The tribal people of the district—Bodos, Rabhas and others—are the repositories of considerable wealth of folk-literature in their respective tribal languages. The tribal heritage is particularly rich in tales, myths and legends. Being by nature musically inclined, the tribal people, the Bodos and Rabhas in particular, have also an imposing store of folksongs and rhymes.

Apart from the material available in the tribal languages, we have also a fairly large body of songs and rhymes composed or adapted by, and current among, tribal people in the local Goalpara-Assamese. The greatest contribution in this field comes from the Pati Rabhas who inhabit extensive tracts in South Goalpara. Though very small in number, the Hajongs living in the south-west corner of the district also have much to offer in this field.

I Materials in the Tribal Languages

(Note: The following discussion is almost wholly confined to folksongs and rhymes. As I am not conversant with any of the tribal languages, I have prepared it on the basis of various published materials. For the Bodo specimens I have drawn heavily from the

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1. An interesting Rabha myth has been included in Chap IX, Sec.I(4)(v). A number of Boro tales and myths have been collected and published. See J. D. Anderson: Kachari Folktales and Rhymes; Bhaben Narzi: Boro-Kacharir Jana-Sahitya, pp.61-80; English renderings by Dr P. C. Bhattacharya, Ibid., pp.54-52. Dr Goswami reproduces and analyzes quite a few Bodo tales and myths. See P. Goswami: Ballads and Tales of Assam, pp. 114, 134-148. For Garo tales, some of which are current among Garos living in Goalpara, see D. S. Rongmuthu: Folktales of the Garos.
English renderings done by Shri M. M. Brahma and Dr P. C. Bhattacharya, and the Assamese renderings done by Shri Brahma and Shri Bhaben Narzi. The Rabha specimens are almost entirely based on Assamese renderings done by Shri Mani Rabha.

Although no separate collections of songs of Goalpara tribals are available, I have taken all possible care to include here only such materials as are peculiar to this district or, in any case, have been collected from places within it.

(a) Bodo Folksongs

The Goalpara Bodos, who are heavily concentrated in the Kokrajhar sub-division and scattered in the rest of the district, are deservedly famous for their folksongs and dances. The more important of their folksongs can be grouped as (i) songs connected with the two festivals, Boisāgu and Damāsi, (ii) songs of love, (iii) marriage songs, (iv) songs of jest and humour, (v) nursery rhymes, and (vi) songs of peasant life.

(i) Songs of Boisāgu and Damāsi

Songs of Boisāgu, the festival marked by unmixed joy and merry-making and of welcoming the New Year, reflect the mood of the season:

1. M. M. Brahma: Folk-songs of the Bodos. It gives original texts in Bodo and their Assamese and English translations. I have retouched the language of the English translation in some cases where it was found necessary.

B. Narzi: Boro-Kachārir Jana-Sāhitya. It also gives three versions as in above. The English translations are by Dr P. C. Bhattacharya.

2. M. Rabha: Chāthār. Also magazine articles by the same author, the chief among them being 'Rabha Loka-gitar Gati Prabāh' in Souvenir of Assam Sahitya Sabha, 39th Session, 1972.
O mother dear
Boisāgu has come—
It is Boisagu

The old year has departed
O mother, our Boisagu has come.
The new wind of the New Year
Has brought new life and hope.
Rivers and lakes,
Trees and creepers,
Birds and beasts,
All life is dancing with joy.
Let us come out too,
Young and old,
Men and women,
Boys and girls,
Let us congregate and rejoice.¹

Many songs sung on the occasion contain an invitation to
dance. Generally, it is the elder sister's husband addressing the
younger sisters-in-law:

O my younger ones,
O my dear sisters-in-law, Manbari-Bibari,
Come along, 0 my sweet ones!
All of you come in a row to dance.
O my younger sisters-in-law!
If you do not agree to dance
And you offer me nothing,
Then I will neither shoot the peacock
Nor will I shoot other birds,
[Though I have come for shooting].
Listen to me, my younger ones, Manbari-Bibari

I will shoot down
Your household cocks and hens.
O my sweet Manbāri-Bibāri,
Come along, all of you, in a row.
In such days of rejoicing
In our new spring festival Boisagu,
Let us dance together forming rows.
But if you neither agree to come
Nor give me something,
I will not ask you, I will ask nobody,
But I will shoot down your tame swine.  

Some songs also make fun of women, as the following one
ridiculing a woman of Ouwābāri village for failing to offer drinks
to a guest:

Oh you fickle girl Sewāri,
You wild thing of the nook
Of the fallow field
O dear Rāngāmoti,
They say life is sweet
You woman of the village Ouwābāri
You can give drinks to your relatives only.  

