CHAPTER VI

FOLK ELEMENTS IN THE DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Dramatis personaes are the chief media for the presentation of dramatic plot. Without characterisation it is not possible to portray the dramatic plot. The dramatist depicts the characters of the play on the basis of the story of the play. So it is one of the fundamental ingredients of dramatic art. Characterisation is the really fundamental and lasting element in the greatness of any dramatic work. The characters of drama gives immortality and gravity to a drama. Character creates situation. Character is situation. The dramatist personaes must be reliable and distinct. Aristotle mentioned four characteristics of dramatis personaes. First, characters must be good; secondly, characters should necessarily be appropriate and be fitted for the plot; thirdly, characters must be true to life, and fourthly, characters must be consistency.

Drama means presentation of some characters. Characters may be of various types and may have various dimension. Through these characters the message of drama is established. Characters are developed through the dynamic events of drama. In order to depict character the playwrights specially take care to reveal the psychological and sociological features of the dramatis personaes. Hence, it is said 'Every object has three dimensions: depth, height, width. Human beings have an additional three dimension: Physiology, Sociology, Psychology. Without the knowledge of these three

1. Hudson, William Henry: An Introduction to The Study of Literature, p. 186
dimensions, we can not appraise a human being. Character is the sum total of his physical make-up and the influences his environment exerts upon him. William Archer points out 'Character drawing is the presentation of human nature in its commonly recognized, understood and accepted aspects, psychology is, as it were the exploration of character the bringing of hither to unsurveyed tracts within the circle of our knowledge and comprehension.'

We know the dramatis personae from their performance before our eyes. Their activities are controlled by feeling, emotion, motive and willing. Dramatis personae are dynamic. Every human being is in a state of constant fluctuation and change. Nothing is static in nature, least of all man. Complete introduction regarding character is not found in drama. Butcher writes, 'they reveal their personality not in all its fullness, but to such an extent as the natural course of the action may require.'

In the history of world literature it is found that all playwrights derived their dramatis personae from the visible world. So that a particular character give us some particular aspects. Because characters are the representative of a society. Hence, each and every character entails their beliefs, customs, attitude towards life, religion, class character, education, psychological condition, social condition, and the like. In a class division

3. Ægri, L. : The Art of Dramatic Writing, p. 33
6. Ibid, p. 349
society there are so many economic classes. Although a great change of wind has been blowing on the rural life, still the basic qualities of their life remain unchanged. The folk society does not easily give out their fundamental characteristics even in the process of its gradual change and transformation to an elite society according to the law of evolution. Hence, we notice the special behaviour pattern or traditional idea of the folk community through the dramatis personae. This is a feature of the Assamese social drama.

Ram Navami:

The first modern Assamese social drama Ram Navami written by Gunabhirm Barua was written in 1857, just after his return from Calcutta. It was published in 1858. The play is a social tragedy which based on widow-remarriage. The dramatist emphasises the necessity of widow-remarriage. Navami is a child-widow of the Brahmin community falls in love with Ram. She becomes pregnant. The matter likelihood and her family were ex-communicated. She could not marry Ram because they were not in a position to protest against the social sanction. As a result both Ram and Navami commits suicide.

In this play there is a sub-plot centering round a love story of two unsophisticated village folks — Mangalu and Sonphuli.

Though Ram-Navami is influenced by the Western technique in its very structure and technical devices at the same time it is not free from the impact of classical Sanskrit drama and old
Assamese dramatic tradition.

The dramatist gives us some valuable and significant information of the contemporary society through the various dramatis personae. We also find a beautiful picture of simple folk belief, customs of life in the play. The dramatist has portrayed many characters like Mangalu, Sonphuli, Nigadati, Kām, Sātolā, Mahājan, Navami, Sayandri, Phuleswari, Pelani, Narā, Urbasi, Jayanti, Sihurām, Dato, Khātani, Rahā in the drama. Through these characters different aspects of rural life has been vividly reflected.

In this drama we find some idea of traditional folk beliefs, superstitions, worship of religion etc. In this connection we may refer to the following points:

(1) When Mangalu ask Sayandri what is the function of Kām Sendur, then she replies - through this the relation between boys and girls can be establish.7

(2) Kām, a friend of Ram goes to bring one thousand leafs of Bell and some good qualities of flowers. At night he will worship.8

(3) Inspite of an widow, Navami secretly spends one night with Rām. She considers Rām is her husband. She says,

Navami : āmār kālī jathārtha bibāh sidhi haichei, etiā thākileo hānī nāi. tathāpi dārun desācharar murat neocan keocan di kahāo, he jagadishwer! eote jen patibratā dharma pratipālan karib pāro9 .........

7. Rām Navami : Act I, Scene- IV, pp. 7-8
8. Ibid, Act- 2, Scene- I, p. 13
(Navami: We have really married yesterday. Now it will not hamper. Still due to social obstruction I put off my ornaments. O God! Help me to save my religion with him).

(4) When Adhikāri Goshāi comes to the village temple yard, then Sājtolā says,

Sājtolā: .... adhikāri gohāi āhiba lāgiche domdāini sishya prāshisyā etāi ni jam di khele khele bah. āru kār kat ki dibā thābār āche jatanāi tha a in mānuh bilāk epha- liā hai āthu kāri thāk. (goshāik drsti kari) hera! goshāi āhib lāgiche sakaloī sābadhān thāk, hera āhi pālehi sakaloī haridhān de. 10

Adhikāri priest is coming. All takes sits according to your caste and keep silence. Everybody keep your goods carefully. Others sit on your kees-separately (notice to the priest). Hallow! priest is coming. Everybody keep carefully. Hallo, he comes. Everybody utter the God.

Both male and female expresses their respects according to their own style and behaviour pattern to Mahājan (goshāi). Khātaniār then says everybody should touch the foot of prabhu. After that Mahājan Prabhu orders Khātaniār to tell the people that one touch of his foot is sufficient for them. He also tells the people through Khātaniār that people should keep their goods at his chief helper. Sājtolā informs that some people did not give

and do not bring goods today. He says, if they do not obey what he will do? Then Mahājan replies, he should punish them according to the laws.11

(5) In the village court, Mahājan orders,

हेमधलेल सिबकांताच गाहात चैत मारा, तर गांधारने अलाग।

पाल्चशा तऱ्क दिल्या हे दाई वागिबा.12

(Then you mar sealed on Sibakanta's house. They will be ex-communi
cate. They will be release if they pay rupees five hundred as fine).

