CHAPTER - VI

MATERIAL CULTURE IN RAJANIKANTA BORDOLOI'S LITERARY WORKS.

There are many basic queries that have to be asked and answers found as regards to the constitution of material culture - even if tentatively. Such queries are - what are the chief elements that may be designated as material culture? What its main ingredients are? How do these differ from other aspects of culture of a particular society? To answer all such questions one has to approach an Anthropologist. The Anthropologist would say that material culture of a particular society or a human race is that portion of cultural organ which delineates the gross and entire phenomenon of knowledge. In this conception of idea material culture deals with the physical products of cultural organ. These products are physical or tangible by nature, and obviously, it deals with the crafts, artisanship and making which determines the cultural behaviour of a society. It also determines the actual position of other aspects of culture of that particular society. It also relates other fields of folklore study, viz. oral literature, social folk-custom and performing art form.
Richard M. Dorson, while determining the nature of this particular field of study, has elaborately described the entire constituent - elements of material culture. He maintains -

"In direct contrast to this oral folklore is physical folklife, generally called material culture. Now we deal with visible rather than the aural aspects of folk-behaviour that existed prior to and continue alongside mechanized industry. Material culture responds to techniques, skills, recipes, and formulas transmitted across the generations and subject to the same forces of conservative traditions and individual variation as verbal art. Now men and women in tradition oriented societies build their homes, make their clothes, prepare their foods, farm and fish, process the earth's bounty, fashion their tools and implements, and design their furniture and utensils are questions that concern the students of material culture."¹

Depending on this remark of Dorson we can arrive at this conclusion that the elements of material culture or physical folklife denote the objects of distinct cultural periphery of a society. In other words it can be said further

that these elements, which are most outwardly in nature, bring forth the completeness of other cultural elements. These elements are refuges of other cultural organs.

The study-field of material culture of a particular society can be tabulated as follows:

A - Folk-architecture and folk-sculpture
B - Food habits and recipes.
C - Folk life system.
D - Folk-instruments.
E - Folk artisanship and technicalities.
F - Folk industry
G - Folk-art
H - Domestic home-stead system.
I - Domestic house-wares
J - Utensils, attires and ornaments
T. Chattopadhyay is of the opinion to classify the folklore materials into two divisions - material folklore and formalised folklore. The former excludes the homesteads, domestic materials, farm implements and dresses. The latter which is also called non-material folklore comprises of folk-literatures, folk-arts, folk-dances, beliefs and superstitions etc. Further he draws a line-sketch of all elements which can be placed as material culture as follows: (Loksanskritir Tattwarup O Swarup Sandhan, p. 112).
The elements of material culture are abundantly noticed in Rajanikanta Bordoloi's novels and other literary works. It has been mentioned more than once in the foregoing pages that Bordoloi could obtain apparent ideas of these cultural elements in course of his round-the-corner tours of Assam. He gathered experiences of heterogeneous cultural aspects of the state in course of his travels throughout the state and he translated these experiences in the pages of novels and other literary achievements. His only social novel Miri Jiyari is the complete exposition of Mishing culture. The Mishings have their own cultural entity and life which is an integral part of Assam's great cultural map. Almost all the pages of this masterly work-piece are adorned with the outcome of outstanding capability and exquisiteness of Bordoloi's enviable penmanship. Likewise, his other novels are also loaded with innumerable elements of physical folklife. Besides, one can find such elements in special references of his three short-stories and essays.

Architecture and house-plan:

The architecture of Assam, particularly of the medieval period may be broadly classified into two distinct categories viz. the secular and the religious.\(^3\)

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In Bordoloi's novels one can easily notice the varied architectural reference of these two distinctive patterns of Assamese homestead which are woven into different themes of the episodes of the plot. These can be categorised as follows:

1. Satirical architecture in Manomati and Miraj Bhakat.
2. Domestic homestead of nobles in Pandua Dhor and Manomati.
3. Tribal dormitory in Miri Jiyari.
4. Architecture of temples and shrines etc. in Tamrakar Mandir, Pandua Dhor and in other articles.
5. Architecture of historical monuments of the Ahom regime.
6. Domestic home-stead of common villagers.

There is an elaborate and vivid description of the famous kirtan-ghar of Barpeta in Manomati. The description lies in the first chapter of the book and the chapter itself is named after the description as Barpeta kirtan gharat (in the kirtan-ghar of Barpeta). The discourse of this chapter is related to the contextual description of the doul festival of Barpeta. The doul festival is
observed in Barpeta-satra in the month of Phagun (February and March) every year. In describing this festival, the author has given a picture of architecture of Kirtan-ghar which is the representative specimen of satra-type of architecture of medieval Assam.

According to the description of the novel, the measuring area of Barpeta satra is huge and vast. The satra is surrounded by a fortification of brick. In popular Assamese a fortification is known by the word gar. This is a common feature of architecture in all sorts of public complexes of Assam. This wall-like structure is erected around the main-complex area for sheer protection and architectural decorum. Again in ancient times a gar was also constructed in vulnerable places during the days of war as a blockage for invading foes. This was also built in those days to attack enemies as the resort of skilled war-fare. But, apparently there are marked differences in the construction of these two types of fortifications. Those used in the wars were constructed with high elevation of land, soil and other materials, but not with brick and cemented mortar. But the fortification built of brick which surrounds a house-complex is an exquisite workmanship of Assamese architecture.
The stockade of narpeta _satra_ covers a land of four puras. This vast, long and huge stockade is an example of Assam's architectural uniqueness. The entrance to the _satra_ is to the west of the complex. Here in this context, we can find a conventional approach of Assam's domestic house-building system. The people of Assam have their own beliefs and superstitions in connection with their house and its construction. Accordingly, they keep the main entrance of their home-steads either in the western or in the southern side. This they do, in their own way of believing, to evade any eventuality from evil forces. Climate and natural calamities as well as storm and torrential rains etc. were also taken into consideration. In the sayings of Dak utterances of worldly wisdom and knowledge of day to day life are found. It is said here that —

rub pachim kari ghar bandhila
dakshine bhui uttare bari
atiya dibha tini sari
pube bhanu pachime chaya
uttare gua dakshine chua.  

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4. pura (skt. putaka) is a unit of land measurement prevalent in Assam. It covers 4840 sq. yard.

Meaning:

Houses to be constructed facing east and west. Agricultural land should be placed in the south and the garden be planned in the north. Build three rows of compound fencing. The house should get the sun to its eastern side and trees should be in the west. plantation of areca nut should be done in the north and the south should be open.

In respect of building houses, the western direction is still considered to be the most auspicious one in Assamese popular belief.

There is reference of existence of pucca portico in the satra. It is known as bat-ghar or bat-gara in Assamese. It is in the fore-front to the original entrance of the main complex. In Assamese house building, whether it is of satriya type of construction or domestic home-building, the presence of one bat-ghar is regarded as an inevitable one. It acts like a gateway to the main house; besides it does the duty of a primary barricade of the main complex. Even to-day, in Assam a bat-ghar is constructed as a special mark of traditional building.
It is mentioned earlier that the house-building system as has been described in Manomati is the archetype of Satra architecture. Mention of Dakshinpat Satra in Nirmal Bhakat and Mayamariya Satra in Radha Rukminir Ran is also made in these two novels. The Satra institution of Assam is the most salient feature of Assam Vaishnavism. The structural feature of Satras, which appear to have own architectural setting, lay tremendous impact on Assamese house-building system, and stand as a prototype of the kind. A study of structural feature of a Satra will clarify the matter. According to S.N. Sarma each principal Satra, which is generally situated on quadrangles surrounded by palisades or wall is marked by the existence of four different units (1) the namghar (prayer hall), a gabled roof hall, (2) the manikuta (sanctum sanctorum), (3) huti (residential hut), and (4) the bat cara (the entrance).

It is noteworthy that Satra-architecture attained its completeness by taking a singular pattern during the Ahom rule. The Ahom architecture and sculpture has its own type of contribution to the long history.
of Assam's culture. The Ahom monarchs, of course of the later period, became inclined to the Vaishnavism and helped in integrating the Vaishnavite movement. Hundred of satras were established in the next two centuries and all of these were patronised by the rulers. According to Vaishnavite tradition King Rudra Singha (1696-1714) gave recognition to several hundred satras established throughout his kingdom. These satras, played a conspicuous part in determining the whole cultural discipline of the state including house-building and architecture.

The house building system of ancient Kamrupa was not much complicated. As Assam has been an earthquake and flood-prone zone, the people very naturally preferred wood, timber, bamboo and cane as housing materials to brick, stone and mortar. The roofs were made with thatches. However, with the royal patronage of the Koch, Mughals and the Ahoms people started using bricks and cements of indigenous nature and quality in construction of buildings. The bricks used by the Ahoms were of novel peculiarity. The unburnt, raw bricks were made of sticky soil. These bricks were burnt in the brick kilns with fire. The size of the bricks differed in some cases. Usually these were of one hand's stretched measurement length and breadthwise and of one inch's density in cubic measurement. The bricks were hardened while burning by anointing, a dense plaster of cement
mortar, popularly known as karal in Assamese. For quality and novelty of bricks the Ahoms used various efforts and methods in the field of production of bricks. For example they adopted special measure to produce colours for bricks. For this purpose persons were engaged to collect blood from leeches. Leeches were reared up in lakes and low lands for the purpose. Place names like joktali, chinatoli which mean places of leeches may indicate such practices, prevailed in ancient Assam.

