CHAPTER IV

USE OF RHYMES AND FOLK SONGS IN BANGLA LITERATURE OF THE NORTH-EAST
4.1 Introduction to Rhymes

One unique element of folk literature is rhyme. Rhymes were created prior to folk songs are sung, while rhymes are recited in a particular rhythm. Beauty and melody are forever adored by man. Tagore’s opinion of nursery rhymes is:

“তারো করিয়া দেখিতে গেলে শিদ্রর মত পুরাতন আর কিছুই নাই। দেশ, কাল, শিক্ষা, প্রথা অনুসারে বয়ঃক্রম মানবের কত নুতন পরিবর্তন হইয়াছে, কিন্তু শিদ্র শত- শক্ত হইতে পূর্বে যেমন ছিল আজও তেমনি আছে, সেই অপরিবর্তনীয় পুরাতন বালরাম মানবের ঘরে শিদ্র মূর্তি ধরিয়া জনজ্ঞয়ন করিতেছে, অথচ সর্ব প্রথম দিন সে যেমন নবীন যেমন সুভূক্ত যেমন মুদ্র এবং মধুর ছিল আজও ঠিক তেমনি আছে। এই নবীন চিত্তের কারণ এই যে, শিদ্র প্রকৃতির সৃজন, কিন্তু বয়ঃক্রম মানুষ বহন পরিমানে মানবের নিজস্ব রচনা। তেমনি ছড়াগলিয় শিদ্র-সাহিত্য; তাহারা মানব মনে আপনি জানিয়াছে...”

The same tune is observed in the words of a foreign folk scientist named M. Bloomfield,

“The fresher the vision, when the world was young, so much keener was the interest in the phenomena of nature, in the phenomena of life and in the simple institution which surrounded man. All harmonies and fitness, all discrepancies and inconsistencies, attract the notice of
children and the child-like man... As civilization advances they still sustain life, but they grow more complicated, more conscious and exacting, as the simpler relations become common place, and interest in them fades and wears off.²

In most cases, these rhymes are created by the simple, childish inquisitiveness of primitive man. These rhymes contain elements of mirth and joy. Poor, uneducated folk society has created a beautiful world of joy and mirth for their children and grandchildren. Often a poor mother wraps her hungry in her saree and cap verses to banish his hunger. Her love and caress is revealed in the lullabies she sings for her child. Later in life, the hassles of family life, mental irritation and the tortures of social and familial strictrures, old people become somewhat delirious with a strong desire to retire to the past. Thus rhymes are an effective instrument to bridge the gap between the young and the old, as is revealed in the literature of the North-east.

4.2 Folk Rhymes used in Novels

The rhyme used in the novel ‘Deyal’ is presented in the beautiful form of proverb. The hero of the novel, Ranajit Munda, the son of a tea-garden labourer, wishes to establish himself as a poet among the elite poets of the town. This earns him a lot of criticism in his work place. In the words of his colleagues, Ranajit is ‘ছুপা রুগ্তম’, ‘ডুবে ডুবে জল খায়’³ This proverb is repeated in a rhyme in the novel when Ranajit’s boss is eager to know more about him, as

‘ডুব ডুব ডুবরি, ডুবের মাথায় সুপরি’⁴

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The novel reveals that the mental irritation caused by the fast life of modern days finds respite in the recital of satirical rhymes, instead of nursery rhymes, as is found in the words of Barunda, “খাওয়া যায় কিনা দেখি সুপুরিতা”.  

In the novel ‘Gang-gatha’ by Jhumur Pande, discussed in the previous chapter, there are included some customary Bengali rhymes, commonly used in the Barak region. One memorable character of the novel is Manohar’s mother. A resident of Dudh-patil village, Manohar’s mother’s systematic life was dislocated with the sudden death of her only son Manohar. Thenceforth she has been earning her living by making paper packets, home-made sweets of coconut, puffed rice and beaten rice, and sell them in the urban families. The death of her son has rendered this old lady to lose her mental balance. At present she is given to rambling rhymes the whole day. The author has represented seven such rhymes in the words of Manohar’s mother, which are included in the novel as follows:

(ক) সই গো সই  
মনর কথা কই  
শিয়ালে যে বই খাইছিল  
লবন পাইছিল কই?  

(খ) মনোহর শেষ  
উল্টা পাল্টা দেশ।  

(গ) হাতের ভিতর গাছতলামে থইয়া  
হায়রে কইল্গা কৌরাগিয়া  
পানের বাটা গাছতলামে থইয়া  
হায়রে কইল্গা কৌরাগিয়া...  

(ঘ) বইনারি গো বইনারি  
সিঁড়রাই ফুলাত বাইতায়নি  
সিঁড়রাই বড় কালা

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The rhymes used in different parts of the novel are actually symbols expressing the status of the characters presented in the novel. Here the rhymes recited by the old lady act as the essence of the story. In fact, many of these rhymes are directly to the many events that affect the life of the heroine Phulwanti. It needs to be mentioned here that Phulwanti’s anxious thoughts regarding her young daughter who is missing, brings in the first rhyme uttered by Manohar’s mother, as—‘সই গো সই ...’.

The later part of the novel has it that Phulwanti gets news that her daughter is kidnapped by some notorious persons and sold in the brothels of Siliguri. Phulwanti is berserk with agony at the news because aware that the society of which she is a part, will never accept a sex worker among them. Phulwati leaves her daughter to her fate, while her heart bleeds. Her wails and sorrows are concordant with the rhymes of Manohar’s mother: ‘কাউন্ড না গো সেনামণী...’
This unique element of folklore, that is rhyme, is obviously created by women. The urge to bring up their children inspires them to create rhymes. In the novel, women like Manohar's mother, Phulwanti, Malati, and such like, have lost their children to the perversion of the society. The author has appropriately used the rhymes to express the grief of the mothers who have lost their children.

4.3 Folk Rhymes used in Short stories

A precise and clear use of nursery rhymes is found in the story 'Dolna'. An unemployed Santhal youth, Sanatan, takes up the profession of crafting and selling toy cradles of bamboo, which is highly priced by the townsfolk. However, Sanatan is amazed to think that the smart wives of city-bred gentlemen, although are amply educated, prefer hand-made cradles to rock their babies to sleep instead of singing lullabies to them. At home, his nephews Sona, Bilu are still lulled to sleep by their mother and grandmother who sing such lullabies as

"আয় ঘুম যায় ঘুম বাঙাদি পাডা দিয়ে
বাঙাদিরের হেলে যুমাল লেপ মড়ি দিয়ে।"\textsuperscript{13}

In modern society women have crossed the threshold of family life after successfully managing their family and children and have joined the workforce of the modern world. Modern women enjoy equal status with men. Time has altered the traditional ways of bringing up children as well as managing work life. As such, babies of city-bred people are not lulled to sleep by the lullabies of their mothers and grandmothers, but are rocked to sleep in their cradles. The inclusion of the rhymes in the novel brings home
the hard reality of professional life and the loss of the affectionate days of child-rearing.

God-Almighty has divided his greatest creation, mankind, into two parts—man and woman. However, certain biological compulsions make woman, her own enemy. She often has to bear the insolence and insults of the mighty man, because biological weaknesses. Such instances are found in the story “Luiter Aartonad”, which cites the examples of many such women from Champakali to the dumb-witted Bindu, seen at the gates of Shuklewar Mandir, who were physically and mentally raped and tortured by men. Champakali alias Kalaiburi, was raped in her youth, by Dharmeswar, the head of the beggars. The consequence of such a derogatory collusion was the birth of a girl child, Swapna. But she also could not escape the lecherous assaults of her father, Dharmeswar. Even today the unhappy mother sits on steps of the river bank under the rain-tree tree waiting and lamenting for her lost daughter, and lost days of the past. She expresses her sorrows in the words of the following rhyme:

"дум, дун, неоркар мадхе дун
дхармесваре хел мадху, англ амавр кул"14

The rhyme reveals the grief of poor woman who has been robbed of her chastity and therefore ostracized by the society for the rest of her life.

Frequent uses of rhymes are found in the works of Jhumur Pande. She makes use manifold of rhymes to deal with various issues in her stories. One such instance is observed in her short story “Mokshoda Sundarir Harano Prapti”, where she has used the concept of a gaming rhyme.
In her story, the eighty-year old Mokshoda, a permanent resident of Meherpur camp, places a tumbler on the ground to save her bed from being soaked by rain. The tip-tap sound of raindrops makes her nostalgic about her childhood days and the games, like Bondi, which she played as a little girl. Such happy thoughts of the past ring in her rhymes as she sings:

"একবার গেলাম উত্তরে
ডুলু বাঁশের তিতরে
ডুলুর বম বম
মাদারে শলা
মাদারে শলা।"15

The use of rhymes in 'Kanai-er Kichhukshan' comes with a different hue. Eight-year old Kanai, with four younger brothers and sisters, tries hard to support his mother’s earnings by selling waste products. At such a young age he has gained access to police station, cinema halls and even the vendor stalls. He took up the burden of contributing to his family at the young age of six, starting with selling balloons beside the puja pandals. As time rolled on, he shifted profession several times, one of them being to dress up as a cowherd and beg for alms and money, singing rhymes. Born and brought in the mud-flat areas, he had never tended cows, but his mother, Malati, had taught him all the rhymes suited to his profession of a fake cowherd. As he stands by the river, later in his adulthood, he recollects his childhood rhymes:
The use of the above mentioned rhymes play a notable part in the story to focus on the life of Kanai, a child labour, changing his profession repeatedly, to secure his earnings.

Child is an integral part of nature. Every child wishes to imbibe the natural laws of laughter and playfulness as he/she grows up, be it Madhuravati, the eight-year old maid servant of college lecturers Tamojit and Devapriya, or their little daughter Titli. Little Madhuravati in “Madhuravati Santar Kaate”, is as transparent and as lively as the river Madhura. She loves to scamper about and sing between her works which makes her nostalgic of her by-gone days in Rupchhora tea-garden. Only Tamojit, her employer, has the ability to delve into her mind. Although his wife, Devapriya, is a strong protagonist of the ideal ‘save the child-labour’, yet in reality she does not deter from being rude and rough with little Madhura, even to the extent of inflicting physical abuses on her. However, Tamojit, in his own way, tries to mitigate her sorrows by reviving the
stories of Madhura’s world, inquiring about her grandma, Kheplimani. In this connection, the author of the story resorts to the following rhyme:

“খেপলিমানি পান খায়
হাসতে হাসতে জান যায়।”

This fun-filled rhyme appropriately represents the light and frivolous attitude of a wretched little girl and her silent service to this selfish world.

We have another sarcastic use of rhymes in Subroto Roy’s story ‘Pongu’. In this story, dull-witted Samik aged thirty, and his mother lives with his uncle. Besides his mother, Samik is looked after by Binu, the maid-servant of the house. From childhood to adulthood, Samik had observed only one marriage ceremony, that of Chhayadidi, a neighbourhood girl. From then onwards, he has developed an obsession to marry, and his dream-bride is none other than Binu. His idiocy was mocked at by everyone, and the following rhyme was chanted to taunt marriage-obsessed insane Samik:

“হাবা করবে বিয়ে
টুঁপুর মাথায় দিয়ে
হাবার আজ বউ চাই
শরীক চন্দ্র হবা জামাই।”

For the sake of using folk elements in folk literature, authors often recreate the elements to suit their creations. The above-mentioned rhyme is also such a re-creation of folk element by the author.

