CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

Folklore studies the human activities of the society in relation to its social habits and behaviour in a particular ethnic group. In this perspective, folklore, to the recent time was being regarded as an indispensable part of social science. In fact, folklore emerged as a new field of learning in nineteenth century. Due to the rapid advancement of folkloristic study all over the world and the new projection of study-interest bestowed upon it, folklore, now-a-days, has attained a world-wide dimension. As an avenue of research analysis the completeness of folklore, as a single unit of study has undoubtedly marked the academic circle of interest with the sense of modernity and novelty. So far as the academic sphere is concerned, folklore may be termed a new subject. But in respect to the world of human wisdom, wherein folklore has been playing the pivotal role since the age of primitivity, the importance of it can not be underrated at all. Of course,

in our country like India, the study of folklore with all its systematized grammar and hypothesis ready in hand, is relatively new and modern. But its discourse has been always ageless everywhere in the world.

Folklore has its relations with both arts and science. The relationship is very deep, wide and hence it is striking. It has its relation with literature, with anthropology, with linguistics, with history, with archaeology and with all other allied disciplines. The interrelationship of all these branches is a hallmark of study itself. With the advancement of study of all these disciplines, different approaches have crept into; as a result, modern thinking on the part of folklore study has also taken place. For this reason perhaps it is now regarded as a separate, independent and individual stream of study rather than as a constituent of social science or other disciplines mentioned above. Rightly does observe T. Chattopadhyay — "Folklore must be recognized as a subject having a discipline of its own. In its formative period folklore used to be studied along with or under other subjects. But to-day it is no longer a branch or sub-branch of any other subjects of humanities or social sciences. Paradoxically it may be said that the study of folklore began through the study of allied subjects and evolved duly as a subject major with its own dominion and discipline and now folklore itself helps to the study of
the same allied subjects. ........ on the whole folklore is an exciting field of study for its relative complexity". 2

Folklore systematically studies the traditional aspects of the societies of different ethnic groups. Hence it is a knowledge of the past. Its importance is at par with the importance of sociology, anthropology, history and linguistics. People always maintain a desire to know the past. In fact, it is a lust of people's mind. The study of folklore and folklife of a particular society opens before its eyes the way to know the past- the customs and rituals of age-old generations. With the help of folklore materials we can meet our grand father and their days.

The traditional aspects which make us know about this past obviously include a wide range of things viz. culture, customs, social norms and last but not the least the literature. So, for the complete study of cultural aspects of a particular society, the study of folklore material of that society is the primary thing.

2. Chattopadhayay, T.: Loksanskritir Tattwarup O Swarup Sanshan, p. 132-133
Purpose of Study:

It has been mentioned earlier that the study of folklore has attained a world-wide dimension now. As such its importance as an independent discipline of study is accepted by one and all concerned with it. With this viewpoint it can be summarised that folklore does not remain as a subject of common people's discussion for merely recollecting the treasure-house of past time. As the well-oriented avenue of study-interest it has its own importance.

Tushar Chattopadhyay remarks that 'folklore, at present, is not a mere subject of leisure-time passage for the romantically emotioned and culturally luxurious people, but, it, as an avenue of well-directed learning remains to be the subject of scientific approach. It is a well established fact that without proper knowledge of folklore the history and real learning of human-life and the knowledge of society and civilization can not be valued. The nature of diffusion or acculteration in the inter-action level in respect to the conflict and counter-conflict of socio-economic structure can be attained well through the area of folklore. The way of human life and the totality of life struggle are the fundamentals of folklore. In this
perspective folklore is the inevitable part of life and the discourse of folklore is the discourse of life. Amidst the in-depth, meaningful and unhindered discourse of folklore, the echo of past, the memento of present and the image of future are reflected.  

This conception of folklore is very important when the multiplex sides of a civilized society is taken into account. Therefore in the subjective discussion of folklore, the historical, psychological, archaeological, anthropological, socialist, linguistic and literary projections are regarded as primary factors. The cultural aspect of folklore also can not be set aside. Archer Taylor has mentioned three cultural aspects of folklore. These are -

(1) folklore is, in many cultures, indistinguishable from literature;

(2) literature contains elements borrowed from folklore; and

(3) writers have imitated folklore.


