CHAPTER-II

LEGENDS: AN INTRODUCTION

Eminent scholar R.M. Dorson has placed folklore and folk life into four major sub-divisions. These four sub-divisions are oral literature, material culture, social folk custom and folk performing arts. Since oral literature verbally transmits among the folk groups and it expresses thoughts, feelings and behaviors of the group so, sometimes it is called as verbal art or expressive literature. Oral literature has its distinct form through which it can be easily distinguished from the other genres of folklore and folk life. The term oral literature or expressive literature is itself a broad concept, because all the traditional utterances like folk narratives, folk poetry, traditional songs, proverbs, riddles are included in oral literature or expressive literature. The other three groups like material culture, social folk custom and folk performing arts are found to be in direct contrast with oral literature; because all these forms of folklore and folk life are visible but oral literature is invisible and implied. We can touch, feel and realize the components of the other three genres but the same is not possible with oral literature. Physical skill, technique and definite formulas are also attached to the material culture, social folk custom and folk performing arts but oral literature totally depends upon the behavior of the folk group.

2.1 ORAL LITERATURE:

Oral literature is widely known as ‘verbal art’ or ‘expressive literature’, it is the voiced form of traditional utterances which is expressed either in form of spoken words or sung. People consider
oral literature or verbal art as folk literature also; it is the literature of folk groups which transmits generation after generation either in form of tale or song. Depending upon their text and context, oral literature primarily be divided into various forms; some major forms of oral literature are- oral narratives, oral poetry and folk speech etc. Oral narratives has also its various sub-divisions such as legends, myths, fairy tales, romantic tales, religious tales, animal tales, jokes, numskull tales etc. We can again divide each form into various sub-genres, depending upon their theme, text and context where, at first legends can be taken into account. Scholar Stith Thompson has mentioned about legends, according to him; a legend is an account of an extraordinary happenings which is assumed to have actually occurred in the past. He has further mentioned that a legend of an incident which has an attachment to a certain locality, probably also be told with equal conviction in various other places of the world around us. The fundamental forms of legends are found to be as historical legends, mythical legends, etymological legends, religious legends, local legends etc. Similarly myths are also another major sub-genres of oral narratives. Stith Thompson mentioned that myths are intimately connected with religious beliefs, thoughts, philosophies, practices and ceremonies of the common people of the world. Myths have mainly two sub-forms; such as origin myths and religious myths. And the other major sub-genre of oral narratives is folktales, these are a kind of short narrative in prose by an unknown author which is transmitting orally, generation after generation from the remote past. These tales are repeatedly narrated by the word of mouth. In the later of definition of folk tales the word ‘known author’ is also
incorporated to them. Oral poetry on the other hand is the traditionally transmitted poetry which is performed either as song or other form of utterance in various contexts; ballads, folksongs, lullabies, folk-epics are the good examples of oral poetry. Folksongs associated with marriage, birth and other forms also come under this genre. Like Folksongs, Folk speech also a major genre of oral narratives, these are the speech of common mass which deviate from the standard language of elite class of people of the society, these are supposed to be used by the common people of a certain locality. Colloquial words and other such utterances are considered as folk speech, some folk speech of a certain community is understood only by the members of that folk community, a non-native speaker can hardly follow the folk speech of others. The language of the folk speech is different from the language which is spoken and taught in the formal situation. The chief characteristics of folk speech is that, it is rather restricted than liberal. Folk speech is generally the unwritten form of words; which is not used in formal situation. Colloquial talks, prayers, laments, cries are the good examples of folk speech.

2.2 MATERIAL CULTURE:
The physical form of folklore is known as material culture. According to R. M. Dorson, “Material culture responds to techniques, skills, recipes and formulas, transmitted across the generations and subject to the same forces of conservative tradition and individual variations as verbal art” (Dorson: 1972 : 2). Material culture is the visible aspect of folklore, like the other genres of folklore, material culture reflects the tradition, convention of a community. It helps
in the preservation of tradition and culture. We can easily assume the richness of a community, its place in the society through its material culture. The concept of material varies from person to person; the material culture of one community may be unfamiliar to the other. Similarly the rich and dignified material culture of one community may look odd to some other community. Some good examples of material culture are house–making, decoration, cloth making, food preparation, making of dress, making of furniture and utensils etc.

2.3 SOCIAL FOLK CUSTOM:
Social folk custom is another major sub-division of folklore and folk life, apparently it is closer to the other three divisions of folklore but a minute observation brings the clear distinction among them. The matter of social folk custom mainly confined to a family or a community observances. The way one family or a community performs their rites and rituals are included in social folk custom; it is regarded as a private property of the family or the community. As soon as social folk custom is brought to light, it provides an observer the way of thinking, understanding and performance of the family or the community. An observer can easily dive deep into the matter of tradition and custom of the performers by studying their social folk custom. The performance of various rites and rituals can also be included in this group. Social folk customs are closely attached to the religious practices. In Assam, the field of religious practice is very vast, so we witness a large number of social folk customs performed by different performers round the year. Since, the religious thinking
and outlook is also attached to the social folk customs, so it becomes more traditional, orthodox and highly restricted and encompasses a large number of social folk custom of a community.