Childhood and rhymes are forever inter-connected. That is why many have resorted to rhymes while reminiscing about childhood and youth in their literary creations.
In this context, mention may be made of Debabrata Dev’s works, along with those of Jhumur Pande, Paritosh Talukdar. In his story ‘Maati’, rhymes act as the keynote of the nostalgic recreation of Kunjalata’s blissful childhood, who is the central character of the story.

“নাও- এর বাদাম ভুইল্যান
কোন দূরে যাও চাইল্যান।”

The customary norms of the society have always relegated woman to an inferior status— to be dominated by men— in her childhood by her father, in womanhood, by her husband, and in her old-age, by her son. For Kunjalata, this third phase was undecided. The story depicts that the seventy-three year old Kunjalata, is turned out by her son Satu, and is destined to find a new shelter, for the fourth time in her life. The tension of her undesired new haven brings back her childhood memories. Her thoughts go back to those days when Kunjalata, holding the hands of her father, played with water on Alta Mia’s boat; how she sought refuge in her father’s lap in fear of being kidnapped by the boatman; the oracle of the boatman, that the future is as uncertain as that of sailing boat. No one, not even old Kunjalalata knows, where, at which shore her boat will finally anchor. The story weaves a beautiful, intricate knot between Kunjlata’s voyage of life and the lyrics of the rhyme.

Regarding rhymes, an important point needs to be mentioned. Modern authors try to implement various changes in their stories to give them the desired shape. To achieve these changes they omit and transform the folk elements judiciously. This attempt is observed in Dipankar’s story ‘Aamish’, where the title, literary style and more particularly, some line of a rhyme has also undergone significant changes. The story ‘Aamish’ by Dipankar first appeared in ‘Lekhakarmi Galpo Sankalan’ in 1995. The
concept of rhyme was inculcated into the story in connection with the customary event of choosing the bridegroom for Anu. The traditional Indian culture of selecting the bride and the groom is an important social custom, of which preparation of various food items is a significant part. It is in this connection, Anu’s elder brother Bhupati, the main character of the story, remembers the lines of a particular rhyme, ‘দুল ব্যথিত’, on seeing the carcass of lambs, dangling at a butcher’s shop. These lines of a particular rhyme were aptly used to describe the situation. The revised form of the same story appeared again in 2002, in a collection of short stories ‘Kholosh Katha’, re-titled as ‘Aamisashi Praharguli’, where one of the lines of a rhyme, ‘দুল ব্যথিত’ was omitted.

In another story by Dipankar some changes were incorporated regarding the folk elements used there. In 1999, a story entitled ‘Bhoy’, was published in the collection, ‘Uttar Purber Bangla Galpo, which was previously published in the short story collection ‘Kholosh Katha’ under the name ‘Ekti Cliché Kahini’. The proverb used in ‘Bhoy’, ‘লাঠি বার মোষ তার’ was omitted in the next edition. However, in ‘Ekti Cliché Kahini’, another rhyme, ‘আমার সোনা, চাঁদের কপা/ সবাই বলে দে-না দে-না’ was introduced. The above mentioned changes were incorporated to reveal the suspicious nature of Nayana, the main character of the novel, in connection with the loss of her nose-pin, leading to suspicion and then interrogation of the housemaid Malati.

Several folk elements have been used together to form the central issues of the stories ‘Ujaan’ by Swapna Bhattacharya and ‘Dunduburi Katha’ by Ranabir Purakayastha. In the ensuing chapter, the rhymes used in the two stories are explicitly discussed.
In the story ‘Ujaan’ we see that after a lot of ups and downs the hero of the story, old Khsitindramohan, arrives at Samar’s residence, helpless and penniless. His only relation with Samar is that of the heart, the only basis on which Khsitindramohan expects to seek his help. Right from Samar’s childhood, Khsitindramohan had been his story-telling uncle. The happy incidents of narrating stories and reciting rhymes to Samar are still embedded in Khsitindramohan’s memory, as he rejoices in the sweet remembrance of the following rhyme:

“সিংহদের মায়া আমি নরহরি দাস
এক এক বাঘে আমার এক এক গরাস।”

This rhyme was again used in the story “Dunduburi Katha”, in relation to a folk game. *Dunduburi* is actually an insect, living inside the earth which comes out when children recite a particular rhyme accompanied by a circular movement of the hand over the loose earth of an ant-hill.

The story reveals how Amalkanti gives a verbal narration of his childhood village to his daughter Champa, and introduces her to his childhood memories. And Champa, her surrounded by the walls of city-life recollects her father’s childhood days and chants the rhyme:

“পিপড়ের চিত্র চারপাশে
দুন্দুবুড়ি নাচ করে
সাহেব দেখে সেলাম করে।”

Amalkanti and Parna’s conjugal life has many cracks and holes through which peeps in the appearance of Chandra in Amalkanti’s mind’s window. As Champa chants the rhyme, Amalkanti visualizes Chandra as transformed into *Dunduburi*, an imaginative character, thus satisfying his
unrealistic yearning for love. Other folk constituents of the story are discussed in the following chapters.

Kartik Lahiri has used some rhymes in his story ‘Bandinivas’ to untangle some psychological problems.

As a consequence of racial conflict, Assam is witness to uprisings against the Bihari and Marwari populations in different parts of the state, culminating in state-wide curfew. Active life has come to a stand-still, which is broken only by the regular sound of the police boots patrolling the city. All the characters of the story, big or small, clustered in the mess building, virtually transforming it into a prison. The only exception is Bijonbabu. Curfew or not, Bijonbabu’s daily routine remains unaltered. However, the plight of the lively youngsters like Chinmoy, Arun, Harsha, brings a sarcastic smile on Bijonbabu’s lips, which reminds Arun of a certain rhyme in his book:

“মোটকা মানুষ হোতা মুখ  
বুকে ভোঁতা, আহামুক।”

At the end of the day everyone, from the quarantined people to the patrolling sentry, all lose their dynamism and become dumb-headed, stupid people. The liveliness above-mentioned rhyme plays an important role revealing the psychological status of the inmates of the mess building.

Amitava Dev Choudhury, in his story, ‘Prasiddha Rakta’ has presented a reconstructed form of a Bengali lullaby. The story has it three friends, Rajshekhar, Sandip and Amalchandra grew up in Silchar town. Occupational necessities forced Amalchandra and Sandip to settle at different places, but Rajshekhar, who had taken up the job of a school master, permanently settled down in Silchar itself. Of late, amidst his daily busy schedule, an event of the past is constantly haunting Rajshekhar. In a
letter to Sandip, he tries to recollect the event, where he remembers a dark complexioned youth. Nobody knew his name then, or what was he, a Santhal or a Bengali, or wherefrom he had come, Bankura or Purulia. His only identity was that was a laid-off tea-garden labourer. That was his only crime. For that reason he was falsely accused to have stolen a gold ring of Molymasi and was beaten to death by the angry public. Sandip, Rajshekhar and Amalchandra were a part of that crowd, although their real intention of joining the crowd was to impress Molymasi’s daughter Mimli. But today, after many years, Rajshekhar is haunted by the incident. While recollecting the incident, Rajshekhar tries to delve into the real reason of the crowd marking the simple Santhal youth as probable thief. Perhaps it was his dark complexion and unassuming looks which segregated him from the crowd; or the flute, which he had kept hidden in his bosom, the wand with which he spread the melody of love. In a reply to Rajshekhar’s letter Sandip described the plot of a story he had conceived. It said that once in a village, a young man, in a bid to find the time that was lost set out for an unknown destination. He had realized that all the clocks of his village had stopped. So in order to revive the consciousness of the villagers, he has decided to step forward towards a new time period. The author has denoted this period as Nabajagaran. Sandip further confirmed that the path taken by his hero does not end in Silchar but beyond it, perhaps the whole of India. Sandip’s storyline though disturbs Rajshekhar, also raises a ray of hope in him. Rajshekhar wishes for a peaceful sleep and happy dreams. The hope of peaceful sleep incites Rajshekhar to utter the rhyme:

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'আয় যুম আয় না
কেন করিস বায়না
দুধ দেব কলা দেব
আদির করে কোলে নেব
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The darkness of caste, creed and colour has pushed back this country and its people. And that is why the young generation of today is oblivious of the sanctity of human blood. But it is the responsibility of the present generation to wipe out this difference and extend their hands in brotherhood to all Indians. Rajshekhar has surrendered himself to this dream of a new time period. The rhyme used here is a yearning that the dream does not turn into a nightmare.

4.4 Folk Rhymes used in Verses

The oldest branch of Bengali literature is verse. In the Bengali literature of the North-east, the use of folk elements in verses by modern poets is quite rational. In this connection, the name of Tapadhir Bhattacharya carries ample weight. In his poem ‘Dateline Assam, 1983’, he used a popular Bengali rhyme, which is particular to a Bengali folk festival named Bhatridwitiya or ‘brother’s day’. The rhyme goes as follows:

“যথম দুয়ারে দিতে কাঁটা
বোন দিয়েছে ভাইকে ফোটা
মরতে নরক সর্গে জলাপাদ
ভায়েরা তাই গিয়েছে যথম দুয়ারে...।”

or

“যথম দুয়ারে দিতে কাঁটা
বোন দিয়েছে ভাইকে ফোটা
ভায়ের আজানে জাগবে না সে ভাই জাগবে না
আর কোনদিন
কোজাগরি রাতে জাগবে না সে বোন জাগবে না
আর কোনদিন...।”

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As an outcome of the language movement, many people of the Barak Valley have lost their land and dear ones, which have distorted their regular lives. This disturbance has also led the Hindu and Muslim population of the region to dowse many of their traditional and conventional rituals and festivities of their daily life, in their continuous struggle against this social oppression. The blood stains have disgraced the sanctity of the *Ramzan* moon. While the emotional devotion of the imminent *Bhatridwitiya* is absent, so is absent the sisters’ plea of saving their brothers from the thorn-laden path leading to Yama’s door. No brothers will hitherto awaken by the sound of the *Azaan.* Earthly humans have transformed into heavenly executioners and snatched the brothers to be thrown at Yama’s door. So also, sisters who are lost on the poisonous night of *Kojagori Laks mipuja* will never see daylight again.

The poet has taken his poem to new heights by implementing the above-mentioned folk elements in his poem.

‘Krishnapaksha’ is another of Tapodhir Bhattacharya’s long poems, where the poet has used various elements of folklore. In this chapter the rhyme or part of it that we propose is as follows:

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“অষ্ঠীৎ এখন শাস্তি কল্যাণ হয়েই আছে
অন্ধকার, যদি যুথপাড়ামি মাসি-পিসি হয়ে নামলে এভাবে
বাবু আর বিবিদের মদির নয়নে কাজল পরাও
নামক, নামক তত্ত্বা, শাত্তি ও নিমন্দ্য যুথে পার হোক রাত
শাপ্তি সুথের নিদর্শন মোদের ধনমণিকে দিয়ে হে অন্ধকার।”
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The mystery of creations is dark. All discourses about Indian literature, society, politics and even history reveals that man wipes out the darkness of ignorance and has become the torch-bearer by dint of his knowledge, strength and intelligence. However, some self-centered people,
to satisfy their ego are eager to taint this light in blood and destruction and
dowse it in the pyre of hatred. The poet does not welcome this peace.
Rather, he desires the blissful slumber of a child, put to sleep by the
lullabies of their mothers and aunts. The eternal desire of the mind is to
awaken from the darkness of peace, to greet a golden dawn. This is explicit
in the line of the particular rhyme included in the poem.

