

FOLKLORE AND POLITICS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE BODO

Faguna Barmahalia
UGC, Senior Research Fellow,
Department of Folklore Research, Gauhati University.

INTRODUCTION :

Though Folklore is considered as old as mankind the study of this particular field has emerged as a scientific discipline in the nineteenth century. The term 'folklore' was coined by a British antiquarian William John Thomas in the year 1846. In a letter sent to a daily published magazine named "Athenaeum", Thoms introduced the term 'folk-lore' to mean 'the lore of the people'. He proposed the word Folklore to be used as an umbrella term that would cover the knowledge of the people which are traditional as well as creative according to the environmental needs. It is also concerned with the traditional ways of life and customs of the people.

"Folklore is an artistic communication in a small group".¹ It includes myths, legends, folktales, jokes, proverbs, riddles, chants, charms, blessings, curses, insults, retorts, fairs, teases, tongue twisters, greetings etc. Besides these it also embraces folk customs, folk dances, folk arts, folk beliefs, folk medicines, folk instruments, folk music, folk songs, folk metaphor names, i.e. the nicknames and place names etc. moreover within the ambit of folklore falls games, gestures, symbols, political jokes, folk etymologies, folk recipes, embroidery, design, houses of traditional type, even the street vendors cries', sounds, lused to summon animals or give commands.

FOLKLORE IN POLITICS

We are aware that folklore has been used as a tool for different ends including political purposes. During Chinese revolution and also when African states were fighting for their political self determination folklore was systematically used to reconstruct their past history and mobilize the minds of the people. While conveying the aspirations for cultural independence, folklore has been instrumental in the establishment of modern nations in many European countries also. Since 19th century onwards folklore is being used for strengthening the ethnic and nationalistic ideas of the people. The relationship between culture and ethnic identity was always close and effective. Ethnicity is an excellent tool for fulfilling the aspirations for the people and safeguarding their identity.

In the late 1920's folklore became an important academic discipline in various universities, often being an obligatory course, or an adjunct to a broader course in German *Kulturkunde* or *Landeskunde*.²The first national state to make political capital of folklore

¹ . <http://folklore.missouri.edu/whatis.html>

² Dorson, R.M. *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*, 1972, p-16

studies was the National Socialist Government of Hitler. During 1930's a massive literature of folklore was published in Germany, documenting the Nazi concept of a Herrenvolk united by mystical bonds of blood and tongue, culture and tradition."³ In establishing the folkish state folklore had been the central point of Hitler political thought. The growth and development of Folklore as an academic discipline emerged all over the world. In Soviet Russia, folklore was used as a powerful force for the advancement of communism.⁴

In Finland, Kalevala is one of the greatest epic Finish people and was composed by Elias Lonrot. The composition of Finnish folk poetry served the amount of nationalistic purpose and folklore used as a mirror for Finish culture, as a means of gaining insight into the minds of the people.

With the manipulation of multi party political system in Turkey in 1945, the moderate and secular era of Atartark was slowly reversed. A small ivory of ultra-nationalist Islamic started influencing the folklore studies further. The folklore conferences became a part of political and ideological activities of the government. Folklore was manipulated for political and nationalistic purpose in Turkey.

In Ireland the drive for cultural nationalism proceeded and fed the movement for political independence. Famous Irish literary personalities used folk traditions in poems and plays. They fought for the revival of the Gaelic tongue and heritage against the shifting cloak of English culture.⁵ In Greece political and cultural nationalists utilized folklore to get an advantage over other European scholars. In the United States, the government gives pressure on the scholars, market and publishers to make the folklore to fit its ideology. In the 1930's, the line of depression the leftist singers aroused the sense of social injustice and political radicalism through singing of protest songs in the United States.