Songs of the Damasi festival are more in the nature of rhymes. For example:

  Glory, glory, glory
  Glory be to our village ... etc.

There are also some rhyme-like songs sung at Boisagu particularly
during the cattle-rites.

1. Bhaben Narzi: Boro-Kachair Jana-Sāhitya, pp.11-12 (Eng. tr. by Dr. P. C. Bhattacharya).
2. pp.179.
(ii) Songs of Youth and Love

These songs are rich in interesting poetic images. Many of them are sung by girls. Here are a few examples:

Why do you weep, O thirsty bird,
Why do you weep to the sky?
What is your grief?
Is there no end to it?
The bird shakes its wings and weeps,
It weeps to the sky.
The heavy showers and the resultant floods
Will not quench her thirst.¹

What pensive song
Does the bird sing on the tree?
O bird, are you also weighed down
By pain of heart like me?
Union is ensured to the bird
But sorrow and pain
Are my lot.
I see you, O my love, in dreams,
But on waking, I find you not.²

The dove is cooing
Oh, dear, I too shall go with you.
The crow is cawing,
Oh, dear, I too shall fly with you.
The horse is neighing,
O handsome youth,
Untie the knot of your phāli.³

¹ Phāli is a napkin used as a comforter or a turban.

1. H. L. Foot : Folk-songs of the Rodo, p.141
2. Ibid., pp.145-146.
3. Ibid., p.146.
Groups of girls sing the following song while collecting leafy vegetables growing wild in the fields. It seems to contain a hint at the practice of a young girl going to the man of her choice of her own accord and getting married with him:

After we have collected vegetables,
Let us go, friend, to the house
Of our beloved one.
Our parents do not dispose of us in marriage.
Neither can we tell our brothers.
The years have elapsed bit by bit,
Our youth is also slowly passing away.

The following is a bagurumba song sung by girls amongst themselves (along with dances) to relax themselves and to unburden their youthful hearts, brimming with love and desire:

Hop and dance
Hop and dance
Dance in vigorous movements.
Had you not been a youth
Of the same family as ours,
I would have caught hold of you
And taken you in my lap.

Some songs are in the form of dialogues between the lover and the beloved. These are almost exclusively sung by the youths and maidens of Kokrajhar sub-division, mostly during Boisagu:

Youth: The hololokhā plant of the hills -
You alone will be my life's mate.

1. Ibid., p.142
2. Ibid.
Maiden: Buy me from the market
A bottle of scented oil,
A pair of bracelets and a bright necklace.¹

There are songs of conjugal love also. In the following
song, a dialogue between husband and wife, there are references to
lumbering-camps in the hilly regions where Bodo men go to earn money
as labourers:

Wife: From the Bhutan hills,
Where you are going to cut wood,
Fetch me, dear,
A shuttle made of sal wood.

Husband: Most gladly I will,
O dear Goychiri, my jewel
I will fetch the shuttle
But keep in readiness
Rice-beer for me.²

(iii) Marriage songs

Songs like the following rather didactic in spirit, are
sung in the marriage pandal when the bride is seated among the
relatives:

O sister, you are lucky.
Through the grace of the creator
You will now own
Spotted cows and large granaries.

¹ Ibid.
² M. M. Brahma: op.cit., p.152.
From now on
Your parents are no longer your kin,
Your father-in-law and mother-in-law
And the relatives of your husband
Are now your near and dear ones.
Oh little sister,
Stay with your husband.
Work well, be happy,
And lead a fruitful life.¹

Teasing songs are a speciality of the marriage songs of
Assam, including those of Goalpara. Bodo teasing songs are mostly
aimed at the bridegroom, often demanding the best of food and drinks
and ridiculing the arrangements, however good they might be:

Give us sweet, old wine,
And give us striped pigs.
Bring out for us the pot of wine
And make available the striped pig
There is joy in the air, rise to its level.²

There is the cockroach
On the wall of the house,
The wine you have served
Is sour to the taste.
There is the centipede
On the roof-top
Absolutely tasteless is your wine.
There is mud in the wine pot,
And you have surely mixed
A lot of water in it.³

¹. M. M. Brahma: Folk-songs of the Bodos, pp. 159-160.
². Ibid., p. 158.
³. Ibid., p. 157.
(iv) *Songs of Jest and Humour*

The Bodos are a cheerful people and appreciate a joke or a comic song. There is a big number of joking songs among them. While pleasantries are exchanged in songs between men and women, young and old, particularly interesting are the songs of jest and fun exchanged between brother-in-law and sister-in-law. Husband and wife and even mother-in-law and son-in-law exchange jokes in songs.