As such, to know all about the total form of a nation's literature and its subject-matter and technique as well, the study of folklore of that nation is very important. The systematic and analytical study of folklore material on the basis of its general principles as well as its multi-channeled resourcefulness has opened up a new avenue of interest in the academic and cultural sphere. Particularly in deliberating the literary genius of an eminent litterateur of a nation, the traditional elements, which primarily constitute the basic foundation of literature, the scope of studying the folklore material in the same cannot be underestimated at all.

III

Assam and her literature are endowed with multifarious traditional materials. In fact, the very foundation of Assamese literature is built on the clay-material of oral narratives and its likes—traditionally handed down from generation to generation. A close study of the history of Assamese literature makes one aware of the abundance of such clay-materials. For this reason perhaps due weightage is attributed to this genre of folklore material—more popularly known as moukhik sahitya (oral literature). Prior to the advent of the elite variety, the folk or oral
literature, with its all varieties of forms and contents, tended to signify its existence as the only early specimen of Assamese literature. The discovery of these beautiful elements was too surprising — too fascinating. However these are not above suspicion in respect to the authenticity. The result of all these uncertainties regarding its authorship is highly regrettable and it can be regarded as an irrepairable loss to the nation. While going through histories and observatory surveys of Assamese literature, one can notice the lack of emphasis on the part of history-makers, on the intrinsic values of all these material, however numerous they are. Only the abrupt and casual mentioning of these elements, as found in the pages of literary history do not give the due recognition to them. Contrary to it, these early specimens of Assamese literature are of tremendous importance for the construction of literary monument of Assam. That was in the early stage — in the presankarite era. With the advent of the great Vaishnavite age — the age of golden heritage of Assam — the religious and metaphysical elements began to react in literature. Later on, during the period of romantic upsurge, beginning from 1888 A.D. the entire literary process underwent a radical change which again paved the ways of incorporating the folklorical elements into its content, form, structure
and all other aspects of creative literature. To pinpoint the matter one can easily notice the literary works of the early Jonaki period. The two naths (nath denotes prabhu, the master), Lakshmi nath (Bezbaroa) and Padma nath (Gohain Barua) were the pioneers amongst the writers of the period. Bezbaroa is still regarded as the unchallenged architect of modern Assamese literature, only because of the fact that he made good use of his proven genius as a true and perfect traditionalist. Barring the essays of religious and Philosophical heavy-loads, the entire network of Bezbaroa - literature is fully conceived with the blending of folkloristic and elite elements. Gohain Barua too did not lag behind in his effort. Their time demanded the reconstruction of the past and hence their literary engagement too, had to cater for the same. The process then began - the process of rebuilding the distant past - the process of preservation of the oral heritage on which the basic concept of culture of a nation can thrive and flourish. The process started with Bezbaroa himself and as a follow-up measure continued with the efforts of other contemporaries namely Chandrakumar Agarwella, Hemchandra Goswami, Padma Nath Gohain Barua and last but not the least Rajanikanta Bordoloi.
Rajanikanta Bordoloi is best known in Assamese literature for his contribution of novels. His contribution to Assamese literature is of such magnitude that he is justly attributed with the coveted sobriquet of Upayes samrat (the monarch of novel). Taking all these things into consideration — particularly his able potentialities as a specialised historical novelist — Bordoloi is rightly called the father of Assamese novel. He is often compared with two great legendary figures, representing two different nations — David Scott of England and Banerimchandra of our neighbouring state Bengal. Bordoloi nurtured within his mind a deep and sincere fascination for the history of Assam — its glory of ancient past. With a view to propagating the glory of the past in the mind of common people he made good use of the historical events in the theme of his novels. But though a historical novelist he was and though he displayed tremendous amount of zeal and enthusiasm in deliberating these elements, Rajanikanta, like all other his predecessors, could not persist playing the pivotal role of a sensible traditionalist in his literary achievement as a novelist.
Critics are conspicuously aware of the authenticity and genuineness of his historical novels. But the elements of folklore material, which are clearly distinct in his literary works, make way for establishing Rajanikanta Bordoloi as a true folklorist and traditionalist. It would not be right proper to stop and deviate from one vital point here. Believing in the authenticity of Bordoloi as a historical novelist and appreciating him as a creator of the same in Assam, one may step far and forward for the observation with a completely different angle. Then these basic queries appear in one's mind.