"Paalaker Chhaya" is another poem in which part of another popular
rhyme is used. The moon and the sky are the main items of rhymes of all
mothers. When a little chick leaves its nest for its first flight, it searches for
its mother. For the tired, distracted fledgling, the memory of the warmth of
its mother’s feathers, consoles the little bird. The same happens in the case
of a human child.

It is customary for the Hindus to cremate the dead. When one’s
mother dies, she is customarily surrendered to the flames of the funeral
pyre, but her entity as his childhood rhyme singer, is forever alive in his
heart. Thus, in the words of the poet:

“পড়ে রইল চাঁদের কপালে চাঁদ টিপ দিয়ে যাওয়ার
শৈশব, কেশোরের ছায়া তরঙ।
পড়ে রইল কুড়ারা সরানো রোদে সহজ মায়ার
আঁকা মূর্তি, দুধের পিঁত মতো মৃত্তি
নিতে গেছে চিতা, তবুও আগন ছলে
গল্প- অনুপন”29

Although after the completion of one’s mother’s cremation, and the
funeral pyre is dowsed with water, the old and the wise advise him not to
look back at the cremation site, yet the nostalgic days of childhood, the
familiar rhymes sung by his mother throughout his childhood and youth,
kindles incessantly in his heart. The application of this particular line of the rhyme reveals a sensitive aspect of the poet.

An alternative transformation of another popular rhyme is found in poet Bijoy Bhattacharya’s poem ‘Ekti Sakaal’. The following poem shows this extraordinary use of the rhyme:

The dream of the new generation is to look forward to a peaceful morning. A rootless person floating from this end to that end, ultimately, touches the shore of a new land, and settles there, then branches out to reach new corners of this new piece of land. In the new dawn of his life, he aims to protect the loss of crops from the raiders and give a new lease of life to the future generation. The poet has given an uncommon explanation of the rhyme used in his poem which reveals protesting nature of the poet.

A traditional folk festival of Bengal is Bhatridwitiya. A particular rhyme is associated with this festival where sisters plead for the long life of their brothers. Just as we see poet Tapodhir Bhattacharya has used part of this rhyme in his poem, “Deadline Assam, 1983”, so also another poet, Dibyendu Bhattacharya, uses the same rhyme, in his poem, ‘Bijoyee Se’ from a different point of view:
Death is the ultimate truth of human life. All the dreams, emotions and imaginations come to a standstill in the face of death. Despite this inevitable truth of life, every brother takes pride in striving to overcome death inspired by the plea of his dear sister, on this emotionally auspicious day. The application of usual folk elements indicating traditional folk ceremonies, have made the poem complete.

The litterateurs of North-east Indian Bengali literature have used many popular rhymes to suit the various requirements of their literary creations. On many occasions several nursery rhymes have been recreated. Different authors have represented these rhymes or parts of them to give an extraordinary status to their versatile creations. Sometimes they were used to add a sarcastic note to their write-ups, while in others they are used to revive childhood memories, or to represent folk games or to reveal the tortures endured by child laborers. The rhymes are used to represent various strata of a society, that of the rich and poor, of men and their women and of the particular parts played by them in the society.

So, for the modern poets and writers of the North-east, rhymes are not only instruments of consoling a weeping child, sheltered in its mother’s bosom, but have also been used to decipher different temperaments of the society at different times.
Here we can cite the comment of the famous folk scientist Sokolov. He opined that, "... the popular rhyme, like many other genres of folklore, is at the same time both a memorial of the remote past the loud voice of contemporary times...".32

4.5 Introduction to Folk Songs

Of the various flows of folk literature, one notable element is folk song, which is presented in a unique combination of melody, beat and instruments. Probably, folk song has emerged as a consequence of primitive hunters' chanting of witchcraft incantations or as a medium of dispersing physical strain; and gradually has transformed into various and variegated forms of folk songs. These are created and spread verbally. The essence of folk music/song is retained through passage of time. But as it transcends time, newer elements pertaining to new times and places, gives it a new character. And that is it is never outdated. Just as it is created to suit the requirements of the society, so also society strives to sustain it through time, instead of leading it to destruction.

"The concept of folk incorporated in 'folklore' denotes a group in which the cultural, economic and educational diversity of the city is much less pronounced, where modes of life, customs and lore, including songs, are known and shared more homogenously throughout the group; where cultural possessions of the individual more nearly resemble those of his neighbour. Just as folk contrasts with city culture, so folk song which embraces folk music—contrasts with poetry, popular song, art music of the city".33
Ashraf Siddiqui has given the following explanation of the above-mentioned comment:

"অর্থাৎ যে সমাজ তাদের নিজেদের মধ্যে একটি একাত্মতা উপস্থাপন করে—তাদের মধ্যে লোকগীতি পরিবৃদ্ধি লাভ করে—তাদের সামাজিক জীবনে এই সব গীতিগীতি সকলের মনে সম্পন্ন—নাগরিক জীবনের সঙ্গে এই জীবনের ব্যবধান অনেক—নাগরিক কাব্যকলার সঙ্গে এদের কোন সম্পর্ক নাই। বাংলাদেশ পাটের জন্য প্রসিদ্ধ। পাট কাটা, পাট নিড়ানি, পাট ধোয়া ইত্যাদির সঙ্গে বহু গান গাওয়া হয়ে থাকে। কোম-সোম হিসাবে পাট কাটার এই গানগুলির প্রয়োজন এবং বেশী যে এগুলি না গাইলেই চলে না। কোমেই পাট কাটার এই গানগুলির অঙ্গ বিশেষে এই সকল কৃষক সমাজেরই জানা হয়ে থাকে।"\(^{34}\)

Therefore, from the stage of pregnancy till death, various folk songs are composed to indicate various stages of life. Besides, the natural differences in dialects have also added to the variety of folk songs. Various trends of verbal folk songs have significantly influenced written literature of the North east, and this aspect will be dealt with in detail in the present chapter.

### 4.6 Folk Songs used in Novels

Tea-tribes are a significant part of the North-east, and the folk songs which reflect their joys and tears are prominently represented through the folk songs predominantly known as *Jhumur*. *Jhumur* is the pivot of social life of the tea-tribes and all their cultural activities are centered on these folk songs.

Novelist Jaya Goala from Tripura has used three *Jhumur* songs in her novel ‘*Tobuo Madal Bajey*’. It is not that these songs have been used to
highlight love, desolation, joy or festivities alone, but the author has judiciously used them for the advancement of her novel, as well as to express the hero’s ties with his clan-life. The central character of this novel is Domoru, a common tea-garden labourer who works very hard for his livelihood. His small family consists of young sister and two motherless childless children. A flashback of Domuru’s life reveals that his pregnant wife Phuli slipped off the hill and died of miscarriage. When alive, Phuli was Domuru’s sole companion who filled his life with joy and laughter. She put all her labour to prepare a local brew called Hanria, in their household distillery and marketed it, to support Domuru’s meager earnings. Today, although there is no end to their misery, yet Domuru cannot think of demolishing the distillery because everything associated with it, the oven, the benches and glasses, all bear the touch of Phuli. On such a dreamlike situation the bottle of spirit slips off his hand and crashes to the ground, reminding Domuru of Phuli’s voice:

"বাঁশ কা বুদাভারে কে মারে সিটি
ছোটো কে দেওয়ার নদীলাল মারে সিটি
লাজইয়, ছোটো কা দেওয়ার নদীলাল মারে সিটি,
... ধীরে গো ধীরে, হায়রে গো ভালা
ছোটো কে ...।"35

Who is whistling among the bamboo bushes? Young brother-in law is softly whistling among the bamboo bushes.

The song was aptly sung by Phuli, who was the centre of a loving family, surrounded by a doting husband, loving brothers and sisters-in-law and affectionate children.

In the same novel the author uses another Jhurnur song with a different perception. Domuru falls in love a second time, with Kokborok
girl, Kasmati. Despite the persistent poverty of his family, the burden of his unmarried sister Shaon, the pains of his motherless children, Domuru’s heart flew out to Kasmati, residing in the hills. Among the ordinary incidents of daily life, Domuru’s sister casually provokes him to bring a new sister-in-law. It appears that the casual remark by Shaon was in reality verbal expression of Domuru’s ardent desire, which he expresses in the following musical notes of a Jhumur song:

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"নিদাশিন্ধি সুপিয়ে পম সারিনা
নামেদো সাইরে বেজান বিগিনা" 36
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to which Shaon gives a dance accompaniment. Domuru loves his sister more than his life. He encourages her dance steps by uttering the beats of the Dhamsa Modal, as Dhi-dhig-dhicha. The percussion instrument Dhamsa Modal is an indispensible part of Domuru’s tribal cultural life. For this reason, the sequence of Jhumur song enters the novel repeatedly, either as a memoir of Phuli’s death or to celebrate the joy of love in Domuru’s life a second time. Another Jhumur song enters the novel with a different note, which represents a special moment of clan-life.

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"সালে ফোটে বিঙ্কুল
ফোটের মলিন রে—
বিঙ্কুল লিল জাতিকুল রে।
হলদি হলদি বিঙ্কুল
পিয়াসে আকুল রে—
বিঙ্কুল করলি কোন ফুল রে।
ঐ বাঁশির টানে, রাধার মনে ফুটল
কিসের ফুল
বিঙ্কুল লিল জাতিকুল।" 37
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The bright yellow flower of the ridge gourd blooms in the evening but withers in morning. This flower is symbolic of love which breaks all barriers of caste and creed, tears all social bondage as is depicted in Radha-
Krishna's love-story. The author has used the tiny yellow ridge gourd flower as a symbol of love, which had illuminated the evening of Domuru's life with its simplicity and freshness, but was caused to wither in the morning due to man's incessant needs, desires, rivalry, hate and revenge.

In the next instance, a *Jhumur* song is used to welcome spring, the season of colours. The entire community of the tea-tribe, the young and the old, men and women, Shaoni, Gulabi, Suratiya, her old grandma, Badal's mother, old man Jhunu, Laxman and his wife, even Domuru, are dancing to the tunes of *Jhumur*, to celebrate Holi, the festival of colours, announcing the approach of Spring. It is this alone which brings some colours into their forever wretched lives. All the miseries inflicted by poverty, hunger, deaths and diseases, terror of militancy, tortures by the police, are drowned in the joy and happiness inherent in this colourful festival. However, even on this happy occasion, Domuru is somewhat hesitant, because he had promised Shaon that he would bring Kasmati as his wife on that day. But here he had to face a bitter truth of having to lose those basic values of life which formed the inherent part of his clan life. Kasmati, belonging to the Kokbrok tribe, put a condition before Domuru. In order to wed Kasmati, he would have to leave his clan and join the militant group of the Kokboroks. Domuru is caught between two conflicting decisions – all the happiness and privileges of a wealthy life on one hand and the song, dance, merriment, poverty and hardships of his clan life, on the other. While he is aware that celebration of the spring festival of colours gets polluted with the blood of the innocent, on the other hand he visualizes Kasmati waiting for him on the mountains.

