CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction:

The community with a narrow cultural identity may suffer in the socio-cultural relationship with other community. The inevitable role of folklore cannot be neglected in the identity movement of a group. Folklore is the way of living of a community. It is a method to know a group’s history and background of the people. It reflects cultural unity and integration among the people through different folklore materials. In modern days, every community is trying to save their collective identity. The language, cultural behaviour, tradition, and folklore are the important vehicle of the identity of an ethnic group. These common behaviours mark them as integrated people. For the better fulfillment of civilization, improved socio-cultural and socio-economic life is an important aspect.

North-East India is regarded as traditional homeland of the Indo-Mongoloid population of India. The people of Assam are the result of acculturation, assimilation, and synthesis among the different groups of people came to Assam at different times. According to the book "People of Assam" by B.M. Das, the people of Assam can be divided into two divisions, one is tribal and the other one non-tribal. The process of interaction between the Aryans and Non-Aryans and between the tribal and non-tribal is being carried on in Assamese society.

Assam is mini India. It is situated in the extreme northeastern part of India and lies between 24.8/ N latitude and 87.42/ E and 96.E longitude. It is bounded by
the Arunachal Pradesh in the North and Nagaland in the North-East and Manipur in the East and by the states of Mizoram and Tripura in the South East, Meghalaya in the South, and West Bengal in the west. It has international boundaries with Bangladesh in the South East and South West and Bhutan in the North and North East. The state has Goalpara in the lower Brahmaputra valley and Cachar in the Barak valley. The entire North East region is connected with the rest of India by a thick corridor leading from Dhubri and Kokrajhar district of Assam.

Assam covers 78,438 square kilometer of India which is 2.4 percent of the total geographical area of India. The state includes two major river systems of the Brahmaputra and the Barak valley of the Meghna systems. In other words, there are two distinct natural regions viz, the plain area of the Brahmaputra and the Barak valley comprising of twenty-one districts. The district in the plain area is Dhubri, Bongaigaon, Kokrajhar, Goalpara, Nalbari, Barpeta, Kamrupa, Darrang, Sonitpur, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Sivasagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Nagaon, Morigaon, Karimganj, Hailakandi and Cachar, and the hill areas consisting of two autonomous districts. The two hill districts of Karbianglong and North Cachar hills cover an area of 15,200 square kilometers and account for about a fifth of the land area of the state. (Gopalkrishnan: 2000: 2) The state has a population of 31,205,576 persons according to 2011 census. The names of the newly formed districts of Assam are Karbi Anglong West, Karbi Anglong East, Kamrup Metro, Chirang, South Salmara-Mankachar, Charaideo, Biswanath, Majuli, Hojai, Dima Hassao, Udalguri are newly formed districts of Assam.

Until 1962, the entire North East India was known as Assam. Now it is divided into seven states. Until the year 1962, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Mizoram
were districts of Assam. Nagaland was declared as a separate state in 1963, Meghalaya in 1972 and Mizoram as a union territory in 1972 and became a state in 1987 and Arunachal Pradesh in 1987 and Manipura and Tripura in 1972. The Assamese people live in Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland and some parts of Manipur, Tripura and West Bengal (Sen: 1999: 16). Dr. Banikanta Kakati in his book “Assamese: Its formation and development” (1995: 5-6) wrote that Hiuen Ts’ang visited the country in 643 A.D. and the western boundary of Ka-mo-lu-p’o (Kamarupa) was the river Karatoya in North Bengal. The pilgrim crossed a large river and came to Ka-mo-lu-p’o. According to the authority of Sanskrit Kalikapurana (supposedly of the 10th century) and of Yogini Tantra (supposedly of the 16th century) – both mainly devoted to geographical accounts of the land and the name of the region. The east of the river Karatoya in North Bengal to the river Dikkara (Dikrai) in Eastern Assam was Kamarupa and its permanent western boundary had been the river Karatoya since the times of Narakasura and Bhagadatta of Kurukshetra fame. Regarding the practicing language of the kingdom, Hiuen Ts’ang explained that the practiced speech was slightly diverse from Middle India of that period. He stated that the earliest Assamese books were written under the patronage of the kings of Kamatapur that was outside the western limit of modern Assam. (Kakati: 1995: 5-6)

Culture includes every aspect of life. Every person learns to relate to the society through his or her own culture. With the knowledge of the past, the person can imagine future possibilities. Man’s Cultural experience take him/her to a level at which he or she attains unity with the society and the world, and one can feel that he or she is not alone and is protected. Assam is the homeland of several tribes.
According to 2001 census, 12.42% of the total population was tribal. The decadal growth rate of Assam is 16.93 and in India, it is 17.64. The growth rate was high in the last century than the national growth rate. It may be due to the migration of people from the neighbouring countries of Assam. Assam includes 2.2% of the total population of India.

1.1 Population structure of Assam:

For understanding the miscellaneous population structure of Assam, we need to focus on languages and religions of Assam. According to 2001 census, the distribution of population by scheduled languages in Assam was like this - (Census, 2001)- Assamese (1,30,10,478), Bengali (73,43,338), Hindi (15,69,662), Bodo (12,96,162), Nepali (5,64,790), Santali (2,42,886), Oriya (2,31,474), Manipuri (1,54,059), Others (1,00,082) and All Total (Assam) 2,45,12,931.

