Chapter V: Folklore and Folklife in Acharjee’s Children’s Books

5.1 Children’s Books and Elements of Folklore and Folklife

In written literature, aspects of folklore and folklife primarily made its way through children's books. Folktales (including myths, legends) and ingredients of all folklife are shared by a particular group with common experiences and traditions, with a culture in which these elements of folklore and folklife are embedded and whose beliefs, values, quandaries, and aesthetics they express. Children's books are written by children's book writers for children's book readers, and the beliefs, values, predicaments, and aesthetics they express are those of the authors, their readers, and publishers. They might be set in other times and other places.

Authors frequently insist that as folktales exist in different versions and variants and are constantly changing, so they should have a right to retell a story as they please. Valerie Scho Carey in his preface to Quail Song regards this aspect of children’s literature as “‘weaving several sources together, mixing and matching in the true storytelling tradition.” It must, however, be remembered that folklore and folklife are unique in its own way, and deviations from and distortion of the original are, therefore, neither enriching nor justified. Therefore, Charles Dickens in his Frauds on Fairies comments:

It is a matter of grave importance that Fairy tales should be respected.... Whosoever alters them to suit his own opinions, whatever they are, is guilty, to our thinking, of an act of
presumption, and appropriates to himself what does not belong to him. (victorianweb. pva 239)

It is true that children's books are written (and illustrated) not told orally, and their authors, with a few exceptions, may not have studied these stories and have never told these stories as part of traditional habits of those communities. Yet, the appeal of these children’s literature rests specifically on their representation of folk traditions, on their providing a connection to ethnic heritages, on their facilitating children to visit other cultures.

Children’s books are written for roots, for alternatives, for community, for a chance to expose children to diversity, for implementing a "multicultural" curriculum. Thus, Children’s literature has an important role in fostering common consciousness and helping the children to envision themselves as distinctive people with a unique history and socio-cultural identity.

In Assam, the history of children’s literature is not very discouraging. Though all children’s literature had their basic frame in folklore and folklife that are meant to educate children in the right direction, yet the children stories of Assam from its birth itself are rich and scientific. Akhil Chakravorty in his article entitled Hatipati Sikimiki Aru Ramdhenu Kardhenut Debendranath Acharya published in Debendra Nath Acharya: Sristi Aru Chetana aptly remarks:

The very mention of our age old children’s literature reminds of a mellifluous naam (song). No ultra modem Assamese woman can boast (?) of not to have listened to that song. These lines from the book Kankhowa (Ear Eater) are-

Do fall asleep O Kanai (Krishna), the ear eater comes /He now comes to you after eating all the children’s ears.

The mentioning of the sample of old Assamese children’s literature from the Kankhowa has a reason. The recent child psychology does not recommend mentioning of fearful monsters to terrify children.
Judging the lines of Kankhowa from this angle, it appears that it deviates from the recent scientific outlook; but at the same time we must remember that Lord Krishna was not all afraid. ...Instead Krishna asked her mother to show how this nonexistent Ear Eater etas ear. This only reveals the child’s curiosity not fear. Thus, Assamese children literature that begins with Kankhowa and Bhimcharit are scientific and rich from its early days. (64)

The tales like Afikar Konwar, Egalar Bah published in Arunodia, Lakshminath Bezbaroa’s collection of stories for children Burhi Aair Sadhu (1911) and Kakadeuta Aru Natilaora and later Benudhar Sarma and Jyoti Prasad Agarawala’s children literature are full of scientific temperament. This is not to maintain that others failed to contribute to Assamese children’s literature; instead, we must maintain that though many other writers created a huge bulk of children’s literature yet the much needed scientific temperament was missing in most of them. Debendranath Acharjee, who earned reputations for his novels, also contributed greatly to enrich Assamese children’s literature in the right direction.