The following one represents a playful encounter between a brother-in-law and sister-in-law:

Sister-in-law: 0 my brother-in-law,  
When you earn money  
By cutting wood in Porbotzora  
Do please bring for me  
Dry fish and meat.

Brother-in-law: Surely I will, little sister-in-law,  
But do please keep ready for me  
Rice-beer from bara paddy  
And a meal of jaha rice.

Sister-in-law: 0 my brother-in-law,  
When you earn money  
By cutting wood in Porbotzora,  
Do please bring for me  
Bracelets, ear-rings and a necklace.

Brother-in-law: Surely I will, little sister-in-law.  
Scrub your finely curved neck,  
Or else it will get soiled  
While wearing the necklace.  

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The next represents a good-humoured duel of wit between mother-in-law and son-in-law:

Son-in-law:  Mother, mother,
Your daughter does not know
How to prepare fish chutney.

Mother-in-law:  So you are blaming my daughter,
A fine son-in-law you are!
You yourself do not know
How to bring good fish
Or to eat it.

Son-in-law:  Mother, mother
Your daughter does not know
How to prepare chilly chutney.

Mother-in-law:  So, it is my daughter
Who is at fault, is it?
A fine son-in-law you are!
You yourself do not know
How to grow chillies.
You are a good-for-nothing.¹

(v) Nursery Rhymes

Many Bodo nursery rhymes centre round the moon. And, the moon always has an important place in Assamese nursery rhymes including those of Goalpara:

'O moon, give us one banana,
Or, if you can spare
Give us two.'

The moon replies:

'I have no banana
What shall I give?
The crows have eaten up,
The whole bunchful of it.
Father-in-law found nothing left
When he came
And mother-in-law too came,
In her spotted girdle
[But got nothing].

The first part of the rhyme has an exact similarity with an Assamese rhyme.

This one is sung to quieten a weeping child:

Come, come,
Let me carry you on the back.
We shall go to look for crabs.
You will have your feed later.

Crabs are being roasted
Meat is being roasted,
Bring them along.
If you have any fish and meat,
Bring them along.
There, it has come
Now eat your fill and hush.

(vi) Songs of Peasant Life

Bodo cowherds while grazing their cattle in the fields sing such songs:

1. Ibid., p.136.
2. Ibid., p.65.
The reeds grew,  
There is good grass  
O cattle, eat your fill,  
And be fat and strong.  
Do not eat tender grass  
Lest there be stomach trouble.  
Grow into bulls and draw our ploughs,  
Or else, the whip won't spare you.  

There are some songs through which old men advise the young in the farmyards:  

Listen to me, boys  
And be cautious  
JaikhaliBuha is playing on his flute, [name of a man]  
And some bird is singing  
On the thailad tree  
Bear yourself well, boys  
And stick to truth.  

(b) Rabha Folksongs  

The Rabhas who are concentrated in the south of Goalpara are divided into several groups. Of them the Rangdanis, the Maitoris, the Daburis, the Totolas, the Bitaliyas, etc. still retain their own language, whereas the Pati Rabhas have completely forgotten their own language and accepted the local Assamese dialect for all purposes.  

The most important of the folksongs of the Rangdani and Maitori Rabhas are those connected with their two principal festivals,  

1. Ibid., p.133.  
2. Ibid., p.191.
The songs sung in connection with the Bāikhā festival are also called chāthār. The chāthār are of two types— chatkāmini (erotic songs) and gyātini chāthār (restrained songs). Long devotional songs, another class of songs sung at Bāikhā, are called hoimāra.¹

Woven round the erotic sentiments of young men and women, the chatkāmini chāthārs are comparable to the Bihu songs of Upper Assam.

The young man in love sings:

When I sit down to take my meal,
The rice does not go down my throat.
I am reminded of you,
But I do not see your golden face.²

The love-lorn maiden sings:

Sitting down at my loom,
I only think of you.
When I remember you
My mind is blown away.³

Aside from these, there are more restrained songs sung by older men and women, which are called nākjumāī. Here is a specimen:

Come 0 boys and girls,
Let us eat and

¹. Mani Rabha: Chāthār.
³. Ibid.
Let us eat and fly, like the crows,
Let us stir up the towns and cities
Come, come, you people, come
Come, you people, come.

Songs of the Grimbuda festival: The principal songs of this festival are sung in invocation to gods and goddesses of the rice field.

