CHAPTER III

USE OF FOLK NARRATIVES IN BANGLA LITERATURE
OF THE NORTH EAST
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3.1 Introduction to Folk Narratives

With the dawning of creation, primitive man formed a specific idea about the relationship between the creator and his creations. Based on this concept, primitive man paid obeisance to the catastrophes of Nature like storm and thunder, and even birth and death, in the form of worship and penance. In a community of ignorant men, the leader of the clan or society often built up fantastic stories to explain the various mysteries of nature. Just as scientists provide intelligent explanations of various enigmatic phenomena of the world, so also in ancient times, primitive clans or tribes resorted to fantastic tales, where they tried to rationalize the mysteries of nature. These creative folk anecdotes are called Myths in English and Lokapurana in Bengali. Renowned folk scientist Jameson has remarked that: “A story presented as having actually occurred in a previous age explaining the cosmological and supernatural tradition of the people, their gods, heroes, cultural traits, religious beliefs, etc.”, in the book, ‘Standard Dictionary of Folk Mythology and Legend’. Explaining the above statement, Dr. Siddiqui has said—

“আর্থাত সত্যি সংঘটিত হয়েছিল এমন লোকবিশাসপূর্ণ বংশানুক্রমে চলে আসা গল্পই হলো ‘Myth’.”

Both myths and folk tales are created at different phases of life of primitive man. Memory being the only means of preservation, it is not
amazing that many myths or events were later transformed into folk tales. Ashraf Siddiqui’s opinion regarding the similarity and difference between myths and folk tales is worth mentioning here.

“The line between myth and legend is often vague.”

This chapter attempts to discuss the various traditional Bengali folk narratives, having primarily classified them into fairy tales, tales pertaining to religious penance, tales of Puranas, etc. according to their subjects. These folk tales and narratives carried down through generations based on memory and oral usage has greatly influenced the works of Bengali litterateurs of North-east India. The present chapter intends to highlight this aspect of the Bengali literary creations of this region.

3.2 Folk Narratives used in Novels

Shyamal Bhattacharja gives a picturesque description of the life-style of the dutiful soldiers stationed among the snow-covered, harsh mountains, in his novel ‘Bukhari’. Young soldiers like Aloke, Jayanta and others have learnt to suppress their pains and emotions and adapt themselves to strict discipline. The blood-stained earth of the training centre at Belgaum is witness to their long and painful punishments, stripping the skins off their knees and elbows. Nursing each others’ wounds and continuous struggle
against hard reality has rendered them the capability of finding joy even in extreme physical pain.

Airman Aloke began his life as an air-commander at the confluence of Nubra and Shihek, surrounded by the Ladakh mountain range in the East, the Saltoro range at the back, and the Karakoram in the West and North-west. The sky at Khalsor is popularly known as 'Yankee Junction' among the pilots. Nature-loving Aloke was forever deluded by his dreams of wild mountains existing in the fairy stories of his childhood days, and the thrills of the snow-clad mountain ranges seen in the films of his youth. He effectively fulfilled his youthful dreams by establishing himself as an efficient pilot of the Indian Air Force, defending the borders of his country. Atrocities between two neighbouring countries turn into devastating war taking the lives of several innocent soldiers. Although all soldiers fight the war out of love for their motherland or for sheer livelihood, yet in reality the soldiers continuously have to fight even subconsciously. For man is unaware of the power of Nature. The author describes the growth of various mountains and cliffs in the Himalayas, the continuous rise of the Himalayas, the extinction of the Thetis Sea, the devastating effects of an earthquake or a volcanic eruption, obliterating whole civilizations in seconds. The novel delivers the message that Nature may be silent but is definitely alive. Unaware of the actual strength of the massive power of Nature, people are unnecessarily engaged in fighting for control over different parts of the earth, killing thousands of innocent soldiers. Man has only shadowy ideas about nature, which can change abruptly, and so also his conception of the Himalayas or the Thetis Sea can change as a result of political conflicts among neighbouring countries. Though philosophically spoken, all men live together in God's world, yet men try to carve out
specific territorial boundaries to suit their purposes, which are often not
accepted by the people of a bordering country. This results in wars among
the various countries, sacrificing the lives of thousands of brave soldiers.
But these soldiers do not dither to accept death, or be oblivious to the hard
facts of life. Undaunted by the bitter cold (-50 degree temperature), airmen
Aloke, Jayanta, Chitta and others give in to enjoying themselves in the
warmth of the ‘Bukhari’, as they re-live the dreams of their families,
remembering the days of happiness and bitterness spent with them. The
warmth of the ‘Bukhari’ deports Aloke’s thoughts back to his childhood
days, when he laid beside his grandmother, listening to her fairytale
remembering the coziness of her tattered bed-clothes, the warmth of the
love of his wife Antara, and even the warmth of the ‘Bukhari’, trying to
save his life against the bitter cold of the Himalayas. Aloke sways at the
juncture of dream and reality as he contemplates upon his by-gone days:

“The aukhuma rupakshwa golp sconate shonate maare madheoi chup hokey bebe. Rajauputra
ba bandinir kunara rupen borona karate karate. Ehe chup manuhati bolata chok
dekh orea bujato aukhuma khuwamani. Ekhanei ake, aheh kojaya hariye gece!
mane hoy sisharek koon premiker borona. Kesharek puukre jala, shalok buk,
pashakkir dekhate dekhate pramik youbanar aynay dekha nijere deharaite. Kato
aakanyak nirei theli ai bandinir dehara. Badd puukreki khal jala choote maach
beke utolei maharanga choi mere bule neye. Tera nidei parek rajaaputra uke
dhum thaliero rakshas bhedhe par pokhariyage charishe nijere dekhe feri gelehi
golpe naate gachhi mudiye yaye.”

The author’s use of the concept of the entrapped Princess of the
fairytale is quite well-planned. Grandma, while describing the beauty and
attributes of the fairytale Princesses, subtly included bits of information
about her own beautiful youth, which had silently passed away, leaving no
trace. Her words regaled of the days when defying all their desires and reluctances, breaking all barriers, a charming Prince would come, liberate the Princess and carry her to his own land. But what happened after that is never told in any fairy tale. Just as fairytales do not tell the stories of youth, so also, while ranting on the description of a fantastic world, Grandma reminisced about the unsatisfied dreams of her lost youth, with a desolate look in her sunken eyes. Similarly, the story of how soldier Aloke spends his lonely nights yearning for the warm love of his beloved wife Antara is also unknown to all. The author presents the query:

“তারপর? এই ভরা বৌবানের গল্প কে বলবে আমাদের? রূপকথার গল্পে ভরা বৌবানের গল্প নেই কেন?”,

As Grandma’s tale come to an end, Aloke sways between sleep and wakefulness as he remembers his childhood days.

“A very well known motif of Bengali fairy tales is that of the winged-horse. In this connection let us put forward a tale involving a winged-horse. The story is taken from Ashutosh Bhattacharya’s, ‘Bangla Lokasahitya’, vol.IV.

Once upon a time a king ruled over a country. Despite being a pious ruler there was no peace in his land, because a huge demon swooped down upon his people and tortured them at regular intervals. The king tried his best to protect his people, but failed. One day a Prince from an unknown land came there and sought to fight the demon. Armed with the blessings
and encouragement of the king and his people, the prince chased away the
demon, using his skill and efficiency. But the Prince decided to kill the
demon to put an end to his atrocities. And to achieve the goal all he needed
was a winged-horse. His ardent search for the animal, equipped with a
diamond bridle to tame and control it, ultimately led him to the animal.
Collecting bits and pieces of information about the winged-horse, the
Prince finally located the animal stooping to drink from the sea. He
successfully bridled it with the extraordinary diamond reins, and ultimately
led the animal to fight with demon and kill it. When the Prince returned
victorious to the kingdom, the King married off his daughter to him, and
the Prince left for his abode with his newly-wed bride, riding on the
winged-horse.

Although the author brings in the issue of fairy tales to describe
Aloke’s childhood, yet the conceptual events like the Prince’s search for
the winged-horse to fight the demon, the use of a diamond bridle to tame it
and to wander about among the clouds, are Aloke’s real-life desires. For
Aloke the winged-horses are the fighter planes and his sole aim is to kill
the demon-like enemies and protect his motherland. Like the victorious
Prince, Aloke also dreams of returning victorious to the warm embrace and
warmth of his loving wife, Antara.

Author Shyamalbabu has very intelligently introduced parts of
another fairy tale in the later part of his novel. Although the fairy tale,
‘Pakshiraj’ does not reveal the details of the conjugal life of the Prince and
the Princess, yet it remains a pertinent question whether Aloke’s wife
Antara and his Grandma, were really happy in their marital lives.

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In this way the author introduced the concept of ‘Suworani and Duworani’ in this novel.

The characters Suworani and Duworani are very well-known motifs of Bengali fairy tales, which been used in several novels including the present one. The character Suworani in all Bengali fairy tales enjoys a happy and carefree family life with her husband and children, while Duworani suffers all the miseries. ‘Antara’, whose soldier husband lives in a distant land, must be a Suworani, enjoying the bliss of a happy family with her little daughter, ‘Tora’; while Alok’s Grandmother, a child widow, must be the Duworani. But at one point both of them must be Duworani; Antara, pining for the company of her distant husband and Grandma, whose beautiful youth is now only a sorrowful nostalgia. The end of the story is a medley of fantasy and reality.

Estranged women in reality are always a combination of Suworani and Duworani, of happiness and loneliness. The existence of two women,
Antara and Grandma, in Aloke’s emotional life, gives birth to a new fairy tale in his mind.

In this way, the use of fairy tale characters in the novel have helped the author to lead forward his novel, as well as highlighting the yearning of his hero for a satisfactory sensual and family life.

The story of ‘Alibaba O Challish Chor’ is a famous Bengali folktale, which is judiciously used in Kartik Lahiri’s novel, ‘Antajya’. Here the hero Alinda is constantly reminded of his Kokborok origin, by the taunting remarks of his childhood friend Shonit, who himself is of Brahmin origin, as well as a meritorious student. Shonit firmly believes that Alinda had secured the government job only because of his Scheduled Tribe background. From that day onwards began Alinda’s conflict of existence against the backdrop of caste and race. Quiet and reserved person that Alinda is, he feels the twinge of the social line of division at every step. It was because of his tribal origin that his girlfriend Madhavi’s father had refused to accept Alinda’s family as their neighbour. Alinda learnt the reason of their eviction from the so-called elite society, from his own father, Aghorbabu. Even his colleagues often corner him just because he is a tribal, and had obtained the job on the basis of tribal quota. Alinda feels the burden of this social division at every step. This hesitation and mental instability regarding social existence forced Alinda to join the military outfit of another tribal youth, Dharmajay. This terrorist organization aims at rescuing the tribals and their culture from the imposition of the non-tribal elite class. Dharmajay pointed out to Alinda, that the language in which he had been speaking till then, was not his own. Similarly, the happiness shared with Shonit during Durga Puja, or Pher Khachi Puja, were nothing but illusions.
Alinda realizes that the educated, elite plains people do not even treat them as human beings, rather they are thought of as slaves. The only respite from this tortuous environment is the company of Nitaibabu, who is also a tribal like Alinda. But there was a time when plains people stood in awe of the tribal chiefs and bore all their tortures in obeisance. The gifts and wealth that the plains people acquired from the tribal chiefs enabled them to gain power and impose their own laws, customs, language and culture, upon the tribesmen. Gradually, the kings and of the tribesmen and the entire tribal population submitted to the authority of the plains people. But the tribal people, who even now live in the mountains and hills, in the Lunga, have kept alive the essence of their originality. At one point of time, educated tribal youths like Alinda, demeaned their uneducated tribal brethren, thus creating a wall between their own educated and uneducated tribesmen. On the other hand, they could not even gain the status of honour and equality among the townsmen. This feeling of rejection and dishonour is crushing the people like Alinda between two opposite pressures. Alinda decides to master his mother tongue as the only means of escape from this difficult situation, which, he believes, will enable him to defend his illiterate tribal brethren. Only then they would not have to live the lives of second grade citizens or foreigners in their own country. Alinda’s newfound friends Dharmajay, Kishore, Durbajay, Hansraj, Lura, Mandija all lead Alinda to believe that he could bring back the lost honour of his tribe. Alinda feels comfortable in their company, as if they are his own.