5.2 Children’s Books of Debendranath Acharjee

The entire gamut of children’s literature by Debendranath Acharjee can also be regarded as an attempt of such scholastic exercises that foster common values enabling the children of Assam with opportunities to discover themselves as akin to the traditions and cultures which they can call native or their own. While Sahityarathi Lakshminath Bezbaroa’s enduring bulk of children’s literature was attempts to inject moral impetus through folklore and folklife, Debendranath Acharjee’s works were mostly aimed at imparting educative values through the elements ingrain in socio-economic-cultural heritages of folklore.

Debendranath Acharjee’s children’s literature includes a poetic collection Ramdhenu Kar Dhenu (Whose Bow is the Rainbow), a short story collection Hatipati Chikimiki (The Glittering Milky Way), a long story Haladhiya Charaye Bao Dhan Khay and a collection of posthumously published poems in
Debendranath Acharjya Rachana Samagra under the heading Padya Padya (Poetry Poetry). In Debendranath Acharjee’s children literature, there is always a synthesis of Romanticism and Nationalism.

### 5.3 Debendranath Acharjee’s Ramdhenu Kar Dhenu

In his Preface to Debendranath Acharjya Rachana Samagra, Prafulla Kotoky writes “Debendranath Acharjee will be remembered for his invaluable contribution to children’s literature in Assamese. The most remarkable among them is Ramdhenu Kar Dhenu. In his Ramdhenu Kar Dhenu, Acharjee uses rhythmic verses to unearth many the of the mysteries of nature, the hills and mountains and borders of Assam, the monsoon air, different florals, the twelve months, the important places of Assam and Meghalaya, the rivers of Assam and myths related to them. Though these poems are not collection of folklore and folklife, yet the delineation of the elements of folklore and folklife are easily discernible in these verses. Acharjee remarked in the foreword of the book that his attempt was to offer additional linguistic skills to the Assamese medium students beyond the limited scope of textbooks.

Truly, Acharjee’s Ramdhenu Kar Dhenu fulfills his objective of developing the linguistic skills of the children through the incorporation of folkloristic elements in it. Axom Sahitya Sabha awarded “Premdhar Dutta Memorial Award” to this book in the category of Children’s Literature in 1972.

Ramdhenu Kar Dhenu includes twenty one poems and brings to fore equal number of poetic themes. The first poem of this collection entitled Ramdhenu Kar Dhenu? Sat rang Ki? (Whose bow is the Rainbow? What are its seven colours?) The poet Acharjee first explains the scientific truth behind the phenomenon called the rainbow and then he writes:

*Satota Ghorai Tane Surujar Rath*

*Hatipati dekhi heruwale gatipath.*

*Natini kolat loi Burhiaye kay,*

"Ramdhenu Mor dhenu; Sat rang Tai.”(501)
(Seven horses pull the chariot of the Sun/looking at the Milky Way forgets the road to be done/taking grandson in her lap, grandma says/ “the rainbow is my bow; you are the seven colours.”)

One of the basic elements of folklore is unfounded belief and Acharjee’s use of the Milky Way’s wrong turn at the sight of the Sun’s chariot drawn by seven horses conforms to this tradition. Though the modern child is deeply influenced by the cartoon worlds, the folk customs always speak of a great attachment between grandchild and grandmother. Therefore, Acharjee’s rainbow is grandmother’s rainbow and grandson is her seven colours.

In the poem Asamar Pahar-Parbat aru Simanta (The Hills-Mountains and Borders of Assam), Acharjee reflects the nostalgia for the glorious past and the feeling of a necessity of documenting the existence of national consciousness or identity. He does so by articulating the richness of resources of the hilly areas and the life-spirit of the different tribes living in these parts of greater Assam.

