CHAPTER VI:

USE OF OTHER FOLK ELEMENTS IN THE BANGLA LITERATURE OF THE NORTH-EAST.
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6.1 Introduction to Folk Beliefs and Customs

Every man earns some beliefs and superstitions from his family and social connections which might have no legitimate relation with religious norms or other social happenings. Usually, the beliefs observed in folk society are nurtured in the folk psyche, and thus are considered folk beliefs and folk tradition.

Folk belief is such a belief whose specific characteristic has not yet been determined. Besides folk belief has close relationship with custom and superstition which are inherent parts of folk mentality. The relation between superstition and folk belief is circumstantial and that between folk belief and folk culture is attributive. That is because what is folk belief for some people, is superstition for others. But there is a significant relation between folk belief and folk custom. We can cite the opinion of Muhammad Abdul Khalek, to establish our view:

"কারণ লোক বিশ্বাসের মধ্য দিয়ে বিশেষ কোন বন্ধ, ঘটনা বা মানসিকতারই স্বীকৃতি দেওয়া হয়। অন্যদিকে লোকবিশ্বাস যদি লোকসমাজের জীবন ধারণে কার্যকরীতার প্রকাশ পায়, যদি তা কিয়া ও অনুশীলনে রূপান্তরিত হয়, তাহলেই তা পরিণত হয় লোকসংস্কারে। একটি বিশ্বাস একজন নির্দিষ্ট ব্যক্তির মনে যথেষ্ট অবস্থান করে ততক্ষণ তা লোকবিশ্বাসই বটে। কিন্তু যে মুহূর্তে সামাজিক স্বীকৃতি
Actually folk belief and folk custom are two expressions of the same thought. It needs to be specifically mentioned that folk beliefs and folk custom being firmly ingrained in the thoughts of Bengalis, which is reflected in the Bangla literature of the North-east.

6.2 Folk Beliefs and Customs used in Literature

In Bikash Sarkar’s novel, ‘Lendu Ray-er Jieebisha’, there is a discourse of a folk belief in the society under discussion. The novel gives an apathetical account of the lost time of a wasted person. The central character is Lendu Roy, the vagabond son of lazy, lecherous Ramanimohan, a former landowner but presently a pauper, except the familial residence. Vagrant and homeless Lendu had to bear the burden of his sick father, two sisters and a sickly niece. His source of income is his connection with the anti-socials and all heinous activities. But Lendu is one who craves for love and affection which draws him towards the beautiful Ashma. Lendu surrenders himself completely to Ashma, just like a child. Ashma is an extraordinarily beautiful woman, wagon-breaker Inamul had enticed away from her home in Bangladesh. Inamul himself was a lecherous thug and a heinous murderer who was killed in police firing. It was when Lendu had gone to deliver the news of Inamul’s death to his family, that he met Ashma for the first time. He fell in love with her, instantly. Ashma had no one in India to call her own. Even the country was foreign to her. Her only stimulation to survive was Lendu’s love for her. In the course of events, Lendu gets involved in the murder of social
philanthropist, Raghu Mandal, and commits exchange of a paltry sum of money. Later, Lendu, haunted by the crime, takes shelter in the dilapidated shanty of Ashma. On a stormy night, they are joined by Haruda, — once a civil engineer, presently a drunkard and a vagabond. With his encouragement and in his presence, Lendu informally marries Ashma. Ashma becomes pregnant with Lendu’s child. Under the austere circumstances of floods all around, Lendu and Ashma, with many others like them, are forced to take shelter in the railway station. While assembling the tit-bits of household materials, Lendu suddenly notices a cat sitting on their wooden cot. The author introduces the concept of a folk belief to explain Lendu’s mental condition, as he remembers his mother’s words:

“ঘরে দূরে দেখে, তাঁরপাশে একটা ভিজে একসা বিড়াল। বেশ হটপট, শাদা, কিন্তু এ দুর্যোগে সে মুখে আসে, লেন্দুকে দেখে সে মাঁ ও কেরে চুপচাপ বলে থাকে।

উরু-অবধি জলে দাঁড়িয়ে লেন্দুর হঠাৎ মা-র কথা মনে পড়ে, স্ত্রীর বাহন বলে মা বিড়াল মারতেন না, আর স্ত্রী হলেন বংশবৃদ্ধির দেবী। আশায় পেলে ওই সজ্জন বেঁধে উঠেছে, সে তো মা স্ত্রীরই কুপা, ফলে বিড়ালটাকে রক্ষা করতে হবে দূরে।”

One of the many deities worshipped in Bengali household, Ma Shashthi is no less important. The folk belief is that without the benevolence of Ma Shashthi, no woman can conceive a child. And Ma Shashthi’s mount being a cat; any injury to a cat infuriates the deity. This gives rise to the folk belief cited above. The author has dexterously used the folk belief to give an insight to Lendu’s traditional conviction. It also reveals a softer side of the otherwise notorious anti-social Lendu Roy where he is characterized as a good, responsible husband and a forthcoming father.
We now focus our attention to the various folk beliefs mentioned in Jaya Goala’s novel, ‘Tobuo Madal Baaje’, which have been discussed in some previous chapter, regarding some other issues. The novel gives a detailed description of the events marking the rise and fall in the life of the hero Domuru. And to highlight these events the author has used various folk belief like incantations, witchcraft, taboos, etc., to construct her storyline.

The author portrays the character of a mid-wife, Gangaburi, who is known to chant incantations to facilitate quick delivery of Domuru’s wife, who is in labour pain. The following excerpt paints a picture of old Ganagaburi.

“মাঝের যে শ্রীলোকটি চ্যালে চ্যালে পায়ে ছুটে যায় ওই টিকলায়। ওখানেই গাঙারকুড়ির ঘর। রুড়ি মন্ত্র-ট্রি জানে, জলপাড়া, তারিখ কবর দেয়। যদি কিছু দেয়-এই আশায় শ্রীলোকটির পায়ে হোন হন গভীর।”

In the same context is introduced the character, Ojhababa or the magic man. The author has given a picturesque description of the ferocious looking magician and his ‘visions’. The author has created characters possessing magical qualities which could heal and treat the sick, because these folk beliefs are transmitted through the generations.

One of the common folk beliefs is not to utter the word ‘snake’ at night. This is a wide-spread social prohibition. This concept is used here in the novel in the in the words of Gangaburi, as she describes the condition of her shanty to her grandson, Fagulal:

“একদিন হল কী রাতে ঘরে দুখল লতা। সাপকে এখানে লতাই বলে সবাই।
রাত-বিরেতে।”

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This restriction is a kind of solace against the fear of poisonous creatures like rats and snakes which infest the dilapidated shanty of old and lonely Gangaburi.

The call of the Aral bird at night is said to be ill omen. As a preventive measure, a counter magical practice of driving iron rods into the oven is a common folk belief. In the novel discussed here, this folk belief enters the text as part of depressing thoughts of poor Đomuru as he spends one of his desolate sleepless nights.

"— অরাল পাখির গুহা ডেকেই চলেছে। শুনে থাকতে পারে না ডমুরু উঠে গিয়ে লোহার শিকটা উন্মুক্ত রেখে দেয়।"?

The call of the Aral bird is pre-emptive of the distorted decision taken by Đomuru in his attempt to secure personal wealth and happiness at the cost of sacrificing the peace of clan life.

Another ancient belief prevalent among folk societies is ‘witchcraft’. This ancient belief is included in this novel in the imaginative story of the old lady Phulmoti, turning into a witch. Santhal woman Phulmoti is the contemporary midwife of Teentonga village. Till now she has attended the delivery of all the pregnant women of the village. Starting from delivering infants to prescribing empirical medication and diet for the nursing mothers, everything was her responsibility. But while attending the childbirth of Gobra’s wife, old Phulmoti sensed some complications and suggested that the pregnant woman be shifted to a hospital. This prescription of the wise, old woman, however, instead of being applauded, led her to be pronounced a ‘witch’.