“মনে হয় কত আপনার জন এসেছে কত কাছে, এক পরিবার, মেন বিরাট এক
বাড়ি, তার শত ঘর, এক এক ঘরে বাস করছে এর ভাই ওর কাকা মামা দাদা
তার মাসি - কত কত, কেউ অনাত্মীয় নয় রঙ্গের বাঁধনে কেউ কাউকে ছেড়ে

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The author cites the example of the fairy tale, ‘Alibaba O Challish Chor’, to support his description of Alinda’s emotion. The story goes as follows:

Alibaba and Kasem were two brothers of whom Kasem was a wealthy businessman while Alibaba was a poor woodcutter, toiling hard to make two ends meet.

One day, while out in the forest to get wood, Alibaba chanced upon a group of bandits and their secret hideout in the mountain cave where they stored their loot. Learning the magic words to the cave, Alibaba entered the cave after the bandits left. Initially he was astounded by the heaps of gold and jewels lying before him, but soon mustered his wits to pack his sacks with as much wealth he could gather and returned home. Alibaba’s wife became overwhelmed at the sight of such enormous wealth and her extreme excitement aroused the suspicion of Kasem and his wife. They tricked Alibaba’s wife to part with the secret of their new-found store of wealth, whereupon Kasem set out for the forest to obtain a bigger share of the bandits’ treasure. After entering the treasure trove of the bandits, Kasem
gathered as much wealth as he could store in sacks and started for home. But in his excitement he forgot the magic words to open the cave and remained locked inside. When the bandits returned and found Kasem, they beheaded him and left the place leaving the body behind. Meanwhile, as night set in and Kasem did not return home, a worried Alibaba set out for the cave to find his brother. Finding the beheaded body of Kasem inside the cave, Alibaba brought back the body and the jewels collected by him. News was spread that Kasem had died of a sudden illness.

When the bandits returned to the cave and found the dead-body gone, they became suspicious that someone else had learnt of their secret hideout, and promptly set out to find and punish the person. Identifying Alibaba as their target, the bandit leader disguised himself as an oil-merchant and reached Alibaba’s house with forty kegs of oil, seeking shelter for the night, planning to kill him. Simple and unassuming Alibaba and his family got involved in entertaining their valued guest. But their beautiful, young and intelligent maid-servant, Marjina, saw through the bandit-leader’s trick. With the help of a man-servant, Abdullah, Marjina succeeded in killing all the thirty-nine thieves hidden in the kegs by pouring hot oil on them, and finally stabbing the bandit-leader to death. Marjina then exposed the identity as well as the conspiracy of the bandit-leader to the astounded Alibaba and his family, and the tale came to an end with Alibaba becoming the sole owner of the immense wealth of the bandits.

In this fairy tale, the hero Alibaba came upon the treasure trove by chance, which entirely changed the life-style of him and his family. In Shyamal Bhattacharya’s novel, the mentally hesitant Alinda unknowingly got involved with Dharmajay’s militant outfit, with the hope of retrieving
the lost honour of his tribe. Just as the gold and jewels found in the bandits’
cave were immensely valuable to Alibaba, so also, the members of the
militant organization were equally valuable friends of Alinda. In the
presence of Akhira, Durbajoy, Lura, Mandija, he felt:

“একদিন পাহাড় লুপ্ত হয়ে যাবে, শুধু শুধু একবার না, নিরক্ষরতা অজ্ঞতার
সুখে মহাজনরা লিখিয়ে নিত জমিজমা সব, এখন সেই সুখে নিতে পারবে না
ফের, সকলেই এখন সাক্ষর, তারা জানে কিনে সাই দিচ্ছে তারা, টিপ সাই একটা
অভিশাপ, সেই অভিশাপের ভাবে নুইয়ে পড়ছে না ফের, সকলে মাথা উঁচু করে
দাঁড়িয়েছে ...”।

Alinda is the representative of a lower middle class family, and is
compelled to work to maintain his family comfortably. However, the dream
to save his tribesmen, the thrill of being one of the same bloods as his
brethren, could be achieved only by joining the terrorist organization.
Joining the organization seemed like gaining hold of Alibaba’s store of
wealth. The author has painted the character of the hero Alinda as one
tortured by the practical problems of life and brings in a touch of fairy tale
as a mark of his wish fulfillment. Thus, it can be said that, the folk element
has been judiciously used in the novel ‘Antajya’ discussed above.

Udayan Ghosh is a powerful writer of the North-east, making a
conscious effort to introduce elements of fairy tales in his novel,
‘Harishchandra’. People living in modern towns often give in to creating
literature on topics relating to the daily lives of the rural people, about their
everyday needs, desires and tastes. The hero of this novel, Harish, tries to
identify himself as one of such authors. He is a simple tea-trader, moving
about in the villages and rural markets of Barak Valley, as part of his
business activities. He regularly spends his evenings gossiping and chatting
with his friends at Palwan’s tea-stall. Harish and his friends Hiranmay, Shaktipada, Shantanu, and Bidyut spend their evenings, chatting on varied issues ranging from politics, social issues, literature and even women. Amongst all these, Harish’s friends often encourage him to pen down his varied experiences, and proclaim himself as a successful litterateur. However, nothing seemed to work right in Harish’s life. His stock of experiences, bubbling ideas never found expression in pen and paper. The love that had brightened his youth got lost into oblivion. His chance acquisition of some wealth from a lottery also got flunked. He was thrashed mercilessly by Jagadish Paul for a paltry debt of nine rupees and although he burnt with the ardent desire to return the slap, yet it was never accomplished. Nor could he fulfill his mother’s wish of marrying a princess even after crossing forty, and his physical appearance does in no way conform to that of an ideal groom.

From his childhood Harish had been elated by the romanticized ideas of the physical beauty of the Santhal women, their rice-beer and their drums. But when he confronted them in real life, he could only recognize stark poverty in their malnourished bodies, distorted bone and teeth formation, and grief-stricken sunken eyes, the tattered, dirty clothes of the Santhal men and women, telling the stories of their misery and deprivation. But to become a successful litterateur he has to blend these realities with his imagination. Harish ardently yearns for the appearance of the ‘old magician’ or *Bhelkiwala Buro*, but he never comes. Talking of the *Bhelkiwala Buro*, the author takes us to his childhood days as follows:

"চেলেবেলার ভুলে যাওয়া গল্পের কিছুটা রেশ ওর মনে লেগে আছে। রাজা এক
গরিবের মেয়েকে এক রাশি খুঁড় দিয়ে একটা ঘরে বসিয়ে করে রাখলেন। রাজার
ছুক্তম, ‘যদি ওই খুঁড় থেকে সোনার সুতো তুলে এক রাত্রের মধ্যে আমাকে একটা
This fairy tale element mentioned in the novel discussed above, have played an important role in characterizing Harish. He is continuously confronting torturous problems every day, but is incapable of turning this bitter reality into imaginative literature. At forty, Harish’s world of fantasy and dreams has already been lost into oblivion. Now the ‘old magician’ of his dreams does not help him to weave golden threads of literature from the hay stock of his experience-layered reality. The dreams of his life are painted as:

“পরদৃ গাছিটি তার খড়ের সুসমাচার বুকে কোন সূর গ্রামে চলে গেছে চিরকালের মতো”।

Harish is tired of trying to fulfill his mother’s dream and his own desires, and gives in to reminisce his childhood laden with the magic reality of fairy stories.

Author Kartik Lahiri mentions Punyi Pukur, a customary religious practice of rural Bengal, in his novel, ‘Neel Rakta’. The novel tells the tale of three generations. Hemlata alias Rama is the daughter-in-law of Raghabraj and Rasamoyee Roychowdhury whose past is laced with the memories of her association with her loving, religious and somber mother-
in-law. Soon after her marriage, Rama had to shift to Kolkata with her husband, Rakhalraj, leaving their rural home in Comilla, to the utmost displeasure of Rakhalraj’s parents.

Rakhalraj and Hemlata’s son Raghu has never seen his grandparents, yet their presence in his thoughts is forever alive. Hemlata was so influenced by her mother-in-law Rasamoyee, that even after many years she could imbibe Rasamoyee’s art of story-telling, when Raghu insisted on listening to the fairy tales, in the lines of his ‘Grandma’ or Thakuma. In this relation, the religious ritual of _Punyi Pukur_ has been mentioned in this novel as in the following:

“কোন এক গ্রামে এক ব্রাহ্মণ বাস করতে তার দুই ছেলে এক মেয়ে খুব গরীব তারা ব্রাহ্মণ ডিকে কিরে যা আনে তারা কলে তাই ভাগ করে খায় গরীব হলেও তাদের মুখে হাসি ছেড়া কেউ কান্না দেখেনি কিন্তু দেখে এমন খরা হলো পর পর কয়েক বছর যে শেষমেষ তাদের ভাল কিছু ঘটে আর রাগা চলে না কি করে ব্রাহ্মণ-ব্রাহ্মণী হেলমেয়ের হাত ধরে নেমে এলো রাজায় বঁটে তো বঁটে কোথাও কিন্তু মিলছে না তখন ভর দুপুর সামনে একটা পুকুর পুকুরের জল একদম কাচের মতো ঝকঝকে ছোটো ছেলে বায়না ধরল তার থিয়দে পেয়েছে ব্রাহ্মণ গেল তখন কঠো কুঁড়ে ব্রাহ্মণী রামর যোগাদো বাস্ত হল মেয়েটি তার খুব শান্ত বলল রামর তো নেরী আচে আমি ততুকন্ন পুনিমী পুকুরের বলত নেরে নি।

‘কি সুপ্নর বল মা তুমি, ঠাকুমা কি এর চেয়েও ভাল বলতেন’?”

The ritual _Punyi Pukur_ mentioned here is a female-oriented, non-scriptural ritual practiced in rural Bengal, in which young maidens between five and nine years of age, participate, beginning from _Chaitra Sankranti_ to the end of _Baisakh_ of the Bengali calendar. This ritual does not necessitate any incantation by a priest, but is performed by young participants. On such occasions a square hole is dug on the mud courtyard or in the garden.
or even on a cemented floor setting up dykes on the four sides and filling the hole with water. The idea is to construct a mini pond with openings on four sides as four ghats, each of which are decorated with cowrie shells on both sides. In the centre of the make believe pond is placed a basil plant or a branch of a bel-tree, and then it is filled with water from a vessel, amidst chanting of a six-lined rhyme. Then flower offerings are made into the mini pond by way of worship. One of the rhymes chanted during this religious ritual is as follows:

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"পুনিয়া পুষ্কর পুষ্পমালা
কে পূজে রে দুপুরবেলা?
আমি সতী লীলাবতী
ভাইয়ের বেন পুষ্পবতী;
হয়ে পুষ্প মরবে না
পুষ্পিকীতে ধরবে না।"
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The above-mentioned rhyme has been collected from Abanindranath Tagore’s Banglar Brata.