IN INDIAN CONTEXT

Politics of ethnic identity in the north-east India is well known phenomenon. The ethnic assertion in this region is mostly linguistic and cultural in nature. Most of the ethnic groups in the north-east region have been demanding either autonomous or separate state to maintain their socio-cultural identity. After the Indian Independence we have not seen any changes as we have seen today in other parts of India. North East India still remained backward in terms of economic, education as well as politic. In this scenario many educated and middle class elite people has involved in working for the all round development of their community. In Assam, the Bodos are assumed by themselves to be exploited and suppressed by the Assamese society. Consequently, the socio-cultural identity movement has been emerged among the Bodos.

With the emergence of ethnicity and identity political movement among the different ethnic groups in north east India including the Bodos, folklore has been used as an instrumental to mobilize the minds of the people and it has been playing a significant role in promoting the ethnic consciousness and in strengthening the sense of cohesion. It is certainly true to say that the studies of culture whether Anthropology or Folklore has been concerned with politic.

³ .Ibid

⁴ .Ibid

⁵ .Ibid

According to the political point of view, Politics is a struggle for power and on this front folklore always plays the role of integrating of a community or a nation. At the same time it acts as an agent in playing the divide and rule policy among the people too.

One of the remarks given by Anil Boro on the Bodo community says, "The elements of Bodo Folklore as well as their oral history embedded in the oral tradition have proved to be effective assets of the ethnic and cultural identity of the Bodos. These assets have strengthened their nationalistic cause and prolonged demand for autonomy.⁶ Thus, traditions of the people as strong weapons for the reconstruction of political and social histories are the best evidence. The historian can use the elements of folklore for better understanding of the people's life and their world view. They convey messages, the information about events of the past, but the intention on them may not be directly historical.

Multifaceted functions of folklore in a society are obviously understood and the uses of folklore materials for different ends have become a fashion in the contemporary world. In most of the cases government or ethnic groups take serious steps or interest in its national folklore collection and publication, which also reveal nationalistic or ethnic motivations. In this connection we have seen that even traditional rituals have been transformed in to political holidays and gradually lead to ethnic and cultural unity. It is sometimes conscious move to direct such a course of development which can bring some kind of political freedom or ethnic unity. It is not always simply for preservation of their tradition only. Folklore has throughout the history of its study been connected with political issues and concerns. Political recognition of particular ethnic group can not only reshape the designated group's self awareness and organization but can also increase identification and mobilization among ethnic group formation. This specially so happen with much support, from the very base of the groups' culture and folklore genres. Political support makes the ethnic groups and improves economically, socially as well as culturally. Somehow political and cultural act of ethnic groups go hand in hand for all round development of its sake.

According to William Bascom, "Political use of verbal art is not a new phenomenon. As Bascom said, "the function of verbal art as an instrument of social and political change---was apparently not discovered---until in 1961'.⁷(Bascom:1981:213). Since time immemorial verbal art has been used for continuing and stabilizing culture, even used for political change. Myths and legends have been used to promote ethnic unity, regionalism, nationalism and anti nationalism. By the Nazi folklore was used to the fullest possible extent to serve the purpose of nationalism, politics and ideology, in that period folklore was the main means to restore the values of the traditional society. Hitler wanted to preserve their folklore with its widest possible meaning to serve the greatest end it itself. Folklore was re-shaped to adjust their national and political situations. Within Germany, the nationalistic aspect was further emphasised during the Nazi era. Folklore studies, *Volkskunde*, were co-opted as a political tool, to seek out (and modify) traditional customs to support the idea of historical continuity with an Aryan culture. Anti-Semitic folklore such as the blood libel legend was also emphasized.

⁶ . Boro,A.2004,*Oral Tradition As History:A Discourse on The Historical Elements in The Bodo Oral Tradition in The Flute and the Harp*,p-83.

⁷ .Bascom,W. *Contribution to Folkloristics*,1981,p-213)

It is noteworthy to mention here that during the freedom movement of India, Mahatma Gandhi started using the (Swadeshi) home made local items. This movement had been used as a means of decolonizing the minds and establishing the consciousness of nationalism to the people on the one hand and on the other hand this led to encourage the indigenous folk materials producers and Indian cottage industry as well.