(6) In this play through the character of Mahājan we find a dream which gives us a special kind of folk belief. The dream is the real cause for the rapid change of the character of Mahājan.13

Dream plays a vital role in Assamese folk society. The dreamer is a representative of the old Hindu Brahmīn community.

The above noted character reflects various folk elements through their behaviour and actions.

Kāniyār Kirtan:

Kāniyār Kirtan (1861), written by Hem Chandra Baruā, is a propaganda play. Kāniyār Kirtan deals with the moral degeneration in the Assamese society brought about by opium addiction. It is a satiric play containing four acts. The playwright depicts the evil effects of opium eating. Kirti Kanta, the son of Bhadreswar

11. Ibid.
12. Ibid, Act V, Scene- III, p. 58
13. Ibid, Act V, Scene- V, pp. 63-64
Barua (a Mauzadar) became a regular opium-eater by the inspiration of Padmapani who is an Assamese preceptor. Kirti Kanta has lost everything due to his bad habit i.e., opium-addiction. Even he has lost his wife's life and ultimately he himself expired after few days of his wife's death.

The repentence of Kirti Kanta in the last scene is summarised in one stanza --

Kirti Kanta : ..... kepâ kâni bihar ses
kâniyar nai jnânar les
hâi hâi ki ghor kles
kâniай khâle ñsam des.14

"There is nothing next to opium as poison. The opium-eater has not got the least wisdom. Alas! Alas! what a terrible misery! Opium is at the root of the destruction of Assam."

Moreover, the play exposes the moral hypocrisy, falsehood etc. of those who profess to be the guardians of religion and social ethics.15 In the first scene, Padmapani asks Bhadreswar Barua for a bit of opium. Bhadreswar is astonished at the behaviour of the priest. In the second scene of the same act, Kirti Kanta and Padmapani talks about opium. Padma says that after taking opium such kind of medicine his stomach complain relieves. Then Kirti says he should wash his face and should take milk and fruits. But as because Padma comes from outside he do not take milk and fruits.16

15. Barua, B.K. : History of Assamese Literature, p. 149
In the second scene of the Act- II the dramatist portrays another picture of our social rituals and folk belief through the dramatis personae of Lalitā and Mangalati. Lalitā says that the condition of her is very bad. She becomes pale. She do not know what happens of her boy. So, she seeks to see prediction (Mangal) by the Mangalati. Then Mangalati says that she brings some kari. She also says that if kari is not available then she can do predict by rice. She gives a mark on earth. If she find kari it will be better. There is no doubt. Without money the result of prediction will not be sure. When Lalitā gives money then she says it is the act of spirit.17

We also find a picture of folk-life through the dramatij personae like Rāmjan and the Piyadā or the Court-peon. Their mode of speaking, behaviour, everything is folk.

Litikāi:

Lakshmināth Bezbaruā's Litikāi is a farce based on a folk-tale. The absurd and exaggerated activities of seven arch-fools is the subjectmatter of this farce. Nitāi, Satāi, Manāi, Titāi, Phuhāi, Rasāi and Bholāi were the seven brothers. These seven arch-fools considers a tilled rice field on full of moon lit-night as ocean and they tried to cross it by swimming. They count each other several times but every time the accountant himself omitted. The cunning Brāhmin (Deurām) observes their foolishness and he takes the advantage. By tricks he manages them as his attendants.18

17. Ibid, pp. 29-30
them place the bundles of their paddy-corn on the head of the old mother (Suvarā) of Brāhmin. As a result the old mother of Brāhmin is smashed to death. The Brāhmin becomes worried and he made a plan to kill them in turn. Titāi was slight clever. He escapes death and by way of revenge, marries the Brāhmin sister-in-law by a trickery. Then the Brāhmin was nervous. The seven arch fools are illiterate, extremely lazy, gullible, superstitious and parasitic. Through their characters we find funny manner of speech and naivete. Bezbarā shows that in our society some men frequently use dialogues of Bhāvanā either correctly or wrongly. Titāi, (slight cunning) one of the fools declares,

mohe rant hūri buli hāhība lāgile
nāk kāti māri yābā lāgība, jāstrat
koiche, hāriya jiniyā keho jinyā
hāriya, konokāle ksatriyar nāhi
parājoy.

If the mosquitoes laugh at us for accepting defeat in our fight with them, we shall have no alternative but to die in shame. The sastra says, 'some become victorious after defeat, while others become defeated after victory. The Ksatriyas do not know defeat.' The playwright skillfully depicts the picture of clash and strife between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law through the character of Suvarā and Chandi. Through the character of Burāh and

and Sājtolāni we find the role of prediction on rural folk. As a whole it is a pure farce having a picture gallery of rural life.

Nomal:

Bezbaruā's 'Nomal' is a farce where a simple foolish village man Nāharphutukā go to his guru for giving a name to his son. Due to his foolishness and lack of memory he has been exploited by different persons in different situation. Bezbaruā depicts the character of Nomal purely as a rural folk. Through this character we find simple traditional belief, social customs and rustic behaviour. Nicali was his wife. She advised her husband to go their guru for naming their baby. She firmly believes on their guru. Earlier they have lost five sons. So her simple religious mind expected that their latest new-born baby would alive if their guru will give a name. She offers a gamocā with 25 paise to their guru.

Nicali: mai na gamocā ekhan bui thaico tāke siki etāre saite loi joā.23

(I make a gamocā, you give this with 25 paise).

Through this character the respect of woman folk to their guru and a particular ritual is revealed. Nicali also sings lullabies to calm her baby which is a distinct feature of Assamese folk society.

22. Ibid, Nomal p. 1041
23. Ibid, p. 1041
Nicali: *oich oich e bändar powāli*
   *baroitokāi loi ḫāi pithi jokāri*/^24^
   (Oh monkeykid, bird carries it).

Pācani:

In this farce Bezbaruā portrays two important characters drawn from Assamese society, are Lharomai Pācani is a childless man who does take his meal unless he receives guest everyday. But his wife Pācaniāni is quite opposite manner. For Lharmai Pācani guest is like the son of God. Even he is ready to give everything for the reception of his guest. Through the character of Lharomai Pācani we find a simple kind hearted man. He believes receipt of guest is the biggest virtue. On the other hand, through the character of Pācaniāni we find a rigid and conscious woman. She loosely interpreted the version of Śāstras for her own interest.