"পাইরে কী কাওই না ঘটে পেলা। ফুলমতী নাকি ডাইনী হয়ে গেছে। জাতে সাঁওতাল ফুলমতী। কৃষ্ণভরের এই ঢাঙ্গা মেয়ে মানুষটাকে আর ধাই রাখা যাবে না। ও
These folk people profoundly believe in black magic, witchcraft, voodoo, for the cure of their ailments, rather than resort to modern, scientific treatment. They are extremely prejudiced against modern medicines. Under such circumstances, the practical thoughts and experiences of Phulmoti only earned her the label of a ‘witch’. Not only that, all the heads of the village unanimously pronounced her to be responsible for all the premature deaths that took place in the village. Further, it is decided that as her punishment Phulmoti must be forced to eat human excreta, so as to make her magical powers ineffective.

“ওতে নাকি আর মরতে তত্ত্ব কাজ করে না। তাঁর ফতি করতে পাবে না। কুদূর্ঘ হনতে পারবে না। সব শ্যায়সার্থী তাকে নষ্ট হয়ে যাবে।”

Such an ancient folk belief, which is nurtured in the folk mentality for a long time, is included in the novel, to carry it forward. Very often the society cannot accept the advanced intelligence of wise, rural women like Phulmoti. Instead, they are ostracized and condemned as unchaste women. This negative social mentality is beautifully portrayed by the author.
The novel also includes instances of ghosts and ghouls and such other unearthly creatures. The novel entertains various large and small characters residing in Teentonga village. Such an unusual character is a spirited, young woman, Bijli. Presently, Bijli is possessed by the ‘Chalani Ghost’. Ojhababa or the exorcist has made preparations in Bijli’s courtyard, to drive out the ghost and emancipate Bijli. A lot of people have gathered there to watch the fun. Most of them are burdened with a variety of problems, and have assembled there with the hope of getting some positive solution to their myriads of problems, from Ojhababa. Like Dhonu’s father, who is spitting blood, is waiting there and clasping the talisman given by Ojhababa.

“In the novel, ‘Tobuo Madal Baaje’, the technique of the application of these folk beliefs can be said to be a kind of survival. That is because these elements of folk belief have survived the influence of time, and sometimes have incorporated the changes of environment in them. The attempt of the authors to include these folk beliefs in their literature as a mark of such survival deserves applause.

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The technique of incorporating these folk beliefs and traditions in the short stories of the Bengali literature of the North-east is worth mentioning. In this connection, author Subroto Roy written ‘Deola’, is worth mentioning. The story contains the concept of the supernatural. The tale is presented in the form of narration by Porandidi, who gives the details of the transformation of Toraikandi. This narration of different events includes the mention of some supernatural happenings. The actual transformation of Toraikandi began with the news of the coming of the Langta Sadhu or the Nude mendicant.

The story has it that as soon as the Langta Sadhu stepped into the village, the inauspicious crow stopped cawing, Belu’s abnormal son was cured, and barren woman Ruby became pregnant. At the discretion of the Langta Sadhu, off-season mango was available. In fact, the Sadhu had himself eaten the mango and planted the seed in the ground. The mango tree that sprang from it is witness to all the changes that took place in Toraikandi.

There is a manor house at a Toraikandi and in it there is a large pond. Sulata is the second wife of Bhubanmohan, head of this mansion. Young and vivacious Sulata freely ridiculed the Sadhu and that too in the presence of Bhubanmohan himself. Old Bhubanmohan, despite being impotent, craves for a son to carry on his family lineage. However, Sulata becomes pregnant by the grace of the
Sadhu. But, Bhubanmohan being extraordinarily proud of his ancestral blood, rapes and kills Sulata, then throws her body into the Deola pond. There are many supernatural events and happenings relating to Deola Pukur, which are mentioned in the story. The story has it that the Kathakhakur or the chronicler often related events like the banks of Deola Pukur being flooded with glistening brass utensils, or that the Deola Charak plank surfacing in the waters of the pond, etc. The author uses many such unearthly anecdotes to build up his story.

In the story ‘Chhinnamul’ by Kumar Ajit Dutta, there are several instances of beliefs and incantations relating to snakes. These beliefs and incantations are nurtured through the generations of the families discussed in the story.

“একটা গুপ্ত মন্ত্র আমার বাপ আমার কম্বুহারে দিয়ে গেছে।”

The ancient belief associated with sculpting the idol of Goddess Bishahari is that Ojha Bhrigukanta chants the incantations and dances to mesmerize the snakes. Then a small amount of clay is collected from the snakes’ holes and mixed with a larger amount, by the potter, Kalukumar, who then makes the idol of Bishahari with its dough. The poor magic man who had been detached from his ancestral profession and forced to live the life of a beggar, dreams that the local people will again begin to worship Goddess Bishahari. So, moments before his death he transpires their ancestral incantation and talisman to his son, Toira, requesting him to take the ancestral profession of Ojha or exorcism.

We have discussed the story ‘Dhak’ by Paritosh Talukdar, in the previous chapter. The story includes instances of beliefs of a different nature. The hereditary profession of Deven Ruidas is to play the drum. His
father was a renowned drummer of Chanchai village. But presently he is an invalid for his lower limbs are paralyzed. The villagers believe that:

“...অনেকেই বলে পলাশপুরের খানে ভুল বাজনা বাজিয়েছিল। মায়ের অভিশাপ
লেগেছে।”

Any unintentional mistake in executing the hereditary profession perfectly may cause the person to be cursed. This kind of folk belief which speaks of intuitive danger is cited in the story, ‘Dhak’.

In another story, ‘Ekta Lok Esechhilo’, by Debabrata Deb, we find the discussion of the moral values of two different generations. The older generation ties up everyone by the bondage of love and strength, while honouring their self-respect. But the self-centered present generation only leads a mechanical life. The village teacher Abani Master’s son is a high-profile government official, living in the town. They belong to the elite class of the town moving about in the company of the rich and elegant townsmen. They feel ashamed to maintain any relation with any inhabitant of their ancestral village. Such a situation arises when an old resident of village makes his sudden appearance at their plush city abode, which veritably embarrassed Abani Master’s son and his family. However, the old man not only knew Abani Master’s son very closely, but also related many events of his childhood and youth, with minute details. This brings alive the memories of the traditional beliefs of his youth in the mind of Abani Master’s son as he becomes nostalgic.

“..আত্মা আপনের দেইখা—বুঝে বাবাজী, পরীক্ষা দিবার কলে একবার
আপনের—এই মা শীঁংলা—বলে হেঁচ রুঁচে কপালে হাত ঠোকালো লোকটা—
বসত হয়েছিল মনে পড়ে?”

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The traditional belief is that smallpox is a benevolence of Goddess Sitala. Conservative people never forget to revere the deity even while merely uttering the name of *Ma Sitala*. This incident of folk belief is referred to by way of narrating an incident of the previous period.

In the story ‘Kakshapath’, by Mithilesh Bhattacharya, there is mention of another folk belief.

“হারাধনের যুগলি চায়ের স্টেল বেস করেকজন দিনমজুর গল্প করছিল মায়েমেদে দেখা দিলে নাকি দেশের খুব মঙ্গল হয়।”¹⁴

That is there is a common folk belief that frequent clouds and rains in the month of *Magha* of the Bengali calendar, are benevolent for a country’s development. Actually this folk belief is the reflection of the wisdom gained from years of experience of a monsoon determined agricultural nation.