Many writers of the national revival were the collectors of folklore. Creation of new Folklore are also seen as the expressions of the nationalistic spirit of the people. In respect of Bodos revival, C.K Sarmah observes thus- "The emerging class of litterateurs among the Bodos in the first quarter of twentieth century made attempt to infuse consciousness and confidence among the common Bodo 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 Dimacha Kachari 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 political set up of Assam inclined them to take recourse to traditional narratives like myths, folk songs, 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*, *Daoharam Jwhwlao*, *Daimalu*, *Seubar*, *Jaoliya Dewan*, *Swmdwn*, *Tularam*, *Gambari Sikhla*, *Birgosri Sikhla* are very popular among the Bodos."⁸

In fact, the Bodos are also using their folklore items comprising their traditional costume, folk song, folk dance and oral literature like myths, legends and other forms of narratives are being used for supporting their movement. There are some folk songs or narrative tales of the Bodos which include the stories of *Ada Bachiram*, *Daoharam*, *Jwhwlao Dwimalu*, *Cheobar*, *Swmdwn*, *Jaoliya Dewan*, *Gambari Sikhla* etc. These songs and narrative recount the history of the Bodos.

Bachiram and *Daoharam* were two legendary heroes of the Bodos who fought against the Bhutanese. The following lines are songs about Bachiram:

Goraya dabraydw Bachiram Jwhwlao
*Gonggar chubaya phwilaygou.*⁹

English rendering: Ride on horse, *Bachiram*, Bhutiyas are coming in a body

In Bodos society women also took part in the 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.

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

⁸ . Source: wiki.indianfolklore.org/images/a/a4/lfl

⁹ B, Brahma, *The Folk Song of the Bodos*, p-2

*Danghang chuhang ada Bachiram
Akhra barini akhra bugdao ada
Hazo khoroao daoha nangnw
Goraya mabar zwgdao,¹⁰*

English rendering: Oh dear Bachiram, Get on the saddle, (with) legs in the stirrup, Get on the saddle, (with) legs in the stirrups, Put spurs to the horse, And march forward :(to battle)

There are various rivers which are associated with different myths and legends. Many scholars have put forward and agreed upon the fact that if the name of a river begins or ends with *ti* or *di* it was originally named by the Bodos. In this regards what Rev.S Endle says may be recalled,

"It is indeed not all unlikely that the people known to us as Kacharis and to themselves as Bodo were in earlier days the dominant race in Assam; and as such they would seem to have left traces of this domination of the nomenclature of some of the physical features of the country, eg. the Kachari word for water (*di, dwi*) was originally a Bodo name."¹¹

It is clear from the above statement that Bodos myths and legends tell that direction of livelihood was received from the God through certain supernatural old people who acted as mediators and teachers. These strengthen social order and distinguish the tribe from other communities. They think that they received their traditions from their aged people. Such kind of narratives helped the emergence of national awakening among the Bodos.

In Indian context, religion plays pivotal role in building up and maintaining the identity of a group. *Bathou* is the indigenous religion of the Bodos. Recently the *Bathou* religion has been relegated to the reviving line. Subsequently the worship of *Bathou* as the supreme god has been resurrected. This folk religion has now been playing a vital role in re-establishing the identity of the Bodos. The followers of Bathouism assume that the religious practices of other religions distorted the original myths and religion and marginalize their language, culture and tradition. The emergence of *Bathou* movement has created a reaction among the believers of traditional faith and practices as well as the follower of other religion in the Bodo society. It can be observed that the modified form of *Bathou* religion will continue to play significant role in reconstructing the identity of the Bodos.

Many of the educated Bodos have returned to the original faith. Now a days we can see that there is kept an alter of *Bathou* in the courtyard of many educated Bodo families. Like the Bodos, the Meiteis of Assam and Manipur were converted into vaishnavism under Chainatanya school. In the first half of the 20th century a group of Meitei cultural revivalists started to restore the lost Meitei cultural identity in an effort to search for cultural self definition. A strong tendency among the Meiteis to retain the mirror of their ancient culture through the recapturing of the lost cultural history has been visible in the present society of the Meiteis. The *Sanamahi laining* the indigenous religion of the Meiteis has now successfully revived, the number of the follower of *Sanamahi Laining* gradually goes on increasing.