2.4 FOLK PERFORMING ARTS:
According to the division of R.M. Dorson, folk performing arts is the last sector of folklore and folk life; traditional music, dance, drama and other systematic movement recognized by an individual or a community are the good examples of folk performing arts. It is very difficult to distinguish between folk performing arts from the other genres of folklore, because an observer can hardly see the distinct differences among them, for example; an oral poetry or a folk speech may take the form of folk performing arts when it is performed in front of the audience. So, it can be said that one oral poetry or folk speech does not remain same when it is performed in front of the common audience. But the performance of oral poetry or folk speech should not be a haphazard one; it must follow strict rules and regulations laid down by the members of the community. The rules and regulations framed by the community may vary, depending upon the norms and other related rules or it may be modified from time to time. The style and performance of folk performing arts introduces one community with the world outside. The rich ethnic culture of a community is reflected through its folk performing arts. The performing arts of one community gives rise to the birth of popular culture. Folk performing arts may have different sub-genres such as folk music, folk dance and folk drama. We come to know about the richness and in depth quality of knowledge of a community through its
performing arts. The rich performing arts of a community introduces and establishes it in front of the other.

2.5 PROSE NARRATIVES:
Prose narratives is an important major sub-genre of oral literature. It mainly includes legends, myths and folktales. These three sub-categories of prose narratives are closely related to each other in respect of their form and structure. Since, these three are the narrative in prose so they clearly distinguish themselves from the other branches or the sub-category of oral literature such as proverbs, riddles, ballads, poems etc. Though these three sub-genres of prose narratives are closely related to each other; yet there are a lot of differences in their text and context. A minute observation brings the clear distinction among these three. For example, a legend is not at all similar to a myth or a folktale. It is orally transmitted historical narrative of a community which is believed to be true both by the speaker and the hearer. Sometimes, a legend works as an unwritten constitution of a community by which the community is guided. The members of that community respect their legends more than their written constitution. Myths on the other hand are considered to be more sacred than secular. Religious ethics of a community is also found to be related to the myths. Subject matters of myths are generally related to the activities of God, Goddesses and other deities. Sometimes, we can know about the origin of a community, its culture and the other forms of folk performance through the myths of that community. Religious practices of a community are also guided by the myths of the same. Folktales on the other hand are told to amuse the audience
by the members of a community; these are specially told at the
time of leisure. Sometimes moral lessons are also incorporated with
some folktales. Similarly a folktale of a community works as a
guide through which the machinery of the community works.
Besides amusing the audience, a folktale imparts knowledge among
the listeners. Thus, these three major sub-genres of prose narratives
differs from their functional approach; the very common features
among these three are that- all these three sub-genres are found in
unwritten form, they are found to be transmitted orally generation
after generation. Eminent scholar and folklorist William Bascom,
made a clear distinction among these three major sub-genres of
prose narrative. The definitions laid down by William Bascom can
be mentioned in the following way:

Myths:- “Myths are the prose narratives which, in the society in
which they are told, are considered to be truthful accounts of what
happened in the remote past” (Bascom: 1965: 4). Myths are found to
be associated to fantasy and imaginations. The community in which
myths are told, believe myths to be the truthful accounts of what
happened in the remote past. Myths are sacred than secular, they
are accepted on faith and taught to be believed. Since, myths are
regarded as sacred, so these can be considered to be the controlling
fact of a community. The main characters of myths are God, deities
and super heroes which are beyond of human nature and the
incidents related to myths are supposed to be happened in the
remote past or in the other world or before the creation of this
human world, which is totally different from the world as we have
here today. The stories of myths mainly deal with the origin of
the world, of mankind, of death, of geographical features and of phenomenon, of superhuman characters such as deities, Gods and their activities which are mainly-war, victories etc. Myths tell us how and why taboos should be observed by the members of a community.

**Legends:** “Legends are the prose narratives which, like myths are regarded as true by the narrator and his audience, but they are set in a period considered less remote, when the world was much as it is today” (Bascom: 1965: 4). Legends are generally secular in nature, the main characters of the legends are human being; sometimes some superhuman characters appear in the legends but, they keep a very close contact with the human beings. Legends mainly tell about the migration, incident related to some persons, origin of the name of a place, etc. Legends are also found about war and victories, love and lost, victories of the past heroes and heroines etc.

**Folktales:** “Folktales are the prose narratives which are regarded as fiction” (Bascom: 1965: 4). These are also one of the major sub-category of prose narratives which attract attention of the audience. Folktales have neither historical evidence nor a slightest proof that had happened in near or the remote past. Folktales are taken seriously neither by the speaker nor by the listeners. These are also neither placeless nor timeless hence, these can be told at any time or at any place. The prime aim of telling a folktale is to amuse the audience; among them only the moral tales have the exception, as they are told to impart moral lessons among the
people. Folktales have a few more sub-categories such as nursery tales, fairy tales, animal tales, human tales, tall tales and dilemma tales etc.

William Bascom has clearly showed the differences among myths, legends and folktales. He has used the following chart to present his explanation in an elaborate manner:

**THREE FORMS OF PROSE NARRATIVES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FORM</th>
<th>BELIEF</th>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>PLACE</th>
<th>ATTITUDE</th>
<th>PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Myth</td>
<td>Fact</td>
<td>Remote Past</td>
<td>Differentworld other or earlier</td>
<td>Sacred</td>
<td>Non-human</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legend</td>
<td>Fact</td>
<td>Recent Past</td>
<td>Worldof today</td>
<td>Secular Sacred</td>
<td>Human</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folktale</td>
<td>Fiction</td>
<td>Any time</td>
<td>Any time</td>
<td>Secular</td>
<td>Human or Non-human</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Bascom: 1965: 5)

