PREFACE

Born and brought up in a village, my childhood days were sweetened by the tales I heard from my grandfather, parents and other elderly members of the family. Storytelling and listening sessions were usually in late afternoon and evening. Other forms of lore such as song, rhymes and sayings gradually became familiar and interesting. The language of such oral literature, grounded as it was in the local soil, acted as an additional attraction and made the tales and songs appear as ‘my own’. This memory, by no means unique, got rekindled by a chance encounter with some workers on a construction site who to sing songs and narrate stories in the evening to overcome their tedium. A new set of people, a new language, new tales and songs; but the novelty was not enough to overwhelm the marks of familiarity. These were the people of chars of Nalbari district, and this experience prompted my desire to undertake the present study. My desire became a decision after my meeting with Dr. Pradip Jyoti Mahanta, Professor and Head, Department of Cultural Studies, Tezpur University, Assam, without whose encouragement and kind supervision, this study would not have been possible. I am deeply grateful to him. My sincere thanks are also due to Dr. Bimal Mazumdar, Assistant Professor, Department of Assamese, Gauhati University who not only introduced me to my supervisor, but also constantly helped and prodded me along. All other faculty members of the Department, especially Dr. Malini Goswami who was the Head when I started it, Dr. Upen Rabha Hakacham, the present Head, also deserve my gratitude for their support and suggestions.

During the entire course of my study, I have received encouragement and help in different ways from all the colleagues in the College and the Department. I take this opportunity to express my profound sense of gratitude to them. My special thanks to Mr. Triken Das, Former Head, Dept. of Zoology; Mr. K. K. Mudiar, Head, Dept. of Geography; Mr. Dilip Deka, Associate Professor, Dept. of Statistics; Dr. Dipak Goswami, Associate Professor, Dept. of Geography; Mr. Dhiren Rajbongshi, Associate Professor, Dept. of Mathematics; Ms. Ranjana Bhattacharyya, Assistant Professor, Dept. of English; Dr. Pradyumna Sarma, Assistant Professor, Dept. of History; and Mr. Ratan Deka, Assistant Professor,
Dept. of English, Nalbari College who have encouraged and goaded me since I choose the subject till today.

My friends and well-wishers, constant companions in the evening addas, especially Mr. Anukul Sarma, Mr. Jiten Deka and Mr. Dilip Medhi have helped me a lot with valuable books and ideas that rendered my job easier. I remain obliged to them.

The librarians and support staff of K. K. Handique Library, Gauhati University and T. N. Goswami Library, Nalbari College have rendered me invaluable service by providing books and journals I needed. I record my debt to all of them. But my special gratitude goes to Mr. Banikanta Bhatta, Former Librarian, Nalbari College who has been always supportive of me with books and advice.

The most crucial support has come my way from the informants, the inhabitants and representatives of the Chars of Nalbari district who have helped me collect the specimens of their verbal art, my primary resource. I offer my gratitude to all of them, especially Md. Kismat Ali, Md. Abdus Sattar and Late Abu Bakkar Siddique through whom I gained access to others and the tough terrain of the chars.

But without the encouragement and kind service of Mr. Gautam Bhagawati, Nalbari Commerce College, Nalbari my work could not have been embodied in this form. I sincerely acknowledge his valuable help in this regard.

In the end I express my thanks to all members of my extended family, especially my wife Meenakshi, and daughters, Amritanand and Divyanand who have given me the strongest support, though they suffered the most in the process as usual.

Place: Nalbari.                      (Amar Kumar Nayak)
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