¹¹ .Endle,S.The Kacharis,p-16

In this revivalist movement folklore has been used for the awareness of Meiteis Identity. And it has been a power to counter the Hindu religious power structure. Here what M. Sadananda Singh a young energetic PhD student of Manipur University may be mentioned:

In this cultural revivalist movement many traditional performing arts also have been taking a significant role in resurrecting the pre-Hindu culture of the Meiteis. Among those of the traditional performing arts the *Wari Leeba*, a storytelling tradition has now become a very important device for mobilizing people's mind, changing their attitudes towards their cultural traditions. Since the people of Manipur have the native inclination towards story and music, the role of *Wari Leeba* in getting people involved in the cultural revivalist movement becomes very important.¹²

Further he concentrates on the role of *Wari Leeba* in resurrecting the ancient culture of the Meiteis which was totally marginalized. He says thus:

The social and cultural function of *Wari Leeba* is that it is increasingly acknowledged as tool for reviving our culture not to get lost and uprooted culturally. Thus the cultural impoverishment of the Meiteis in the Hindunization period is kept in check by a counter discourse. Meitei myths are used in *Wari Leeba* are able to demythologize the alien cultural historiography. Today this has been used as a means of decolonizing the minds.¹³

As *Sanamahi Laining* the number of the follower of Bathou religion are also increasing day by day. And this particular religion has become an institutional religion Earlier the Bodos didn't have permanent temple like Church and Mosque. Now they have established *Bathou Thansali* for the worship *Bathou*. It is seen that each and every religion has a separate day for worship. Like Sunday is for Christian. Considering its necessity to assemble the followers of *Bathou* once in a week, they have accepted *Tuesday* as the best day for them. A devotee of *Bathou*, Bhaben Fwrwngiri, he also called *Tuesday* is the sacred day and suggested to worship *Bathou* on that day. Now this day has been accepted by the organisation as the sacred day for them and observes regular service of prayer like the Christian. In fact that All Bodo Religious Union has been making all out efforts to give an organized and institutionalized shape to the *Bathou* religion. Prayers and regular services are conducted on the basis of prescribed religious text. Each and every village has set up *Bathou Thansali* (Prayer hall).

During my field work I have observed that a few converted people specially neo-vaishnavite Bodo people are coming back to *Bathou* religion. Four years ago, I visited a neo-vaishnavite village named Dhekiapelua is located just near the Missamari Army camp with a view to collecting folklore materials. As a research student of Folklore, I interviewed with the informants and collected a few folklore materials from the elderly men and women associated with neo-vaishnavism. When I visited again in this village in the month of April, 2009, the old picture was completely changed. This is a strange! "A flag of *Bathou* Religious Union was hoisting within the campus of the *namghar*". The village *namghar* was being made as *Bathou thansali*. It is interesting to note here that they demolished the *manikut* and the *Bathou* altar was established here. The performance of *Bathou aroj methai* (*Bathou* prayer song) was also going on inside the village *namghar*. However, the permanent vaishnavite's *Namghar* is being

¹² . M. Sadananda Singh. *Wari Leeba: on the role of Storytelling tradition in the cultural revival among the Meiteis of Manipur*. Seminar paper presented at the Interim Conference of the ISFNR held at NEHU, Shillong.

