

Chapter - I

Introduction

A serious attempt to study on a philosophical endeavor of a special genre of literature, of a specific geographical and linguistic region requires methods of sociological and philosophical interest. Here, in this thesis the genre of literature is the oral narrative literature, more specifically the Assamese oral folktales that are collected and compiled by Lakshminath Bezbaroa (1864-1938). The name 'Bezbaroa' signifies an authority in the Assamese literary, linguistic, cultural and sociological circle. Bezbaroa is the pioneer of Assamese literature and known as the *Sahityarathee* or the charioteer of Assamese literature. Lakshminath Bezbaroa pioneered various literary branches in the Assamese language in a crucial period of Assamese language in the nineteenth century.

In Assam when somebody talks about folktales, it is definitely about the popular tales of *Burhi Air Sadhu*. *Burhi Air Sadhu* and the two other collections *Kaka-deota* *Aru Nati Lora* and *Junuka* are well known and frequently told and listened folktales in Assam. Both Bezbaroa and his collections of folktales are close to the common people and these have immense influential capacity. Children grow to their adulthood by listening to these tales and their moral literacy begins with the lessons of morality hidden in these tales. As according to Bezbaroa, these tales are called the *Sadhukatha* or the honest and good stories having moral lessons or the tales told by pious person, it becomes necessary to judge these tales whether these tales own the moral values or not. Folktales are called the moral tales, but no any effort is making to judge these tales till date. So, it is a keen endeavor to study these tales to justify these tales as moral tales.

1.1. Introduction to Bezbaroa and his Contribution

Before going to the issue of morality of the tales by Lakshminath Bezbaroa, it is important to know about the person first. Lakshminath Bezbaroa was an illustrious son of India, and a member of the galaxy of the great men and women who raised high the glory of India during the last century. (Chatterji, *The Nineteenth* 6). This great son of India and Assam was born like a legendary figure in a boat on the mighty Brahmaputra near a village Ahatguri of Assam in a full moon night of November in the year 1864. That full moon was of the pious *Lakshmi-puja*, so his name was casted as Lakshminath. His father Dinanath Bezbaroa was a judicial officer of Assam Government Service. His mother Thaneswari was his father's second wife as the dignitaries of that time was having two wives.

Lakshminath spent his childhood in the Vaishnavite holy place Barpeta and this environment influenced him a lot. Another influence of this kind came to him as his father was a devotee of the Vaishnava cult and the saints from the Kamalabari *Sattra*¹ used to visit their home very frequently. The practice and performance of the religious music and traditional dramas and reading of the *Bhakti*² literature by the saints Sankardeva and Madhabdeva was a regular job in his household. Lakshminath was born to it.

After he passed the matriculation examination Bezbaroa went to Calcutta (present Kolkata) and started his college education in Ripon College. Though there were many ups and downs in his education life, yet Calcutta became the workshop of his life. His intellectual life begins with the establishment of Assamese Language

¹ A monastery of the Vaishnavas of Assam

² Devotion to God

Improvement Society, *Asamiya Bhasar Unnati-Sadhini Sabha* in 1888. Next year in 1889 with his friend Chandra Kumar Agarwala started a new Assamese journal *Jonaki*. It was the forwarding step for the Assamese life, language and literature and later on it becomes a giant leap to the great renaissance.

Nineteenth century was the most significant period of Indian history for cultural development and identity assertion. This period witnessed how a colonial power became the ruler of not only the greater part of India but the ruler of the Indian minds too. (ibid. 1) This period also witnessed the thrust for an intellectual grab against the colonial seize. Lakshminath Bezbaroa was one of the leading figures of the mission of nationalism. Bezbaroa's contribution for nationalistic movement was observed by two facets- as an Indian and as an Assamese. As an Indian, he had worked for the Indian National congress, and as an Assamese he served his region in the field of culture, literature and language. Before him it was Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan, who tried to introduce the modern knowledge store to the Assamese speaking younger generation by translating the Geographical articles from English to Assamese under the title *Asomiya Lorar Mitra* (Sarma, *Lakshminath Bezbaroa* Preface). It was not only the mere collection of translated scholarly articles; rather it was an approach to open up the store of the national history and geography for the future generation. Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan was the first among the humanists of nineteenth century. Gunabhiram Barua and Hemchandra Barua, the compiler of the Assamese dictionary *Hemkosh*, carried forward the movement of letters and the principle of humanism which was initiated by Dhekiyal Phukan. Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan, and Hem Barua were followed by Bezbaroa who tried to explore and renovate the rich Assamese folk cultural heritage. Bezbaroa's dialogue and discourse was an attempt to establish a new society and identity by dismissing the social hierarchy through the assimilation of the classic and