This ritual has to be practiced consecutively for four years after which its completion is celebrated with a specific amount of cowrie, which are due to the girl’s brother. It is also necessary to feed some Brahmins and gift them with gold or coins of a good amount. Just like other Bengali rituals, rhymes sung are also pleadings for the girl’s good fortune and procreation, as well as, for the well being and bountifulness of nature. Raghu’s grandmother was also no exception to this trend. In fact, all her worship and rituals were directed to the well-being of her family and children. But the passage of time forces everyone to pursue a life destined by his fate. Raghabraj had left his familial home in the village, to make a name for himself in a so-called advanced village; his son Rakhalraj, settled himself amidst the modernity of the town-life in Kolkata, while Rakhalraj’s
son Raghu, followed the footsteps of his ancestors. Rasamoyee’s yearning for the happiness of her joint family in the practice of customs and rituals have now turned into loving tales of yonder days within the small family of Hemlata.

The novel ‘Neel Rakta’ tells the story of three generations, of the separation of one generation from the other. The progeny of the new generation, Raghu, reveres his past generation, longs to hear about his grandparents, the stories told by his grandmother, which reminded him of his ancestors, blood-relations and his motherland. He says:

“আমি কেন ঠাকুর্ডা ঠাকুমাকে দেখতে পেলাম না? রামা হাসে, ঠাকুমা তোর জন্মের আগেই মায়া যান।কিন্তু ঠাকুর্ডা তো রেখেছিলেন?” ।

Though Raghu has established himself as a modern, city-bred person, with a scientific bend of mind, yet he finds solace in delving into his ancestral past, the religion, faith, culture and practices of his ancestors. The novel highlights the trend of the modern generation to move out towards the cities, for an easy and luxurious life, breaking the bondage of a joint family, and finding satisfaction in forming nuclear families. At the same time, the mention of a particular ritualistic practice observed by the elderly women of the family and lovingly remembered by the younger generation, attempts to bridge the gap between the old and new generations, to glorify the past in the eyes of the new.

In the novel ‘Gang-gatha’, author Jhumur Pande, depicts the picture of everyday life of the labour class living in the mud-flat regions of the Barak river. The novel is adorned with various elements of folklore to maintain its continuity. This chapter discusses the tactic of using the concept of Savitri Brata, a folk ritual, widely practiced in the Barak Valley.
The novel has it that the whims of nature gave birth to a half-slum half-suburb area named ‘Dudh-patil’, inhabited by a variety of people like Narahari, Phulwanti, Malati, Sumati, Sushil, Sukur Mia, and others from various walks of life. Neither do they have a permanent income, nor any dream for a better future. Hunger, infirmity and death constitute their gloomy present. Only on days of election do they earn some status as civilized town’s men or as sympathetic people, in the eyes of political leaders. At other times, men like Narahari, Sushil and others work as fish and vegetable vendors, while Malati, Phulwanti and the like work as maids in the houses of the rich and the well-to-do, residing in the city. Girls like Sita with dreams in their eyes, are forced into flesh trading while many like her are secretly transported into the dark world by the people of the smart elite class. Young lads like Kanai turn to become scavengers selling scraps for a livelihood, simultaneously gearing to become anti-socials of the future.

Phulwanti, the heroine of this novel, is one insignificant character of this cosmopolitan crowd. She works as a maid servant in the houses of Bijonbabu and some others in the town, to run a family of five children and an indolent husband. Phulwanti’s eldest daughter, a girl of fourteen or fifteen years, was mercilessly sold to the brothels of Siliguri by someone of the privileged class. Phulwanti, despite learning of the whereabouts of her daughter in the red-light areas, is unable to bring her back. Suppressing all her sorrows, she leaves her home for her daily chores. Besides, she also takes the responsibility of reconciling the regular quarrels between and the other women of the neighbourhood, taking Malati to the doctor to be treated for her broken head and even nursing her. Her familial and social responsibilities often make her late for her work, resulting in abuses from
her employees, and the torment of the fear of losing her job. On one such commonly busy day, Phulwanti comes across the Shivbari or Shiv-mandir, where all the women folk have gathered together to celebrate Savitri Brata, another ritual performed by Bengali women. The author describes Phulwanti’s thoughts as follows:

“আজ সকাল থেকেই শিববাড়ির সামনে এয়োডি সেয়েদের লাইন লেগেছে। সাবিত্রী বর্তের ফুল নৈমিত্তি নিয়ে দাঁড়িয়ে আছে সবাই। ফুলক্ষী কাজ থেকে যেতে যেতে থরমেক দাঁড়াল। আগা- মাথা দেখে নিল লাইনটা। পতির মনের জন্য নাকি বন্ধু করে এয়োডিরা। যেহও ফুলক্ষীর অতো পতিরতা সাজার সময় কোথায়? এসব করে বাবুদের বউরা। আর হাসত তো এখনও পড়ে পড়ে যুমোছে। এমার বরের সঙ্গে কঁড়া করে যে বিষ কেয়েছিল ওই বউটাও তো থাণা সাজি নিয়ে দাঁড়িয়ে আছে। আর যে বউটার পতির সঙ্গে সারদিন খাট খাট খাট ওই বউটাও তো দালপঞ্চাড়ি শাড়ি পরে ... তবে না লোকে বলে পতির জন্য করে ... ধ্যাৎ যতসব! ফুলক্ষী পা চালিয়ে হবিত করে হাঁটে।”

A commonly practiced ritual in the Barak Valley is Savitri brata. And this idea very consciously applied to the novel by the author. We present a brief description of the ritual as follows:

_Savitri brata_ is widely observed in the Barak region of the North-east, on _Krishna-Chaturdashi_ of the month _Jaishtha_ of the Bengali calendar. Normally married women participate in this traditional ritual wishing for the welfare of their husbands and families. The function continues for three days, with the women keeping a fast and following other restrictions, on the first day. On the second day, arrangements are made for worship under a banyan tree or in the courtyard with a banyan branch dug in the middle of it. Two earthen pots are offered, one to goddess Savitri and another to Lakshmi-Narayan. In front of them is painted a picture of Yama (the God of Death) in black, with a white ceremonial thread on his shoulders, while
pictures of Savitri and Satyavan are drawn in yellow, red and green colours. The elements of worships constitute flowers, fruits, haritaki and an axe made of bamboo. White sandalwood paste on a peepal leaf is offered to Satyavan, and vermillion on another peepal leaf is offered to Savitri. During the days of worship, participants do not eat anything procured by ploughing the earth. Another integral part of the ceremony is that the *brata katha* or the ritualistic scriptures are read out by a narrator. This is followed by a series of norms and practices, till the completion of the ritual on the third day, which is often an extravagant event. The purpose of observing this traditional ritual is to secure the welfare of one’s husband and children.

However for a poor woman like Phulwanti, toiling through the day and night, this kind of function, seeking the well-being of one’s husband seemed nothing but a fancy. Only those women living in the luxuries of city-life, where there is no scarcity of food or other necessities, can indulge in such kind of fanciful celebrations, to cover up their strained relationships with their husbands. But Phulwanti neither has the time nor the desire to observe such fanciful rituals, especially for the long life of a lazy and drug addict husband like Harendra, who never lifts a finger to help Phulwanti run the house or to share her hardships. For Phulwanti, even standing in the temple courtyard, decked up in a red-bordered saree and articles of worship in their hands, appears to be like a clown. Ironically, however, towards the end of the novel, we find Phulwanti is forced by circumstances to dress up like a clown, wearing a red-bordered saree, only to earn some money.

The female dominated rituals of Bengal are almost always directed towards praying for the well-being of the family, husband and children. But in the eyes of the author, in a society which does not recognize the entity of women, do not accommodate them to lead a respectful life, where men do not strive to protect the honour of women, the traditional practice of such
social rituals, by the women from different socio-economic strata, appears to be nothing but a farce. And the author’s conscious effort to show the satire involved in including these social customs in the novel, deserves applause.

At the end of the novel, author Jhumur Pande, has included a detailed description of another such ritualistic penance, Suryabrata, in order to describe the daily routine of the hero of the novel, Narahari. The hero, Narahari of Dudh-patil, is a simple, lemon vendor. Orphaned at childhood, he is a lonely man even at sixty-plus having surrendered his married wife to her lover. This devout, honest man is loved and respected by one and all in Dudh-patil and also by his daily customers in the city. One such customer is Savita Devi, a college teacher, who had promised to make arrangements for his old-age pension. When Narahari reached Savita Devi’s house, he saw the function of Suryabrata being observed there. The author describes Narahari’s thoughts as:

"বৃদ্ধিকর্তার খর নিতে যখন সবিতা দেবীর ঘরে পৌঁছল নরহরি, তখন সূর্যটা
ভোজনি।
সূর্যব্রত হচ্ছে বাজিতে। মেয়ে-বউরা হাতে বাঁধ, করতাল বাজিয়ে ঘুরে ঘুরে
লাচছে।—

বৃদ্ধির ঘরে লাগছে গওগোল রে
পাড়ার লোক
বৃদ্ধির ঘরে লাগছে গওগোল
হাট হইতে বন্ধ আইলা
মাথার পায়ে শঙ্কা বহিয়া
শাবাদিকে জানায় দাতব্য রে
পাড়ার লোক ...

বৃদ্ধির ঘরে লাগছে গওগোল ...

এ মা ওই তো সুমধু, কোকিলা, বালাইরের বউ, সবিতা দেবী— কলেজে পড়ান,
দিদি— ডিসি অফিসে চাকরি করেন, এক মা-জননী সবাই শ্রীধর্ম তুলে
একসঙ্গে নাচছে।"
One very common ritual performed in the Cachhar and Tripura regions of the North-east is *Suryabrata*. This ritual is performed by all women, married or unmarried, on every Sunday of the month of *Magha* of the Bengali calendar. The uniqueness of this function is that the participants spend the whole day, from dawn to dusk, standing on their feet. The ritual begins at dawn, before the sun rises, when the women take a bath and then light a lamp. When the sun appears the lamp is shown to the sun and then kept in a sacred place covered with a basket, till sunset. From the time the lamp is lit, the women do all the work, preparing for the puja, participating in the songs and dances, even paint a rangoli, without sitting down for once. At dusk, the lamp is again shown to the dying sun, and after immersing all the materials of worship in water the participants break their fast with a vegetarian diet. The songs sung on this occasion, are all centered on the life of Lord Krishna, of his birth, his becoming the king of Mathura after killing his notorious uncle Kansa. However, most women are keen on singing the songs which speak of the love of Radha-Krishna, of all the hurdles Radha had to overcome at her in-laws to fulfill her union with Krishna. The singers use this opportunity to regale their joys and miseries.
to their beloved Lord Krishna, through their songs. The author draws our attention to the fact that women of all generations, from Radha to Malati, all face the same eternally feminine problems. Suryabrata is celebrated for the well-being of the family and children.