S. J. Sackett in his research article “Poetry and Folklore: Some Points of Affinity” (The Journal of American Folklore Vol. 77, No. 304 (Apr. - Jun., 1964), pp. 143-153) writes: “Similar devices have similar functions, whether they are found in folklore or in literature, we can perhaps use our understanding of its functions in literature.” Acharjee’s poems can also be best studied if we follow the observations of S. J. Sackett. For instance, in the present poem he says:

*Aphala Bhangoa Daphalar gat hezar hatir ball,*

*Dakhin pubat Patkai pahar Naga Chinghowar thal.* (501)

(The strength of a thousand elephants in the hilltribes of Daphala/ In the south east lies the hill Patkai as the place of Naga Chingpho)

Here the use of the metaphor *hezar hatir ball* (power of thousand elephants) to show the energy of the tribe Daphala (Assamese alternative to mean the Nishi tribes of Arunachal Pradesh) and the description of the different tribes, hills etc. bears the attributes of a riddle with the title of the poem as an answer. Again, though his poem *Mousumi! Mousumi!* (Monsoon! Monsoon!) focuses on the science behind the monsoon, yet many of the stanzas are written as riddles and
focuses on pseudo scientific lore about the weather, plants and animals- constituent elements of folklore proper. Acharjee writes:

Raije Dawar mate,  Bhekulir baiya pate,
Gase kande hat tuli, “Aha Megh Aha” buli. (501)

(People invites cloud, arranges marriage for frogs/ with raised hands trees cry out, saying “Come cloud come.”)

This celebration of Bhekulir Biya (Frog-Marriage) is a form of folk ritual, which we still find in many parts of India. The common folk beliefs such as “monsoon as thief” taking away the waters of the world making the lands barren, and lingered stay of monsoon as causing Mahakal (havoc) have also found excellent literary expression in this poem. The description of folk customs is at the heart of another poetic work Baramah (The Twelve Months). The poem narrates different folk customs observed in the different months of the Assamese calendar beginning with Bohag and ending with Chot. After giving description of the new leaves in trees and sounds of melodious birds in a romantic vein, Acharjee continues to write about Bohag:

Barhamthuri Kathalar Muci Husari Karir khel
Keteki Kapau hate hate loi kutumar Biyani-mel.
Suruj kakaye Ramdhenu bhangi jahar patile pang
Bardoichilai mitir khalehi, Rangalir Bihuwan. (502)

(Holding leaves of Barhamthuri, and green jackfruit, we play Husari- Kari/ with orchids like Keteki-Kapou in hands the relatives gossip/ the sun breaking the rainbow heralds the summer / Bordoichila visits relatives, and it is time for gifts and festivities of Bohag Bihu)

Here, Acharjee’s mention of Barhamthuri, Kathalar Muci (green jackfruit) , Husari (a party of singers and dancers going about from house to house during Bohag Bihu) Karir khel( Kowri shell – folk game), kutumar Biyani-mel (chit chat of relatives) are instances of folk traditions observed in the month of
Bohag. In the following stanza, the poet uses an Assamese proverb in order to describe the month of Jeth:

_Eneye Jethai Nasani tate Natiniyekar Biya._

_Barata kharere prithivi sijowa suruje maral diya._ (502)

(Aunt is already a dancer and it is her granddaughter’s marriage now/the earth is facing draught with the shining sun sharpened by its bright circle)