Similarly, in a previously discussed story, ‘Ekti Cliché Kahini’ by Dipankar Kar, there is presented a character possessing supernatural powers—

“যদিও অনেদের সবেচ্ছাপাতের বাড়ির মহিলাটির উৎসাহেই মায়া জটা, কপালে মন সিদ্ধারের কুটিটা, গলায় রুদ্রাকের মালা, পরনে লাল পাড় শাড়ি... মহিলাটির আশ্চর্য দিতেছিল, যে নাকি হারানো কিছুর অব্যর্থ সন্দ্যান দিতে পারে।”¹⁵

Divination means knowing the future with help of charms and incantations. The supernatural ability of foretelling the chances of recovering lost things is a part of Divination. In the story mentioned above, belief in divination underlies the incident of Anal’s wife losing her nose ring and her wish to recover it.
There is also the mention of folk belief in supernatural powers in the story, ‘Manush’, by Badrudjaman Choudhury. In his story the allusion to this folk belief is observed in the dialogue between Rajjak and his wife, Patabibi, who are two important characters of the story.

“... শক্তিতে এই পালকটা যদি আমি পেতাম?
কোন পালক?

গুনের শক্তিতে নাকি এমন একটা পালক আছে, যেটাতে চোখ রাখলে সমস্ত পৃথিবী
এক নিয়ে দেখা যায়। পালকটা পেলে আমি দেখে নিতে পারতাম কোথায়
চৌধুরীর টাকার পাহাড় তৈরি হচ্ছে।

তোমার তো শুধু টাকা আর খাওয়া! বাড়ালা সেই যে সকলে বেড়িয়ে যায়,
ফেরে সন্ধ্যার সময়। কতো থামে থামে দরজায় দরজায় ওরা যুরে বেড়ায়।
পালকটা পেলে আমি বাড়ালা কে সমস্ত দিন চোখে দেখতে পেতাম।”

The author has very intelligently presented the difference between Rajjak and Patabibi’s way of rationalization. This belief in the supernatural, ‘with the help of a vulture’s feather’, is nothing but Divination. And the many elements related to magic and transcendental vision, mostly are related to birds. In fact, using a bunch of feathers as a magical wand is a very common practice.

There are ample examples of a variety of folk beliefs regarding birds, in the Bangla literature of the North-east. Mention may be made of some such beliefs. The hooting of the White owl guarantees the welfare of the family, while the call of the Ishtikutum bird announces the arrival of a guest. These two common folk beliefs of the Bengali society have been included in the short story ‘Swapner Chhabi’ by Jhumur Pande.
The hero of the story Swapnadeep is a painter, who is disturbed by the miserable end of the weak and tortured women. Women are put to death even at the nascent stage of fetus. Swapnadeep is desirous of making a documentary film on the coerced women of the society and for this he has focused his attention on the lives of women in brothels, as the subject of his film. However, like all others, his girl friend, Tusu also views the subject as deplorable. But while determining the subject of his documentary, Swapnadeep believes to be able to unite his dream and reality. And this belief kindles in him a flame of happiness.

"... আবার উল্লাস দিয়ে বন্ধীর পেটা।"\(^{17}\)

This auspicious sound of the call of the white owl pronounces the indication of a good beginning for Swapnadeep. The documentary is aimed at making the society aware of a hard reality. The social system created by a class of self-interested people is loathsome to another class. But those who are forced to embrace this odious system in order to survive are also subject to this hatred. Women such as Sukanya, Mita are forced into this hateful profession of prostitution, are in reality pure and chaste. This is the belief of Swapnadeep, which he feels is supported by the auspicious call of the white owl.

Sukanya, a resident of the red light area, is expecting a child. Although a prostitute by profession, yet the child growing within her womb is the fruit of her love and passion. The news of the arrival of this child has filled her with ecstasy and joy. The author mentioned the call of the Ishtikutum bird as signifying the arrival of a new guest in the life of Sukanya.

"সকাল থেকেই আজ ইষ্টিকুটুম পাখিটা ডাকছে। কাজের মাসিটা এখনও এল না...।"\(^{18}\)
Although her child will not carry the name of its father, yet Sukanya is happy at the thought of giving birth to a child, which is symbolized by the call of the *Ishtikutum* bird. And in this way the author uses a folk belief in her literature.

In the story, ‘*Jyotsnay Ekjon Paglee Taar Chhele O Mayur*’, by Kishore Ranjan Dey, little boy Chhutku is in the habit of wandering in the fields and meadows at the dead of night in search of her insane mother. And his companion in these rendezvous is Mayurda. Most men are intimated by the primitive fear of ghosts, demons, and evil spirits and are aware of the means to be rid of them. The story presents such a folk belief. While crossing the betel-nut garden of the Sarmah’s, in the middle of the night, Chhutku stops the car to urinate. While doing so he even beckons his companion to do the same.

“পেছাপ করে দাও মহুরদা। গাছেদের দিকে মুখ করে পেছাপ করলে ভুতে ধরে
না। বাবা বলেছে।”19

The incident of the fear of ghosts and evil spirits and the means to overcome them are folk beliefs which are appropriately used in the story.

In another story, ‘*Raita Bhalo Acche Kintu*’ by Jhumur Pande, there is mention of a folk belief regarding finding solutions to problems.

In Silchar on a particular day a number of little children succumbed to untimely death by consuming a dose of Pulse Polio. Another child, Raita, only daughter of a subject teacher, Himanish, in a remote village school, has also been administered a dose of the vaccine. Learning of the news of mass infanticide in the town, Raita’s parents spend a sleepless night, worrying about their daughter’s health. On that night the abnormal
behaviour of Raimoni, Raita’s mother is described by the author in the light of the following folk belief.

“রাইমোনী ঘড়িটা দেখল ঠিক বারটা দশা।... কোন দিন তো পেটা ডাকে না।...
ডাকে ডাকে।... আমি একটু আগে হলুদ ছিটিরে আসি।”

A night owl’s call is said to be a bad omen. The counter magical practice is that sprinkling turmeric into the fire rids all bad omens, and this idea is very justly used in the story. We have observed that ‘Fire’ is believed to be sacred element commonly used in counter magical practices to offset the evils of bad omen.

The issue of folk belief which has been used in Bengali literature of the North-east with significance is about ‘dreams’. The credence that dreams come true belies a primitive ideology prevalent in human society. Dreams are normally characterized as early morning dreams, dreams related to snakes, and the like.

Author Kishore Ranjan Dey has used the concept of snakes in dream in his story, ‘Briksher Niche’. The story is a presentation of the activities of a youth obsessed by sexual desires. Bappa, a village youth, covets a lustrous desire for the sexually beautiful city-bred and educated Teesta boudi. The presence of Teesta boudi, the manner of her speech, excites the carnal desires of Bappa. He eagerly waits for a solitary opportunity. Once on a dark night he accompanies Teesta to her home and gets into conversation with her about dreams of snakes,

“— ‘বৌদি, তুমি এখনও সাপের স্নাত দেখে?’
— ‘দেখি তো মাঝে মাঝে’।
...
‘আমার বন্ধু নীলমণির কাছে জেনেছি সাপের স্নাত দেখার সম্ভবে বৌদির শরীর
ইচ্ছের একটা সম্পর্ক আছে’।...
Folk people believe that dreaming of snakes lead to procreation. This primitive belief has given rise to many wishful ideas regarding snakes. It is generally presumed that there is some connection between dreams of snakes and suppressed sensual desires of man and woman. In the story mentioned here the idea of dreams is appropriately used to express the suppressed sexual urge of Bappa towards someone else’s wife.

The story ‘Swapne Bhatphool’ by Manas Sikdar is entirely based on dreams. The hero of this story is a physically invalid orphan, Neelu. Having no one to call his own, Neelu depends on wealthy Rasu Mandal’s daughter Asha, for his survival. Neelu’s world consists of hunger, dreams about Asha, a daily dose of slaps and blows and his early morning dreams. Besides these another important issue of his life constitutes rice. Just for the sake of two square meals of rice a day, Neelu has to bear the oppression of a household appliance at Rasu Mandal’s house. But he cannot consume a lot of rice to fulfill his desires, because various diseases have dried up his oesophagus. But his yearning to consume a stomach full of rice consummates in his dreams of heaps of rice, at every dawn.