folk resources. This attempt by him is perceptible in all of his writings, serious or satire. It seemed that his mission of regional nationalism was inspired by the philosophy of regional Neo-Vaishnavism and the European moderate philosophy. Lakshminath Bezbaroa's contribution was so valuable for the country that Suniti Kumar Chatterji had included him in the band of the great 'writers and thinkers, poets and novelists, historians and essayists, artist and scientists' of Bengal during the period of 25 years from 1850 to 1875, even though he was from Assam and wrote in Assamese. (Chatterji, *The Nineteenth* 4)

Bengal was the most significant centre of British rule in India. Consequently, the intellectuals from Bengal had been in a forefront of a new socio cultural awakening. Furthermore, they began to enjoy a prominent position in the national level. British rulers observing the smartness of the Bengalis and observing the similarities between the languages of Assam and Orissa, introduced Bengali language as the official and administrative language in both the regions along with English. Though this mistake was rectified later on, Bengali was sustained from 1826 to 1873 as the administrative language and the children, at school, were taught through the Bengali language instead of their vernacular language, Assamese.

Under such a circumstance, most of the nineteenth century Assamese writers tried to explore and inculcate the new ideas and thoughts of the new age of the Indian Renaissance through their writings. It was a conscious effort to understand and preserve the basic Assamese culture and tradition under the realm of the linguistic identity. This mission was started from Culcutta by the intellectual Assamese students.

Bezbaroa took initiative to rejuvenate the Assamese identity, language and culture. As a part of the new awakening, he, with his two companions Chandra Kumar

Agarwala and Hemchandra Goswami formed a society *Asamiya Bhasha Unnati Sadhini Sabha* for the development of the Assamese language. They started writing in Assamese and produced most valuable kind of pioneering works in Assamese in the epoch making journals *Jonaki* and *Bahi*³ under the editorship of Lakshminath Bezbaroa. Under the leadership of Gunabhiram Barua and young Lakshminath Bezbaroa and Chandra Kumar Agarwalla *Jonaki*, the monthly journal appeared in 1889. In this journal, the Assamese folk culture and religious tradition came into limelight with the assimilation of the traditions of nineteenth century, western culture and the Bengali tradition (Barua, *The Road* 33). For their profound interest, Assamese language and literature was flourished during the last decades of the nineteenth century.

Among his contemporaries, Bezbaroa was the prominent figure in many forms of literature in Assamese language such as poetic literature, humorous and satirical writings, novels, dramas, short stories and folktales and several volumes of serious essays which are regarded as his outstanding contributions to the Assamese language and literature. His works brought about an intellectual and spiritual renaissance in Assam. His autobiography *Mor Jivan Sowaran* is a significant contribution of the writer, vibrantly reflecting the contemporary cultural and social attitude of the upper stratum of the nineteenth century Assamese society.

Bezbaroa, at a time, was an imitator of the western '*Sahabi*'⁴ culture and way of life. But, he had a profound respect for his own culture and tradition that was innate to him for his childhood environment. Being inspired by his ardent emotion, in the later period, he employed himself in the task of reconstructing the past of Assam with the help of his writings. In this effort, he gave emphasis mainly on three basic heritage

³ The monthly periodical published from 1909 to 1940.

