Chapter-7

CONCLUSION

In the light of what has been explored and interpreted in the preceding chapters, the researcher takes the opportunity to conclude that if any one of the specific functions is assigned to the traditional folktales, they will open up immense possibilities in retaining the interest of present day generation. The meanings and significance of the tale telling tradition depend on reallocating the role of folktales in the technology dominated society of Assam. Previously the tales were told to belief and to entertain but with the change of time there is enough scope in using these tales to serve multidimensional functions in a number of social contexts. It would be valuable experience for the present generation to be acquainted with few traditional tales and know that the folktales are what the story tellers feel to be a true reflection of real relationships between members of a society and to be prompted to utilize them for the smooth operation of the society. Every act of folktale narration, every transfer of oral folktale (from oral to written and then to oral) is different from the last time it was performed, told and transferred. The narrator or performer add his own imagination, body language and linguistics competence during the time of narration. Variations after variation of the same tale are found due to this reason. The tale teller’s purpose of selecting the tales (Whether it is to lull the children, or to entertain the listeners or to provide instruction), the surrounding atmosphere, the age group of the listeners, their background all have some impact on the application of tale telling situation. It is not possible to sustain the originality of the tale. The folktale survives because of the renewed interests it gains through new performances, new literary translations, and transfusion in literary works, and its transfer from one medium to another powerful medium
such as novels, theatre, and films and animation and archiving through digital versions.

The tale has no doubt a content, though simple, these have multiplicity of functions. If utilized systematically it will enhance the popularity and prestige even in the midst of written literature and modern technology based entertaining gadgets. With the help of simple folk narratives the other practices and institutions of the society can also be transmitted and made to survive. However, a change in the mode of narration from oral to written and then to digital can be functionally more useful in the present day situation. As a tale is not simply a repeated version meant to entertain, a living recitation delivered to a responsive audience for the socio-cultural purposes as reinforcement of beliefs, customs and taboos, release of aggressions through fantasy, providing of instructions, stimulating imagination, orienting language skills, pedagogical explanations of the natural world and application of pressures for socially accepted pattern of behaviour would be functionally relevant.

In the classroom situation of Assam, a few selected traditional tales from the Jatakas, the Panchantras, Aesop and Katha Charit Sagar may be adopted for developing skills from the most basic to more sophisticated. While cataloging the tales for serving this purpose it is to be remembered that they should be given level wise priority. Stimulation of imagination of the students, drawing attention and concentration, instilling reading habit, (since this is the mode in which oral stories have now been preserved), enhancing memorizing power, inculcating reciting activity could be a few objectives. An exercise to stimulate thought such as presenting a moral from a tale and having the students invent a story to illustrate would be challenging rather than contrived. Such an exercise would help developing speaking and reasoning skills in language learning classroom.

Traditional values form an important part of the intangible aspects of our culture. But these traditional values are under threat of erosion especially
among the youth due to the forces of globalization and consumerism. The folktales could be used as a tool to challenge that because they hold much potential in inculcating traditional values in our children. Some fundamental Assamese traditional values reflected in almost all the folktales as discussed in the forgoing chapters are— the virtue of having good thoughts and intention, the feeling of gratitude, the strength of unity, the helping attitude towards friends, obedience to parents and filial piety, loving kindness and compassion, commitment and obligation of love, respect and loyalty in one’s relationship with other people and so on. However, these are universal human virtues that get an honoured reflection in the folktales all around the world. The societal values inculcated and transmitted by a repeated performance make the listeners accept them as real way of meeting a particular need and thus becomes the way of the folk— the folkways. Folkways are simply the customary, normal and habitual ways of dealing with things. New generations should absorb folkways partly by deliberate teaching but mainly by observing and taking part in life about them. Once they constantly hear the happenings of the folktales they start believing that those are the real ways they should follow. When this feeling emerges in them, they stop imitating the customs of the other groups. Those will appear before them as quaint oddities and not as practical and sensible ways of getting things done. Traditional folktales have enough potentialities to establish the folkways while motivating the people to follow them. For Assam, a state which accords top priority to the preservation and promotion of culture as one of the pillars of Gross National Happiness, the importance of preserving and promoting our oral traditions is no trivial matter.

