Chapter IV: Folklore and Folklife in Acharjee’s Short Stories and One Act Play

4.1 Incorporation of Folklife and Folklore in Short Stories and One Act Play

The emergence of the short story and one act play in their fullest developed forms are rarely found as genres of literature devoid of traditional offshoots. Though in recent years, these two genres have found tremendous experimentations, yet the plots that shape these short stories and one act plays have never ignored the cultural heritages and traditional links that in turn form the basis of the social contexts of the plots. In fact, the oral tradition has always remained the basis of Indian as well as Assamese culture. It includes history, religious practices, cosmology, rituals, folktales, proverbs, riddles, games, songs, dance, magic, epic tales, myths and narratives. In all the modes of modern experimentations of short story and one act play, therefore, the authors intentionally or unintentionally depend on the expression of everyday life merged in its traditional cultural roots.

No doubt, people’s interest in hearing and telling story can be traced to a very ancient time and this has found expression in such forms of storytelling as folk tales, myths, ballads and the epics. Although, the ancient literary works like the Vedas, the Puranas, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Upanishadas, the Jatakas etc. have come to be regarded as capacious tour de force of short stories, yet beginnings of the Indian and for that matter Assamese short story proper do not account its origins in them. M. Rama Rao writes:

We have had in India stories which lie embedded in the hymns of the Rigveda or scattered in the Upanishadas and the epics, the
stories which constitute the Panchatantra, the Hitopadesha, the Sukasaptati, the Dasakumaracharita and the Vetalapanchavimsati in Sanskrit, the Buddhist Jataka Stories in Pali and a host of similar stories in modern Indian languages. (216)

It deserves mention here that the modern plots of short story and one act play are not devoid of the spirit of the inherited cultures from these works despite its expansion in the light of western influences. In fact, much of the earliest written literature draws its materials from pre historic lore. The Assamese short story derived its inspiration from the indigenous beliefs and general attitude to life.

In the domain of Assamese short story, Syed Abdul Malik inaugurated a new era in the Awahan Age before the war, and his influence upon the authors of the younger cohort is all encompassing. His stories have great human plea and he shows the immediate experience with people of all sorts particularly those who are not yet fully modern but finds inspiration in traditional roots. The Assamese short story achieved its peak in the fifties of the last century. Upendranath Sarma in his Modern Assamese Short Stories writes:

The writers of the age of the Ramdhenu had eschewed decadent romanticism and sentimentality and had concentrated in the depiction of realistic situations. The Second World War and its effects with its attendant economic crisis leading to the Bengal famine, and the clarion call for the final struggle for freedom affected the writers deeply when they were adolescent. (Sarma. Web. 1)

Jogesh Das, Mohim Bora, Saurav Kumar Chaliha and Bhabendra Nath Saikia dominated the arena of Assamese short story during the 60s, 70s, and 80s of the twentieth century. In fact, many literary luminaries tried their hands in short
story writings and no one could avoid incorporation of socio-cultural elements imbued in the Assamese folk tradition.

Assamese One Act Play or Ekankika Play draws its origin from the most influential Assamese traditional theatre called Ankiya Nat propagated by Vaishnavite leader Srimanta Sankardeva and Madhavadeva in the fifteenth century. Anka means Act in Indian languages. Since then the Ankiya Nat or plays containing one act performance has been a dynamic literary tradition in the region till date. Lakshminath Bezbaroa’s Pachani is generally regarded as the first Assamese Modern Ekankika though it was admired as a farce. Bezbaroa’s play Gadadhar Raja was published in an issue in the eighth volume of Assamese journal Banhi. The play took less than an hour to perform on stage and had one single act in it. The play enjoyed much popularity and was enacted in several places. Another celebrated periodical Awaahan was credited with the publication of a number of Ekankika plays like Bichar, Prajapati Bhul, Kabir Jivan, Hridayar Mulya, Atmasanman by pioneering progressive writer Lakhsmidhar Sharma. There is not much evidence that these plays were enacted, but certainly they had a role in pioneering the modern Ekankika Play. In the forties, a satire in all the monthly assemblies of Guwahati Sandhiya was performed in a regular manner. Prabin Phukan, Narayan Banuah, Prabhatchandra Sharma, Surendranath Saikia were some other playwrights of that phase.