"ডীলু স্বপ্ন দেখে এক বিরাট মোটা মোটা থামওয়ালা বাড়ির বারান্দায় সে বসে,
আর তার চারপাশে ভাত, পুতু ভাত, ভাতের পাছাড়!..."  ২২

Dreams are visualizations of the sacred soul. An ancient belief of the human race is that dreams of dawn come true. Nilu’s suppressed desire to consume a stomach full of rice obsessed him to dream of heaps of rice around him.
Although instances of folk beliefs are rarely used in Bengali poems of the North-east, one such application is found in Tapodhir Bhattacharya’s composition, ‘Nachiketa Phire Elo’.

After the cremation of the deceased and the completion of the funeral rites, the mourners return home. Before entering the house they ritualistically touch fire and iron, so that the soul of the deceased can do no harm to the living relatives. This is a kind of folk belief. In the poem the poet says:

“... নাচিকেতা ফিরে এসে ছুঁয়েছিল লোহা, শস্য আগুনের আট”

Scientific rationalization tells us that touching iron and fire and nibbling bitter grains kills germs. This folk belief has developed as a protection from the germs that may have had affected the deceased. And this protective folk belief has survived the passage of generations and is stored in the collective memory of the society.
Rites, rituals are usually entwined with the daily activities of life and religious practices. Festivals and ceremonies, along with rites and rituals are also large conglomeration of peoples where man becomes great and noble in the real sense. Folk festivals are an integral part of folk life.

The rites, rituals and festivals which form an integral part of our daily life, and are represented in the stories and novels are very commonplace and do not bear any special characteristic. Besides these commonplace rites, rituals and celebrations, there is also mention of some extraordinary ritualistic practices in some of the literary works. For example we can draw on the previously discussed novel, ‘Tobuo Madal Baaje’, by Jaya Goala. The novel mentions an instance where a girl, Golabi, belonging to the Orang tribe is in love with Suraj, who is a Diku or a youth outside their caste. Golabi’s parents do not approve of this inter-caste marriage. In a vehement negation to the possibility of such a wedding, the girl’s family murder Suraj following a ritual akin to their particular tribe. The author of the novel has very artistically portrayed the ritual of human sacrifice prevalent among the Orang tribe as in the following:

“ঐ ওরাণা কেমনে মানুষ মারে, জানিস নাই? কাল ছিল আমের পুজা, জানতে বেল্লরা আসেছিল। বস।... পুজার তীর ওরা নাকি রামারাহর বসে যায় মদ লাগি ধেতে। দুপুর কিংবা বিকেল ধেতে শুরু হয় খাওয়া। যাকে উৎসর্গ করা হবে সেই মানুষটিকে অতিথি হিসাবে সবচেয়ে বড় হয় রামারাহরের খোলা দরজার একটি আগে।... তত্ক্ষণে সবাই ধেতে- পিয়ে একদম আদিম বনে গেছে, রকে আঘাতে হিঁস্ত খেলার দেশা। অতিথি তো তথন বেলমাল। বেখবো। নেশার অতলে সে গেছে তালিয়ে... অনেক রামারাহের চুলোর উপরে দেবতা ধাক্কে—— গোল গোল
Veneration of deities with human sacrifice is a primitive ritual which is still prevalent among the Orang tribal community. In the novel mentioned here, the author has introduced this punitive issue of human sacrifice in order to highlight the inherent culture of clan-life.

Different kinds of traditional customs exist in the folk life of various regions of North-east. Incidents highlighting these different folk customs have frequently been referred to in the literature of the North-eastern authors. Such is an occasion where Jhumur Pande mentions a certain folk custom inherent with the Bengali wedding ceremony, in her story ‘Mokshodar Harano Prapti’. Different aspects of the story have been discussed in some of the previous chapters. Here we focus our attention on Mokshoda’s nostalgic thoughts about the rituals and customs of weddings.

The story has it that Mokshoda of Basudev village was married off in the Akhailmura village. While describing the romantic journey of the newly-wedded bride from her parental home to her in-laws, the author mentions the customary rituals of Uludhwani or the ritualistic musical sound made by Hindu women, scattering of parched rice along the way, etc. The author even presents a picturesque description of the customary reception of the new bride in the home of her in-laws.

“... আলতার উপর পা। বরণ করে ঘরে তুলছেন শাপড়ি।
The advent of the new bride, considered an appellation of Goddess Lakshmi, into her in-laws house, is expected to shower blessings on the family. As such it is customary for the mother-in-law to sing the qualities of the bride as she enters her new home. This wedding ritual is widely practiced in the Barak region, and is appropriately represented in the story.

Just like all other folk elements, instances of various folk festivals are also referred to in the literature of this region. The novel, ‘Gang gaatha’, by Jhumur Pande have been discussed in several of the previous chapters of this research paper, in connection with the analysis of the various folk components. Jhumur Pande has also found an occasion to mention the celebration of the famous Charak Puja in her novel. In the novel there is the description of the growth of a semi-urban village, ‘Dudhpatil, on the banks of the Barak river, which has housed some hundreds of refugees coming over from Bangladesh, during the seventies. Over time many of them have become owners of houses renting out rooms. One such person is Balai Das, in whose courtyard have assembled a large group of people like Narahari, Phulwanti, Sushil, Malati and others, belonging to the poor, labourer class. As part of describing their daily life, their joys and hardships, the author has introduced the issue of Charak Puja, a hugely celebrated folk festival of the Hindu Bengalees. The bearer of the novel is the old lemon-hawker, Narahari. The author presents a perfect picture of the changes that have taken place in the celebration of Charak Puja, from
the past to the present generation, as represented by the nostalgic thoughts of old Narahari.

"নরহরি বাইরে বেড়িয়ে দুম তাড়ায়।... অবকাশ কেটে গেছে।... ওদিকে পূর্বদিকের ঘরে চড়ক পুজার শিরদূর্গী আয়না নিয়ে মোকাঙ্ক করতে বসেছে। আগে চৈত্রমাসের সংক্রান্তিতে চড়ক পুজা শেষ হয়ে যেত। ইদানিং বৈশাখেও চড়ক পুজা হয়। শিব একবার রূপালী রং আর গোসীরী ষে বাস্তু রং মাথে তা-ই মাসভর চলে। রোজ রোজ মোকাঙ্ক উঠানের কোনও পাট নেই। তবু তেজর কাজল উঠে যাওয়া এ সব ঢিকটাক করার জন্য বসতে হয়। শিব জটিটা খুলে ঘুমোয়, দেখতে নরহরি। শিবগোসীরীর নাচ বা কালীর নাচ ভাল লাগে, কিন্তু আজনের উপর হটা দা-এর উপর নাচ বা পিঠে বড়োশি পাখা কেমন বীড়বীড় লাগে। আগে দুষ্পাতিতে নরহরিদের ঘরের সামনেই চড়ক পুজা হত। বড় পুকুরে সারা বছর ভাসত চড়কের গাছ।... একটা ছোটখাটা মেলাও বসে যেত।"  

One of the most celebrated folk festivals **Charak Puja** is celebrated through the month of *Chaitra* culminating on the day of *Chaitra Sankranti*, i.e. the last day of *Chaitra*. Lord Shiva is the deity worshipped in this festival. Another integral facet of this festival consists of performing arts like dances in the attire of Shiva, Durga, Kali, etc., physical feats, together with fairs and such-like. Besides the Dudh-patil village mentioned in the novel, in many other villages this festival extends to the Bengali month of *Baisakh* as well. That is particularly because a group of people are professionally engaged in presenting different forms of songs and dances pertaining to different parts of the festival. Thus other than being religiously important, this festival has gained significance among the common people as a means of earning a livelihood.