The issue of Suryabrata has been included in the novel by way of describing a special day of the daily life of Narahari. Modern society is a conscious witness to the existence of class difference in it. But over the centuries, great leaders have always announced that all men are children of God, and he makes no distinction between the rich and the poor. But in reality, the so-called rich and the elite sympathize with the poor and the weak only when they need them to satisfy their selfish needs, and once their desire is accomplished, they never hesitate to dissociate themselves from such people. The author points several instances of tortures inflicted upon the economically weaker section. Malati’s daughter is mercilessly raped and killed, her body hanged from a tree; Phulwanti’s young daughter is transported to the red-light areas; prostitute Sita’s sister is cheated in love and is ruthlessly murdered; Shivashambhu’s son is killed in police encounter; innocent vendors like Subal lose their lives, and so on. However, God had promised equal rights to all his creations and Narahari is a witness to this belief at the entertaining occasion of Suryabrata in Savita Devi’s house. Here all women including maid servant Sumati, Balai’s wife Kokila of Dudh-patil, college teacher Savita Devi as well as the sophisticated female employees of the D.C. Office, all take part in the ritual, forgetting their class difference; their social status. All unite together, standing throughout the day, praying for the happiness of their husbands and dear ones.
The author has successfully passed on the message that like Narahari, everyone desire for a happy classless society, and to establish this notion she used the idea of *Suryabrata*.

### 3.3 Folk Narratives used in Short Stories

Author Swapna Bhattacharya has made use of various folk anecdotes in her short story, 'Ujaan'. We focus on analyzing these anecdotes in the following discussion.

The central character of this story is Kshitindramohan, who has undergone many ups and downs in his life. Umanath, another important character of this story, and his family, are tied to Kshitindramohan in a heart-binding relationship. Forced to leave his native land, Brahmin Pandit Kshitindramohan found a new shelter and new identity as supervisor of a brick-kiln. There, he and his wife Charu were overwhelmed by the warmth and love of their newly-found sister Preeti, her husband Umanath and their children, Samar and Rita. In their company, the couple felt relieved from the misery of having to leave their native land and home and even of the sorrow of the memories of their dead children, who lay buried in the woods behind the house. From the day of their introduction, Kshitindramohan felt an attraction towards young Samar, who reminded him of his dead children, and his abandoned rural home. Samar loved to hear fairy tales from Kshitindramohan, whom he lovingly called “Galpo Mama”, (Maternal Uncle), and his favourite was the story of Lal Kamal and Neel Kamal, the story of two brothers and a demon. Stifling a sigh at Samar’s capricious demand to hear the story once again, Kshitindramohan wails out:
In the present story, the fairy tale ‘Saat BhaiChampa O Parul Bon’ has been introduced to fulfill a specific wish of the author. The fairy tale is as follows:

A King had seven wives but no children, which made him very worried and sad. Suddenly he got the news that his youngest queen was expecting a child which made him enormously happy. But the six other queens were burning with jealousy at the good fortune of the youngest queen.

The King, while holding court, was eagerly waiting for the news of the birth of his child, so he tied a gold chain to his own waist, the other end of which he tied to the waist of his youngest queen, so that he would know of the birth of his child immediately after it was born, and would come to greet him.

Some time later the youngest queen gave birth to seven sons and a daughter. But the jealous elder queens instead of informing the King of the good news put the infants into covered earthen pots and dug them in the rubbish in the backyard of the palace. When the King questioned them about the new borns the elder queens informed him that the youngest queen had given birth to some mice. The King was furious and threw the youngest queen out of the palace. The poor woman was forced to wander about making dung cakes for a living.
The absence of the Princes made the flower garden of the palace barren, and the King did not have any flowers for his daily worship. One day the palace gardener saw that a tree was laden with white Champa flowers, and eagerly reached out to pluck them for the King’s worship. There was a little Parul flower among them, who sang out loudly and sweetly to her seven Champa brothers, that the king’s gardener had come to pluck the flowers, should they allow him or not. Immediately all the flowers moved upwards beyond the reach of the gardener. They demanded that the King would have to come personally to pluck the flowers; only then they would allow him to get them. When the King heard this, he immediately came to the backyard to pluck the flowers. But as soon as the King reached there, the little Parul flower informed her brothers of the King’s arrival and asked them whether they would agree to let the King have the flowers. The Champa flowers again moved up beyond the reach of the King. They then demanded the elder queen should come to get flowers. But when she came the flowers moved up once more. This went on and on till all the six queens tried to get the flowers but failed. Lastly, the flowers demanded that they would come down only if the youngest queen, who was thrown of the palace, came to pluck the flowers.

The King sent his men to search for his poor, deserted, youngest queen, As soon as she appeared there, all the Champa and Parul flowers jumped down into her arms crying ‘Mother, mother’ and transformed into seven handsome Princes and a beautiful Princess, instantly.
The King realized the conspiracy of the six elder queens and immediately arranged for their punishment. He then returned to his palace with his youngest Queen and the seven Princes and the little Princess, and lived happily thereafter.

The specific purpose for which this particular fairy tale has been chosen by the author is to bring forward the concept of 'rebirth'. The fairy tale highlights the idea that the infants that were buried by the conspirating queens were reborn as beautiful flowers. This fantastic concept of rebirth of the seven Princes and their little sister Parul from the flowers kindles the unrealistic desire in the heart of Kshitindramohan, for the rebirth of his dead children, which prompts him to narrate the above-mentioned fairy tale to little Samar.

In the second part of the story, is introduced another fairy tale and a ballad, with the intention of making the story more lively and interesting.

After many years, a forlorn and bankrupt Kshitindramohan arrived at his nephew Samar’s residence, for some help. Little Samar of yonder days, is now a grown-up family man with a son and his widowed mother. Kshitindramohan’s sudden appearance at his house makes him and his mother extremely happy, and Samar duly introduces him to his modern wife Sudha. Sudha’s dark complexion and shoulder-length hair, takes Kshitindramohan to his past. In the words of the author:

"ক্ষীরীন্তমোহনের মনে আসে সমরের প্রিয় রাজকন্যার গল্পের কথা।
কুচবরন কন্যা— মেধবরন চুল— সমরের খুব পছন্দ ছিল ঐ গল্প। রূপকথার গল্প বলতে গেলে সমর প্রায়ই বলতো... মামা কুচবরন কন্যা, মেধবরন চুলের গল্প কও।"
Both Kshitindramohan and Samar have come a long way across time beyond the fairy world to the present real world. Although Samar’s modern wife Sudha does not match with his childhood concept of a dark, long-haired bride, yet his childhood fantasy and the stark reality of the present exist simultaneously.

The later part of the story tells us that learning of Sudha’s parental origin being Mymensingh of present Bangladesh, Kshitindramohan casually remarked:

"কৈ জানি আছিল তোমার বাপের দেশ বড়মায়!
বড়টি মূর্ত হেসে বলে— আমরা ত পেছি না, শুনি ময়মনসিংঃ।
ফিতীদমোহন হেসে বলেন— ও, নদ্যর চাঁদের দেশের মাইয়া তুমিঃ। জানিনি
নদ্যর চাঁদ কে?
সুন্ধা মাথা নাড়ে।
—কোথায় পাইবাম কলষী কইন্যা কোথায় পাইবাম দড়ি...।" 23

A person uprooted from his homeland eagerly clutches the memories of his past. Just as Kshitindramohan nurtures every lovable moment spent with little Samar, in his memories, so also he re-lives the various fables and stories of the different regions of his motherland, Mymensingh. However, Samar’s modern wife Sudha, whose family tree traces back to Mymensingh, is totally oblivious of the stories related to her motherland; has no knowledge of the famous lover Nadyer Chand. This stark truth of reality strikes hard at the heart of rootless Kshitindramohan, who stifles his
sigh in his smile. He tries hard to acquaint Sudha with the identity of Nadyer Chand, by singing parts of the ballad mentioned above.

The epic narrative 'Mohua' included in Dinesh Chandra Sen's collection of the ballads of Mymensingh, entitled 'Mymansingha Geetika, is actually a famous folk tale of Mymensingh. A ballad is a tale told through songs. The author has included this concept of Mymensingh’s ballad in her story in order to acquaint her readers to the uniqueness of Mymensingh district of Bangladesh.

In the third chapter of the present research project we have discussed the story 'Dunduburi Katha' by Ranabir Purkayastha, in connection with the issue of rhymes. The present chapter focuses on the use of folk tales in the story.

The story is named 'Dunduburi Katha', where Dunduburi is actually a small insect. One of the traditional stories has it that if the sands of an anthill are circled with a finger accompanied by the singing of a rhyme, very soon a beautiful ant or insect comes out of the hole. This childhood mystery of Amalkanti has overwhelmed his little daughter, Champa. And so when beautiful Chandra makes her appearance through the openings of Amalkanti and Parna's conjugal life, then little Champa imagines Chandra to be the insect Dunduburi. The author has introduced two fairy tales in the story discussed here in order to paint the picture of a tender relationship between father and daughter which surpasses all expectations. The first of these are parts of the famous story 'Tepai', which goes as follows:

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“কলিঙ্গেল প্রথমবারের শদে গা করল না অমলকাঙ্ঠ। পাঁচটির কাছে তো।
সীতা এসেছে। কাজের মেয়ে। রুমাল তুলে চাঁপাকে বললে দরজা খুলে দিতে।
খেলালি একথাণ মেয়ে, কিছুতেই দরজা খুলবে না। রাপের হতাব যেমন,
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The next part of the fairy tale is as follows:

“কলিতালে আবার বাজাতে চাঁপা বিক্ষু। অমলকাড়ির দিকে তাকিয়ে বলল— জান বাবা? তারপর টেপাই কি বলল জান বাবা? দরজা খুলে দিল,— অজাজ অভাগা টিয়া, ঘন ঘন ডাকিস কিয়া। ওমা তুমি? দরজা খোলা রেখে মৌঢ়ে এলো চাঁপা। অমলকাড়ির কানে কানে বলল, — মদ্যবুদ্ধি।”

It is essential that a summary of the famous fairy story ‘Tepai’ be included here to help the analysis of the story by Ranabir Purkayastha, where it is used. The story goes as follows:

A rich merchant had a very happy family with seven sons and a very loving daughter ‘Tepai’. Being the youngest of the family, Tepai was doted by all, particularly her parents. They were ever eager to fulfill her smallest wishes and impossible desires. On a night of full moon, seeing the big, round moon in the sky, Tepai made an unusual demand to acquire it. Her father tried his best to reason with her, but to no avail. Having no other option the merchant raised a ladder on their terrace, and tried to pluck the moon with a rod, but he slipped and fell and died immediately. Even the death of her father could not deter Tepai from making her capricious demand for the moon. Not being able to overcome Tepai’s stubborn
demand, her mother attempted to get the moon, but she too met with the same fate as her husband.

With the death of her parents, Tepai’s life became miserable for though her seven brothers loved her very dearly, yet they had to leave for business in distant lands, leaving Tepai in the care of their wives. But of the seven sisters-in-laws, none except the youngest one loved Tepai a wee bit. Rather they always conspired to harm her. One day all of them including Tepai went to bathe in the river. The eldest sister-in-law, offered to teach Tepai to swim, and evil that she was, pushed her into deep water intending to drown her. On reaching the banks the wicked sister-in-law spread the rumour that Tepai was swallowed by a crocodile.