(A) In what does the excellence of Bordoloi's novels actually lie? — In deliberating the historical themes only or in other factors?

(B) What are the main qualities and specialities of the novelist for which he is being given a high profile in the literary world of Assam.

(C) Has he not similarly incorporated the essence of novels which Scott and Bankimchandra have applied in their literary works?

These queries are not seemingly discussed in so far the appreciation of his novels. It is necessary to analyze the elements of material abundant in his literary works — these materials should be taken as different units of discussion. In dealing with the principles of folklore study
the relationship of folklore and history is a point to be noted with utmost interest. And the novels of Rajanikanta Bordoloi are the best place wherein these two genres are blended with great dexterity and clarity. *Miri Jiyari*, the only social novel he wrote, is a self-classed exposure of the folk-culture of Mishing community of Assam. His last work-piece *Khamba-Thoibir Sadhu Katha* is originally a Meitei legend. Besides these two, all his other novels and other literary works are also loaded with elements of heritage and tradition of Assam. *Bihu* the traditional folk-festival of Assam with its multifarious tribal and non-tribal variants evoke a deep adoration for it and it was Rajanikanta Bordoloi, who firstly established this festival on the written pages of creative literature. Almost all his novels are 'burdened' with the descriptions of this great cultural festival. Besides *Bihu*, various other fairs and festivals and folk-cultural aspects have had their own special mention and projection in his novels. *Nāra chiga bihu* of the Mishing, the *doul* festival of Barpeta *kirtan-ghar*, the *barsabah* and other such fasts and festivals of likeness, observed in Assam, are some of these to be mentioned. Besides these the *deodhani* dances, the *ojapelis*, the *bhaonas* and religious ceremonies like *moroi-puja*, *deo-puja* etc. are also well-described in his novels.
In personal life, Bordoloi was a civil government administrator and for official engagements he had to tour and travel extensively throughout the state of Assam. In doing so he came into direct contact with different cross-sections of people. While travelling every nook and corner of Assam he gathered the experience of a lot of variety of folk-culture of the various ethnic groups of people. Being extremely fascinated with the multiform of culture he gleefully collected whatever he came across in the form of traditional material. Though he was not a folklorist of rare excellence, at least in the real sense of the term, Bordoloi played the role of the collector of folklore material. Later on, he placed all these elements in his creative works. By this way, his novels, in the long-run has become the cherished treasure-house of folk elements. This was also disclosed by the novelist himself. As an example of the objectives of the novelist we can refer to the preface of his Dandua-Droh, a historical master-piece. Here in this historical novel, the traditional elements are embodied and confessed. Why and how it is done? P.C. Bhattacharyya\(^5\) observes that Rajanikanta Bordoloi has composed his novels centering round the stories of ancient Assam, the gallantry of Assamese and their tragic memories. His novels can usually be classified into historical and social divisions — but according to my mind his novels can be designed as novels of purpose.

He had a deep love for his own land. For this he wanted to bend the mind of the readers to the past of the land and its heritages. He wanted to depict the picture of his mother-land and for this purpose Scott and Bankimchandra's novels were his ideals. Writes the author —

When I was a student of College I had gone through the series of novels written by Sir Walter Scott and late Bankimchandra. Having beheld the hills on that side of this place and reminding the rivers, the rivulets, the ponds, the lakes, the hills, the small forests of almost all places of my Assam, I recollected that 'High land', 'lowland' etc. of Sir Walter Scott I pondered — Alas! O' my motherland Assam! what a place of nature's desire you are! ....... your past history was filled with manifold episodes, but to depict your natural beauty, to author a novel on the theme of past history there had been no novelist of Sir Walter Scott and Bankim Chandra's calibre.