⁴ Gentle man like; more significantly like a British Gentleman.

fields that were the Assamese religious tradition that is the neo-Vaishnavism, the political history of Assam, and finally the folk tradition of Assam. (ibid. 33)

Bezbaroa was a great patriot serving his nation and nationality through his contribution to the field of language and literature. Though his life was spent in the midst of the Bengali culture and tradition in West Bengal, he earnestly wished to serve mother Assam and his native people. He recuperated the Aryan origin Assamese language by assimilating the native dialects and speech from the native communities. He collected folktales and compiled three volumes- *Burhi Air Sadhu*, 1912 (Grandmother's Tale); *Kaka-deota Aru Nati Lora*, 1913 (Grandfather and Grandson); *Junuka*, 1913 (a rattle, small plaything). The folktale collection *Burhi Air Sadhu* by Bezbaroa is a popular literary and folklore specimen intensely used for multi-faceted analysis by the scholastic personalities.

Contribution to Folklore

Among his huge literary contributions to diverse fields, a very special effort catches the attention of the serious intellectuals that is his contribution to the field of folklore in general and the oral tale or the folktales in particular. Bezbaroa collected orally transmitted tales from the common people of Assam, and after some serious analysis, retold them in black and white and compiled them in three above mentioned volumes: *Burhi Air Sadhu*, *Kaka-deota Aru Nati Lora* and *Junuka*. Bezbaroa was the first among the short story writers, 'which is distinct from a legend, an anecdote or a tale'. (Goswami, *Lakshminath Bezbaroa* 97). Apart from the modern short-story tradition, he was also seriously involved in collecting the primitive folktales. This effort by Bezbaroa to rejuvenate and reconstruct the past by working in the field of folk tradition was the marvelous one in that period of time. In the contemporary period a

good number of research works on folklore, including folktales are carried out by the researchers from the fields of social science research. But, at the time of Bezbaroa it was a very rare approach in the Assamese language.

Bezbaroa's opinion on folk life and folklore was quite different from his predecessors. Haliram Dhekiyal Phukan and Gunabhiram Barua had a very low opinion of the folk cultural nuances of Assam like *Bihu*⁵ Song, and *Bihu* dances. But, unlike his predecessors, Bezbaroa had a great regard and high estimation of the folk culture of his land that manifest in all of his literary works. Very frequently he uses the folk speeches and proverbs in his short stories, dramas and novels and also in his poetic works. He was the first to compose poems in ballad style and his *Dhanbar-Ratani*, *Bhadoir Bilap* and *Ratanir Bejar* conform to the style of old Assamese ballads.

He collected sixty seven tales in both prose and verse forms and compiled them in his three volumes *Burhi Air Sadhu*, *Kaka-deota Aru Natilora* and *Junuka*; but two other folktales, *Ghar Pata Kaka* and *Mula khua Burha* are not included in these volumes for some unknown reasons. These tales have been included in the category of short stories, even though they possess the characteristic features of folktales. These two tales were published in the journal *Jonaki* (forth year, vol. 2).

Bezbaroa's main aim was to revive the Assamese identity and to generate the spirit of humanism by reconstructing the past and by cultivating the present and by assimilating both the eastern and western ideas without doing any harm to its basic principles. He had a unique style of telling the tales. It is because of his choice of words, his style of telling and the use of the speech of the very common people. He himself had said in the preface to *Burhi Air Sadhu*, that after the collection of the tales,

⁵ The main festival of Assam

he rewrote them in a popular story-telling style, which is experienced by him in his prosperous childhood by the story-tellers of his life Rabi Kaka (one of his grandfathers) and the *Deka-Satradhikar* of Jorabari *Sattra* (Bezbaroa, *Mor Jivan* 03-125). Rabi Kaka, Rabinath Majudalar Baroa, from Jorhat, was Bezbaroa's childhood friend and guardian and also the store of tales and fictions from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and from the *Puranas* and also the tales of kings, queens, ghosts and of other supernatural objects. The grandfather also told young Lakshminath and his childhood companions the tales of three old men. However, Bezbaroa did not retell these tales in black and white in any of his three folktale collections or in other part of his contributions.