Tepai, however, reached the opposite bank and was rescued by some cowherds and taken to their village where she began to live with the farmers. After a long time, one night Tepai was feeling very miserable worrying about her brothers and their whereabouts. Coincidentally, at that time, Tepai’s seven brothers anchored at the riverside of the village where Tepai was residing. The brothers sent their servants into the village in search for food, and they came upon the hut where Tepai was resting for the night. Her pet parrot suddenly screeched to wake her up, telling her to arrange dinner for her seven brothers who had come to her door. The fairy tale went thus:

"পা তোল গা তোল টেপাই,
ভাত বাড় এল সাত ভাই।
টেপাই বলল অভাগা অভাগা টিয়া
ধন যন ঢাকিস কিয়া?
বাপ মরিল চাঁদ পড়েতে,
মা মরিল চাঁদ ধরিতে,"

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The servants informed their masters of the conversation between a bird and a woman. The astonished brothers reached the hut to find out the mystery and were once again united with their beloved sister.

The story concludes as usual, with the wicked sisters-in-laws being duly punished and Tepai being wedded to a rich, handsome, young merchant, and all of them lived happily ever after.

The summarized version of the story ‘Tepai’ has been taken from the collection, ‘Banglar Lokasahitya’, Vol.IV, by Sri Ashutosh Bhattacharya. Part of this fairy tale has been presented earlier in the story ‘Dundubri Katha’, with a particular purpose. On that stormy night when Tepai was worried about the well-being of her brothers, all she yearned to see was the faces of her dear brothers. At that instance, the sudden appearance of her brothers was not only amazing but also endearing to Tepai. Similarly, in the story discussed above (Dunduburi Katha), as father and daughter exchanged dialogues, the sudden appearance of Chandra, whom Amalkanti yearned to see, was equally amazing. So for little Champa, Chandra was the living image of Dunduburi.

In the later parts of the story another fairy tale ‘Kajalrekha’ has been included to deal with a special issue. Amalkanti’s dream-girl Chandra’s marriage is fixed with a groom of a distant land. While Amalkanti’s wife Parna is busy entertaining the guests of the groom’s family, at his home Amalkanti spends his idle hours telling a fairy story to his beloved daughter, Champa, as a ruse to hide his physical inability, just as the helpless Prince in his story. In the words of the author:
‘Kajalrekha’ is a famous character of the Bengali fantasy world. The beautiful fairy story, endearing to every child in Bengal, is taken from Ashutosh Bhattacharya’s ‘Banglar Lokasahitya’, Vol.IV. We give a brief account of the story ‘Kajalrekha’ as follows.

Kajalrekha was the most beautiful daughter of a rich merchant, who was destined to be married to a dead Prince. Although the merchant tried his best to free his daughter of such a foreboding calamity, but destiny had its own way and Kajalrekha was inadvertently married to a dead Prince. The following part of the story describes the hardships Kajalrekha had to endure, in retrieving the life of her Prince husband, and how at the end of the story the two were happily united.

Author Ranabir Purkayastha very intelligently weaves the theme of the fairy tale, ‘Kajalrekha’ into his story, where life and fairy tale unite together to become one. Chandra’s marriage is arranged with a person from a distant land. Champa’s enquiry also gives a different meaning to the
concept of the groom belonging to a place beyond the seven seas and the thirteen rivers, as in the fairy tales.

“ধর্মমর্দি গুপ্তাশি কি বলল বাবা? কাঞ্চনমালার তো অন্য গল্প, সে তো থাকে সাত সমুদ্র তের দৌলার পারে সোনার দেশে।”

Kanchanmala is another traditional fairy tale of Bengal, which Amalkanti secretly wanted to relate to Champa in the cover of a different story, ‘Kajalrekha’. Actually, in Amalkanti’s family surrounded by Parna and Champa, the phenomenon of Chandra’s imminent wedding is also a ‘different story’. Amalkanti’s thoughts are expressed as:

“একদিকে রাজকন্যা কাঞ্চনমালা, আর একদিকে থোঁরা চোঁরা থোঁরা।
রাজপুত্র।”

In ‘Dunduburi Katha’, the physical disability of Amalkanti and facial deformity of Parna gave rise to misunderstandings in his and Parna’s conjugal life, which in turn created opportunities for Chandra’s enticement, and ultimately Chandra’s wedding being arranged in a far away golden land. We find here that the story simultaneously deals with the issues of the fairy tale heroine Kajalrekha, the treachery of the maid, the inability of the lame Prince, with equal importance.

In Amitava Dev Choudhury’s story ‘Prasiddha Rakta’, the application of the fairy story ‘Ghumantapuri’, speaks of the author’s literary superiority. If Nabajogaran or ‘Renaissance’ implies moving forward superseding the contemporary world, then the people living in Silchar as well as the whole of India, is backward in their thoughts, awareness and culture. This is the belief entertained by Rajshekhar, the central character of the novel. Although the inhabitants speak of stepping towards the twenty-first century, the ‘feudal blood’ in them restricts them to adopt a modern
outlook. That is why, when a forty-plus Balaibabu is referred to as an aged person he reacts negatively. The hyacinth-laden pond of Moly Aunty has two separate veg and non-veg bathing ghats. When a gold ring gets lost in it, the persons engaged to retrieve it, as part of their profession, seem to make the impossible, possible. This fanciful idea of turning the impossible into possible, gives rise to concept of an extraordinary cold-storage, in the mind of Rajshekhar. He imagines that if in the twenty-first century such an unusual cold-storage can be constructed where people with incurable diseases can be kept in the frozen room of the storage for an indefinite period, till a cure for their ailment is discovered, and then such sick people can again live normal, healthy lives. This fantastic idea of keeping the terminally ill people in an unconscious but composed state for an indefinite period, dwells in Rajshekhar’s mind, and herein comes the anecdote of the fairy tale. The author relates the story as follows:

“রাজকন্যার সেই যুমের মতন— যুম পাড়িয়ে গেছে এক দাঁড়ি কবে কোন যুগে - যুমিরে পড়েছে সবাই রাজামহী কোটাল সৈন্য সামন্ত - যুম যুম সেই দূরে খোঁরা পুরী অমল ধর্ব শ্রেতেগুরুর পুরী ধর্ব ধর্ব করছে যুমে— আঁচ্ছা ‘ধর্ব ধর্ব’ কী ‘ধর্ব’ থেকে এসেছে নাকি?— অন্তিষ্ঠ আসবে কোন এক সুকেশ সুবেশ রাজপুরা; রাজকন্যার যুম ভাঙাবে— সৌনার কাঠি রুপের কাঠি— এর নামই নবজাগরণ। আদর্শ হিমথর আবিষ্কৃত হলে রুপকথার মানেতাই বদলে যাবে অন্যরকম হয়ে যাবে নতুন হয়ে উঠবে।”

In relation to the above-mentioned story, we bring here a summary of the fairy tale ‘Ghumantapuri’, from the book ‘Thakurmar Jhuli’ by Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar.

A young and handsome Prince of a country once set out to visit the distant and unknown lands on his own. Wandering for many a day, he
entered into a dense forest, and discovered a magnificent palace in it. But there was no living being in the palace and it was covered by thick foliage and brambles. On entering the desolate palace, the Prince came upon a beautiful Princess, lying deep in slumber, amongst a mass of lotuses. The Prince was astounded by her beauty and kept on gazing at her, as years passed on. One day he accidentally awakened the Princess, by touching the golden wand on her head. Instantly all the inhabitants of the palace awoke from a deep sleep of a thousand years. The King married his dear daughter, the Princess, to the Prince amidst great rejoicing and merriment, and the happy couple left for the Prince’s parental land. Back home, the young Prince’s father had turned blind with weeping for him. The Prince restored his sight with help of the golden wand and hence they lived happily ever after.

Although various scientific inventions and innovations have carried human civilization to the pinnacle of progress, yet the world of fantasy reveals the magnificence of human imagination. It may even be that fantastic imaginations of fairy tales have influenced many a scientific innovation, as is pointed out by the author of ‘Prasiddha Rakta’.

In Kartik Lahiri’s story ‘Janma’, the issue of ‘demon’ makes a startling presence. Demons in Bengali fairy tales, unlike ghosts, are mostly visible. The illusory belief about demons is that they are hideous-looking; possess incredible strength, cannibalistic and evil-minded in nature. Such a symbolic demonic character is introduced in the story ‘Janma’.

The story has it that Baby, the six-year old daughter of Prabhatbabu, spends the day with her dolls. At night, her elder sister, Ira, puts her to sleep, telling her bed-time stories about demons and kings. While asleep,
little Baby dreams of a grotesque demon, which destroys all her dolls. The author relates it as thus:

“ঝাড়া ঘুম ভেঙে গেল বেবীর। উঠে বসল ধড়মড় করে। সারা শরীর ধমে গেছে; এতক্ষণ একটা রাক্সা গিলে খেলতে চাইছিল। তার ইয়া লয়া লয়া নথ— বড় বড় চুল, খোঁটির মত নাক। ও মাগো। তুক তার পুতুল ভেঙে দিচ্ছিল আর জিম— চোখ বুজল বেবী। আরো জোরে চেপে ধরল চোখের পাতা। রাক্সা নিচুষই এখনও যায়নি, জিম ঠিক এ ঘরেই আছে। মা, মা, চিত্কার করে ডাকতে চাইল বেবী। কিন্তু গলা দিয়ে ঘর বেরোল না। করেকটা চোখ গিলল। রাক্সা নিচুষ জিম, টুকু— ধপ করে পড়ে গেল বিচ্ছনায়। পাশে হাত বাড়ল চোখ বদ্ধ অবস্থায়। রাক্সা দিকে পেলে জড়িয়ে ধরবে। এ ধার ও ধার বুঝল। মেজদি নেই? কেঁদে উঠল বেবী। চোখ খুলতে ভরসা পাচ্ছে না যদি রাক্সা দেখে কেলে। আরো জোরে চাপ দিয়ে চোখের পাতা। টুক যদি পুতুল ভেঙে দিয়ে থাকে তবে? জিম বদি—

ঝাড়া চোখ মেনল বেবী। রাতি ঝুলছে। মশারি তামানে।

আর ভয় করছে। একটা পোকা। বেঁ বেঁ শব্দ করে উঠছে। কান চাপল। তুক শব্দটা ধামছে না। তবে রাক্সা এখনও আছে।

চোখ বুজল, আবার খুলল।

তারপর মশারিটা টেনে দুটোই ছুটে এল মা-র ঘরের দিকে। বাক্সাং, রাক্সা তাকে তাড়া করেছে। জিম, টুকু—

হায়তে লাগলো বেবী। কিতু ঘরে চুকেই বিমুচ হিয়ে গেল। বাবা, বড়দি মেজদি, শকরদা। সবার দিকে তাকাল। আছ।

বড়দি একবার তাকিয়ে চোখ ফিরিয়ে নিল।

বেবীর ভয় করতে লাগল। তবে কি এখানেও—”

In this story the ‘demon’ is death incarnate. In a patriarchic society a female child is neglected, or a female foetus is killed even before it can see
the light of the world. In this story, the wife of old Prabhatbabu, who has fathered three living and two dead female children, is once more expecting a child.

The yearning for a male child in the family have forced the aged lady to shed off all fear and shame and become pregnant once more in the hope of a male child and a beautiful, secured future. However, after the retirement of Prabhatbabu, which is imminent, the entire burden of running the family would have to be borne by the meager income of his elder daughter, Sadhana.