Come āshu rice,
Come sāli rice, come,
Come cotton,
Come Lakshmi, come.¹

After the religious rites are over, the young and the old sing songs jesting among themselves. They are called khi jāl kāi or teasing songs. The following are two such songs, the first one sung by old men jokingly praising themselves and the second one sung by young men picking at the young women.

The leaves of the riching banana in the hills
Are beautiful to look at;
So also the old people of these days
Are beautiful to look at.²

While walking from this side to that,
One only gets aching feet,
When one gets a new wife
One only feels like getting into bed.³

¹. Ibid.
². Ibid.
³. Ibid.
The Rabhas also have some colourful songs sung on the occasion of the elaborate Rabha funeral ceremony, called pharkanti. These songs are accompanied by dancing and the playing of various distinctive Rabha instruments. Of the different kinds of such songs the most important are the ballad-like songs in which patches of the sad story of two sisters, Randana and Chandana, are narrated.¹

Rabhas also have songs sung in marriage ceremonies.

II Songs composed by Tribal groups in Local Assamese Dialect

The above songs are the exclusive treasures of the particular tribal groups in their respective tribal dialects, and although they must be counted as folksongs of the district, the ethnic rather than the local character is more important in them.

But there is another group of songs, also belonging to people of the tribal stock, which are composed not in any tribal dialect but in the local Assamese dialect and thus reflect in local Assamese the tribal mind at work. From the sociological point of view these make an interesting subject-matter for study.

As we have noted, most of the Bodos and Rabhas are bilingual in the sense that they speak the tribal dialect at home and the local Goalpari dialect for communication with the non-tribal neighbours. But except in case of the Pati Rabhas and the Hajongs, all the materials of folk-literature of the tribal groups of the district are in the respective tribal languages. Only here and there, we find stray

¹. Ibid.
expressions or even lines borrowed from the local Assamese. For example, in the following Bodo song, the first two lines are in Bodo while the last two are in Assamese:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{gārī lāng lāng gārī lāng} \\
\text{gārī khāmālā,} \\
\text{bakhā koribār kāpor nāi} \\
\text{chirā topolā.}
\end{align*}
\]

But so far as the Pati Rabhas are concerned the story is entirely different. They have adopted the local Assamese dialect not only for common speech but also for literary compositions. It is true that they have largely got themselves integrated into local non-tribal population and adopted many of their beliefs and practices. At the same time they have not given up their tribal beliefs and practices altogether. As a result we have from these people a body of most interesting songs that reflect their particular genius.

**Bahrāngi songs**: Bahrāngi songs are sung, often with accompanying dances, by grown up Pati Rabha men and women while enjoying themselves in parties gathered round the container of the home-made liquor on any festive occasion. They are sung just for the fun of it and are almost always in a jocular or satirical vein, having a dig at the frailties and foibles of the two sexes. Meant for teasing,

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1. In other district of course, there are songs composed by people of this group in the local Assamese dialects. See P. Goswami: Bāra Mahar Tera Git, pp.218-221.

2. Harimohan Sarkar: Bahrāngi Gitār Ānchalat. It is collection of a big number of Bahrāngi songs with a good Introduction. All the specimens of Bahrāngi songs given here have been taken from this collection.
there is no trace of acrimony in these songs. On the contrary, a spirit of robust joviality runs through them.

There is a lot of sex coming in, but there is little of the overt eroticism of the Bihu songs or of the repression complex of the bhāwaiyā and chatkā songs: Through them we get the wholesome picture of a society laughing at its own weaknesses. Such jest for life, such joie de vivre is rarely found in other Assamese folk songs.

Like Bihu songs the Bahrāngi songs are short independent pieces. Each song is usually 'a quatrains ... with alternate rhyme' where 'the first two lines which make up the setting of the rhyme may be meaningless or contain such homely expressions that it is hard to find parallels to them in another language.'

Though men's and women's parties do not sing songs that are exclusive to each, some songs are supposed to express men's sentiments whereas others are said to deal with women's. Here are a few specimens of men's songs:

The leaves and soft barks of the āthiyā banana
And the sapling of the bhīm banana,
I roam about the streets
In the hope of being kept in as a son-in-law.

The jujube tree is at the front entrance,
The parakeet sits in it;
This girl is fair and pretty,
How is it that she is not given in marriage?

The above is an innocent joke at a nice-looking girl of a marriageable age. But mark the impishness of the joke in pieces like the following:

...Let the husband of a fine woman die,
   So that I can marry her!

