bring greater amount of paddy in the beak? The triumphant will eat the other.

The wig tail answered in affirmative. Naturally, the wig tail could not compete with the raven. According to the precondition, the raven came forward to eat the wig tail.

The clever wig tail suggested the raven to wash his beak as it was very very bad odoured.

The raven went to the sea and asked some water. The sea wanted a pot.

The raven went to a potter, but the latter wanted some soil to make a pot.

Then it ran to a buffalo for his horns to dig the soil. The buffalo advised him to kill himself firstly.

There after, the raven approached a dog to kill the buffalo. The dog asked some milk to acquire energy.

In search of milk, the raven requested a cow. But the cow wanted some grass to increase milk.

Now the poor raven felt need of a sickle to cut grass.

For the sickle, it prayed a blacksmith who was in the crisis of fire.

Finally, the raven found out an old lady who was setting fire to boil cloth. She attached few pieces of burning fire sticks to the wings of the raven according to it's will.

The raven was returning cheerfully across the sea with the hope of taking the flesh of the wig tail. The wind lit up the fire on the wings. The raven was burnt down.

Thus the folktale ends.

SYMBOLIC INTERPRETATION:

If we see the various motifs of the tale, then we find here a democratic national movement. The raven is much more powerful than the wig tail. To defeat the raven in an encounter is a hard nut to crack for the wig tail. But the wig tail is quite aware of the strength of a mob. So, though the wig tail offers his consent to become prey of the cruel raven, he begs time to knit the entire network. All the ingredients of the conflict namely the blacksmith, the buffalo, the dog, the old lady etc. pass the proposal to the next until the final blow is strengthened. So tolerance of the repressed exists up to the formation of a genuine ground to form a rebellion or a movement. Each member of the mob is interrelated and thinks itself to be insufficient individually. The raven is blind of its prowess and is ignorant about a united effort.

This folktale taught the pre-independent Indians to solidify heart to heart intrication in order to smash the muscle power of the British, the invincible antagonist.

One more folktale from "*Panchatantra*" (Assamese edition by Khargeswar Sharma, 1998) has been incorporated here. This folktale has been supporting the Assamese society in various situations when subjects are exploited and chain of development is hampered by improper and pseudo rulers.

THE BLUE JACKAL

There was a clever jackal in a forest. Being hungry, one day he moved towards the village. The street dogs chased after him. The jackal being shocked entered in to the campus of a house of a washerman. There was a tub filled with blue water. The jackal suddenly fell in it and the whole body turned blue consequently.

Next morning, he returned to the forest. All the beasts were terrified by the new comer. They wondered, "Where from this stranger has come?" They sent a messenger to approach the blue jackal. The blue jackal introduced himself as- "I have been created by Brahma (the creator in Hindu Mythology) according to the prayer of Indra (the king of heaven) to remove anarchy from this forest. All of you have to follow my order. Otherwise, you will be beheaded."

The blue jackal was given a hearty welcome and enthroned with due reverence. He appointed the elephant as the minister, the lion as the lieutenant and the tiger as the killer. He drove away all the jackals considering those as inferiors. The lion and the tiger hunted fresh deers for their king. They took the remains only which the blue king had left.

The exiled jackals wondered "The king is much similar with us in physical features. How had he been created with a difference by Brahma?" One old blue jackal advised, "Tomorrow you will be howling not far from the court." A group of jackals began howling accordingly. Being heard, the blue king could not control his passion. He stood up on the throne and howled loudly. The blue jackal was torn into pieces by the elephants.

SYMBOLIC INTERPRETATION:

This tale stands for a credulous society which is quite apathetic to its potentiality and resources. Here subjects are loyal and maintain job hierarchy to please the king. Here the king is honoured with divine origin. The blue jackal symbolizes a pseudo ruler who is indifferent and ignorant to his responsibility and greedy for comfort and power. He has full command to his ministers and officers but fails to command his passion in constructive activities. The conspiracy to highlight his real background has been designed from his own brand.

Once upon a time there was an orphan boy who lived in an old hut at the end of a field and worked as a humble shepherd boy. Nearby was the domain of a king with a prosperous wealth of cattle, until a voracious giant appeared and proved a scourge. Night after night he would visit the cattle shed and devour the cattle one by one. Rapidly their number lessened until almost all but a few were eaten. No one could find out the mystery of the missing cattle for a considerable time as no one had yet seen the giant.

At last, late one night, the giant as usual entered the enclosure and began eating the cattle when some villagers saw him and raised a hue and cry. Armed with whatever they found –spikes, spears and knives – the villagers came out in large numbers to attack the giant who then fled for his life with the villagers in hot pursuit. They eventually overran the giant, caught him and after binding him securely, they belaboured and pounded him so much with their weapons that his whole body was bruised with wounds.

The villagers were vastly astonished to find, however, that the more they beat the giant the bigger he grew in bulk and size. At length, his body burst through the walls and roof of the house in which he was being belaboured and he thus escaped and ran once more for his life. On reaching the field he met the orphan shepherd tending his charges in the field and sought his aid.

“O! Little brother, be so kind enough as to help me or else I will be killed; so please hide me somewhere.” He entreated. “How can I ever hide” replied the boy, seeing the huge giant, “a great big creature like you, when I am so small and frail? No, I cannot, as that would be impossible.” “Not at all”, said the giant, “only say that you can and I will transform myself into a fly and hide inside your stomach.” The boy agreed to this and no sooner had he done so when the giant became a small fly and fluttered into the boy’s stomach through his mouth. Very soon the pursuing villagers following in the tracks of the giant crossed the same field and came up to the orphan shepherd boy. “Have you seen a fleeing giant pass this way?” they asked the boy.

“No,” said the boy, “I saw no one.” At this the men became angry and shouted, “You must have seen him and hidden him somewhere.” “Out with him at once.” They threatened, “or we will surely punish you severely.”

“ Think a while, brothers,” answered the boy meekly . “ How can a small and frail boy like me hide so big and powerful a giant?” the villagers saw the truth of this and left him .

After that the boy asked the giant to leave the stomach. But the giant refused to do that . The boy gradually became thinner and thinner as the giant started sucking all the good foods inside the boy’s stomach .One day while he sat in a smithy idly watching the men shaping things on the anvil, he gradually dozed into slumber and was soon fast asleep and dreaming.

In his dream, he was resting on the ground near a pool in which innumerable bull frogs were frolicking among themselves and making a terrible noise with their discordant croaking. On hearing them the giant’s greedy passions were roused to the utmost and he shouted out, “Hey! You noisy bull frogs, had I not been inside this boy’s stomach today, I would very soon have caught you all and made a good meal of the whole lot of you.” “Huh! Huh! Kroak! We care a fig for what you would have done to us, you nasty old hog!” retorted the leader of the bull frogs in disdain. “And if the poor boy wishes, he can easily prepare and eat an astringent condiment made from the ashes of dry bamboo shoots and you would then be dissolved into nothing at all. So be done with your boasting,” added the bull frog and leaped back into the pool. When the boy awoke, he remembered exactly what the bull frog had said in his dream and determined to act upon it. He, accordingly, collected the dry bamboo shoots and prepared the mixture. Before eating it however, he decided to ask the giant once more to leave as he was of a naturally kind disposition. “Look here, giant,” he said, “although you have made me become as thin as a reed and caused so much misery I shall yet give you one more chance. Are you prepared to leave my stomach?” The giant’s answer was an impertinent refusal as usual; so the boy swallowed the condiment and thus ended the greedy life of the wicked giant.⁵

SYMBOLIC INTERPRETATION:

In this folktale, exploitation of the powerful upon the needy laymen has been realized. The Karbi community of Assam are enriched with glorious chapters of their kingdom , ,huge repertoire of folklore materials with Sabin Alun(the Ramayana story with slight variation from the original Sanskrit text and full of local imagery, recited in holy occasions with melodious tune) , Haimu Alun(the songs of Haimu, a Karbi beauty), Rangpharpi(A legendary Karbi heroine), folktales with flavors of protestation against the tyrants and dishonest etc. Having influenced by the activities of the native heroes and heroines from legends, myths and also from folktales, they took an unprecedented role to drive away the British regime from Assam as well as India during the colonial days.