Indeed, the modern Assamese Ekankika (One Act) play is a post independent phenomenon that found much popularity through different competitive performances mostly in urban and sub-urban areas. The first Ekankika Play competition was held in Dibrugarh in 1959; and in the same year Assam Ekankika Play Association (Asom Ekankika Nat Sanmilani) came into existence. Now, in Assam Ekankika (One Act) play competitions have reached festive expansion and thousands of plays have been written and enacted all over the state.

Of the many dramatists who incorporated mythical elements to write his plays, Atulchandra Hazarika remained a pioneer. His mythological plays include Narakasur (1930), Beula (1933), Nanda Dulal (1935), Kurukshetra (1936), Ramchandra (1937), Champavati, Sakuntala, Savitri (1939), Rukmini Haran
(1949) and *Nirjita* (1952). In *Narakasur*, fate dominates as a causal agent. In *Beula*, the dialogue is oratorial. Vidusak is modeled on the Shakespearean fool in *Rukmini Haran*. He could make his people talk naturally. His plays had crisp dialogues. Samudra Kajal Saikia in his *Imagery of Everyday: The Success and Failure of Assamese Ekankika (One Act Play Productions)* therefore quotes Atulchandra Hazarika:

> Tracing all these evidences quite convincingly claims that Ekankika in Assamese cultural practice was never a trend that introduced only by the western world. Hazarika also regrets that in that time hardly anyone tried to evaluate these plays as a serious practice but all accepted an addition to a full length play production.

(kankhowa.blogspot.in/2011/01)

Again, Satya Prasad Barua in his play *Jabala*, recreated the ancient episode of Jabala and Satyakam of the *Upanishads* in modern form. Similarly, Mahendra Borthakur has also recreated an ancient episode in his *Pitamahar Sarasajjya*. In fact, There is no doubt that One Act Play subverts the ‘desire’ of the grandiose theatre, and therefore, the scope and practice of entering elements from folk culture practiced by the lower and middle class people always allures the dramatists of such plays.

### 4.2 Debendranath Acharjee’s Short Stories and One Act Play

Acharjee published three short stories namely *Halibhakat* published in *Saptahik Nilachal* (April, 1969), *Paap* in *Silver Jubilee Souvenir* of Chintamani Library of Baligaon, Jorhat and *Dadhichi* published in *Amar Pratinidhi* (September, 1977). In addition to these short stories, Acharjee wrote ten more short stories which have found publication in *Debendranath Acharjya Rachana Samagra* as a separate section- *Galpasamgra*. The short stories published here are: *Sthabir, Ramapandit, Anritasya Putrah, Miss Desmukh, Tomi, Railjytra, Gargramat Khankhana, Gali Aru Rajpath, Mat and Bhikshu*. These short stories
though have been shadowed by his legendary novels are never of less importance in terms of their merit.

In fact, the adroit language of Acharjee is unmistakable in all the short stories. What is most interesting about these stories is its incorporation of folklife in its most refined manner. However, it must be maintained that Acharjee’s attempts were not triggered to recreate oral or folk tales and folklife.

Truly, Acharjee premeditated on the scenes of the then contemporary rural life of Assam where folk elements are inseparable from the everyday activities of rural people. Thus, his short stories rely heavily on setting which is essentially rural omitting complex plot and offers a complete treatment of its character in relatively concise narrative. Arlen J. Hansen in his article *Short Story* incorporated in *Encyclopædia Britannica* rightly says:

As a genre, the short story received relatively little critical attention through the middle of the 20th century, and the most valuable studies of the form were often limited by region or era. In his *The Lonely Voice* (1963), the Irish short story writer Frank O’Connor attempted to account for the genre by suggesting that stories are a means for “submerged population groups” to address a dominating community. Most other theoretical discussions, however, were predicated in one way or another on Edgar Allan Poe’s thesis that stories must have a compact unified effect.