In nanomati again (4th chapter), while describing the house complex of Chandi Barua, the novelist has given the specimen of Assamese home-stead and medieval sculpture. The house complex of Chandi Barua has been named as tol and is surrounded in all sides by a brick fortification. Chandi Barua is a man of high social position - a man of dignity. With the specimen of said tol of the place known as barua jhari, one can come across the idea of house-building system of contemporary social-life. It has been said that in front of Barua's house there exists a large tank. The side banks of the tank are adorned with native flowers which is the earmark of a house-site of socially dignified persons. Observes S.N. Sarma — "The excavation of gigantic tanks for
supplying drinking water as well as for beautification of different areas, was enthusiastically undertaken by the Ahom monarchs. Not only the kings, even the queens and nobles took initiative in digging tanks of different dimensions for the welfare of the people by causing tanks allotted to them .......... These big tanks, popularly called sagara, were usually treated with some chemical substance which kept the water of the tanks clean and pure. The process of the chemical treatment was called rah dhala and officer under whose supervision water of the tanks was treated was called Rasendra narma. The number of tanks, big and small, are numerous and they are scattered over the regions ruled by the Ahoms. In Kamrupa and Darrang some pre-Ahom tanks are also noticed.9

Besides the main house, there are various types of house, known as cara ghar, maral-ghar, bura-ghar, etc. which are very much common features of an Assamese domestic home-stead. In Assamese society, such types of different units are planned as inevitable necessity for different purposes. More over, randhami ghar, bharal ghar and gohali ghar are also built for its respective usefulness. Amidst all these small units of houses there exists a big

court-yard called cotal. It is almost customary to have a yard in every house-hold of Assamese society which is also an integral part of the socio-cultural life of Assamese people. Observes N.K. Barua quite rightly in this context - the other inevitable part of house is the two court-yards in the front and back side of houses. There is beautiful description of court-yard in Assamese folk songs. It is noteworthy to find the practical usefulness of court-yard as a place of leisurely relaxation of villagers and other activities. The villagers gossip here in the morning and evening leisure time, take cool in summer, have the worm of fire in winter, keep the paddy, thrash it, sieve and winnow it and work-out bamboo and cane-making in leisure-time. Mothers and grand-mothers sing lullabies in the evening. They make the babies to sleep by narrating folk-tales, prepare the wasp for looming, sundry the paddy and rice. Festivals and religious institutions are held in the court-yard by installing pandals. On the whole the court-yard has various relations with Assamese folk-life.

In Dandua Droh, another historical novel reference of almost same type of home-stead is found. It is in the description of premises of Haradatt Choudhury of Jikeri, a

place in Rangia Civil sub-division of Kamrupa district, Hardatta Choudhary, the central figure of the novel is a noble and as such his house-complex is a specimen of respectability and dignity. There is a garden in front of his premises and a big tank near it. A temple is on the bank of the tank. A big house exists beside it—guests are accommodated here in this big house. After it there lie the cara ghar, mural ghar and soa ghar. Jikeri’s Choudhary has his own worshipping apartment. This is known as gosain-ghar. The presence of such worshipping house is regular phenomenon in the premises of Assamese noble class.

Hardatta’s brother Birdatta too owns a premise of uniform planning. His complex has large areas of nut and cocoa-nut garden. A tank lies near by. The residential area is surrounded by a thick fence of split bamboo—popularly known as cakoa and tati (8th chapter).

On the other hand in Manomuti again (3rd chapter/2nd part) one can find a description of a residential premises of Mainbari village. The description given by the novelist is a pen-picture of Assamese home pattern. It runs—’The premises where Purusotama general Mingimaha stays at Mainbari village is a big one. There exists a courtyard in the front of the complex. There are two gardens to the north and south side of the court yard.
There are as many as eight apartments in the middle of the complex. To the west of these apartments there is a garden of larger area. The cara-ghar or the portico is on the front; it is lying north and south wise. This has two rooms. The southern room is on the front side. It is open towards the southern side. On these two sides it is knee-high; two fencings made of reeds are erected on it with grooved bamboo to the bottom. The northern room is covered with fencing. There lies a cot in the southern room. To the north of portico there is another apartment adorned with a dome. (This house is directed east-west wise). The main entrances of this house faces the courtyard. A holy scripture is being kept inside this house. There is a passage in the southern side, which serves as thorough-fare to the inner apartment. In the inner courtyard a long cow-shed exists with east-west direction. To its south there is a bar-ghar for the owners' use. To its north again there have been series of grannaries. All these are constructed in north-south direction. In between the main house and grannaries there is a small thorough-passage to go to the garden in the hind'.

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The description found in Rajani Kanta Bordoloi’s novels are specimens of home-steads of magnates, men of ranking and respectability. But the housing-pattern of common people is not always alike. In this connection B.K. Barua has opined quite rightly -

As folk-life is undivisible, so, be it nam-ghars or residential houses, all these are bearings of Assamese life. The village housing system of Assam becomes different in some aspects due to the local geographical state (the banks of river, the hills and the jungles etc) and the socio-economic positions of the inhabitants. 12

It is clearly seen in various pages of Bordoloi’s novels, particularly while describing the architecture of Chandi Barua’s premises, such references have been made (4th chapter). One of such references is '.................. in between these ponds there is a passage. While going through this passage one can see the dome of Barua’s portico, i.e. the cara-ghar which happens to be a large one. The house is thatched, two-roofed and has a dome on it'. 13

The dome-pattern structure is the specimen of Ahom architecture in Assam. Houses, constructed with dome and gable, were regarded as the luxurious dwellings of the

12. Barua, R.K.: Assam Leha Simrikiri, Pr. 91-91
people of royal stature. These were also regarded as the token of singularity and uniqueness of royal heritage. The Ahom kings, with a view to differentiating the life-
-style of royal family and nobles with that of common people imposed some restrictions in building such houses.

B.K. Barua observes that during the days of the Ahoms the commoners could not construct houses with dome. Neither they could build pucca houses. General people were not allowed to construct pucca houses, nor they were allowed to build houses with a dome. Only the kings could construct houses with domes on both ends. 14

Chandi Barua was a noble of Kamrup and a man of high social profile. The premises of Chandi Barua with all its dome-shaped construction and pucca architectural pattern gives us a clear picture of social system of contemporary life of Kamrup. S.N. Sarma is more meticulous in his observation. He remarks "the common people were not allowed to build houses having gabled roofs at both ends. A house with gabled roofs with rounded ends was a privilege confined to nobles and members of the royal families. This restriction, however, did not operate in Western Assam which came partially under the Ahoms in the second half of the seventeenth century." 15

purpose in building the perspective of the novel. Through these descriptions and other relevant elements one can easily guess the dignity of Chandi Barua and of Haridatta Choudhary in Pandua Drok. Upon such dignity and vanity of this man the main theme of the novel gets its own development. Hence all these elements of physical folklore system have their own contextual relevances in the development of plot and theme of the novels.

On the whole, the picture of Assamese home-stead (specially of elite class) in Pandua Drok is very clear. Like the descriptions, found in the novels of Rajanikanta Bordoloi, one can find various examples in other works of literary personalities of the time. The traditional set-up of Assamese home-construction is almost the same every-where in the state.

Observes D.K. Barua that the Assamese people construct within the complex many apartments to serve different purposes. They construct caran-ghar, a bar-ghar, jaru-ghar, maral ghar, sowani ghar, bulani-cara, pak-ghar or randhani ghar, dheki-sal, tat-sal, gobali-ghar, bhural-ghar, and besides these bat-cara and nam-ghar or kirtan-ghar.16

16. Barua, B.K.: Asam Loka Janskriti, i. 92
In Assamese home-stead, the presence of one maral ghar was almost a must in the past. It was built almost in the front of the main apartment, popularly called bar-ghar. Maral ghars were being used by the women-folk in joint families, whereas the bar-ghars were being used as the main apartments by the heads of the family. This was built so with its separate existence. The kitchens were situated generally in a distance from these houses. The system of constructing the store-houses, commonly known as bharal-ghar was a bit different from that of others. In Assamese society people felt the necessity of constructing a store-house for the storage of food grains collected from paddy-field. Moreover, in addition to building cow-sheds for keeping the cattle and other domestic animals, they built cang (elevated desk) for the purpose. Sometimes they construct nests etc. for keeping pigeons, ducks and poultry. While describing the house-complex of Chandi Barua in Manomati, the novelist has mentioned of a long thatched house where countless birds, duck, pigeons etc. were kept.\textsuperscript{17}

In the discourse of premises in the novels the novelist has made special mentions about the existence of namghar and gosain-ghar. It is almost customary in

\textsuperscript{17} Bordoloi, R. : \textit{Manomati}, i. 17
Assamese society that each and every village should have a common prayer-house. This community prayer-house is called nam-ghar. In some places it is known as gosain-ghar. Namghar or gosainghar is a socio-religious community institution. But an Assamese gentleman of rich financial status while constructing his full house-complex, does make provision for a prayer-house of his own. The Assamese people are religious by nature and it is almost their second nature to adore the Almighty in the morning and in the evening. In conformity with this general norm the gentle person, who have their own prayer houses, sit and pray god with deep adoration in their specially constructed nam-ghar.

J.N. Sarma has provided an account of typical medieval Assamese house complex thus — "Usually the house complex of a family consisted of four main huts attached to each other, viz. cara ghar (sitting room), maral ghar (intermediary house where the hearth was kept burning and where members used to sit, discuss and perform household duties), barghar (sleeping house where valuable things are kept) and randhani ghar (kitchen and dining house). In addition to the above, there were bharalghar (grannary house), cohali ghar (cow-shed) and in the Brahmin, Kayastha and Kalita families a gosain ghar
A prayer room or the deity room existed. The last named house was invariably a part of the Brahmin house complex, but it was not an indispensable part of the house-holds of other castes. The size of the each house noted above depended on the economic condition and number of family members. The pattern of the house complex usually followed in eastern and central Assam is shown below:

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        Karapat
          |  
          |  
Vharalghar  Gosainghar  Cora ghar
          |  
Courtyard  Naralghar
          |  
Randhani ghar  Barghar
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In western Assam the residential house complex was different from that of eastern Assam. Here houses were built and are still being built in the square or rectangular plan keeping the inner court-yard in the centre.  

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Such a house plan is almost evident in all the descriptions of the novels.

Morong house:

Mention has been made of morong house of Mishings in Miri Jiyari. The description of naraciga bihu which is known as porag by the Mishing people is the special feature of this novel. While describing this festival, the novelist has given special attention to the importance of this community dormitory of the tribe. The main theme of the novel is the love affair of Janki and Paneni. Their love and affection got its all sorts of attainment in and around this morong house. Hence the contextual importance of this community dormitory is the noticeable phenomenon of this novel. Each and every community does possess its own cultural entity and characteristics. With the help of such cultural characteristics the traits of the community flourish and come to the stage of identity.