In his chart, Basom has pointed out six major characteristics which help to bring a clear distinction among of the three major sub-genres of prose narratives (myths, legends and folktales). He has discussed about the form, belief, time, place, attitude and principal characters related to myths, legends and folktales. So far as the belief associated to a myth is concerned; it is believed to be a fact both by the speaker and the audience and it is widely accepted by the member of the community where it is told, the time which myths represent is basically the remote past, it may also be before the creation of the world. The time which myths represent just remains in the memory of the people and it is
presented as the recollection of the memory of the past; the place which myths signify is generally the other world or non-human world of earlier time; may be before the creation of this human world. So far as the attitude of the common men towards myths is concerned, Bascom has mentioned that, myths are considered as sacred rather than secular and the major characters of myths are God, Goddesses and deities, this is also one reason why myths obviously become sacred than secular. Thus the main characters of myths are non-human, they may be either God, Goddesses, deities or the superhuman which is totally different from the common man of our world. In the similar way, Bascom has pointed out six major important features for legends in this chart. According to him, legends are regarded as fact which is considered to be the unwritten constitution by the speaker and the audience and the belief related to legends is not the ultimate belief that is established after proper examination, it is just a fact which is widely accepted both by the speaker and the audience. Bascom has mentioned that the time of legends setting is the recent past. Unlike myths; legends represent the recent past where as the former represent the remote past; so legends are believed to be the true historical document in comparison to myths. In respect of time and place of occurance, legends are regarded as of our times where as myths can be regarded of the time beyond our existence. The place of legends setting is also the human world of present time, it is our world of men and women which establishes legends as the true document of time and place. According to Bascom, legends can either be sacred or secular, since it is the living history of our world and the principal characters of legends are
human being so there is every possibility of being secular or sacred. Like myths and legends, Bascom has also tested folktales by using his six major characteristic features. According to him, the belief related to the folktales is fictitious; it is told and listened just for entertainment; neither the speaker nor the listener takes folktales seriously to be cherished forever. It is used to pass the time happily and just for the entertainment. There is no fixed time of composition and telling of a folktale, rather it is composed and told at any background and at any time. The time related to folktales is also not fixed because it is used just to entertain the audience. Unlike myths and legends, the place related to the subject matter of folktales is also not confined. Myths and legends have definite place related to them; for example, the back ground of myths is the different world which is dissimilar to the human world and the back ground of legends is the world of today where the common people live, but folktales have not a specified background related to them. Instead, the background of folktales may either be a different world like myths or the world of today like legends. The attitude of speaker and audience towards folktales is always secular. The subject matter of folktales may also be either of men or God or some other things. Since, folk tales are told to entertain the audience, so this does not matter whether it is secular or sacred. The principal characters of folktales may appear as human or non-human. Here the non-human characters may be fox, tiger, bear, monkey or other animals who behave like men or other living being; whose behavior is similar to men, throughout the character of the story. Thus, William Bascom, the eminent American folklorist and scholar has minutely compared some characteristic
features of these three major sub-genres of prose narratives and made a clear distinction, which is a praiseworthy outcome of his minute observation. His analysis helps a reader to dive deep into the matter of these three major sub-genres of prose narratives. Bascom has incorporated one more chart to make a more clear distinction among myths, legends and folktales. According to him, in some communities people follow some strict principles at the time of telling myths, legends and folktales, so he has introduced three more characteristic features along with the existing six to show the basic differences among the three genres of prose narratives. The new chart prepared by Bascom is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Formal features</th>
<th>PROSE NARRATIVES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Conventional opening</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Told after dark</td>
<td>No restriction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Belief</td>
<td>Fact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>Some time and some place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5a</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Remote past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5b</td>
<td>Place</td>
<td>Earlier or other world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>Sacred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Principal character</td>
<td>Non-human</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Form of prose narrative</td>
<td>Myth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Bascom: 1965: 6)

In this chart Basom has mentioned that in some communities the speaker warns his audience before telling a myth, a legend or a folktale and he gives a basic idea of the theme of his subject matter; Bascom has mentioned this type of opening as conventional
opening of prose narratives. Generally, a teller of a myth and a legend does not seem to follow this type of conventional opening but a teller of a folktale strictly follows this type of conventional opening before telling a folktale. The second important characteristic feature that Bascom has introduced in his new chart is about the specific time of telling of myths, legends and folktales. According to him, there is no restriction of telling a myth and a legend but a folktale is usually told after dark. The opinion in favor of telling a folktale in dark is that, if a folktale is told after dark then it can attract more attention from the audience, than it is told at day time. The other new feature that Bascom has introduced in his new chart is the setting of a tale. According to him, myths and legends can be told only at some specific time and place but folktales can be told at any time and at any place, hence he has termed them as ‘Timeless, Placeless’. Except these three features, the other remain same as it is already mentioned in the previous chart introduced by Bascom. This chart makes a more clear distinction in understanding these three major sub-genres of prose narratives.