Pācaniāni: *tumiyei dekhon kirtan sāstrar bāık mānā,*
   *bole - kukur sirkāla gādharo ātmā rām,*
   *jānī sakaloke karibā parnām", mor mānere khāi pāt phalā mānuh ālahitkoi āmār mekuri kukurakhe emuthi khuovā bhāl. Mekuri kukure khāiyo alap, guno lai sarah mānuhe khāiyo sarah, guno lai yadi, lai alap.^25*

(You abide by the precept given in the sacred book *kirtana*. It says, "Even the soul of a dog or jackal or an ass is God Himself.

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^24^ Ibid,
Knowing this, you salute them all." I also feel that it is better to feed our dogs and cats than these ungrateful human guests. The dogs and cats take very little, but their appreciation of this charity is greater than its actual merit. Human guests, on the other hand, eat more, and yet their appreciation is much less than what the charity would actually justify).

In 'Pācuni' Bezbaruā gives a contrast of ideas through the characters of Dharomāi Pācuni and his wife. Pācuni believes that by serving guest one can acquire the highest virtue, but his wife does not consider it to be a virtue.

The materials used in this farce for the creation of humour are the frequently applied traditional rural tools, such as the grinding arm (dhekithorā) of a pounding machine. The whole environment of the farce in which the characters performed their activities is the folk activities. This folk activities has partly expressed in dramatis personae of this farce.

Cikarpati Nikarpati:

The story element of Cikarpati Nikarpati of Lakshmināth Bezbaruā is based on a popular folk tale. In this farce Bezbaruā depicts the activities of two well-known thieves. The two thieves Cikarpati and Nikarpati were very clever. Through their characters we find absurd activities, and wondrous events. The two thieves becomes intimate friend and by their joint effort they manages the groom for the daughter of the king of Cikampur. The way in which they have taken and have been able to managed this—that
itself is an act as like as the act of fairy or an angels.

We also find folk elements in the other dramatis personae in this farce. Through the character of Bethāi we find a particular ritual of a particular society. A jag has stolen by Cikarpåti. Then the owner of the jag, Bethāi complains in the court. When the pasker ask him to his father's name in the court then he replies.

Bethāi : balātkār neki? nakao, nāpāi kābā, āmar gāot koneo bāpekār nām nākārhe. tomālokār nagarat tene dastur thākile thākib pāre.26

(Bethāi : Is it harasment? I do not tell you, it is prohibited. Nobody utter their father's name in our village. Such type of ritual may have in your city).

Wife of Bethāi stands as a village folk. She is a simple village woman who believes on God. The character of two judges Minārām and Ghinārām depict as a folk type. The two honorary judges declares their decision as a rural judges on the complain raised by Bethāi.

Rongdoi is an attractive character in this farce. We find the jovial element through her character which is an essential characteristics of rural folk.

Cikarpåti : kiya nokova? eito khong neki?
Rongdoi : khongar pehāk.
Cikarpåti : pehāk koloi gol?
Rongdoi : mākar gharat bihu khābaloi.

26. Ibid, Cikarpåti Nikarpåti, Scene- I, p. 1050
Cikarpati: ketiyā ubhati ahiba?
Rongdoi: bāt paduli sukāk.
Cikarpati: bāt paduli ketiyā sukāba?
Rangdoi: mok diu buli ājiloike nidiyā
tutuvāi thakā kānarlokā-pārayor diē. 27

(Cikarpati: why don't you speak? Is it due to anger?
Rongdoi: More than that. It is anger's uncle.
Cikarpati: Where did the aunt go?
Rongdoi: To celebrate Bihu in mother's place.
Cikarpati: When will she return?
Rongdoi: When the roads become dry.
Cikarpati: When the road will be dry?
Rongdoi: You promised me to give a pair of lokāpāras,
but until today it remains unfulfilled.)

Gāonburā (1899):

Padmanāth Gohāin Baruā, a contemporary of Bezbaruā, wrote
three light comedies. Of these, Gāonburā is undoubtedly the
author's best. 28 Gāonburā is a realistic drama full of plebeian
humour. It gives a realistic picture of the British administra-
tion of the closing decade of the nineteenth century. Gohāin
Baruā shows great skill in depicting low life and rustic
scenes. 29 Sometimes this drama has been regarded as a farce,

27. Ibid, Fift ocene, p. 1060
sometimes as a light comedy and sometimes as a social play. The playwright has skillfully depicts the various characters. The hopes and hopeless, likes and dislikes, aspiration and desperate as reflected in the characters gives us enough time for thinking. The central character of the play is Bhogman who is a simple village man. One day he is going on a village road. The ruler's man by force catch him as Kuli (labourer), they compelled him to work in the house of the lord. Bhogman considers it to be an insult. After that he then manages to secure the honary office of a village headman after a good deal of solicitation. He thought that this will bring him power and status, this honary job affects his normal domestic and firm work and he gets a bitter experience. He suffers much for his honarary job. Mr. young who is a District Magistrare comes to the village for investigation about the collection of revenues. Bhogman forcefully collects rations for the Magistrate from a section of villagers. He becomes unpopular for such act. Even the Magistrate and his officers do not praise him though everything done by Bhogdhan was simply to please them. He even could not pay his own revenue. The Kouzader orders attachment of his property fur collecting arrears of revenue due to his name. Bhogman and his wife Kongdoi weep and weep only. A tragic situation is thus created around the hero.


In Bhogman's character, we find several situations of laughter and pity. We may refer to the following dialogues —

(1) Bhogman: Nahi deuta; tetiyāo etā kathā; kām pāle āru enekoi vāi nakaro. etīā tenei nicalā dekhihe: tāte āku mai ketiyāo chehābar āyet thiya howā nāi.

(Chāhābak olāi āhā dekhi kapi kapi). a, deuta, deuta, sauwā, sauwā, olālehi, olālehi, āghaok!)  

("Bhogman: No, father! Then also a different thing! I do not fear if I get job. Now, I am very poor! Besides this, I never stood earlier before the lord.

(Bhogman trembles when the lord is coming) Oh! father, father, that is, that is, he is coming, You go before me.