Bengali folk life is clustered by various folk festivals. The novel gives an account of several such folk festivities commonly celebrated among the households in association with various events. On the day of
Kartick Sankranti it is particularly customary to wash and clean everything related to the kitchen and hearth, then drive out the ‘A-Lakshmi’ and welcome Goddess Lakshmi into the family. In some regions there exist the customary ritual of cooking different types of vegetables together on the last day of the month of Aswin and consume the same on the first day of the month of Kartick. In the Barak region it is ritualistic to cook eight types of vegetables. After the consumption of the food so prepared it is customary to beg for divine blessings with the recital of some rhymes. According to the novel, a mother and daughter who were tenants of Balai are murdered. Following the incident, the little hamlet is flooded with police, journalists and lots of curious people. In the hustle-bustle that is going on, everyone except Narahari is oblivious of the fact that the day is the auspicious Kartick Sankranti. The author uses his thoughts to describe the festival as follows:

“আজ কার্তিক সংক্রান্তি। আতে আনাজ থায় লোকে। কেউ বলে সিঁচাচ সংক্রান্তি।
সব কিছু দুঃখেমুখে পরিস্থিতি পরিচ্ছন্ন করে অলক্ষ্মীকে তাড়িয়ে লক্ষ্মীকে ঘরে আনে
মানুষ। আশিনে আতে আনাজ দেখে কার্তিকে থায়।

ছলা ছাড় ছলি ছাড়
বারো মাইরা পিচাইয়া ছাড়
আশিনে রাখে কার্তিকে থায়
যে বর মাগে সেই বর পায়।”

In the present world of degenerated moral values, inhuman activities like rape and murder are everyday affairs. The traditional folk practices of discarding A-Lakshmi and welcoming Lakshmi seeking the welfare of the family are gradually disappearing. These practices are only revived in the recollections of old people like Narahari. In this excerpt from the story, we observe a hint of remorse on the part of the author, for the decadence of these folk customs.
Besides novels, even short stories of North-east India account for the folk-festivals. Other than Jhumur Pande, author Mithilesh Bhattacharya also has given a description of the ‘Charak’ festival in his story ‘Chaitra Pabane’. Thus two different authors have mentioned the same festival in their writings, but with a different connotation. In the story, ‘Chaitra Pabane’, the festival of ‘Charak Puja’ is used to focus on the merriment of the festival, as well as to describe the colourful procession of the people dressed as Hara-Gouri:

“The song is to be sung in the presence of the god. The god is dressed in white and the festival is celebrated with joy. Shubhaphalee Chandra Choudhury has described the festival in his story ‘Chara’.”

The celebration of ‘Charak Puja’ is judiciously highlighted in the novel and story, together with the significance of providing a detailed documentation of the folk festival.

Kumar Ajit Dutta written, ‘Smritir Goli Perie’, is entirely based on a ritual practiced among the Assamese people. One significant function of Assamese society centres on Assamese girls’ attaining puberty, which is ritualistically celebrated with all formalities. All these include discovering the weal and woe associated with the time of first menstruation, from the fortune-teller, dressing the girl in wedding attire and giving her into marriage with a plantain tree, planting a fruited plant, etc., as integral parts of the festival. The author has used the incident of Sumita Devi’s niece
attaining puberty, to describe the details of the celebration in the words of Susmita Devi herself:

"তার বলায়ও পূর্তেছিল আমের ‘ঘাঁটিপুলি’। পূর্তেছিল বরদেউতা...। বাড়ীর একামলাতীকে জড়ে করে বরদেউতা সেই বুড়ো গণকদেউকে ডেকে অনুরোধ করেছিলেন, ‘হে ব্রাহ্মণেনেত ব্রাহ্মণেনেত’। দীর্ঘরাতি করুন, এ গাছি বড়ো হয়ে যখন ফল দেবে ওই সময়ই এসে আমার এই সরু আই (ছোট মা) সত্যি সত্যি করের সাঙ্গে সাঙ্গে পারে, ‘জোয়ার’ (জামাইয়ের) পাতে পাকা আম তুলে দিয়েই এসে আমরা থেকে পারি তে আম, বিলোতে পারি চাঁদিদের ঘরে- ঘরে।" 30

The above-mentioned ceremony is performed as a mark of wish fulfillment of a woman to bear children just as a fruit-bearing tree does. The rituals mentioned in the story acquaint us with the fact that the initial hurdles and struggles of two young girls belonging to two different generations, entering into womanhood are almost the same.

Besides novels and short stories, the verses of North-east India also include various instances of functions and festivals. In this connection, Amalendu Guha’s two poems are worth mentioning.

Among the several folk festivals Navanna is particularly worth mentioning. It is celebrated in the month of Poush of the Bengali calendar, when the ripened crops are harvested, thereby bringing contentment and happiness among the farmers. This happiness is reflected in the huge preparation and distribution of sweets and cookies as integral part of the celebration of Poush Parvan. Poet Amalendu Guha of North-east presents a picturesque description of this unique fiesta of Navanna, as reminisces of a prisoner, in his poem, 'Bondi'.

The folk festivals celebrated in our daily lives have become inherent within each one of us. Thus, a prisoner confined within the walls of his cell,
recollects the festivities of *Navanna*, with the same yearning with which he yearns for his freedom

*“বিষ্ম মনের মাঠে সাঙ্গের রোদে নিয়ে যায়
নরম থারের শিশে মুছে দিয়ে শিশিরের নীড়,
শৌর্য আাণোনা বাতিবাড়ত সদ্যাকাষে ঘায়
লাপলির মাণে ভাজে নবামের স্বপ্ন করেদির।
বিবর্ণ কলাই- চরা বাসনা সহসা আহত
ব্যাকিপের অভিমানে ছুঁড়ে ফেলে পালি দিয়ে ওঠে।
ভেসে ওঠে মনটি পারে পুঁখালি যাত
একজন দীর্ঘশ্বস ইটের দেওয়ালে মাথা কোটে।”*

*Bihu* is the national festival of Assam. Venerating youth is the theme of this festival. Merriment and festivities among the agricultural class are the essence of this festival celebrated with pomp and glory, in accompaniment with various songs and dances by the youngsters of the society. In Amalendu Guha’s poem, ‘Bihu’, we get a detailed picture of the folk festival, *Bohagi Bihu*, gloriously celebrated throughout Assam. In the poem the poet analyzes the emotional yearnings of young couples as follows:

*“... ও ঘরের রাতে তাঁতশালে দিলের তাড়াকাড়ি কাজ,
বউড়িকারি কার সোনা হবে আলো বিহৃদান—
তোর কাজের কাঁচে টিয়ার টিহিটি ডাক তোন
তাঁতশালে মাকু ঘুসে, টোকিশালে ধানভরা ধান
হীরকে ছড়িয়ে পড়ে।

...........................
মহিষ শিশের বাঁশি সোজা সুরে দেখা কথা কয়—
ফাঁদে আঘন দেহে, ফাঁদে কুলাদাম ধান,
বিছ আপে। এইবার ঘরে তোকে উঠবাই সহই,

...........................
আহা ওরা মুখে থাক, পান গেয়ে টোকিকে নাচাক।
সুনিন আনুন হরি শূলারুক চাঁদির মিলানে।”*
Honouring the yearnings and desires of the young generation, the older generation also gratifies their requests with blessings and warm wishes. The Assamese cultural belief is that union of young couples lead to making Mother Earth more green and vegetative. The above-mentioned poem adds a special flavor to the Bangla literature of the North-east. Besides the poem plays an extra-ordinary role in highlighting the integration of the cultures of two different language-based societies.