On one such critical night, when little Baby is terrorized by dreams that a demon is destroying all her dolls, her mother Uma suffers labour pains of child birth, in the adjoining room. At last, death snatches away Uma’s new-born daughter, much to the relief of the two elder daughters. Just as demons existing in fairy tales create a fear psychosis in the minds of children, so also the burden of female children creates trepidation in the hearts of fathers, even in this modern, scientific age. For a safe and comfortable future, as well as for carrying on the family lineage, a male child alone is desired. A female child is like a puppet in the hands of men, who can kill her or destroy her wishes any moment, just as the demon destroys anything it wishes, instantly.

Even during the modern era of globalization, the female foetus is neglected, crushed and killed by the society. The author has used the concept of demons of fairy tales to highlight this existing evil characteristic of the twenty-first century society.
Here we have chosen to analyze the short story ‘Pratiksha Klisto Ratri Shesher Jhar’, by author Aminur Rahman, of Brahmaputra Valley, in connection with the use of an Islamic belief.

Asgar’s wife Sakina is a mother of two daughters. Asgar had given her Talaq in front of the entire village. The issue of Talaq or divorce is legitimately accepted by the Muslim community. Just divorced Sakina was lying shattered on the ground, weeping and forsaken, worried about her unknown future. Her mother consoled her in her distress, another neighbour Jinnat Mia’s wife Zubeda Bibi picked her up and gave her shelter in her house. Thereafter began Sakina’s new life; she began to work as a housemaid, first at Zubeda Bibi’s house and then with the family of a doctor couple. On the advice of the lady doctor, Sakina filed a case against Asgar and succeeded in obtaining alimony from him. In the beginning, Asgar used to meet her on the way and gave her the monthly allowance.

After a long period of two and half years when Asgar’s second wife becomes pregnant and goes to stay with her parents, Asgar takes the opportunity to visit Sakina’s dilapidated hut. The lecher Asgar bribes Sakina’s daughter and informs her that he would come to meet her mother at night. At the end of the day this news takes Sakina by surprise and makes her somewhat hesitant and emotionally nostalgic. Asgar comes to meet Sakina at the dead of night. Insanely lecherous Asgar imposed himself upon Sakina to satisfy his lust. Although tremendously painful, yet Sakina seemed to enjoy the sensual moments after a long two and half years of abstinence. At the end of the tempestuous affair, a disheveled and almost naked, Sakina discovers that Asgar had thrust a paltry sum of money in her hand before storming out of the house. Instantly, she is awakened from her sweet dreams to hard reality, and the erstwhile event of
Talaq on a cursed evening comes back to her. Sakina despises herself for her weakness, at the sight of the five-rupee note in her hand. She painfully remembers the cursed evening of Talaq; how Asgar had hid the actual truth from everyone, and falsely blamed her to execute the norms of Talaq. Everyone was oblivious of the truth that Asgar was in reality an animal who inflicted inhuman pains on Sakina. For a long time Sakina had been suffering from agonizing pains in her private parts, yet Asgar did not deter from inflicting brutal tortures on her every night, to satisfy his own carnal desires. When Sakina could not bear the pain any longer, she firmly protested, even stopped speaking to him. As a result Asgar imposed Talaq upon her.

Divorcee women are discarded by the society, and women alone are blamed for such misfortunes. The society never finds any fault with men. Men are forever pure. Sakina remembers the words of Matin Maulabi. The anecdote of the Islamic tradition finds a place in the story as an explanation of the creation of women. As such:

“সাখিনার মনে পড়ে যায় মতিন মৌলাবী বলেছিলেন, ‘আল্লার পুরুষদের বিশেষ ক্ষমতা দিয়ে এই জাহাজে পাঠিয়েছেন!’ মতিন মৌলাবির আরেকটা কথা সাখিনার মনে পড়ে যায়। তিনি বলেছিলেন, ‘আমনের বুকের বাম পাশের এক টুকরো যেটা বাঁকা হয়ে দিয়ে আল্লার হাওয়াকে, মানব জাতির আদিমাতাকে সৃষ্টি করেছিলেন। অতএব নারী পুরুষের অধীন, পুরুষের আজ্ঞাবাদী।’ মতিন মৌলাবির এসব কথা মনে পড়ে যাওয়ায় কার উপর বেন সাখিনার জীবন কোন জমে ওঠে। কিন্তু সে ক্ষেত্র ঠিক কার উপর, সেটা বুঝতে পারে না সাখিনা। অসহায় বেদন করে সে।”

Giving due importance to Motin Moulabi’s comment on the issue of creation of women, a belief prevalent in Muslim religion, is mentioned
here. God created the universe in six days comprising of the sky, seas, land, the sun and moon, the entire solar system, even the Netherlands. He carefully remembered to create birds, animals and insects as well as aquatic and domestic animals. He even created a ‘heaven’ named Behest. Then taking a handful of soil from the Behest, he created man and breathing through his nostrils, put life into him. This man worked very hard all day growing crops. So God created some more birds and animals to keep him company and asked man to name them according to his wishes. The man complied with his request, yet did not develop any inclination to be friendly with any of them. God then put man into a deep sleep, during which God extracted a bone from the left side of his chest and created another creature similar to man. When man woke up from his sleep and saw his new companion he was filled with joy. She was ‘Woman’, man’s perfect companion.

The Bible also supports this belief as found in Genesis:

“Woman is her name because she was taken out of man.”38

That man was ‘Adam’ and the woman was ‘Haowa’, (or wind) who is the original mother of all women. This Muslim belief is contained in the story discussed here. The narration of the Muslim scriptures has been included in the story as follows:

Perennial questions such as ‘what is the position of women in the society? under whose dominance lie women in the society? why should women alone be subject to tortures?’ continuously disturb Sakina. And as a solution to her disturbing mind, this narration has been appropriately used in the story. When certain questions cannot be answered rationally, man
usually turn to Puranas, Koran, Bible and such other scriptures, which contain ancient folk beliefs, to satisfy their hearts.

Sakina has learnt that women are forever dominated by men, and women have always to abide by the wishes of men. Aminur Rahman’s story ends on this note where the protector himself is the oppressor. Zubeda Aunts son Ainul also does not let go of the opportunity of raping Sakina at one of her unguarded moments. Poor Sakina has no one to complain to against this injustice. The author has judiciously used the scriptural episode to signify the helplessness of Sakina and her likes.

The Mangal Kavyas or the Bengali epics of the mediaeval period contain a number of elements of folk tales. Similarly the story ‘Neta Dhopani’ is such a folk tale, included in the epic Manasa Mangal, which is appropriately used in Shyamal Bhattacharja’s short story, ‘Dhopamuni Kimba Dino-r Gene’.

In the story, the hero, Tamal, is a devoted employee of the S.D. office. He is well-trained in the identification of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes people. His present research however poses a dilemma before him when he strives to enquire into the matter whether his childhood friend, Habul, actually belonged to the scheduled caste or not. His search takes him to the dilapidated hutment of Surendra Majumdar, Habul’s father, in the slum of Santipur. There Tamal observes the poor condition of his Surendra Kaku and his wife, who have not recovered from the shock of the sudden death of their son Habul. Surendrababu was once a renowned private electrician but is now handicapped after an accident. Their only source of livelihood is the meager income of their younger son, Babul, who is a hawker in the trains. At present, if Babul can be given a Scheduled
Caste certificate by Tamal, then he will be eligible to obtain an employment. The required ‘card’, which Surendrababu handed over to Tamal, could be used to certify Babul as a Scheduled Caste. The problem before Tamal is that the documents mention Surendrababu as belonging to the Dhobi or ‘washerman’ caste; and in Bihar, Dhobis or washermen are called Gadhawala or ‘Donkey owner’. Tamal is perplexed as to how a ‘washerman’ can become a ‘donkey owner’. To find a proper answer to his puzzle, Tamal delves into the book by the famous ethnologist, H. H. Risley, where he found the following information:

“বাংলা ও উড়িষ্যার ধোবারা নিজেদের নেতা হুনি বা নেতু ধোপানির বংশধর বলে দাবী করে। নেতু, নাকি সংস্করিত ধারার কাপড় ধুতো। অন্য একটি গল্পে ধোপানীর ছেলে নেতার কথা শোনা যায়।”

Tamal was deeply engrossed in the confusing thoughts of the ancestors and descendants of washermen as described by Mr. Rissel. Just then his little daughter, Riya, aroused him from his thoughts with the question whether the Takshak (a kind of venomous chameleon) is a descendant of the dinosaur. Little Riya had recently visited the Science City, where she saw the images and replica of various types of dinosaurs. This experience has induced her to find traces of dinosaurs in every kind of reptiles, even a Takshak, which often infests the house. In reality, however, the existence of dinosaurs is yet to be proved. And this query about the source or gene of dinosaurs induces man to search for fossils, eggs, bones or even the Puranas or folk tales. In this regard the author makes the comment:

“ধোবারা যেমন ধোপানীর ছেলে নেতাকে তাদের পূর্বপুরুষ ভাবে।"
There are a variety of stories about washermen prevailing in the different regions of Bengal. At present Tamal is engaged in finding out who is or are the ancestors of the washermen. Tamal wonders if Surendra Majumdar actually bribed someone to get himself identified as one of Bihar’s ‘Donkey-owner washerman’, or whether it was an unintentional mistake by the investigating officer. At this phase of the story, we find the entrance of Tamal’s wife Shila. While trying to put little Riya to sleep, Shila regales her with the stories of Behula, Lakhindar, Chand Saudagar, eminent characters from the famous epic Manasa Mangal. Tamal is very happy to see Shila in the role of a story-teller in opposition to the modern world of advertisements. In the author’s description:

“In this part of the story, the author has upheld the folk tale of ‘Neta Dhopani.’ The story of Neta Dhopani as found in the epic Manasa Mangal is described below:

The legend has it that Neta Dhopani was born of the cloth used to wipe the tears of Lord Shiva. Thus she is the sister of Padmavati. Her main occupation was to wash the clothes of the deities of heaven. Besides, she
executed many tasks on the order of Padmavati. By the curse of Padmavati, Lakhindar lost his life due to snake-bite. His chaste wife Behula, vowing to restore her husband’s life, took up a journey on a raft along with the dead-body of her husband. According to the Manasa Mangal composed by Vijay Gupta, Behula, in her journey, crossed several ghats like Ujjaininagar, Godar ghat, and many like them, until she reached Rajghat. Finally, after overcoming a lot of hurdles, Behula succeeded in encountering ‘Neta Dhopani’ at ‘Dhopanir Ghat’. Then, with the advice of Neta Dhopani, and after surmounting several difficulties, Behula reached Swargapuri or ‘Heaven’, from Rajghat. There Behula succeeded in appeasing Lord Shiva by her songs and dances, and with his blessings brought back her husband to life. Not only that, Behula’s father-in-law, Chand Saudagar, ultimately agreed to worship Manasa, and his six dead sons were granted their lives and Chand Saudagar retrieved all his lost wealth.

In the above mentioned story the mystery of Neta Dhòpani’s origin is supernatural. Actually, the authors of such Mangal Kavyas have located some literary elements in ‘tears’, which is why the issue of Neta Dhopani and her activities become clearly defined in Tamal’s mind. At the end of the story (Dhopamuni O Dino-r Gene), Tamal arrives at a definite conclusion.