Finally, Domuru takes the firm decision of living with his tribe and give up the hope of marrying Kasmati. With this firm determination he
rejoins the *Jhumur* song and dance of his tribe. The author makes appropriate use of the *Jhumur* song to banish the dilemma within Domuru and enable him to choose the right path of love and companionship among his tribesmen.

In the novel ‘Deyal’, we find the existence of two different types of *Jhumur* songs. In the novel they are used to highlight the past recollections as a means of strengthening the mental weakness of the hero. The hero Ranajit Munda, son of a tea-garden labourer, had gone to the city for higher studies, to fulfill the dreams of his parents. But instead of being stalled by the magnetic pull of city-life, he has successfully established himself in the heart of the city. He has earned name and fame as Ranajit Mandal, renowned poet and litterateur, among the city-bred elites. However, despite these volatile changes, he cannot forget his roots; his dreams are haunted by the presence of his haggard looking, poorly clothed, labourer father, the coarse hands of his poor mother, roughened by the hardship of plucking tea-leaves. Remembrance of his origin evokes in him hatred towards his past identity and he wishes to tear himself away from his past with the last drop of his blood. It is this bloodline which has forced him to retrace his steps on many occasions. But very often he is lost reminiscing about the natural ambience of his childhood days, where lying flat on his back he could fondly watch the beauty of the green tea-plantations on the slopes of the hills in his neighbourhood. The memory of the flowers on the slopes of the tea-gardens swaying in the winds brings back the familiar tunes of the *Jhumur* song:

"বিঙ্ঘাকুল মনে রাখিয়া।
সাঁঘের বেলা জলকে গেলে
হামকে ডাকিয়া।"38
The song is used to represent a picture of simultaneous existence of beauty and harmony in the attractive sight of pretty, lively maidens going to fetch water in the evenings, along the paths which were decorated by the soft yellow glow of the ridge-gourd flowers. Sitting alone within the walls of his rented flat in the city, Ranajit is engulfed by a feeling of a homeless wanderer. The continuous conflict between the trial of existence in the city and that of his roots in the tea-gardens, leads him to muse that the meager earnings, Talap, of his leaf-plucker mother and his labourer father, is far better than the stationary atmosphere of his cloistered room, the breathless race of moving forward, or even the sound of the money he earns. At least such an existence did not force him to hide his identity. The Jhumur song is used to show the change in the mentality of the hero and settle his disturbed mind.

The second instance of the use of a Jhumur song in the novel has come as in the following. After leaving Ranakhola tea-garden for the city, the first person to extend a friendly welcome to Ranajit, was Saswata. The carefree, lively Saswata inspired Ranajit to develop new and progressive values of life. The two were inseparable on all occasions of literary discussions, poet’s meet, even leisurely discourses. But sometime later, occasions of Ranajit’s attainment of laudations as a poet, or the publication of his first story transformed Saswata’s views about him. However much he tried to become a gentleman in fair clothes, his origin was nothing but a Munda, a low-caste. Ranajit felt that even Badal uncle’s pet enjoy a higher status than him. The dog Sweety, being of a good Spanish breed, automatically earned the right to settle on Saswata’s bed, an honour which even so-called gentleman Ranajit, did not acquire. He realized that the picturesque description of the real village life in his literary works,
although earned him accolades, and ignited his readers, yet in reality the society looked down upon his rustic origin. That was only because he carried the blood of a tea-garden labourer in his veins. It was for that reason that he was falsely accused of embezzling funds with regard to publication of the souvenir of the book fair. The only two persons who could vouch for his innocence were his colleagues Niranjanda and Barunda. But Niranjanda had retired from his service and Barunda was ill. So Ranajit is forced to hide his identity and shun office and in doing so, he is compelled to participate in the celebration of another friend Sumit’s exhibition of paintings. Ranajit is conscience-stricken as he remembers his father pleading him to play the drum and sing the favourite Jhumur song:

“রণ রণ, মান্দলটা কই রে? বড়া বাজা বাপ। বুমুরটাও গাইস। ঐ যে

‘বাদল দিনের মান্দল বাজে আঁধার জলে অত্রে
ও সাধীরে যাব নাই, যাব নাই, মালিকের ঘরে।

— পা বেটা, শরিলটা দুখাছে, মনটাও।”

The two Jhumur songs used in the novel ‘Deyal’ has successfully represented the mental disturbance of the hero as well as to serve as the impetus in solving all his dilemmas.

to wipe away the fatigue of the body and mind. He fondly remembers how the tunes and beats of the Jhumur songs washed away the pains of poverty, the strains of labour, of his hard working father, while he, being established at the heart of fame and wealth, was exhausted by his puzzling emotions. Although his tired physical entity resides in the company of his elite friends, his exhausted mind seeks respite in the nostalgia of the melody and beats of Jhumur songs.

The two Jhumur songs used in the novel ‘Deyal’ has successfully represented the mental disturbance of the hero as well as to serve as the impetus in solving all his dilemmas.
North-east is the confluence of many races and tribes, and Meghalaya is the home of the Khasi tribes, possessing their own unique tribal culture and customs. Anjali Lahiri, a renowned litterateur from Meghalaya, is the author of the famous novel ‘Biloris’, where she perfectly blends the various aspects of Khasi folk life. One such element used is a Khasi folk song, which makes its presence in the novel on two occasions, each with a different connotation.

The heroine of the novel, Biloris Ponrup, is a vivacious, lively, young Khasi girl, much as the clear, slender Jasai River which flows from Peakphut in Shillong. She lives in a small Khasi village with her mother and brother, their only means of subsistence being a small tea-stall. Yet Biloris’ appearance bears the traces of aristocracy and aspirations of a dignified life.

April announces the arrival of spring in Biloris’ village Marbisu, where all villagers are engaged in preparing for the annual dance festival to welcome spring. This dance is a customary ritual of satisfying the god of harvest as well as the occasion in which young men and women choose their spouses. Like all other youngsters Biloris is also a jubilant participant of this joyous programme. After completing her household chores Biloris spends her evening beside the Jasai river, humming the words of a favourite rhyme as she dips her feet in Jasai’s water. “कि जेम, कि ओयान, कि जेम, कि लेइत/ उँम निरपि, उँम जासई...” The silky smooth green moss, the yellow petals of the dandelions, swaying with the flowing river, sweeping the rocks, makes Biloris hum the song:

“कि जेम, कि ओयान,
कि जेम, कि लेइत...”
The author gives the following Bengali translation of the above rhyme:

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বছর আসে, যায় সে চলে
স্নেহিত জলে তুষ্ণ তুলে,
ও সিমি, ও জসাই নদী
বইছো তুমি নিরবধি...
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Just as the waves storm the crystal clear water of Jasai river, so also dreams of Biloris storm the calmness of her thoughts and strive to cross the barriers of the distant mountains where the sun sets. Her mind wishes to discover a new land beyond the mountain range where she hopes to meet her Prince charming and a society free of cultural obscurities and traditional restrictions. Biloris ardently hopes to meet her Prince charming from the land beyond the mountains where the culture is free of superstitions and traditional restrictions.

Attracted by melodious voice and beauty of Biloris, a young government official, Sumanta Choudhury, who is a regular customer of Biloris’ tea-stall, is drawn towards her. Hailing from the tea-gardens of Tinsukia, Sumanta felt Biloris to be a live canvas of Paul Gaugan. As the couples gazed at each other, the softly flowing Jasai river stood guard to their new-found love. In this part of the novel, the author uses the Khasi song to represent the natural union of the crystal clear waters of the Jasai river with the ever-flowing dreams of the beautiful young Biloris.

However, certain unforeseen changes completely shattered Biloris’ dreams as well as her life forever. Despite being engaged to a wealthy officer’s daughter, Rita, Sumanta unknowingly fell in love with Biloris. Simple, easy-going Biloris rejected the offer of love by the village lad Tokin and surrendered to Sumanta, in the hope of creating an educated future generation. She prided herself in bearing Sumanta’s children and
hoped to build up an ideal home for him. However, her dreams were shattered when Sumanta’s obeisance to caste system and aristocracy forced him to desert Biloris and flee forever.

The Khasis being a matriarchical society, they do not label any child as illegitimate, even if the mother and child is disowned by the man. So Biloris’ daughter ‘Lily’ grew up in the home of her grandmother. Biloris’ entire world centered on Lily and all her efforts were directed towards her proper upbringing. In a bid to provide Lily with the best possible education and honourable social values, Biloris crossed the threshold of village life and took up the job of a housemaid in the capital city of Shillong. Very soon she was thrown out of the house on charges of theft. Her miseries however did not end there. In an attempt to reorganize her life, Biloris, along with some other young women of her like, were duped by a Panjabi contractor, and set out for Delhi with the hope of better job prospects. Instead they were transported to the brothels of Dariyaganj.

At the young age of mere twenty-one, Biloris became deprived of all the love and cares of life and had to painfully bear the burden of physical tortures. Her tears washed away all her dreams regarding her dear daughter. However, she is often haunted by the thought of the purity of the love which Tokin had once offered her and which she had erroneously rejected.

In the following phase of the novel, Biloris and her comrades are rescued by a self-help group, and returns to Shillong, after six long years, infected by severe venereal diseases which segregate them from the rest of the society. Along her journey back home, the winding mountainous roads, the coiling black smoke of the mini-bus she is travelling in, the
greenery all around her, the serene beauty of nature, makes Biloris nostalgic and she is lost in her thoughts. She painfully realizes that she has nothing to give to her society, not even touch her beloved daughter with her infected hands. Her hesitation is suddenly soothed by her favourite folk song about the Jasai river:

"ফি দ্রেম, ফি গুরানি, ফি দ্রেম কি লেইট
উম নিরপি, উম জাসাই...

The Bengali translation of which is as follows:

"বছর আসে যায় সে চলে
স্ফটিক জলে তুলান তুলে
উলি পথি, উ জাসাই নদী
বইবে তুমি নিরবদি
অলাগ অলসী যাহাই
মনে কে আব রাখে তাহাঈ
বইবে তুমি নিরবদি...

The slender Jasai river has become vivacious after the autumn rains as it flows into oblivion. As Jasai rushes out to meet the distant sea, she drowns the stains and dirt of all storms and whirlwinds into darkness. Likewise, Biloris also seeks to wash out the sins and stains of her past in the waters of Jasai and wishes to embrace a cool, quiet life in future. She is now an experienced woman of the world just as the brimming Jasai river, full of untold tales of the past. Jasai river is the sole witness of Biloris' silent acceptance of worldly life, once more.

The use of the Khasi folk song in the novel by the novelist has given a new life to the tribal heroine and enhanced the style of the novel. The folk song represents the absolute unification of the easy, simple and vivacious Khasi girl Biloris and the pure, beautiful Jasai river which is a symbol of the natural beauty of Meghalaya.
Another popular form of folk song of the tea-tribe is *Tusu gaan* or *Tusu* song which is sung during the Tusu festival. This festival and the songs particular to it, reveal the joys and sorrows as well as the various problems in the daily lives of the tea-tribes. On this occasion, tradition has it that the head of the family relates the tales of the past to the junior members of the family.