The morong house is the primary element of Mishing culture and folklife. It reflects the democratic system of rural life of the Mishing people. This dormitory is the basis of democratic social system current in the society. Amongst the Mishing there are deka cangs for the unmarried youths and gabhara cangs for the maids, but during the days of festivals and other social functions the difference of
The 'Mourung' or the bachelors' dormitory is an important institution in a Mishing village. It is a public hall constructed in a central place of the village. It may be constructed in a plinth or in a platform. The wooden posts and beams are decorated with wood carving of primitive design. The Mourung serves the purpose for the annual mourung and other major festivals. Public gatherings such as 'kebang' are held here. It is the venue for the village elders for their assemblies where disputes are settled. Formerly the bachelors' dormitory served as a training institute for the youths but today that aspect is neglected and naturally the dormitories are not well maintained. During festivals, however, the mourung acts as a

new look. In some villages in 'Nambar' (public congre-
gational hall) takes away much of the traditional functions
of the morong. 20

The system of constructing the morong is similar
to that of tribal home stead. It is the archetype of
tribal home-building system, which is till quite different
from the modernised luxuriant architecture of elite society.

The place selected for construction of this public
hall is generally away from the busy village life. Need-
fully the place selected for constructing the morong should
be open and wide. It should facilitate the youths and
virgins to perform their dancing activity without hindrance.
There should be provision for space to prepare foods and
drinks in large quantity. The word morong in the Mishing
language means open and freeness. 21

The morong has its own uniqueness in its con-
struction. Generally this house is constructed in east-
west direction. Its building material consists of timber,
bamboo and thatch. The posts are of wood; these are nor-
mally round. The beams are decorated with flower-curve.
Roofs are thatched thickly. The entire house is erected

Samah Thakur, C.C.;
Satwik, M.C. 21

on a platform of bamboo, usually known as pany. M. Pena has given a clear, graphic description of the construction of morong. He writes —

"The morong is built generally in a centrally placed open meadow with its axis lying parallel to the Subansiri or the Brahmaputra river. It has a bamboo platform raised about 5 feet above ground with strong supporting wooden posts and beams, but without walls around. The thickly thatched roof is supported by two rows of wooden posts in both sides with one big central post gaikuntha. The wooden posts are decorated with primitive wood carving. The beams are made of matured cinelo (Salacia sulburryycym) are also decorated with various wood carvings. A crude image of rahu fish with a trunk (pirbibik) is invariably there, the significance of which is not clear. Some people think it to be the image of goddess of wealth or fertility. However, various other designs like birds, circle, square of assorted kinds are also added and painted in yellow, green and white. Ladders are provided in both ends of the platform". 22

The Morong has its own origin in antiquity. A section of scholars believe it to be the relic of the hunting stage of human evolution. Hunting is closely associated with the tribals and perhaps for it the relationship of such public halls, current among the tribals cannot be believed. The Nagas and the Adis are two dominant hunting tribes. These two tribes also have separate dormitories for both boys and girls. The Adis call it magup. The bachelors dormitory for the Garos is known as moki fanthe. While the Mizos call it sowlbuk. It is known as dere among the Miyongs.

Till recent past kebang - the supreme panchayat system assembly was held in the Morong. So the importance of this dormitory in Mishing folklife is a salient feature to be noted with interest. Keeping in his mind, Rajanikanta Bordoloi has given special reference of the Morong in Hiri Jiyari. The dormitory has played an important part in the development of plot in this novel. In the third chapter the novelist has provided a footnote on Morong. The naraciga bihu is celebrated in the Morong wherein the affair of Janki and panei becomes deep in course of their dance performance. Hence the sequence of events of the

23. "Morong ghar: it is the community sacred house of the Miris. Almost all the Miris dwell on platforms. Their Morongs are also erected on platforms". Bordoloi, R: Hiri Jiyari, I. 11.
novel takes the climax centring round this public dormitory and finally the verdict of baregam (the chief) in kebang is heard in morong itself - the verdict to excommunicate the lovers guilty of adultery and immoral infatuation.

**Other Architecture:**

(a) Excepting *Niti Ajyati* and other novels are historical ones and almost all the themes of his novels revolve round the events of Ahom rule. Therefore, there are references of some famous historical buildings of Ahom regime in his novels. Of course the descriptions are bereft of elaborate and vivid account of the architectural pattern of such buildings. Of the descriptions of such buildings, constructed with Ahom architectural design mention can be made of *rang ghar* (Rangili, p. 60). Likewise references of *kareng ghar* (palace-house) and *talatal ghar* (storied-building), two other monumental works of the Ahom regime can also be found in the novels. During the Ahom rule *kareng ghar* was built to do the royal administration. *Rang ghar*, built in Rangpur, the erstwhile capital of the Ahoms, is an inclosure of the capital. Here the Ahom kings sat with his nobles and minister to view the public shows. *Talatal-ghar* is another monumental specimen of Ahom architecture. It was built by the king to escape during foreign invasions. It has seven under
ground stories with a tunnel-linkage to river, sikhow, which was dug to facilitate the kings to make clandestine move during political upsurges and wars. All these buildings which may be called to have secular architectural patterns are distinct examples of Ahom-architecture, observes L. Gogoi —

The examples of architecture of the Ahom era can still be found in unaffected state. Many monuments have lost its existence due to humid climate, earthquakes and floods etc. but the rang ghar, talatal ghar, sila sanko and gar ali etc. are still there to signify the architecture of that era.24 He further notices about the pattern of construction of these buildings. Although the doors and windows of rang ghar, talatal ghar and kareng ghar bore the little semblance of persian and bangal architecture, in fact a unique Assamese architectural style during the Ahom era was formed. On the other hand its similarity with the architectural-technique of bhat of ankas of Com bosha signifies the influence of Tai-architecture also.25

The Ahom kings were very conscious as to the quality construction of buildings. It is also known that the Ahom rulers appointed different officers to look into

different departmental duty, entrusted to them. Doul Barua, a special officer was appointed by the Ahom kings to supervise the qualitative construction works of temples, shrines, satras and other monumental buildings. The surname or title is still being used by a particular sub-tribe of Ahom community, who holds the pride of maintaining quality construction works.26

The *rang-ghar* (the pavilion building) was built to view the public shows by the kings. The king enjoyed the merry and gaiety of *bihu* festivals when *bihu* dances were performed on the lawns of the building. He also enjoyed from there the fun of *mahiju*, *sen-juj* and *kani-juj* during the *bihu* days. From that viewpoint, *rang-ghar* has its own contribution to the field of Assamese culture. The roof-structure of *rang-ghar* bears the semblance of Assamese two-roofed typical home construction. The *kareng* house of Cargan and *talatal* house of Rangpur are both seven-storied ones. There are three stories each on and beneath the earth surface and a story on the surface level of the earth. Rock-sculptures were curved on the walls of the buildings. Images of flowers and leaves, god and goddesses, animals and common people are carved on the buildings. On

26. Informant: Miss Sangita Doul Barua, (23 yrs), a student of Gauhati University, 11.6.92
the gosain-dol, situated on the west of Joy-sagar vast uses of terracotta sculptures can be noticed. Although it is an only specimen of its kind it bears the semblance of Gauriya form. There are two cement carves-out of Dragon on the walls of Kareng ghar also.\textsuperscript{27}

Reference of burial mounds of the Ahoms known as maidams are also found in the novels. The construction technique of these maidams is having its own characteristic. Normally the maidams are constructed with timbers like sal (shorea robusta) and singari (castenopsis indica). Sometimes these are built with bricks like a tomb on four cornerd cave-hole.

The most striking example of architecture and house-building system of Ahom era lies in the construction of pat-ghar, holong-ghar and singari-ghar etc. These were small huts, constructed with timbers and other local housing materials. These huts were erected for the purpose of king’s coronation. The most special features of these houses were its wood-carves. The beams and posts of these houses were decorated with designed wood-works.

Reference of designed wood-works is found in other descriptions also. In *Nirmal Bhakat*, Nirmal Atoi gave the description of Burmese architecture to the listener of his episode thus —

The domes of the houses of the kings were adorned with golden pinnacle. Most of the houses of commoners were constructed with wood. Their temples, like the 

of our country, were pointed and nice to look at. These were made of wood. There were golden pinnacles on all domes and the woods were bedecked with various design-works. The Burmese people were adept in wood masonry.

On the whole the architecture and sculptures of the Ahom days has a great significance part in the cultural history of Assam.

*Temples, shrines and religious institutions:*

The term temple has many equivalent expressions in Assamese and Bordoloi has made use of almost all these expressions to carry the meaning in colloquial ways.

Mentions have been made of daul, a word used in Assamese to denote the temple, particularly in eastern part of Assam covering the districts of Jorhat, Golaghat, Sibsagar

Dibrugarh, Lakhimpur, Tinsukia and also in Darrang and Sonitpur. The word perhaps may be originated from devalaya, another term again to mean a temple. Mention of various temples and holy places has been made by using the term than (nkt., sthana- a place) in many occasions. The term is a popular phenomenon of Assamese people to carry different meanings viz. (a) to mean a seat of the religious heads of the Vaisnavas, (b) to indicate the places of worship, associated with the cremation of religious persons and (c) to mean a temple as in the cases of Balia Babor than etc. Another word mandir, originated from sanskrit mandira is very commonly used throughout the whole of Assam. Gosain ghar, namghar etc. are some names of temples, where the word ghar is used to denote a temple.

Bordoloi has made mention of various temples and shrines of Assam in his literary works. As has been said earlier there is no elaborate description of architectural techniques of such temples and shrines. But one can elucidate the general pattern of architecture of such temples etc. from the occasional references made in his writings. In the building system of all these holy shrines the elements of Assam's folk-art, folk-architecture and folk-sculptures etc. easily noticed. But wholly, the entire temple building activities of Assam is a Pan-Indian phenomenon which has its
unique impact in Assamese architectural network. Observes P. Sarma - "The temple building activities of Assam can be said as an offshoot of the same architectural type that was once popular in North India. They are basically the nagara type with regional elements infused into them. Mostly they are sikhara or rekhaeul type in their elevation. An examination of the temple sikhara reveals that a variety of shapes, such as rekha-deul, natha, hut-shaped, barrel-vaulted, bulbous, round, pyramidal and polygonal etc. exist. As for ground plan, we find all sorts of geometric patterns right from square, rectangular to stellate and polygonal. The temples of Assam seem to have one chamber i.e. the garbhagrha which contain an antarala, a mandapa, a mukhamandapa or archamandapa or any one of or all of them.