In this folktale, the giant is symbolized with the ruthless British lion, when the shepherd boy replaces the suppressed mass. Giant's deliberate sucking of nutrients from the weak boy's stomach without his consent, refers much to the British domination over India like a parasite paying a deaf ear to their willingness and comfort ability. Dreaming of the boy and his discovery of a mean to put an end to the devil resembles the Second World War (1939-1945) where the Indians found out options and conditions for hammering the weak points of the British. The offering of chance by the boy to escape the giant from his stomach to suit his welfare coincides very much with the prayers and petitions, moderate steps and movements like Non –cooperation and Non –violence geared by M. K.Gandhi to create a congenial situation for the inhabitants.

CONCLUSION

The folk society has never been compromising with cruelty and tyranny. It has been taking revenge against injustice and disgrace. The folk society estimates the value of life in terms of character and efficiency not by professional status. In the folktale of the frog, the king neglected the frog for his negligible physical feature. But the frog was efficient organizer. The king

surrendered in front of the huge troupe consisting of beasts and gifted half of his kingdom along with the princess to the frog. This metaphor reveals the fact that the folk society is respectful to the united strength of the proletariat and compels the tyrant king to bow down at the honest and organized strength.

“The most striking characteristic of these didactic fables is their persistent political nature. The nature of power, the qualities of leadership, mother wit and cunning as the weapons of the weak, subversions betrayal and con games are regular themes, while this is said about the animal tale of the Indian type in general, it fits in with the Assamese folktale as well”⁶

So we can conclude that folktales are never outmoded by the challenges of time. The appeal of folktales is ever latest as the human instincts are remain constant. Nationalism evolved in any country, state or community can absorb some sort of nutrition from folktales and here comes the oral-written continuum. Undoubtedly, Assam shares more in this sphere.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Birendranath Datta, *Folkloric Foragings in India's North East*, (Guwahati: ABILAC, 1999), 205
- 2 Ibid, 208
- 3 A.K. Ramanujan, *Folktales of India*, (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 183
- 4 Birendranath Datta, op.cit,
- 5 S. N. Barkataki, *Tribal folktales of Assam(Hills)*, (Guwahati-3: Publication Board, 1970), 103-104
- 6 Lalit Kumar Barua, *Oral tradition and folk heritage of North-East India*(....., 1999), 43

CHAPTER-10

10 FESTIVALS AND NATIONALISM WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE SPRING FESTIVALS OF ASSAM

The intimacy between nationalism and festivals very often becomes the focal theme of most of the seminars, discourses and symposiums of social science these days. Being a composition or synthesis of genres like oral literature, material culture, rites, rituals and various practices; a festival is better to be compared with a mirror of a particular community or a race or sometimes even of a nation. Nowa days, apart from its devotive and ritualistic paraphernalia, an extra emphasis is laid to exaggerate the racial glamour and elevate the economy in the celebration of some festivals. Here, an effort has been made to see the interdependence of the Rongali Bihu(the spring festival of Assam) with Assamese nationality

All the four broad categories of folklore namely – (i) Oral literature, (ii) Material culture, (iii) Performing folk art and (iv) Folk customs contribute to the formation and acceleration of nationalism in various degrees and it is the festival which encompasses most of the genres of the four categories.

“The word festival is derived from the Latin Festas (of a holy day) and from the Indo-European dhes or dhesto the root of several words linked with religion Feotas and Feoterals are major events reated by an entire community is symbolic and active form to show the essential life of that community at once the distillation and typification of its consporate existence. At a festival the culture of a group is brought to its fullest expression and is consciously deployed in the public view. Thus, festivals constitute a prime act of reflexivity, whereby a society extrudes an arm at of itself, as it were, with an eye at etc end and looks at itself”.¹

Devotion was the main concern in every festival along with elaborate paraphernalia. Now a days, festivals have been undergoing a sea-change by shifting its functions from ritualistic hegemony to the testimony of a community's identity Assertion of ethnicity or looking back to one's glorious past has become a widely debatable burning question these days. The mono culture evolved due to the processes of modernization as well as globalization has become a matter of threat to the distinct vernacular cultures.

Karl Marx has made two distinctions of classes – classes in it self and class for itself in reference of cohesiveness. There are some sort of unifying factors which bind each member of a community. At least one thread of commonness is required whether it may be a festival, a ritual, a custom or any other ancient or current tradition. Among these, festival deserves special attention as it conceives a series of paraphernalia including customs, rituals, rites and a harmonic juxtaposition of folklore genres like material culture, oral literature (sermons, holy songs, chorus) and performing folk arts (dance, songs and dramas).

Let us take the Bohag Bihu (the spring time festival) celebrated in Assam. This festival is pragmatic with both cultural and economic ethics as it was mainly an agricultural festival or a festival of peasants where production and reproduction are the hidden mantras. Ploughing, weaving, poultry farming are the central economic issues concerned with it. Though, the modes of livelihood have gradually shifted from agriculture to other spheres like business, government services, large and small scale industries, the primitive urge for the festival remained.

This festival which was celebrated amidst natural abundance and spontaneity, now-a-days, impuled to be arranged artificially covering a wider horizon and subsequent addition to suit some socio-political issues.

A thrust has been entrusted to make the paradigm shift. A seasonal festival from mud, aromatic with folk observations like rituals, rites, taboos

and relevant customs has been dragged into the mosaic floor of a society which has already been flourished in the main stream of modernisation and partial westernization. It has become the life line of the Assamese nationality.

Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, an eminent humanist cum singer sings like –

Bohag eti matho ritu nahay

Nahay bohag eti mah

Asamiya jatir e ayush rekha

Gana jivanar e sah.

(The Bohag is not only a season or month but also the life line, valour of the Assamese nationality)

Now-a-days the Bihu songs and the Bihu dance which were performed during the Bihu days have become no more calendric. It has lost its occasional and contextual significance and has become free of time and space jurisdiction. It is performed in abroad either as a part of cultural exchange or as a marker of Assamese identity. A dramatic change of viewpoints has been observed. This festival considered a few decades ago as full of vulgar and erotic appeal by few elite scholars acknowledged unquestionably as the chief spoken person of the Assamese culture.

Not only in performing folk arts and folk customs, but also the material culture associated with this festival has traced to the central core of identity as well as nationality. The floral towel “*Gamocha*” specially woven by the womenfolk to hand over to the dearest one during the springtime is now-a-days exhibited in any part of the world to justify the skillful hands and artistic minds of the Assamese stock. “Bihu songs and dances which were originally confined to the upper Assam regions, they have now been accepted almost as the hallmark of Assamese culture and are freely performed by all sections of the Assamese youth even in the lower Assam areas. Also such traditional items of physical folk life as the Assamese hand woven towel called gamosa, the Assamese tray called sarai have come to occupy special places as symbolizing Assamese distinctiveness and are being dramatically displayed in public”²

Not only is the spring time Bihu of Assam witnessed this paradigmatic shifting of role, but these parallels in others states also. The Ganesh Chaturthi had been observed in 1927 firstly in Maharashtra under the patronage of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, a luminary of pre-independent India. Cohesive ness among the nationalistic sulkiest was the main motto of this observation.

The *Durga Puja* culmination in *Vijaya Dashami* also suggests good over evil. In Maharashtra the hero Sivaji became the symbol of the festival. *Sivaji ki jai!* (Victory to Sivaji) was a greeting on this day.

Similarly the Durga Puja celebration in Bengal and in Assam by the Bengali clerks and officials after the British annexation gave a new fillip to the nationalistic movement a pan-Indian significance during the nineteenth century. To imagine India in the form of Goddess Durga, Bankim Chandra's depiction of the *Bharatmata* (mother India) in the form of Goddess kali in his famous novel "*Anandamath*" were the driving spirit for most of the patriots in colonial India. Even today also, in Hindu nationalism, formation of various wings of *BJP* (Bharatiya Janata Party) like *RSS* (Rastriya Sayang sevak Sangha), *Vishwa Hindu Parisad* etc are based on Hindu mythologies. Goddess Durga was created by gods to kill the tyrant demon *Mahishasur*. She is the most beautiful goddess with ten hands and weapons in each and rides on a lion. The pre colonial Indian imagined him or her as Durga and the British as the demon whose killing was supposed as their *swadharma* (religion). Again to kill the oppressors of *Bharatmata* has also been conceived as the ethics of Hindu religion resembling the smashing of *Mahisasur*. Anja Kovacs in her article "You donot understand, we are at war! Refashioning Durga in the service of Hindu nationalism"³ depicts this in a very lucid manner.