2.6 MYTHS, LEGENDS AND FOLKTALES:
There is no universally acknowledged distinct classification to establish the difference among the three major sub-genres of prose narratives namely myths, legends and folktales; only some analytical concepts have been provided by different scholars of different regions and most of the analytical concepts are found to be similar after proper examination. For example, almost all the scholar of the world have accepted myths as sacred than secular, legends as the unwritten historical document of the recent past and folktales to be
told just to amuse the audience. It will be noteworthy to mention that myths, legends and folktales are not the only sub-genres of prose narratives, there are some other sub-genres also available such as anecdotes, humorous, jokes and riddles which belong to the category of prose narratives. Since, I have selected legends as the subject matter of my study, so I have concentrated my analysis only on these three closely related major sub-genres of prose narratives which have at least some common features among them. First, I put forward a comparative statement provided by Malinowski to show the differences among these three basic sub-genres. Sometimes, it happens that one ‘tale type’ may be a myth in one society; a legend in the second society and a folktale in the third society. In reality is almost impossible to draw a water tight division among the three; one can find out only a tentative difference among them. The statement put forward by folklorist Malinowski to show the differences among the three sub–genres of prose narratives can be discussed as follows:

Malinowski termed myths as *liliu* and mentioned that these are regarded not only as true, but also venerable and sacred. According to him, myths are told during the preparation of some social functions such as rituals, which are generally performed at different times and seasons throughout the year. He has mentioned that the main function of myths are to serve as justification of the rituals performed with which they are associated. Similarly legends or *libwogwo* to Malinowski are the serious statements of knowledge which are believed to be true both by the speaker and the audience and they contain some important factual information in
them. These are neither privately owned nor told in any stereotyped way, so legends are not magical in their effect. The main function of legends according to Malinowski, is to provide information and whenever some audience make specific inquiries about the facts related to them, then these can be told at any time of a day, month and year, but in general they are often told repeatedly during the season of trading voyages. The third sub-genre of prose narratives according to Malinowski is *kukwanebu* or fairy tales (i.e. folktales) which are purely fictional in nature. These are privately owned by the speaker and dramatically told in front of the intended audience. Malinowski has mentioned that, a speaker tales fairy tales after the sun set or in dark in the winter season, specially in the month of November and at the time of planting and fishing seasons. According to him, fairy tales denote a formalized reference to a very fertile wild plant and there is a vague belief among the people about the fairy tales which are not very seriously held. It is traditionally believed by the people of a community that the recital of fairy tales have a beneficial influence on the new crops. It can be summed up with the view that the main function of fairy tales are to create amusement among the audience.

If we compare the differences put forward by William Bascom and Malinowski to show the distinction among myths, legends and folktales then we find that both the scholars come closer in most of the points. For example, both Bascom and Malinowski have agreed that myths are sacred than secular, which are basically related to rituals and traditions, these entirely deal with the religious matters of the societies and help them as an invisible
guide or an unwritten constitution. Regarding legends, William Bascom has mentioned that legends are ‘Fact’, which is regarded as true both by the speaker and the audience; Malinowski too has mentioned that legends are the ‘Serious statements of knowledge’ which provide information that are considered to be true. Again the two scholars have agreed that folktales are fictional rather than historical and realistic which are told just to amuse the audience in a dramatic way. Bascom has mentioned that folktales are usually told after dark and the similar point has been raised by Malinowski too, whereas he has made it specific that folktales are told after dark in the month of November, just before the planting and fishing seasons. Both the scholars have agreed that folktales are taken seriously neither by speakers nor by listeners. Whereas, Malinowski has mentioned that telling and listening of folktales just before the sowing of seeds help in growing new crops.

Besides these the two scholars have also mentioned some visible dissimilarities which help us to distinguish these three major sub-genres of prose narratives. Myths, legends and folktales differ from one another basically in their origin and purpose. Myths are the primitive philosophy which are supposed to be created before the origin of the world, perhaps this is the reason why Bascom has mentioned that the place of myths is the ‘Different World: Other or Earlier’. Myths are the product of the simplest intuitive form of human thought, these are the series of attempts through which people can understand the existence of the present world around them, these are also used to explain life, death and nature, Gods and cults. But the same is not applicable to legends and folktales,
because legends are the primitive history of men and the universe which are regarded as secular than sacred; these are fact rather than fiction, legends are considered to be the simplified document of recent past. On the other hand, Folktales arose from the need for entertainment, these are not believed to be true. Since folktales serve only for the purpose of amusement, so these are of fictitious in nature, and these are believed to be true neither by the speaker nor by the audience. Folktales are free of time and place; therefore it take what seems entertaining for the audience and omits what is considered to be boring for them. The subject matter of folktales can be often manipulated here in one way, there in another; according to the narrator and the demand of the audience. Folktales are nothing but the quintessence of all works of fantasy of mankind in their leisure time.

Differentiating these three sub-forms of prose narratives namely myths, legends and fairytales renowned folklorists Sir James Frazer presented his personal view that, by the term myths he understands a mistaken explanation of a certain phenomena, whether it is of human life or some other external nature. According to him, such explanations originate in the instinctive curiosity concerning the causes of things which at a more advanced stage of knowledge. Myths seek satisfaction in the philosophy and science, but being founded on ignorance and misapprehension, these are always found to be false and fabricated. He further asserted that had the subject matter of myths to be true then they would cease to be myths. According to Frazer, the subjects of matter myths are as numerous as the objects which present themselves to the mind of the
common man; that means a speaker can create a myth in the way as he desires so; for everything which exists in his curiosity and of everything he which desires to learn. For him, the most frequent questions which many people generally attempt to answer by the term myth are those which are related to the origin of the world and of men; the apparent motions of the heavenly bodies, the regular recurrence of the seasons, the growth and decay of vegetation, the fall of rain, the phenomena of thunder and lightning, of eclipses and earthquakes, the discovery of fire, the invention of the usual arts, the beginning of society, and the mystery of death etc. In short, Frazer has put forward his view that the range of myths is as wide as the limit of the world; being coextensive with the curiosity and the ignorance of men. Dealing with the legends, Frazer has mentioned that by legends, he understands traditions whether oral or written, which relate to the fortunes of real people of this real world in the remote past or which describes some events which is not necessarily have to be related to human being that are said to have occurred. Frazer viewed that legends contain a good mixture of truth and falsehood, he further asserted that, for were the legends wholly true then they would not have remained as mere legends, instead they would have taken the place of history. For him, the proportion of truth and falsehood naturally varies in the contents of legends and in most of the cases falsehood generally found to be predominate the details of the legends as result of which the elements of the marvelous, miraculous and fictious often enter at a large number into the contents of the legends. While mentioning about the last major sub-category of prose narratives i.e folktale, Frazer has put forward his view that
by the term folktales he understands a kind of narratives which
was invented by some unknown persons and handed down by the
word of mouth from generation to generation. For him, folk tales
are a kind of narratives through which a speaker intends to describe
an actual occurrence which is purely based on imagination. The aim
of folk tales is to entertain the audience and there is no scope at
all for them to make a claim of the credulity of the speaker. In
short, according Frazer, folktales are the fictions which are pure,
simple and the product of imagination without having a slightest
chance of reality in them. Thus he has emphasized that this kind
of creation is devised not to instruct or edify the audience but to
amuse them in their leisure time. He listed folktale to the category
of pure romance.