According to Population Census 2001, Religion-wise distribution reveals that out of total population in the State 64.89 percent were Hindus, 30.92 percent were Muslims, 3.70 percent were Christians, 0.08 percent were Sikhs, 0.19 percent were Buddhists, 0.09 percent were Jains, 0.09 percent were from other religions and persuasions and 0.04 percent did not state religion. (Economic Survey Chapter-2 POPULATION, planassam.info/...Assam_2010.../Economic%20Survey_Chapter-POPULATION.pdf)

1.2 Boundary mechanism of Sarania Kachari Community:

The tribal and Assamese culture does not have a fixed boundary obviously. This composition of culture can be seen in language as well. Sometimes great tradition in Assamese culture has grabbed the little tradition that is the tribal culture
in respect of religious thinking, marriage rituals, and birth rituals. The tribal languages have borrowed various Assamese words in the day-to-day life experiences. People from the different corner of the world came and settled with the local tribal people. The Assamese language acted as a prominent factor integrating the culture united. The process of settling down in the region was not peaceful for every time. A tendency of assimilating in Hinduism was in past as well. The caste system was not rigid here. The Brahmin never employed tribal people in ploughing but engaged in physical works, which was against Indian caste system. The social relationship of tribal people with the other caste people was easy due to the conversion of Hinduism that was going on all the time. Now, it is interesting to note that a medieval work Yogini Tantra clearly says that one needs to eat in this land the meat of the duck, the pigeon, the tortoise and the pig. Moreover, if one does not have to suffer from calamities. Even Vaishnavas take fish and meat (not pork) in this land. This liberalism towards life drew the tribal into the Hindu fold. (Goswami: 1983: 166)

In Sankardeva’s Vaishnavism, there was no discrimination between the castes in the field of devotion. The relaxation regarding caste system was a very important factor in case of assimilation. A Sudra Guru led the people belonging Brahmin caste. Lower caste people were allowed into the Namghor along with members of the other caste. A Naga person from Arunachal called Narottama was an important Vaishnava devotee. Assam Vaishnavism insisted only one God and caste liberalism. Body cleanliness of the Assamese is also the result of the teaching of Vaishnavism.

In the medieval period, Assam had two important ruling kingdoms to the West and to the East. The western kingdom situated in Koch Bihar who patronized the Vaishnava preachers and their cultural deeds. Ahom who ruled for six hundred
years established the eastern kingdom. By getting attracted to Hinduism, the Ahom became Hindu and later came to patronize either the \textit{Vaishnava} or the \textit{Sakta} faith. Prafulla Dutta Goswami commented on assimilation process of Assam that the Hinduism in Assam is a compromise between pure Aryan customs and rites and local Mongoloid practices. Respect for all kinds of work without any fear of losing caste, love for weaving and for colourfull dresses, the durable \textit{Endi} and \textit{Muga} (gold-coloured) silks, special dishes like alkaline, preparation of vegetables and fish and meat cooked with bamboo shoot are some of the local contributions of Assam that should be appreciated in other parts of the country.

One does not underestimate others by considering their caste, which is absolutely against the humanity. Sankardev started to form a society by ignoring the caste status of the people and their economic status. He considered injecting the civilized, sanskritised behavior amongst public. The public accepted these wholeheartedly as the religion was too simple and economical in respect of offerings or maintenance of rites. The important function of culture is to unite the people, not to split them. Ethnic identity movements of North East India for seeking separate state or seeking scheduled tribe status by a completely assimilated group are a weapon of being politically sound.

In “\textit{Sankardev and his times}”, Maheswar Neog has written about Sankardev’s Vaishnavism the non-Hindu population of the country found an attractive portal into Hinduism and through that they entered into a cleaned and disciplined way of individual and social life. The old ways of uncleaned food, clothing, and general behavior were replaced by cleanliness and decency. The Mlechas were no longer Mlechas, after their conversion; they were to be counted only as members of a holly
The allegations against the Sankardev was community dining and sanctimoniousness in dining in which Kaivarta, Koch, Kalita, Brahman and others gathered and dined together. Folklore inspires a nation’s soul both mentally and emotionally (Goswami: 1983: 370). Culture carries the soul of a nation. One Language, nation or culture cannot evolve from a particular point of time. The formation of a language, nation or culture is a continuous process, which flows with the time. The analysis and discussions belong to a particular point of time, which we aim to discuss. When Sukapha entered this land, it was not Assam. There were some small kingdoms occupying small areas at that time. There was no concept of being one. During six hundred years of Ahom’s rule, Ahom defeated these small kingdoms of Kachari, Tiwa, and Karbi and they covered the land.

Sukaphaa, Sankardeva, Lachit Borphukan, Ajan pir, Chilarai all unconsciously contributed to the formation of greater Assamese culture. They were just doing their duty for the development of the public by mentally, physically, socially and politically. Nobody should neglect one’s culture and community. Everybody should try to know each other’s social situation, culture and should respect each other. No culture is high or low, great or values less. Every culture has its own meaning, own respect. The cultures are game of time, which evolved and changed. Each stage has its own importance in the history or in the future.

1.3 Subject and people of the research:

From the long past, different communities and ethnic groups has been living in the Brahmaputra valley and the hills surrounding it. Ethnic groups brought their
own culture and language. Most of these are in a modified form. The liberal reforms of Sankardev and Madhavdev attracted many ethnic groups to adopt the Assamese language and the Hindu religion. Assam is the land of different ethnic communities. The formation of Assamese community is possible with the contribution of these different ethnic groups, caste Hindus and Muslims and different other races coming to the Assam at various times. Shankardev created the Assamese culture with the elements of different ethnic communities of Assam.

Srimanta Shankardev created the composite culture with ingredients from all ethnic groups within the geographical boundary of the Brahmaputra Valley. His most important innovatory contribution, the Kirtonghor or Namghar was derived from the Murung ghar of the Mishing tribe, with the former being as multi-faceted as the later.

Satra is a place where people from different ethnic groups or religion, caste come and pray God together. Shankardev appointed some non-Brahmins as head of the Satra. Shankardev understands the value of the equality in the society. He established Satra as a commonplace of worshipping God without considering caste, creed, and religion.