It can be asserted that the connection to the natural world and the need for conservation of it is not a primitive urge but a primal one. Such a desire existing in sophisticated society indicates some inherent quality to explain phenomena that require advanced skills to understand. The need for resource conservation was embedded within a primitive psyche and, in a period of increasing global warming, provides counterbalancing primal concern
towards respect for the environment. The expressions and the attitudes concerning nature have been derived from the simple, less-developed or even undeveloped social systems that fall victim to some natural calamities. As mentioned by Sarit K. Chaudhuri in his research paper, in spite of various contested voice concerning many intricate issues, such as, traditional knowledge, IPR, politics of power structure, access and spring of benefits etc. There is a general agreement that there are various important lessons to be learned from the cognitive and empirical dimensions of folklore tradition for conserving our natural resources aiming at the sustainable development of the communities in specific and mankind in general. There are significant contributions which deals with such issues (Kothari et al 1998, Ramkrishnan et. al. 1998)

The age-old institution of marriage and conventional family pattern has occasioned a lot of debates and discussion in the gender studies today. The family with its neatly assigned roles for women and men seems to be a burden foe most of the so called ‘new women’. The tales provide sufficient information of certain sensitive points about gender constructions in traditional Assamese society. A woman is seen as a symbol of virtues like chastity, purity, obedience, loyalty and tolerance. While in case of man physical prowess is the sign of strength, in woman’s case the suppression and endurance symbolize her strength. In other words, man’s strength is external and woman’s strength is internal. The main concern of woman characters as depicted in the tales is to safeguard their chastity and purity. Another significant point that the folktales bring to light is the role of woman in the then society. A woman’s life becomes deplorable after marriage. A married woman must know how to manage the household. Those who are expert in managing the households become dearer to the in-laws’ family. Those who are inefficient to run house are punished both physically and mentally. This deplorable condition of woman as reflected in popular Assamese tales like Silanir Jiekar Sadhu, Champavati, Kecha Nahar etc. provide a chance to comprehend the deep emotional magnitude of the gender based power
structure – whether to resist or to cherish it, supplies useful insights and database for understanding the actual status of woman in traditional society. For the feminist the folktales can serve as a powerful communication medium to speak of the actual realities of gender discrimination and game of power politics in order to domesticate young women and girls subjugating their own feelings, emotions, protest, aspirations and identity. The remark by Hasse in this context is worth mentioning– feminists view the most popular folk tales and fairy tales as primary sites of contention within the civilizing process and argue that the most popular stories shape the sexual, gender, and social politics of modern society and keep women subordinate to men. (Hasse, 2008, 336). But for the gender studies folktales can make one compare the past and present realities of man and woman relationship and understand what one has to lose for not understanding properly the time honoured traditional values— which is referred to as Sanskara in the society. Projecting the female identities of women, the tale telling activities can be functional in providing the easy-to-refer materials for gender studies in general and feminist study in particular.

In achieving social maturity, academic success, moral compliance, behavioural codes and environmental ethics the role of folktales is beyond any question. Apart from these four functions, folktales can be used to promote social development between two groups of a society, if the tales can show some similarities in terms of structure and interpretation. Social development must not primarily be a question of money, technology, industrialization or political will, but must integrate the dimension of life and mind, social behaviours, skills, attitudes, customs, tradition, cultural values, linguistic determinants, information, beliefs and opinions. It is a process that involves self-conception, self-determination, self-purification and self-sufficiency. In this context, folktales can help the contemporary society achieve social harmony and social peace without dislocating from the roots, the cultural heritage.
The fact is that these traditional heritages, which are the distinctive marker of Assamese identity, at present, due to cultural borrowings driven by globalization are suffering a lot in the midst of suffocating exhaustion of alien culture. No one can deny the positive sides of globalization and consumerism that have become so essential in the present day context of modern economy and modern way of life. These very same forces which are threatening the traditional culture and values have brought tools like the digital technology which can be used for the preservation and promotion of our invaluable treasure of traditional culture.