(2) Young: (Bhogmanar ocaī cāpi) tumī kelei bāi kariche? hāmi bāg tākiche ne bāluk tākiche? (gā — cāpi cāpi dhemālike) hāmi kijāni etā tomāke kāb pāre!

Bhog: (barkoi kapi mouzādārak kai) deuta, deuta ki hai etā kaok, mok beyākoi lāgil dekhon!

("Young: (he is coming near to Bhogman). Why are you tremble? Am I a tiger or a bear? (he then

33. Ibid, p. 261
proceeds to Bhogman). Now, perhaps I shall eat you!

Bhog: (he trembles so much and says to Mouzādār) father, father, you tell me something, he follows me badly!)

B.K. Bhattacharyya points out that Bhogman's false sense of prestige is not becoming a porter and his equally unreal solution in accepting the job of a village headman to save his prestige. The contradiction between his manner and the real social situation is carried in the play to a comic magnitude in two ways. At home, he faces an economic crisis which ruins his peace of mind and drives him to a state of acute misery. There is a folk element in the character of Kachukhowā, kerpāi, Reperā. This is well expressed in the song sung by Gaoburas:

ghorarkhorāk khāi
para r kām calai
ghuri phuro cine-rāti anahāri bisoykhovā
āmi gaobura. 35

(We take rations from home and carry out work for others, we are starving office-holders and have to do our duties at all hours. We are the village headman).

Besides the character of Bhogman we also find folk elements in the other character of this play like Rongdoi, Dr. Young,

34. Bhattacharyya, B.K.: Humour and Satire in Assamese Literature, p. 199

Kacukhowā Cutiyā, Kerpāi Koch, Reperā Kalitā, Mangalā etc.

Teton Tāmuli:

Gohāin Baruā's 'Teton Tāmuli' is a full-fledged farce. The playwright here depicts a rural picture through the characters. The story of Teton Tāmuli is derived from the famous trickster tale named Teton. In this play there is about thirteen characters. Out of this thirteen characters, ten characters belong to the rural category. The central character Teton is a youngman who is very clever and a witty plebeian. His absurd activities and paradoxical manner makes this character as a folk character. When Teton's brother-in-law asks whereabout of his father, Teton replies in a paradoxical manner,

Teton: ..... bopāi pātāl chiri talar māti opar karibaloī goiche.36

(Father has gone to dig the nether world and bring the earth below to the surface).

When Teton's brother-in-law ask about his mother, he replies in the same paradoxical language,

Teton: āi sādiniyā paitā khuvāi marā jiyābolei goiche.37

(Mother has gone to revive the dead by feeding him on boiled rice soaked in water for seven days).


37. Ibid.
When at last (Uhanáî) brother-in-law ask Teton about his sister-in-law then he replies like-wise,

Teton: bālti sāgar cāli mānik tuliboloi goiche. 38

(My sister has gone to raise pearls by sifting the ocean).

In this play Teton performs different activities like a clown of a folk-drama. His activities, behaviour pattern are witty. Teton's clownishness gives much pleasure. When he was hungry, he meet with two thieves and according to their agreement he enter into a house and he beats on a broken drum (Dhol). Then the owner of the house awaken from sleep and immediately catch him and asked him who is he. He replies,

Teton: ..... bole, 'hātat puthi, māngalbār, suhība lāgiche ne māikon? mai rātī phurā. 39

(A religious book is in my hand and today is Tuesday — is it necessary to ask me who is me? I am a man who surrounding at night).

All activities performed by Teton in the play is like the activities of a folk-character. When the tiller says,

Tiller: ..... sou bāgar bukuloi yōvā, garuto mār etā māri rākhi diyāgoi. 40

(Hallo! my son you please beat the bull and control it).

Teton actually goes and kills the bull. But the tillers instruction was not like that. He simply requests Teton to

38. Ibid.
40. Ibid, Act- II, Scene- IV, p. 292
control the running bull.

Similarly, when the fruit-seller says,

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pohāri : paicāto pelābi, kalāsit labi, bukut gor māri loi yābi.\(^4\)

You give the money, take the bunch of bannas by giving a kick in the chest. This is the simple meaning of this expression. But Teton actually done this.

Teton has been able to marry the daughter of the minister by a clever device at last he makes himself an officer called Teton Tāmuli of the kings court. Considering the common properties of a folk character, namely, exaggeration, abnormalities, prominence of situations etc, we see that here the character of Teton Tāmuli has full-filled these norms.

Besides the character of Teton Tāmuli, we also find folk elements in the other characters, i.e., Dhanāi (son-in-law), Manāi (father of Teton), Champāvati, Rongdai, Pratham chor, Ditiya chor, Hālwā, Pohāri, Grihasta, etc. The playwright displays intimate knowledge of rural life through the characters.

**Bhut Ne Bhram:**

Gohāin Baruā's 'Bhut Ne Bhram' (Is it spirit or Hallucination) is not a much popular play. This play can not be consider as a comical or serious social play in the true sense. This play

\[ \text{Ibid, Act- II, Scene- V, p. 295} \]
is a collection of some pictures with a definite purpose. Gohain Barua himself says about the purpose of the play in the preface of the play. He says, it is true that the drama may not be fit to be called comic, but if this can remove the illusory belief in ghosts among men and even to a limited extend, the author would be gratified. To achieve this end the playwright depicts the character. The picturesque as depicted by the dramatist give us some valuable information about the beliefs of the nineteen century. The characters of Hālowā, Jālowā, Soneswar, Fazlur, Pohāri, Garakhiyā, Pratham Kāniyā, Ditiya Kāniyā, Tritiya Kāniyā, Māk, Nariyā, Bez, Guwāl, etc. are superstitious, irrational. From this dramatis personae we find the traditional customs, behaviour, rituals and beliefs of the people.

Mahari (1893)

Mahari by Durgā Prasād Mazumdar is a satirical farce. The theme of the play is based on the life of the tea garden. One day a half-educated boy Bhābirām meet Mr. Fox the European manager of the Ouguri Tea Garden. Bhābirām presents at the Bunglow of Mr. Fox with an introductory latter from his brother (who is a pleader) for getting a job. Bhābirām has a little knowledge of English. However Bhābirām manages a job in the garden. But due to his foolishness and conspiracy made by Holirām Bār Mahari, he has compelled to give-up his job. The acts and behaviour of Bhābirām gives us humour. When Mr. Fox begs Bhābirām

42. Gohain Barua Račanāvali, Bhut Ne Bhram, Preface
to give him a hammer then Bhābirām sends him a saw. Such a folly act creates humour and wit.