The present study is an attempt to understand about the Sarania Kachari; how they became Sarania by the influence of Sankardev and Hinduism in a different point of time. The role of Shankardev in bringing the different people of Assam into the same platform was a historical phenomenon in conceptualizing the Assamese identity. The importance of Shankardev and his thoughts will be valuable and incredible, in present-day multilingual, multicultural and multi-ethnic context.
It was an innovative process started by Sankardev in order to make gradual assimilation of tribal into the Hindu Sanskritized people. They propagated the massages of Vaishnavism from East and west throughout the Assam and asked the people to accept "Eka Saran Nam Dharma." based on love, devotion, justice, equality, brotherhood, tolerance, and love. The different communities of Assam such as Bodo, Kacharis, Rabhas, Garo, Meches, Lalung, Miri, Sonowal came and approached the masters and they converted into large numbers of "Vaishnavism". It means Saranias came from Bodo, Kacharis, Rabhas, Garos, meches, Lalung, Miris etc. There is another aspect of being Sarania. It is the influence of Hinduism. Some tribal people took Saran under the Lord Vishnu with the help of a Brahmin. They were Kachari, Rabha, Bodo, Karbi (Mikir), Tiwa (Lalung), Mishing (Miri).

In Yoginitantra about the religion of Kamrupa is written like these: The religion of Kamrup was Kirat. There is no rule for Sanyas (relinquishing family life) or long fast in Kamrup. There was no need to give up Non-Veg and no rule for Brahmacharya. It was not a crime to keep physical relation during the periodical time of women. Women chew betel nut; therefore, their teeth were not white. (Deka: 2011: 142). Duck, pigeons, tortoise, swine all were eatable here. Forsaking these things created difficulty. Possibly many people did not like these religious rules, but could not give up due to fear of religion. So, many Mongolian kings gave up kirata religion and became Sarania. But the term Sarania was not evolved at that time.

1.4 Objectives:

The present study is an attempt to understand the role of folklore in the identity movement of Sarania Kachari community of Nalbari and Baksa District of
Assam. In this study, the importance of folklore in their identity movement is projected. This research focuses on their acculturation and assimilation process in Assamese society. The main objectives of this study are-

- To study the origin and growth of Sarania Kachari community in Assam.
- To describe the folklore and folklife of Sarania Kachari community. This point consists of the social folk custom and performing arts and some parts of verbal and material culture for revealing their identity through folklore.
- The researcher aims to find out the reasons for taking Saran and reasons of starting identity movement.
- To study the process of acculturation and assimilation of Sarania Kachari community in Assam.
- To observe the techniques of using folklore material in their identity movement.

The pattern of in-group feeling is the hallmark of a group. This in-group feeling establishes common social traits and aspirations. The community people express some interconnectedness in search of common social goals and aspiration. The harmony of the local people is expressed through community activities like community fishing, community feasts, and festivals. The local ethnic groups of Assam are characterized by homogeneous culture and some ethnic groups are assimilated with Hindu Assamese people in such a manner that they cannot be separated. It becomes difficult to decide whether the group identity is positive in-group feeling or it is an expression of negative identity building against other groups that a feeling of being discriminated from the mainstream Hindu Assamese people.
Ethnicity remains an important source behind the identity-seeking movements in Assam among the groups, even for them also who demand themselves as indigenous inhabitants of Assam and even for them also who have considered to have been assimilated into the mainstream Assamese culture. Certain selective cultural traits act as symbolic ethnic identity. Cultural features such as language, food, music or other provide in the group feeling towards an ethnic group and ethnic identity. A group shows their common features to another group. The culture of Assam is composite one. The folkloristic cultural traits are considered very important for symbolic expression of ethnic identity.

1.5 Traditional life:

A Celebration of the traditional festival is one of the special characteristics of every ethnic group. The Sarania Kachari celebrates some important festivals throughout the year. The Sarania Kachari community celebrates Bah Goshai Utsav, Bambool Pita Utsav, and Kati Gacha etc. Traditional foods are always available at these festival times. During the celebration of Bah Goshai Utsav, they abstain from drinking and killing of animals. Sarania Kachari people are good cultivators and rice is the staple food. They eat meat, fish and usually have homemade drinking.

Such group often lies on some selective cultural traits which become a symbol of their ethnic identity. Language, food, religion, and music are examples of cultural features which they use as a symbol of cultural expression of the group and reveal their commonality with other members of the groups. Especially important amongst the cultural forms, the various elements of folklore or folk life including songs, crafts, food ways, holiday rituals and other traditions which symbolize and express ethnicity.
1.6 Review of Literature:

It is mentioned in the above that number of published work on Sarania Kachari is small. The researcher has studied books on the history of Assam and the ethnic communities lives in North East India and souvenirs of Sarania Kachari for a general idea on the community.

In the book “Sarania sakal kon jatir manuh” (Das: 1993), the writers included some comments of different people on Sarania Kachari community. They are criticizing Sarania Kachari people, as Sarania people want a separate identity. By supporting themselves they stated that a converted Hindu of Mishing community or Naga community, or from Khasi community, or from Chutia, or from Dimasa community do not become a non-Naga, or a non-Mishing, or a non-Khasi, or a non-Chutiya, or a non-Dimasa. This happens in only in districts such as Darrang, Kamrup and Goalpara of Assam. When a Bodo or a Rabha or a Kachari takes Hindu religion first he will be Sarania, the second stage is Saru Koch and after that Koch. (1993: 13)

The book “Sarania Kacharir Bibah Padhati” (The system of Sarania Kachari marriage) (2015) is about the system of marriage and the local rituals practiced by Sarania Kachari. The writer belongs to the same community. His descriptions are based on local practice.

One book is “Sarania Kacharir Somaj aru Sanskriti” (2002) by Sri Nalini Deka. This emotional book covers the distinctive characteristics of Sarania Kachari in respect of its social and cultural life. This book describes the origin of the Sarania Kachari community from the author’s point of view and political movement in the past and present. He is a Sarania.