He had a unique art of storytelling that is why the tales of Bezbaroa sounds that 'countless Assamese story-tellers of yore have come alive'. After reading or listening to his tales, it can be estimated that Assam had been performing a long and rich tradition of story-telling, which was kept alive by the parents, grandparents, the other elderly persons and even the little children of the grand Assamese society (Nath, *The World* 19) of pre British invasion. In the chaotic condition of local global nexus, Bezbaroa tried to retrieve the Assamese folktales from the intangible form of oral to a tangible and concrete written form. His three collected volumes are not the mere collections of folktales for the amusement of the little children, but it was an attempt of holding up the distinctiveness of the unique Assamese language, culture and tradition. His sole intention has been reflected at the pages of his preface to *Burhi Air Sadhu*.

The preface to *Burhi Air Sadhu* reflects his mastery in the field of folklore and folktale. Here, he elegantly offers the definition of folklore (he used the term 'folklore' instead of 'folktale') covering its scope, function and texture. He pointed out that the Assamese term *Sadhukatha* implies a narration, narrated with the purpose to teach a

moral lesson. Instead, there are many Assamese tales without any direct moral lesson. It is observed that even in the collection of *Burhi Air Sadhu*, there are only a few tales that have a direct moral in it. He also tried to catch the attention to the distinctive nature of the Assamese folktales, even though some similarities are observed in the genre of folktales from different regions of the world. He very firmly opined on the distinctiveness of folktales of different region, language and culture instead of its basic similarities. He even forwarded some explanations on account of the reason behind the similarities among the folktales. First, the folktales are so old that they evoked when the Indo-Europeans were sharing same culture as a single group. Second, some Bohemian tales used to travel from region to region by words of mouth, and in assimilation with the new language and culture the tales achieve a new and distinctive local form. And for the third reason Bezbaroa emphasizes on the common human thought. Men think alike, so tales from different regions may be similar. Here he talks about the commonality of human imagination. From the study of the preface to *Burhi Air Sadhu*, it is observed that Bezbaroa is not only the mere collector of folktales; rather he offered a scholastic study on folktales. For this, he studied the contemporary folklore scholarships of Europe and other regions of India very well.

In the preface, Bezbaroa provided a scientific commentary on definition, nature, origin, classification and function of folktales. Though he used the term 'folklore' instead of 'folktale', his commentary provides his in-depth study on the world of folklore and folktale studies. A vivid analysis on '*Sadhukatha*' the Assamese term for folktale has been incorporated in it. According to him, the term *Sadhukatha* means moral or honest tale or the teaching of saints or pious people. As the main function of folktale is entertainment or amusement, the moral values reflected in folktales, especially in the collected folktales of Bezbaroa is worth studying from the perspective

of philosophical and social interest in the context of the contemporary techno-centric global social phenomena. For this purpose an analysis is made on the three collected volumes of Bazbaroa namely *Burhi Air Sadhu*, *Kaka-deota Aru Nati Lora*, and *Junuka*.

1.2. Definition, Classification and Function of Folktale

Folklore genres, basically the folk narratives are original and primitive verbalization and socialization of human thought and emotion. Folklore preserves the social fabric of the society. As a component of folklore, folktale contributes to preserve culture and also seeks to entertain and educate the society. It presents and reflects culture, beliefs and values of the society. In everyday life, it is also used as a tool for communication, learning and entertainment in the rapidly changing world. A folktale is anonymous by nature as it evolved off the nature of people to tell and listen to tales and transmitted orally from generation to generation within the common people. It is universal in different countries in different forms putting on the local colour for a particular flavour.