(www.britannica.com)

Indeed, like Frank O’Connor, Acharjee in his short stories also attempted to account for the genre by suggesting that stories are a means for “submerged population groups” to address different issues relating to the rural lives of Assam. Further, Acharjee’s short stories are usually replete with enigmatic and distinctively Assamese folk motifs. Therefore, his stories cannot be understood without having knowledge of the cultural context of the Assamese people.
Acharjee also tried his hand in one act play. He, however, wrote only one such play entitled *Ek Tarikh*— (First day of the month). The plot reveals a pathetic account of the people without cash who basically buy their necessary grocery goods on credit only.

### 4.3 Incorporation of Folklore and Folklife in Acharjee’s Short Stories and One Act Play

*Dadhichi* is the first story included in *Galpasamagra* of Debendranath Acharjya *Rachana Samagra*. This is the story of a village chief called Mahuram Gaonburha and his sacrifice for the cause of his village. The setting is the new environment of the Lakhai *bil* (*bil* in Assamese stands for a large aquatic body) created by a government fishery project. The Lakhai *bil* was cleared of its natural aquatic features. The story narrates the pathetic plight of the people after being deprived of the traditional ways of earning their livelihood from the Lakhai *bil*. Earlier, the indigenous fish varieties like *Sal, Sol, Chenga* etc. had been found abundantly in the bil, and about a forty financially weak people of the Lakhaipariya village earned their daily bread for six months from this ‘Lakhai bil’.

People approached Mahuram Gaonburha for solution. When all their approaches with fishery officer, officer of the agriculture department etc. bore no fruit, Mahuram Gaonburha asked the villagers to build an embankment on their own saying *raiye nakh jokarile nai boi* (from every droppings of nail, river flows—meaning power of united action). However, the toils of the villagers were shattered by a thunder storm before completion. Mahuram Gaonburha himself tried to offer resistance in vain and his dead body was found after four days of the turmoil.

In the story *Dadhichi*, the protagonist Mahuram Gaonburha is caught between traditional Indian folk beliefs and the rural social system pervading it. For the village folk of Lakhaipariya, the ruling deity of the village stayed in a wetland known as Lakhaibil, and accordingly he was called Lakhai *Devata* (Lakhai God). By following the traditional belief system, the villagers sacrificed a goat by way of strangulation every year in the neo-moonlight night of *Aahar* month. However, Gaonburha did not like Lakhai *Devata*, for it took the life of his son in a
mysterious manner in a night when his son went out to check the fishing rod for ‘Sol’ fish. So, he challenged the Lakhai Devata- ‘Kal dakini! - Toko edin sam’ (Devilish witch- one day I will avenge).

Actually, Mahuram Gaonburha gave consent to the public to transform the Lakhain to a large fishery also to avenge his son’s death in Lakhain. Therefore, when the entire public wished to offer Puja (worship) to Lakhai Devata, Gaonburha impatiently negated the wish, and finally in the thunder storm night he offered himself saying: ‘Devilish witch, Oh! You don’t feel happy without eating the village!’ He then lies in the breached area of the embankment and said ‘First eat me then eat others!’

Truly, the title of this story ‘Dadhichi’ is well justified. Dadhichi, one of the central characters in Hindu mythology is primarily known for sacrificing his life so that the Devas (Gods) could make the weapon called Vajra from his bones. After being driven out from heaven, by the serpent king Vritra, the Devas (Gods) needed a powerful weapon to aid their fight. By using the ‘vajra’, made from the sage Dadhichi’s bones, the Devas conquered the Asura and reclaimed heaven. Acharjee uses this mythical reference of Dadhichi to replicate the sacrifices of the protagonist Mahuram Gaonburha for the cause of the villagers.