In the statement made above, the purpose of the novelist is clearly evident.

But inspite of these heterogeneous traditional elements distinct in his literary works — a systematic study on this particular aspect of Rajanikanta Bordoloi has not been attempted till now. Efforts are continuously

6. Bordoloi, R. : Dandua Droh, Preface, p. 0.2
being made only on the evaluation of the historical potentialities of this literary figure. Several scholarly discussions are also made to evaluate the western influence on Rajanikanta Bordoloi. In this way, it is thought, the evaluation of the writer remains half done. It is deemed proper to justify the viability of another cross-sectional observation which can throw new light and dimension on the creative talent of this legendary novelist. Thus it seems to be viable to carry out a detailed analysis of his novels with another projection. In this context, perhaps, the proposed scheme of study is going to be analytical and purposeful discussion on the traditional and folk-elements in his literary works. It remains to be expressed that upon the solid plinth-structure of these traditional elements the literary genius of Rajanikanta's monumental work-pieces have flourished.

Scope of Study:

Folklore and literature are intimately related to each other. In one sense the former is complementary to the latter. Without the folklore resources of a particular nation, its literature can not be found in true shape and growth. Literature, written in form,
process of the elite groups of the society. But despite its elitist character, due to obvious reasons, folk-elements, do creep into it. Though oral and written literature are two different classes, having their own identity, the former becomes the basic source of inspiration for the latter. Basically the literature of written variety of a nation is moulded on the oral heritages which corresponds in parts to the written literature of literate society. In this aspect there are clear analogues of these two. It was only due to the 'ethnocentrism' of the western scholars, who paved the way of dissension, the only difference of these two came off. Rightly does observe Alan Dundes -

"...... if one looks at the analogy from an evolutionary perspective, one can see that it is the literate societies who have analogues for older and originally oral literary forms. Folktales were told the world over long, long before writing was ever invented. It is only the curious ethnocentric bias of members of western societies in favour of writing which has substantially discouraged students of literature from seriously studying oral literacy products". 7

Therefore the study of a particular literature in the folkloristic perspective requires a completely different approach. This approach should aim at analyzing the admixture

But there are limitations too in such approach. Firstly, such kind of evaluation is a new approach. With critical estimation of this nature, some new lights may be exposed, but the total and real appreciation of literary works are not attained. In the pursuit of our humble work the following points are kept in mind.

(A) To trace the development of folkloristics in western countries and the basic concept of folklore-study and try to apply them in formulating the elements in Rajanikanta Bordoloi's literary works.

(B) To project the folk-elements and delineate them in contextual perspective with a close study.

(C) To focus new light on these fields wherein no discussion has been made so far.

I humbly like to place my argument for selecting the author for my discussion. Assamese literature owes very much mainly to the rich heritage of its own. The members of the early Jonaki period of Assamese literature, who constituted the circle of writers, were responsible for a literary romantic upsurge. They wholly dedicated themselves to mould the basic foundation of its literature as its modern most out-fit. Rajanikanta Bordoloi, being one of the
members of this club, had to resort to touch his genius-hand, — like all other predecessors and contemporaries as well, — on this modernity and fill the vacuum by blending and mixing the oral and literary elements. Though he was not a folklorist of Lakshminath's excellance and calibre, Rajanikanta incorporated the age-old elements of social folk-life into the written variety of literature of his motherland. Far from being a historical novelist, Rajanikanta Bordoloi happens to be a genuine linguist, true traditionalist and potential folklorist. At best no analytical study has so far been made to focus on this direction. Limited and stray studies on the traditional aspects in his literary works have been undertaken — but a folkloristic approach is yet to be made. Therefore a vast scope remains for an interesting and purposeful study. After careful consideration of all these factors it is decided to confine on the scope which remains to be attempted. Highlighting the pioneering efforts of this great novelist — the effort of his treatment of folklore material always provides us with an unlimited scope.
Methodology applied:

Meaningwise method means 'following way'. It is the specification of ways in a given order to achieve a given end. Folklore is a field-oriented discipline. Its study primarily depends upon the methodological ways of analysis. But due to the dearth of a proper methodology, there are diversified opinions regarding the study of folklore. Different folklorists have suggested different methods which are more or less feasible and applicable in their own fields of study. In the field study of folklore generally three types of method have been accepted. They are as follows:

(1) Questionnaire method
(2) Participant observation method and
(3) Interview method.

