CHAPTER VI

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In the preceding chapters we have discussed psychoanalysis and its application in a few Assamese verbal tales. An attempt has been made in this research work to study the prose narratives of Assam and to analyze them from the viewpoint of Freudian psychoanalysis. We presume, as many psychologically oriented folklorists do, that by analyzing the narratives the inner aspect of the human psyche is revealed and as well as analyzed. We are guided by the theory of Alan Dundes, a Freudian folklorist, who postulated, "what is not said is more important than what is said". All human displeasure, it seems, is created from hunger only—the hunger of food and the hunger of sex. Both these aspects of human behaviour are equally important in developing human personality. But by looking at the matter from different perspectives, it has been seen that the hunger of sex has quite often dominated the human subconscious, which has resulted in different mental diseases in the human society. Many people suffer from this kind of hunger, which affects the psychology of such people and more often than not remains the unsaid aspect of the mind.

The first chapter serves as an Introduction to the present study, where the land and people of the study area, the topic of the study, the scope of the study, the methodology of research, the field work, the hypothesis proposed, the problems faced during the research, the objectives and significance of
the study and the work so far done in this area have been explained concisely.

In the second chapter, there is a general discussion of folklore and folklife where I have discussed how the common people of Assam suffer and how especially the women of Assam have been neglected and exploited by men's rank sexism and the State's callous and even inhuman bureaucracy.

In the third chapter the theoretical aspects of psychoanalysis have been briefly explained besides discussing the aims and objectives of psychoanalysis and expounding psychoanalysis as a method and as an interpretative art.

In the fourth chapter, there is a discussion of verbal art, different genres of verbal art, their classification, etc.

The fifth chapter has been divided into two parts. In the first part the collected tales from different sources have been discussed, and the second part is the analysis part, where four Assamese folk-tales collected from the written source have been analyzed from the Freudian psychoanalytical point of view.

Although some scholars hold that folk tales are a storehouse of amusement, some people believe that they embody moral values. Another view is they are just fanciful creations, and not in any way a realistic portrayal of day today life, and still another approach is that they encapsulate old social traditions. Now, all these views seem to be valid, though partially.

But the Freudian view in psychoanalysis is that folk-tales are based on the real life of society. Myths are a reflection of human miracles and the
tales are based on realities. With a systematic study of folk-tales, we can explore the afflictions of a society: the fire of heart and the fire of the stomach. The hunger of the stomach and the hunger of the heart are two wheels of the chariot of life through which the earthly life (sangsar) moves. The eternal hunger of the heart lies in the sex-complexities. Tales are a symbolic expression of the human heart and the stomach as well.

Psychoanalysis as a science of emotion has tried to proceed by indirection. For the Freudian psychology, the emotions are prevented from being expressed directly, not only by the weight of authority represented in culture but by a self-concealing relation among the emotions themselves. Therefore, "our inner lives are not simply or directly embodied in actions, but become expressive and 'symbolic' as emotions get distorted and partial discharge." ¹

There is no doubt that a proportionate and honest as well as meaningful innovation makes tradition strong and powerful. Therefore, the "proportionate and meaningful innovations are necessary in respect of a living tradition to make it even effective. There is in fact some limitation of innovation in respect of a living tradition as the undue pressure of innovation may push it back to the mouth of extinction." ² Yet "The past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past." ³

Again, the positive and healthy content of life reflected in the folk narratives of Assam, provides cultural models, of yearning for and pursuing a good and happy life, for the Assamese people who have suffered a lot in different ways in different times. These people have discovered certain spiritual, intellectual and psychological comfort in heroes, in their adventurous stories and actions. In times of crisis, they find a modicum of comfort and direction in the actions and adventures of the heroes and heroines of the tales, and their roles become helpful models for them.