The Assamese proverb _Eneye Burhi Nasani tate Nitiniyekar Biya_ (the old woman is already a dancer and it is her granddaughter’s marriage) that refers to finding an occasion to do something by the ever enthusiast, is hybridized by Acharjee as he replaces _Burhi_ (old woman) by _Jethai_ (aunt). Again, _Barata khar_ (twelve drought) is a folk belief that there are always twelve droughts in the month of _Jeth_ and the _suruje maral diya_ (appearance of a circular halo round the sun during the month of _Jeth_ is an omen that presage a drought like condition) is a part folk belief too. Again, Acharjee mentions the indigenous fruits like _Jamu_ (a sweet fruit), _Leteku_ (a kind of acid fruit, Baccareua sapida), _Paniyal_ (a kind of plum: Flacourtia cataphracta) etc. to tell about the rainy season heralded by the third month of the Assamese calendar _Ahar_. The line _Ahare sathat ahar karile Saone dharile maan_ (the month of _Ahar_ eats in the _Sath_ Ambubachi time), _Sawon_ bestowed its honour) is truly a metaphor used by Acharjee to show the folk ways of describing seasons. This poem also abounds in folk elements narrating agricultural activities. For instance, the _Paiita_ (boiled rice kept overnight) _Bhadiya_ (born or produced in the month of _Bhada_), _Lakshmi_ (the Hindu Goddess Lakshmi), or the pronouns from the Assamese folklife like _Ahina_ (born in the month of _Ahin_), _Ghilachakaliya Dauni_ (the reaper with round and flat hair knot like _Ghila_- round flat seeds of a wild creeper, Entada scandens), _Magha_ (belonging to the month _Magh_, born in the month of _Magh_), etc. refers to some of the still extensively used folk habits and symbols. The poem _Baramah_ is also replete with folk beliefs associated with the _Kati Bihu_ and _Magh Bihu_. Acharjee writes:
.....Khabaloi nai, katiya Kangali Bihu,

Mrigapahu chara Tulsi-ialat bantigasake janso. (503)

(Nothing to eat, during poor thrusting Kati Bihu/ offering light under the Tulsi plant under which deer graze)

Dokmokalite hilo phutil. Mezi uthil jwali

Sakolo raize pranam janale agani-ahuti dhali. (503)

(Firecrackers blazed in the dawn, Mezi lighted with fire/ all the public prayed the lord of Agni offering oblation to the deity.)

Here, the prayers under scared tree Tulsi in the Kati Bihu and prayers to the Lord Agni in the Magh Bihu are age old religious folk rituals. Grazing of the deer under the Tulsi plants is also a mythical folk belief prevalent in this province.

In fact, the traditional significance of all the twelve months of the Assamese calendar like Bohag, Jeth, Ahar, Saon, Bhada, Ahin, Kati, Aghon, Puh, Magh, Phagun and Chot are lucidly expressed in the poem through the depiction of unique folk life of Assam related to these months. For instance, the month of Bohag is considered an auspicious month for tying the nuptial knot and the month of Jeth is a month of hot weather and the same is expressed in Acharjee’s Baramah in a revealing way:

Kharate Patile Bahagir Biya Grismrajar mat

Enete Jethar Jaithai ahil, garamat nai tat. (503)

(In the opinion of king of hot weather, Bhagai got married in the draught and in the meanwhile the bearer of the Jeth came with pricking hot weather)

Further, different folk customs like celebration of Janmastami (Birthday of Lord Krishna), Durga Puja etc. also finds delineation in the poem. This celebration is a form of folklore, which we find still existing in different parts of India.

Acharjee’s poems like Axom aru Meghalyayar Pradhan Thaibilak (The important Places of Assam and Meghalaya), Kiya Bikhyat? (Why Famous?), Nana Thai Nam Nai (many places without names) are storehouse of different place
names of Assam. Here in these poems Acharjee not only narrates the significance of the place names, but he also offers poetic exuberance in narrating the customs and traditions of these places.

His poem *Axorar Nadibilak- Brhmaputrar Biya* (*The Rivers of Assam-the Marriage of the Brahmaputra*) is deeply rooted in the folklife of Assam. The poem foregrounds an array of folk rituals relating to marriage, marriage gifts, peasant’s life, folk instruments, etc. to draw a pen picture of the different tributaries of the mighty river Brahmaputra. For example he writes:

\[
\text{Pagladiai Senai bajale Manahe bajale Banhi;}
\]

\[
\text{Champawatiye phulmala dile Saral Bhangai dai, (506)}
\]

(The river Pagladiya plays Shehnai, Manas plays Flute; Champawati brings garlands and Saral Bhangga brings curd.)