¹³ Ibid: p2

reconstructed as *Bathou Thansali*. It is to be mentioned here that some of the Assamese speaking Bodo people also can speak Bodo language now and even they can pray fluently in Bodo language in the *Bathousali* without any hesitation. According to the follower of *Bathouism*, this is a grand success.¹⁴ According to Jogeswar Baro, "We got re-birth and survived through *Bathou*. Once day Sankardeva disintegrated our society as well as blocked the path of our walking in the Bodo society. Now we have earned and achieved the path of learning and teaching our mother tongue and culture to our next generation only because of *Bathouism*."¹⁵

Like the Ahom, Marans of Assam also has started reviving their folklore materials. Earlier they identified themselves as Hindus, but now they have said that they are not Hindus, they are Buddhist. Their revivalism is seen in the marriage ceremony, death ceremony, *medam mephi* and so on.

Generally, there are two ways of disposing the dead bodies –1.Burial and 2.Cremation.Traditionally the Bodo people followed the burial system for the disposal of the dead body. In course of time, they followed both the burial and cremation system due to influence of Hindu religion. But the follower of *Bathousim* has discarded the cremation system and started following past tradition. There is a belief about this that if the dead body buried then the bone will tell the generation of the Bodos.

Generally the Bodo kept their sons and daughters name with their own community's words. As informed by the informants they kept their sons and daughter names observing the size,colour,behaviour,month,day etc. of birth the boys and girls. If the boy had short nose or flat nose, then he was named *Nabla*,if the girl is born in the month of *Bwisagu* (the new year of the Bodo) is named as *Bwisagi* etc. But under the influence of other religions, specially, Hinduism and Christianity, they used to keep Hindu names, like *Ganesh*, *Bijoy*, *Durga* and the impact of Christianity ushered in names like *John*, *Abraham*, *Michel*, *Entina* etc.

Let's see the following chart:

Bugab Saikiya (Kachary) Bugab is Bodo word (18th century)



Masuay Kachary (Kachary) Masuay was also Bodo word (19th Century



Purna Kachari, Purna is Assamese word (20th century)



Thaneswar is also Assamese (20th century)



Sona Mainao (Bodo) (21st century).¹⁶

¹⁴ . Barmahalia,F. *Revivalism of Bathou Religion among the Bodos of Assam*, in the International seminar organized by centre for Indigenous Culture held from 1 to 2 Feb, 2011 at Central Jharkhand University

¹⁵ .Informant:Jogeswar Boro,57,Thelamara,Sonitpur

¹⁶ .Informant:Thaneswar Boro,Samukia,Khelmati,Sonitpur

Chart II:

Traditional Bodo names	Hindu and Assamese names	Christians names
Arga, Merga, Bunda, Lebra, Daokha, Laodum Usunda, Belsri, Thukhli, Gambari, Damfla, Bwhwithi, Hagrama etc	Durga, Parvati, Swaraswat, Ganesh, Siva, Shankar, Rihon, Paresh, Sukla, Dhiraj, Paniram, Dhiraj etc.	Michel, Imanuel, Illius Nelson, Entina, Prinjin Jisu, Jacob. John, Jisu Etc.

It needs mention here that the naming of the people was done with the original Bodo words. Still most of the old men names are to be found as mentioned in the chart. In this context it is seen randomly that after the conversion to neo-vaishnavism, Christianity and other sects of Hindu religion in the first decade of 20th century, the Bodos started taking education through Assamese medium schools which influenced them greatly. The non-Bodo teachers of the school who couldn't pronounce the Bodo names changed their name and gave Hindu names. Even it is seen that they kept Assamese names and surnames in place of Bodo names and surnames.

The tendency to go back to the Bodo names became stronger after the ethnic movement for the creation of Separate Bodoland launched by All Bodo Students' Union from 1986.¹⁷ The Bodo people started taking Bodo names in place of the Assamese or Aryanised names mostly during the Bodoland movement launched by ABSU. Let us see the following chart:

Traditional and modern names	Meaning
Iragdao	The name of a King
Swmdwn	Legendary hero
Gambari	Legendary heroine
Hirimba	A legend, got married with <i>Bhima</i>
Mithinga	Nature
Bwhwithi	Flow, current
Derhasar	Successful
Mainao	<i>Lakhi</i> , one of the goddess
Billifang	Dusk
Samaina	Beautiful
Sansuma	Thoughtful
Gwjwn	Peace