The job of classifying folktales was first done by Edwin Sidney Hartland. In his work, *The Science of Fairy Tales*, Hartland divided fairy tales into two classes- sagas and *Marchen*. The significant feature of *Marchen* is wonder and the other; the sagas are having the elements of explanation and belief as determining factors. Another folklorist, von der Leyen classified the oral tales into two broad categories “Generally, we can say the saga is the simple picture, the *Marchen* is the complex one; that the saga aims at condensation and simplicity. The *Marchen* at lengthening and expansion; that in the saga is developed instruction and play, in the *Marchen* narration and play at the cost of instruction.” (Cited in Goswami, *Ballads and 81*)

Besides these classifications, Dean Thompson classified oral tales under the broad category of folktale into two broad classes: legend and *Marchen*. Again he classified legends as place legends, legends about persons, etiological tales or nature legends and tales of super naturals that represent real belief and legends of events. Under the category of *Marchen*, he included animal tales, supernatural tales, trickster tales and jokes (ibid. 83-84). Thompson's classification is done on subject matter.

Assamese folk literature is rich enough having all types of folktales. Apart from the above classifications of the great folklorists, the classification of folktales can be made on the ground of their functional aspects that are entertainment and elements of morality imbued in them. The present work is an attempt to distinguish the Assamese folktales according to its functional aspect. The three folktale collections by Lakshminath Bezbaroa have been selected for this purpose and illustrations of these works are done to furnish the categorization of folktales according to their functional aspects.

In his "Four Functions of Folklore" (1954), William Bascom comprehensively discussed about the functions of folklore and more particularly of the verbal form including folktale. Some of these functions are common to all genres of folklore and some are genre specific and these functions vary from culture to culture in terms of its significance and applicability.

The most significant function of folktale is amusement and entertainment. Another function of folk tales is to impart education, which sustains survival and survival is the first and foremost step towards civilization. But, in the introduction to *Burhi Air Sadhu* the compiler interpreted the meaning of the Assamese term for folktale '*Sadhukatha*' as 'honest story' or more appropriately 'moral story'. Therefore, it can be

said that moral function is another important function of folktale. This moral function of folktales is as primitive as the tale itself and even the modern and post modern literature have also been following this tradition. The tales are meant to be read for pleasure first, and then they offer some lessons for survival which may be practical and psychological. The moral lessons in a folktale are meant for preparing a morally sound personality.

1.3. Folktales as a Genre of Moral Literature

Though the folktales are signified as simple and spontaneous products opposed to complex, (Jolles, Andre, 1929, cited in Dorson) these are complex textually, contextually and structurally. According to Linda Degh, the folk narrative scholars are always in search of the answers to three basic questions: “what is the message of folktales? What are the forces that create, launch, disseminate, maintain, vary, corrupt, and reinforce them? What do they mean to their performers and their audience?” (Dorson, *Folklore and* 54). The present work is an enquiry based on the above mentioned first and the third questions.

Folktale and fairy tale or *Marchen* or oral tale is a sub-branch of the greater folklore genre. Folktale is an oral tradition having traditional morality within it. “For folktales are a faithful reflection of the world as it appeared to the primitive mind; and we may be sure that any idea which commonly occurs in them, however absurd it may seem to us, must once have been an ordinary article of belief” (Frazer, *The Golden* 875).

From the advent of the civilization, a way of life has been adopted by the human society and this ‘way of life’ is advocated as culture or folklore of a particular society. Folklore includes the wholesome knowledge of the common people gathered from sense experience and self perceptions. This knowledge includes the concept of right

and wrong, do's and don'ts. The concept of right and wrong, good and bad leads to the understanding of morality. Folktales are full of such conflicts between good and bad, right and wrong and honest and dishonest. These types of conflicts resulted to the judgment of morality in folktales and as such, they are called the moral tales. Exploration of these types of knowledge by the academicians in various fields of folklore makes it an interesting field of scholarship. With the passage of time, folktales have acquired innovative dimensions as an effective medium of entertainment and moral edification through advanced technology.

1.4. Literature Review

A survey of the relevant literature has been done and a good number of references were collected to start the research. The collected references were mostly on collections of folktales of different culture, society and region and some are on the functional and theoretical analysis of folktale and folklore. After completing an invigorating examination on Bezbaroa's life and his contribution to the field of folklore, the main survey of literature is done in two stages: at first, an investigation is carried out on the folktale studies done in different perspectives. Secondly, the survey focused on the chief concern of this thesis, the philosophical and theoretical literatures resting on both folktale and morality.