The narration of folklore and folklife of a place is incomplete without the description of the natural resources. Acharjee’s collection of poems *Ramdhenu Kar Dhenu* would have also been incomplete had Acharjee not included his poems like *Kath Aru Banh, Barasun! Barasun!*, *Charai, Baraichila*, etc. These poems are rich not only in terms of their enriching information of the flora and fauna of Assam but also for the depiction of the folklore related to them. For instance, in the poem *Bardoichila*, Acharjee narrates the age old folk belief of *Burhiai* (grandmother):

\[
\text{Burhiaiye kole- “ Bardoichila sahurar gharaloi jay,}
\]

\[
\text{Natun Bowari ulati ahise khange rage eko nai. (509)}
\]

(Grandmother says- Bardoichila goes to father-in-law’s house/ new daughter-in-law returns with anger of beyond measure).

In fact, the folk stories related to the Assamese folklife are many in number and Acharjee never spares a single occasion to mention these stories. Therefore, his last poem of the collection *Sonmani Keni Jowa?* also makes a reference to grandmother’s stories.
Burhiaiye sadhu kaba topaniye mati niba

Tetiya akou moi Bardoichila hai

Nasi-bagi urj jam saponar desholori. (509)

(Grandmother will tell story/ sleep will call / then I again become Bardoichila and will dance away to another country.)

In Debendranath Acharjya Rachana Samagra, commenting on the collection of poems entitled Ramdhenu Kar Dhenu, Prafulla Kotoky writes:

The act of writing poems like this is impossible without an intimacy with nature and also an inherent creativity. The poet brings together nature and Archimedes’ theory with a story-teller’s deftness. Naturally, one is reminded of the writer’s mastery over language. These compositions appear to have been written with the view of enhancing children’s imaginative and expressive power. (Preface)

Thus, though Acharjee’s poems are not directly documentation of folklores and folklife, yet the delineation of the elements of folklore and folklife are easily visible in these verses.

5.4 Debendranath Acharjee’s Story Book Hatipati Sikimiki

Debendranath Acharjee’s story collection Hatipati Sikimiki (the Glittering Milky Way) which includes ten short stories is based on pseudo scientific lore about the weather, plants and animals. Akhil Chakravorty in his article entitled Hatipati Sikimiki Aru Ramdhenu Kardhenut Debendranath Acharya published in Debendra Nath Acharya: Sristi Aru Chetana rightly says:

As his Children’s Story/ Tales Hatipati Sikimiki will remain as a milestone. Every story is interesting.the stories are enriched with scientific analysis. The speaker of the stories are neither any special
persons nor the authors himself. Not even the grandfather or grandmother. The character of the stories is itself sometime assumes the role of a speaker. (66)

Truly, this collection may be studied and be explored from folkloristic point of view to ascertain how deeply the stories are rooted in the folk life of Assam. The first story Maram Aru Hanhi (Love and Laughter) explores the pseudo scientific lore of Fulkunwari (The Flower Queen). When the child Tultul worries about his planting of Jasmine Flower, Fulkunwari appears in his dream to tell him that the plant will survive because of his love and smile only. This very notion of vibrancy of plants when it comes into contact with the planters is a folk belief of all Assamese people. Again, in the story Hatipati Chikimiki Nasi Nasi Jay (Glittering Milky Way Goes on Dancing), Acharjee explores oral traditions for tales that can stimulate personal imagination. Here the grandmother narrates a story about the Milky Way to her granddaughter Runjun and reveals many scientific facts of the universe through revealing folk beliefs of the Milky Way. Acharjee also depicts the common habit of uttering the name of Saint Narada thrice to do away with evils associated with the fall of shooting stars on earth. Acharjee’s story Phuli Utha Balloonar Dare (Like Blown up Balloons) for children is written in the light of Greek mythology. In Greek mythology, Daedalus the architect made two pairs of wings out of wax and feathers for himself and his son namely Icarus in a bid to escape from their imprisonment in the island of Crete. Daedalus tried his wings first, but before taking off, he warned his son neither to fly too close to the sun, nor too close to the sea, but to chase his path of flight. Trounced by the giddiness that flying, Icarus soared into the sky, but in the process he came too close to the sun, which due to the heat melted the wax. Icarus kept flapping his wings with no feathers and fell into the sea.