Further, folklife entered into the story through a detailed description of the different fishing equipments used by the village maidens at Lakhai Bil. The discussions of the villagers on issues pertaining to their folk beliefs also constitute a major part of the story. Acharjee’s use of Assamese sayings like phulate bari howa suggesting early doom or satote bagh dekha (inkling at hallucination) etc. are also distinctive folkloristic elements in the story.

Halibhakat is a story written in the backdrop of the past rural life of Assam’, writes Prafulla Kotoky in his preface to Debendranath Acharjiya Rachana Samagra, ‘The language well expresses the theme and the temporal backdrop of the story.’ This story offers a critique of the social system of the rural Assamese society critiquing the aspects that involves social customs.

The central character of the story Halibhakat derives his name from the customs of naming on being born on the day of Holi festivals. Initially being
reared in the Satra tradition under Salajana Adhikar (head of the Satra cult), Hali became a Bhakat (Devotee) from the age of four itself. In Assamese Satra cult, the head of the Satra known as Adhikar is an unmarried person. However, with the marriage of Salajana Adhikar, that Satra become non-existent and Halibhakat becomes fully a celibate monk after performing the rituals of his dead parents. Halibhakat becomes completely disinclined from the rules of family life, and instead become very popular amongst the folk for his pleasing and helping attitude. As the story progresses we find the story of Saruram the only son of Tularm Bayan who elopes with a girl of low caste from the neighbouring village and faces social boycott creates problem in the marriage of his sister Subarna. When the groom’s party of Subarana refuses to comply with the public demand of apology for keeping tie with the family of Saruram, Halibhakat came as a rescuer. The celibate monk Halibhakat becomes family man. However, after the sad demise of his wife after five years leaving his two years old son near Saruram he again treaded the paths of celibate monk till his last breathe at the age of ninety seven.

Fatalism is an aspect of folk belief. Indian folk depend more on their fate and less on efforts. Here, in the story Halibhakat, Kandura Bhakat- the father of Halibhakat had many children and all of them died prematurely. Kandura Bhakat accepted his fate as the wishes of the god and therefore to save the life of Hali, he prayed for his long life and as per religious belief he offered that his new born will only serve Govinda (God) and accordingly he brought Hali just at the age of four to act as “Salajana Adhikar” (The Current Head of the Vaishnav Monastery) and left him there. This very act clearly reflects the traditions of folklife.

Also, the primitive ways and means of Halibhakat at his youth like living only on boiled food prepared on his own and having only banana fruit on the night hours, and yet having a glowing and healthy physic, his use of ancient method of staying in a hut, and his offering of edibles to the children considering them as epitomes of Child Krishna, and his ways of herbal remedies fortified with his humming of religious prayers and many other such activities clearly captures an environment of folk tradition that celibate monk follows in Assam.
Further, the elements of folklore in the story are also the description of marriage, use of Dhuliya, Biyanam (marriage song), marriage reception, the priest and the rituals of marriage. These aspects of marriage narrated in this story clings to its culture and therefore, they definitely represent elements of folklore and folklife of Assam.

Acharjee’s short story Paap is also written in the backdrop of the past rural life of Assam especially during British regime and here too, the language well expresses the theme and the temporal backdrop of the story. The Assamese oral tradition of weighing scales between sinfulness and righteousness act depicted in the story thrive from the indigenous beliefs and general attitudes to life. Acharjee here transmits and stores the values of their experiences by telling the tales of Rudra Mahajan to the younger generations as guide. Therefore, the story Paap (meaning sin) validates the assertion of Chinua Achebe (published in Tradition of oral literature in the works of Chinua Achebe-An Insight by A. Hazel Verbina) in his essay The Image of Africa that oral traditions do have significant functionality and serve a far more utilitarian purpose, which doubles as mainstream intention meant for cultural preservation and ultimate ‘survival’ of the people.

