CHAPTER – IV

IMPORTANCE OF FOLK LITERATURE IN BODO AND ASSAMESE SOCIETY

Assam is rich in cultural art of both ethnic and non-ethnic type. Assam is a land of rich cultural heritage and a broad field of folk literature. Assam being a land of composite culture reflects a chain of folk literature of different tribes throughout the year. It is as if the people cross the threshold to come together with traditional literature and momentarily forgetting their tough lives. Most of the folk literature are interlinked in Assam and have their roots in the diverse faith and beliefs of her inhabitants, but a spirit of accommodation and togetherness characterizes the reflection of social picture in all folk literature. The perfect fusion of folk literature and heritage of her numerous races has made Assam the home of the most wondrous tradition and literature which are passionate, compelling and mesmerizing, reflecting the true spirit, tradition and lifestyle of the people of Assam.

The Bodo and Assamese folk literature are not in a good position in urban area but still there is enough in the store to take some important knowledge about Bodo and Assamese societies. Being a huge colourful society based state, Assam, has always marked the tradition, culture and literature are the symbol of wisdom. These two literatures are also the broader among the different races and easy to get in every corner of the state. Each folk literature expresses a community’s unique way of life through a
set of customs, knowledge system, beliefs, literature, performing and non-performing arts through its spatial, social, spiritual and experiential dimensions. Folk literature serves to develop a flexibility of thinking and a critical consciousness about events and choices of action. It is important for the social function that it fulfils.

The Bodo folk literature and Assamese folk literature plays a great role in the Bodo society and non-tribal Assamese society of Assam. These folk literatures cannot be ignored by the peoples of Bodo and Assamese. The importance of these two folk literatures in Bodo and Assamese society are discussed as follows –

4.1 Recreation and Inspiration:

Folk Literature is originally created by preliterate communities and passed down orally from one generation to another generation through the words of human mouth. Even though, folk literature of one region may have similarities with that of another region, it tends to flourish in a certain geographical and environmental setting. “Although composed by individuals, folk literature, by the nature of its composition and preservation, becomes a collective product and assumes the traditions, emotions, thoughts and values of the community. Because folk literature is oral basically, it tends to rely on some devices and patterns of language and style. Nevertheless, it is replete with artistic beauty, wit and joy.”

236 The Folk literature, by its nature, is conditioned by the land atmosphere and its surrounding environment. “At the same nature attunes them to appreciate nature and its changing faces, to sing about the land and the rivers, about

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236 Sen, Dineshchandra: Maimansingha-Gitika, Calcutta, 1923, p.12
the rain or the lack of it, about the pleasures or pains of the different seasons.”

The rich folk literature of Bodo and Assamese includes folk songs, folk tales, proverbs and riddles that draw upon the indigenous culture of this land but which, through the centuries, have also absorbed alien cultures and been modified in the process.

According to the Ashutosh Bhattacharya “Folk songs are set to tune and passed down orally from generation to generation. Folk songs express the lifestyle of the rural people, with all their hopes, expectations, sorrows and dreams. Everything, starting from individuals to society and from religion to occupations, influences the form of folk songs. Nature, environment, seasonal diversity adds to the beauty of folk songs.”

Folk songs are also inspired by the search for the perfect being and communal harmony as in Baicagu and Bihu songs. They are also inspired by the desire to have a happier, more harmonious conjugal life giving rise to the marriage folk songs. Almost every village woman can sing these songs.

The following are the example of Bodo and Assamese folk songs which provides the encourage or inspiration for the new recreation –

**Bodo:**

“Sandung khow sanding hona
Okha khow okha hona
Gaiyo zong phuyo zong.”

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239. Faguni Narzary: Informer, Age- 38, Gogamukh, Dhemaji
English rendering:  Not being afraid of the heat of the sun
                                      And the shower of the rainy days
                                      We plant the crops and pull out,
                                      The crops to plant

Assamese:  “Hahe pani pale sore somoniya
                                      Paroei pani pale nase,
                                      Eikhoni hasoti amaku nalage
                                      Zuriya tatsal ase.”240

English rendering:  The Duck swimming when she gets water
                                      Pigion can dance when she gets water
                                      No nees this cloths
                                      I have dual looms.

The farmers, working people, cowherds, and boatmen all sing songs while working or resting. They sung during ploughing, harvesting, threshing, rowing, thatching, knitting nets, weaving, digging, dragging heavy objects etc. These songs are meant to encourage people during labour and to provide recreation.