Acharjee, however in this story uses the metaphor of blown up balloons with hydrogen gas to reveal old Assamese folk saying: Ahankare patanar mul (Arrogance brings downfall). Indeed, Phuli Utha Balloonar Dare (Like Blown up Balloons) written in the light of Greek mythology is not certainly what Richard M. Dorson in his Folklore and Fakelore Essays Toward a Discipline of Folk Studies
bluntly called "fakelore": the representation of materials written by professional authors as reproductions of the oral traditions of historical and ethnic communities. Instead, this story can be termed "processed folk": loose adaptations to contemporary literary and moral fashions.

In another story Akamilar Biloai (Ill fate of the Idle) Acharjee brings the popular story of a Cuckoo bird to tell the children about the idleness of the bird and its resultant ill fate. Here, Acharjee mentions the Assamese folk phrase Burha Salika (an old Myna) to reveal the idle behaviour of cuckoo bird in contrast to the active lives of Tuni (Red Munia), Tokora (Baya Weaver), Barhoitoka (Coppersmith Barbet). Though the Cuckoo finds success in cheating the crow and in using its nest for rearing its young ones, yet Acharjee does not use any word of admiration for the cuckoo's cunningness and instead draws our attention to the impending doom for its idle works. While Acharjee describes the scientific facts behind the natural elements like rain, sun and wind, personifying them to reveal the interdependence of natural elements in his story Ejak Barasun, Echerenga Rod. Esati Batah (a shower, a ray of sun-light, a wind), he is adroit enough to foreground the activities of migratory birds like Galabandh (frigate Bird) in Halodhiya Choraiye Bao-dhaan Khay (The Yellow Birds Feed on Bao rice) and brings to the fore the Assamese nursery rhyme-

_Halodhiya Choraiye bao-dhaan khay_

_Saudor puteke nao meli jay;_

_Nawe bole tulubhutung._

_Bothai bole bao._

_Gadhulite gadhulite Daba Bajao. (509)_

(The yellow birds feed on _bao-rice/ the merchant's son sails off /boats keep trailing/paddles keep spinning/ every evening we play the drum).

Here, Acharjee not only mentions about _Bao-dhaan_, a deep-water paddy that produces a particular type of iron-rich red rice, which forms an integral part of Assam's food habits, but also uses the rhymes that have been sung from
generations after generations Halodhiya Choraiye bao-dhaan khay… to bring home the moral lesson of reaching home early.

Thus, through his stories for children Acharjee explains many scientific facts behind the pseudo scientific lore about the weather, plants and animals while at the same time revives a number of oral folklore.

5.5 Debendranath Acharjee’s Posthumous Collection Padya Padya

The living language of folk literature constitutes Acharjee’s poems in his posthumous collection Padya Padya (Poetry Poetry). This collection includes poems that are based on the traditional forms of knowledge regarding Assamese food habits, lore on nature and animals and other proverbials. Here, the use of folk language through traditional usage forms the historical consciousness of the child and leads to cultural unity, by its direct relationship to the age – old Assamese sayings. Acharjee’s Padya Padya reminds us of the Application Guidelines of New York State Council on the Arts Application Guidelines (1994, p.51.) which says:

Folk arts are traditional cultural expressions through which a group maintains and passes on its shared way of life. They express a group’s sense of beauty, identity and values. Folk arts are usually learned informally through performance, by example or in oral tradition among families, friends, neighbors and co-workers rather than through formal education. A living cultural heritage, folk arts link the past and present. Never static, folk arts change as they are adapted to new circumstances while they maintain their traditional qualities. (folkarts/index.web)