The state’s efforts so far as preserving and promoting these oral traditions have been far from satisfactory. The school curriculum includes too little material from the traditional folktales even though the use of our own folktales is expected to be far more effective in inculcating our traditional values compared to the folktales of foreign origin, which are being used. In addition to folktales, local myths and legends and other forms of folk literature and belief systems provide insights into the local history, scientific enquiry, customs, questions, social constructs and the relationship between man and his natural environment. The need of the hour is to adopt new strategies to popularize, update and preserve the oral tradition and upgrade their application in the changing socio-cultural set-up. One of the possible steps towards this is to archive those traditions using digital technology and incorporate them in the school curriculum on a broader scale with proper planning than is done now.

It is true that very little research work has been done in this direction. The specific study of the functionality will add a new dimension to the existing study providing those traditional materials a safe avenue in the life of upcoming generation and motivating them to retain the values all throughout their life, for negotiating the internal conflicts in the society and ensuring a peace and harmonious relationship in the society. Here a few
recommendations on the further scope of documentation, research and application of folktale genres in Assam are offered.

**Recommendations:**

1. **Preservation of Traditional Folktales via Digital Technology**

The advent of digital technology is an advantage to the efforts towards preserving the oral traditions. Digital technology has made collecting, compiling, archiving and making the various forms of oral traditions available to the global audience very easily provided we have the willingness to commit a certain amount of our time, energy and resources to it.

The following are some practical suggestions for preserving Assamese oral traditions using the currently available digital technologies. In short, these are the recommendations to boost the moral for creation of the first comprehensive and dynamic ‘Assamese Folktales Online Database’.

1. **a. Development of Edutainment Software:**

The stories from popular literature have been used for various types of edutainment software. Folktales, which used to be the medium for educating people a very long time ago, may be reconstructed through research for the exactly same purpose, which is to educate people through stories. Designed to suit current technology know-how users’ preferences using multimedia elements, an edutainment software will provide an alternative for moral and socio-cultural education that aims to educate young children to adopt good values. In addition, the software can help to revive the popularity of local folktales among younger generations.

1. **b. Creation of a Web Server and a Database:**

A web server and a database should be created to host the collection of folktales and other oral traditions of Assam. The server could be managed by the Department of Folklore Studies, Gauhati University or outsourced to an Internet Service Provider.
A suitable website with proper interface should be created for accessing the collections in the database. Accessibility could be divided into three or more levels based on whether the user is an administrator, a contributor, a registered user or a non-registered user.

1. c. Formats for Archiving:

An item in the collection could be archived in the form of text, video or audio in suitable formats. If possible, efforts should be made to have any single item represented at least in the form of both text and audio. The text could be in either Assamese or English, or both. The text could also be in any other tribal languages in which the story was originally narrated. This can help preserve the original impact and flavour of the story, which is often lost in translation. Any language of Assamese could be written using the Devnagari script.

1.d. Accessibility and Terms of Use:

The collection should be freely accessible to everyone. On top of that, the collection should be made freely available for use in non-commercial undertakings, especially for education and research in any country in the world. Users should also be able to post comments and feedbacks to the stories. Decision could be made about whether to allow all users or just registered users to post comments.

1. e. Recruitment of Contributors:

Building a large collection would be no easy task without contributions from a large number of people. So, one of the most important tasks in this endeavour will be the recruitment of a large number of motivated contributors, rather than relying solely on a few dedicated researchers to make field study collecting folktales and local legends. For instance, a contributor could be someone who has an interest in folktales and volunteers to collect folktales or other oral traditions in the form of audio and text (and video of the narration taking place, if possible) and upload into the Assamese Folktales Database. If there are not enough volunteers willing to be
contributors, contributors should be recruited with the offer of incentives from among the civil servants and corporate employees working in different parts of Assam. However, collecting and uploading folktales should be done during their spare time, and it should not interfere with their main responsibilities. First of all, each selected contributor could be provided with a digital audio recorder and a digital camera with video capability. Additional incentives must be based on the number of valid stories they upload into the database for proper accountability and transparency.