Another book is “Society and culture of Bodo-Kachari” (1985) by Bhaben
Narji. Bhaben Narji in his book describes about the social and cultural life of Bodo-Kachari and about the conversion of Bodo people into Hindu fold. This book is the result of field study.

Another book “Bambol Pita Git” by Sonbor Baruah (2011) is a collection of Bambol Pita folk song. He is a Sarania person and he collected these songs from different villages, which are continuing from generations. These songs are performed with Bambol Pita folk dance.

Babu Rabha Hakacham’s “Sarania Kachari Sanskriti and Lok Shahitya” (2013) is the compilation of folk culture, literature and oral hymns in circulation. It comprises the birth rituals, puberty rituals, marriage rituals, religious beliefs, agricultural rituals, folk dances, death rituals, and hymns. It is very helpful for a researcher to have a view of the folklore.

The book “Sarania Kachari Jonogosthir Ruprekha” (A Description of Sarania Kachari Community) (2012) is a composition of the different article on Sarania Kachari people. The Sarania Kachari Development council published this book with an aim to establish their culture in front of others and so that readers can understand the culture and the history of Sarania Kachari after reading this book. As the numbers of publication about Sarania Kachari community were very few and very limited books were published about Sarania Kachari community, so to fill the gap of written literature, it was an important step. Different souvenirs published by All Assam Sarania Kachari Student Union, Sarania Kachari Development Council were analyzed for this research. Paresh Chandra Sharma writes in the book “Sarania Kachari Jonogosthir Ruprekha” how these Sarania Kachari people became Sarania Kachari in his article
“Sarania Kachari: Oitihahik Potbhumit ek Alochona” (Sarania Kachari: discussion in historical context).

Sidney Endle’s “The Kacharies” (1975) is an ethnographic description of Kachari tribe from an evangelist point of view. He narrated about origins of Kachari races, domestic and social life, their culture, their way of life, religion, marriage life and other rites of passages, folklore, tradition and superstition and on their mother tongue.

“Kachari Buranji” (2010) edited by Dr. S. K. Bhuyan is another precious work on Kachari tribe. This edited book is based on an old Assamese manuscript chronicle deals with Ahom – Kachari relations from the end of the fourteenth century to the beginning of the eighteenth. The writer compiled in the book about Sadial Kachari, Herembial Kachari, Swargadeus of Ahom Kingdom, the war between Ahom and the Kachari Kings. Kachari Buranji gives an account of the settlements of Kacharies and their consequences of that time and the relations of Ahom kings with other states.

“Darranga Rajbanshabali” (Sharma: 1973) is a historical account written by Poet Baldeva Suryakhari Daivagya. Darranga Rajbanshabali is an account of different Kachari kings ruling arena and different customs, cultures, political, economic, geographical and religious activities of that time Assam. The evaluation of the Koch Kingdom and their prosperity and their quarrel with Ahom Kings, their marriage relations with other states are described in this book.

Sir Edward Gait in his book “History of Assam” (2008) gives an account of history of Assam and the people of this land. The Kacharis are described as aboriginal
inhabitant of Brahmaputra valley (2008: 299). The book is about the old social
structure of Assam, how the kings were attracted to the Hinduism by collapsing their
age-old beliefs. The Hindu priests influenced the non-Aryan chiefs for adopting
Hinduism. This book is the historical account of the social and economic condition,
literature, religion, fine arts of the period from the 4th to the 12th centuries and about
the events of 13th to 15th centuries. The researcher took this book for analyzing the
process of being Hindu in respect of Sarania Kacharis.

can be called an encyclopedia on the folklore of northeast India. Here, the writers
mentioned that “At present, the bulk of the indigenous population is made up of
Assamese Hindus among whom the Indo-Mongloid or Kirata element 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 acculturation, integration and assimilation vis-à-vis the
Assamese Hindoo society- live in the hills and plains, the chief among them being
the Karbies, the Dimasa-Kacharies, the Zemi Nagas and the Kukis in the hills, and
the Bodo-Kacharis, the Mishings, the Rabhas, the Tiwas (Lalungs) and the Deuris in
the plains. Although Saivism and Saktism (and also Tantrism) have had strong roots
here, neo-Vaishnavism with a wonderful spirit of liberalization and synthesis was
ushered in under the unique leadership of Sankardeva (1449-1568) and its influence
on the population has since been both pervasive and abiding”. (1994: 3-5)

In the book “Sankardeva and his Times Early history of the Vaishnava faith
and Movement in Assam” (1965), Maheswar Neog stated about the difficulties and
consequences of Sankardeva’s life and his contribution to every aspect of society.
His contribution towards the establishment of equality in society and reformation of society is still valid.

M.S. Dorson’s “Folklore and folklife” is the dictionary about folklore; this compilation is helpful for maintaining the relationship between folklore and identity. Both identity and folklore evolved from the core of the community. Both are carrying both.

Alan Dundes’s “The Study of Folklore” (1965) includes the article ‘who are the folk’, which the researcher accept as the modern definition of folk for this study. The researcher has taken this book for analyzing the basic concepts of folklore. Alan Dundes offers the modern definition of folklore. The researcher has taken some article from this book for analyzing the relation between identity and folklore. Those articles are William R. Bascom’s Folklore and Anthropology (Dundes: 1965: 25) and Four Functions of Folklore (Ibid: 279). William Bascom’s “Four functions of folklore” make easy to understand the functions of folklore and it shows the relevance of folklore in the present society.