A completely poetic personality, poet Woorddhendu Dass, is a powerful poet of the sixties. Every one of the Bengali settlers of Assam is haunted by the trauma of the partition of Bengal. The Bengalis of this state had to bear a lot of insults and injuries only because they were they are emigrants from a foreign country. The blood-stained decade of the eighties are a burning proof of the tortures they had to bear. The pains of these tortures and of the partition of the country are significantly reflected in the verses of poets like Woorddhendu Dass, who have been mercilessly uprooted from their motherland. The poet’s verse ‘Bodhivritta’, composed on the backdrop of partition, mentions the festival of Navanna as below:

“বললামঃ এবার ওড়া, ডানার বাপটে তোলো ঝড়—
দিপলক্ষিত এই জলধি পেরিয়ে চলো, পিছনে দ্যাখো না;

ললামঃ দুরালো বদন কখনো ঘরের জন্যে মন
একমাত্র উত্তল হয়, সঁাব- আঘাতের তরে প্রতীক্ষায় থেকে
উদয়- দিগন্ত ঝড়ে ততক্ষণে ফুটে উঠবে একটি- দুটি তারা;
রাতের হিমেল রুক্তে পলায় উঠবে আকাশ- প্রান্ত;
নবরাত্রের আশে ম- ম বাংলার চির আহ্মান।

আমি স্বপ্নের হাতে চাহি তুলে দিয়ে ফের সরণ- বিদ্যুর চড়নার
রুক্ষ দুর্যোগে কুটি মাথা।”

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Agricultural people harvest their ripened crops in the months of Agrahayan and Poush, and fill their granaries. This is the time when their hearts are filled with boundless happiness. This happiness is expressed in the celebration of Navanna. The aroma of the sweets and cookies fill the earth and the sky, which revives the fond memories of the past in the poet’s mind. His dreams of the sweet past break with a sudden jerk when he realizes that he is tied to the harsh reality of life. The wide-spread wings of his dreamy sojourn is forced to close down, as he realizes that he can but only strike his head at the closed doors of his memorable past.

In the poem ‘Ganga Brahmaputra’, poet Bimal Dey of Upper Assam, has used several folk components. Assam is the habitat of many races and tribes. Various kinds of social and political upheavals have disturbed their normal social existence. Despite these, the poet reminisces on the beauty of his motherland, Assam in the following poem:

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“মনে পড়ে দূর পাহাড়ে
পরগ্রামের মেলা,
নোটিশ ছাড়াই নীল আকাশে
মেঝ বিটির খেলা।
মনে পড়ে জোর মাদলে
করম টুলুর নাচ
পলায়ন ধরা মাছ।”
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Fairs are an essential part of most folk festival. The fair, Poroshuramer Mela celebrated on the occasion of Poush Sankranti, enjoys worldwide fame. Thousands of people flock to the mountainous ridges of Arunachal Pradesh to participate in the fair. The memories of this fair are clearly alive in the thoughts of the poet. Another folk festival prominently celebrated by the tea-tribe of Assam is Karam Tusu. Tusu dance is the main attraction of this festival. The poet is moved by the uniqueness of the
variety of folk festivals celebrated by different ethnic groups who have settled in Assam, speaking different languages. This description of the variety of festivities is revealed in the above excerpt. Similarly the poet remembers to mention a typical folk element, a fishing contraption, locally called Paulo, in his poem.

Throughout the eighties’ decade the Bengalis living in Assam were enveloped by a shroud of agony. The poet is however, optimistic to regain the peaceful tranquility in future. And this expectation is reflected in his reminiscences of the folk elements frequently used in his poem.

6.4 Use of Folk Games, Folk Dances and Folk Art in Literature

One important component of folk culture is folk games. Games and sports are ancient activities. Regarding the inception of folk games, folk scientist, Abdul Hafiz has opined that:

“, ... অন্যান্য বিষয়ের মত খেলাধুলারও উৎপত্তি হয়েছে লোক-সংক্রান্ত থেকে।
ভিক্ষাত পানীর বিন্দু ও ভাণ্ডি পরিষ্ক্কা সংক্রান্ত খেলাধুলার (Games of Chance) থেকেই পরবর্তীকালে উড়ত হয় নানা রকমের খেলাধুলা। হাজার হাজার ব্যবহার হত ভিক্ষাত পানীর কাজে। পরে তাই পাণ্ডা খেলার ওটিতে রুপাঙ্কিত হয়।... বাংলাদেশের লাড় ও হাজার খেলার মধ্যে সৌরুষ্ট আছে।”

Moreover, various types of folk games have enclosed in their past history, festivals and celebrations, coexistence of various races and tribes, and even the unwritten record of correspondence amongst them. Even today various forms of folk games and sports are prevalent among the various folk communities of the North-eastern region. As such, many
authors of this region have frequently mentioned some of these common folk games, in their literature.

In the previous chapter of the present research paper we have discussed a novel ‘AlekJandar Purer Kathakata’, where an instance of a folk game, such as ‘buffalo fight’, is mentioned. ‘Buffalo fight’ is a very famous but terrifying folk game of this region which celebrated every year on the occasion of Poush Sankranti. Every year on that auspicious day, a huge fair is arranged, and the buffalo-herds of the village punctiliously train their buffaloes to participate in the sport. The description of the buffalo-fight of AlekJandarpur is presented in the novel as below:

‘প্রতি বছরই পৌষ সংক্রান্তির দিনে ওপরে মোষের লড়াই হয়।
আলেকজান্ডারপুরের ছেলেরা অনেক ভাবে চানন সেই হেলে মোষ লড়াই দেখতে।... মোষগোলেকে আর থেকেই লড়াই-এর জন্য তৈরী করা হয়।
কাঁচা তিম থেকে দেয়। কেউ কেউ আবার চোলাই মদন ঢেলে দেয় মুখে। সেল সৌলের আর তে হানিক আর মোষ আর সবুজ মিষ্টির মোষ খুব লড়েছিল।
লড়াইটা জমে উঠলে মানুষ খুব খুশি হয়। এক পক্ষে কমেজো হলে ময়দান চোলে
পালায়। মানুষ তখন মনমরা হয়ে ঘরে ফেরে।’

The lives of the hapless labour-class of AlekJandarpur are dotted with joys and sorrows. They have no dreams for the future. They forget all their miseries and sorrows during the festivities and celebrations and flow along the tide of enjoyment. But for Shiva, Shombhu, Budhua, all their enjoyment is drowned when their fighter buffalo accepts defeat and runs away from the ground. They return home downhearted.

The author has attempted to portray a realistic picture of folk life on occasions of festivities, by depicting a glimpse of this folk sport and the behaviour of the people associated with it.

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We have discussed the story ‘Bandar’ by Shyamal Bhattacharya in relation to proverbs. We now represent the author’s version of the folk game, ‘monkey trick’, where a rural trickster leads a monkey to dance to his tunes. The author gives a picturesque description of the game as follows:

In the story, the incident of the trickster demonstrating his tricks becomes relevant when the hero of the story says,— “আমি মনে করি আমি এখন চিকানোর ‘বাঁদার’”.

The folk game of monkey-tricks is represented in the short story ‘Bandar’, to reveal the helpless mental condition of a person who is compelled to obey the wishes of another.

In the story, “Mokshodar Harano Prapti”, the author has embodied several folk elements, many of which have been separately discussed in the previous chapters. In this chapter we have tried to analyze the issue of folk games.
In the rural areas a cluster of young boys and girls form two separate groups to enjoy a game of Bondi (Prisoner). One of them stands inside an encircled area as the Bondi or ‘Prisoner’, in one corner of the open field. If the person steps out of the circle and someone of the opposite group touches him/her, then the former group loses point. Meanwhile, the other members of the group to which the Bondi belongs, exchange rhymes with the players of the other group while escorting their Bondi to a safer place, all the while protecting him/her from the touch of the opposite group. That is, the Bondi is surrounded by enemies on all sides, but has to run and escape to his shelter. The game involves different tactics of scuttling. The youngsters love the game so much that they even ignore rain and storm to enjoy a game of Bondi.

The story has it that old Mokshoda, a permanent resident of the refugee camp, has only the sweet memories of her youthful days, as the impetus of her survival. In the dark, windowless cell of her camp, the bare amenities are so scanty, she has to place tubs on her bed to prevent rain water from drenching her tattered bed-clothes. But the sound of raindrops awakens her memories as she remembers her childhood enjoyment of playing Bondi and the rhymes she used to recite with her companions.