1. f. Making the Website Dynamic, not just an Archive:

The website should be made dynamic, and not simply an archive of folktales. There should be areas where interested individuals can discuss various topics related to the folktales. There should also be provisions for the readers to upload a different version of the story in response to a story in the database.

1. g. Search and Retrieval:

As the database grows in size, it would become difficult to find the items one is looking for. Therefore, an effective strategy for search and retrieval should also be planned from the beginning with proper provisions for metadata.

1. i. Collaboration with Other Institutions in Assam:

Once the database becomes operational and reaches certain size, collaboration could be set up with other institutions within the state for further research and development of the database and increasing the size of collection.

2. Promotion through Mass Media:

Archival documentation is worthwhile for preservation purposes, but it is far more useful if the materials collected are promoted through various mediums. The communication media can be exploited to educate and disseminate folktales. There is a tremendous potential to reach and reorient the public around the richness of Assamese folklore, given the proven efficiency of mass media like TV in commercial advertisement. For the wider Assamese
audience, no medium is more effective than radio because of its affordability, reliability and effectiveness. Different ministries and departments can use it to educate farmers and other sections of the public on farm techniques, health, hygiene, sanitation, family planning, child immunization etc. by a popular folktale-narration program. Broadcast should be through three languages–Assamese, English and Hindi.

There is a huge potential for the Assamese film industry to raise its standards and relevance by adopting and adapting timeless stories from oral traditions. It is a good news that one of Bezbarua’s story *Tula and Teja* has been adopted for a movie and it has won a success and popularity solely from the story. Such strategies should be enhanced.

Similarly, themes and motifs invoked by the traditional stories should be related to modern themes. There are many unique themes and stories in folklore– ballad, myth, legends, for example, *The Ballad of Panesai, Phul Konwar and Maniknowar, Kamala Kowari* etc. that are not yet used, but can make a great film if properly used.

Interested individuals, especially students, should be encouraged to document traditional forms and to post them on the web through social networking site. In this way, students can be involved in the preservation and documentation process.

3. **Animation Cartoons** :

Storytelling should be made popular through Animation and Game-Based Software. Animation is a multimedia element which is both entertaining and instructional. It has strong power to attract the little minds and ensure a place in their hearts. Animation is often used in edutainment software for its capabilities to minimize users’ cognitive load and enable them to focus on a long promoting socio-cultural values. United States and Japan have done a great job in this line. They have developed the traditional tales into animation films and it has increased the number of viewers of folktales. Application of
animation technology for folk tale transmission has not lessened its popularity, rather enhances it. It is a demand of the present generation that they will listen to the tales but the method of telling or performing should be improvised to cater to their needs. One can import the animation films from other countries. But contents of imported animations are not suitable for local viewing in terms of the cultural values. Locally produced short animation movies based on local folk stories should be aired on education television channel. Efforts should be made to produce local animation stories. Contents from BurhiAir Sadhu, Kaka Deuta Aru Natilora, Aesop’s fable, Panchatantra may be designed and developed to edutainment software aiming to motivate socio-cultural awareness among children. It will be both relevant and rewarding step.

4. Practical use of the Folktales:

The regular use of the database should be confirmed by the educational policy makers in introducing and accommodating them in school curriculum and co-curricular activities in order to regain touch with such a rich, varied and meaningful cultural heritage. It is hoped that a targeted curriculum that specifically addresses the social and personal problems can equip them with ethics and life skills to function successfully and productively in society. Environmental activists should create awareness about the ecological balance and undesired human activities threatening the environment by manipulating these available traditional lore. When tales are coupled with sincere efforts to achieve academic success, social maturity and moral compliance, the tale telling will regain its original status in present day Assamese Society. By creating learning with pleasure not with pressure situation, the researcher envisages a society of behavioral modification and finally healthy social development. If the focus is shifted from social control to the maintenance of peace and harmony with the help of available database, it will open up new vista of thinking in terms of inter-generic relations and their social functions. The researcher is looking forward to start a project of a series of trilingual
story books - Indigenous – Assamese –English for use in all the areas covered by the research.

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