The materials used for construction were the examples of regional elements infused into the national structural significance. Brick and stone were primary materials for constructing a temple. Timber was also used for specific purposes. For the cemented masonry work a lime-surki mortar, prepared locally was used as bonding material. A more sticky and composite mixture made of nati-kalai molasses, tamarind etc. with lime-surki is also reported to

have been in use. Mud of sticky consistency is found to be used in less important works viz. boundary walls, fortifications etc.  

In Tamreswarir Mandir there is the mention of the temple of the copper deity, popularly known as tamreswari mai and kecaikhati gosani, being worshipped by the Deuri-chutias, a greatest plain tribe of Assam. They call the deity of the temple as peshasi meaning the daughter. Once, human sacrifice was offered here in the temple and hence it is called the kecaikhati gosani, meaning the goddess of eating raw meat. The temple may be said to be an off-shoot of Chutiya culture. The Chutiyas had their own cultural pursuits.

The shrine is now at a ruined stage and whatever the semblance of its relics can be found is not sufficient enough to get knowledge of its architectural skill. Various reports of historians, archaeologists and scholars as to the construction of this shrine are ready in hand - but these are rather confusing and contradictory. But the novelist has supplemented a note by W. P. Brown, who came to this region wayback in 1837 A.D. It may be mentioned that


Reverend Brown also compiled a grammar titled Deuri-Chutia Grammar. An extract of the note is given below:

The chief and oldest of the shrines was the tamarghor or copper Temple which still exists in ruins and was lately visited by Captain Yetch. It is described as a small stone building - nearly square built with cement, the stone being joined by iron pins not clapped. The roof was of copper, but it has fallen in and now lies there. The interior is 8' square. The whole is enclosed within a brick wall 130 feet long by 200 feet. Near the entrance in the western wall is a small stone tripod. It is learnt from Changrung phukanar hurumji, the only authentic record on Ahom architecture that the temple actually had a plate of copper laid over it.

32. Bordoloi, R.: Tamreswarir Mandir, p. 82

Sarbananda Rajkumar has mentioned an account of Dalton which is almost identical to that of Brown - the shrine is built square with iron pins. The stones were not cemented with mortar. The thickness of the wall is 4½ and interior is 8 feet long. The top roof of the temple was copper but now it has fallen. The temple is surrounded by a brick wall of 130 feet long by 200 feet. On the front of western wall there lies a three-legged stone. A human sacrifice was offered there every year in early days (As quoted in Pabitra Asam, pp. 23-24.)

33. Changrung phukanar hurumji, p. 29.
From the observations made above, we can come into conclusion that the original stone sikhara of the temple was covered with copper sheets. The original stone was either damaged or lacerated by natural calamities during the latter part of the medieval period. The Changrung phukanar Buranji has recorded the height of the temple but does not give the record of anything about the sikhara, crowning the temple. The measurement of the plan, recorded by Dalton (furnished in the footnote), almost tallies with the record of Changrung phukanar Buranji. Dalton did not find the temple intact and as such the aforesaid Buranji is the only authentic record. The Buranji reveals this much only that the building happens to be a simple one and there is nothing significant in its structure.

There are descriptions of thangs in accounts like Dibrugarh aithan darsan and Joypur maujar sitakunda darsan. These places are common holy places with temple and shrine devoid of any grand architectural skill. In these descriptions the archetype of simple Assamese-architecture can be traced out. The aithan has a small house of tin-sheet and the description given by the novelist is a model of common and austere worshipping house of the time. It is almost
fallen now. It has a soil plinth.\textsuperscript{34} According to the
writer himself the \textit{sitakund} inscription is as follows:
'...... towards the south of this island there is a small
temple. Inside the temple there is the stone idol of
goddess Sita and her other two followers. On the western
side there is an open house of tin-sheet on the temple.
To the south of this house there is a long but fallen
house of brick ....... On the top of the house. There is
a roof of brick and it was modelled on the western archi-
tectural pattern.'\textsuperscript{35}

In Dandua Droh, mention has been made of Nadan
Kamdev temple\textsuperscript{36} when Hardatta performed purahsaran and
sarasadhan to appease goddess Durga. The selection of
this place, still known for its solitude has its own
relevance in the contextual side of the novel. The arduous
effort, tried by Hardatta to appease the mother goddess
Durga could have been made in such a place only. It also
reveals the novelist's sincere effort to expose the might
of old sanctum two the eyes of common people and thereby
establish the rich religious heritage in the pages of
written literature.

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{ll}
\textsuperscript{34} Sarma, N.K.(ed) : & Rajni Bordoloi \textit{Ragamala}, p. 153. \\
\textsuperscript{35} Sarma, N.K.(ed) : & Ibid. p. 157. \\
\textsuperscript{36} Bordoloi, R. : & Dandua Droh, p. 30 \\
\end{tabular}
\end{center}
The Madan Kamldev temple is an old sanctum, situated near Baihata Charali at a distance of about 20 miles (33km) from Guwahati to the north of the Brahmaputra which is said to be built in the 10th-11th century A.D. At present relics of temples, built on a large square area are found. Local tradition speaks of the existence of 18 stone temples out of which ruins of 12 temples only have been identified. Mention of this temple is found in the early history of Kamrupa. There are many legends also as to the existence of this temple. The relics of the temple which are lying scattered in the premises proves that the temple was constructed with stone and brick.

The basic plan of architecture of Madan Kamldev temple is of nagara type. The basic plan of the original temple and its vimana appear to have contained a pancaratha type thoroughly decorated with motifs and designs, the beauty of which was more enhanced by the existence of solid angasikhar. The likes of angasikhar of Madan Kamldev temple have not been found anywhere in the state. On consideration of the architectural and sculpture work decorated on all the vertical divisions of the temple, it appears that

37. Captain Dalton also mentioned the existence of 18 temples in the temple-complex of Madan Kamldev Temple Ruins in Assam, 1855.
The temple belongs to 11th - 12th century A.D. Remarks
P. Sarma - "...... the existence of the long architraves, with pilostered niches occupied by deities similar to those found in the Khajuraho temples as well as the existence of the erotic sculptures and decorative pillar. Capitals at the site, recalling the Khajuraho types point to its contemporariety with the Chandella architecture of the 10th-12th century A.D. 38

There are many images of various gods and goddesses. There is one sivalinga, an embracing image of one god and a goddess under a roof of tin-sheet. At present, worshipping is taking place only in the Madan Kamdev temple and the Shiva temple. The images are specimen of Assamese folk-sculpture. Some images are carved in erotic and passionate state. The temple at present is maintained by a local committee and the State Government has recognized it as a place of tourism.

Bordoloi was very much influenced by the architectural skills of these temples and shrines and also of the Assamese domestic home-stead and tried to adorn his writings with mention of the same. In Dandua droh mention of various temples and shrines of Guwahati viz. Kamakhya, Bhubaneswari, Sukreswar Ugratara, Catrakar, Navagrah and Basistha etc.

have been made. All these temples and shrines were constructed with tremendous architectural skill, which bespeak of a rich tradition of Assam. The famous temple of Kedarnath of Hajo a renowned place of socio-religious institution and heritage, has also got special mention in the same novel. Other places of worshipping like Aswaklanta, Janakasneswar, Dirgheswari and Radhan Kamdev etc. are all associated with variegated myths and legends. Mention of all these religious places have found place in the pages of novels which prove the love and esteem of the novelist to the tradition of his motherland. It is often noticed that the mention of all the heritages was made as occasional ones. Sometimes mentions were made usually as it did not have any close linkage with the plot structure of the novels. But whatever it might be, mention of these temples and shrines etc. had given his writings a canvas of folklore and heritage, upon which the essence of historical novels can doubly be deepened and flourished. Nordoloi never failed in this endeavors. He incorporated the elements of architecture and sculpture in the minimum ever possible scope in the novels and other writings. He even expanded his observation to the architectural skills of Nurma when he made mention of Hajo's type of building in Nirmal Bhat. Nordoloi in his novels, tried to make
people of Assam aware of their rich heritages in this particular area and as such his novels are invaluable assets to have at least a glimpse of domestic homestead and folk-architecture.

**Food habit and recipe:**

Assamese people have their own heritage of food habit and recipe. The geographical environment helps a lot in preparation of food materials of a particular nation. The food-habit is determined in relation to the state of ecological and environmental condition. Assam, being situated in a different geographical environment, has had its own peculiar type of food-culture. On the other hand, Assam being culturally inhabited by multifarious tribes and sub-tribes, it has had different food habits and recipes. Generally, depending upon the food-habits the Assamese people can be widely placed under two broad categories - (1) Conservative and (ii) Liberal. Obviously the people of tribal variety and origin (both plain and hill tribes) are liberal in their food habit, barring the strict religious prohibitions the tribal people of Assam do not like to be conservative in their food-habit and recipe. On the other hand the non-tribal folk, due to their ancestral conservatism, go against the course of naturalism while
preparing their food-material. For example wine and meat are current among the tribal people which marks the cultural trait of their own. People belonging to different tribal ethnic groups habitually eat pork, chicken and beef etc. which are socially prohibited in an orthodox Hindu society. Even they have their own ways of preparing fish - an equally permitted food-material. Every tribal society has its own drinking habit, too. Therefore, depending upon this particular unit of food-culture the people of Assam can broadly be placed in two different cultural traits. The people of Assam being categorised as tribal ones, prepare amongst themselves a native liquor with the pulp of rice. Popularly this variety of liquor is known as lao-pani in Assamese tribal societies. The Ahoms also indulged in such native liquor and still the drinking habit is current among them. The tribal people, during the observances of their festivals, resort to community drinking-habit. On the other hand, these liquors being prepared from rice-pulp are mostly enriched with vitamin. The tribal people for the rich quality of such type of drinking material take these as inevitable part of their day-to-day life food-habit.
It has been mentioned time and again that Bordoloi's *Miri-Jiyari* is more a document of Mishing folk-life than a novel. In the third chapter of this novel we come across the food-habit of the Mishing people when the novelist discoursed the *nara ciga bihu*. An extract of description from the novel with free rendering will substantiate this -

It has scarcely dawned in the Miri villages on the bank of Suvansiri. There is pomp and splendour in the Miri villages. The youths and virgins, being attired with beautiful garments have visited the doors with baskets in their hand for collecting rice, salt, oil and pulse. Some have collected the dishes and leaves. On the other side some twelve people have carried on their shoulders some six swines. Two people have carried in a basket almost forty chickens. The women-folk have given the utensils out of their house. 39

This is the usual and common picture of a tribal community feast during the festivals. Community feast is a must in the days of festivals and for the said feasts the food materials should come through the *tolon* (collection) system - this is one of the most charming side of composite Assamese cultural arena. Unlike the usual days the community feasts are eaten in banana leaves and the use of it

is still current in Assam. During the feasts the differences of status and position of people are less considered and even the women, too coming away from the daily business become a part of the social gathering.