Works of Bezbaroa

The study on Bezbaroa is done in two phases: one is by exploring Bezbaroa's own writings and the other is by studying the literature of the other writers on Bezbaroa. The primary source of this thesis is Bezbaroa's three folktale collections respectively, *Burhi Air Sadhu* , *Kaka-deota Aru Nati Lora* and *Junuka*. Among these three, *Burhi Air Sadhu* has a special significance for its preface or introduction as

Bezbaroa is discovered here as an experienced folklorist for his speculative details on folklore/ folktale. In this introduction to *Burhi Air Sadhu*, Lakshminath Bezbaroa discussed on the following points:

- ✓ Different types of folktale
- ✓ Migration of folktale
- ✓ Methods of the collection of folktale
- ✓ The meaning of the Assamese term ‘*Sadhukatha*’ –this point leads to the function and significance of the Assamese folktale.

Bezbaroa is observed as a moralist for his collection of tales as a tool to teach moral values and for bunch of articles included in a small book *Bakhor* (1915) and *Kamot Krititva Labhibor Sanket* (1903). Among Bezbaroa’s writings, his autobiography *Mor Jivan Sowaran* is regarded as an important piece of literature to know his principle regarding the value of virtue and morality. This autobiography mirrors us the background of Bezbaroa’s personality as a moralist. The study on Bezbaroa’s writings is carried out very easily with the help of the six volumes of *Bezbaroa Rachanavali* edited by Nagen Saikia.

Works on Bezbaroa

A lot of books and edited books in both Assamese and English were found available on life and works of Lakshminath Bezbaroa which significantly helped in the study.

Lakshminath Bezbaroa the Sahityarathi of Assam an edited book by Maheswar Neog is a prolific collection of essays and articles by profound writers of India and

Assam on the life and work of Lakshminath Bezbaroa. It is a significant contribution to understand Bezbaroa.

Lakshminath Bezbaroa: Srijan aru Manan by Madan Sarma is another noteworthy work on Bezbaroa. It contains articles on *Burhi Air Sadhu* interpreted through recent theories of folk tales. Here, the author takes up one of the most controversial topics, concerning reconstruction and deconstruction of folktales.

Adhunik Asomiya Sahityar Aitihya aru Lakshminath Bezbaroa an edited book published by Gauhati University Publication includes two intuitive articles on folktales along with other articles on Bezbaroa.

Besides these works, articles, essays and news paper documents on Bezbaroa's life and work proved to be very helpful in understanding the subject.

Folktale Studies

Stith Thompson's *The Folktale* is the study on the great folktales from all over the world. This book has provided the theories on folktale along with the other scholastic studies on folktales. As the acknowledged authority of folktale studies he posed some questions regarding folktale. These questions have the capacity to rethink about the folktale.

In *Folktale and Reality* Lutz Rohrich proposed a bold theory of folklore genres as context of symbolic representation.

In the John D. Niles translation of Max Luthi's German classic *The European Folktale: form and nature*, the author has depicted 'a definitive statement about the nature, style, and form of the folktale genre in its European variety.' In this book the author provides in-depth study on the function and significance of folktale in the sixth

chapter. Max Luthi, in *Once Upon a Time on the Nature of Fairy Tales*, tries to elaborate the nature of fairy tales and folktales too by studying the meaning, form and the symbolism in fairytales. Though the analysis in the present dissertation does not concern itself with symbolism of folktale, yet the above work has offered some insight into the examination of the folktales.

Folktales from India by A K Ramanujan is a profound collection of folktales from India. Its Preface is very thought provoking tracing the history, context and the regional importance of Folktales of India. Ramanujan includes three Assamese tales among which one is from *Burhi Air Sadhu* and the other is *Teja and Teji*, another version of *Tula aru Teja*.