In this play the characters are painted in robust outline, but its humour is essentially grotesque. Attempts have been made to create comic effects through various devices. Through the character of Bhābirām, Mr. Fox, Mākari and Bhekōlā an element of jugglery and incongruity of words is used as a means of causing laughter. Mr. Fox utters a mixed jargon consisting of Hindi, Assamese and English words. Through the character of Mākari we know the behaviour and rituals of lower stratum. In this play we also notice a particular ritual in a farcical manner in the conversation between Mr. Fox and Bhābirām.

Topanir parinām (1932):

Benudhar Rajkhowā is a leading dramatist of the pre-independence period. Basically he has earned wider fame as a writer of farces. He wrote seven comic dramas. Topanir parinām (The consequences of sleep) is a vivacious representation of how Topani, a young educated man, seduced a young dame and was forced to marry her. The story of the play is based on a folk-tale. In this play the only element of laughter in it centers round the verbal misunderstanding created by the accidental use of the idiomatic Assamese expression 'topaniye jokāiche'. Topani is an educated young man who seeks to marry Ajali, the daughter

43. Baruā, Hem : Assamese Literature, p. 185
of jaibar. One day Topani goes to Ajali's house as a guest. At night Topani teased Ajali. Then she shouts and complains to her mother,

'āi Topaniye jokāiche'

Her mother replies,

'Topaniye jokāiche yadi sui thāk'

And accordingly the naive girl sleeps with Topani.

This can be possible only in the world of Sādukathā.

Tini Ghoini (1928):

Tini Ghoini of Benudhar Rājkhowā is a small seven Act play. The play deals with the problem of co-wives. Ālirām is a young educated man. He has married three women. Among them Phuleswari his first wife is half-educated, but she is uncultured; his second wife is Rangdoi. She is unable to meet the emotional needs of Ālirām. His third wife Padumani is highly educated. She meets his emotional needs but she is over free. However, he was not happy. So he decided to leave his home and he seeks to go on pilgrimage for Kāshi. At that time his wives come to know the matter and accordingly they prevent him from his journey. Now he repents and declares himself;

Tini ghoinir premat parile kumār cākar dare
ghuriba lāge.45

45. Tini Ghoini, Act- VI, Scene- V, p. 50
(One has to revolve like a potters wheel, if one falls in love with three wives).

Here the playwright shows the evil effect of polygamy. Through the character of Aliram, Phuleswari, Rangdok, we find the lower pattern of livelihood. Being an educated young man Aliram marries three women — but he is not still happy — such act is the element of simple humour and it makes this character as a folk-level character. The humour of this play is purely situational. However, the elements of laughter we also find in the dialogues such as,

\[\text{Aliram} : \text{tomar gānat pami golo}\]
\[\text{Padumi} : \text{yene jokto cunar panit.}\]
\[\text{Aliram} : \text{tomar kathāt mugdha holo.}\]
\[\text{Padumi} : \text{yene pahuto byadhar bāhit}^{46}\]

\[\text{Aliram} : \text{I dissolve in your love.}\]
\[\text{Padumi} : \text{As does the lech in lime}\]
\[\text{Aliram} : \text{I am enchanted by your words.}\]
\[\text{Padumi} : \text{As the deer is by the tune of hunter's flute}\]^{7}.

Corar Sṛsti :

Corar Sṛsti (the making of thieves) of Benudhar Rājkhowā may be considered as a light comedy. The dramatic story is borrowed from the Arabian folk-tales of 'Alibābā' and the forty thieves. The central character of the play is an expert thief, Dhurandhar. Dhurandhar does theft only in

\[\text{46. Ibid, Act- IV, Scene- I, p. 25}\]
rich man. He also distributes unnecessary stolen goods among the poors. He knows how to charm. The two husbands Dhumuhā and Maurām lead unhappy lives with their respective wives, Cenidoi and Batahi. One night, with the help of charm (Nidrābān) he gets the wives exchanged. The two pairs now enjoy their new conjugal lives. Though the drama is derived from an Arabian folk-tale, nevertheless, the playwright has been able to maintain his own skilfulness. Through the character of Dhurandhar the traditional use of charm, mantra and tantra of a particular society has been clearly expressed. Other characters like Cenėdai, Batahi, Maurām, Dhumuhā also gives us some features of Assamese folk-life.

Bhāgya-pariṣā (1916):

Bhāgya-pariṣā of Chandradhar Barūā is a notable light comedy of Assamese literature. The theme of the play is derived from an Arabian folk-tale. The original name of the Arabian folk-tale is 'the story of the Merchant who lost his luck'. In this play Paniram is the main character who is very poor. Dhanakanyā and Bhāgyakanyā plays a significant role on the character of Paniram. Due to the misfortune Pānirām loses the money beg, but when he is lucky enough he becomes a prosperous trader and he also recovers the lost money beg. As a folk-story based drama here we find the supernatural elements in the magical powers of the two goddesses which bring luck to Pānirām. We can point out the supernatural elements in this way: (a) Dhanakanyā and Bhāgyakanyā comes for singing from
heaven to the world and they experiments their magical powers through ।
| pānirām; (2) kite takes away money from the head-dress |
| of । pānirām and leaves it deposited in her nest; (c) a valuable |
| piece of diamond accidently out from the belly of a fish; (d) the |
| money beg lost hidden inside a basket of husk which was sold to a |
| man, but after one year the lost money beg recovered from the |
| same basket, etc. |

The playwright displays skill indepicting the varied picture of rural folk-life. pānirām, Māniki, Mān, Woman, Kewalīyā Bhakat, Fisherman, Moneylenders etc, are the realistic and representative of their classes. The songs as used in this play is the song of rural folk.

pānirām : jetukimāk ājibahālo,
Māniki : jetuki-bāpek ājī bahālo etc.