Besides this, the habit of eating pork and chicken, as found in the above description, brings forth another aspect of the Mishing culture. Pork and chicken are very favourite with the Mishing people. These two pet animals, have had close relation with the Mishing people far from being the food material. Same thing can be told in case of apong, the native liquor of the Mishings. Apong, is used in ritualistic observances, in worshipping and in entertaining the guests. Observes S.N. Sarma -

"............. the tribal people cultivate the habit of drinking liquor from their childhood and it is a must in all their social and religious gatherings. Liquor is brewed from rice, and is called lao-pani or joo. This variety of liquor though intoxicating is nutritious also." 40

In the aforesaid chapter of the novel mention of apong has been made on several occasions. The novelist has sometimes named it as laopani and sacrastically sometimes has called it amrit (the nectar).

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Given below two references of literal translation from *Miri Jiyari* wherein the mention of apong has been made in the context of celebration of naraciga bihu.

Thus the blessings were over. The youths and virgins stood up. The cook also became ready with the permission. The bhakatas could not hold the batis. One female bhakatani was to make them drink the amrit. Thus the drinking of amrit was accomplished by them. Thus the drinking of amrit was finished.

Again -

......... in due time the saj was ready. The entire dih was placed with all utensils amidst the bhakatas. The distributor stood up. He started distributing the saj. All the old people, the paka-bhakata and keca-bhakatas began eating the saj, with joy. The youths and virgins did not sit. They were on their knees when these people began eating.

In the references the word saj has been used by the novelist to mean the prepared dishes and dih has mentioned the food-recipes.

The system of existence of common distributors in such community feasts is an usual factor of Assamese social

42. Ibid. p. 14.
life. In such feasts superiors and elderly persons are
given much respect and they are entertained first. Such
things are clear evidences of simplicity and social decency
of entire Assamese tribal societies.

Besides Miri Jiyari, in the other novels too,
Rajanikanta Bordoloi has brought the reference of wine
as the element of drinking habit of several characters.
It has been noticed and said earlier that the novelist
has used the term amrit (nectar) to imply the meaning of
ridiculous bearing. This is very befitting to the charac­
ters and situations of the novels. Wine is treated as an
improper food in civilised social set-up and as such it
can't be taken with usual freeness and openness. "The use
of liquor or wine was mainly confined to the tribals and
some low class people. Among the Hindus, especially those
of the upper classes, indulgence in wine or spirituous
liquor was considered a great sin".43 The novelist with
a more meticulous out-look observes the improper effect
of wine. In Rangili, Satram told his friend Santiram "to
take few drops of 'nectar' first and then go" (page 30).
But as taking wine was a prohibition, Santiram was emba­
rassed at the offer of his friend and hesitated to drink.

43. Sarma, S.N.: A Socio-Economic and Cultural History
of Medieval Assam. p. 250.
Moreover, should there be the over intoxication, he feared, he might lose his balance. Santiram then said to his friend -

"Friend! If I do take it more, I may get intoxicated and I may lose control over myself. My father will know my state if I go in this way on the road. My father will get worried if he comes to know about my addiction with liquor. Friend! You best know it that my father happens to be the 'medhi' of guru families. What will remain then with us if everybody comes to know that the son of a medhi family is addicted to wine." 44

This is only an example of the kind. There are several other such contexts in which the novelist has advocated the impropriety of country liquor as a drinking food. In Assamese traditional life wine is a restricted food and the inhibition of the same is prevalent and as such it cannot be taken in a liberalised manner. Such contextual references have deep affinities with Assamese social life.

But the matter is somewhat different with peoples of royal status and the like. They can drink at their own will and there is no hindrance on them. There are many contexts in Bordoloi's novels where we can find some

44. Bordoloi, R.; Rangili, p. 31.
characters in the habit of drinking wine. In *Rangili* (p. 34) king Chandrakanta is so portrayed to pass the latter most part of his life in the midst of luxury of liquor and court-dance of royal house-maids. In *Manomati* there lies the scene in which Mingimaña, the general of the Burmese invaders, is found drinking pitchers-full of liquor and enjoying the company of brought-in lady-love (p. 99).

Nothing sort of a deliberation on Assamese food-culture can be complete without special discussion and observation on the role of tamol-pan on the same. Tamol is the areca-nut and pan is the betel vine leaves; the two joint-words means a preparation consisting of the areca-nut, betel-leaf, lime and spices, which is chewed by all natives of India. But the Assamese people have their own ways of chewing the same and the tamol pan forms one of the most integral part of Assamese cultural life. In Assamese homestead complex the presence of a garden of a betel-nut is almost inevitable. Betel-nut has its own place of respectability and honour in the traditional cultural set-up of the Assamese people. A sarai with a bunch of areca-nut is the most esteemed element in Assamese society. S.N. Sarma has traced the antiquity of this habit of Assamese people thus — "the *Yoginitantra* has remarked that the women of Kamarupa are habitually addicted to
tambuls (tambulas asadabhavet). The same authority further remarks that in Kamarupa there was no provision for ascetism and abstinence from non-vegetarian diet. Brahmacarya was not meant for the people of Kamarupa. It was a great sin to avoid eating duck, pigeon and wild boar. Probably the Yogini-tantra simply legalised the then existing practices and food-habit of the people of Kamarupa. 45 Assamese people are hospitable by nature. Guests are entertained with the sincerest cordiality by Assamese family and the custom to greet the visitors first with the offering of a piece of betel-nut is the unique trait of Assamese society. Even the poorest of the poor who does not possess anything to greet a guest somehow manages to offer him a piece of betel-nut. Moreover the Assamese people use it as a māhūḍī (the act of chewing anything after eating) after taking anything in the form of food or drink. In this way betel-nut has its own use of application in practical ways also. On the whole betel-nut has its distinct relationship with every sphere of traditional Assamese life. The reference of betel-nut is abundantly noticed in all items of Assamese folk-songs viz. lōkagīt, bīhu-nam, biya-nam and ban-git etc. The Assamese

youths and virgins reciprocate their love with the offering of betel-nut - as such it acts an element or symbol of love.

There are innumerable refrains in Assamese bihu songs wherein the lovers are found to yearn their beloveds with the fond memory of offering the same. The chewing of betel nut by typical Assamese old grand-mother is rather a known phenomenon of Assamese folk-life. As such, the influence of betel-nut in every sphere of Assamese social life is noticeable.

Chewing of betel-nut is an age-old custom but the method of its use has undergone changes. Scholars assume that the first ever use of betel-nut in Assam was made prevalent by the Dravirs. But the Austrics and the Mongoloids, who also came to Assam to reside here, were also known to be habituated with the use of it. Chewing of betel-nut is the popular habit of mostly all Assamese people and the Khasi people of the nearby Meghalaya. The Khasis are the remnants of the Austric stock.

In popular Assamese there is a pair-word tamol-cali which has been mentioned by our novelist time and again. In Radhai Ligiri, the mention of the word is found. Such

46. Bordoloi, R.: Radhai Ligiri, p. 75
minute observation on the part of the novelist is the clear evidence of his sincerest endeavour to give the novels a folk-cultural outlook. Cali is a climber tree. Its bark is taken with betel-nut to make a pleasant taste. There are also references of different methods of slicing and preparing the betel-nuts for chewing in the novels. Bordoloi's novels are real pen-pictures of Assamese cultural life and as such he concentrates on each and every thing on contextual footing. For example in Rangili the heroine of the novel has offered his beloved a piece of thuriowa tamol. The offering of the thuriowa tamol, which is prepared by rolling on the betel-nut, connotes a very symbolic thing in Assamese social life. Unless there is any sort of cordiality between the people, thuriowa tamol is never offered to anybody. Therefore the mention of this typical characteristics of Assamese people has its special significance in the novels of Rajani-kanta Bordoloi.

Other than thuriowa tamol, there are other methods of preparation for chewing betel-nut in Assam. These deserve special mention here- These are -

(1) khaniowa tamol (sliced betel-nut)

(2) Cakaliowa tamol (thinly sliced betel-nut) and
(3) Khundiowa tamol (powdered betel-nut)

In almost all the novels descriptions of chewing betel-nut by the characters are evidently abundant. Such descriptions have given the characters a local and natural touch which is very befitting to the perspective and background of the novels. In addition such local touch has provided the characters with the necessary elements of folk-portrayal. In Manomati48 Pamila reddened her lips with the chewing of betel-nut with lime. Again, in Manomati itself the same character is described to redden her lips by chewing it with camphor. In Rangili mention of betel-nut has been made on several contexts.

In Bordoloi's novels many an occasion is found where descriptions of taking prasad are given. In Assam, like almost all other parts of India, prasad is distributed after religious functions of Hindu society. This is a traditional process. Prasad is the mixture of food offered to any deity or gods and goddesses, the remnant of which is partaken by the assembled devotees. It is generally made with soaked but-mah (pulse-gram), mug-mah (mug pulse), mati-mah (a kind of pulse, phaselous radiatus)

48. Bordoloi, R : Manomati, P. 34.
and rice etc. Ingredients of some fruits viz. apple, banana, orange, sugar-cane etc. are mixed with it. In lower-most part of Assam, specially in undivided district of Kamrupa, prasad is popularly known as gajj. The custom of taking prasad after any religious congregation or any sort of worshipping or nam-kirtan is traditionally current in Assam from early date. In some places again bhog is also offered along with prasad. In Assamese villages, there sometimes arise scenes at the time of distributing prasad, as the question of share and respectability relates to it. Bordoloi's sharp eyes could not even evade such a lighter side of life which is a good reflector of typical folk-life. One of such examples can be literally translated from Hanomati —

"The bar sabah or kirtan-ghar ends. The distributors begin to distribute the prasad in earthen pots. The chief arbitrators expect to have big dishes for themselves. All become arrogant with vanity at the time of taking prasad. Everyone claims big dishes as they are from prestigious families. Thus there arises a very disorderly situation. At one time the big dishes get finished. At length, the distributor has placed before Tajoram a cakali mala. Seeing the cakali-mala Tajoram becomes furious.