Incidentally, these songs also give a picture of the social customs of the Pati Rabhas as well as the values they care for. While the song cited above lightly hints at the custom of widow remarriage, the one below speaks with a note of disapproval of a woman who divorces her husband and marries another man.

I place the chepā. I place the khokā [fishing traps]
   But no fish are caught,
   You leave one husband and take another
   Are you not ashamed?

The following specimens are from among women's songs:

There are no stars in the sky,
   I see the moon in the morning,
   I shall not defile my body
   Unless there is a union of hearts.

I uprooted keturi bulbs
   Mistaking them for turmeric.
   I got an old man for a husband
   While I was expecting a young one.

How frank and forthright these women are in speaking about themselves. They are equally outspoken when speaking about men. Here is a one with a dig at the young man who cannot resist stealing a look at any pretty woman that happens to pass his way:
Whether you plough or not
You must have the bhuti on your waist.
And whenever you see a pretty woman
You pretend that the bullocks are giving you trouble.

[Bhuti: A straw-bundle with a smouldering fire, which the farmer carries to the field, supplying cinders for his smoke]

Dandyishly dressed you are,
You are an officer of which village?
Don't come our way,
We will keep you [enticed] by making eyes at you.

The specimens we have cited above reflect the general spirit of the Bahrangi songs—humour and joviality. But there are a handful of songs which have a sad air about them. To cite an example:

O my body, my body,
My body knows no cool,
My dear husband is not with me,
My body knows no cool.

Cowherds' songs: These are another group of songs that are jestful in nature, but of considerably limited range and colour in comparison with the Bahrangi songs. They are practically simple jokes, told in the form of songs, exchanged between cowherds while grazing the cattle away from the village. The cowherds usually being boys and young men either in or just past their adolescence,

the majority of the jokes with which they amuse themselves—not unnaturally—betray an obsession with the thought of the opposite sex:

I try to count the plumes
Of the flying nak-chilk bird,
When I see anybody with bracelets and beads,
I imagine her to be my wife.

The exchange of jokes sometimes takes the form of a duel between two singing youth, in which case the most common line of attack for the first singer is to express the desire to get the other's sister for a wife, while the other's defence consists in discounting the possibility of such a desire being fulfilled:

The first cowherd:

Showers of rain
Have passed across the Garo Hills, [The Garo Hills are just south of the area]
I have taken a liking to your sister,
Who knows whether I can marry her or not!

The second cowherd:

There are the state buses
At the Krishnai station.
You won't get my sister
For you already have a wife.

Bhaluk-nās or bear-dance songs are the songs sung by Pati Rabha boys on the occasion of the Bhaluk-nās ceremony in which parties of boys, some of them made up as bears, go from house to house asking for alms. They are simple rhymes meant to be funny:
Come out 0 householders,
Bring along lamps,
Recline your backs
And look at our bear-dance.

The dubulā grass on the front entrance,
It dies but grows again and again.
Looking at our bear
They laugh hi hi hi.¹

The Pati Rabhas also have some songs of religious and ritualistic association. These are the songs of Tukuriya Puja² and Dānagā Mārā Puja³ both almost exclusively Rabha institutions. Both groups of songs contain stories about how some Rabha gods and goddesses were born, how they came to be worshipped and how their worship brought blessings. These songs contain a very large number of references to rivers, lakes and other places of the southern region of Goalpara.

Folksongs of the Hajongs

The Hajongs living in some isolated pockets in the southwest corner of the district have completely given up not only their tribal language but also their tribal beliefs and customs. They speak a form of the west Goalpara dialect and have adopted a large body of beliefs and rituals, customs and practices of their more numerous neighbours. Thus, the bulk of their folksongs are also seem to be adaptations from different sources.

¹ A collection of Bhāluk-nās songs are to be found in S. Rabha: 'Rābhar Bhāluk Git' in Asam Sahitya Sabha Patrika, Year 24, No.3.
² Harimohan Sarkar: Tukuriya Git.
The Hajongs sing Kas Puja songs and Bas Puja songs much in the same manner as described in an earlier chapter. However, the bulk of the Hajong Bas Puja songs contain young men's gibes aimed at young women. While they have some marriage songs, their nursery rhymes and game-songs are quite attractive and have interesting affinity with such songs of other parts of Assam. Also interesting are the rhymes called Thubo-Thubo or Shibo-Shibo songs which are remarkably similar to the Ori songs of South Goalpara and are recited by boys in exactly the same manner as in Ori.

1. P. C. Hajong: 'Bah Puja' in Jana Siksha, Year 30, No. 2. Much of the information given here has been received directly from Shri Hajong.