Truly, Paap is a short story that depicts the real folklife of Assam that surrounds the discussion of ultimate fate written by the almighty with his measuring rod for sinful act after the demise of certain so called Mukhial or headman of the village. The title of the story Paap aptly describes the sinful acts of Rudra Mahajan in indulging illicit affair with the daughter of a Bez (magic healer) namely Dhiraj. Also, his act of earning wealth through accruing interest from money lending is a common instance of sinful activities in rural folklife of Assam. Further, the very setting of the story in depicting the rural shop of Dighala and the ambience of gossips amidst smoking in Silim (a wooden smoking instrument) is an important trait of folklife of Assamese society. Again, Gaonburah’s divide and rule policy by creating fight between different Khels (clan) is a dominant folkloristic aspect shown in the story.

The short story ‘Sthabir’ is written in the context of life around the Assamese families working in the tea garden especially during the period of war.
followed by Non-Cooperation Movement of India and its subsequent period after Independence. Acharjee begins his story by commenting on the central character Ratneswar Mahari’s plight of being delinked with the outside world for serving continuously for thirty four years in the tea garden. He depicts how the traditional hierarchy system of power is exploited amongst the tea-labourers, and how Ratneswar enjoyed the Babu (officer) status before he came to a standstill (Shhabir) situation after his retirement. Also, for his traditional bent of mind Ratneswar did not encourage any enterprising effort of Tharu, his son. He discourages Tharu’s cluster enterprise by uttering the Assamese saying Gharar khai parar garu Sarowa (use one’s wealth for the benefit of others). His decision not to part with saved money even for the establishing his son’s enterprise proved fatal.

In fact, though this story apparently does not use any folklore of Assamese society, yet the story is replete with the ways of folklife during the British regime. The traditional practices of punishment in schools, the babugiri of ‘Babu’, sahabgiri of British people and folk ways of keeping landed property as security of food are some instances of folklife discernible in the story. The story Shhabir also recounts the impact of the Second World War as well as the Non-Cooperation Movement led by Mahatma Gandhi. Here, Acharjee depicts some of the worries and fears of the common folk gathered at the gossips of the village community.

Further story narrates the fears for ignoring the religious customs in which Hindu people has to perform some religious activities annually after the death of one’s parent. Acharjee writes one such incident that involves Ratneswar Mahari:

That night an earthquake took place. Ratneswar did not perform his annual ‘Saradh’ (annual ritual prayer for the dead) for the last two years. Feeling terrified by the earthquake, Ratneswar called upon the priest and performed his pending two ‘Saradh’ in the last lunar day of the dark fortnight. (461)

Indeed, this tradition of offering Shradha (annual rituals for the death) and superstitious fears related to the failure of performing the same is a unique aspect of Assamese folk believes.
Acharjee’s *Ramapandit* is a short story that offers folkloristic aspects mainly related to the Pandit cult represented by the Brahmins, their nature of being stasher despite being in possession of enormous wealth. In the story, the narrator begins his story by describing the scenes of the last hours of night indicated by the screaming sounds of fox. He then describes the traditional pattern of Assamese houses in villages having *Maral Ghar* (ladies room), *Chora Ghar* (sitting room), *Barghar* (central hall), *Sowaghar* (Sleeping room) *Bharal Ghar* (granary). The narrator then introduces Ramapandit, who as a *Satygrahi* of the Independence movement came to pass the night at his house. Pandit Ramanath Shastri’s (popularly known as Rama Pandit) life history then forms the core of the story – a story which is representative of Assamese folk tradition of Brahmin Pandit cult.