“একবার গোলাম উত্তরে
দুবাঁশের বিতরে
ডলরে বম বম
মাদারে শলা
মাদারে শলা”

Unlike her childhood game of Bondi, in her present state, no one would come to rescue her from the refugee camp to a safe shelter. She has to remain a life-long prisoner in the refugee camp. Having lost everything in
life to the partition of India, Mokshoda's only means of survival are her memories, dreams, sorrows and sympathy. This aged woman's memories of the past are remarkably fresh and alive. This uniqueness of Mokshoda's character has been intelligently portrayed by the author.

Folk dance is an integral part of folk culture. Sri Ashutosh Bhattacharya's opinion about folk dance is:

"Folk dance is communal reaction in movement patterns to life's crucial cycles," Samaj-Jibonedar Anandabodhichar Gostigat Manobhoner Sherir Abhignakchhi Lokonota."^{40}

In the post-Independence Bangla literature of the North-east, the authors have made several references of various folk dances, frequently practiced among different tribes and races of this region. In this connection we need to mention Kaathi Naach or 'Stick Dance', as represented by Jaya Goala, in her previously discussed novel, 'Tobuo Maadal Baaje'.

People, who live by the dint of their physical labour, choose to perform different types of solo or group dances, in order to relieve their fatigue or to express their enjoyment. In the novel, 'Tobuo Maadal Baaje', it is given that the village damsel are absorbed in playing with colous on the occasion of Holi. Just then the presence of the group of Kaathi Naach dancers makes their merriment livelier. The whole village has assembled in
the courtyard of Shaoni’s house to watch the *Kaathi Naach*, in the darkness of night.

“The author has included the incident of this dance in the novel as representing the union of Radha and Krishna, to impart the message of young couples expressing their emotional feelings.

Another novel by Jhumur Pande, ‘Alekjandar Purer Kathakata’, is based on the lives of the tea-tribes. The novel mentions *Kaathi Nritya* as well as *Jhumur Nritya*. The tea-tribes are wont to perform the *Kaathi Naach* on the occasion of the Holi festival in which they worship their Gods Radha and Krishna. The old and the young people of the village become engrossed to the beats of the ‘sticks. Usually the youths dress up as young women, go from house to house, collecting money, food, etc. In AlekJandarpur’s group of *Kaathi Naach*, Budhua is playing the drum, his little son Mangal, is playing the flute, while Shiva has dressed up as a young woman and Shombhu, as a joker. They go on singing:

‘দালে লালে পিয়ালা
 puddle লালে পিয়ালা
 নারী হয়ে মোহন বীশি
 আমরা বাজাব শ্যাম,
শ্যাম আর গোষ্ঠী মুক্তনেই গলা ধরাধরি করে গান ধরেছে।... একটা কাঠি নাচের
dলদং ভিন বাপান থেকে এসেছে। ওরা রাধা কৃষ্ণ সুদামা সেজে কাঠি নিয়ে ঠকাঠক
শান করতে করতে গান গেয়ে নাচেছে—

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In the same novel we find mention of *Jhumur* dance also. One of the main festivals of the tea-tribe is *Karam Tusu* and *Jhumur* dance is an essential part of it. A branch of the *Karam* tree is the main ingredient of this ritual. On the first day of the celebration the worshippers perform a *Jhumur* dance, brandishing a *Karam* branch, following the beats of a Tomtom (Maadal). The ritual continues for three days according to traditional norms and strictures accompanied by *Jhumur* dance till the last day of celebration. The young dancers hold each other by the hand and dance in a semi-circle, stepping to the beats of the *Maadal*. The author gives the following description of *Jhumur* dance:

The author has mentioned the events of *Kaathi Naach, Jhumur Naach* and such other dances, in order to make a realistic presentation of the moments of the festivals and enjoyments of the inhabitants of Alekjandarpur. The personal lives of every one of the folk communities are laden with problems, which they strive to forget through the enjoyment of festivities and celebrations. And their successful representatives in these activities are *Lakshmimoni, Shombhu, Subala, Budhua* and others, whose collective
dances form the essence of these happy occasions, as expressed in the novel.

We have already discussed the novel ‘Biloris’ by Anjali Lahiri, in connection with folk songs. In the present chapter we wish to discuss the aspect folk dances mentioned in the novel.

The novel ‘Biloris’ is based on the traditional beliefs and superstitions of the Khasi tribe. A commonly observed folk festival of the Khasi tribes is the annual dance programme, held in the early weeks of April. It is called Marbisu which means ‘The day to dance merrily’. The author has portrayed the dance as in the following excerpt:

This dance is a thanks-giving function to the Almighty who has blessed the Khasi tribe with a good crop in the previous year. Besides thanking Him, the dance is also meant to plead to the Lord to shower His blessings on the Khasis and their crops in future. Besides in the Marbisu dance programme, Khasi youths and their elders have the priority to choose their brides. The author has also given another significant explanation of the dance:
"From time immemorial earth has been worshipped as a woman. There are ample proofs of different races and tribes throughout the world trying to appease Mother Earth through different song and dance programmes, in order to secure her blessings for a good crop. This aspect has been beautifully presented by the author through the application of the Khasi folk dance, in the novel.

The short story, ‘Dhansiri’, by Kumar Ajit Dutta, is based on the backdrop of the Assamese tribal life. It is a short story with a different tenor. The author describes the famous Bihu dance of Assam, and other related functions like Huchuri Gaan, Bihu dance, etc.

Incessant terrorism, tortures of various organizations have reduced the basis of Assamese culture almost to the level of extinction. Man has become selfish and inconsiderate. The hero of the story Suman, haunted by his emotions, have come to the village Dansiri, to look for the lost folk life of Assam. Immediately on his entering the village, he was taken captive by a terrorist group. He was subjected to severe physical tortures, for refusing to bow down to their unjust demands. Later, in a half-dead condition he found shelter in the house of a village gentleman. In this family that Suman relocates the real picture of traditional Assamese culture. To highlight this aspect, the author illustrates the various aspects of Assamese culture. In the following excerpt from the book, we wish to draw the readers’ attention to the exclusiveness of Assam’s Bihu dance and Huchuri songs:
Bihu is Assam’s national festival. Songs and dances are the main components of Bihu. Both male and female members join the collective Bihu dance. The dance is accompanied by several folk music instruments like, drum (dhol), flute (penpa), cymbals (taal). In Huchuri dance, groups of young boys and girls, go from house to house, performing songs and dances, offering blessings to the households, and receiving rice, money, cookies, etc., in return. In the Assamese folk life, young boys and girls become adept in this dance from a very early age. This aspect is presented in the novel in the words of little Amoni.

We have already discussed the poem, ‘Luit Paarer Gaatha’ by Amalendu Guha. The poem makes a reference to Jhumur dance as in the following:

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“সরুজ দীপের মতে এখানে ছড়িয়ে আছে হাজার বাগান,
হাজার বাগানে শুনি, ওবাও -সাঁওতাল -মুগ্গা,
নামজীবী মানুষের মহা- ঐকতান।
ফুঁজো হয়ে পাতা তোলে; শিরদাড়া টন্টন,
তবুও তো মেয়ে ও মরদ
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North-eastern India is home to many races and tribal communities. Every one of this region is thus nurtured by the different elements of folk culture that exist in this region. The poet is also not an exception. Young men and women belonging to the Oraon, Santhal, Munda tribes residing in this region, step to the beats of the Tomtom, in a Jhumur dance. The sympathetic beats of the Jhumur dance enliven the scarcities and complaints of their easy and simple lives. This is picturesquely portrayed by the poet in the above poem.

Just like the different subjects and objects of folk culture, the evolution, expansion and culmination of folk art are everlasting creations. Folk art is defined as

"Objects and decorations made in a traditional fashion by craftsmen without any formal training, either for daily use and ornamental or for special occasions, such as weddings and funerals are called folk arts."