Festivals have a magnetic fascination. Persons of a particular community, caste or state sprade in nook and corners of the world might come to enjoy the festivity or might feel some deep sensation of togetherness with his fellow members. Now adays, the springtime Bihu is celebrated by the natives and immigrants with the same urge. Circulation of compact disk and cassettes full of Bihu songs and dance, gorgeous celebration of the festival even thrills a child born abroad.

Though most of the scholars claim the Satriya culture as the chief identity along the Vaishnavite tradition of Assam, the strict codification and

ritualistic complexity do not allow the peasantry to be easily swallowed. It is extremely polished or elect to be digested easily except the intelligentsia and persons with religious overtone.

But the *Husori* songs are quite indebted to the Vaishnavite tradition for the devotional incorporation.

The Bihu songs are the mirror of the physical features of the land, the charm of green hills and dancing rivers. There is a breath taking attachment of the Assamese people with the mighty Brahmaputra (Burha Luit), the sole bearer of Assam's history and culture.

*It thundered up in the hills,
It rained in the plains,
Like water from a breached dam
my mind was breached.
There was none to console me
On the bank of the Brahmaputra
Is the barhamthuri plant,
There did we collect firewood,
O God Brahmaputra, do not wash it away,
Else you lose them who offered you areca-nut ⁴*

We observed here that when a festival comes to be used as the cultural identity or milestone of nationality of particular community, then automatically the material part or folk instruments or folk items associated with the festival get symbolized, and as a consequent, decontextualized and again recontextualized. For example, the *Eri* and *Muga* silk worn during the Bihu performance, the areca nut and betel leaves, the *gamosa* (towel), the tray (*sarai*), the weaving tools (*Ugha, mako*) associated with the spring time bihu celebration have become entities and manifesto of the grater Assamese society.

“In recent times there has been a sea-change in the nature and significance of the spring time Bihu. With the spread of modern education, urbanization and to some extent, industrialization, the festival is fast losing its old functional character. For the educated Assamese, it has now become a

“national and cultural” festival and a song like the following, which refers to muga, an exclusive silk of Assam, is symbolic of Assamese patriotism:

*So dear is the muga reel
 Dearer is the shuttle
 Dearer still is the Bihu of Bohag
 How else but to hold it? ⁵*

One mechanism by which an ethnic or national group awakens to a consciousness of identity is the perception of a threat to the group by a force external to it. Frequently, economic interests of actual or potentially dominant strata are directly or indirectly involved in movements asserting such identity of which these strata becomes the dominant and decisive carries. These movements typically engender articulate, vociferous and charismatic leaders capable of mobilizing masses of people to organized action. They could also engender literary and other artistic figures who weaver the themes of group identity into their creative work and religious and moral figures who blend religious fervour with identity. Economic and power interest of the dominant strata of the group could thus get camouflaged, submerged in, or blended with passions of identity of the group as a whole. In such contexts whatever “facts” are known of the past are intermingled with myth and fantasy, and a new perception is created of a past that is glorious, pure and exclusive. New customs, traditions, festivities, rituals and so forth are invented in keeping with these perceptions.

The various ethnic groups of Assam have been asserting their distinctive cultural identities by regenerating the folklore materials, by shaping their own history. The Bodo of Assam, a dominant tribal community, has been celebrating the Bathou Puja festival amidst pomp and gaiety. The Bodo movement have been receiving uncountable feedback from the oral concluded that literature and Bathouism. Similarly the Ali-Ai-Lrgang, a spring time festival of the second largest tribal group, the Mishing, celebrated on the first Wednesday of the month of Phagun is no more merely a celebration of the peasantry and illiterate people. It has become the symbol of Mishing nationality. Formation of Student Union, Sahitya Sabha and other literary organizations are the outcome and are pillars of further socio-political issues.

The celebration of Medam-Me-Fe and the proliferation of Tai-language emphasize the ethnic consciousness of the Ahoms. Similar consciousness and reassertion of ethnic identity have been observed in other groups of Assam as well as of the other north-eastern states.

So it can be concluded that the process nationalism in Assam has been breeding in two ways parallelly. One is in wider perspective- greater Assamese nationality, amalgamated with various ethnic groups celebrating a common spring time's festival with names Bihu, Baisagu, Baikhu, Bisu, Ali-Ai-Lrgang etc. A common platform is artificially created for greater Assamese nationality despite of too much variation in manners, styles and presentation.

The second one was underground for long days and recently has crept forward either for the fear of losing its own identity or for some economic and political benefits or for both. These are the ethnic groups residing in Assam who also are ingredients of greater Assamese nationality. The early Ali-Ai-Lrgang of the Mishings, the Baisagu or Bathou Puja of the Bodos, the Karam puja or Tusu puja of the Tea tribes, the Meh-dam Me-Fi of the Ahoms are national identity of each community forming at the same a composite Assamese nationality by the symbolic manifestations of the spring time Bihu.

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CHAPTER-11

11. EXPLOITATION OF FOLKLORE IN BODO NATIONAL EMERGENCE

- A CURRENT SOCIAL PHENOMENON-

The Bodos are the major and the most noteworthy among the tribes of Assam. It is believed that they first came from South-West China through Tibet and Burman. The Bodo language belongs to the Tibeto Burmese linguistic family. There are many sub-classes of the Bodos namely Bodo, Rabha, Dimasa, Tiwa (Lalung), Tipra, Garo, Sonowal Kachari, Mech, Chutiya, Koch etc. They had once their kingdoms in the state of Tripura, at Dimapur and Maibong of Nagaland, and in the districts of Darrang, Nagaon, and Kamrup of Assam.

In Assam, The Bodos are the only tribe who demanded for the first time a separate political autonomy in the form of a state. The Bodo nationality formation cannot be analysed in isolation from the Assamese nationality formation.

Processes like Sanskritization or Brahmanization by the upper class Hindus or the Hindu priests who modified various myths, legends and rituals to create the geneology of the tribal kings with Hindu gods and goddesses, were the first step to assimilate various tubes and non-tribes in Assam as well as in N.E.India. The second approach was the Neo-Vaishnavism, an egalitarian approach preached by saint Sankardeva and his earnest disciple Madhabdeva. There was a provision for the lower caste people or tribes to upgrade themselves by castes or to enter into the Hindu fold by taking initiation to a guru (prophet) and by reciting his holy name given by him. Consequently, a tribe caste continuum was formed. The Saraniyas are the initiated Vaishnavite who were Bodos out and out. The second approach was

quite liberal where most of the elements were borrowed from the tribes. Thus, the Bodos were incorporated to the cultural core of Assamese nationalism.

But there were some factors which compelled this tribe to struggle for a separate political autonomy in later days. Few reasons pointed out generally for a separate identity movement are -----

- (i) Though there was a frequent voice of greater Assamese nationality in the pre-independent days, in practice, the caste Hindu leaders paid a deaf ear towards the socio-economic issues of the Bodos.
- (ii) Despite of active involvement almost in every socio-economic issues, participation in the Congress ministry by the Bodo leaders was ornamental only. The congress was addressed as the League of Caste Hindus.
- (iii) Towards the early part of twentieth century, Kalicharan Brahma preached the prevention of liquors etc. This Brahma movement augmented a wider horizon to the up growing Bodo-movement.

From the 1st part of the twentieth century upto these days, the Bodos have been continuing various processes and means to justify their distinct identity and revitalize their glorious past. Formation of *Bodo Sahitya Sabha*, adoption of *devanagari* script, recognition of Bodo language as M.I.L. in the university level, collection of folklore material, prevalence of traditional dresses among the Bodo people of all walks are the outcome of their identity movement. Bodo textile receives wider proliferation and marketization as a consequence of identity consciousness.