In Don-Ban-Amos’s “Folklore in Context Essays” (1982), he tried to describe folk from a different point of view from traditional and modern. He described how a peasant society carrying the heritage of a community as it belongs to the land and primitive work which is based on belief. The researcher is trying to analyzing the traditional as well as the modern concept of folklore with the help of this book. As one of the main reasons of studying folktales, by Grimm brothers was to make their nationality strong. So influenced of nationalism is one of the most important factor in case of development of folklore studies. Behind the folklore study, nationalism was always there.
In the book “Living Folklore”, writer deals with different words and their meanings associated with folklore and practical behavior of folklore. Moreover, for interpreting folklore, the writer analyzed different theories relevant to folklore. Students of folklore can have an overview of different theories of folklore and they can understand the way of relating the theories in the field. Folklorists go to the field for studying different folkloric elements. This book can be used as a handbook for collecting ideas.

“Folklore the Pulse of the People” (Islam: 1985) is an account of definition and scope of folklore. The writer describes the changes in folkloric tradition in practical. The study of folklore needs efforts for establishing it with other disciplines. The book is about the limitation of folklore, its relation with other fields and problems associated with it and implementation of theories in Indian folklore. The relation between folklore and society is positive whether it is used positively as it is an active agent of social change.

The researcher includes the four types of folklore mentioned by R.M. Dorson in his book “Folklore and Folklife”. The student and scholars of folklore always use this book “Folklore and folk life” (1972) as a dictionary of folklore. It helps to understand the meaning and practices of folk performances. The various writers define the various fields of oral folklore, social folk customs, material culture and folk arts so that student can understand easily. It covers the methods of collecting data; it shows how the methods are different in respect of different folkloric field and preservation of folklore through archiving and printing also included here. The book depicts how the interest and enthusiastic nature of a folklorist help to collect proper data.
In the book, “A Guide for Field Workers in Folklore” (1964), writer Kenneth S. Goldstein discusses different methods and tools used for collecting folklore material from the field which is very helpful for a beginner in the research area. He discusses here the role of collector, kinds of folklore data, time, searching for literature on the topic for the detailed investigation.

For analyzing the study on Sarania Kachari community researcher took two articles from the book "Interpreting Folklore" by Alan Dundes (1980). One is "Who are the Folk" and another one is "Texture, Text, and Context". The modern definition of folk is widely accepted given in the first one. In the second article, he has written for having a clear concept about a folk element first the folklorist think about the texture, text, and context. He defines that all folklore cannot be orally transmitted. A folk genre should be described in terms of these concepts. It is difficult to translate a genre of folk literature in one to another language because of textural differences. However, the text may be translated, as it is independent of Texture.

In the book “Ethnic life worlds in North-East India” (2008), writers give a concept to understand the communities of North East India and their identity struggles. For this study researcher took four chapters from this book for understanding the identity politics in North East India. Those are “Reconceptualizing an ethnic life world”, “Return of the native”, “Nations from below”, and “Rethinking India’s North East”. In this book, the writer is showing how small identities are evolved in North Eastern part of India and their revolution against the system. This book helps in analyzing the situation of Assam from the time of Indian National Movement to present. The various incidences regarding Assamese identity, student movement, Boro Autonomy movements are widely discussed.
In Nandana Dutta’s book “Questions of identity in Assam” (2012), the circumstances of ethnic identity movements are analyzed from the researcher point of view. The researcher has taken this book for analyzing the ethnic appraisals of North Eastern part of India and ethnic struggles of assimilated community like Sarania Kachari, Sonowal Kachari, Ahom, and Koch Rajbongshi.

The book “Ethnicity and Nationalism” (Eriksen: 2010) is helpful for understanding about ethnicity and nationalism arising in all around the world. The researcher took the concept of us and them in respect of explaining Sarania Kachari with other communities, the political use of cultural symbols and the creation of an ancestral identity for establishing Sarania identity. The concept of minority and majority can be applicable in everywhere. And the problems of immigrants minorities is a significant problem of ethnic arising in Assam. The writings on the theory of plural societies, ethnicity and hierarchy, struggles over cultural identity and social integration, the problems of identity and boundary help the researcher for finding the solution of the problems identity struggle of Sarania Kachari community.

Benedict Anderson’s (2006) book “Imagined Communities” is the description about imagining the ethnic boundary which is applicable in case of Sarania Kachari and other tribal communities of Assam.

The “Durable disorder” (Baruah: 2013) is the description about the political and ethnic struggle of North East Indian people. The struggle they are facing since Indian Independence and ethnic appraisals are designed here.

In the book “Ethnic groups and boundaries” (Barth: 1998) writers are trying to evaluate the terms and conditions of ethnicity its causes of occurrence and its
boundaries. The cultural diversities and in ethnic boundaries are the causes of occurring ethnic identities struggle. The problems of articulation and maintenance of ethnic diversity frames the circulations of the society. In Friedrich Barth’s book, the detailing circumstances of an ethnic community help the researcher to find out the solution to the problems of Sarania Kachari community. These two books define the ethnicity and identity of which is an asset to clear the concept.

The historical books about Assam history help the study by throwing light on the possibilities of Sarania Kacharies history. In some books, the name Sarania is found. The researcher tried to analyze some historical books about the history of Assam; these books are defining Sarania community as follows-

Kanaklal Barua Bahadur writes about Sarania Kachari in his book “Early History of Kamrupa” as follows

A word is necessary with regard to the theory of Babu Nagendra Nath that the kocbes of Kamrupa are the descendants of the Vedic Panis who were identical with the Phoenicians of old. Mr. Basu comes to the conclusion that the Koch is descended from the Vedic pani and was driven into eastern India by the Aryans. It is true that as stated by Mr. Basu, the Vedic Panis were a seafaring people and traders by occupation, but whereas the word pani is derived from pana, the word Pani in Pani Koch has nothing to do with pana. The “Pani Koch” literary meaning water Koch evidently refers to the class of Koches who are considered clean enough to carry water for the high caste Hindus. Even to this day, the process of Hinduization is going on. A Kachari animist as soon as he becomes a disciple of a Vaisnava Gossain, is called a Sarania Kachari or a Kachari initiated to the “eka sarania dharma” of the Vaisnava Gossain. His descendants in the seconds or third generation having eschewed pork and wine for two or three generations, are raised to the status of kocbes and are considered clean enough to carry water for Brahmans. (Baruah: 2009: 37)