Nimāntran (1915) :

Nimāntran of Padmadhar Chaliḥā is a neat farce where we find a comic picture of distress of four scholarly fools who lack of common sense. According to S.N. Sarma it is highly entertaining. Little learning is a dangerous things — the theme of the play is basically based on this ethical proverbs. Here we find a philosopher, a grammarian, an astrologer and a physician from a western country come to the king's court for attending a feast. When the

47. Sarma, S.N. : Asamiya Nātya Sāhitya, p. 368
guests are provided with a little ration then the rest they have decided to collect themselves. Accordingly, the philosopher goes to the oil-presser to buy muster oil. When he speaks sophisticated language the oil-presser does not understand. However, he buys some in a can. But he has confused on the road — whether the oil contains the can or Vice-versa, to solve this mystery, he holds the can upside down. The oil comes out and the can becomes empty. Then he goes to the royal guest house with the empty can.

On the other hand, the physician goes to market to buy vegetables. He finds everything is costly; so he buys a cucumber only and comes back.

The grammarian got the duty of cooking. He was waiting for vegetables and oil. When the boiling rice was emitting some words (bhut, bhut, bhut), then he thought that this is not pure and hence, he threw away the rice. After that the philosopher and the physician presents with empty face. But the astrologer was not return. Then they all go to the forest in search of the astrologer. He is discovered at the top of a tree with an axe in his hand. It is found that the astrologer did not cut the branches of the tree as the stars were yet to be in their proper spheres. His accompanies request him to come down.

Their speeches, behaviours and activities regards them as a folk type character.
Kene-Maja (1919):

According to the playwright it is a lyrical drama. Because it being full of songs. However, this play is a new type of farce Kācim and Julekha were poor husband and wife. One day they have made a plan to improve their economic condition. They arrange a fake dance-show to earn money. The chief attraction of this dance show was a Bājji from Lucknow. Julekha sells tickets about Rs. 745/- to the rich man. In this way they earn money and become rich.

The playwright use songs to create fun. There is enough element of humour in the dancing pairs.

Kācim: dil mor jān mor piyār
Julekha: nojokabā-eivore him siyār
Kācim: tumī āsār sambal.
Julekha: tumī jarar kambal.48

Kācim: My heart, my life, my beloved.

Julekha: Do not vex me like this. I would make face at you.

Kācim: You are the means of my hopes.

Julekha: You are the kambal (rug) at my winter.

Kukurikanār Āthmangalā (1917):

Kukurikanār Āthmangalā by Mitradev Mahanta is a farce which is based on a popular folk-story of Assam. Here the dramatist successfully depicts the amusing story of a night-blind young man (Cengeli) going to his father-in-law's abode.

to attend the Āthmangalā fest. There is a folk-element in the character of Cengeli. Cengeli is cunning but simpleton too.

Being a night blind man it is difficult to go his father-in-law's house at night, but he goes by holding the tail of a cow. When he was at cowshed of his father-in-law, at that time his brother-in-law thought him as a thief, then he try to hide him that he was not a night blind and provisionally he has succeed. However, his latter activities and behaviour proves him as a night-blind man. In the dinning room Cengeli slaps his mother-in-law in her face mistaking her for a cat. Then he cuts unpalatable jokes with her in the after-dinner chat — being again unable to distinguish her identity from her sister-in-law's. To secrete his night-blindness he hides himself in the place meant for throwing leaving from dinner plates (cuva-pātrā). When the leavings are thrown on his head, he thinks that it is raining and he prays to the rain god. According to B.K. Bhattāchāryya, Cengeli is a perfect clown and his clowning is beautifully portrayed. The source of the farcical here is mainly the defective eye sight of the purblind son-in-law. His activities are the sufficient ground for making him as a folk-character.

Biyā-Biparjaya (1925):

The theme of the Biyā-Biparjaya by Mitradeva Māhānta is based on a popular proverb — 'bridhashya taruni vārjāya'. It is a satirical farce on child-marriage, dowry and superstitions.

49. Bhattāchāryya, B.K. : Humour and Satire In Assamese Literature, p. 221
Here we notice, some evils of rural life such as child-marriage, dowry and superstitions from the character of Māniki, Jagara, Pohar, Bhuban Chandra, Cengdoi etc.

Kărengar Ligiri (1937):

'Kărengar Ligiri' of Rupkonwar Jyoti Prasād Āgarwālā is one of the greatest plays in the history of Assamese drama. From the point of technique Kărengar Ligiri is one of our best domestic tragedies with a romantic bias. Here the playwright portrays a powerful love story. The hero of the play Sundarkonwar is a complex character. He is a prince. He has wide knowledge about scriptures. He is an idealist but he is anti-woman. Without his interest he married Prince Kānchankumāri according to the order of Rājmāo and under social pressure. Kānchankumāri loves Anangarām. Anangarām is a friend of prince Sundarkonwar. In a very bold manner Kānchankumāri express the naked truth just on the first night of her meeting with the husband that she really loves Anangarām. After that the revolutionary minded Sundarkonwar handed over Kānchankumāri to Anangarām at Kājiranga forest. Then Kānchankumāri commits suicide. People says that this is due to the secret love of prince with his palace maid Sewāli. The Rājmāo (king's mother) order Sewāli for banish. When Sundarkonwar learnt this he declares that he will marry Sewāli and he immediately goes to Nagā Hills to bring Sewāli. Sewāli considers it that if the

50. Baruā, Hem: Assamese Literature, p. 196
prince will marry her, then the officers and ministers may kill him. So she sacrifices her life by jumping into a spring.

Through the character of Sundarkonwar, the dramatist deals with the conflict between man and environment, old tradition and new outlook, man and destiny. Though there is a lot of Shakesperian and Ibsenian influence on this play is perceptible in its structure, the drama is absolutely a fundamental creation. The dramatist displays the characters of this play in the light of native air and water. Hence, we find various local folk-elements in the dramatis personae of this play. The character of Rājmāo and Anāngarām are typical illustrations of conservatism although they belong to the class of elite. Kānchānkumāri is mentally very strong. Although she recognises that social sanction and the order of parents are not always helpful and effective for the around development of human personality, still she accepts the laws of divine power (Bhāigya) and its influence on human life, so she says, 'Bhāigye sāgi diā ghar tor bar khutā mānuhe larābalod tān, si kasta barhāi, khutā ughāl nākhi'.51 (it is very difficult to move the post as made by luck, it increase suffering, the post never fall). The heroine of the play Sewāli is very simple, innocent and soft. She is just like a Sewāli flower. Her words, behaviour, activities all are reducible. Simplicity is the special feature of her character. So that she sacrifices her life by jumping into a fountain to save the life of prince. Other female

characters like Seujee, Rebati, Runuk, Junuk, Thunuk are purely local folk.