In this chapter, we focus on a few dominant genres of folklore relying on which the Bodo nationalism has sprung up heading towards a new horizon. Though the Bodos have an appreciable reservoir of oral literature and material culture right from the Vedic ages, yet a little bit has been unearthed in black and white. Lots of oral literatures were missed due to the loss of their script in the mythic past and they had to merge in intellectual darkness for a few centuries. After a few decades of debates and discussion, the Devanagri script has been adopted to express them. Yet very less has been done in the name of preservation and revitalization of their oral treasures and material culture.

BODO LEGENDARY FIGURES IN THEIR NATIONALITY FORMATION

The emerging class of litterateurs among the Bodos in the first quarter of the twentieth century made attempt to infuse consciousness and confidence among the common Bodos in order to establish themselves as a homogenous group deserving sufficient attention. This was necessary as the Bodos living in different parts of Assam in the first half of the century were not conscious of their common ethnic and historical background despite the fact that they had their own kingdoms, ranged from the full statehood of the Dimasas – Kacharies to those confined to much smaller localities till 1850's. The attempt of the Bodo middle class to have employment and political power in the colonial political set up of Assam inclined them to take recourse to traditional narratives like myths, folksongs, legends, etc. These genres of folklore were of tremendous use to construct their fragmented history and a rich legacy of heritage. And this in turn became helpful in assertion of their identity. The legendary heroes and heroines like Ada Basiram and his lieutenant Daoharam, Joholao Daimalu, Seubar, Jaolia Dewan, Soumdoun, Tularam Senapati, Gambari Sikhla, and Birgosri Sikhla are popular among the Bodos. There are various legends whether in verse or in prose depicting the valour and patriotism of the heroes and heroines in their fight against their traditional enemies mainly the Bhutanese.

(1) A STORY OF GAMBARI SIKHLA, A BODO HEROINE:

Gambari Sikhla was a queen of Bijni Estate. She was a Bodo heroine. Once, the king of Bijni had to pay tributes to the king of Bhutan. The king did not like to recognize the superiority in power of the king of Bhutan. She tried to bring the king of Bhutan under the control by any means. Ultimately she was believed to be a concubine of the king and tried to overpower him but failed. She fought with the king for a long time camping at a place near Gosaingaon town, where she dug a big tank popularly known as Padma Phakri. She lost her life in fighting with the king of Bhutan.

(2) BIRGASHRI SIKHLA (LEGENDARY HEROINE):

The area of the Bijni Estate is called BagDuar. It was during the British regime that the whole area was divided into several Talukas or Mauzas for the smooth administration. Every Taluka or Mouza placed under a person whose responsibility was to collect revenues from the tenants and deposit to the British India Government. The collector of revenue was called Mouzadar or Choudhuri. Birgashri Sikhla was a Mouzadar of the Bodo community. The area where Birgashri Sikhla lived was called Chaudhuripara and still the area is known as Chaudhuri para (in Assamese or Bodo para means village).

Birgashri Sikhla was also known as Theng phakhri. She was very courageous and straight forward lady. She remained spinster till her death. It was the system that the Mauzadars had to collect revenues and deposited the same to the British India Government along with other valuable goods annually as a token of presentation. Birgashri Sikhla had to engage as many as twelve Bodo youths of stout figure to carry the valuable goods to Goalpara. In case the Mauzadars failed to deposit the fixed amount of revenue and valuable goods regularly then the British India Government imposed penalties on them.

One Birgashri Sikhla determined that she would not pay the revenue and also would not deposit the valuable goods to the British India Government. Thus she was regarded defaulter and was pressed hard to pay the arrears. There was a clash between the young lady Mauzadar and the British India Government. The clash became more and more serious and ultimately she was compelled to fight with the British soldiers. Birgashri Sikhla was a good fighter and she could ride well. She fought with the British soldiers on the horse back and in the long run she had to flee. The British India Government declared her to be a great enemy of the government.

While fled away, Birgashri took rest at a small hillock near the present town of Bongaigaon. One day, while she felt thirsty Birgashri attempted to take water from a stream setting her horse free. Suddenly the British soldiers attacked

her and killed her with their guns. Birgashri died and her long sword was left by the bank of the stream. One day the sword of Birgashri was seen by a certain saint who took initiative to build a temple where the sword was placed with a belief that the sword belonged to a goddess. At present the temple is known as Bogeswar Mandir. It is believed by some people of the area that the sword might belong to Birgashri Sikhla, the Bodo heroine, who was killed by the British soldiers. It might be possible that the name of the temple originated from her name, Birgashri.>Birgaswar>Bargeswar>Bageswar. The place around the temple is known as Birjhara and which is believed to have origin in the name of Birgashri. The particular area where Birgashri took rest for a while and was killed by the British Soldiers is now called by the local people Birjhara which is believed to have been developed from Birjiroa>Birjora>Birjhara.(Birjiroa means rest of Bir or Birgashri)

BODO FOLK SONGS

Ballads of heroes or narrative songs of the Bodos include the stories of Ada Bachiram, Daoharam Jauhaulao, Daimalu, Cheobar, Soumdoun, Tularam Sednapati (lieutenant), Jaoliya Dewan, Gambari sikhla etc. The depiction of the warfare between the Kacharis and the Bhutiyas on the frontiers is frequently found in Bodo folksongs.

Basiram and Daoharam were two legendary Bodos who fought against the Bhutanese.

Garaya Dabraydou Bachiram Jauhaulao

Ganggar Chubaya phailaygou¹

(Ride on horse, Bachiram,

Bhutiyas are coming in a body)

Bodo women took part in battles. These heroic souls could lay down their lives for their motherland. In the following song, the heroic women are encouraging Bachiram and Daoharam to fight against the enemies.

Phoi oi phicaphor noncoro phoi

Daoha nanno thandini

Dahal thungri lananoi bikha phorda nanoi

Ducmon phorkhou hocodini

Ada bachiram zoholao
Nonlay goraya dabray lando,
Akhra bugdao nanoi nono hoco lando
Naykor honoi nayhor ducmonphralay,
Haylado huilado phoilay gou.
Nana nana nanlaygon hazo gophayao
Thoya thoilay gon docmona,
Derha laygon zon Boro phora.
Dagi ada Baciram zoholao dagi nono,
Zoholaoni phica, birni phica nonlay uthri hagon
Ada Daoharam zoholao nonbo daoga lando,
Nonbo lamayao benco hoido.²

(Come, oh you sons of Bodos,
 Come you out, sword and shield in hand
 Let us go and rout the enemy
 Brother Bachiram, ride forward,
 Pursue the enemy hard,
 See, there he comes in all strength.
 Let the fight be in cave,
 Kill the soldiers of the enemy
 We, the Bodos will win the game.
 Fear not, Bachiram, fear not,
 You are born of heroic loins,
 Victory will surely be yours
 And you, brother Daoharam,
 Go you forth on the elephant's back,
 Sword in hand to meet the foes on the way.)

When Bachiram started for the battle against the Bhutias, his wife sang farewell---

Danhan chuhan ada Baciram
Akhra barini akhra bugdao ada

Hazo khorooa douha nanno
Goraya mabar zogdao,
Danhan cuhan, dauhan cuhan ada Bachiram can mokhan,
Thana thanlaigon hazo khorooa daoha nanno,
Thoia thoilaigon hazokhoroni gongar cubaphor,
Danhan cuhan ada Baciram canmokhan

(Oh dear Bachiram
 Get on to the saddle, (with) legs in the stirrups,
 Put spurs to the horse
 And march forward: (to battle)
 The battle breaks with the Bhutias.
 Let (if) Bhutia soldiers die,
 That's no concern of mine.
 Get on to the horseback,
 Advance and climb the hill.)³

Bodo damsel "Gambari" fought against the Muslim invaders riding on a horse like the Queen of Jhansi, Lakshmibai.