Riddles are short compositions that pose problems to be solved. At least two persons are required to. Riddles may be composed in prose or verse. Riddles in prose are usually contained in one sentence, while riddles in verse have at least two to four rhyming lines.

240. Gogoi, Lila: Op-cit, p. 190
Proverbs are the shortest possible compositions for wit, learning and entertainment. They span from pithy sentences to rhymed couplets. But, however short, they are composed on the basis of human experience, pragmatic consideration, and wisdom.

The folk literature of Bodo and Assamese creates inspiration for recreation among the people. The various aspects of folk literature such as folk song, folk tale, proverbs and riddle etc. provides inspiration for recreation or amusement, for instance, womenfolk sing songs in different dimension while they are weeding in the work field similarly. The men folk also sing songs while they are busy in their paddy field and in different work field. These songs are the source of inspiration to do the new creation in different aspects, such as in agriculture field, fishing, hunting, social religious ceremonies etc. the folk tales, riddles and proverbs also provides amusement for recreation in different social and national aspects.

4.2 Weapons of Knowledge and Wisdom:

Folk literatures have been shared in every society to entertain, educate, and preserve culture. Folk literatures play an invaluable role, along with other cultural traditions, in bringing people closer together and “ensuring exchange and understanding among them.” UNESCO’s refers “As globalization and social transformation demand renewed dialogue among communities, educators and artists are more motivated to protect and promote oral traditions and related cultural heritage.”241 Telling folk tales from Bodos and Assameses, presents some of the narratives long held by the people in this region, and reflects their culture, values, and beliefs. Hae-Ri Kim says “Today’s

children may think of folktales as old-fashioned or even irrelevant. However, the influence of folktales is alive and well even today. Folktales transcend the generations of people who passed on these stories. The original tales were transmitted orally from storyteller to storyteller and were eventually written down. Folktales continue to evolve, and are shaped according to the conditions of the times. Therefore, folktales never cease to be relevant even today and will remain so in the future. Moreover, the indigenous knowledge and wisdom found in the folktales keep us connected to our traditions and indeed help shape our culture.”

The Bodo and Assamese folk tale plays a vital role in the societies as a weapon of knowledge and wisdoms. Moreover, the indigenous knowledge and wisdom found in the folk tales keep us connected to our traditions and indeed help shape our culture. As for example – The tale of the Monkey and the Hare, give important moral knowldges among the people. Specially, this tale narrates the story of friendship between a monkey and hare who with the help of intelligence and tactfulness try to take revenge on each other. But real massage of tale is that what should be a friend do for his true friendship and how to maintain the relation of true friendship.

Throughout the generations, the folk literature may change, but its core message remains the same. The people of the society do not need to try to teach values explicitly. Instead, peoples just teach, thus maintaining folk literature as a tool to educate children on how to live with integrity and peacefully with others. Folk songs reflects society’s

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attempt to give form and shape to its hopes and fears, and answers to its questions. 
These are provides order to seemingly random experiences, as well as express the 
culture’s belief system. The languages of folk literatures are an important part of 
children’s literary heritage. Because, of the oral traditions and the language of folk 
songs and folk tales are musical, rhythmic and melodic.

Frequently emphasized values for global citizenship, such as respect for diversity, 
human rights, and sustainable development, which songs and stories touch on, still 
remain to be discovered and translated into daily life. Proverbs and riddles also embody 
the popular attitudes, beliefs, customs, traditions, and values of the society. Thus 
enriching children’s and peoples consciousness and appreciation of the cultures of other 
people. The following are the example of Bodo and Assamese proverbs which provides 
the consciousness and moral knowledge to children as well as society –

**Bodo:**  
“Onkhar nai khansiya habnwrwnga.”
(The worm once cameout from the hole, 
can not enter the hole again)

The message or moral knowledge of this proverb is that what is done can not undone. 
So each and every work should be within the discipline. Because, once make wrong it 
ever change to right.

**Assamese:**  
“Zaluk pipoli ada khai,  
Dake bule tar kah polai.”

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243. Udai Basumatary: Informer, Age- 45, Dotma, Kakrajhar
(Those who are take the ginger and zaluk, Dake people says there is no cough)

The moral knowledge or wisdom of this proverb is zaluk and ginger is the medicines for preventing the cough. Such kind of wisdom is consisted in this proverb.