Kārengar Ligiri is a mixture of tragic and comic elements. In this play the comic situation creates through the character of Bapura. In Shakespearean plays there are comic characters to create humour and fun. They are known as Fool. We find there are two types of Fool in Shakespearean dramas, i.e., wise fool and Rustic fool. Jyotiprasāda Bapura is like the 'fool' of Shakespeare, who appears to be foolish outwardly but is full of wit and cleverness. Bapura is a servant and faithful accompany of the hero (Sundarkonwar) like the character of Vidusekha in the classical Sanskrit drama or Shakespeare's fool.

Nirmalā (1924-26):

Nirmalā by Lakshmidhar Jarmā is a full-fledged five-act social tragic play. Nirmalā, the heroine of the play is married at her twelve years to an old Brahmin, Jadu bāpu. Her husband dies even before she got puberty. Her father Baruā arranged a private tutor to take her education. Padma Kānta Hazarikā, the private tutor falls in love with Nirmalā. But the conservative society is not allowed to the widow-remarriage. At last the hero and heroine commits suicide by jumping into a river. The playwright here depicts a tragic picture in the life of Nirmalā and her family. Although it seems to be a domestic problem, but the play is not domestic one. H.C. Bhattāchāryya points out.
Nirmala is the outcome of a revolutionary attitude of the author against the prevailing custom of early marriage and the ban upon widow marriage of Brähmin girls. \(^{52}\) In this drama the dramatist in his exposition boldly shows the conservative character and hypocrisy of the Brähmin community. Early marriage and the problem of child widow, the impact of casticism, the corruption, meanness, and shamelessness of rich social leader and the tragic story of Brähmin widow has clearly expressed in this play. There are many characters in this play. The villain of the play Maheswar is a typical illustration of scoundrel. He utters the name of Krishna, Hari, but he acts notoriously. Through this character we find the idea of folk customs and belief of village folk. e.g.,

Maheswar : rām, krishna, hari (mātīt māṅgal cāi) gāyan bārā, tor larātor operat sandir dristi pariche. rangā kāpor ejor, dhan tinidon, son epherā, rup-epherā āru kalā cāgali eta bāmūnak dilei dekhon tor larātor bhāl haba lāge. \(^{53}\)

Maheswar : Ram, Krishna, Hari (He predicts on earth). Borua, the Janidevata is not satisfy on your boy. Your boy will be cure if you offer to Brähmin a piece of red cloth, rice three begs, a piece of gold, a piece of bronze, and a black she goat.\(^{7}\)

Likewise Manu, Chandi, Māneswari, Vokonda, Bakuli, Maheswari, Kāndurā, Bhudhar etc. also give us different idea, belief, customs and attitude of village life, e.g.

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\(^{52}\) Anattāchāryya, H.C. : Origin and Development of the Kusamese Drama and the Stage, p. 83

\(^{53}\) Nirmalā, Act- I, Scene- 3, pp. 14-15
Maheswari:  
\[\text{tai jakhiniye eyâk ãhudi khuwâle.} \]
\[\text{nahele si tar piche piche kukurtor} \]
\[\text{dare ghuri phure kiyya?}^{54}\]

(That naughty girl spells him. Otherwise why he goes back to her like a dog?)

Although the play is not successful in its entire result, still it gives us a vivid picture of rustic scenes.

Cirâj (1962):

In the field of drama, acting and film of Assam Nat Surya Phani Sarmâ is a bright star. He has written about eight plays. His historical play Bhogjarâ and social plays Kiyya and Cirâj are the milestone of Assamese drama. Cirâj is his master piece. He preaches Hindu-Muslim unity in Cirâj. The central character of the play is Cirâj. He is very simple, but his responsibility for man is immense. He saves the life of Sâbitree from her impending death. When the villagers remarks him that Sâbitree being a Hindu girl, they should send the girl to the Hindu village, then Ciraj says,

\[\text{Cirâj: eha mor kihar garaj pariche hindu-ahindur bicâr} \]
\[\text{karibalohe. mânuhe mânuhar gharat âsraya bicâriche,} \]
\[\text{mai âsrayi nîdile amânuh naham ne?}^{55}\]

(Cirâj: It is not my duty to judge whether she is Hindu or Muslim. Man seeks to shelter in the house of man, if

54. Ibid, Act-2, Scene-1, p. 135
55. Phani Sarmâ Racanâvali, Cirâj, Act-1, Scene-3, p. 235
I do not give them shelter, shall I not be inhuman?)

The character of Ciraj is very attractive whose peculiarity of his individuals is simplicity. He works for the interest of the public and also donated his property and wealth by the request of public. We find his simplicity from the dialogues of Aghona. When Ciraj received a letter from Sita (illegal daughter of Sabitree) in Calcutta then Aghona was sitting. Ciraj read the letter seven or eight times infront of his sister Phatemā. He forgets about the existence of Aghona. Then after half an hour he comes from home to go to the Masjid to read the letter infront of the people. He thinks service of man is the service of God. There is no Hindu, no Muslim, no Christian, no rich, no poor. Only there is a human society. This is his humanistic philosophy. Ciraj is the representative of the unity and harmony of human society.

In the character of Aghona we also find folk-elements. He is faithful servant. He spent fifty years in Barua's family. He is closely associated with the good and bad, likes and dislikes and problems and solutions in Barua's family. His behaviour, speech everything reveals him that his character is like the folk character of clown or Vidusaka as we found in Sanskrit drama or western drama.

56. Ibid, Act- III, Scene- I, p. 264
Magribar Ajān (1946):

Saradā Bardoloi is a notable playwright and actor. His significant plays are Magribar Ajān, pahilā tārīkh (1956), sei Bātedi (1957), Upahār (1972), pohār jilingāni (1978) etc.