The novel 'Alekjandar Purer Kathakata' is a memorable creation of Jhumur Pande. Written on the backdrop of the lifestyle of the tea-tribes of the Barak region is full of folk elements. In this relation we wish to discuss the suitability of the application of Tusu songs in this novel.

Alekjandarpur is a small village in the Barak Valley. The river Dhaleswari flows on the east, of which the Muslims on one bank while the Manipuris on the other. Most of the villagers here are farmers, working as sharecroppers. The meeting place of all the villagers is the village *Battola* or under the Bayan tree. The main characters of the novel are Budhua, his wife, Lakshmimoni and their little son, Mangal. Besides, there are a lot of other large and small characters, as well as the stories of their hopes and despair. Such a character is Sarada, who lives with her brother. One important event of the clan-life of Lakshmimoni and Sarada is *Tusu* Puja. An inseparable part of Tusu puja is songs sung at different intervals of the festival. According to convention, this time Sarada has to play the role of Tusu’s mother: So, *Tusu* songs are being sung at Sarada’s home:

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“রামের মাগো দুঃখ দশা
রামের বড়ু দুঃখ দশা
তেল বিনে মাথায় জটা
বস্ত্র বিনে গাছের বাকল।”
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At the end the idol is immersed in the river accompanied by the song:

In the second part of Tusar festival, all the women of the village including daughters roam the alleys of the village with the idol of Tusar on her heads, visiting the compounds of the affluent classes, singing the song:

Pusha. They sing:

encompassed in the celebration of Tusar festival on a rainy winter night of

Subha, Ramswaran’s wife and other women of the village, are

Lakshminani also comes and joins the tune, assuming Tusar as a little child.
In the novel discussed here, the Tusu songs sung on the occasion reflect the stories of the different joys and sorrows, problems and their solutions, of the everyday lives of Sarada, Subala, Lakshmimoni, and others.

The same novel contains instances of two Bhojpuri folk songs, centering on the folk ritual, Jitia. The novel has it that the ancestors of the characters cited in it were inhabitants of Bihar, who had flocked to Assam to work as tea-garden labourers. Working under the rigorous supervision of the European masters, these people could never go back to their native Bihar. This uprooted population made Assam their new homeland, their deracinated culture finding newer grounds, getting assimilated with the Assamese culture. Jitia is a folk festival observed among the folk people of Bihar. The novel mentions some folk songs which are inherent parts of this festival practiced by the ancestors of Lakshmimoni. The characters of the novel, Budhua and his laboring wife, Lakshmimoni, and their little son, Mangal were a peasant happy family. However, at the conspiracy of the notorious businessman, Samirbabu, a prospective candidate for the oncoming elections, Budhua is forced to change his profession. He has now taken to brewing local liquor. Want and scarcity becomes their regular companion. Encircled in these problems, Lakshmimoni arranges for the celebration of Jitia, for the welfare of her family and son. According to the ritual of this festival, married women assemble together with the puja articles, and prepare to bathe in the river at early dawn. They sing some folk songs on this occasion, such as:
A three-day programme, this festival concludes with the women taking a dip in the river and worshipping the earthen pot on the river bank. They sing a different song on the last day of the festival, as below:

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“রাধে রকমিন দুনুর বহনিয়া
কি চলিহ ভইলি না রাধে
গঙ্গা আসনানোয়া
তবি গেইলি গঙ্গা...
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These song offerings to Mother Ganga by the women, absolving their sins and seeking blessings for their family and children, are presented in the novel which has no doubt elevated the status of the novel.

Another popular form of Bengali folk song is *Bhatiali*, usually sung by boatmen plying the rivers. When a boatman steers his boat across the heart of the river towards an unknown destination/horizon a little respite from his tiring work finds expression in his rendition of a *Bhatiali* song. In other words, *Bhatiali* song is the musical expression of a lonely boatman’s
leisurely recreation. In the novel, ‘Alekjandar Purer Kathakata’, there is included a *Bhatiali* song at the end of the novel.

In the concluding part of the novel, the happiness of Lakshmimoni and Budhua’s family is disrupted by the conspiring people around them. Incited by the notorious Samirbabu, simpleton Budhua is induced to change his profession. He even becomes suspicious of his friend and well-wisher Shambhu as having an illicit affair with his wife and inflicts unjustified pain and torture on him. Ultimately, drunkard Budhua, losing all moral values of life, trades his entire ancestral property to notorious Samirbabu and elopes with Banowari’s wife.

When the whole of Alekjandarpur is engrossed in celebrating the arrival of Goddess Durga, Lakshmimoni at last finds some time, beside the Dhaleswari river, to be alone with nature to unburden herself. As she settles down on the river banks she hears the faint sound of a *Bhatiali* song from one of the boats plying in the river. As she hears the song she imbibes the real meaning of it. The *Bhatiali* song mentioned in the novel is:

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“কইন্ত্যা নাই হর যায় রে
চোঙা পিঠা লইয়া
বুড়া বাবা সঙ্গে চলইন
bগলো ছাড়ি লইয়া।”
```

Lakshmimoni has silently drained herself in maintaining the loving family of her husband and child without giving preference to her own likes and dislikes. But the only reward she got was poverty, derision and insult. Today Lakshmimoni is free of all burdens and has attained the status of taking the decisions of life. She wipes off all fears and decides to protect her son and her ancestral property of three generations. She vows to give a new meaning to her future. The *Bhatiali* song of the boatman inspires her to take this firm decision of accepting the challenge to restructure her life.
4.7 Folk Songs used in Short Stories

We now shift our attention to discuss the application of folk songs in the short stories of North-east India. In Amitava Dev Choudhury’s story, Prasiddha Rakta, there is reference of a dark, Santhal boy, whose only prized possession was a flute, a symbol of love, with which he played the tunes of the Bhadu, Tusu, Karam, Jhumur songs. Further, the author uses few lines of a Jhumur song, which mingled with his own words gives a significant meaning to his story. The author uses the words of a common Jhumur song:

“ও তুই লাল পাহাড়ির দেশে যা,
রাজ্য মাটির দেশে যা
হিথাক তুকে মানাইছে নাই গো
একেবারে মানাইছে নাই গো!”

in his story in the following manner:

“জেগে উঠছে আঙুল মধ্যমা তজনী অনামিকা জেগে উঠছে বৃদ্ধা কনিষ্ঠা অনামিকা
হাত জাগা উঠছে ব্লেড ওই তো ব্লেড না বাঁশি জেগে উঠছে অদ্ভুত বাঁশি ও তুই
লাল পাহাড়ির দেশে যা রাজামাটির দেশে যা লাল পাহাড়ির দেশে যা হিথাক
তোকে মানাইছে নাই গো লাল পাহাড়ির দেশে যা বাঁশি বাজছে অদ্ভুত আমার
শরীরময় অক্ষরার হলকা মিষ্টি জ্যোৎসার মতো আমার হাড় আমার হাড়ে জ্যোৎস্যা
বাতাস, শনিশ্চন সাঁওতাল সেই লোকটা ওই তো আমি বাঁশি হয়ে পেছি কেমন বাঁশি.
বাজছে আঙুল বাজছে ব্লেড বাজছে আমি বাজছি মধ্যমা তজনী অনামিকা কনিষ্ঠা
আমি বাজাও আমাকে বাজাও এই জ্যোৎসনার আচ্ছন্ন অক্ষরার আমাকে বাঁশির
মতন তুলে নাও বাজাও আমাকে বাজাও আমাকে বাজাও।”

In the later part of the story is included the instance of the love story of Sandip’s classmate, Sharmishtha. Sandip did not reciprocate her love for him, and this frustration drove her to attempt suicide by slashing her wrists. In another instance, Sandip’s brother like friend, Amalchandra expresses
his love for a Delhi-based young beauty whom he had saved from death by donating his blood after she had met with an accident. All these incidents of love are tied together by the bond of blood. That is why the dark complexioned Santhal boy had to die a bloodied death, protecting his love; love-struck Sharmistha shed blood to secure the love of her beloved; while Amalchandra found his love by donating blood to an injured girl. The blood that flows in the veins of all humans is always red, and its only objective is to sustain life and love in every human being. This objective knows no difference between complexions or restricted mentality.

With the passage of time Raj shekhar recovers and dreams of a new heaven where the dead and infirm for years again come to life. This new haven of Rajshekhar is like his dream, 'lal paharir desh', where the dark Santhal boy is playing the tunes of love in his flute, to the beats of Madal; where damsels like Sharmishtha, shedding off all sophisticated restrictions of the modern life, surrenders herself to her love. The sharp razor has transformed into a flute in that land of wonder. A land where exists only the love of the hard-working poor people which they have earned by spilling their blood. The inhabitants of this new land have no hatred or envy, any dreams for the future. Rajshekhar places the people of the new generation, like Sharmishtha and the Santhal boy in his new world, who he thinks are unsuited in this rude world. In this way the author has used the lyrics of a Jhumur song to construct his storyline in a unique manner.

Another particular instance of Tusu festival recurs in a short story of Jhumur Pande. Tradition has it that, on the occasion of the Tusu festival, the head of the family relates the tales of the past to the junior members of the family. This phenomenon is observed in Jhumur Pande’s short story, ‘Sukh Gachher Galpo’.

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In her story, ‘Sukh Gachher Galpo’, an elderly character, Rambasia, re-lives the tale of the Tusu festival of her childhood days. In fact, ‘Sukh Gachher Galpo’ is an account of the reminiscences of Rambasia.

The story centres round old Rambasia, a tea-garden labourer and her orphaned grandson, Lakhinder. Lakhinder, a youngster of the modern generation refuses to take up the job of a tea-leaf gatherer. Instead he wishes to enjoy a luxurious modern life acquiring expensive modern gadgets in exchange of Rambasia’s landed property and monetary deposits. As Rambasia reviles her grandson for his wayward behavior, she rambles about her first love with the mahout of a circus party, the news of her son Bharat’s birth, incident of her elopement on her marriage night, the missing of her son, the death of her daughter-in-law. All these incidents come back to her as roles of snapshots. Although Rambasia fought incessantly for her livelihood, yet she cherished certain traditional values of life. For her, hereditary culture is more valuable than modernism. So, despite losing all the positive elements of life, she keeps alive the trails of her picturesque past, her favourite Tusu song, in the closet of her heart:

“ছেটাবাবুর ভাষা ঘরে
তুলে চেলা মাইরেছে
তে দেইখেছে, কে দেইখেছে
জনার বেটি দেইখেছে...”

In another short story’, Srimati Chale...’, by the same author, we find the use of another Tusu song:

“ওলো ওলো কালো ছৌঁড়ি
তোর যে বড় নাম জনি
বাংলার ভিতর কদম ফেলি
সাহেবের মন তুলালি
চি চি লাজ লাগে না

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A group of Tusu singers taunt a dark-complexioned girl saying that despite her uncomely appearance, she has dared to venture in the Bunglows of the Sahibs and seduce them. Shouldn’t she be ashamed of her behaviour? With such a dark complexion, it does not suit her to chew betel leaf.

The central character of the short story, ‘Srimati Chale...’, is Srimati, daughter of Jagat Bauri and beloved wife of Sridam. Srimati, to save her honour, hacked down the infamous dacoit, Bhotu, and accepted jail sentence like a victorious woman. The four long years behind the bars brought to her several devastating news like the death of her father and mother-in-law. On the day she is released, her husband Sridam does not come to receive her. She is, however, worried that some misfortune has befallen him, and runs frantically across lanes, fields and market places, to reach home as soon as possible. As she runs anxiously, she reminisces about her past and her beloved household, the picking of blackberry in their courtyard, of their cow Dhali and its calf Mangala, the Shefali tree, the garland of Shefali flowers during Durga Puja, visiting the Padma Beel, even catching Koi, Magur fishes from her father’s beel and cooking tasty dishes. All these happened when her mother was not at home. In fact her mother had eloped with her Subhash uncle. Srimati only faintly remembers her mother’s countenance. She faintly remembers that during Poush festival, when Srimati and the ladies of the neighbourhood visited the local households, with the Tusu deity; singing Tusu songs, her mother also lent voice to the song.
While in jail, Srimati acquainted an elderly, insane woman, who often indulged in laughing or crying or throwing food. Sometimes she spent a long time to prepare betel leaf and nut and chew it leisurely, and occasionally even offered Srimati. Today Srimati wonders what it was that had made the woman insane. Just as the event of betel nut chewing by a dark complexioned woman is unbecoming, so also the insanity of that old woman must be due to some shameful reason. Srimati remembers the shame she had to endure because her mother had run away with another man. The Tusu song is perfectly used to weave a connection between Srimati’s shame on account of her mother’s elopement and the improper act of chewing betel nut by the elderly, insane lady, within the jail bars.

_Baul_ is another aspect of folk song which is worth mentioning. In fact, _Baul_ is a religious sect following the doctrine of austere penance of the body as the seat of ultimate truth. The central theme of their philosophy is ‘What is present in the body is present in the Universe’. Based on this philosophy, _Baul_ aims at discovering the unknown personality through austere physical penance. Such a _Baul_ philosophy based folk song is presented by author Soumitra Baishya, in his short story, ‘Nikhileshder Benche Thaka’.

The hero Nikhilesh is an educated unemployed. He spends his lazy days painfully, slighted by everyone around him. One day his nephew Piklu, a ninth-standard student, requested him to write an essay on ‘Aim in Life’, for his homework. Although Nikhilesh mechanically agrees to accomplish the task, yet the essay ‘Aim in Life’ actually makes him thoughtful when he thinks of his own aimless life. Staying alive just physically and realizing the meaning of life reminds him of the Baul song:
‘Aim in Life’ is not only some lines of pen on paper, but in reality it is a life-long search, similar to the life-long penance to know the unknown bird of the Bauls. Nikhilesh realizes the essence of Baul philosophy that the search for the ultimate truth involves such endeavours which should be indulged only during youth when the physical and mental strength is in its prime. The meaning of life changes with the passage of time, and cannot be retrieved, just as a broken earthen vessel cannot be re-structured. According to Baul doctrine, ‘life’, does not only mean keeping alive some cells, but to select a certain goal in life and arduously to achieve it. And this is perfectly reflected by the author in the above-mentioned Baul song.

Another very popular Baul song being musically rendered for many years, by various folk singers is as follows:

“সাপের লাল সাবাইল মেঘে বৈরাগী
লালের আগা সাবাইলাম, ভোগা সাবাইলাম
লালদি সাবাইলাম ভুগন্ডি...!”

The above-mentioned baul song has been used by Badrujjaman Choudhury, in the story, ‘Laakh Taakar Manush’. A simple summarization of the song has it that the different parts of the bottle gourd plant can be used for different purposes; as a delicious dish for a gourmet or as a life-saving musical instrument for a Bairagi.

The Story ‘Laakh Taakar Manush’ tells the tale of a beautiful young girl Aasman Taara and her old grandmother. Aasman Taara spent most of her time in listening to the reminiscences of her grandma, which seemed to wipe away most of their present miseries of poverty and scarcity. So she enjoyed such stories. The old lady was always anxiously burdened with the
responsibility of maintaining a young girl and protecting her chastity, which made her short-tempered. The two persons barely survived on the meager earnings from the bottle gourds and bananas growing in their courtyard. Vegetable vendor Bashir, whom Aasman Taara called Chacha or uncle, was a regular customer of their meager ware. But Bashir, while pretending to buy vegetables from the old woman cast lecherous glances at Aasman Taara, and sought to accost her at any pretext. Bashir was well-known throughout the village for his debauchery. One day, as Bashir accompanied the old woman, on the pretext of paying her for her vegetables, his fellow farmer taunted him, indicating his obnoxious intentions. In this, he was joined by another farmer who sang the famous Baul song:

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"সাধের লাউ বানাইল মোরে বৈরাগী।
লাউয়ের আগা খাইলাম, ডোগা খাইলাম
লাউদি বানাইলাম জুংকালি।"
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The Baul song is intelligently used in the story to ridicule Bashir's lecherous intentions of seducing young Aasman Taara. So the tuneless rendition of the above-mentioned Baul song inspired a third farmer to quip that this bottle-gourd is not that which accompanies a Bairagi, because the raw banana between the two is the old granny, Renubibi. The author judiciously uses this popular Baul song in his story to depict how this deeply philosophic song is transformed into a light-hearted folk item by way of acclimatization into the daily events of life.

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"হরি দিন তো গেল সন্ধ্যা হলো
পার করো আমারে... !"
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This Baul song has been used by two authors in two separate stories with different perceptions.
In the story ‘Thain’, old Harimohan is the central character. His childhood friend Mohit, while on his death-bed, sang to Harimohan, a popular Baul song, ‘হরি দিন তো গেল সন্ধ্যা হলো—’, to remind him that in this present world, neither wife nor children are one’s own, but only a fantasy. The only practical relation among one another is that of selfishness, and just as sunlight vanishes at the end of day, so also, one’s family members disappear when their selfish demands are appeased. Harimohan was sceptic about Mohit’s belief and was displeased with him even after his death. However, towards the end of his own life’s duration, Harimohan is forced to discover tinges of selfishness in everything around him. His discarded homeland, forgotten friends, the loss of the simple, evergreen, boundless nature, the labourious rearing of his two sons, one of whom is a teacher and the other an engineer, they and their wives’ misbehavior, and even the last letter of his wife Manomoti, all appear to be full of meanness. To escape from the hatred of those around him and live life according to his own principles, old Harimohan takes up the job of an accountant with a Marwari businessman. He eagerly hoped that in his struggle for an honourable survival he would be supported by his wife Monomoti, who resided with his engineer son in Bombay, and that they would again share the same shelter. But to his utter dismay, even Monomoti, like the others, advises him to try and adjust with his son’s life-style. Thus Harimohan realizes the actual philosophical meaning of the Baul song, which his friend had sung in his death-bed. That is, other than God, beauty and activity, no other values of life can sustain a man in his old age. The author makes a brilliant use of the folk song on his story ‘Thain’ to solve Harimohan’s queries about life.
Author Dipankar Kar has used a line of the above-mentioned Baul song in his story 'Shatru Shatru Khela', as a title to the introductory chapter. It is pointed out that the devotees pray to Lord Hari at the end of their lives, in order to pass on smoothly to the other life beyond this world, towards the end of their physical life on this earth. This is compared to dusk or evening of person's life span. However, the author uses this Baul song in his story to give a different meaning to the doctrine of life and death.

"হরি দিব তো গেল সন্ধ্যা হলো"{58}

It is like an unnatural phenomenon to acknowledge the opposite natural phenomenon of the approach of dusk. Darkness and gloom brought about by terror, bomb blasts, are not mere lyrics of the Baul song, but are a bitter reality. As if the whole world is preparing for a game of enemies.

That part of human body which decides 'life' and 'death' is termed as 'life-bird'. The human body is only a cage. All our emotions like love and hatred, hope and aspiration, zeal for life is contained in the heart. In the poem discussed above, the poet resorts to the lines mentioned to describe the physique and mind of a beautiful prostitute and the Baul song is used to express the remorse of the poor woman. The body of the beautiful woman is the symbol of a cage where 'love' does not reside. It is only the haven of sorrow, remorse and sin. Just as a Baul searches for the unknown bird, so also this hungry mind searches for a migratory bird of love in the market of flesh trade.

Many songs have been composed on the basis of various aspects of the Hindu Puranas, which are not related to any particular religious ritual. Instead, they ascribe more importance to humanity and humane activities or
rituals rather than religious attributes. And it is for this humane quality of
these songs that they enjoy a special honour in literature. Two such songs
have found place in Kartik Lahiri’s short story, ‘Kangsa’.

The story relegates the tale of a poor, old couple, who have lost their
only son, Dulal, whom they set adrift in the waters of the Howrah river.
From that day, every single day of the past thirty-five years, they patiently
await the return of their son, spending their days laughing, weeping and
praying to God, in their make-shift home on the banks of the river. In order
to earn a living, the old man dons the dress of a beggar, tilak on forehead,
cymbals in hand, trying his best to sing a folk song in his tuneless voice.
Sometimes his old woman picks up the cymbals and replaces his hoarse
voice her melodious tune of a Vorai geet

“রাই জাগে গো জাগে শামের মনমোহনী বিনোদনী রাই।”

The freshness of the Vorai geet (song) enlivens them every morning to
patiently look forward to their only son’s return from the land of death.
They have no complaint against anyone, not even their fate, but only hope
that a new dawn will bring back their son. The old man strives hard to
make his tune somewhat melodious to appease his audience, or there would
not be enough alms for them to repair their before the heavy rains. But to
add woe to worries, some vandals pulled down their shanty, in the name of
collecting revenues. The old couple had no one to turn to either for alms or
for accusations. When patron turns to be a tyrant, then public impeachment
is the only recourse left, and so the old woman seeks to cry out to the
public for redressal through the song:

“আমরার কপাল ভাঙিলে পর
তুমির লাভ নাই”

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The Puranas have that Lord Krishna was born within the prison walls of Kangsa, whom he was destined to kill. And for this reason, he had to reside in Gokul, with Nanda’s family, till he came of age. Likewise, in the present day also, there is the need of a reliever in the society, and with this strong hope in mind, the old woman sings the Vorai song, to spread awareness among the people. It is not only a folk song, as they do not seek for alms, it is their only way of protest against injustice and yearnings for peace which makes them sing the tale of the Puranas with a new flavour.

The author has used the folk song to represent the voice of protest of a terror-stricken society.

In the story ‘Bharong Paakhir Naach’, author Shyamal Bhattacharya, has directly used some tribal folk songs, together with a perfect blend of Baul songs. The story begins with the wailing tune of a Kirtan by Haripriya, from Sindhukumar village of Tripura, who has found shelter in Kalibabu’s home in Kolkata. Haripriya sings the following Kirtan in Tripuri language, before the idol of Radha-Krishna:

“কৌথানা- নি রিংহিয়া খালাই
সালব মকল কানা
প্রাণ বাখা কাইসা খাইদি লাই
প্রাণ বাই বাখা কাইসা খাইদি লাই।”

Kalibabu’s daughter Kalapini is like a grand-daughter to Haripriya, to whom she explains the history of the above-mentioned Kirtan. The
leader of the Riyang rebellion, Raja Ratan Mani, is everyone’s dear God. In his court this Kirtan was sung as an offering to Lord Khusi-Krishna. Even today the Tripuri Kirtaniyas express their heart’s emotion to through this song offering.

The author wished to propagate the idea that the people of up-stream and down-stream owe allegiance to the one and only God of Love, Lord Krishna, which he successfully accomplished by depicting the discussion between Haripriya and Kalapini’s grandmother, Nirupama.