49. Cakali-mala: A small earthen pot which contains lesser amount. Here cakali-mala connotes the meaning of a trifle thing of lower dignity."
and said to the distributor reprovingly - 'what! am I a man of a pretty mala?' The distributor answers - 'my lord! the big dishes are already exhausted! that is why I have offered you this mala'. Tajoram then says - 'on what right you have given caru(s) to Govinda and others and have humiliated me by offering the mala?' The distributor then requests - 'my lord! please do away with your anger'.

This is the most common picture of Assamese folk-life.

Bordoloi's novels bear historical footing and therefore there appears the foodhabit of royal personages. The Ahoms had their own type of food habits, but due to their assimilation with the Assamese culture and tradition, it also underwent transformation and change. In Rangili there lies the description of food-items arranged for the Ahom king Chandra Kanta Singha.

'At about 10 o'clock at night when it is the time for the dinner, the king along with four youths enters the dinning apartment. The dinner for the king is brought in in golden maihang; the youths are offered in dishes of bel-metal. Different dishes prepared from ducks, pigeons, fishes, goat-meat wild-birds and crabs are provided.'

51. Bordoloi, R. F Rangili, pp. 35
In Rangili again one can find more references which bespeak of the food-culture of Ahom Kings -

The kings with the bliss of Bhattacharyya of Nadiya, Santipur could eat goats, chickens, wine according to their will. Of course, they did it well to give up the habit of taking beef in a hot place like India. 52

The novelist has given such remarks to make the readers well acquainted with the culture of the Ahom days - more particularly the days of Chandra Kanta Singha. The Ahoms were more powerful human race and structurally well built to digest any sort of food. Initially they were accustomed in taking beef, but due to the cultural syncreticism and assimilation of their culture with the mainstream of Assamese society they gave up the habit as it was strictly prohibited in Assamese Hindu Society.

Rajanikanta's genius hand never failed to focus on the food-habit of common people also. In fact, the mention of some traditional food items of Assam is abundantly noticed in the pages of his writings. This has transformed his novels into the documentations of Assamese folklife.

So far the contextual bearing of such reference is concerned, the mentioning of such traditional food-items, which primarily constitute a great and large part of the culture of

52. Bordoloi, R.: Rangili, P. 37
a particular nation, has given his novels a wide and new dimension. **cira**, **pitha** and **sandah** etc. are the most common items of Assamese food-culture which are occasionally incorporated into the pages of his writings. The early Assamese literature provides numerous references to the use of such food items. It is not denying the fact that with the advent of westernized dishes into the dining table of Assamese people and the hypo-enculturation of the masses, the people have tended to forget about their own native food habit. But as the popular maxim goes on, that folklore survives on the heritages, the people of Assam still can not forget their own tradition outright. **cira**, **pitha**, **sandah** etc. are significantly associated with the **bihu festival**. So these items are more than a common menu in the festival. But in traditional Assamese society these items are found round the year. **Jalpan** is an another word which has found place in almost all sorts of traditional setting in the novels and mention of the same has been made in common parlance of the characters. There are several penpictures in which the characters of the novels are depicted eating in traditional ways. Assamese people are very fond of this particular dish, which is prepared in various ways. Most commonly **bara-caul**, **cira**, **sandah** etc. are taken as primary ingredients to prepare this type
of dish. Yoghurt or curd or any kind of thickly fermented milk-liquor — more commonly known as dai is mixed with gur to the above ingredients for the completion of the same.

Bordoloi's novels have mentions of many feasts — either of community types or of social and ritualistic sorts. We have already come across the community feasts of naraciga bihu of the Mishing people in Miri Jiyari. Besides this the non-tribals, who have figured in the themes of Bordoloi's writings, have their own food-liking and this has been more precisely discoursed in the pages of his novels. The non-tribal people of Assam are orthodox in their food habit. This side of Assamese cultural life has also crept into his novels. An observatory reference of few such descriptions can be cited from Rangili in the description of marriage-feast of Bichitri and Manai. The feast was arranged in an austere manner as the parents were very poor. However the items of barali fish, tortoise, matimah and ou-tenga clearly indicates the food-habit of Assamese people in festivals.53

In Nirmal Bhakat again, the novelist has given the food habit of the Burmese people. Nirmal atal was made captive by the Burmese invaders narrated that the Burmese

53. Bordoloi, R.: Rangili, P. 86
people were habituated in taking cow, buffalo, wine, pig, chicken, duck, pigeon and dried fish. They ate mouse, rat and bat also.  

Clothes and draperies:

The list of material culture is complete with dress-material, ornaments and cosmetic etc. which are mostly treated as integral elements of cultural life of a nation. The literary works of Rajanikanta Bordoloi have special mention of these items, which bear testimony of traditional Assamese life-style. It has been mentioned earlier that Bordoloi wrote an article on the dress and costume of Assamese women under the name and style — Asamiyanir Sajpar. In the novels also, he has made keen observations on the dress-material of Assamese men and women. With the descriptions of such nature, one can get the glimpse of Assamese fashion — particularly of the days of the Ahom period—upon which the themes of his novel revolve.

In Miri Jiyari, while describing the dance-sequence of bihu-groups of which both Janki and panei were also performers, one comes across the vivid description of typical

bihu-dancers of Assam. Identical descriptions are also found in Rangili and Rahdai Ligiri. As Assamese virgin dancer wears a set of muga dress in bihu performance. panei and her co-dancers are attired in traditional muga-riha and mekhela cadar. They have pinned in their khopas kapou flower. Janki and other male-dancers are clad in muga curia. They wrap a turban on their heads and wear a necklace round their necks. Ear rings of Jangfai, set with precious stones are common ornaments worn by the dancers.

Description of other costumes, worn by Assamese women as also abundantly noticed in the novels. The day-to-day life dresses of Assamese woman are very common by nature. Generally Assamese women wear a mekhela in the lower-most part of body. Cadar and riha are most common pieces of cloth which they wrap in the upper-most portion of body. Khaniya is a long piece of cotton cloth with a flowered border. It is folded double and wrapped round the body. Kacali is the breast-ware. Being thus dressed up with unique variety of cloths, they make themselves up with cosmetics, acquired from nature's beauty. Such dress and make-up materials are quite often seen in describing the physical beauty of woman characters. In describing

55. Bordoloi, R.: Miri Jiyari, P. 10
56. Bordoloi, R.: Rangili, P. 44
57. Bordoloi, R.: Rahdai Ligiri, P. 5
This the novelist has mentioned about the ornaments also.

In Manomati the costume of the heroine of the novel is described thus:

Manomati has worn a flowered pat-mekhela and wrapped a riha around her body. She has worn a pair of golden bala in her wrists. In the nose there is the nak-phul. kariya is worn in the ears. In the forehead there exists the mark of vermilion. The hair is tied with a khekeru-patia khopa and her two lips are being reddened with the juice of chewed betel-nut.  

Almost similar description prevails in Rangili when Santiram, on the advice of Satram acts in a female role in the Rukmini haran bhaona performance. The description in which Santiram dresses himself up in a female costume is self-explanatory of the costumes and cosmetics of traditional Assamese women-folk. It would be an interesting reading if we give a rendering of the relevant passage.

' ........... he wears a pair of riha mekhela made of pat. He puts on an artificial breast cloth and sets artificial hair on head. He takes a rumal with some longs in it. She wraps round her body a silver bordered khaniya. Then combing the hair beautifully he puts a vermilion mark

on the forehead. He scrubs kajal in the eyes. Already he had a clean shave in the day time. He reddens his lips with the colour of the chewed betel-nut. He rubs alta in the hands. In the hands he wears the gold-studded muthi-kharu of silver brought in from his friend Satram. 59

Bordoloi laid much importance in portraying the female characters of the novels. Therefore all his novels are well-conceived with description of costume and gracefulness of the woman characters. Even in Rahdai Ligiri, when Rahdai becomes a sanyasini in her latter life, the novelist has portrayed the beauty of her as a sedate and calm woman, traditionally clad in gerua costume.

There is mention of dress-materials of gents also in his novels. Among these mention can be made of —

mugar curia (Rangili, p. 87)
gomcengar cola (Rangili, p. 137)
kingkhapar cola (Rangili, p. 96,100)
enga cola (Rangili, p. 101)
edi kapor and edi barkapor (Rangili, p. 134)

Toilet and cosmetics:

In traditional Assamese cosmetic-ware lips are reddened with the chewed betel-nut and the hands and fingertips of woman are coloured with jetuka. Hair forms the most beautiful and splendid part of woman's body and hence it needs utmost care for its make-up and setting. Generally the Assamese woman sets her hair traditionally by tying the hair in a knot more popularly known as khopa. There are various types of khopa's which have more or less found mention in Bordoloi's novels. Kaldillya, lahori, khekerupatiya etc. are some of the varieties. Kakol, phani, and dapon are the most essential materials for hair dress making. The mention of all these three has been found in Manomati.  

Ornaments:

In Vedic era ornaments were classified into four wide divisions - (1) Abhedya, (2) Bandhaniya, (3) prokhsepy and Aropya. Bordoloi's novels are endowed with mention of ornaments of Assam. Assam is rich with traditional ornaments which are worn by both men and women. Ornaments of various metals like gold, silver, ember and copper studded

60. Bordoloi, R. : Manomati, p. 34.
with jewels are used by both males and females. A large variety of ornaments are recorded in medieval literature and chronicles. Haliram Dhekiyal Phukan, the noted historian of the earlier part of nineteenth century gives an exhaustive list of ornaments used by the people of Assam. The list of Assamese ornaments is elongated one but from that variegated types some very popular pieces have made heavy inroads into the pages of his novels.