Observing James Frazer’s remarks on the three sub-genres of prose
narratives namely myths, legends and folktales it is found that he
is comparatively strict in his understanding of the contents of
myths, legends and folktales. However, we see that in some points
Frazer comes closer to the opinions of Bascom and Malinowski.
Because he has considered myths as the “Mistaken explanation of
some phenomena” that may be related either to human life or the
lives of external nature such as God, Goddesses and deities which
have no relation with human life and society. So far as the subject
matter of myths are concerned; Frazer has viewed that the subjects
of myths are the countless objects which are already present in the
mind of men; these are may be a kind of curiosity, desire and so
many other things which generally lingers in human fiction. Like
Bascom and Malinowski, Frazer has admitted that the subjects of
myths are related to the origin of the world and man, seasonal changes, discovery of fire, society etc. Regarding legends, he has viewed that the legends are the bearer of tradition, which may be either found in written or oral form. According to him, legends are the mixture of truth and falsehood where the percentage of falsehood is more in legends than the truth. Drawing the comparison between history and legend, Frazer clearly mentioned that had the subject matter of legend been wholly true than it would have been treated as history not legend. Thus, he has indicated that legends provide information for history but it cannot be history itself. Frazer has written about folktales that folktales are purely the creation of imaginative mind; this sub-genre of prose narratives is very short, simple and pure fiction where the percentage of reality is very less in it. According to him, folktales neither instruct nor rectify the mind of the audience; instead they amuse them through its imaginative subject matters. The most important feature that he has mentioned about folktales is that, folktales never demand credulity of its subject matter hence, there is no chance at all to consider them as true story. Besides these categorical differences, we have seen that myths, legends and folktales differ in their settings of time, place and action. These three sub-genres of prose narratives are found to be different in their principal characters too and more importantly, beliefs and attitudes of listeners are also associated to the subject matter of these three, in addition, they often appear in different social settings, at different times of a day or a year and under specific circumstances. Myths, legends and folktales are told for different purposes in different social background and have distinctive functions. They differ in degree of creative freedom
allowed to the creators in their rates of charge and in the ease with which they spread by diffusion. Above all, they may also be distinguished by the presence or absence of conventional opening and closing formulas related to them, where stylistic differences of these three sub-genres are also a matter of concern; the manner of delivery of dialogue and the subject matter, the identity of the narrator and the composition of his native and non-native audience, the degree of nature of audience participation at the time of narration and the factor of private ownership etc.

2.7 WHAT IS LEGEND:
The term legend is found to be derived from the Latin word *legere* which means to read; thus it originally means that, it is a piece of reading referring to a book containing accounts of lives of great men, heroes and saints arranged in the order of Christian Calendar. If we observe legends minutely, then we find that through legends we are able to know a lot of past history as well as the present culture of a society. Early scholars seemed to have been laid emphasize only on the literary approaches of this sub-genre of prose narratives, it is noticed to some extent that the scholars disregarded the social content, historical vale, psychological aspect and social performance of legends. In the latter half of nineteenth century, onward the scholars seemed to have changed their notion towards the study of legends and they began to consider them from wider prospective. They began to study linguistic, historical, sociological, psychological and cultural aspects of legends. Thus, along with myths and folktales; the legends are also an important sub-genre of prose narratives which demand a wide approach both from scholars
and the audience. When the boundaries of this genre of prose narratives is tried to be defined, then it is seen that the divisions of legends into micro subcategories often led to theoretical over classification and sometimes made them insignificant. The most important consideration here is that why tradition participants tell legends, generations after generations, years after years and remember and retell this mono episodic believable narratives. In this context, scholar Timothy Tangherlini’s view on legends can be taken into account, according to him, a rigorous examination of the text may make the meanings of legends understand in a better way. He coined the term “synthetic approach” for the understanding of legends, while discussing about this approach, he has seemed to disregard the specific interpretative approach whether it may be historical and textual. Rather, he emphasized on the fusion of all the mentioned aspects with rigorous examination of the text itself. He mentions that legends can be characterized as “A traditional (mono) episodic, highly ecotypified, localized and historicized narrative of past events told as believable in conversational mode” (Tangherlini: 1994: 22). Tangherlini further emphasized that legends reflect the values and traditions of a group to which they belongs.