Edward Gait puts his remarks about Hinduism in “History of Assam” (2013) as follows
The process of Hinduization had, probably, already commenced at Maibong, at least among the royal family and the act of conversion took place; the Raja Krishna Chandra, and his brother, Govind Chandra, entered the body of a Copper effigy of a cow. On emerging from it, they were proclaimed to be Hindus of the Kshatriya caste, and a genealogy of a hundred generations, reaching to Bhim, the hero of the Mahabharat, was composed for them by the Brahmans. (2013: 309)

W.W. Hunter (1879) in his book “A Statistical Account of Assam” mentioned about Sarania Kachari community as follows

Ethnical division of the people – Kamrup district as might be expected to form its comprising the ancient religious capital of Guwahati, contains a large Hindu population of the good cast than any other district of Assam. More than one half of the total number both of Brahmans and of Kalitas in the entire province are to be found in the single district; Sunrise again, and Vaishnavas are exceptionally numerous. The Mohammedans also in number more than in any other district except Goalpara. Among semi Hinduized aborigines, the Koch, the Chandalls, and the Doms; and among the aboriginal tribes the cacharis, the Rabhas, the Saranias and the Mikiris are the more conspicuous. The Saranias indeed, are almost entirely confined to this district. (1879: .29)

The writer included “Sarania” word in the list of aborigine in page no. 30, section B in this book “A Statistical Account of Assam”.

Satish Chandra Das, in his article “Social, cultural, economic and educational plight of Sarania Kachari’s” in the souvenir of 11th Biennial Conference of All Assam Sarania Kachari Students Union stated that

The various tribal communities, such as, Bodo-Kachari, Rabhas, Garos, Meches, Lalungs, and Miris and Sonowal came and approached the Masters (Garus) they are converted into large numbers of Vaishnavism: Saranias were among them. Sankardeva propagated his messages into the middle and eastern part of Assam and Madhavdev following his master preached messages at Barpeta, Western part and Northern part of the Kamrup District, particularly in Sripur deor with Barama as center towards later part of 15 (fifteen) and 16 (sixteen) centuries. Bhattadev directed Bhagavandev, his disciple to Govindapur, and Sripur Deor with Barama as center and indigenous tribal people were converted to vaishnavism as a part of Hinduism. (Mahaliya: 2009: 68)
In the book *The Assamese* (Cantlie: 1978), writer states about the Saran system as follows:

The terms applied to the converts in different districts vary. In most places, the first stage is that of the Sarania. Another name for an early stage of conversion is Madahi, in which, as the name implies, the converts still retain his old freedom in the matter of drinking and eating. Above the Madahi rank the Heremia, or Saru Koch, who have begun to submit to restrictions in this respect, and are supposed to abstain from intoxicating liquors. This subdivision is also called Phairi in Nowgong. At the top of the list stand the Kamtali or Bar Koch, who in outward appearance at least are ceremonially pure Hindus. They are generally supposed to conform entirely to Hindu precepts and to refrain alike from strong drinks and from eating pork and fowls. Whether this “purity” exists in fact as well as theory is doubtful. (Quoted in Cantlie: 1978: 242)

The method of conversion by the Gosains is described in some detail by the officiating Deputy Commissioner of Nowgong in respect of the Lalungs, Kacharies, and Mikirs of the district. The tribal people are frequently lectured upon the purity of the Hindu religion and the ease with which they can acquire salvation and a position in Hindu society if they give up their habits of eating pork and other forbidden foods and drinking strong liquor and confer to Hindu usages. When after some time they show some inclination to becoming Hindu, the Gosain gives them the option of simply taking saran and remaining free in their eating habits (this is the status of the sarania Koch) or of becoming perfect Hindus (Saru Koch). If they decide on complete conversion to Hinduism, they undergo *prayascitta* (atonement) at a cost of Rs 5 to 20 according to circumstance and receive *saran bhajan* from the Gosain. They are required to change all former utensils of cooking and eating and also their dwelling house. They are then admitted to Hindu society as Saru Koch and, provided they continue to abjure forbidden food and liquor, they become in the third generation ‘as good as any Hindu of the Koch caste. (Quoted in Cantlie: 1978: 242)
In the book “Bodo: Vaidic Bhashar Eta Agraja Bhasha” (Bodo: A premier language in Vedic civilization), the writer explains that the very first step to enter in Hindu religion is to give up forbidden food by Sashtra. After the step they came to known as Khena, now they are able to invite a Brahman for purifying him. After learning religious rules and regulations from Brahman one khena will upgrade to Sarania. one Sarania should maintain religious obstruction in order to get upgradation. the next step is Bor Koch or Jati Koch which is only one level down to kshatriya. For proceeding to kshatriya from Sarania they have to go through a procedure of cleanliness and skip some food. In Goalpara region, Sarania Kacharis are known as Pani Koch. (Brahma: 2015: 203-204)

In this book, the hierarchical order of caste in Assam is stated as follows-
Brahman- Kshatriya (Rajbanshi)- Bar Koch or Pani Koch- Saru Koch- Sarania- Khena (Ibid: 206)

From above paragraphs pointed out from various books can be summarized in one sentence that Sarania people took Saran at different point of time under a Ggosai for getting the position of Hindu people.

1.7 Methods and Methodology:

There are various methods of investigation and research in cultural and folklore research. The following primary and secondary tools and methods are used for the purpose of the study and data collection:

- Interview method.
- Structured Interview (used schedules), Unstructured Interview, Personal Interview, Group Interview.
Observation method (Participant and non-participant Observation method).