In the following segment of the story the context of the Baul song enters the discussion as part of Haripriya’s reminiscence. Haridas and Haripriya was a beggar couple, who sang Kirtans for alms, before they became permanent residents of Sindhukumar village of present Tripura. Their elder son is a teacher of Kokborok language in the village school. Long ago, on the day of Ambu-bachi, Haripriya and her spouse, along with many others of their neighbourhood, started out for a pilgrimage to Kolkata. On reaching Sealdah station, they were struck by the flood of human population there, and in their bewilderment they lost all their money, belongings and even their companions. As they waited at the platform for their comrades, the afternoon heat, terrible hunger and worries, bore them down. For some temporary relief, and to boost up his wife, Haridas croons the Baul song:

“আমার মনোপায়ি মিশিতে চায় যেয়ে ওইসব পাথির দলে
যেই সব পাথির ফাঁকি দিয়া ঘুরে বেড়ায় বনে জঙ্গলে
কুঁত করে করি মানা, পাথিরে বাসা ছেড়ো না
সে আমার কথা গুনে না, তার সনে পারি না বলে—”

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Man is forever a dreamer, fantasizing that all the good things of his dreams as well as the home of his god is stored away in some unknown land, which induces him to undertake adventures to foreign lands. However, the truth is that our tattered home and this body of ours is the real pilgrimage. God resides in the temple of Love caged within the body, and it is meaningless to wander from place to place in search of him. This is the context which is repeatedly rendered in the Baul songs. At that moment, homeless, penniless and helpless, Haridas compared himself to a homeless bird who was wandering in a foreign land in search of friends and shelter. It is a real manifestation of the lyrics of the Baul song for the old couple.

In the following part of the story, old Haripriya getting separated from her husband among the huge population, continued to sing the incomplete Baul song of her husband:

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শিকলি কেটে ময়না টিয়া, তুইসব পাথির দলে গিয়া
আবোল ভাবোল বলবলিয়ে
হায়া হতে চায় মূলে
হায়ে রে জংলা পাখি
আর তুমি দিও না ফাঁকি —
...
কুঠ করে করি মানা, বাসা ছেড়ে না, বাসা ছেড়ে না
সে আমার কথা শুনে না, তার সেন পারি না বলে —
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as she searches for her husband here and there, weeping for him. Haripriya’s song reveals the sorrows of losing one’s near and dear ones in a foreign land. Moreover, Haripriya, mother of an educated school teacher, is forced to take up begging for a livelihood, to grab the money thrown at her, and at last find shelter in Kalibabu’s home as a flood-affected refugee.

At Kalibabu’s place, Haripriya befriends his daughter Kalapini, and they share a very close relationship. On the basis of their verbal discourses,
the author tries to paint the picture of ethnic clashes between the Bengalis and the tribal population of Tripura. Haripriya re-lives the period of terrorism during the eighties. She particularly remembers the day of the bloody riot when Bengali and tribal people gathered at the house of Kirtania Goverdhan Das of Mandai. Here the author has used a Tripuri war-song of the Reshier—Khagra, as follows:

"হাঙুকুকুক কলকু মহুমুই পিনজাগই
পাগড়ী নরগলিয়া যাদু পাগড়ী নরগলিয়া..."

The Bengalee translation of the above Tripuri Kirtan given by Govardhanabu's guru Khusikrishna in the following words:

"....দীর্ঘ পাহাইড়া পথে কাউনের চাষ এত ভালো অহং বে লোয়ামী
যখন যুদ্ধে যায় তার বড় পাগড়ীতে অবি দেখতে পায় না,পাহাইড়া পথের দুই ধারে
দু'পাঁচি ফুলের পাছ, তাঁর পাওয়ার গড়ালিও দেখা যায় না, করনার ধারে অনেক
পাথর থাকিয়া পৌঁছাইয়া নিকটে পৌঁছাইয়ে পারি না, ঘন কুয়াশার করণে তারে
একটিবার দেখতে পাওয়া যে বেদানা সে যেন রাধিকার বিরহ।"

The singing of a war-song instead of a song of love, in a Kirtan, is only an indication of self-protection, to which even their Lord Krishna had assorted in the battle of Mahabharata. The simple, peace-loving tribal of the green and lustrous Tripura has often fallen prey to the atrocities of political interests. The above song is only a protest against such atrocities and a prayer to their protector and savior, Lord Krishna, by the Kirtaniyas, immersed in the thoughts of Radha.

On that terrible night, the war-song was followed by a folk song of the Kuki tribe:

"মোনা ভিয়েনা চুলে ভেনুইন
খেয়ে চুলাই হন
খলং রক পা ইন খোয়ং"
As the Kirtan proceeded, Govardhanbabu’s eight-year old son began to dance happily to the tune of the Kirtan. The Kirtaniyas assembled there were astounded by the sight of a little Bengali boy dancing like a bird to the tunes of a Kuki song. Moved by the scene they continued to sing:

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ছাপাহাইন মে রিল আরহলাপ লা ইন।
পিঙ্গি ভার আইছিরেম লাইইন।
নিনিং খলা আইছিরেম পোইন।
পামিয়েন খুরেকা অনইছিরেম।```

This song reveals the emotional bondage of the Tripura-based Bengali and Kuki culture, on the one hand, while throwing light on the Kuki belief of the inception of life on earth. Just as the Bharong bird dances in merriment to celebrate God’s creation, so also the little child danced to the melodious tune of the Kuki song, forgetting all the restrictions of racial differences. Just then, a group of savage, greedy, egotists came down upon the gathering like an apocalypse and cut down everyone present there. Only Haripriya, Haridas and Govardhanbabu’s little son, survived the brutal attack. Haridas and Haripriya brought up the little boy as their own son, Sudama, who later became a teacher in a Kokborok school in Sindhukumar village in Tripura. He had married a Tipra woman and had a child. As Haripriya reminisces about that horrible night, the only question which perturbs her is that how will the society identify Sudama’s child, as a Bengali or as a Tipra? Actually the child is nothing but a representative of mankind. This is the message that reflected through the Kuki song and the events described in the story, thus giving the story a different status.
In the following analysis, we would like to discuss the application of *Bhatiali* songs in the short stories of North-east Bangala literature. One such Bhatiali song is aptly used in Rita Ghosh’s short story ‘Baraker Banke’.

The story talks of a river-bank anchorage of the Barak river, called Masjid Ghat, lying opposite of Silchar town. Machan Mia is a veteran ferryman of Masjid Ghat, following an occupation that his family had been practicing for the past three generations. Presently, he lives in Silchar town, in a rented house with the family of his working son. Presently confined within the walls of the rented house, his mind floats backwards to his past, when he was a tired but happy boatman, ferrying people across the river throughout the day. At the end of the day the red glow of the dying sun soothed his body and mind and as he marveled at the creation of God, let out his heart in the following *Bhatiali* song:

“তুমি দুনিয়ার রসিক আল্লা
নীন দুনিয়ার মালিক
ও রসিক...”

Although old Machan Mia is provided with all the comforts of life by his son, but the real mental freedom and happiness of Machan Mia is unknown to his son. The above-mentioned *Bhatiali* song brings back a ray of happiness to old Machan Mia who is otherwise tied to the boredom of the glittering city-life.

Another meaningful use of a Bhatiali song is found in Debabrata Choudhury’s story ‘Choraghumi’. Fishermen are acquainted with rivers from their childhood and their life and death revolve around it. The story highlights the life and struggle of three fishermen friends of different ages, Neelkantha, Dudhnath and Hajim Mia, each with a unique personal
problem and with a different attitude and expectation towards life. For Neelkantha, who was bogged down by the pressure of debt and the thought of the imminent death of his ailing son for lack of money required for his treatment, remains unmoved by the dangers of the storm outside. Neelkantha is hell-bent to catch a large fish, so as to earn some good money. On the other hand, young Dudhnath, an inexperienced, eighteen-year-old lad is awestruck by the fiery appearance of the stormy river. Neelkantha administers some philosophical discourse to dispel his fears and transform Dudhnath into an experienced soldier of life, but his lectures go unheeded. Just then, as if to dispense his fears, the bold and matured voice of Hajim Majhi sings out the following lines:

“ও আমার দরদি আগে জানলে
তোর ভাঙা হৌকায় চড়ড়তাম না…”

Superficially seen, this Bhatiali song is just a light-hearted explanation given by an old fisherman to describe the mental turmoil of the young fisherman. But at the end of the story, the same Bhatiali song is used to give a different status to the story. Neelkantha is a responsible father. In order to reduce his debt burden and to make his family solvent, he stakes his life to catch a large Boal fish, but loses his balance and gets drowned into the whirlpool of the river. His unconscious body is labouriously retrieved from the whirlpool by Dudhnath and Hajim Mia and laid down on the deck beside the half-conscious Boal fish. As Neelkantha regains consciousness in the evening on their way back home, he suddenly remembers the notoriety of the fish merchant, Kshirod. Neelkantha flares up in anger when he realizes that a major portion of the profit earned by selling the large fish, caught so painstakingly, would be usurped by the evil fish merchant. Anger and self-respect induces Neelkantha to release the
half-conscious fish into the water again, to enjoy a free life in the river once more. Actually, Neelkantha is the compassionate friend mentioned in the Bhatiali song, who realizes the joy of freedom and releases the fish he caught, although he fails to release Dudhnath from the bondage of a fisherman’s perennial woes and burden. Satisfied in being able to save the fish, he succumbs to a peaceful slumber on the deck of the boat. The Bhatiali song unites two separated ideas in the story.

4.8 Folk Songs used in Verses

In Ramanath Bhattacharya’s poem, ‘Mrityu Tumi Ekhon Esho Na’, a protagonist of life wishes to enjoy life through the soft touches of a child, in the companionship of women, in the spontaneous activities of all birds, animals and other creatures of nature. Not only that:

“হাসগুলো হঁচে হঁচে পলক জাগায়
মায়ের মমতা গায়ে গাঢ়েরা দাড়িয়ে
হায় প্রশান্তি দেয় খুব খুব বাতাসের গান
সোনালি ধানের খেত চেটে তুলে ডাকে
মাঝি ডাকে নদী ডাকে ভাটিয়ালি হরে
জ্যোৎস্নার আঁচল মেলে চাঁদ হাঁটে
তারা চলে আশুমান গিয়ে
চারদিকে সূর্যমার ফাঁদ
মৃত্যু তুমি এখন এসো না।”

The Bhatiali tune of the boatman, the sliding moon, everything touches the heart of the poet. Here the use of the Bhatiali folk song as a cause to stay alive is absolutely justified.
Another renowned poet of Barak Valley is Bikash Sarkar. We get a glimpse of a Bhatiali song in his poem, ‘Anantachhutor’, as in the following:

“বড়ইতলায় বাবা গাইছেন কেন এক ভাতিয়ালি গান 
কনেরা পরেছে কানে রোদে রোদে নুমে পড়া মালতীর ফুল 
পিয়নকাকুর বুঝি চিঠি দেবে, আমি দোঁড়ই ভাটিয়ালি ছেড়ে 
কিছুই দেয় না কাকু, গান শোনে আর অশ জিরেয় 
আমি কদম রেনু খুটুটি একবাগ এলোমেলো চিঠিপত্র ছেড়ে 
বারার দুঃখে বুঝে আসে, তাকে অপার্থিব মনে হয় 
হাওয়া নেই, শুধু ভাসমান গান, মাটিনা ভাটিয়ালি।”

This poem, ‘Anantachhutor’, is veneration to his ballad-singing father and the hardworking labourers, and reflects an image of his personal and literary life. The poem focuses on the emotional bondage of a refugee family with the daily events of its past. Sometimes it is reflected in the expectation of a letter, which gets accentuated by the father’s rendition of a Bhatiali tune. The arrival of the postman creates the ambience of an unwritten letter as described in the tune and lyrics of the Bhatiali song, which spreads a message of enjoyment among all, as they look back to their past. Every element of the song brings back to them memories of the land and life they had to leave behind. Just as the song brings back to them the various folk elements of their folk life, so also it gives an elevated status to the poem which contains it. The poet gives his personal opinion regarding this poem as in the following:

“দেশের বাড়ির নটালজিয়াকে আমি খুব সচেতনভাবেই ছুলতে চাইনা। কেননা 
আমি জানি মানুষকে শেষ পর্যন্ত তার শিকড়ের কাছেই ফিরে যেতে হয়।”

There are certain divisions of folk music, which can be sung on various family rituals at any time. These songs have certain specific
behavioural uses, for which they are sung at particular occasions only. One such specific form of folk song is *Bibaha Sangeet* or wedding song, which is most remarkable. Marriage is a social institution which acknowledges the promise of a man and woman to live together. Various races and tribesmen living together in the North-east practice various traditional and ritualistic functions and folk songs with respect to the wedding of a couple. One popular form of wedding song sung in the Barak Valley is known as *Dhamail*, which is sung by married women and young maidens describing various rituals and customs associated with wedding.

The story ‘Mokshoda Sundarir Harano Prapti’ by Jhumur Pande begins with a *Dhamail* song. The story is a nostalgic account of Mokshoda Sundari’s past life. Old Mokshoda is terrified of the word ‘partition’. Her memories of a happy family consisting of husband, children and other loving members of the family, is instantly uprooted by this single word. Mokshoda repeatedly returns to her memories to revive her torn roots, where she chances to find her lost son, Khokon, or her husband and mother-in-law, or the grandeur of her wedding. She fondly remembers her wedding evening— Mokshoda, daughter of Ramchandra Bhattacharya, dressed in her bridal attire, while her granny and Dhan Mashi, Bakul Mashi, and others are busy with the rituals of the wedding. Mokshoda still remembers perfectly the song announcing the arrival of the groom:

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“চালার তলায় ভামুর ঝুমুর
কলার তলায় বিয়া
আইলেন গো সুন্দরিজামাই
মুক্ত মাথায় দিয়া।”73
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A smile touches the lips of the permanent resident of Meherpur camp, Mokshoda, as she reflects upon the instance of her turmeric tainted body, at
the time of her *Adhibas* bath, and her friends Parulbala, Satyabhama, Charulata, and the other women, singing the Dhamail:

> "হেমতুঙ্গ কাঞ্চে করি
> যমুনাতে জল তরি
> জলের ভিতরে শামরাইগো...
> "

The song is an instrument of teasing the young bride by the rural women, citing the example of Radha-Krishna’s water amusements. The occasion of the groom’s arrival, the celebration of *Adhivas*, are all associated with different wedding songs. And for lonely, hapless, old Mokshoda Sundari, the memories of these ritualistic folk songs are the only respite from her present drudgery. The *Dhamail* songs are judiciously used in the story to represent the stray but happy memories of an old woman as well as a tool to build up the story line.

This wedding song finds entry in another story, ‘Baraaker Banke’, discussed earlier. A significant member of the hero Machan Mia’s family is Sakinabibi. Three times married and three times divorced, childless Sakinabibi seeks shelter in Machan Mia’s household. At that time Machan Mia’s wife had just expired. Though the villagers prescribed that Sakinabibi be married to Machan Mia, and she was also not opposed to the idea, yet Machan Mia himself refused to accept her as his wife. However, Sakinabibi spontaneously took up the responsibility of raising Moni, the motherless infant son of Machan Mia. She not only brought up Moni with all the love and care of a mother but also dreamt of getting him married to a beautiful celestial nymph. As she cradled little Moni, she crooned the wedding song:

> "মনিমিত্র বিয়া অইব
> বেহেরের হরি কাইনা অইব"
While spending his retired life in the city home of his son, Machan Mia reflects on his past, the hard labour of his ferrying days, and even the existence of Sakinabibi. Although Machan Mia never allowed Sakinabibi to enter his room in the twenty-five years that she had resided in his courtyard, Sakinabibi looked after Machan Mia’s household, his crops, his betel-nuts, his poultry and even the tattered bed-clothes, stitched by Machan’s deceased wife. In return of all these works, Sakina sometimes got a cup of tea or a piece of fish, depending upon the mercy of Machan Mia. These little benevolences were enough to for Sakinabibi to be happy. And so, even after eight years of marriage of Moni Mia, she croons the wedding song, “মনিমিছার বিয়া অইব...”

The story ends with Machan Mia returning to his village home, free from the shackles of city-life: Back home, he enjoys the happiness of a free, labourious boatman and the friendship of his old-age companion, Sakinabibi. The wedding song mentions a celestial nymph whose prepared food and betel nut would appease the master of the family. But in reality, at the end of Machan Mia’s life, Sakinabibi herself appears to be the celestial nymph. It is this realization of Machan Mia that induces him to dowse all his hesitation and dilemma and enjoy a cup of tea prepared by Sakinabibi. The wedding song is justly used in the story to reflect the ascension of Machan Mia from his age-old prejudices and misconceptions about life.

In Tapodhir Bhattacharya’s poem ‘Katha Shesh’, the application of a popular ceremonial folk song is quite laudable. The popular folk song ‘সোহাগ চাল বদনি ধনি নামাতো দেখি’ has been represented in the poem as follows:

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All the particles of this universe, the sun, the moon and the celestial bodies are moving according to the rules of nature. The distortions of these rules are found in the minds of man. The progress of mechanized civilization has swallowed up the traditional functions and rituals of folk life, like *brata, parvan*, story-telling, as well as ceremonial songs and dances, like *Sohag Bodoni’s* dance. Now the heart does not respond to the enjoyment of *Sohag Bodoni’s* song and dance. In the poem discussed, the poet highlights the absence of heartiness in the artificial pomp and grandeur of the present-day functions and ceremonies.

A particular form of folk song, commonly known as *Bhaowaia*, is sung in different regions of North Bengal and Assam, and some areas of present Bangladesh. In the valleys of Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, West Dinajpur and some other districts of North Bengal, East Rangpur district of Bangladesh and even in Dhubri and Goalpara districts of Assam, the people largely speak in the Rajbongshi or Kamrupi dialect, and the *Bhaowaia* songs are also sung in these dialects.

There are diversified opinions regarding the origin of the word *Bhaowaia*. Some say it comes from the word ‘Bhaowa’, some say it comes from the word, *Bao*, while still others opine that it comes from the word, Bhao. This form of songs comprise not only of individual songs of love and estrangement, but also collective songs relating to social and religious...
functions like weddings, ceremonies; accomplishment of hard labour, to express different tastes and moods of different situations. A division of Bhaowaia songs is attributed to the buffalo-herd, for which they are termed as the songs of ‘meadows and fields’. A farmer’s visualization of a crop-laden field finds expression in the following Bhaowaia song:

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"আল্লামেখেদেপানিদে
ছায়াদেরেতুই...
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This song is used by two poets with two different dimensions. In Tapodhir Bhattacharya’s poem, ‘Aasanna Shushrushar Barta’, contained in the collection of verses, ‘Kabitasamagrah’, he uses the song as in the following:

```
"আল্লামেখেদেপানিদে
খরাকুঠামাটে
নিয়েবার বর্ষনেরগান-গাওয়ামেখ
রান্নেরচুলাথেকে
বাঁচুকবাঁচুকবীজ,জাতকলাঙল
নিয়েআয়সুমকলীদিন
নাছুক,নাছুক্সোহাগবদনী,আল্লামেখ
দেপানিদেছায়াদেরেতুই!"
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The details of folk life that is long lost, comes back in the recurrence of various contents of folk culture. In this connection the poet brings in the lines of the Bhaowaia song to represent the prayer of a poor farmer to God for a shower of rain, so that the arid fields can once more become vegetative and fruitful.

Another renowned poet, Amalendu Guha makes use of the same Bhaowaia song in his poem, ‘Swapne Dekhi’, included in the collection of verses, ‘Luft Parer Gatha’. The part of the poem which contains this piece of the Bhaowaia song is as follows:
Human mind always craves for peace. So in a world of envy and hatred, man ardently prays for peaceful blessings in the form of clouds and rain. In the face of destruction of all creations, even the Creator seems to be stupefied. The poet attempts to highlight this issue in his poem, where he uses a part of the *Bhaowaia* folk song to impart his message.

In poet Karunaranjan Bhattacharya’s poem, ‘Til, Tisi, Nakshatrer Kshet’, uses folk song to depict the quiet, pleasant environment of rural life:

Scientific and technological inventions have remarkably changed the everyday life of human beings. The unbleached saree of one’s beloved is replaced by synthetic sarees, visits to Mars and Saturn, conquests of various dangers on earth, has led man towards a more successful life. On the other hand, scientific inventions of destructive weapons have marred the peace and serenity of human life. But still, pictures of *Palash* flowers blooming in the spring, and various other scenes of rural life haunt the memories of people living in towns. The poet has used the words, “একার চিত্রার তিল, তিনি কেন্দ্র”, of the folk song to describe the traditional village life,
as if to provide a temporary relief to the otherwise busy schedule of city people who are uprooted from their rural background.

Like all other elements of folk study, even folk songs owe their social penetration to audition and memories. But the flow of time invariably brought some visible changes in them, in their dispersion and rendition. Although, the traditional, social mode of presenting a folk song necessitates it to be accompanied by particular tunes, beats and musical instruments pertaining to them, yet many of the noted poets and authors have used many of these folk songs or parts of them, in their works, to give a special effect to their literature. The application of folk songs in literature clearly shows that the lyrics of folk songs bereft of their tunes, are also capable of articulating different meanings, giving those creations a special status. Another fact that is worth mentioning is that various tribal songs are directly used by different authors of this region, in their original language, which no doubt have expanded the entry of tribal culture into the Bengali literature of the North east.

Human mind continuously searches for a new meaning of life. The use of folk song in written literature seems to suggest that they are the traditional tools to discover the new. This search continues till today, and is expected to be continued in future in the Bengali literary works of the North east.
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*Marked folk materials are collected from field survey.*