But besides these, other methods suitable for use in social sciences are often applied, accepted or may be taken to be granted for folkloristic discussion. Descriptive method is one of the same. In this piece of study,

8. Tushar Chattopadhyay has mentioned about three distinctive methods, which are given due importance in the western countries (Lok Sanskritir Tattwarup O Swarup sandhan), p. 141.

These are -
(1) Descriptive method
(2) Comparative method
(3) Technique-based method.
excepting in a few occasion, the descriptive method of
discussion may be said to be accepted and applied.

"The descriptive method" according to M.H. Gopal,
"is simple and easily appliable to various social problems,
particularly in developing countries. It is a fact finding
approach related mainly to the present and abstracting ge-
erations through the cross-sectional study of the present
situation". 9

The descriptive method is applied to interprete
the casual connection and relation of certain topic of
study with allied branches. It analyzes the elements of
folklore primarily on the basis of a certain time and
space. 10 The method is applied when the term of the pro-
blem, obviously is not a complex one and fulfils and satis-
fies certain criteria. It is also used when the scheme of
study is capable of being described and not merely argued
about. Taking these things into consideration and the
nature of the study the descriptive method is applied.

But in deliberating certain topics, primarily
those relating to the analysis of some traditional set-up
presented in the novels different approaches of methodo-
logy are applied. For instance, different performing art

9. As quoted in the "Scientific Method and Social Research" 
by Ghosh, B.N. p. 30
10. Chattopadhyay, T.: Lok Sanskritir Tattwarup O
Swerupsandhan, p. 141
forms as have been depicted in the novels require an investigable approach. This is also required to be applied here. The 'archaeological reality' of some of the writings and settings of the novels can be proved in field survey only. In the analysis of these parts, efforts have been made to have a clear-cut picture of historical and traditional truth by direct field involvement. In case of field-work, I have come into contact of people from different quarters. These people have helped me by responding to the series of questions in occasional interviews. Same is the case with the finding of the variants of different folklore materials from people. So both interview and questionnaire methods have also had found place in the study. Therefore this scheme of study is an admixture of various methods - questionnaire, interview and descriptive method - the latter being the primary one.

This scheme of study has been completed in eight chapters. An appendix and a bibliography of selected books and periodicals etc. have been attached in the end of the same. The first chapter, the present one is an introductory note on the scope, area of study and methodology applied in the study. The second chapter is 'Folklore and Folklife'. In this chapter an attempt has been made to give a conceptual idea on the terms folklore and folklife. Stress has
also been laid to explain the newly coined term 'folklife' — its possible relationship with folklore. The main motto of my research work is to find out the elements of folklife in Rajanikanta Bordoloi's work. As such the term 'folklife' has been elaborated here in detail. Here two brief notes are also provided on the relationship of history and folklore and oral and written literature. Bordoloi is known as a historical novelist and as such it is felt needful to establish any kind affinity that may persist in between these two disciplines. The third chapter centres round the life and socio-cultural and literary background of Assam. The chapter is so designed to delineate the literary scene which was responsible for tremendous amount of inspiration for the writer of the time. The fourth chapter relates to the chronological study of the writings of Bordoloi. Brief accounts of all literary works are also provided here. The remaining chapters are designed on the basis of Richard M. Dorson's 'four large groupings' of folklore and folklife. This has been done to find out the elements of folklore and folklife in Rajanikanta Bordoloi's literary works. The first one of its kind and the fifth in serial, deals with the elements of oral narratives. The sixth one has dealt with the physical folklife in the novelist's work. In the seventh one elements of social folk—custom have been discussed. And in the last one, various performing art forms of Assam, as have been found in Rajanikanta Bordoloi's works are discussed.