In Assam the famous folklorist Dr. Praphulladatta Goswami had done the scientific analysis of folktale. His *Ballads and Tales of Assam* is regarded as a milestone regarding Assamese folktale studies and this book seems to be quite helpful in this research. There is still a lot to explore in this vast field. It is quite a noble attempt to perform an operation in the field of the folktales of Assam.

Assamese Folktales: A Structural Analysis, the outcome of the Ph.D research work of Dr. Mrinal Medhi is also proven useful for understanding the nature of Assamese folktales.

Sanjeev Kr Nath in *The World of Assamese Folktales* has provided an English translation of Assamese folktale collections by two prominent Assamese story tellers and a systematic study of those tales.

In Nandana Dutta's *Mothers, Daughters and Others: Representation of Women in the Folk Narratives of Assam*, the author analyzed the Assamese folktales from the

gender perspective and this is helpful to understand the psychology of society through folktale in this perspective.

Oral Tradition and Folk Heritage of North-east India by Lalit Kumar Barua gives emphasis on the simple tribal tales and the evolutionary written form of folktales. It discussed on the complexities in the process from oral to written.

Philosophical and Theoretical Literature

Ronald Paulson and Peter Eisenman's *Sin and Evil: Moral values in Literature* provides an analysis on confusion of sin and evil. The author tries to draw attention to the distinction between sin and evil. This book provides new ways of thinking about important issues that characterize the contemporary era.

Bobby Norfolk and Sherry Norfolk's *The Moral of the Story* is an approach to using storytelling and folktale in character education.

Dev Raj Bali's *Introduction to Philosophy* and Trueblood's *General philosophy* provided the philosophical base to justify the moral values of folktales. These two books are on the basic concepts of ethics and morality and also give emphasis on the theories and principles of ethics. Morality and the moral values are very complex concepts, however these two books analyses the concept of morality and issue of moral values very clearly.

In the process of the review of literature, these books along with some articles and research papers are read and on the basis of the best knowledge gather from this exploration, the aim and objectives of the study is finalized.

1.5. Aim and Objective of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine what message the folktales convey to the society; whether these are for amusement or for teaching and transmitting the moral values along with the traditional, social and cultural values. Folktales are told both for entertainment and education. But it can be a question that what does it mean to its listeners, amusement or morality. Though, this education part is yet to discuss theoretically. This is a keen attempt to study folktales regarding its function of moral edification apart from its function of entertainment.

The objectives of this study are:

- To examine the fact that social and moral values are social constructions.
- To study folktales in the perspective of social and moral values proposed in the socio-cultural phenomena.
- To examine the aspect of social and moral values (sense of morality) in folktales through the philosophical principles.
- To justify the folktales as a medium of moral teaching and to search the challenges on folktale as a medium of moral teaching.
- To re-open a scope for discourse on folktale as value based education.

1.6. Area of the Study

There are many folktales in Assam both in tribal and non tribal versions. But this study engulfs only the tales from the three Assamese folktale collections *Burhi Air Sadhu*, *Kaka-deota Aru Nati Lora* and *Junuka* by Lakshminath Bezbaroa. Besides these three collections of folktales, Bezbaroa also published another three folktales that are

Ghar Pata Kaka and *Mula Khua Burha* in the short story collection *Sadhu Kathar Kuki*, and the other tale *Bhusung Pahu* in the magazine *Bahi* in the year 1951. Though these tales are not included in the three folktale collections, these tales can be easily identified as folktales. However, these three tales are excluded from this work as these are not included in the mentioned collected volumes. The area of this study covers the moral aspect of the folktales included in the three collected volumes of folktales by Lakshminath Bezbaroa.

1.7. Significance of the Study

Folktales are regarded as the means for amusement and moral instruction from times immemorial. The prime collection of Indian folktales that is *Panchatantra* or the *Hitopadesha* is itself an example of telling folktale for education through entertainment. In our society, it is the elder's authority to lead the younger generation to a morally cultured individual and for this task, the elders of the society often seek help of traditional tales, customarily transmitted from their forefathers. The people of the society often use some songs, proverbs, folk speech and folktale to provide the moral instruction. Folktales occupies the prime place as a tool of educating the younger generation and for this reason folktales are even included in to the text books of the growing generation to educate them not only the moral lesson but to educate them about their own culture and tradition.