The above myth has two important utility in the story. First, it has aided the hero of the story to take a firm decision. Secondly, in the present modern world, the futility of caste system is as meaningless as tracing the origin of a common reptile to a dinosaur. And the basis of most imaginations is obviously myths and legends. But the hero of the story, Tamal, is a young man with modern outlook, who arranges to provide for a poor family, on humanitarian grounds. The use of the Purana episode in the story pronounces that modern outlook does not give importance to
traditionality like lineage and can freely reconstruct such beliefs to suit necessities. So the story has—"ভামলে মেয়েকে ভোক বলে, রুখলি রিয়া, তঁকুকে অভশ্যই ডাইনোসারের বংশধর।" Therefore as a result of Tamal’s inspection, Surendra Majumdar was definitely a ‘Donkey owner washerman’, and as such his son ‘Babul’ most surely, belonged to the Scheduled Caste.

3.4 Folk Naratives used in Verses

Other than novels and short stories, poems by the North-eastern poets, are also richly endowed with anecdotes from folk tales. In this discussion we would primarily like to mention the works of poet Tapodhir Bhattacharya, where we have selected the poem ‘Shikore Jaler Ghran’, from the collection of verses, ‘Tumi Sei Pidito Kusum’. The concept of fairy tale comes into the poem as follows:

"পথের অনিতা যদিও ফুরোল।
শিকড়ে জলের আণ।
লেটেগাঁথ এখনো স্থায়।
নেমেছে অনন্ত চন রেপাতকর জড়ে।
তের না তেজিশ নদী।
হিদিশ জানে না তার বেঁধামা-বেঁধমী।
ভেঙে গেছে জিয়নকাঠিও।
কে এল এ পথে।"

Some common concepts of Bengali folktales like Notegachh, Tepantar Math, Bengama-Bengami, Jionkathi, etc. are used in the poem above. The fairy story tellers end their narrations saying that ‘Galpo amar phurolo/Note gachhti murolo.’ But in the poet’s opinion, the Notegachh representing the new inventions and continuous demands of the modern world, is quite powerful and upright.
Everyone is well accustomed to the elements of Bengali fairy tales like *Bengama-Bengami*, *Tepantarer Math*, the seven seas and thirteen rivers, Prince on horse, the magic wands of gold and silver, with which to save the life of the Princess, and so on and so forth. In real life, however, the advancement of human civilization is facilitated by innumerable scientific innovations. These innovations have flooded humanity with both their boons and banes, and no one can fathom the ultimate consequences of this continuous progress. But modern man is tired of this making and breaking; replacing villages by ultra-modern cities and towns have rendered man a pauper. Games of death and destructions have ultimately broken the 'magic wand of life'. Although man is uselessly pursuing a path of hatred and destruction, yet in his heart, he is a peaceful creature who repeatedly goes back to the quiet dreams of his childhood. Despite this yearning, selfish man keeps alive the *Notegachh* of his demands, and man in his greed for a luxurious life has made death his life partner.

Another long poem by Tapodhir Bhattacharya is 'Krishnapaksha', where he has used various contexts of folk elements. Here we attempt to discuss the technique of application of the fairy tale 'Saat Bhai Champa'. The summary of the poem is as follows:

India has been attacked by foreign invaders several times. This country has been ruled by the Sakas, Huns and the Muslim rulers repeatedly, despite India being the conglomeration of various nationalities, religions and colours. History is witness to all these. Right from the inception of Bengali literature, beginning with Charjyapad up to Alaol; all have painted the picture of harmony. Mother Nature does not distinguish between sequences of her creations; hunger knows no difference between Ram and Rahim, or who among the hungry should get the first right over
food. All these demands have given rise to death-like ‘Krishnapaksha’, or New Moon fortnight, the darkness of which encompasses the whole nation. Over time, geniuses like Sakyamuni, Lalon Fakir, Sreegyan Atis and Pandit Rahul have preached men the charm of breaking away from this eternal darkness and lead the path of light. The poet yearns to know whether in such an enlightened country as ours, is there no chance of the birth of such a genius who could lead the present generation from darkness to light. So the poet uses some lines from the fairy tale, ‘Saat Bhai Champa’, in his poem, to welcome such an enlightened person. We cite here the part of the poem, where the portion of fairy tale is reproduced;

A summary version of the fairy story “Saat Bhai Champa” has already been presented in this chapter, in the discussion of the story ‘Ujaan’. The association of this story with Tapodhir Bhattacharya’s poem
lies in that just as in the fairy story the seven Princes and the little Princess
had transformed from flowers to human-beings to punish the evil queens,
so also the poet, Tapodhir Bhattacharya, welcomes them once again to
relieve this world from the darkness of evil and hatred. Every element of
Nature is subject to destruction, except hatred and envy. The poet endears
to some great heart to wipe away the traces of envy. He urges the eternal
brothers to establish the truth that no language is under the coercion of any
other. This solution should not be pronounced by any religious diktat or by
the selfish desire of any conspiracy, but in the words of fulfillment of
dreams. Just as the seven flower Princes and their little Princess Sister
brought back their poor, desolate mother and lived happily thereafter, so
also the poet dreams of a leadership who would be a successful pathfinder.

The application of fairy tales in the poem is justified in the sense it is
used to induce human beings to overcome jealousy and hatred and establish
a peaceful world.

In another poem by the same poet, namely, ‘Paloker Chhaya’,
taken from the collection ‘Kimbadantir Bhor’, there exist two successful
implementations of folk elements. In this poem the poet introduces the
subject of two Bengali fairy tales, ‘Aran Borun Kironimala’ and ‘Sonar
Kathi’. The context of Sonar Kathi is entered into the poem as below:

“কোলাহল শেষ করে উঠল যায় রুদ্রালিরা
অশ্রুলীন চোখ মুছে নিয়ে
নির্বোধ আশ্র শুধু হৃদয়ে চায় মায়ের চিরবুক
কুপালের ভাঁজ, অপারিত হাসি
সেনকের মত তিল ছড়িয়ে ভাবি, একবার
এ আশ্র যদি হত যুম- ভাঙ্গানিরায়
সেনার কাঠিতে মতো, জিয়ে তিলে চুমু খাই
যদি ভাঙ্গা নিদালির ঘোর”
The essence of the poem is the heart-rending remorse of a person at the death of his mother. Bengali tradition has it that after death, the kith and kin of the deceased observe several traditional rites till the cremation of the body. The son observes all the customary rituals like a puppet, till the body is surrendered to flames. Just before lighting the pyre, the son looks upon the face of his beloved mother for one last time, and wishes that if once again the beautiful fingers of her mother could become the magic wand of the fairy tales. In this connection, the traditional Bengali tale ‘Sonar Kathi’ is summarized as follows:

Once upon a time, a young Prince, travelling alone came upon a grand palace in the midst of a dense forest, but found no sign of life anywhere. On entering the palace, the Prince discovered that all the inhabitants including the King and the Ministers, as well as the royal animals were turned into stone statues. When he entered the Princess’ chamber he found that a beautiful Princess was deeply asleep on a golden bed among golden lotuses. The whole body of the Princess was covered by lotus petals, except the face. The Prince was stupefied by the unparalleled beauty of the sleeping Princess and kept on gazing at her. Suddenly he...
noticed a golden and a silver wand near the head of the Princess. When he picked them up out of curiosity, accidentally the gold wand touched the head of the Princess and she awoke immediately. Simultaneously the whole palace came alive. A demon had put the Princess and the other residents of the palace to a never-ending sleep by the touch of the silver wand. The Prince had saved them from such a misfortune. As a reward, the King gave his daughter in marriage to the young Prince and the couple happily returned to the latter’s kingdom.

In the story the Prince aroused everyone from their sleep by the touch of the magic wand. But in the poem, however much the person tried, his love and yearning could not bring his mother back to life. The person was desperately searching for signs of life at the corners of the seemingly smiling lips of his dead mother, while his companions tried their best to bring him back to hard reality. After the completion of the cremation, all his relatives and friends went back to their regular lives. But only one word echoes in the mind of the hapless man: ‘Come back, come back’.

“ফিরে আয়, ফিরে আয়।”

The biggest truth of human life is birth and death. Man becomes immortal by his works. Living men keep alive the achievements of a deceased person in their memories and dreams. Mother Nature’s imperishable achievement is her progeny, who keeps alive his mother’s memory in his heart forever. The poet paints the heart-felt yearnings of a person to revive his mother from death, as he dreamt his mother’s fingers to turn into life-giving wands which would wipe away all the terrors of death.
Another long poem by him is ‘Paaloker Chhaya’, which contains contents from another fairy tale ‘Arun, Borun, Kironmala’. In the poem we find the excerpt as below:

“দিনলিপি জড়ে শুধু ছিদ্রহীন অসূর্য অষ্ট অনুভব
এলিয়ে পড়েছে কথকতা
লাবনের ভাষা তুমি নিরীতে রেখে গেছে নিখর মুহূর্ত শুধু
এই বার্তা তোমাকে জানাই

বেঁচে আছি তোমাকে ছাড়াই, এই তুষ উচ্ছারণ
বড়ো হস্তাক্ষর বিষ- গুলাম
তোমার সমস্ত আলো অর্থন বন্ধ কিরনমালাকে দিয়ে
মিশে গেছ অষ্ঠাকারে, পারাপারহীন
অমোহ বিদায় আজ যাপনের অনুপুল্য হলো
তুমি আছ চিরদিন তুমি নেই নেই নেই
নেই?
কেন নেই তুমি?”

According to the rules of creation, death and destruction have distorted human life many a time, despite which man has survived and held himself above all miseries. However hard it may appear, this survival is competition between life and death.

In the busy schedule of life, motherless children learn to prosper along their chosen path, often without the guidance of any other dear ones. As he faces this hard world, the destitute person of the poem realizes how his mother had suffered all the tortures of life, but has ultimately succeeded in protecting her own creation, with the last drop of her blood. It is in this connection the poet brings in the context of the fairy tale, ‘Arun, Borun, Kironmala’, in his poem. The story in brief goes as follows:

Discarded children Arun, Barun and Kironmala are the motif of this fairy tale. As most Bengali fairy tales go, the three siblings, two sons Arun
and Borun and a daughter Kironmala, of the youngest Queen, had to be forsaken by their parents by the connivance of the elder Queens. The three orphaned children happened to be brought up in a Brahmin family. Later in their lives, Arun, Borun and Kironmala grew up to be very brave and intelligent. These qualities and their diligence helped them to conquer the 'mystic mountains' and win the golden bird. The bird helped them to acquire huge wealth and even discover their family’s identity. The children learnt that they were actually royal progeny and even succeeded in finding out their long lost mother. The poor Queen was discarded by everyone being falsely accused of giving birth to so-called animals, instead of human children. In the end Arun, Borun and Kironmala proved that they were able children of their mother.

The person mentioned in the poem is also abandoned by his mother in this world of light before she left for the other world. Although he feels the presence of his mother in all his successes, yet her absence in reality makes him thoughtful and gloomy. Just as the characters of the fairy tales, this human child is also fighting his way through the hardships of life to prove himself an able child of his mother.

In another poem by the same poet, namely, ‘Samay Pishach’ from his poem collection, ‘Kimbadantir Bhor’, the poet mentions a Bengali folk ritual, *Magh Mondaler Brata*, to highlight the folk life which is fast losing its eminence. Divided into twenty-four parts this is another of the poet’s long poems, where he includes the folk element in the twenty-fourth part as:

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“কথা হুরিয়েছে। প্রকৃত সৌন্দর্যের বেলা
মৃদিয়েছে লটেগাছ আর ধানের সুন্দর। ডালো,
এবার তাহালে নাচ হোক বৌ- বিয়ের, মাগ- মণ্ডুলের
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The essence of the poem is that the madness of evil and hatred has rendered Mother Nature utterly barren. From arid crop-fields to epics and ballads, there is nothing but void. In the entire imaginary world of epics, narratives and even story-telling, the merciless songs of the crematorium or: "চঙ্গালের শাশান গীতিকা", have gained prominence.