Acharjee derives his ingredients for his poems in Padya Padya directly from the dynamic interactions among human beings in communal-traditional
performance contexts rather than from the stiff lines and fossilized structures of mechanical instruction or bureaucratized education, or through the relatively steady inputs from the classical traditions. For instance, in the poem *Japjarl* (Scribbles) he writes:

\[
\text{Bhinihi misiri nikini kinili siki dee misimi tita}
\text{Liriki bidari pitiki pitiki titiki titiki laga;}
\text{Gami piti tini sipinik lihiri rihar dahi,}
\text{Listi likhili kisti pihili khisiri gilili bahi;}
\text{Kharisa pihili nimakh nidili pitika titiki hol. (541)}
\]

(Oh, brother in law! instead of buying rock candy, you paid a coin to buy bitter *Mishimi* root/that tastes bitter even in touching; carefully thinking you have given ‘Riha’ yam to three spinners, you wrote the list, ground in the mortar and swallowed Rice-Lentils kept overnight; mixed bamboo shoot pickle without salt and the mashed potato became bitter)

In the poem *Chakradhar Biloi- Jatowa Thaas* (Miseries of Chakradhar – Idioms) Acharjee uses some well known Assamese idioms to depict the miseries of Chakradhar. For instance, he uses idioms like *Bhtar oparat danah para* (From frying pan to fire) *Phutkar fen* (in vain), *dolar bagari* (rolling stone) etc. to give a message that the stored wealth of a miser always meets ill fate. Prafulla Kotoky in *Debendranath Achariya Rachana Samagra* writes “There is not a second instance of such a poem in our language.” (Preface)

On the other hand, his poem *Beberibang* (Nonsense Utterance) depicts some traditional oppositional and contradictory sayings prevalent in Assamese like *Akashat Sang Pata* (day dreams), *Gasat Garu Utha* (climbing of trees by cows), *Sape Neulak Khay* (Snake eats Mongoose) etc. Though nonsensical in utterance, these words have been extensively used by the Assamese people over a long period of time to give warning about matters which are next to impossible.

In the poem *Artthaheen* (Meaningless), Acharjee rhetorically questions the Assamese nomenclature of living beings found in the Assamese environment. Here, he adroitly posits the folk revelation that all are guilty but only one is blamed
as he says *Sakolo Choraiye Mas Khay, Teo Masroka Kiya Bole?* (All birds catch fish, but why then only Kingfisher’s name?). In *Melengar Mel* (Meeting in Meleng), Acharjee criticizes the tradition of evening meetings of the young people that is generally considered as wastage of energy and time in meaningless activities, and hence he uses the folk phraseology for them *Paduli Sunga* (Gossip Monger). In *Siyalar Bejali* (Healing Practice by the Fox) Acharjee gives vivid picture of the unscientific healing process practiced by the false healers of Assam. He writes:

*Rajar dehat rogar bah.*

*Mou edhanire khowai thaka.*

*Tetiya raksha pariba pran.*

* Lagat sijaba Guir bhari*

*Jwarar bhamak keniba jaba.* (543)

(The king is suffering from fever/ feed him a little honey/ life will be saved/ boil the legs of Iguana/ fever will go away)

Again, in the poems like *Mas* (Fish), *Banxaak* (leafy vegetables) and *Bandarab* (Herbal medicine), Acharjee gives a catalogue of ethnic Assamese culinary with the extensive and varied use of fish, leafy vegetables and herbs respectively. Through the narration of these indigenous food items, Acharjee digs out the cultural roots and uses them as a basis for developing a national sense among children. For instance, in the poem *Mas* (Fish), he mentions many of the indigenous fishes of Assam (many of which are not even seen by the present generation) like *Kandhuli* (Feather back), *Karoti* (Ganges river gizzard), *Laupati* (Silver hatchet chela), *Selkona* (Large razorbelley), *Mouah/ Bariala* (Jaya), *Darikana* (Flying barb), *Silgharia/ Lasu* (Brahmaputra labeo), *Kurhi/ Kuria* (Kuria labeo), *Lasu/ Loannee* (Pangasia labeo) etc. Again in the poems *Banxaak* (leafy vegetables) and *Bandarab* (Herbal Medicine), Acharjee informs the children about many leafy vegetables and herbs which bear unique characteristics as indigenous plants of Assam. Mention may be made of *Helonchi* (Enhydra fluctuans), *Tita bhekuri* (Solanum indicum), *Ponownowa* (Boerhaavia repens), *Bhotuwa* or
Jilnil (Chenopodium album), Mesandori (Houttuynia cordata), Morolia (Stellaria media), Bhedailata (Paederia foetida), Modhusuleng (Polygonum caespitosum) etc. Assamese people have been traditionally using these herbs as medicines for their healing property.