4.3 As a mirror it reflects Culture:

Folk literature is a mirror of society and culture, where the social and cultural pictures can be reflected that the social and culture of the people to whom it belongs. It reflects the cultural details of the people unveiling their minds and providing clue to past events and their archaic customs. It also reveals the effective elements of culture such as attitudes, values and cultural goals. It is not a simply form of amusement, it accurately reflects the familiar details of culture, the rites and rituals, customs and costumes, food habit, craft, art and their traditional belief system. It is an integral part and most important in Bodo and Assamese society because it depicts or reflects its roots deeply embedded in culture and it fulfils the social function. Hence, it must be admitted that it reflects socio-cultural and the folk literature of a community or a group of people not fully understood without a thorough knowledge of their society and cultural background. The folk literature of the Bodo and Assamese may be regarded as their native ethnography. It not only reflects their rites, traditional beliefs, and customs but also reflects the socio-economic and socio-cultural aspects. Following folk songs are the example of Bodo and Assamese which highlight the social picture and customs of both socities –

\[244\] Utpal Tamuli: Informer, Age-40, Marioni, Jorhat
Bodo:

Oi gotho? Nongba godo mamwn,
Bangal na jungal, Harsha na Mephal mon?
Dinoinifrai Bodo jabai.”

English rendering: whoever you were,
Whether you were a Muslim, a Garo,
A Bhutia or Non-Bodo (Harsha) or Nepali
You have become a Bode from today.”

Through this folk song the custom or social belief of the Bodo community is directly reflected. While after the child is born the umbilical cord is cut with a sharp-edged slip of green bamboo skin placing the cord, a cotton or muga silk thread is tied around. If the baby is male, the cord is toed five times and if the female, it is tied six or seven times. The cord is cut by a woman whose hand is believed to be ‘bitter’. It is believed that the cut-wound will dry soon. No widow or widower is allowed to cut the cord. It is believed that the child may not have long life if the cord is cut by a widow or widower. Then the baby is sprinkled with holy water, mix with some Dub grass, a few holy basil leaves and a ring of Gold. While sprinkling holy water the woman who performs the above mentioned folk song.

Whatever the type or form of the folk literature, it is very important, more than the obvious historical, archaeological or anthropological reasons. Folk literature is

245. Faguni Narzary: Informer, Age- 38, Gogamukh, Dhemaji
246. Narzi, Bhaben: Boro-Kacharir Samaj Aru Sanskriti, 1966, p. 144: ‘a man or woman is called bitter hand, if the vegetables or the betel leaves cease to grow after the touch of that particular man or woman.’
extremely precious for those descended by its origination for it teaches what the past knew, shares much about the ancestry and imparts ancient insight with intelligence. It gives all a sense of belonging to a specific culture and allows people to learn their roots of heritage in a very exclusively particular way. It gives each of us the ability to know who our people were and are.

4.4 Folk literature imparts Education:

The folk literature plays a vital role in imparting education to the non-literate people of society, especially among the younger generation. It is usually used to convey some message while entertaining children. Since its educative purpose, folk literature still exists and even popular for society and children. Through folk literature, children will automatically or unknowingly acquires moral values. The simple melodious tunes of the folk songs are appealing to children while at the same time imparting different kind of useful knowledge of different subjects and so on. The folk songs teaches about the moral lesson and discipline among the children. The proverbs, the riddles and the folk tales also help educate people in an interesting and informal manner. Proverbs often impart technical knowledge regarding ploughing, sowing, irrigation and harvesting etc. to the farmer. Riddles help sharpen wits and they also make children grasp mathematical problems easily. The main message of folk tales is that justice and goodness will always win. It can be a media of conveying the basic of good behaviour because it is fun and does not force children to do something. The character of the tales may give perfect example of the effect of acting good and bad.
Folk literature easily persuades children to do good things. It can improve the intelligence, emotional and spiritual value of children. Moreover, it can develop children’s morality that may lead them to be able to determine the negative or positive of attitudes, values or behaviour. It directly influences the way of children solving problems. Besides, it educates children to be wiser and to respect their seniors, friends, parents and their environment. Folk literature also emphasizes on the children imagination. It can improve the intelligence and give some good values to children. Through folk literature, parents can teach children to become responsible of social and friendly. The morality, socio-religious and socio-cultural values that may imply in the folk literature giving them perfect modeling of becoming a real human.