Pandit Ramanath Sashtri, *Tarkabyakaranteertha* also known as Rama Pandit, a permanent *Adhyapak* (Professor) of Majargoan Ajyadharmarakshini Satuspathi Tol is equally adapt in agricultural activities and uses his spade. Being a Brahman wearing sacred thread, he however does not carry spade on his shoulder but ties the same in waist during work. In other folk culture other than Assamese, Brahmin does not work in paddy field. But in Rama Pandit, Acharjee draws a picture of the folk ways of the Assamese Brahmins who takes bath in the early morning in pond ignoring all weather condition and does religious rituals with wet body, goes to *tol* for imparting education, cleans his own household premises, takes tobacco with beetle nuts, eats normal folk foods including non-vegetarian dishes. Rama Pandit’s wife also conforms to the traditional life-styles of Assamese rural society and does every household works besides traditional sewing activities. In fact, Acharjee’s Rama Pandit typifies the life-style as mentioned by renowned Folklorist Barendra Nath Datta in his *Folkloric Foragings in India’s North-East*. Datta writes:

Brahmin has high place in the society. But compared to the modes of life followed by Brahmins elsewhere, the Assamese Brahmin’s life-style might appear to be ‘un-Brahminic’. The Assamese Brahmin has no scruples about doing all kinds of physical work
except ploughing and he will have nothing to do with vegetarianism. Even then the Assamese folk mind has not taken kindly to the privileges enjoyed by the Brahmin. (50)

Rama Pandit is also often ridiculed as a great miser with a popular Assamese saying - Angulir phakedi pani atopawa nasarake (even no single drop of water flows through the gaps of fingers). Another feature of folkloristic aspect is revealed through his nickname Bagha Pandit for his heroic deeds in killing a Bengal tiger to save his own life. Also, the cure for his wounds and cuts through his use of aromatic herbal plant is another aspect of folklife of Assam.

The description of Rama Pandit’s meeting with Mahatma Gandhi and his realization of the necessity of ignoring the warning of the narrator’s father, and his readiness to eat in jail ignoring his religious compulsion is an aspect of the Brahmin society residing in Assam. In fact, like the story writer Premchand, Acharjee, believed in self-sacrifice and ceaseless work on behalf of the suffering masses. Ramapandit was determined to stick to this belief even at the cost of sacrificing his religious dogmas.

In the story Amritasya Putrah, Acharjee describes the usual scenes of a general ward of a hospital and centers its focus on a Bikharini (begging woman). The Bikharini of the story, who was called mad-woman by others, was actually waiting for husband from the operation theatre of the medical in a most pathetic way obeying her husband’s words who in reality is no more alive.

Though the story does not reflect the folkways of life in a direct manner, yet reference to the folklore and folk belief is quite discernible in the story. Instead of the usual scene of crows in hospital premises, Acharjee portrays the mutual understanding of a pair of crows in having water from a pipe and compares it with the folk tale of Vayas Dampati (Pair of weaver birds) who showed extreme understanding that reveals great survival value for our species that it became firmly imprinted in their genes as an instinct. The description of the conditions of the people waiting in the portico of a hospital has found adroit hands in Acharjee’s language:
After some time the ward boys carried out the dead body along with the bed and kept in the veranda covering him with cloth partition from four sides. The old woman the two maiden girls cried for some spell of time—"Where have you left, leaving us alone. What will be our fate now?" Then all of them left the veranda in search of dead body carrying vehicle, woods and bamboo for arranging his cremation at side of the river. ... One gone, one came. This is the rule of fate. This is static and unchangeable. Like ‘fill up the gap’ questions of school leaving examinations, the nature has arranged everything to fill its gap. Why should we poke our head in it? (470)

Thus, Acharjee has narrated the plight of the common people at the approach of inevitability of death and illness. It is also to be noted here the folk custom of the old Assamese society when cremation of the dead people was arranged only at the side of the river- a practice still followed in many rural areas of Assam.