As poetic literature fulfils the spiritual desires of people and helps them grow up, folk narratives in prose help also children and adults to be mature. "The Vrat (fast) stories and tales as a sub-genre are full of fairy tales, symbolic tales and historical legends of valour and romance". 4 Furthermore, the collections of folkloristic tales from the mouth of storytellers themselves and occasional publications of individual texts or anthologies in the book form have become widespread over the last 200 years. For various reasons, these have been distributed around the globe and provided work and enjoyment to thousands of producers and readers. Maybe, the climax of this activity has already passed. However, it is hoped that many more collections of this kind and other kinds will come out and help research and teaching in this field.

Terry Gunnell has also pointed out:

Words and narratives paint and transform not only places but also people, both those who listen and those who utter the accounts themselves. Again and again, we have heard how narrative helps to underline and define identity, not only in terms of heritage but also in terms of our position as regards the ecological environment around our fellow men and us. Our choice of narrative helps us to define who we are and how we are different from those around us, it sheds light on our values, our fears, our emphases and our self-image. It is the wallpaper with which we decorate our surroundings, the map for our personal landscapes. And here, in a sense we construct another island of words.  

Now, at the end of the Millennium, the folklore faces new challenges. The theoretical and methodological frameworks have been challenged from time to time in all disciplines. Attempts have been made from time to time to discard what has become obsolete and irrelevant and replace it by new knowledge, new ideas and new theories for new needs and even new functions of the discipline. These challenges in fact revitalize disciplines and offer them more firm places....


The modernization of the societies led many scholars to believe that folklore was dying or would die out very soon. In fact, some genres did disappear from the oral tradition owing to the impact of modernization, though they continued to live on in other forms of the modern media. 7 For example, the television super heroes in different countries have taken on some of the roles that traditional folk heroes had. Interestingly, this kind of change and continuity of tradition is more visible in modern mass culture, and the hero of this mass culture possesses the same characteristics as the traditional animal heroes had. Similarly, in other countries the magic folk-tale is no longer transmitted orally, but through books, videos and television and now the Internet and E-mail. Gary Alan Fine writes, “Television has apparently changed the temporal boundaries of entertainment, possibly more than it has altered the content of the stories.” 8

Besides, parents more often read out or retell folk-tales and narratives to their children. The professional storytellers too adopt folklore from printed or oral sources. These storytellers are not bound by regional or by national folk traditions but feel free to use stories from any culture. This means that we may have to reconsider the idea that oral transmission is a fundamental criterion in the definition and identification of folklore.

8. *Ibid*, *Pp. 219-220*
Moreover, “urbanization and industrialization made old traditions connected with rural life of the agriculture-based communities who, more often than not, were the actual carriers of the tradition, of less interest to the ever-changing frame of the new society in which the folk as well as their lore were always on the move. In this scenario the link between the past and the present was not entirely broken, and in fact this phenomenon has on the other hand created new possibilities of social interaction and the creation of new folklore and oral tradition based on the old traditions.”

The rise and spread of the T.V. phenomenon in India has been very fast. It has made a strong impact on Indian society and mass culture. Besides the direct telecasting of great Indian myths, epics and other forms of oral narrative, including “frozen” forms such as The Ramayana, Vikram and Baital and living folktales, serials like Dada Dadi ki Kahanian (tales of grandfather and grandmother), TV has telecasted numerous indirect forms and has proved a strong medium of mass culture, which has played the role of renewing folklore and other forms of oral tradition in the modern Indian society. One such example is ‘Ashcharya Deepak’ (‘magic lamp’), which is one of the most popular tales. In it the frame of ‘Aladdin and his Wonderful Lamp’ of the Arabian Nights is being modernized to suit the present-day industrial society and its needs. Similar forms exist in the regional language programs as well. For example, the Assamese folk- tales “Nimati Kaina,”

9. Handoo ibid. p.22
“Sauti Jaimati,” “Tejimala,” “Tikhar and Suti Bai” and the folktales collected and published by L. Bezborooah have been used by the modern TV network in Assam for similar purposes. Again, a fair number of Assamese folktales—both Assamese and tribal—have appeared in English translation, in collections such as J. D. Anderson, *Kacaari Folktales and Rhymes* (1895), Grierson, *The Linguistic Survey of India. Volume III*, (1903) and J. Borooah, *Folktales of Assam* (1915). Borooah’s book contains 15 tales translated from the Assamese collection of Bezborooah *Burhi Air Sadhu* (1911). Benudhar Rajkhoah, *Assamia Phonology* (1905) has about a dozen short tales supposed to have been based on actual occurrences. Bezborooah’s *Kakadeuta and Natilora* (1912) has also been translated into English by his daughter, Srimati Aruna Devi Mukharji in her *Tales of Grandmother from Assam* (1955).