If we observe legends minutely then we are able to know a lot of past history as well as present culture of a society. It is already mentioned that, scholars in the past seemed to have been laid emphasis only on the literary approaches of this genre; the social content, psychological aspect and social performance of legends were found to be disregarded in their analysis. Legends provide a lot of information in studying and understanding history of a society but
they are not history themselves at all, because legends are the mixture of fact and fiction. The percentage of fiction in legends are found to be more than fact. These are orally transmitted generation after generation; hence, with the passing of time it may be modernized, coloured, filtered, modified, fabricated or reshaped according to the intention of a teller and the community to which they belongs. But still, the historians can find a clue to understand history of a particular society by going through their different aspects. Legends provide raw materials for the study of history; the role of history in the study of legends is significant one, legends not only refer to a believable past events but also present themselves as a historical document of time. The study of historical legends help in exploring the aspects of historical phenomena and their relationship to the story as well as the authenticity. Legends may have both external and internal historical context, a narrator may consciously or unconsciously ignore both the historical implications, but still they are wedded unintentionally to legends. Besides being historical, the study of legends unearth the ethnographic description of the cultural environment in which the stories are prevalent. The relationship between legend and history is more closer; so it can be confirmed that legends provide an ample resources for studying history though in most of the times this aspect of legends is ignored and overlooked. Legends can be conceptualized from two prospectives; one, is that from the point of view of the community or the society to whose tradition and culture they belong and the other is from the researcher whose analytical schemes provide different insights into their oral performance. Scholars have defined legends in various ways such as folk history, prose narrative and
uncritical folk science, wisdom and philosophy of the folk, reflection of the real world of the recent past, religion and mythology of an unknown society, projection of conscious and unconscious mind of individuals or groups, collective response to the social ambiguities and aesthetics of the society to which they belong because they basically cover the most important sensitive areas of human life, culture, society and its surroundings. These are mostly manifest in unofficial discussions, considerations, rituals, etc. since their very inception; through various stages of development of the society. A legend is a story, a narrative, a communicative act, a social event, a narrative response to a stimulus, a poetic response - all of which could be said of any other form of folklore.

2.8 WHAT IS FOLK LEGEND:
The legend in its essence, demand to be believed both by the narrator and the listener. They present an incident, history and reality and tell about the things that really took place in the recent past. Folk legend belongs according to its own awareness, to the world of reality and also belongs to the knowledge of the folk. The folk legend are popular stories with fantastic, objectivity and with true and untrue contents, told as factual event of the recent past in the form of a simple report. They are usually different from the other legends forms in various aspects; such as in setting, language, story, characters etc. So far as the setting of the folk legend is concerned, a folk legend origins in folk background which is far away from the elite society; mention of rural setting is often found in such legends. The folk language, which is used in folk legend is also different from the language used by the elite class
of people. Generally folk language is considered to be rustic, unrefined and unstructured form of language which does not follow the basic structure of standard language, the use of folk language bring a vast difference between folk legend and the other forms of legend. Story of the folk legend also originates in the folk background; these are the stories of common men and women, mention of rural scenario, the characters like witch, deities, demon are very common here because such characters are very much present in the society which they represent. So far as the characters of folk legend are concerned, they are found to be strictly following the folk-customs of their respective society. All most all the characters of folk legend are the true representative of society which they belongs; the reflection of which is found in their manners, customs and attitudes towards life. Since, the folk characters are the product of a particular folk society so the reader get a complete picture of that particular folk society through their activities.

2.9 CLASSIFICATION OF LEGEND:
Linda Degh has mentioned that eminent scholar Bausinger classified legend into the following groups.

(i) Supernatural Legends or Demonological Legends.
(ii) Historical Legends.
(iii) Aetimological Legends.
Bausinger’s Developmental Scheme

(Degh: 2001: 39)

Here Bausinger has mentioned that, legends developed by conceptualization, interpretation, and retelling. All these factors determine the divisions which is based upon the existing collective belief system and pertinent motif patterns. Analyzing Bausinger’s scheme we find that all the legends have some common features in them, such as experience, event and objectification and gradually they can be categorized based on their theme.
Scholar Von Sydow has presented a classification of legends into different sub-category. He categorized them depending upon their time; such as of Recollected time, Undefined time and Mythical time. The category which falls under Recollected time is again divided into three more sub-groups and named them as memorat, fabulat and chronicat, whereas the category under Undefined time is divided into Glaubensfabulat and Personenfabulat and the third category consist only Aitionsfabulat. His classification of legends is presented in the following way:

a. Recollected time
   1. memorat—a “form—less” personal recollection;
   2. fabulat—a “form—bound” story about past events.
   3. chronicat—a family saga, and ordered (“form—bound” chain of memo rats and fabulates, narrated about several generations of a single family.)

b. Undefined time, but still in our present world.
   1. Glaubensfabulat—a fabulat about some supernatural figure, “form—bound”
   2. Personenfabulat—a fabulat about some human (real or fabulous) figure, “form—bound”;

c. Mythical time
   1. Aitionsfabulat—an etiological animal tale (not clear whether “form—bound”) (Jason: 1968: 14)

In 1963 an international committee drew up four tentative categories of legends based on available collection of legends and these are as follows:
(i) Etymological and Eschatological legends.
(ii) Historical legends and legends of History of Civilization.
(iii) Supernatural being and forces or Mythical legends.
(iv) Religious legends of Myths of Gods and heroes.