Chourba bangal phaibay
Malayni deshkhau sekhophoibai
Dagi dagi rouniyaphour
Dang jaunghabou gambari sikhla
Jenthra jaunghou bisourja alamala⁴
 (Foreigner Muslims are invading our country.
 Oh, valiant fighters don't be afraid.
 Damsel Gambari is with us.
 We will not surrender so easily)

Again one patriotic Bodo song with natural beauty is—

Ayo angou habab
Daima daisa jiri
Bang phang laiphang sari sari
Samonang thau, naibay thathao

*Sourjigiri sourjinay*⁵

(Oh my native land,
 you are adorned with the
 god gifted streams and green flora.
 My thirst will never be filled despite of
 my constant drink of your beauty)

Another specimen of patriotism is ----

Jaungni Asampuri

*Ai oi, Jaungni jaunaum bima,
 Goy kxanthal ouwa thajjou sari sari
 Sakhathi phakhathi doima doisa jiri jiri
 Jeroibou nuharjoubou hajouni mala
 Nidan gaiya, thainay gaiya joungni rajjouwa*

(Oh my motherland,
 you are lovely with rows and rows of
 betel nuts, jackfruits, mangoes, bamboos etc, and
 ornamented with rivers and rivulets,
 rows of mountains wherever you see.
 No scarcity of people, no deathknel)

Again,

Zoholao zalia gothofor zon

*Zoholao zalia gothofor zon
 Zonlay raokhoubo gia gia
 Dahal thugriano zonni gelegra mua mua
 Zoholao... ..gia gia
 Corba cuthura gaglab phobia zonni raizoao
 Dangon cugon guagon
 Zonlay raokhaubo gia gia⁶
 (We are sons of heroes
 We know not fear, we know not
 The shield and the sword
 are our play things-our toys.*

Should any enemy invade our place?
 He will be cut into pieces and be killed,
 We have no fear and we do not pause)

The Bodo women took part in battles. These heroic souls could lay down their lives for their motherland. It can be perceived from the above examples that those ballads were strong testimonies of Bodo patriotism. Overcoming all prejudices and taboos, the womenfolk took equal share both in well and woe. *Gambari Sikhla's* fight with the Muslim invaders and *Birgoshri's* against the British soldiers compels us to think that patriotism deserved topmost priorities in this warrior community. The Bodos were frequently involved in battles with the Bhutiyas in the Northern frontier. The Bhutiyas entered in Bodo kingdoms through several gates (Assamese term 'Duwar') along the north boundary and involved in battle with the Bodos.

CONSCIOUSNESS TOWARDS MATERIAL CULTURE

Among the four categories of folklore, material culture too serves significant roles in the assertion of the identity of a community or in the nationality formation of that community or in the recovery of a nation from the grasp of foreign invaders. For example, we may cite the independent movement of India where bonfire of foreign clothes, wearing of khaddar (handmade cotton clothes), circulation of the spinning wheel etc. were unavoidable chapters led by M.K. Gandhi.

Folk costume is the visible, outward badge of folkgroup identity, worn consciously to express that identity. Nowadays, even earlier also, a particular folk costume of a particular community serves as an identity of nationality of the community. A costume is the expression of the folk ethics, imagery of the weaver's dream, strong means of status of the person and the community

concerned. A particular dress may signify a particular state of mind. In the present culture of Europe, local costumes expressed locality, region, or province. In the United States, the term folk costume can be used to describe the dress of all traditional, regional, ethnic, occupational, and sectarian groups. It identifies the wearer to the outside world as well as his own community, it is prescribed by the community and its form is dictated by the community's tradition. Don Yoder in his article "Folk costume" comments—

"Folk costume is that form of dress which (i) outwardly symbolizes the identity of a folk community and (ii) expresses the individual's manifold relationships to and within that community."

In the essay "Uncovering the Secret Vice: Toward an Anthropology of Clothing and Adornment", Ronald A. Schwarz says about few functions of folk costume. These are -

- (i) Adornment: Evidence from the Apes and Archeologists.
- (ii) Protection from environment
- (iii) Protection from supernatural forces
- (iv) The shame hypothesis

In Assam, lots of communities live side by side and usher a common greater Assamese nationality. As a result a particular folk costume has begun to represent the Assamese nationality. The Bodo is the major tribal group in Assam. Lately, they felt a sense of segregation from the mainstream and used to continue a series of movement to form a separate territorial council. So a few ingredients have come to the foreground to emphasize and represent their strong nationality. Folk costumes specially the dokhona, aronai have been embraced to gratify and accelerate their distinct nationality.

In Assam too, the floral towel "Gamocha" specially woven by the womenfolk to handover to the dearest one during the springtime is now-a-days exhibited in any part of the world to justify the skillful hands and artistic minds of the Assamese stock.

"..... Assamese hand-woven towel called gamosa, the Assamese tray called sarai have come to occupy special places as symbolizing

Assamese distinctiveness and are being dramatically displayed in public'⁷

The dresses used by the Bodo dancers are *Dokhona*, *Aronai*, *Rege-Regang*, *Janji Khanai fali* (wide belt made of cloth) blouse etc. *Dokhona* is the principal Bodo female dress worn from the breast upto ankle. This garment measuring about 1.5x3metres is woven by the Bodo girls themselves. It is very hard to say about the source of the "*dokhona*". People have traced some sort of link with Buddhist synonym "*drubkha*" meaning Tibetan / Bhutia women's dress.

Bodo girls wear a shoulder scarf known as "*Pasra*" along with the *dokhona*. It is put on as a protection of the chest from cold weather also used as an ornament.

"Another manifestation of a semiotic expression of the problem of the Bodo identity can be found in the realm of dress. A national dress often becomes an important way of expressing the solidarity of the participants of a nationalist movement. Therefore, the leadership of such movements always tries to project a special dress as the national dress. For this, they either try to resurrect the dress that their predecessors used to wear, or even invent a new one."⁸

Aronai is like that of an English neck-tie but more wide and equal throughout its length. *Regang* is the most beautiful and attractive scarf of the Bodos. It is not only a beautiful scarf but a symbol of skillful embroidery of Bodo females which is most probably never before witnessed by non-Bodos.

Among the other clothes woven by the Bodo damsels, the *Eri* shawl is note worthy. It is made from the cocoon of caterpillars. It is soft, handy and has high quality of heat resistance. It has been acknowledged as a status symbol, a token respect by the old people.

Among all these clothes the Bodo *dokhona* is in an emerging trend for the emergence of various weaving centers with superior quality of thread. But the main driving force behind the reviving tendency is the assertion of identity.

“The Bodo *dokhona*, which was traditionally woven out of coarse yarn, are now-a-days woven with fine thread and even pat and muga. Besides, traditional dresses, fashionable jackets, shalwar, necktie, T.V and sofa cover and vanity bags are being produced by Bodowomen. The way aronai and other Bodo garments are being promoted and showcased in the present days ethnicity discourse testify the revival as well as the invention of tradition in the negotiation of identity”⁹

The Bodo women previously used to wear *Riha-Mekhela*, a popular Assamese dress. The *Mekhela* (worn in the lower part by women folk) and *Riha* (piece of cloth wrapped over the breast) are product of the Bodo women. It is said that the Riha is a variety of *Phali* donned by Bodo women. At present, it is very hard to find a Bodo woman in an Assamese dominated area wearing Assamese dress. Now, there has involved a standardized dress of Bodo women folk following a model of Kokrajhar area, the main power centre of Bodo-movement. This kind of change has mostly occurred in the post-1986 period in the wake of the ABSU-led separate statehood movement. The Bodo men folk are also no exception to this dress identity.

“The traditional Bodo scarf, *Aronai*, has now become a symbol of Bodo identity assertion. It is common sight to see invariably all the Bodo leaders, thousands of participants in the public rallies, functions, etc donning *Aronai*.”¹⁰

This socio- political role of Dokhona-aronai can be equated with *Gamocha* (generally floral towel) of the Assamese people, which has been utilized as a costume of pride and artistic excellence of native weavers and as a special gift of auspicious occasions, now a days, come to be used to welcome political leaders and in other nationalistic issues. During the anti foreigners agitation in Assam, the local leaders of AASU (All Assam Students Union) used *Gamocha* to wrap around their necks.

There may be hundreds of means to express the nationalistic sentiment of a particular community. There may be language, culture and historical

background to be emphasized, may be violent liberation forces or anti-leagues to be arisen. But the costume of that particular community serves as an ideal and prosperous means of expression of identity consciousness or nationality.

A Costume is like a microcosm where one finds mirrored in their relative intensities the aesthetic, moral and nationalistic ideals of those who wear it.