Again the short stories like Miss Deshmukh, Railjatra, Gali Aru Rajpath, Tommy and Bhikshu are satirical representations of modern familiar life of cities in contrast to the rural lives. On the other hand Acharjee delineates the folkloristic aspects imbued in history in his story Gargramat Khankhana. The story is based on the incidents of Assam history and it ends in tragedy. Aurangzeb’s Governor, Mir Jumlah occupied Gargaon, the then capital of Ahoms. Internationally acclaimed Indian author Arup Kumar Dutta in his book The Ahoms writes:

Mir Jumlah’s ambitions reached even higher- to teach the upstart Ahoms a lesson and capture their entire domain! The noble had risen from humble beginnings as an attendant of an oil-merchant to become one of the most eminent individuals in Hindustan; he was, by nature, ambitious and even dreamed of conquering China once he dealt with the Ahoms. (197)
Acharjee taking cues from this historical character writes about the aftermath incidents of Mir Jumlah’s victory of Gargaon. In the story Mir Jumlah is named as Mazumkha and also as Khankhana. Also, his assistant Rashid Khan is named as Rashidkha. These naming are purely crafted from the folk ways of naming the Mughal people in Assam. Also, the story of Rashidkha’s female attendant Zunabai and offering of Sirajee (wine) from Persia by Rashidkha and the mysterious death of Zunabai after having that wine are aspects Assamese people’s folklore related to the attack of the Mughals. Further, the uneasy state of environment of Assam for the Mughals is best described by Acharjee when Mazumkha speaks- ‘in this province, the air is poison, the water is poison.’ Actually these are some of the aspects which have been orally strannitted from the time of Ahoms in stating the dwindling conditions of Mughals in Assam.

The short story *Mat* (Opinion) is based specially on the folk tradition of early marriage of Assamese girls to avert any inauspicious consequences. The protagonist of the story namely Mahiram is introduced as the *Barbayan* of an Assamese *Satra* or Vaishnavite Monastery. The story reveals that the traditional customs permits some exceptions to the male in matters of their dress and manners, yet they are vociferous enough to protest any oddity amongst girls. Therefore, the two sons of Mahiram Barbayan are not affected by the stern criticisms while his educated daughter is not tolerated for violating folk conventions by the public. The story also depicts as to how the prevailing traditions have to be followed specially in terms of marriage. Sumala, the educated daughter of Mahiram, poses great problem for her father by showing determination of marrying the boy of lower caste. Mahiram Barbayan therefore approaches the Adhikar Gohain:

“Itwar, I have been drowned in great sin. A stain in Bayan’s house will stay for ages. My daughter-”

Gosain said, “I have heard, fixed her mind in lower class. It happens if you do not act on time.”
.... “The responsibility of the public and the society lie on my head. Can I agree to that—just because you are a Bayan? It may have been allowed for common folk; but you hold position of Bayan in Satriya tradition. How shall I give opinion in these matters not allowed by religious doctrine?” (493)

Clearly, this conversation between Barbayan and Gosain reveals the prevailing religious practices in terms of marriage with lower class, and therefore, it is a striking instance of incorporation of folklife in the story.

Further, the village people maintain the Assamese proverb- Lao dangar haleo patar tal (However big is the gourd, it is always covered under leaves – meaning the subjugation of women by the male). They insist on early marriage of his daughter saying –Amar dinat sowali bulile kurite Burhi (In our days, the girls become old at the age of twenty). All these references are hinted towards the Assamese social custom of early marriage of a girl before she attains the age of making her own choice in selecting her life partner. Indeed, marriage as a social subject demands community approval. Jawaharlal Handoo in his Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction states:

Another important area of folklore and folklife, very close to material culture, is the field of social custom. "Here the emphasis is on group interaction rather than on individual skills and performances" (Dorson, 1972:3). Investigations in this area are more concerned about the family and community observances of the people living in villages, tribal belts and even industrial areas of Indian cities. Of particular importance are the rites de passage of birth, initiation, marriage, death and similar rites. These rites, as is well known, have special significance in Hindu life. (Folkintro. Web. 1)
Therefore, all the village people shown in the story are in favour of early marriage for the college going girl of Mahiram Barbayan. However, his daughter is bold enough to stay unmarried till her education is complete and selects her own husband from another caste. Here, the folklore of interracial dating presents the supposedly utopic vision that love sees no colour.