(Degh:1972: 76)

This classification is quite simple, the very name Etymological and Eschatological makes the point clear that the subject matters of these legends deal with the origin of something. It may be about the origin of the world, origin of the name of a place, origin of some customs and rituals, origin of stories, origin of some culture and community etc. The Historical legends basically deal with the historical events, these legends work as supporting evidence in writing history, the subject matters of these legends deal with the history of civilization, history of some war in the recent past, history related to the royal dynasty, history related to the life history of king, queen and other historical figures and the incidents related to their lives, invasion of a place, making of treaty etc. The stories of Supernatural beings or forces or Mythological legends are almost similar to the supernatural tales, these are the legends about some extraordinary figures which basically creates fear and curiosity in the mind of the audience; these legends are told in a story telling manner but these are believed to be true both by the teller and the listeners. The last category of legends is the Religious legends of Myths of Gods and heroes, the subject matter of these legends centers round the religious matter of a society; sometimes this kind of legend appear to be sacred than secular. Religious legends are very important for the people to whom these belongs, these legends work as an unwritten constitution
and control the religious activities of the people. These legends also work as a message of God, which are orally transmitted; as a result these are found to be very popular among the common mass.

Following Grimm Brothers guidance, folklorists of modern times have distinguished three kinds of legends and these are listed below:

(i) The mythological or demonological. Accounts about ordinary people’s encounter with supernatural agencies.

(ii) The historical. Stories about historical events, locations and known personalities.

(iii) The etiological, also known as *Natursagen*. Explanatory stories about the origin and nature of animate and inanimate phenomena.

(Degh: 2001:51)

This classification is self explanatory, from their classification one can easily trace out the distinction of their contents:

**2.10 ESSENTIAL FEATURES OF LEGEND:**

Legends are classified into various categories depending upon their subject matters. In most of the classification of legends, we find almost similar content, except a few minor dissimilarities. Besides the contents, some legends bear a few other common features which distinctly differentiate them from the other sub-genres of prose narratives. Some essential common features of legends are listed below:
(i) Legend as a bearer of tradition:
Legends work as tradition bearer of a certain culture of a society to which they belongs so, it is often believed that legends are traditional. Sometimes this concept appears to be wrong because, all the legends are not traditional at all; no doubt, legends bear tradition of a society but the inclusion of the traditional elements into the legends are not intentional. Since, legends are similar to oral history, so it is expected that they reflect the traditional society without omitting even a single element of it, thus the inclusion of traditional elements into the legends appears to be spontaneous rather than intentional. This does not matter how traditional element enters into legends but it is clear that in most of the times legends work as tradition bearers of a society. Some folklorists prefer to call folkloristic, the study of folklore as ‘traditional-research’ and the ‘science of tradition’. If we agree this opinion that folklore is ‘traditional-research’ and legends contain the essential components of folklore then legends ought to be traditional. Folklorist Linda Degh raises question about the traditionality of legends. He asks about the way how to determine the degree of traditionality in legends; whether it is in content, form and other ideological meanings of a story or in some other forms. Of course, almost all legends bear a huge amount of traditional materials in them but it cannot be termed as traditional at all. In conclusion, it can be mentioned that legends are the good combination of traditional and non-traditional elements.
(ii) Legend as a product of imagination:

Legends are the creation of a folk group, these are created and orally transmitted either to entertain people or share the treasured knowledge of the community to which they belongs. It is often thought that legends are only a product of creative imagination, but the definition of legends makes it clear that these are neither a creation of an individual talent nor a group, rather it is the property of a folk group of a certain community and these are handed down from generation to generation from the remote past. Legends work as history of the remote past when the practice of writing history was almost absent among the folk groups. They supply reliable information about a community to which they belongs. Had the legends only been a product of creative imagination and their aim would have been to entertain the audience then there would not have been any truth at all in legends and they would have failed to attract a large number people towards their content. Besides being a good story, the legends are regarded as historical document or oral history. No doubt, a legend may be manipulated either by a narrator or the other members of a community to whom they belongs but this manipulation is made either to enhance the beauty or to uplift the standard of the community, but the historical evidences which are attached to them can never be disregarded. Thus, we can say that legends are the product of creative imagination which bear a huge number of historical truths in their contents.
(iii) **Time related to legends:**

The exact time which legends bear is really difficult to ascertain, as it is generally mentioned that legends are the historical accounts of the remote past which are handed down from generation to generation. Here the question arises regarding the limitations of ‘remote past’ because no scholar have seemed to be found properly ascertained the existence of remote past of legends. It is often said that, a legend is a historical account of the remote past, but the question is that, what is the exact interpretation of the word ‘remote’-is it of prehistoric time?.... or legend-producing past? .....or the immediate past? Thus, it is very difficult to define the time related to legends in the proper sense of term, so the proper interpretation of time related to legends hang in balance.

(iv) **Legends in the form of orality:**

It is widely accepted that legends are orally transmitting generation after generation from the remote past. The content of legends are considered to be true both by the narrator and the audience as most of the legends bear historical evidences in them. Legends are orally told; in a legend–telling situation, the teller tales a legend in front of one or more audience who sit near him and listen to him attentively. But it is seen that whenever a legend is written down on a paper and kept it for further reference for the future, then it loses its beauty and the authenticity; the possibility of that, it may play the role of written history or the other form of prose narratives. So, legends are always orally transmitted in a story–telling manner and the beauty of a legend lies when it is spread verbally among the audience.
(v) Legends as believable oral narratives:
It is known fact that legends are the believable oral narratives, it is believed both by the speaker and the listener, along with the member of the community to which they belongs. Belief is the prime concern of legends, it is said that, a legend is believed to be true both by the speaker and the listener, but nowhere it is clearly mentioned that whether the belief associated with the legends is the absolute and unconditional belief or doubtful? Whatever it may be; it is accepted that a legend is believed to be true, so why it is widely circulated. Since, legends are a part of oral history so the concept of belief must be there in it, because whenever there is concept of history, then it is always supposed to be believable. Most of the scholars admit that legends are the base of history, these provide an ample source as well as basic materials on the basis of which history of a community or a nation can be constructed. Thus, it is admitted that legends are believable oral narratives which transmit orally from generation to generation.