Inferences can be definitely drawn that the Bodo Identity is synonymous with an aronai and a dokhona, particularly in public gatherings. Now, school and college going girls are bound to wear dokhona in the BTC area failing to which would lead them severe punishment. Imported clothes are to withdraw their already enjoyed status from their protected area. Soft and loin clothes with renewed designs and motifs are produced by the Bodo weavers to whom sophisticated technology and marketing provisions have been facilitated. In and outside Assam, affinity and attraction towards their folk costumes have been observed in the non Bodo section also. Financial soundness and ethnic identity have equally been attained by the circulation of the folk costume of the Bodos.

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CHAPTER 12

12. CONCLUSION

History of nationalism from the great Yandaboo treaty in 1826 up to these days in the very heart of Assam has been illustrated here emphasizing the interdependence with folklore. Assam has been witnessing many paradigm shifts including fragmented kingdoms including the hills, assembling of them under the British administration., attachment of it with the Indian government in 1947, diffusion of seven states in the decades of sixty and seventy, formation of autonomous councils by a few dominant tribes, long six years relentless campaign by the AASU (All Assam Students Union) against infiltration, migration and central exploitation, emergence of ethnicity and several extremist groups etc during the last two centuries. A comparison has also been made regarding how the interdependence of folklore and nationalism stands with peculiarity unlike in Finland, in Basque or in Germany. Dilution and vulgarization of folklore materials in national emergency, the oral-written nexus etc also receive much significance in the discussion.

Reflections of nationalistic spirits in folklore genres of Assam have been written in chronological order, starting with mid.19th century, to be precise 1857 mutiny, various peasant movements like Phuloguri (1861), Patharughat (1894) and at Barama, Lachima, and Rangia etc. Romantic Nationalism (1890-1940), Indian National Congress and Gandhian Ideology, Post Independence Assamese nationalism and ethnic assertions.

In the second chapter, Folksongs depict the conflict between the British government and various tribes of Assam, disappointment of the tribes due to the strange and inhumane approach of the British ruling class have been cited. Though the concept Assam did not emerge at that time, yet each community felt a hasty deterioration of their cultural treasure and value system.

Khamti, Nagati, Garo Khasiati

Lagate Dafala Miri

Ronga-chila habite bor mel patise
*Phringik dharogoi buli.*¹
 (The Khamtis, the Nagas and
 the Garo Khasis
 accompanying the Dafala Miri
 organize huge gathering at the forest Rong-chila
 to catch the firingis)

Similarly,

Bornoir paniye patharkhan burale
Kharali ahudhan bom
Firingi khedote maro jadi marimwe
*Kaloloi khiyati thom*²
 (River Bornoi flooded the field
 So we will plant Ahu paddy in winter
 If we die in the expedition against the firingis
 Our fame will never fade)

Though Piyoli Barua was hung in 1830 and the movement was smashed with brutal hands, yet the folksongs remained in the revolutionary zeal of the people.

The Assamese language was the lingua franca of all the communities with distinct languages and dialects. In 1836, it was dethroned from the offices, schools and colleges and replaced with the Bengali language.

Discovery of tea plants in 1823 was another socio-politically important event in the history of Assam. As soon as the hegemony of the tea estates transferred from Maniram Dewan and Jagannath Barua to the East India Company, local labourers started disappearing from tea cultivation. Many reasons may be cited in favour of this phenomenon, among which the mostly acclaimed are, (i) the uprising of the Sepoy mutiny and (ii) strange and disgraceful codes of behaviours of the British Sahibs which were supposed to strike indigenous value-system.

Maniram Dewan was hung in 1857.

Following this, lots of ballads and folksongs started curving the Assamese revolutionary mind. Though a brand of folksongs were heard favouring Maniram's death, yet his hanging left a shadow of utter sadness and multiplied the agony and hatred twice for the ruling class. Chapter depicts such type of folksongs and chapter II also bears the same.

With the shortage of local labourers, the East India Company started importing workers from Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal, Madhyapradesh, Andhrapradesh etc. and confined them amidst the hard and fast rules of the tea gardens of Assam. These imported labourers, who were engaged in incessant struggles against the land annexation and unruly taxation of the British and faced immeasurable atrocities and massacres, now again, fell from the frying pan to the fire. Their grievances and helplessness came out in the folksongs depicted in chapter 2.

Chapter 2 also bears folksongs with past glories and revivalist sentiment of the communities like the Karbis and the Morans, two Mongoloid subgroups.

As a remedial action to maintain the availability of labourers in the tea industries, the Company enhanced the land revenue so that the indigenous labourers would merge in the gardens again being unable to pay the excessive tax. They even imposed taxes on domestic products besides on natural resources like water, wood and even on travel tickets. In 1861, the government banned cultivation of poppy in the southern parts of the Brahmaputra and started supplying consumable opium at a rate beyond the natives' capacity. The peasants assembled themselves in 18th October of 1861 from the Phuloguri region of Nagaon district. Assistant commissioner lieutenant Singer protested the mass gathering and ordered to inform their problems in black and white. The crazy mob felt ashamed of it and jumped over the British soldiers. Their simple sticks could not compete with the British gun. It took many lives. This very episode is depicted as ballad in chapter 3 and later came to known as "Phuloguri Dhewa". This Phuloguri peasant movement was the first peasant

gathering in the history of Assam and spread its wings to different parts and ultimately manifested itself as a driving wheel of Assamese nationalism.

The sudden hike in taxes and land revenue again made peasant unrest at Patharughat of Darrang District. An old man of Darrang district got silver coin of rupees three by selling a basket of potatoes. That drew the attention of the manager of the neighbouring tea-estate. He concluded that the so called Assamese people had been growing economically for such cultivation and it was the very reason for their apathy towards the gardens. One Narottam Das depicted the picture in the folk epic “Dali Puran” as –

*Gaonwe gaonwe dhani hol kuli anba naro,
Jene tene dukhiya haok khajana besi karo*³

(We cannot take kulis as the villages have become rich
So we are to enhance the revenue to turn them poor)

On 28th Jan.1894, the sub deputy collector Anderson of Mongoldoi Division came with armed troupe and made strict order to pay the land revenue. The offended mob went mad with rage and involved in a battle with the British force. More than hundred peasants laid down their lives and many turned injured.

In chapter 3, the ballad covering the incident has been depicted with folk imagery. Another similar movement occurred at Rangia on 24th December, 1893 where both Hindus and Muslims protested against the enhancement of land revenue.

On 11th January of 1894, a Rajmel was held at Kadamtal of North Kamrup district. The peasants’ assembly adopted a proposal to protest in front of the Deputy Commissioner at Rangia. It is reflected in the folksong-

Sunshahana apigila

Khajana baraise

Dibak nolle

Nibak dhari

Piyada logei di⁴

(Have you heard ,you girl,
 the revenue has been increased?
 If failed to pay
 You will be snatched
 with the help of the subordinates)

This way, the long sixty years peasants' movement breeds the great freedom movement under Mahatma Gandhi and overwhelmed every nook and corners of Assam.

Assamese litterateurs and American Missionaries made a relentless campaign to allow the Assamese language a rightful position. In 1846, '*Orunodoi*' was published from Sibsagar. Miles Bronson, Nathan Brown, Robinson etc, the American Missionaries collected folklore materials spread in the hearts of the people and advocated most for the recognition of the Assamese language. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Nidhi Levi Farwel, Hemchandra Goswami made a Herculean task to enthrone the exiled language in 1873. A group of young Assamese students established *Asomiya Bhasa Unnati Sadhini Sabha* in 1888. The Society's mouthpiece "*jonaki*" created a brand of native writers like Lakshminath Bezbaroa, Manik Chandra Baroa who tried for the revival of the Sankarian Cult and folklore. Newspapers like *The Assam Bilasini*(1871), the *Mau*(1886) and the *Assam bandhu*(1885) played a pioneering role in the field of Assamese nationalism as well as journalism. Bezbaroa's short stories and poems depict the glorious chapters of Assam and the folk minds. Chapter 4 highlights its best.