¹⁷ .F. Barmahalia, *Tradition, Ethnic Identity, Folklore and Politics: A study among the Bodos of Assam*, Presented in the Interim conference of International Society for Folk Narrative Research organized by Department of Culture and Creative Studies, Nehu, Shillong, held from 22nd to 26th Feb, 2011

Now, the Bodos are very crazy about their names. There is also a growing preference for the Bodo names for individual and places. Many Bodos, especially of the younger generation, now, speak only Bodo and prefer not to speak Assamese. They are keeping their son and daughters' names with the Bodo words.

Dress has separate specific role in the maintenance of the cultural and ethnic identity of a community. Until a few decades ago, the converted Bodo people used to dress like Assamese and Hindu people. Women folk used to weave and wear *Chador mekhela (Muga pat)* and men folk used to wear *dhuti* and *gamocha*.¹⁸ In respect of the revivalism in Bodo dress, the ethnic Bodo organizations played a great role. They urged upon the Bodos to wear the traditional dress called *Dokhona*. It is seen that women who disobeyed their instruction were castigated. Even the activists mutilated the dress of the women who used to wear the non-Bodo dress. Now the Bodo people have started dressing *dokhona*, *phali* and *aronai*. But that is not true that the Bodos have completely discarded the Assamese and other dress. People still use the Assamese and other ethnic costume at home and social functions specially in Kamrup, Sonitpur, Darrang, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar. But on some specific occasions and public gatherings called by the Bodo organization, they wear Bodo dress like *Dokhona* and *aronai*.

The Bodos have varieties of dances performed in the *Kherai* worship and different festival. Due to acceptance of Neo-Vaishnavism, the Bodos discarded these dances and accepted the Assamese dances. Like neo-vaishnavism, the follower of Christianity discarded their traditional dances and music. In this connection I interviewed Umananda Boro, "Due to acceptance of Sankari culture we lost our ancestors religion, culture and even identity. In fact, we are very unfortunate for this, as a result, we don't know how to play and perform our traditional dance and music. It is certainly true that the previous generations are responsible for this. Understanding and maintaining the culture of our society now, we started learning our ancient music, dance and reviving our traditional *Bathou* religion."¹⁹

The Bodos have their own traditional musical instruments like *Kham* (big drum), *Siphung* (flute with five hole) and *Zotha* (Cymbol). On the advice of Kalicharan, one day the workers of Brahma religious movement burnt down the musical instruments which form part of the *Bathou* worship. According to Kalicharan Brahma, God cannot be pleased and invoked with the help of the musical instruments; religion is a spiritual and mental state of affairs. We don't need such kinds of musical instruments to pray the God. Like neo-vaishnavism and Brahma religion, Christianity has strong hold among the Bodo people. After conversion they also discarded their traditional musical instruments in their society. Understanding and maintaining the culture and identity of their society now, the Bodos irrespective of their religion, caste, sex, have started learning their ancient music, dance. Now it is seen that these they have started using these traditional instruments.

Generally the common surnames of the Bodos are Swargiyari, Bwisumuthiary, Narzary, Khakhlary, Borgayari, Mahilary, Sumframary, Mochahary etc. But the Bodos gave up their surname under the impact of Hinduism. There were some reasons behind changing their surname. One of the reasons was the conversion to Hindu religions and another was the titles

¹⁸ . F.Barmahalia, *Impact of Neo-Vaishnavism on the Bodo Society: A Study in the Sonitpur District*,

¹⁹ Infromant:Umananda Boro,M.57,Thelamara

offered by Ahom king. During the reign of Ahom rules for the convenience to rule the country, they distributed some areas to the local people of different caste tribes, e.g. they offered 100 families for *Saikia*, one thousand families for *Hazarika* etc. Like the other castes and tribes the Bodo people also got this opportunity and accepted these posts offered by the Ahom king. Later on they changed their surname and their next generation also accepted these as their surname and became identified as Bora, Saikia, Hazarika, Tamuli, Das etc.