In the story *Mat* also, the village people is averse to accept the inter-caste marriage of Mahiram Barbayan’s daughter. However as stated by Folklorist Birendranath Datta in his *Folkloric Foragings in India’s North-East* that ‘Assamese society is very much of an open society, the openness being inherent in the very process of its formation’(48), and therefore, the marriage finds an indirect approval from the ‘Prabhu Iswar’, the *Satradhikar*. Also the act of Prabhu Iswar in refusing to offer personal visit but consenting to send prasad for the bride, clearly reveals the social folk customs of Assamese society in terms of marriage.

Last but not the least, Debendranath Acharjee as a versatile writer also tried his hand in writing a one act play *Ek Tarikh*. Here, Acharjee portrays nine characters from the lower and middle class people belonging to different social strata- Mahesh Baruwa (*Najir* in Court), Doctor, Purandar Sarma(* Advocate), Arabinda Kakoty(*Politician*), Bidhan Borah(* Businessman*), Ranen Deka(* Compounder*), Biswajit (*Junior Engineer, PWD*), Nabin Thakur(* Professor in Philosophy*), Niren Kalita(*Son of a Tea Garden Owner studying in a local college*) The protagonist of the play Bidhan Borah typifies the traditional businessman who faces inevitable doom for non-payment of credits by his customers. Similar situation is faced by the character of the doctor. The traditional doctors of Assamese society were not like their modern counterparts in collecting fees from their patients. Therefore, unlike the present day doctors, the doctor in the play can not even afford to pay his bills to Bidhan Borah on *Ek Tarikh*, i.e. the first day of the month. Actually, the traditional doctor represented by Acharjee hardly gets his fees from his patients even after curing the patient completely.

Acharjee as a dramatist was also critical of the idle nature of the people leading to the problems in developing the country. The following excerpt from the
play typifies the message of Acharjee that forsaking traditional means yield
disaster in the economic tradition:

Nabin Barthakur: (making his finger straight) We need
dictatorial rulers. These are problems of food,
problems of life, problems of tribals,
problems of population-

Niren: Problems, only problems- big problems.

Arabinda Kakoty: Bah! Bah! We need only engineers- don’t
need problems. There are many problems-
but no job. This is the time of reorienting
jobs- need engineers-

Nabin Thakur: Surplus of engineers. Now we have
engineering colleges in villages- good for
nothing. Engineers can’t do anything else-
except doing a job-

Biswajit: (Entering) What to do except a job.

Nabin Thakur: Work-

Arabinda Kakoty: Yes, - there is no people who works. Even for
making a small fence in my boundary yard,
I’m searching for people for the last four days
...

Nabin Thakur: I’m not taking about those daily wage
earners. Work of sitting in the office for
regular monthly salary-

Niren: Yes Sir.

Biswajit: We are daily working those types of work.

Arabinda Kakoty: These people will develop our country! All
sluggards- have you ever used *Khaddar*
clothes? Khaddar? The one, which you make on your own by weaving threads—

Nabin Thakur: Mad, Mad. Who have time for such work, now? Wastage- the half of the nation is wasted.

Arabinda Kakoty: And rest of the half is dying without food.

Though Acharjee offers no comment as dramatist on the issue of forsaking traditional activities by the people, he leaves the final judgment to be given by the audience, yet his concern on the fate of Assamese people for ignoring traditional activities is easily discernible in Ek Tarikh.

The dialogues in the play also derive its inspiration from folk language. For instance, the rare meeting of people is spoken of as not even seeing one’s hair - Kota aponar dekhon tikuishal dekhai powa nai (I didn’t get to see even your long tuft of hair). In another instance, in the final scene the characters like Doctor and Arabinda Kakoty mention about being mad like the young ones of frog: Lalukir dare pagal. The character Arabinda Kakoty from Praja Socialist Party mentions about wearing Khadi clothes which refers to the folkways of preparing clothes from handloom.

In fact, Acharjee’s varied experiences gathered in a large canvas have added a new height to Assamese Short Story and One Act Play and imparted a new sense of largeness and vitality.
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