Further, his poems Swarbarna (Vowels) and Byanjan Barna (Consonants) are wonderful expressions of traditional Assamese sayings used in a playful manner for imparting education to children. Here, Acharjee uses a completely heterogeneous set of objects placed against one another in order to illustrate the use of letters of the alphabet. Here, indigenous fruits, vegetables, birds, plants, various agricultural tools and also nature figure prominently as indispensable parts of nursery rhymes.

5.6 Debendranath Acharjee’s World for Children

In his works written primarily for children, Acharjee conceives a world of children full of mirth and hearty laughter mostly in a language which can essentially be described as folk language. Also, his works for children are firmly rooted in tradition and history which facilitates the children to undergo a primeval cultural.

In fact, Acharjee is successful in reviving laughter in the children’s literature exploiting important features from folklore and folklife of Assam. In this regard we can also say that the adult discovers in the laughter of the children his own lost laughter. In his introduction to Karl Simrock’s Deutsches Kinderbuch (1857) Corridi writes: “every time I open this book I feel inspired to leap, to dance, to cry out loud.” He considers Simrock’s anthology of old children’s rhymes “a monotonous event in universal history”. He too conceives of a children’s world, with its own tradition and history which are essentially the history of humankind in general, “The child binds things of heaven and earth together like beads on a string, and springs happily about with his new toy.” This observation also holds good for the children’s works of Debendranath Acharjee. With Acharjee’s children’s works, children can make a verbal play with language, with primeval cultural ethos. The affinity of children and common people with the
folklore and folklife is well known. The common factor is no longer their ignorance; rather it is their naïve genius.

Truly, a child grows and absorbs cultural elements from his cultural heritage, i.e. the “culture” and wisdom of the people to which he belongs, formulating thereby his cultural identity. The development of a child’s cultural identity is also directly impacted by the process of socialization of the child within the particular cultural group in which he lives. Clearly, Acharjee’s works for the children of Assam are attempts to acquaint them with Assamese cultural identity, which depends each time on the group with which the child interacts at any given time, as folk culture – and culture in general – is that identity which is formed by the structural incorporation of cultural influences of other people, assuming thereby new outlooks. Therefore, Acharjee’s narration of folk culture is an important factor for the concept of Assamese cultural identity, which seals and keeps alive the soul of Assamese people.

The phrase “The Child is the father of Man” first appeared in a poem, “My Heart Leaps Up” by William Wordsworth in 1802. While using the phrase, Wordsworth suggested that as a child he felt much joy while looking at the rainbow, and as an adult he still feels the same joyfulness and pleasure while looking at the rainbow in the sky. Thus, a thing of the past that delighted him when as a child still delights him as an adult. And, he hopes that he would continue to be delighted with the beauty and bounties of nature.

Through our analysis of Acharjee’s children’s works, we can say that Acharjee in writing of his children’s literature, not only brought about a hardy hybridization of the literate tradition with the oral, but reached back to memories of beauties and bounties of nature (found in folk culture) from his own childhood, so achieving originality in an unusually literal sense of the term. This was not because he wanted to write for children here. In drawing on the folk elements to which he had been exposed as a child, his aim was rather to re-invigorate Assamese literature.
Works Cited


https://nysca.org/public/guidelines/folk_arts/index.htm

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