His famous collection of folktales, *Burhi Air Sadhu*(1911) and *Kokadeuta aru natilora*(1912) whose introduction bear a sound testimony canvassing folklore materials in national issues. His poem '*O mor aponar desh*' received acknowledgement as the national anthem. Bezbaroa's dramas like *Belimer* (1915), *Chakradhaj Singha*(1915), *Joymoti Kunwari*(1915) show the betrayal and chaos among the royal persons and heroic sacrifice of downtrodden folk people. He jeered at the characters of his short stories who

are too much passive towards the native language, culture and tradition. Chapter4 depicts it despite of its limitations.

The synchronization of Romantic period of Assamese literature (1890-1940) with the rise of Indian nationalism resulted a numerous writing concentrating the plot Assam. Though an anti-British campaign was going on roughly after the Sepoy mutiny or enhancement of land revenue in the form of Rail-mels, and collection and recollection of folklore materials was given birth since 1846, yet the boundary of patriotism hardly touched Assam as wel as Bharatbarsa. Distinct and diverse types of hatred and agony towards the British Raj crept in different communities for different issues. Nationalist writers of Romantic period fabricated the mythical and legendary heroes in their creations especially in dramas. They made a paradigm shift from the Bhakti poets of Medieval Assam by appreciating the patriotic zeal of the characters even if he or she is a villain whereas the bhakti poets tried to proselytize the spiritual faculty of the characters. Chapter 5 and 6 draw significant attention in this case.

Though the Romantic nationalist writers made a Herculean attempt to assimilate the revolutionary zeal of all the communities of Assam by making red alert against the common enemy i.e. the British Raj, it is supposed that the credit goes to M.K. Gandhi who imbibed the pan Indian perspective in the very hearts of the communities apparently by his first visit in 1921. Gandhi, being an urdent devotee of Ramachandra, and with spiritual profoundness, cultivated the dream of Ramarajya (the kingdom of Rama, an ideal king), a religious motivation, who tried to make the sense more and more secular for pan Indian proliferation. His campaign against the foreign made clothes and call for spinning of cotton thread by each revolutionist gave him a distinct personality. Weaving being both profession and vocation for each Assamese lady, easily merged with Gandhi's spinning strategy and the resultant came out with more resonance. Folklore surviving with the lore of weaving gradually started encompassing Gandhian ideology to its core. Chapter7 cites the triangular intimacy of Gandhi, spinning and Assamese folksongs.

After the massacre of Jalianabag of Punjab in 1919, Mahatma Gandhi started a series of movement. He started non-violent movement which received a wide acceptance in Assam.

After his visit in 1921, Montague Chelmsford Reforms failed to satisfy the congress. The result was, the congress under the leadership of Gandhi started the Non-co-operation movement. People of Assam under the leadership of Nabin Chandra Bordoloi and Tarun Ram Phukan took active parts in the movement. In Aug 1921, Gandhiji came to Assam and his visit intensified the movement here. After the tragic Chauri-Chaura incident of 5th Feb, 1922, Gandhi suddenly suspended the Non- Co-operation movement. He was arrested after this incident. In 1926, the Congress session was held at Pandu near Guwahati under the president ship of Srinivas Ayengar. Tarun Ram Phukan was the Chairman and Nabin Chandra Bordoloi was the secretary of the reception committee.

Since 1923, Assam politics was dominated by the Swarajya Party under the leadership of Tarun Ram Phukan.

In April, 1930, Gandhiji started the Civil Disobedience Movement. This movement was more extensive than the Non Co-operation movement. The movement created great enthusiasm in Assam. Many students left the government schools, volunteers picketed the liquor and ganja shops, there were processions and demonstrations against the foreign rule, and attempts were made to hoist national flags on government buildings. Government arrested all the leaders and thousands were put in prison for participating in the movement. The movement was temporarily suspended in 1931 when Gandhi went to London to attend the second Round Table Conference. In 1932, the movement was renewed but the suspension of the movement in 1931 had dampened the spirit and existed till 1934.

In 1935, a new Government of India Act was passed and under this act, Assam became an autonomous province.

In this revolutionary era, Romantic nationalism of Assamese literature was going on. Writers like Jyotiprasad Agarwala, Bishnuprasad Rabha, and Rajanikanta Bardoloi incorporated Assamese folk life and sense of patriotism in the early part of the twentieth century. Rajanikanta is regarded as the Bankimchandra of Assam. In depicting the historical facts and events, as the background of the stories, he added local traditions, not recorded by history, but current among the people. Reference may be made to Bardoloi's *Manomati*, the plot of which is neither imaginary nor based on recorded facts of history, but taken from folk tradition. His contemporary Lakshminath Bezbarua also wrote a novel '*padum Kunwari*' with folk imagery on the basis of the revolt of Haradatta and Viradatta against the Ahom power in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. We may also talk about Dandinath Kalita's '*ganaviplav*', is an attempt to interpret the Moamariya revolt as the popular mass-uprising against the oppressive Ahom rule.

Jyotiprasad Agarwala(1903-1951)'s drama *Sonit kunwari, karengar Ligiri, Nimati Koina* etc. are dramas based on mythical events and on Assamese folk society. His another achievement was that he firstly made the Assamese cinema '*Joymoti*'(a legendary heroine) in 1935. His poems like '*Asomiya dekar ukti*', '*Kumpur Sapon*' etc. are based on glorious past of Assam with nationalistic fervour.

Another revolutionary litterateur, Bishnu Rabha(1909-1964) took active participation in the freedom movement and overwhelmed the freedom seekers with his speech ,poems and books in folk treasure of the motherland.

Gandhi's *Sarkha* (the spinning wheel) was considered as the second edition of *Sudarsan sakra* (the invincible weapon) of Lord Krishna. Ideal Ram and Ramarajya became the dream of each revolutionist. It is elaborately discussed in chapter 5

The last movement for freedom in which Assam participated was the August Movement of 1942. As soon as the national Congress adopted the Quit India Resolution, all members of the working committee including Gandhiji

were arrested. The provincial leaders also had to face the same fate at the same time. The agitating populace turned furious and committed destructive activities like dismembering the railway lines and stations, cutting off telegraph and telephone lines, burning of post offices and police outposts. In Assam also people indulged in such activities and Government adopted brutal steps to put down the storm. At Gohpur of present day Sonitpur district, a teenaged girl Kanaklata and Mukunda Kakati were gunned down by police when they attempted to hoist the national flag replacing the Union Jack of the British. At Dhekiajuli of the same district, more than eleven were shot dead and many were injured in the same operation. Kushal Konwar of Golaghat was hung being involved in railway sabotage. Another few martyrs including Bhogeswari Phukanani, Lakshminath Hazarika, Thagiram Sut etc. embraced death when they campaigned for their tri-coloured flag. Many folksongs were generated depicting these incidents which became a catalyst to launch a national issue. Chapter 8 discusses these keeping paces with pan-Indian perspective.

Unlike other genres of folklore, folktales do not have any direct bearing on nationalism. Recent past may very often deserve a favourable space in folksongs, legends, ballads, narratives and also in the material used to override the rank and file towards a common sensation. But folktales never move in crest and trough even at the cost of a nation's past, it sweeps steady along the time with unknown number of versions and variants. Chapter 9 bears three folktales which pass on in oral-written nexus in the society telling a universal conflict between tyrants and oppressed. Hostiles are spirited whereas peace-loving entertains with it. Yet Bezbaroa's collection of the tale "The raven and the wigtail" to place it in the *Burhi air Sadhu* (Grandmother's tales) in 1911, a crucial period of Romantic nationalism of Assamese literature, leaves much room for chewing the cud. Some one may be spirited or recharged by the deep collective emotion therein. But both action and spirit of the characters are unavoidable ingredients for the patriotic scholars like Elias Lonnrot and his contemporaries whose dreamland were their pre-historic fatherland and enriched themselves with the heroic activities of Vainamoinon, a folk hero and immortalized him in the epic poem "Kalevala" in 1835.