Though, many studies have been done on the structural analysis, origin analysis, type and motif analysis of folktales but, discussion on the function of morality in folktale or the moral function of folktales seem to be left untouched. In his elaborations of the term *Sadhukatha*, Bezbaroa has specified its significance as a 'moral tale or the teaching of saints or virtuous people'. But these folktales are again seen to be

containing references of immoral actions and thoughts such as stealing, cheating, trickery, revenge, jealousy, violence, murder etc. Therefore, it is an important task to analyze these tales to explore what moral lessons these folktales possess. Thus, the study of the folk tales collected by Bezbaroa from the moral point of view is expected to offer a new dimension to the understanding of the tales in a quite different perspective.

1.8 .Scope of the Study

This study is carried out to achieve a better understanding of the folktales regarding its moral values or moral teachings. It is a study on the Assamese folktales collected by Lakshminath Bezbaroa, so the study is carried out on the context of Assamese culture and society till date. The concerns of culture and civilization such as beliefs or ideas are the social constructions. Society is the creator and the destroyer too of a social issue. And this social construction of ideas or beliefs signifies the truth that these are not universal and collective rather the creation of a particular society. The wide social acceptance of such a social construction further becomes an ideology of the society. The enquiry on such social constructions is the objective of a social science research.

In his *Principles for Oral Narrative Research*, Olrik said, “Folklore offers scholars a valuable tool for research, because it leads into eras and classes of society whose intellectual life we would otherwise know only to a limited degree.” But, little research has done on the specific claim of morality in folktales. Since this area is mostly ignored, this work is an attempt to provide different facets of the moral issues of selected folktales from different perspectives.

1.9. Limitation of the Study

There is a rich store of Assamese folk tales both in written and in oral form. Furthermore, plentiful of folk tales exist among diverse ethnic and tribal cultural groups of Assam. But, for time constrains, all these works in the repertory could not have been included in the study. Thus, the study is limited only to Lakshminath Bezbaroa's three collections of Assamese folktales only.

1.10. Methodology

The study is based on textual analysis of the three Assamese folktale collections of Lakshminath Bezbaroa, keeping the issue of moral values of folktale as chief concern. The present work concentrates only on the three Assamese folktale collections by Lakshminath Bezbaroa, *Burhi Air Sadhu*, *Kaka-deota Aru Nati Lora*, and *Junuka*. In these three collections, there are sixty nine tales in total. However, four tales from the collection *Burhi Air Sadhu* are also included in *Junuka* in their abridged versions. So, total number of tales taken for analysis is sixty five. The present study limits itself to an assessment of the folktales, more specifically its moral values provided along with the prime concern amusement. This effort will be partly descriptive and partly analytical. The approach will be theoretical, predominantly base on the philosophical theories and principles of morality and the theories of ethics. As a social science study, the study is also giving importance on the way of life, thoughts and perceptions of the people to emphasize their views regarding the folktale morals in the present day context.

Interview has been quite helpful to judge the people's view regarding folktale in general and the moral issue of folktales in particular. This technique has mainly been used informally in an unstructured way to gather information regarding their views and more openly how they have been attached with this special genre. The interview is

carried out only on the adults of the society; because the minors are only attracted to vignettes of the same story until and unless they were told about its moral values. They are not expected to select the moral themes by themselves accurately. Following the phase of analysis, the researcher has tried to classify the folktales in two categories; moral tales and amusement tales. Re-examination and interpretation of the tales make the work scientific and more relevant in the present day context.

The theories of folktales are very interesting for the scholars engaging at the studies of folktale. There are much more theories, schools of thought and methods are available in folktale studies. Folktale theories such as the Indo-European theory, the Broken Down Myth Theory, Structural theory, Psycho-analytical Theory, Theories of Reconstruction and Deconstruction; but here in this work folktales are considered through the Theories of Morality.