Conversation, discussion.

For secondary information books, articles and web materials and other secondary sources are evaluated.

The researcher collected materials about the history of Sarania Kachari community from the books related to the history of Assam and history of Assamese community. For evaluating the identity movement of Sarania, the present situation of North-east India including Assam is considered. Ethnic identity movements are common political events in Assam and their causes of occurrence are similar in most of the cases. In the present situation for living a healthy life or for consuming political opportunities as offered by Indian constitution, the communities are started to feel that ethnic identity movements are essential. There is very few study material on Sarania Kachari community. The awareness for writing books on their culture, on their history is a new phenomenon. As the researcher is a resident of Nalbari district, she has that opportunity to contact directly with them. For having a good knowledge about the community, the study was conducted by following participation observation method during festivals and ceremonial time.

Basic information is collected from the members of All Assam Sarania Kachari Student Union, Sarania Kachari Development Council, and All Assam Tribal Association. Information is collected through schedules, unstructured questionnaires and personal interview with the member of the All Assam Sarania Kachari student union, Sarania Kachari Development Council and people of Sarania Kachari community.
For analyzing the written literature about Sarania Kachari, Nalini Deka’s book “Sarania Kacharir Somaj aru Sanskriti” (2002), Babu Rabha Hakacham’s “Sarania Kachari Sanskriti and Lok Shahitya” (2013), “Bambol Pita Git” by Sonbor Baruah (2011), “Sarania Kachari Jonogosthir Ruprekha” (A Description about Sarania Kachari Community) (2012) have taken. These are the descriptions of religious, social and cultural life of Sarania Kachari Community in which folklore form a profound position. The lifestyle of Sarania Kachari is literally recorded here for express the culture to others.

The present study is based on field data. At the time of collecting data, emphasis was given on the cultural life of the Sarania Kachari people for firsthand knowledge of the subject. Active bearers are the very important sources of information in case of collecting data. For this study, active bearers of this community were interviewed. Library work has been done at different University library in Assam or outside of Assam and in other libraries.

The list of libraries:

i. Krishna Kanta Handique Library, Gauhati University
ii. Folklore Research Department Library, Gauhati University
iii. Indian Council of Historical Research, Gauhati University campus.
iv. Tartu University Central Library, Tartu, Estonia
v. Folklore Research Department Library, Tartu University, Tartu, Estonia
vi. Tezpur Central University Library, Tezpur
vii. Cultural Studies Departmental Library, Tezpur Central University, Tezpur.
viii. District Library, Nalbari, Assam.
In respect of the published work on the Sarania Kachari community, some books on that community and some souvenir which are published by All Assam Sarania Kachari Student Union and Sarania Kachari Development Council are studied.

1.8 Area of the study:

In Nalbari District and Baksa District there is a wide scope of studying Sarania Kachari community and their culture. Therefore, Nalbari and Baksa district has been taken as the main area of the research work. The Baksa district is situated on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra valley under Bodoland Territorial Council and lies in between 26.58 to 26.83.01 N latitude and 91.42.03 to 91.9708 E longitudes with a total area of 2400 square Kilo Meter. The population density of the district is 475 inhabitants per square Kilo Meter. Bodo, Rabha, Sarania, Madahi are the major tribes. According to 2011 census, the population of Baksa was 9, 50, 075.

Baksa district was a part of Nalbari district. In 2003, it was bifurcated from Nalbari District. Baksa district covers most of the population of Sarania Kachari community. The main areas of Sarania Kachari community in Baksa are Barama, Goreswar, Tamulpur, Kaljar, Borimakha, Muchalpur, Athiabari, Pub Depheli, Baganpara, Darangajuli, Jalah, Suwan Khata and Bhalukdanga. Baksa district has formed by taking some parts of Barpeta, Kamrup, Nalbari, Dhuburi, Bongaigaon, Kokrajhar and Darrang district. BTC was formed for protection to Boro inhibited area under six schedules of Indian constitution. The accord was signed between Assam government, Indian government and BTC. The aim of the accord was to develop Boro inhibited area. For administrative provision, BTC was subdivided into four districts. BTC was declared as autonomous council in 2003 under the provision of the Constitution of India. BTC was formed for confirming protection to Boro inhibited area.
under the Six schedule of Indian constitution. The accord was signed between Assam government, Indian government and BTC. The aim of the accord was to develop Boro inhibited area. For administrative provision, BTC was subdivided into four districts. Those are Baksa, Kokrajhar, Chirang and Odalguri. The major tribes are Bodos, Rabha, and Deuri. The district is sharing international border with Bhutan on the North, on the east Udalguri, on the south Barpeta and Nalbari and on the west, Chirang district are there. (www.joiaaiaxom.com>Assam)

The District of Nalbari attained sub-division status in 1967 and Nalbari attained district status on 14th August 1985. With the pace of time, the population has increased in Nalbari district. The different community and groups create the environment of Nalbari district. A number of different religious people such as Hindus, Muslim, Christians, Jain and Animistic are living together in Nalbari District in a peaceful manner. The distinct ethnic groups by their concentration in a particular locality have acquired particular characteristics, which become reflective through patterns of houses, types of construction, grouping of similar linguistic groups and neighbours. Almost 10,000 people of Sarania Kachari community are living in this district. The main areas of Sarania Kachari community in Nalbari are Siral, Piplibari, Akna, Mukalmuwa, Kaplabari, and Dhamdhama. According to 2011 census, the total population of Nalbari district was 7,69,919 and the population density of Nalbari in per square kilometre is 763 inhabitants. The surrounding of the district covered by Bhutan on the north, Kamrup (rural) on the east, Brahmaputra on the south and Barpeta on the west. (www.joiaaiaxom.com>Assam) The latitude of Nalbari is 26 degrees north and 27 degrees north and the longitude is 91 degrees east and 97 degrees east.
1.9 The scope of the study:

The researcher is interested in finding out the history of Sarania Kachari for having a better idea about Sarania Kachari. No academic research has taken place except Nilkanta Hazarika’s thesis “The Influence of Neovaishnavism on the Bodo-Kacharies of Kamrupa (With special reference to socio-cultural aspects)”(1990) under Dr. Maheswar Neog who concluded by stating that the people who are claiming to be Sarania Kachari and living in undivided Kamrup District were originally Bodo. The researcher was trying to find out the reason for taking Saran and the reason of starting identity movement.