(vi) Reality associated to legends:
Both the teller and the listener believe legends to be true. As soon as the concept of belief and truth appear, then there must be reality in them. The setting of a legend is always drawn from the real life situation and the evidence are also found at the place of their origin, unless and until these are adulterated. Since, the concept of reality is associated with legends so these are regarded as real story of real life situation.
2.11 SATRA LEGEND AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE:

Legends which are found to be associated with satra institutions are known as satra legend. Depending upon the text and context, a satra legend can be well categorized into various groups. There are more than three hundred vaishnavite institutions scattered in various parts of lower Assam. Among them, more than eighty satras are situated in various corners of Barpeta district. At present, many satras of this district are struggling for their own existence. Poor economic condition, encroachment of allotted land, yearly occurring devastating flood are some other problems from which the satra institutions of lower Assam are suffering. Even, it is found that a few satras of lower Assam which were situated near by rivers either submerged in the mighty rivers or shifted from their place of origin. Depending upon all these factors, the satras of lower Assam can be divided into three categories such as Well-known Satras, Known Satras and Lesser-known Satras. There is no prior sub-division available of this kind; but one can categorize them into these three mentioned categories if he or she desires to do so. I have divided so for the benefit of my study. The primary features of these three categories are mentioned below:

(i) **Well-known Satras:**- Well-known Satras are those which are well established, financially sound and successfully attracting devotees round the year. These satras are highly cared by the people who are conscious about their existence.
(ii) **Known Satras:** Known Satras are those which had a glorious past, but these *satras* are gradually losing their past glory; financially these *satras* are also not so sound. These are only managed by the fund which comes as collection from their surrounding inhabitants and devotees. At present, most of these *satras* are facing serious problems such as land encroachment, negligence of a section of the society, yearly occurring devastating flood etc.

(iii) **Lesser-known Satras:** Lesser-known Satras are those which are just surviving for the sake of survival, the number of such *satras* are comparatively very small. During my field study, I have found few *satras* which can be categorized under this group. These *satras* are financially too poor and most of the land allotted to these *satras* are either encroached by people or taken away by the mighty rivers. The people of the society are also not found to be conscious about the existence of these *satras*.

At the time of my data collection, I found a lot of legend related to the Well-known Satras, situated at various parts of Lower Assam. People of these *satras* are found to be very active, who have preserved legends of the glorious past of their *satras*, they told me various kind of legends along with their variants. The same response I found from the people related to the Known Satras too, but I could not collect more legends from the people related to the Lesser-known Satras. I had to visit door to door of the people
related to the Lesser-known Satras for the collection of a single legend, still, I could collect only few place name legends or legends related to the origin of this kind of satras.

For the purpose of my study, I have collected the total number of forty three legends related to the satra institutions of lower Assam. On the basis of their content, the collected legends are distributed in different chapters. In the chapter–V of my dissertation, I have included legends related to the origin of the satra institutions. In Chapter–VI, I have included legends related to the lives of the vaishnava saints. Legends related to the holy items of the satra institutions and place name legends of the places related to the satras are included together in Chapter-VII of my dissertation. So far as the significance of the legends related to the origin of the satras are concerned, the local people consider the origin legends as the unwritten history of origin of their satras, since no written historical records are available about the origin of the satras so, the legends which are orally transmitting generation after generation are highly valued and respected by the people. They are found to be very sincere, regarding the preservation of their legends and they never allow to adulterate the original form of their legends. People consider the visit of vaishnavite saints to their satras as a matter of pride and they keep retelling the incident again and again, which announces the glorious past of their satra institutions. We hardly find any written material about the life histories of all the vaishnavite saints of the remote past, so the legends help us a lot in knowing details about the life histories of these vaishnavite saints. Since legends are told in an informal manner so we can
know some secret and untold stories related to the lives of vaishnavite saints. These kinds of legends help us in knowing the lifestyle of the vaishnavite saints. There are some legends found to be related to the holy items of the satras; these items of the satra institutions are highly valued; these are the real assets of the satra institutions which also bear the history of their glorious past. Legends are found to be related to almost all the holy items of the satra institutions of lower Assam; local people like to tell legends related to these items of their institutions. There are many other legends found in the satra premises which are related to the holy items, such as legends related to the Idol of worshipped lords, legends related to the guruāshon, legends related to the cloth of satra institutions, legends related to the items used by the vaishnavite saints and the other gurus etc. Place name legends on the other hand let us know about the origin of the name of a place where a satra institution is situated; in most of the place name legends it is found that the place where a satra institution is situated was either named or renamed after the establishment of the satra institution. Thus, we can say that the study of legends is one of the ways to know in details about the satra institutions of lower Assam. In my study, I have collected legends related to all the mentioned aspects of the satra institutions and tried my best to analyze them minutely. Primarily, I have laid emphasis on the primary data which I considered to be the raw materials; only in some cases I took the help of secondary sources. In conclusion, it may be mentioned that legends provide the opportunity through which we can know and study the details about the satra institutions of lower Assam.