4.5 Preservation of Tradition:

The folk literature of Bodo and Assamese strive to preserve the tradition of the non-tribal Assamese and the Bodo societies. These folk literatures kept momentum in their own traditional way. These societies have mainly depended on agricultural background. Being the aboriginal people of Assam, the two societies follow some important traditional rules in the maintaining of these folk literatures. Folk literatures consist of folk tales, folk songs, proverbs and riddles etc. that are the traditions of that culture, subculture, or a group. It is largely an artistic expression of human thoughts, emotions and feeling, happy moment of dancing, hunting, merry-making and also sorrowful memories connected with frustration, crop failure, distress and disappointment. Some important traditions of Bodo and Assamese societies are in danger zone due to influence of globalization and modernization. Elite society and urban society have already forgotten their tradition may be due to unconsciousness and ultra modern life style.
Folk literatures have been shared in every society to entertain, educate, and preserve culture. Folk literatures play an invaluable role, along with other cultural traditions, in bringing people closer together and “ensuring exchange and understanding among them.” As globalization and social transformation demand renewed dialogue among communities, educators and artists are more motivated to protect and promote oral traditions and related cultural heritage. Telling folk tales from Bodos and Assameses, presents some of the narratives long held by the people in this region, and reflects their culture, values, and beliefs. Today’s children may think of folktales as old-fashioned or even irrelevant. However, the influence of folktales is alive and well even today. Folktales transcend the generations of people who passed on these stories. The original tales were transmitted orally from storyteller to storyteller and were eventually written down. Folktales continue to evolve, and are shaped according to the conditions of the times. Therefore, folktales never cease to be relevant even today and will remain so in the future. Moreover, the indigenous knowledge and wisdom found in the folktales keep us connected to our traditions and indeed help shape our culture.

Throughout the generations, the folk literature may change, but its core message remains the same. The people of the society do not need to try to teach values explicitly. Instead, peoples just teach, thus maintaining folk literature as a tool to educate children on how to live with integrity and peacefully with others. Folk songs are reflect society’s attempt to give form and shape to its hopes and fears, and answers to its questions. These are provides order to seemingly random experiences, as well as express the culture’s belief system. The languages of folk literatures are an important part of children’s literary heritage. Because of the oral tradition, the language of folk songs and folktales are musical, rhythmic and melodic.
Frequently emphasized values for global citizenship, such as respect for diversity, human rights, and sustainable development, which songs and stories touch on, still remain to be discovered and translated into daily life. Proverbs and riddles also embody the popular attitudes, beliefs, customs, traditions, and values of the society. Thus enriching children’s and peoples consciousness and appreciation of the cultures of other people.

4.6 Process of Socialization and National Integration:

The Bodo and Assamese folk literatures are the sources of the social unity. The most important social and cultural pictures of the Bodo and the Assamese folk literatures are observed with great enthusiasm irrespective of caste, creed and religious affinity in Assam. These two folk literatures help in the better understanding among the different people of the different community of Assam. These two folk literatures survive among the society and they utilize it for a rigid bond among the Bodo and Assamese people. It is like other forms of folklore plays a role in social and national integration. Folk literature helps in the process of the socialization and national or international integration. The folk songs, proverbs, riddles and tales help in the process of socialization and integration. Folk songs help to inculcate good behaviour and adjustment to the social structure. Folk tales or narratives related to people with their ancestors. Their lives and philosophies and their achievements which generates pride among members of society, help in the process of social unity. Folk literature is highly effective in exercising the social unity among the people. A moral folk song helps to control the behaviour of the people so that they do not neglect the norms and value system of their community. These songs describe about the good and evil spirit, merit of
good work and punishment for sin, and help to control the behaviour of the people so that they do not become a social nuisance. The proverb, riddle and folk tale also help modify behaviours of arrogant persons in the society and make them prepare for social and national unity among the people. These also help in generating a value system and modifying the character pattern according to the need for equilibrium and coherence in a society. Of course, the folk literature can built a platform for national integration among the different caste and races. The people of the different societies make themselves mentally strong for making unity through the moral knowledge of folk literature.

4.7 A Platform of Cultural Upliftment:

The Bodo and Assamese folk literatures are masses of social and cultural behaviour. These two folk literatures form the platform of the cultural upliftment of the Bodo and the non-tribal Assamese societies. There are various types of social and cultural functions which are performed among them. The folk literature and cultural fields of the two communities can highly develop through various types of festivals and ceremonies.