In the use of rural and lower middle class urbanised idiom, Bardoloi is unique.57 Magribar Ajān has written jointly by Saradā Bardoloi and Krishnananda Bhattacharyya. In his Magribar Ajān the dramatist preaches Hindu-Muslim unity. We find a beautiful picture of unity, strife and clash, mode of behaviour, speaking of rural life in this play. In Magribar Ajān we find both positive and negative sides of rural life. Lathau, Karim, Rupsingh, Halirām, Balorām are village boys. They learns, plays and games from their childhood. Karim is a Muslim boy. Rupsingh belongs to Kacāri community. But here caste and religion did not hamper their unity and amity. Vedeu is a village girl. Lathau and Karim saves Vedeu when Kābuli try to lost the chastity of her. The villagers decided to boycott her father. Then Karim offer economic helps to save from the boycott of her father. Lathau marries Vedeu. But a wicket young man Balorām displease who also tries to marry Vedeu. Hence, due to jealously Balorām burnt the house of Lathau. Karim sacrifices his own life to save the life of their child.

57. Baruā, Hem: Assamese Literature, p. 198
The drama tries to give a realistic picture how in the villages of Assam the different communities like Hindu, Muslim, tribals etc. live together peacefully. The dramatist displays nicely how superstitions, dogmas, corruptions, casticism, creeds, customs, charms, spells, predictions etc. plays a vital role on rural life. More or less all characters of the play reflects such folk-elements of village life through their functions, behaviours and speeches, e.g.,

Pitrām: ei jāpāri bejinir kathā maio sunicho. Kapili pāra kebājan dekāio tāir mantrar balatei kebājanio chowāli āniche. 58

Pitrām: I have also heard the name of Jāpāri Bejnī. Some boys of Kapilipār brought some girls by the power of her spell.

Bāgh (1971):

Himendra Barthakur established as a dramatist through his social play Bāgh. Bāgh is a challenge against social meanness. In this play the playwright displays that it is scientific outlook and mathematical logic through which all social as well as political problems can be solved. In the beginning, the playwright started the theme of the play by talking of two notorious thieves. Mangalā and pado are the two thieves. A farocious tiger creates a terrible situation in the village. Under this circumstances the villagers were afraid. They request

58. Magribar Ajān: Act-2, Scene-2, p. 37
to the government to take necessary action, but the government remains silent. From top to bottom the officers are busy for their own interest. The villagers leave their home and they resides in other places. Under this situation the anti-social force takes full advantages.

We find a fine rural picture in this play. The rural characters Mangalā, Pado, Thāneswar, Ghaneu, Gāonyburāh, Sātolā and Bāhādur are representative of their classes. We find folk-beliefs, rituals, mode of worships, prejudice, superstitions through these characters, e.g.

(1) Pado : *ei keita mayangar dandeswar beje jari dicil.*

lagat thākle kono vai nāi.  

(Belief of magical practice).

(2) Thāneswar : *ebilāk bāghar khoj nahai sir; gāont kibā apadevatā lambhiche. eibār āmār gāon uchan haba sir.*

(Belief of spirits).

(3) Thāneswar : *... ban-rajar lagat eidare cupoti marā bhāl nahai; tātkoi Ghanābāpui kowār dare pujā-pātal evāg diyāi bhāl.*

(Religious belief)

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59. Bāgh, Scene- 1, p. 6
60. Ibid, p. 7
61. Ibid, p. 11
Thaneswar: It is not good to play with the jungle king; rather it is better to offer a puja as Ghanabapu says.

Tejimala (1976):

Tejimala written by popular playwright Prafulla Borā is a very successful and significant play in the history of Assamese social drama. Here the playwright depicts a vivid picture of rural life through the nineteen characters. Although the story element of this play is derived from a folk-tale, the playwright has been able to prove his skillfulness in depicting characters and other dramatic aspects. Tejimala is a full-fledged tragic play consisting of fourteen scenes.

The heroine of the play Tejimala is a simple, innocent girl. She loves Jone. But due to envy and jealousy her stepmother Būrgā punished her extremely. The cruel woman Būrgā crushed Tejimala's hands, legs, and head and ultimately Tejimala dies. After that the stepmother and the villain Manohar dug a pit in the corner of backyard and buried the dead body of Tejimala. After few days there grew a pumpkin creeper. The creeper was full of fruits. When a beggar (māgani) reached out to pick a pumpkin, the creeper cried out—

'pātare tūlate kee lāu dekhili
kare māgani burhi
bukure kutumak banghe gīlile
sāudor numālijee.'

62. Tejimala, Scene X
have you seen any pumpkin under the leaves
Wherever you come from, Oh beggar
It is poor daughter of the merchant,
crushed to death by my relatives

The beggar considers it as the act of spirit or ghost and accordingly she reported the matter to the stepmother. Then she cut it down and threw it away into her backyard. There grew up an orange tree (jaratenga). The tree was full of fruits. One day Tenga, penga, and other cowherds try to reached out to pick the fruit, the tree cried out. The matter is known by the stepmother and Manohar. They cut down the tree and threw it in the river Brahmaputra. The tree now grew a lotus plant and it blossoms an attractive flower. After few days the merchant Satymbar return his home by boat on the river Brahmaputra from business. When he reached out to pick the flower, the lotus cried out—

hāto nemelibi phulo nicingibi
kākho nācāpibi mor
padumar janam loi jibanto katha
ceenhar jiyyari tor.63

Do not reached out, do not pick the flower.
Do not come to my side
I am living as a lotus
I am your affectionate daughter.

It is obvious that we find there are large amount of folk-elements in the character of Tejimala. The character of stepmother

63. Ibid, Introduction
is the symbol of evil elements. Her behaviour, mode of speaking, activities everything is folk-type. Similarly, through the character of Vuikali, Maināmati, Rangili, Pamili etc. we find the behaviour of folk-life. Mathurā and Manohar are the two attractive characters, Mathurā is the servant of the merchant He is purely a folk character. He uses proverbs, riddles, sufficiently in every dialogues. Each and every characters of the play strongly reflects the belief, behaviour pattern, religions, rituals, customs, simplicity of folk-life.

Over and above these plays, there are some other plays wherein we find folk elements in the dramatis personae. Among these we must mention Bāyaner Khol, Medelu, Ghora-jānar Jalbāk of Jugal Dās, Pahilā Tārrikh, Upahār of Sāradā Bardoloi; Natun Purush of Jagadish Pātgiri; Luit Kānyā of Karunā Dekā etc. We also feel a growing trend towards the journey back to our folk elemental life.