To decipher the latent meaning of folk narratives, one must execute a psychoanalytical analysis on them, which is very close to the analysis one makes of dreams and its dreamers. The question is as to how much effectiveness this theory of psychoanalysis has in answering the question of meaning and its status in the culture. There arise certain problems on this account, which have been discussed by J. Handoo lucidly in his book *Theoretical Essays in Indian Folklore*. They are set down in the following paragraphs.

First, the sources of deciphering the symbolic meaning of a dream lie in the holistic mental personality and behaviour of a dreamer. Myth, folktale and ritual, particularly those that relate to the past, also need to be examined
along with the personality and the behaviour of a dreamer so that their mutual relationship becomes clear.

Secondly, the whole culture should be considered as a mythmaker and the myth should be related to all its manifestations—both synchronic and diachronic—before we try to translate the symbolic expression of folklore into a cultural reality. Complete dependence on texts, as has been the case hitherto, will neither fulfil the demands of psychoanalytical theory nor permit us to know even a fraction of what all of us are trying to know.

Another problem, which seems to have been completely ignored by folklorists following psychoanalytical methods, is the problem of genre—the generic qualities of folklore and the relationship between the genres. This blurriness of genres has led scholars to believe that myths and folk-tales particularly contain hidden messages, which are generally found in latent rather than in manifest content.

The other equally important problem is that of the sexual symbolism employed traditionally as the main theoretical device for justifying a sound psychological analysis. Handoo further says that “the use of sexual metaphor has been championed so much in these methods that sometimes it seems as if it is being imposed from above rather than permitted to emerge out of the text or context or both …”

The other problem with the sexual symbolism practised by folklorists following psychoanalytical theory is that they do not seem to be making any effort towards developing a theory which could unify the latent and the manifest content of the folklore materials they investigate so that it could logically lead us to find an acceptable answer to the problem of meaning in folklore.

Besides, “Folklore is an unfinished profession, a profession within which there are still due many areas of argument and conflict, a profession within which individuals still have serious choices to make. And just as the individual folklorist is required by virtue of his membership within the profession to balance out the conflict in his work, so too is the discipline of folklore itself.” 11

However, whatever may be the feedback in the case of sexual symbolism, we must accept the psychoanalytic interpretations of folklore, which seem to be the only way to lead us into the realm of meaning in folklore.

Furthermore, it should also be noted that the development of a healthy modern society is possible only on the solid foundation of a traditional culture. Tradition and culture provide strong fusion and regeneration mechanisms. The modern culture should draw inspiration and nourishment from the traditional culture to enrich itself.

Hence, in the dilemma in which we have hitherto been, folklore and Freud have enabled modern civilizations to discover their past foundations. Obviously, folklore has provided the trustworthy data and Sigmund Freud has taught us how to find meaning in this data. Time has come to reconsider the issue of the importance of oral discourse and its deep relationship with the human societies as a group, as a collective entity. That this insight should be allowed to be ignored in view of the bandwagon theoretical growth of modern folklore scholarship can be termed as very sad and discouraging. Folklorists were lucky to get associated with the developments of psychology and psychoanalysis (thanks to Freud). This association needs to be continued with much greater rigour so that the concerns folklore scholarship has shown in the serious analysis of folklore may continue and we may continue to try to realize the objectives we set for ourselves when the whole thing began in the first place. In the context of the folklore of Assam, I am convinced by the research I have done that more and more folklore data needs to be subjected to serious psychological analysis so that we may keep alive the issues we have raised and ultimately settle them all.

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