In these two folk literatures, different kinds of folk songs and folk dances are performed by the people of Assam. These folk songs and dances are the most important part of the Assamese and the Bodo communities’ culture. Especially, these types of songs and dances are known as Baisagu and Bihu songs and dances. The Baisagu and Bihu folk songs and folk dances are an integral part in cultural life of people. The society has contributed through different stages of growth to the development of the songs and dances. These are landscapes of the Assamese and the Bodo communities. The history
of art and culture, and that of social growth are intimately interconnected. In these festivals the various types of dresses and ornaments are worn by the people of Assamese and the Bodo societies. The traditional dresses and ornaments are the most important part of the culture. Through these types of dresses and ornaments, the cultural fields of two societies’ can be highly developed.

Presently, the Bogah Bihu and Baisagu festivals are also organized in the urban areas. In towns and cities, there are well-organized Bihu where professional or amateur troupes perform Bihu songs on stage with accompanying dancing. Bihu “Kunwori” (The Princess of the Bihu) contests are held widely. In these contests, young women compete in dancing to the tune of Bihu songs. The best dancer is given the title of “Bihu Kunwori”. And it is seen that in this festival different artist (singers and dancers) are performed various types of songs and dances at cultural nights on the Bihu function stage. Such types of Bihu function stages are most important cultural platforms, where the different people or artists get a chance to show or develop their inner talent. These two folk literatures are the platforms of cultural upliftment of the Assamese and the Bodo communities of the world.

4.8 As a Mass Media:

The folk literature as important in the present context of rapid social changes and improved means of mass communication, as the problems of uplifting the poor masses who dwell in cities and towns, educating the thousands of people in non-literate sectors of the society, and inculcating the spirit of brotherhood and mutual respect. The Bodo and Assamese folk literature has, therefore, received much greater attention and
consideration from scholars, literary critics and social reformers alike. Folk literature regarded as one of the most important and effective instruments of social engineering.

For developing societies like ours, with extremely low levels of literacy, the significance and relevance of folk literature can hardly be over emphasized. It provides aid in educating the young, promotes group solidarity, serves as an outlet to suppressed emotions and provides a means of escape from disappointments and frustration. The secret of its effectiveness lies in the fact that the "folk" are not aware of its subtle ways of functioning. As a matter of fact everything is imported in the guise of entertainment and recreation. A mother sings a lullaby, an old man narrates a tale and someone observes a custom. It is in this manner that important cultural wisdom is transmitted, imported and used where its use becomes necessary and the balance of cultures maintained. One should not lose sight of these and other characteristics of folk literature when one thinks of mass communication as a factor in social change.

Before one appreciates the above role of folk literature in a changing society, however, it may be appropriate to examine its nature and objectives as a mass media. Any mechanism which communicates the messages from one person to another is a medium. Its popularity and breadth of coverage depend upon its effectiveness. When such a method or mechanism is used for transmitting knowledge to the masses in general, it becomes a mass media. Its usefulness is derived from many different objectives for which it is intended. For example, it may be directed to transmit information; it may be used as a tool to change the attitudes of the people; it may be used to generate strong likes as well as dislikes or it may be used as a pedagogical device in schools to impart moral and social education. In any case, the essential quality of a good mass media is
that it serves as a means to prepare people to discharge their roles effectively as disciplined citizens of a country.

Folktales may be apt to communicate a moral lesson in an amusing way, whereas proverbs may prove good guides for socio-economic reforms. Riddles, on the other hand, may serve as a good device for memory-testing, whereas folksongs may prove a better outlet for mental tensions. John Messenger remarks "proverbs are by far the most numerous and most frequently employed of these forms of verbal art and are used in all manner of situations: as a means of amusement, as a method of gaining favour in courts, in performing religious ritual and association ceremonies, and to give point and all color to ordinary conversations".

Folk drama has certain advantages over other forms of folk literature. Because of its audio-visual character, folk drama has great appeal to both the literate and non-literate, Men and Women, young and old, workers and farmers; all are drawn to dramatic forms. Different forms of folk literature serve different purpose, but folk drama in particular performs several functions at the same time. It is not only of great appeal, but is also closer to the psychology of the people. In traditional societies like India, where modernity is still confined to the upper strata of the society, the traditional media of folk operas, drama, ballets and so forth, are more appealing to the masses than the modern media like the radio, and television, which the lower strata do not have access to. One might take advantage of these ways as traditional types of communication are more effective and appreciated by the masses.

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As an instrument of mass media, folk drama is more effective in such societies because it easily combines entertainment with instruction. It easily reflects events of past history of a particular region, and at the same time its performance is economical. These folk performances last throughout the night and the spectators do not show signs of fatigue even after a whole night performance. This also explains how close such forms of folk literature are to the minds of the folk.

Thus, the Bodo and Assamese folk literature has social importance among the people of Assam.