On 15th August, 1947, India got rid of the British rule and became independent. A new federal type constitution was framed comprising a central government and state governments. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru became the first prime minister and Dr. Rajendraprasad as the president of independent India. Gopinath Bardoloi became the first chief minister and Sir Akbar Hyderi stood as the first governor of Assam. Bardoloi was succeeded by a list of active personalities including Bishnuram Medhi(1950-57), Bimala Prasad Chaliha(1957-71), Mohendra Mohan Chowdhuri , Sarat Chandra Singha (1972-77), Golap Barbara(1978-79), Hiteswar Saikia, Prafulla Mahanta, Tarun Gogoi from various parties with varied tenures. During this later half of the twentieth century, Assam saw many ups and downs including the splitting of it into seven segments, Chinese invasion in 1962, communal language conflicts 1971, establishment of medical colleges, universities, institutions and industries. Among these, students unrest centering the issues of influx and central exploitation took vigorous form roughly from 1979.

Assam is inhabited by a large number of hill tribes and plain people. The sixth schedule of the constitution has the provision to offer autonomy in certain matters of administration to the hill people so that they would be free from exploitation caused by the plain people. So District Councils have been formed to give them autonomy. But that did not satisfy the hill people. The autonomous districts clamoured for full statehood.

Nagaland was carved out of Assam in December, 1963. Meghalaya was raised as the full-fledged state in 1972 and as a consequence, the capital of Assam was shifted formally from Shillong to Dispur in 1974. Mizoram got full statehood in 1986 and Arunachal in 1987.

The emergence of hill states had emboldened the Bodos, a major segment of the plain tribes, to make similar demand for statehood. The Bodo people felt insecure due to the indifference of both central and state government towards their needs and aspirations, and for the national congress' hesitation to share political upper hand with the group despite of their marvelous sacrifice in the freedom movement. In 1967, the Bodos formed the

Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) and demanded a Union Territory Udayachal. In 1984, emerged the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) with its motto, 'Divide Assam: Fifty-fifty.' Yet the Assam Government remained silent and this made the Bodo youths furious and led to anti- social activities. Government adopted stern measures. The result was the emergence of a more extreme group called Bodo Security Force(BSF). The BSF now demanded complete independence. The Central Government became agreed in 20th Feb, 1993. Bodoland Autonomous Council was formed. On 10th Feb., 2003, Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) comprising four districts Bagcha, Kokrajhar, Chirang and Odalguri was formed.

The emergence of Bodo language and literature, formation of literary association and revival of folklore are the significant factors in search of their goal. On 16th Nov. of 1952, *Bodo Sahitya Sabha* (Bodo Literary Association) was formed. On 18th May of 1963, the Bodo language was declared as the medium of instruction in schools and colleges. In 1984, it became the associate language in Kokrajhar and Odalguri district. On 24th Dec. 2004, the Bodo language received recognition in Indian constitution. From the decade of fifty of the twentieth century, they have been engaged in a relentless struggle to form a distinct literature rich in folklore and heritage. Due to the scarcity of written documents, they had to trace the oral sources to design their history.

Bodo folksongs depicting the heroic activities of Ada Bachiram, Daoharam Jauhaulao, Daimalu, Cheobar, Soumdoun, Tularam Senapati and heroines like Gambari Sikhla, Birgoshri Sikhla etc had been in use to arise a communal sentiment against the ill-conducts of the British. Their Bodo communal harmony extended to Assamese nationality.

Jaungni Asampuri

Ai Oi, jaungni jaunaum bima,

*Goy kxanthal ouwa thajjou sari sari*⁵

.....

(Our motherland Assam is adorned with rows and rows of betel nuts, jackfruits, bamboos)

Moreover, Bodo folk costume especially the *Aronai* and the *Dokhona* started serving as nationality symbol for the period of national upheaval. Chapter 11 illustrates this with a holistic view.

Other important tribes such as the Mishings, the Rabhas, the Lalungs, the Koch-Rajvamsis have also been asserting for autonomy and have been unearthing their folklore parallelly. Though North-Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong have been offered autonomy, imposition of Assamese language in schools and colleges of these areas neutralizes their expectations.

After curving out of Nagaland, Arunachal, Tripur, Meghalaya and Manipur from Assam, Assamese nationality and identity had been reduced to a stage when incessant influx from neighbouring countries started causing imbalances in demography and property, became a paramount issue. All Assam Students Union (AASU) made a six years long campaign to solve the immigrant issue. At the same time, United Liberation front of Assam(ULFA), a militant group, was formed in 1979(7th April) with a view to fight for the interest of Assam and to pull out corruption and Central exploitation.

At the same time, Assamese towel '*Gamosa*' was wrapped round the neck by each leader of the AASU movement to embolden the threatened Assamese identity. Likewise, celebration of Bihu in open stage and abroad also started representing Assamese nationality. A parallel shift in celebration of springtime festivals of other dominant tribes have also been noticed. The material part of Assamese culture specially the *Sarai*(Assamese traditional tray), the *Japi*(traditional umbrella), *pat* and *muga* silk receive a status and became identity symbols of Assamese nationality. Chapter 10 discusses it with extra references.

In 1985, *Asom Gana Parisad* (AGP), an offshoot of six years long AASU (All Assam Students Union) movement, formed ministry under the chief ministership of Prafulla Kumar Mahanta. But he couldnot continue in the next five years for failing to fulfill the long cherished objectives and expectation of the subjects. In the passage of time, a brand of AGP workers

got separated forming AGPP (Asom Gana Parisad Pragatishil) in the recent past. Now, Mr. Tarun Gogoi from the Congress Party has been adorning the chair of the Chief Minister of Assam.

Extremism pleading for issues like autonomy, economic self sufficiency, and step motherly outlook of the central government started giving a sharp jerking under the port folio of ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam), NDFB (National Democratic Front of Bodoland) and other such groups based on ethnic interest. Various measures had been adopted by the central government to return back to the mainstream; even stern operations had also been executed to crush the backbone of the anti social activities when general people were sandwiched between the two poles. A sizable number of extremists laid down their arms and got absorbed in other spheres.

We have observed that through out all the chapters, nationalism and folklore support each other. From the very emergence of Assamese nationalism in the first half of 19th century, folklore has been serving, has been utilized, and also been revitalized till this day. In the process of revitalization, duplication of folklore i.e.fakelore arises due to the loss of authenticity in text, texture and context. Likewise, commercialization of folklore material i.e. folklorismus has also become a part and parcel of the revitalization process these days. It has been illustrated in chapter 10. For a researcher of folklore, it may become a matter of regret. But nationalism needs it badly irrespective of authenticity or duplicity.

It has been noticed that the picture of the inter relation between folklore and nationalism is unique in its styles and strategies. It is quite peculiar unlike in Finland as described by William A Wilson or in Colonial South India as described by Stuart Blackburn. Assam, being a poly ethnic state with diverse culture and folkloric heritage, fragmented in many parts politically during the British regime, a common genre or item of folklore was a difficult task to lead the people to a common destiny. However, after renaissance in the educated native brand boosted up by English education and the missionaries, the horizon of thinking the concept of motherland got widened. Introduction with the Indian classical texts and epics, composition of dramas and novels by

indigenous writers selecting the plots from those very texts, Gandhi's visits to Assam, at last, expanded the boundary from Assam to India. Folksongs were generated depicting Gandhi, as the saviour, narrating the art of weaving, emphasizing the patriotic spirit of the characters of the mythical events. Yet, the age-old folklore like myths, folktales, legends etc did not cease to expand its utility in the freedom movement in pan Indian level, although the breeding grounds were narrow political jurisdiction.

It has been observed that during the revival of folklore materials, during national upheaval or ethnic assertion, a dilution of the materials is occurred. Generally, folklore materials are collected from authentic sources, from field or from primary sources. Celebration of festivals or observations of rites or rituals are highly calendric with elaborated paraphernalia. But during a national issue or ethnic interest, de contextualization in the hasty collection goes on, leading to artificial polished edition of the materials. For, example, the celebrations of the Bihu dance and songs were restricted only in the Bihu days and were considered as vulgar in many times by the civic society. But as soon as it had become the identity marker of the Assamese nationality, it overcame all barriers by performing irrespective of time and space. Both audio and video cassettes of Bihu dance and sings are in cut throat competition supporting the process fakelore and folklorismus.

It has been realized that the relationship between folklore and nationalism has still been in deep intimation since the advent of the British especially from the middle part of 19th century and will remain in Assam. The process fakelore and folklorismus stand side by side in varying degrees depending upon the depth of the relationship between folklore and nationalism

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3. Nirmalprabha Bardoloi, op.cit, 7

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