The study material is limited to studying Sarania Kachari. The researcher has to take a view of Assam history for knowing about Sarania Kachari. The different tribes have taken saran at different point of time, as for the time limit the researcher has decided to conduct the study on Sarania Kachari living in Baksa and Nalbari.

The subject of taking saran can be discussed differently. The researcher has confined the study on the Sarania Kacharis who are living in Baksa and Nalbari District of lower Assam.

1.10 The limitations of the study:

Though lots of work have been undertaken in the different other communities of North-East India, no such serious study has been conducted on the Sarania Kachari community.

It is mentioned in the above that number of published work on Sarania Kachari is small. The researcher has studied books and souvenirs for a general idea of this community.
For knowing about the ethnic uprisings in Assam it is important to know about Assamese nationality formation and their feelings towards the tribal people. Sarania and Kachari are two different concepts. Sarania are those who take saran under higher authority for upgradation. And Kachari is an indomongoloid tribe. The Sarania concepts vary at different locations of Assam. The tribes like Sonowal, Karbi, Mishing, Dimasa, and Kachari all include some portion of Sarania who have taken saran under a Gosai. They identified themselves in the name of the same tribe in which they belong. The Sarania Kachari concepts are formed only in lower Assam districts like Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Nalbari, and Baksa.

The Sonowal Kachari people live in Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Dhemaji, Sivasagar and Jorhat districts. The short medium statured people belong to Bodo Group and have a close relationship with the Barmans of Cachar district, Boro, Cachar of lower Assam district and Dimachas of North Cachar Hills. They are known as Sonowal because they used to make gold ornaments during the time of Ahom kingdom. Far ago they accepted Hinduism by abandoning their age old habit. They took Saran under Hindu Brahmin and gave up having forbidden food. For this matter, they are known as Sarania. Like Sarania Kachari, they used to dress like Assamese Hindu and Hindu Sonowals used non-tribal titles like Hazarika, Saikia, and Bora etc. Now for saying about their own identity to others, they use only Sonowal titles. (Sen: 1999: 131) The status of Sonowal Kachari is also same as Sarania, but grievance of Sarania Kachari is that they are not getting schedule tribe status like Sonowal Kachari.

Like Sarania Kachari, Sonowal Kachari follow four types of marriage Nowa dhowa (Bor biya), Hom Diya (traditional Hindu marriage by an Brahmins priest), Gandharba (love marriage when people take the initiative without parents consents and
after three days, information have to sent to bride’s relatives), and Churchuriya bibah
(marriage by running away). Marriage cannot be held with the same clan. Most of the
Sonowal Kachari follows Mahapurusiya Vaishnav dharma and disciples of Auniati satra
and Checha satra. They are divided into Sarania and Bhajaniya. A Sonowal Kachari
above the age of sixteen are considered as Sarania and a Sonowal above the age of fifty
are considered as bhaktas and divided into different grades and senior most is called
Medhi. Like other Kachari they worship Shiva, Bathou, Bura poha, Sargadeo, Pir diya,
morak diya, Lakshmi Diya etc. They celebrate Janmashtami Tithis of Sankardeva and
Madhavdeva. Like other community, they also celebrate Rongali Bihu, Bhogali and
Kati Bihu and speak Assamese language. They cremate their dead bodies; do not bury

The Sarania concept vary at different locations of Assam. By the name, it is easy
to understand that they were originally Kachari. Different evidences prove and people
from outside the community comment that they were originally Bodo. The Bodos
defended against Assamese community by saying that they are culturally and
linguistically deprived. At least Bodo language should be an official language at Bodo
inhibited area. They were assimilated into Assamese community at that level that new
generations of Bodo have forgotten their own culture, which is obvious, not the fault of
Assamese community. Living with another culture and being influenced by them is a
natural act. After the formation of Bodoland Territorial Council area, Sarania people
also started feeling like this. If the Scheduled Tribe certificate was issued in the name of
Sarania then some of the Sarania inhibited place would be cut from the Bodoland
Territorial Council Area.
1.11 The accomplishment of the society through folklore:

In this study, the Sarania Kachari’s history and their question about identity is presented with due importance to folklore. The folk materials and celebrations are artifacts of self-representation just for showing differently, these accomplish the cultural and social norms by putting a mark in the society. These folklore artifacts grow from imaginary to symbolic when these perform as an ethnic identity. Discovery of such artificially crafted meaning for presenting the self-identity in the case of ethnic and tribal identities of the region often lead to politics of representation which is not purely proper and constitutional. In such hazardous situation like Assam, it is crafted against the dominant culture of the locality for using it as an instrument to establish the self against others. The imagination of performing differently from the dominant group in the society lies behind the concept of artificial folk songs or folk symbols. Identity making changes their attitudes towards others and themselves by changing, remaking and colouring the present and the past.

The dominant social group satisfies its political access and power at the cost of other social groups by playing a politics of marginalizing them and keeping them out of equal access to power and resources. As a result, the irritated social groups are frustrated and they feel marginalized and exclude from social, economic and political participation. In this context, such displeased groups scream for their specific rights in the form of ethnic struggle. They question the dominant distribution of power and resources as a result of negligence.
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