Another reason was the lure of job opportunities the Bodo people had to take Assamese surname to get the government job in Assam. This, in the same way of other helped the formation of greater Assamese society by bringing to one fold all the tribes or non tribes of Assam. But it is seen mostly in case of the tribes and the ethnic groups including the Kacharis. Hence it started the process of de-tribalisation. But it was not acceptable for some conscious section the Bodo people. They thought that those processes and techniques were initiated by the government itself and the local Assamese people were not logical and negligible." ²⁰

On the other hand it is also seen among the Bodos specially the followers of Brahma religion launched by Kalicharan Mech, that they also started taking and using Brahma as surname discarding his traditional Bodo surname. Consequently, the next follower of Brahma religion also accepted Brahma as the surname without any hesitation. For example, Bipul Brahma, Keshab Brahma, Jwngsar Brahma etc.; but some sections of the follower of Brahma religion used their traditional surname since the beginning. Now, it is seen that the new generation of Brahma religion have also started taking their traditional surname.

Let see the present surnames of the Bodos:

Traditional surnames	Accepted surnames
Swargiyari, Basumatari, Daimari, Gayari, Khakhlari, Sumframari, Machahari, etc	Brahma, Saikia, Hazarika, Mahalia, Deka, Chamua, Das Saraniya, Rabha etc.

Needless to say that the Sonowal, the Thengal, the Saraniya are one of the groups of the Boods. 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.²¹ Consequently, a tribe caste continuum was formed. The Saraniyas are the initiated Vaishnavite who were Bodos out and out. Thus, the Bodos were incorporated to the cultural core of Assamese nationalism. It is very unfortunate that the Saraniya could not attain Koch status due to ethnic movement launched by the tribal leaders in Assam. But they lost their language, culture and tradition. Now, they are trying to establish as separate community. Recently, the Saraniya Kachari Students Union urged their people to write

²⁰. Informant: Keshab Saikia Daimari, 62, Dhekiajuli.

²¹. Barmahalia, F. *Impact of Neo-Vaishnavism on the Bodo Society: A Study in the Sonitpur District*, p-12

their surname as Saraniya discarding their Hindu surnames. The Koch Rajbanshi Students Union also has urged their people to write their surname as Rajbanshi. Due to conversion of Hindu religion; they had to lose their language, culture, tradition as well as identity and became Hindu and identified themselves a part of Assamese. Now, they have started to identify themselves and demanded to get Schedule Tribes status as well as separate state namely *Kamatapur*. Even they have urged to take their traditional tribal food. Another example is re-drinking rice beer in the Thengal Kachari community. Though the custom of making rice beer was completely obsolete in the Thengal community due to conversion of neo-vaishnavism, now the Thengal Kachari also have started drinking rice beer publicly in the *Tara Chira Bihu* only for the invitation of the leaders of the Thengal Kachari Autonomous last two years. Like the The Ahom, Marans of Assam also has started reviving their folklore materials. Earlier they identified themselves as Hindus, but now they have said that they are not Hindus, they are Buddhist. Their revivalism is seen in the marriage ceremony, death ceremony, *medam mephi* and so on.

CONCLUSION

Last four years the Bodo groups formed the Bodo National Convention. It has been trying to mobilize their mottos with a view to bring as well as unite all the Bodo groups living in different parts of world. By organizing various cultural programme, workshop, conference the organization tries to unite all the Bodo groups of the world on a socio-cultural and political arena. Considering the importance of unity, solidarity and survival the Sonowal Kachari Autonomous council has invited the Bodo scholars and politicians to discuss the process of learning as well as studying Bodo language. It can be said that the great achievement of this convention is far reaching. Though the use of folklore items for strengthening ethnic unity and identity is a political motto it is the backbone of the society. Without folklore no one can identify themselves as a distinct community. Folklore as the marker of identity can play a great role to unite people and to strengthen the bond of unity and solidarity.

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