Keru (Rangili, P. 83) is an ear ring

lokpak man (Rangili Page 83) - an ornament of ear

sonar kharu (Rangili Page 95) - golden bangle

son khatowa rupar muthi kharu (Rangili Page 113) - gold studded bangles of silver.

nak-ful (nosepin): kariya (ear-pin); sonar (Manomati Page 5)
muthi kharu (bracelet of gold)

bala (bangle); nakful (nose-pin);
kariya (ear-pin) (Manomati Page 19)

son khatowa angathi (gold studded ring);
galpata (a king of necklace); kariya (ear-pin);
muthi kharu (bracelet) - (Manomati, Page 60)
kundal (ornament of ear) (Manomati, Page 100)

hira khatowa angathli (diamond studded ring)  
(Nirmal Bhakat, Page 12)  
sonar pati (gold-strip) (Nirmal Bhakat Page 40)  
manir keru (ear ring of pearls) (Manomati, P. 28)  

In Miri Jiyari mention of deomani and deoghati associates itself into the belief and superstitions of Mishing people. The Mishings are afraid of any misfortune which might come in their ways of life and think it to be a curse from Almighty on their land and people. So to remedy such misfortune they offer their priest deomani and deoghati. For a Mishing people these two ornamental stones are invaluable and precious.  

Household material:  

There is special reference of some household materials in his novels which are most tangible products of material culture. Mention of a few materials has made his novels a complete picture of Assamese folklife. As regards materials used in bed and items of furniture, there are ample references to these in his literary works. Some of these as have been found in the pages of his novels are —  

63. Bordoloi, R. : Miri Jiyari, P. 70
acara jal (Rahdai Ligiri, p. 112) a traditional fishing net of Assam.

pira (Manomati, p. 35), a wooden low-stool arrangement of sitting.

hengulia pira (Manomati, p. 35) - a coloured variety of pira.

mora pira (Manomati, p. 35) - a kind of decorated low stool carved out from on piece of wood.

bar pira (Dandua Droh, p. 11) - a large variety of stool, meant for man of dignity, social high position.

pera (Dandua Droh, p. 11) - a long and big wooden chest; it is symbolic of prestige and social elevation in Assamese society.

calpira, khatola (Nirmal Bhakat, p. 40) - a bed stead of large size; a four com­moned palanguin.

kingkhapar galica (Nirmal Bhakat, p. 40) - a carpet of kingkhap

There are references of temi-katari in Rahdai Ligiri. A temi is a small pot for containing lime to be taken with betel-nut and a katari is a small knife for slicing and piecing betel-nut. These two things are associated with many customs and rituals of Assamese people - particularly in marriage functions. In the caklang marriage system of
the Ahoms a tradition is current which is known as temi-katari salowa (exchanging of temi and katari).
The bride and the groom, before the marriage exchange these two thing in between themselves. Also the exchange of these two things symbolises the settlement of marriage - hence the custom acts as a sign of pre-marriage agreement.

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Utensils, potteries and others:

Utensils constitute an important part of domestic life. Names of utensils and earthen-pots are found in the novels of Rajanikanta Bordoloi. Utensils and earthen wares etc. used in the Assamese society must have been of a great variety and of exhaustive list, but the novels depicting them being few, our knowledge of them can not be more than sketchy. Some of these are -

(A) Utensils:

kahi (a bell-metal dish), batí (a bell-metal cup)
sonar kahi (golden plate), rupar sarai, pikdan
(an ashtray).

(B) Potteries:

caru (an earthen pot), tekeli, kalah (pitcher)
mala, cakali mala and kumari caru etc.

64. Details of this custom are discussed in the next chapter social folk custom.
Hacati is the age-old traditional contrivance of narrow small cloth where betel-nut is carried about on person. Jolonga is a kind of housewife for keeping needles, threads and other small particles. Japa is a canebasket. All these are traditional domestic ware that have been given contextual exposure in the novels. Reference of paji, a wisp or roll of cotton from which thread is spun is found in Radha Rukminir Ran. Paji kata is a very common process of traditional Assamese weaving industry. In the same novel, mention of ariya a means of lighting system in bhaona performance is made. It is the device of lighting by burning clothes in earthen pots or in the shell of fruits like papaya with the help of oils of nahar and mustard seed. Another device of torching light by the Assamese people in ancient time was the use of tingiri tula. Description of its use is vividly observed by the novelist in the following column in Manomati.

"Every Assamese people does possess a pair of tingiri tula. An Assamese people never fails to take with him three things - a japi, a lathi and a katari when he goes from one place to another. During night he takes a pair of tingiri tula, a katari and a hacati."

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66. Ibid. P. 34.
67. Ibid. P. 34.
69. Ibid. P. 17.
This observation made in respect of Santiram, being equipped with these things is significantly a common portrayal of a typical Assamese villager.

*Mukha* (the mask) is the most unique element in the tradition of all sorts of performing art form. In *Dandua-Droh*\(^71\) the use of it has been shown in course of the *bhaona* performance at Jikeri.

These are some material products that have found place in Bordoloi’s novels. Besides these there are some others also which are mentioned by the author. Realising that these do not bear any contextual importance in the thematic structure of the novels – we have avoided any kind of elaborate discussion of the same. Here mentioning of the names of these particles will clearly manifest the intention of the novelist who have had a keen observation of the material cultural side of the same. These are - hoka and *gurguri* (a traditional pipe for smoking) in *Manomati* and *Dandua-Droh*. *Kekora dola* (a crooked palanquin) in *Rahdai Ligiri*, *hingul-haital* (traditionally manufactured barnishing colour) in *Rahdai Ligiri*.

Besides these reference of domestic implements viz. *dao, ciprang, kor*, utensils viz. *cariya, lota*, dogdogi lota etc. also are mentioned in the novels.

\(^71\) Bordoloi, R. : *Dandua-Droh*, P. 42.
Folk medicine:

Folk medicine and the related superstition of it on Assamese people have its own place of importance on Assamese folk-life. In reality, the primary discourse on folk-medicine begins among the people of villages itself. In spite of gradual advancement of modern medical sciences, the people in general repose faith on this variety, which remains in current among the mass people. Even in diagnosing some types of ailments folk medicine react among the commoners. Therefore, the prevalence of folk medicine amongst all groups of people in the world is a common phenomenon and the commonness of its types and class is observed everywhere. Rightly does observe Don Yoder:

"of folk-medicine there are essentially two varieties, two branches; (1) natural folk-medicine, and (2) magico-religious folk medicine. The first of these represents one of man's earliest reactions to his natural environment and involves the seeking of cures for his ills in the herbs, plants and minerals, and animal substances of nature. Natural medicine, which is sometimes called 'rational' folk-medicine, and sometimes 'herbal' folk-medicine, because of the pre-dominance of herbs on its
materia medica, is shared with primitive cultures, and in some cases some of its many effective cures have made their way into folk-medicine is the magico-religious variety, sometimes called 'occult' folk-medicine, which attempts to use charms holy words and holy actions to cure diseases". 

These two types of folk medicine are still found to be in practice in Assam. Assamese people involve themselves in seeking cures for their ills in herbal medicine and they even resort to charms etc. The use of magic in curing ills is still in practice. People believe the influence of apadevata (an evil spirit) in some uncurable diseases and as such they attempt themselves for getting rid of these evil-doers. These evil doers are vira, yak (skt. yaksha) and bhut (skt. bhuta). To get the victims free from these evil-doing apadevatas the medicinemen popularly known as bejs and ojas adopt various means which are magico-religious. The remedy it brings, nonetheless, is co- incidental in maximum occasions, but still the faith that it instils in the mind of common people is the most striking thing.

72. Dorson, R.M.(ed) • Folklore & Folk-life; An Introduction, p. 192
One or two such references of folk-medicinal descriptions are found in Bordoloi's novels, which have added the novels a shade of supernaturalism. In Rahdai Ligiri one comes across such a reference. One day Rahdai fainted while she was in Rangili bahar in Swargadeu Chandra Kanta Singha's captivity. Kahmati and Bhanu, the two attendants of Rahdai, then sent message to one oja of a nearby village called Joganiya to come and cure her. The oja, at first, thought it to be the influence of a goblin and therefore subjected Rahdai to an ordeal by magic. This is an example of magical way of treatment traditionally being applied in Assam. However the news of Rahdai's illness was given to the king and the king had himself sent his royal physician with medicinal herbs and plants. The king's physician then prescribed to Rahdai some traditional medicines viz. caturmukh tablets to be taken with water of pulped rice and makardhwaj to be chewed with honey.

In the same novel again in the 43rd chapter Dayaram the beloved of Rahdai guised himself as a bej and told the king that he could cure Rahdai as he was trained in the practice in Kamrup and Mayang. He learned the vira mantra and therefore he could subject any patient successfully to the ordeal by magical implication. Here in this description
the novelist had tried to trace the tradition of magic, prevalent in Ancient Assam. "Medicinemen (bej) played a conspicuous role in treating different kinds of ailments both mental and physical. Besides administering herbal medicines they also treated some diseases by muttering spells and incantations. Incantations, generally called mantras were of various types which probably produced some psychological effect on the patients. The gullible patients at least got some psychological relief when mantras were muttered by beating the affected parts of body with a tuft of wild ferns." Kamrup is best known for its rich heritage of witchcraft and magical practices. The tradition is well-referred in many ancient literary works like Yoginitantra and Kalika puran. Mayong, a small village in Nagaon district in Middle Assam is famous in these practices and still regarded as a haunted place of witchcraft, charms and magic.

Musical Instruments:

Music has always been a necessary accompaniment of social life, one of the chief sources of entertainment for the society. Musical instruments play a vital role in the completeness of material culture of a particular

73. Sarma, S.N.: A Socio-Economic and Cultural History of medieval Assam, p. 265.
group of people, a tribe or a nation as a whole. These are the most important tangible products that reflect the cultural heritage of that group of people or the nation. Moreover, by means of studying more about the instruments, associated with the audio-visual performances one is assumed to come into closer link to understand as these can expose the social behaviour of the people.

Assam is rich in this particular field too and can be proud of possessing a variety of instruments of folk - archetype nature. In Bordoloi's novels we come across with almost all the types and varieties of musical instruments, which are found traditionally from an early date. The representation of musical scenes is important in the visual arts enabling us to observe their evolution and types. The musical instruments described in the novels are too small and hardly depict all the details. A scene wholly depicting a musical function is wanting in Bordoloi's novels. It is only in connection with a feast or a festival that the musicians appear, their representation being linked to a number of rites and ceremonies. For that reason only a few of the musical instruments come to our view. In Rangili, there are several references of dhol, khol, taka, pepa and gagana, which are predominantly being associated
with the bihu festival. In the sixth chapter of the novel, headlined as Asamiyar bihu ki? details of these instruments are found.  