Therefore these include three kinds of materials such as (i) articles of daily use, (ii) ornamental articles of daily needs and (iii) articles meant only for decoration. The articles are usually made of canes, bamboos and wood, cloth, clay, and metals. Things like Kantha (embroidered bed-spread), Shika (designed string hangers made of ropes), Alpona (floor paintings), terracotta dolls, idols and toys, Nakshi Pithe (designed cookies), various utensils and idols of brass and bell metal, Sital Pati (mats made of dried strands of aquatic plants), Chalchitra (wooden screens decorated with pictures of heavenly deities placed behind the idols of gods and goddesses),

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winnowing tray, wooden idols, wooden oars, bamboo artifacts, etc., are mediums where the artistic traits of various people find expression.

Among all the articles mentioned above, we have focused our attention on the issue of *Kantha* to highlight the fact how *Kantha* has played a significant role in a novel. Regarding this issue, noted folk scientist, Abdul Hafiz’s opinion is worth mentioning:

“The variety and exclusiveness of this folk art have not escaped the notice of the authors of North-east. Here we need to mention the novel, ‘O Jhingepul Bolo Tare’, by Manik Dass of mid-Assam. We have made a short discussion of the novel earlier in connection with proverbs. Here we present an analysis of the use of the techniques of folk art *Kantha*.

The novel deals with social lives of the Bengalis settled in Assam which has housed various populations of different language groups. In the novel we find a parallel flow of relationship between Raja and Ratri and Raja’s mother has been introduced as a significant part of this relationship. Conversation between Ratri and Raja’s mother gives rise to the issue of *Kantha* as follows:

“... তোমাকে একটা অনুরোধ করতে চাই। ...”

“আমার বাড়িতে পুরনো দিনের একখানা কাঁথা আছে।’’...

“মুরিয়াবাড়ি মখমলের কাঁথা। তিন পুরুষের পুরনো। আমার দাদুর আমলের।
এখন আম এ- সব কাঁথা হয় না। দিদা তাঁর বিয়েতে পেয়েছিলেন। সেই কাঁথা তিনি...”
At the end of several conflicting events, Raja’s mother finally chooses Ratri as her daughter-in-law. And in this connection the issue of the Kantha is again brought into the novel.

Although a woman of the new generation, Ratri’s is highly emotional and dreams of a colourful future. She enlivens the three-generation old tattered Kantha, by completing the lost lines of the rhyme embroidered in it.

Kantha, a significant element of folk art as well as an integral part of Bengali folk life, occupies an important place in the novel. The significance of this object Kantha is found in the title of the novel as well as it being the central issue of the structure of the novel. This Kantha stands witness to the family-life of three generations. It appears that the tattered Kantha is proof of the loops and holes of the marital life of Raja’s mother. It is Ratri alone,
who can successfully mend the frayed Kantha and patch up the decaying family by restoring its traditional values. Raja’s mother has chosen Ratri as the most suitable wife of her womanizer son, Raja. On the other hand, despite belonging to the new era, Ratri alone is the most appropriate bearer of that cultural legacy, one who could successfully mend the fissures and tears of the old Kantha and restore its hierarchical glory.

Time is ruthless. It repeatedly snatches away from man all that is dear to him. Women, motherland and even mother-tongue, nothing is spared. In the novel, Ratri, Raja and his mother are all puppets in the hands of time which leave deep scars on their lives. All they have left are some tattered dreams like the ragged Kantha, which can hardly be repaired by needle and thread. The only means of survival of these people are by clinging to the scraps of dreams, emotions and sentiments, gains and losses, just like the unfinished rhyme stitched on the tattered Kantha. In this novel, the central issue gets entwined with the hierarchical Kantha, which although lifeless, is enlivened by the artistic description of the author.

There are several instances of folk elements in Swapna Bhattacharya’s story ‘Ujaan’. We have already discussed some of them in the previous chapters. Here we are trying to focus on the aspect of folk art used in the story.

Women have forever executed the responsibilities of managing the home and family. In this story also, Kshitindramohan’s wife Charushashi has settled in her new home at Meherpur. In the description of some household artifacts of their new home, there is mention of a folk handicraft, cited here:
Women have always busied herself with various engagements within the household. Household requirements have found expression in a variety of handicraft objects. These include clay dolls for little children, or beautifully designed wall and floor paintings. The author has given a beautiful description of the artistic facet of women within the seraglio.

Folk handicrafts are also mentioned in the verses of the North-east. In Bijit Kumar Bhattacharya’s poem ‘Sonali Baran Dhan’, we find mention of designed winnowing trays.

The main theme of the poem is the rural home of a farmer family. In a farmer’s household all activities starting from sowing to harvesting and storing of paddy, involve the use of various handmade objects. As soon as paddy ripens in the fields, each one of the family gets busy. Farmer women
use colourfull winnowing trays made of bamboo to thresh and sort the paddy before storing it in the granary, for the future. The poet while painting the picture of a busy but Lakshmi-like farmer-wife brings in the issue of a designed and painted winnowing tray.

Amalendu Babu has mentioned a Terracotta plaque in his poem ‘Chithi’. The Santhals live among the bounties of nature in the spring-laden valley surrounded by the mountains of Singbhum and Mayurbhanj. Their lives are as simple and carefree as the flowing streams. Artists usually portray Santhal women as bedecking their hair with Palash flowers, carrying earthen pots on their waists and tying a piece of cloth on their well-formed bosoms. Terracotta is an object of folk art, made of clay. In the modern mechanical world, the lustrous physical beauty of these labourious women, have turned into skeletons. The signs of the once-thriving lives of these people are now merely imaginations of the painters, confined within the contours of their brushes. The eyes of these hapless people no longer reveal the depth which was once captured in the canvas of a painter. Rather, their sunken eyes are only the proof of their toils and hardships which perturbs the poet. The poet pens down his thoughts as:

“এসেছি অধুনা নির্জন এক ইটিশনে
ময়ূরকল্প ও সিংহঘূঁড়ের সীমারে।

রাত্রির মেঝে লম্বা পায়ে আসে জল আনতে।
সাঁওতালের মেঝে মাটির কলসে ভরেছে জল,
আমায় দেখতেই মেলেছে অবাক নিলাঙ চোখ,
খেল পড়ে গেছে খোঁপায় জড়ান পলাশ- দল,
খেলে পড়া নীতি ভুলেছে বক্ষে দে টানতে।
টেরাকোটা শিল্পের মতো সে আঁখে
সচিন দিনে উঞ্চল ছিল তৃণুল প্রাণ,
অধুনা বক্ষ ভেঙেছের গেছে চারের দামে

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Like the litterateur, the painter or a sculptor also represent the realities of life in their creations. But the once common features of folk life and folk people remain restricted within the domain of the artists’ subject matter. In the above poem the subject of Terracotta has been used satirically to visualize the poet’s depression about the present condition of the poor Santhals.

On the basis of above discussion, it can be said that in the post-Independence period, the litterateurs of North-east India have made successful uses of different components of folklore in different forms of their creations. Folk beliefs, folk traditions, prohibitions and restrictions, belief in the super-naturals rites and rituals, customs, festivals and celebrations, folk games, folk games, folk dances, folk art, etc., are taken together to represent an indispensible whole of folklore. In this chapter we have discussed in detail how these folk elements, although in a small amount, have found their ways into the Bangla literature of this region. It can be definitely said that these folk components have been judiciously used in the literature primarily in the construction of the plots of the stories or novels or poems as well as in the characterization of the persons represented therein and to describe the infrastructure of such creations.
Notes and References

4. Ibid, p.82.
10. Ibid, p.92.
18. Ibid, p.82.
35. Abdul Hafiz, Bangla Desher Loukik Oitijhya, p.20.21.
38. Ibid, p.189.
42. Jhumur Pande, Alekjandarpurer Kathakata, p.54, 55.
43. Ibid, p.93.
44. Anjali Lahiri, Biloris, p.15.
45. Ibid, p.22.
49. Abdul Hafiz, Bangla Desher Loukik Oitijhya, p.18.
52. Ibid, p.317.