The poem was composed on the background of the linguistic uprising of Assam, which have marred Nature’s creation by its poisonous strokes. All verses of this period have highlighted Mother Nature’s sorrow at the loss of her children. The poet has identified the poisonous period as Pishachi or ‘Ghoulish’. But the poet desires to overcome the hurdles of this evil period and embrace the success of freedom and tolerance. And so his thoughts repeatedly turn towards folk rituals like penances or Brata which are expressions of wish fulfillment. In this connection he has mentioned Magh Mondaler Brata, in his poem.

The traditional Bengali rituals are the celebrations of Bengalee women and Bengalee mothers. These women wish for happiness and wealth, a loving husband and son, as well as good fortune. Magh Mondaler Brata is celebrated every Sunday of the Bengali month of Magha. The participants draw designs of mirror, comb and container on the floor and light a lamp in honour of the Sun god. They sing rhymes of various kinds as below:
A Bengalee woman is an emblem of graciousness. She is a well-wisher of the family, quiet, reserved and patient. She has an amazing ability to bear pains and an astounding capability of self-sacrifice. The ritualistic mother is like a blooming Sunflower on the earth. She bestows the blessings of heaven on her children. That is, the poet in his desire for the retrieval of folk life as a means to revive a green and crop-laden earth mentions the issue of Brata or penance in his poem. And this desire is explicit in his poem.

Tapodhirbabu has made successful implementation of two folk elements in his poem, ‘Katha Shesh’, selected from his book of verses, ‘Kabachkundal’. The poem mentions a popular folk ritual, Subachanir Brata, as follows:

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কথা শেষ হয়ে এল, ফিরে আসি
ছোটের উজানে
পারের দিনে সুবাচনির ব্রতকথা নেই
হাতে দূরী দিয়ে
বসে আছে তোমা কুমারের বউ,...
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Another popular feminine Bengali ritual is Subachanir Brata, which does not require any rigid norms or chants. It is celebrated for the welfare of the husband, children and family. The ingredients necessary for such a celebration consist of the midriff of a banana leaf, a bunch of mango leaves, betel leaf and nut, oil, vermilion and some fruits. Besides, listening to the narrations describing the deity’s merits and attributes, by the
participants, also form an integral part of the celebration. The function ends with the married women applying vermilion to each other.

The present mechanical world has constricted the common world of folk life. Busy women of the towns and cities may find time to observe the rituals, but there lacks the presence of the narrator, who can sing the praises and the glory of the deity. Thus Subachanir Brata is observed without the narration of its essence. In the modern mechanical world all the words of the human mind is confined within the machines. That is why the folk festivals are celebrated without any devotion. This careless attitude of modern women pains the poet, which he expresses through the inclusion of this traditional ritual in his poem.

The poem, ‘Bihu’

by Amalendu Guha needs to be mentioned in this discussion. Bihu is the national festival of Assam. This festival is celebrated to signify crop cultivation and youthful sensuousness. The festival, Bohagi Bihu is celebrated from the inception of the month of Baishakh, the first month of the Assamese/Bengali calendar. The poet has painted a complete picture of this festival in his poem. We have included this poem in our discussion because of the folk tale included in it. It is a popular Assamese folk tale, named ‘Bordoichila’. The poet has represented the tale in his poem as follows:

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শ্বপ্নের জাল বোনে, দিন গোনে শিপিনি কুমারী,
দিন গোনে বিহুলি আঘাজন আঘাজন কই?
কিয়া কর্ডালি কামনার টানা ও পোড়নে
ধানে পানে বিছ পানে ঠাসাঠাসি সুখ ধৈর্যই
উচ্ছলে উঠের কেবে, সারা দেশে পাহাড় - তৈয়ামে,
অননিবন্ধি বনে, রৌদ্রপিয়ি কোমলাবগানে,
টেকশালে বউঁড়ির তাঁতকালে বিয়ারির রুকে
গ্রামের হিলোল কেবে পারে পারে গানের তুফানে।
আঘাজন বড় আসে বর্নেঞ্চিলার পাখায়,
```
A large part of Assam is inhabited by the Boro tribesmen. In Boro language the word *Bordoichila*’s literal meaning is derived from the words *Bor*, that is ‘wind’, *Di* meaning, ‘water’, and *Chikhala*, which means the ‘deity’ or woman worshipped by the Boros. The three words have combined together to form *Bordoichila*, giving rise to many folk tales among various folk tribes of this region. One such tale is that ‘Bordoichila’ is a Goddess, a popular form of Devi Parvati. On the occasion of *Bohag Bihu*, everyone return to their homes in Assam from their work places, to celebrate the Bihu festival. Married women come back to their parental homes. Similarly, Devi Parvati also desires to come to Assam, her motherland. But her husband Shiva opposes her decision and restricts her journey. However, Parvati defies Shiva’s order, and adopting a terrible, destructive form, comes alone to her father’s domain. As the wind blows through her long traces and as she stomps her feet in anger, Mother Nature becomes disconcerted. This anguish is manifested in the form of heavy rains and storm. This devastating change in Nature is analyzed as Devi Parvati’s arrival to Assam, her parental family, announcing the imminence of Bihu, in the form of Bordoichila. The folk people of Assam like to think of this as the manifestation of their daughter, Devi Parvati or Bordoichila, in one her destructive moods.

The context of Amalendubabu’s poem thus consists of a detailed description of the preparations going on in the homes of the farmers, in order to welcome *Bohagi Bihu*. The women are busy in their looms weaving *Bihuan* or *Gamocha* for their beloved ones; some are busy
husking paddy at the husking-pedal, to prepare tasty cookies on Bihu; the young farmer is determined to wed his beloved this Bihu, for which he happily plays the flute among the fields. In the midst of these all married and unmarried women run out to the fields. The elders are worried because the granaries are not full, would there be sufficient grains to run the year? Yet they also surrender to the merriment of the youngsters, forgetting their wails and woes. They ardently hope that the coming year would give them a good crop. Everywhere, in and out, every chamber of Nature is alive with the expectation for joyful days. In the midst of these preparations, comes Bordoichila, to her mother's abode, announcing the arrival of Bihu.

Therefore, the description of Bihu in this poem would not have been complete had it not included the fairy tale 'Bordoichila'. Just as the dry, arid environment of Chaitra quenches its thirst by the storm of Kal-Baisakhi, so also the youngsters of the rural areas satisfy their desires for love and happiness, through songs and dances during the Bohagi Bihu.

By the inclusion of this fairy-tale in this Bengali poem, the poet has painted a beautiful picture of Assamese folk life, thus building a bridge of complaisance between the language and culture of two communities and two cultures.

We now turn our attention to the poem, 'Kar Hate Rahasyer Chabi' from the collection, 'Nirbachita Sonnet', where there is a mention of another fairy tale. Here, the poet represents a part of the fairy tale, 'Andher Hasti Darshan', as below:

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“মুক্তার সময় কে দে অনুভূতি হর মানুষের 
খুব গাছ অশ্বকার নামে নাকি চোখের পাতায়।
নাকি তার অনুভূতে আছে পড়ে বেদনাতরঙ্গ, 
কিন্তু অবহৃত হয়ে যায় তার সব অনুভূতি;"
```
The main theme of the above-mentioned sonnet is the feeling of ‘death’. The unpleasant truth of the living world is ‘death’; the instance of birth determines the moment of death. Here, in the first octave of the poem the poet’s imagination of death is a deep darkness, the end of a painful life. The poet often imagines that his life-bird has left his mortal body and has wandered away with the wind. At some other times, he thinks death is delving into a deep sleep in the milky-white flood of light.

The poet has used the example of a fairy tale to give a solution to his imaginary feelings of death in the sextet of the poem.

The fairy tale underlying the proverb, ‘Andher Hasti Darshan’ (blind man’s observation of an elephant) is presented here:

Once upon time, a King ordered five blind men to describe the structure of an elephant. Being blind at birth, these five men had no concept of day or night, light or darkness. But their sense of feeling was very sharp. So the blind men attempted to describe the elephant using their sense of ‘touch’. The first blind opined that an elephant was like a winnowing tray, having held the elephant’s ear. The second one said that the elephant looked like a ‘radish’, for his hands touched the tusk of the elephant. The third blind went on to say that the elephant looked like a rope, having...
grasped the trunk of the elephant. The fourth blind said that the elephant appeared to be like ‘pillar’, for he touched the leg of the elephant, while the last one concluded that the elephant was like a wall for his hands felt for the belly of the animal. Thus the five of them could give only incomplete description of the elephant depending on their sensory perception.

The perennial question which haunts us is that who has breathed life into our physical body? The sudden flight of this life-bird to the unknown world which is ‘death’ is also mysterious. Over time various authors and poets have given different explanations of the sense of ‘death’. The poet has used the fairy tale to highlight this aspect of differential opinions regarding each one’s concept of ‘death’. Actually the poet implies that whoever owns the key to this universal truth is yet anonymous. And so we get only fragmented information about the actual feeling of death.

The entire analysis of this chapter reveals that a variety of folk tales, folk anecdotes, epics and ballads, have entered into the literary works of the litterateurs of the North-east. The use of these elements in different novels, short stories and verses of this region, assign an exceptional value to these works. Fairy tales, epics, narratives and ritualistic narrations, which were predominantly stored and nurtured in the memories and oral deliberations, found their permanent place in the literary creations of this region. Varied explanations of the popular fairy stories have been given by authors and poets who have judiciously used these elements in their written literature. Sometimes these are used to define a particular character, or to accentuate the flow of the events, or to capture someone’s childhood memories, or sometimes to represent the community life of the hero. Similarly, they are used to represent the personal thoughts of the young heroines of nuclear families of towns and cities, or as the nostalgic thoughts of ritualistic observations of gracious women. Besides the authors have
borrowed from the stories of folk rituals to establish the idea of a secular society which obliterates distinction between the rich and the poor, upper and lower castes, and all other differences prevalent in a modern human society. In another sphere eminent poets of this region have used their poems as a platform to paint the tribal cultures of this region, highlighting their fairy tales, which are in used in different contexts of their literary compositions, thereby bringing about a cultural integration of the different communities.
Notes and References

3. Ibid, p.6
5. Ibid, p.64.
6. Ibid, p.64.
7. Ibid, p.64.
15. Abanindranath Tagore, Banglar Brata, p.10
18. Ibid, p.117, 118.
26. Ibid, p.43, 44.
27. Ibid, p.44, 45.
29. Ranabir Purakayastha, Dunduburi Katha, p.60.
33. Ibid, p.139.
35. Ibid, p.17.
37. Ibid, p.53.
38. Bible, Good News Bible, p.5.
41. Ibid, p.9.
42. Ibid, p.10.
43. Ibid, p.10.
44. Tapodhir Bhattacharya, ‘Shikore Jaler Ghran’, Kabitasamgrah, p.32.
45. Ibid, p.32.
47. Ibid, p.113.
49. Ibid, p.119.
50. Ibid, p.120.
51. Ibid, p.120.
53. Ibid, p.130.
54. Deven Bhattacharya, Bangla Sahityer Itihas, p.519.
56. Ibid, p.88.
58. Ibid, p.16.
60. Ibid, p.73.