**Dhol:**

According to classification dhol falls under the category of avanaddha vadya (Membranophones). Dhol has tremendous impact on entire Assamese cultural milieu. There are many types of dhol found in Assam. A few of these types have been referred by our novelist in his writings. In Rangili and other novels, where descriptions of bihu observances have found places of mention, we have come across with the references of bihu dhol of Assam.

This bihu dhol primarily played in bihu song and huchari performance, is an instrument of great cultural hallmark of Assam with its typical manufacturing skill. In Dandua Droh again we get an another variety of dhol. During the description of dhuliya performance in that novel there is

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74. Bordoloi, R. : Rangili, P. 13
75. "Of particular interest in the classification of instruments the oldest is that of Bharata (2nd B.C. -2nd A.D.) who, in the Natya sastra gives four groups, the tala, avanaddha, ghana and susira. Tala means 'stretched', hence, those instruments made of stretched jute or strings, avanaddha is 'to be covered' and hence drums. Ghana are solids like sticks and cymbals. Susira means 'hollow' and hence wind instruments". Deva B. Chaitanya, Indian Music, introduction, p. 3
the mention of bardhol. In Miri Jiyar, again there is
the mention of miri dhol and dager. Miri dhol is specially
designed and manufactured by the mishing people. These are
a bit elongated than the traditional bihu dhol of Assam.
Khol is another avanaddha vadya which is played as an
accompanying instrument of devotional music. Mentions of
these instruments are abundantly found in Bordoloi’s
writings, viz. in Manomati, Radha Rukminir Pan, Khamba
Thoibir Sadhu, Tamreswarir Mandir and Rangili etc.

Khol, being an instrument of use in Bengal and
Assam requires an elaborate description as regards its
use and manufacturing expertise. Writes S. Krishnaswami
— "It is also called mridanga though it differs both
from the pakhawaj of the north which is also called mridang
and popular southern mridangam. The khol made of burnt
clay closely covered with thin strips of leather lacing.
The right side is much smaller than the left side and is
two or three inches in diameter. The pitch is constant
and cannot be altered as in other drums. The right side
gives a high pitched metallic sound while the left side
produces a deep bass sound which is used in much the same
way as the bayan in the tabla".

76. Bordoloi, R. : Miri Jiyari, P.8
77. Krishnaswami, S : Musical Instruments of India, P.52
Another instrument which has occupied several places in Bordoloi's novels is tal (Tamreswarir Mandir). Tal according to the classification comes under the category of ghanavadya (idiophones). In Dandua Droh there is the description of another variety of performing folk-art namely ojapali institution. The palis of this institution use a small variety of this instrument. It is known as khutital. It is noteworthy that the Khutital used by the performers of Vyahar oja is distinctly different from that used by the followers of sukanani ojas. In the same novel again there is an elaborate description of dhuliya performance. The dhuliyas of Assam also play a larger variety of cymbal. Manjira is another kind of cymbal which is referred in the pages of novels. In Hanomati and Tamreswarir Mandir mention of ghanta, an another kind of instrument associated with religious song is found. Ghantas are struck bells and it falls under the ramification of ghanabadya. "They have not been 'musical' instruments to any significant extent, but have remained parts of the paraphernalia for worship in homes and temples". Another folk-instrument is khanjuri. Mention of khanjuri is found in Nirmal Bhakat - in the context of singing the dehbicarar git - o' guru moke daya nacariba by the narrator of the

78. Duara, D.: Asamar Vodya Yentra, P. 39
79. Deva, B. Chaitanya: Musical Instruments of India, P. 49
episodes of the novel. B. Chaitanya Deva writes about the manufacturing of this instrument—"Another type consists of smaller instruments - about 20 to 40 cm in diameter with jingle plates of brass fixed to the rim. A number of slits are made on the frame and the metal disks are held in the eyelets by means of nails passing across the gap. Such a frame drum is known as the khanjari throughout the country and is invariably played with the hands."80

There are etymological ballads current in respect to the origin of this type of instrument.

suniok sarbajan suna sarbajan
khanjari vadyar janma suna sarbajan,
kailasat mahadeva gune man
icha hai eka badya karite srajan
mahajog arambhila pace jogiraj
dambaru hante eka badya bhailaha baj
manjura sahite vadya matra ek phal
ninad karila vadya sunibak bhal
dekhi mahadeve ati anandita bhaila
mane guni tar nam khanjari rakhila

Meaning -
All of you please listen to my narration on the birth-story of Khanjuri badya, Mahadeva, in Kailash, once wished to create an instrument and for this he sat on meditation. As a result an instrument along with the manjura came out from his dambaru. The instrument, when sounded was pleasant to be heard and hence Mahadeva was rejoiced at his creation. He gave it the name of khanjari. The instrument was a deep votary of Mahadeva, therefore he used to play on it wherever he did go.

In connection with the bihu Rajanikanta Bordoloi mentions some types of musical instruments namely taka, gagana (Jew's harp) and buffalo-horn pipe etc. All these instruments are specimen of Assamese folk-culture. Amongst these taka a very common clash type of ghana vidya exclusively used in bihu singing and bihu-dancing is made of bamboos with intensive folk-art and craftsmanship.

81. Duara, D.: Asamar Vadya Yantra, p. 43
Observes B. Chaitanya Deva about the primitivity and manufacturing expertise thus - "Even more primitive is the tokka of Assam. It is a bamboo tube, 30 to 90 cm length slit lengthwise. The lower end is cut out to make a kind of handle. It is held in one hand and beaten against the palm of the other or the tube is merely shaken, the slit faces rattling against each other. Though it is a musical instrument now, I suspect that its origin might have been in animal hunt, specially of elephant. Even now, a small bamboo clapper identical with the tokka, is a noise makes in the khedda (elephant hunt) operations in Mysore." Its creation, exposes the otherside of the term 'bamboo culture', used to denote the cultural scenario of entire north-east India. Many a superstition is associated with the manufacture and playing of takas in Assam.

With the takas the horn pipe made of buffalo horns are also blown in bihu making. It can be placed under the category of lip-reed aerophone and can claim world-wide similarity. Remarks B. Chaitanya Deva - "Animal horn as a trumpet has been known from ancient times and is also found extensively throughout the world.

82. Deva, B, Chaitanya : Musical instrument of India, p. 59-60.
Horns of oxen and buffaloes are common. With the inner marrow removed and the tapering end sawed off for blowing, a horn forms a very portable trumpet. Generally it is an end blown instrument, and its name in the local languages is just 'horn'—_seengh............" This specially made instrument has its own place of importance in the cultural set-up of Assam. _Bahi_ or flute is another kind of instrument, which falls under the class of _susir vadya_. There is a reference of it in _Miri Jiyari_ wherein it is said to be played by the _bihu_ group of the Mishing people.

_Gagana_ is the most important instrument of _bihu_ making. The Mishing people also use this instrument in their _bihu_-making. They call it _gungang_. It requires tremendous expertise to make a _gagana_. Assamese people are well-adept in making it.

It is necessary to have a piece of bamboo of at least one inch breadth and seven inches length to make a _gagana_. According to the superstitions current in Assamese society a _gagana_ yields pleasing note if it is made out of stolen piece of bamboo of _bachunga_ used in handloom by the weaver-viragos of the village.
It is now clear that many superstitions are being associated with gagana and its manufacturing skill exposes the folk-craftsmanship of Assamese people.

Ballads are current in Assam as to the evolution of this instrument. Dhuliya ojas sing malitas or ballads on the evolution of various musical instruments. One such malita runs as follows:

"suniok sarbajan amar bacan
gagana vadyar karma suna sarbajan
Hiranyakasiru jaita tan karicila
sehiisthane ekopwa buh jama buhila
sehi bahar muhra ani rulehi buhrai
sowe budhe diye gurit miti capai
dharma cakuwa sunga buh pret gan
srikrishanar cebuke ecari janiba sujan
bansar kono parat ace panire bharu
sukale sei pani pitha gurri para
tini bacarar murat bahdali burha hai
sukamal bherale ani dhowa cangat thai
tan hante sukamale gagana sajile
Saraswati aye badya bajaran karile"85

Besides these instruments, Bordoloi in his novels have given mention of daba, barkah, sankha, madal etc. which are keenly associated with the cultural life of Assam. The Assamese folk life has unending relation with the instruments of folk-archetype nature. Therefore perhaps, Bordoloi in every context of his novels, tried to give reference of all tangible products of greater Assamese cultural milieu. As such his novels, are more or less great reflectors of Assamese folk life, of both past and present. He never forgot to mention any items, with which he got acquainted. That is for perhaps even the kali, an instrument of rare variety but significant of great traditional heritage could find special mention in Dandua Droh. During the description of Haridatta’s Durga worshipping episode mention of kali playing has been made. Significant enough is that the description of kali playing has been given in the same description of dhuliya performance. Kali, though associated with dhuliya performance is not at all obligatory musical instrument for the same. It is played separately. Kali, according to B. Chaitanya-deva is a lip-reed instrument and is blown directly into the lips acting as valves and functioning like the reed of gevani to some extent.  

86. Deva, B. Chaitanya: Musical Instruments of India, I. 110.
A kali is a combination of four segments viz. (1) kanda - a brass or bell metal part functioning like a horn, (2) sar or bahl - a portion like flute, (3) mukhcummi - the kissing portion made of brass and (4) pati or kapli - the reed. From functional point of view the kali can be classified in two form e.g. - joykali used in the ritualistic contexts and the birkali used in war-expedition. References of kali is found in specimens of early Assamese literature viz. Madhav Kandali's Ramayana and Darrang Raj Vamsavali by Suryyakhadi.

Thus it is seen that Bordoloi had reflected in his novels a true and real picture of Assamese social life. In describing the social scene of Assam Bordoloi had to incorporate all the elements of material culture of the state. National literature is the reflector of national life itself. This is the primary motto of all literateurs to cast in their writings a socialistic flavour. With this idea in his mind, perhaps, Rajanikanta tried to place the elements of folklife, ranging from material culture to folk-art, food recipes, costume and cosmetics etc. in the pages of a most sophisticated outfit of literature like novels. It can not be agreed

upon wholly that all these were furnished in conformity with the demand of the plot-structure of the novels - rather these were incorporated into the themes of the novels without any implication of the same. But still inspite of such shortcomings, from the technical points of view, such description of Assamese folklife has added an extra amount of weightage to his novels.