CHAPTER-3

3 FEW ASSAMESE HISTORICAL BALLADS OF COLONIAL INDIA

Defined minimally as a stanzaic narrative poem or song the ballad was one of the earliest forms of material to interest folklorists. Their interest was exclusively in these exemplars that were orally transmitted, that reflected a small homogeneous community that used recurrent phrases lines denominated “Commonplaces”, that focused mostly on the tragic familial and love relations, and that told the story without analysis or interpretative embellishment.

Nationalists and Romanticists both have been attracted to the ballad for ideological reasons. It was perhaps something similar that led to William Words worth and Samuel Taylor Coleridgs 1798 Lyrical Ballads, which references the ballad as a conceptual model even through the individually authored poems seem far removed from the oral progenitors and may well have owed more to the thriving broad side press.

There are various sub-classes of ballads. (a) Mythical ballad, (b) Etiological ballad, (c) Historical ballad, (d) Legendary ballad, (e) Magical or Wonderous or Supernatural ballad, (f) Satirical ballad, (g) Realistic ballad etc.

Among these, the Historical and Legendary ballads are vital catalysts in the nationalistic upsurge. Here, we want to focus the historical ballads of Assam to a greater degree.

The story or the contents of Historical ballads are based on some historical events. Historical ballads help to compose history in a specific way. The valiant character of the hero or the heroine is the main concern in historical ballads. So, historical ballads are very often entitled as Heroic poetries. It plays a significant role in the uprising of national consciousness. The historical ballads also supply ample materials in the composition of
creative literature like poetry, drama, novel etc. In those nations lacking written history, the historical ballads serve as the oral history there. The Assamese Historical ballads composed and collected till now includes “Barphukanar geet”, “Padma Kumarir geet”, “Moniram Dewanar geet”, “Joymoti Kunwarir geet”, “Ajan Phakirar geet”, “Bakhar Borar geet”, “Patharughatar ran”, “Phulagurir Dhewa”, Rangiar Krishak Bidroh”, “Gandhir geet” etc.

Assam, a northeast Indian state, is a melting pot of various linguistic communities having distinct cultural background. Before the Yandaboo Treaty of 1826 a.d. with the East India Company, many small territories prevailed which witnessed successive invasions of the Burmese. The history of Nationalism of Assam can be traced back after British annexation only. The Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 which later took the form of freedom movement can be cited to be a nationwide nationalistic phenomenon for the first time. Here, three ballads namely Maniram Dewanar geet (ballads of Maniram Dewan), ballads of “Patharughatar ran” (the battle of Patharughat) and Rangiar Krishak Bidroh (Peasant movement of Rangia) are taken into account to justify how ballads and nationalism inspire each other.

(a) RANGIAR KRISHAK BIDROH (THE PEASANT MOVEMENT OF RANGIA):

Before the arrival of the British people, Assam had been depopulated due to the Burmese invasions and internal turmoil. The Assamese people, in general, were not accustomed to paying taxes or tolls to any authority except delivering physical labour as “paik” to the king. Due to the reluctance of the Assamese folk to serve as “Kuli” in the tea estates and uprising difficulties in importing Kulis from outside, the British people wanted to play an unfair game with the local inhabitants. They wanted to augment income by hiking the rates of land revenue, imposing fresh taxes, duties and tolls. The peasants after prolonged struggle, against invaders and internal chaos, again fell between the devil and the deep sea.
"Against this backdrop, a new revenue settlement was made in Kamrup and Darrang districts. Immediately after that, land revenue was hiked to 50-70%, even, in some cases, up to 100%. The very people who had expressed gratitude to the Company-Raj when the Burmese marauders were expelled and driven out from Assam, now felt they had jumped from the frying pan to the fire."

All classes of people – from the upper strata to peasants, tribals, Hindu and Muslims alike came together, through Raij-mels, and ryot-sabhas to put up a united peasant front. Phulaguri of present day Nowgaon district witnessed the peasant movement (Public movement) for the first time in the history of Assam in 1861. It was followed by the Patharughat in Darrang in 1894, Rangiya, Lachima, Pati-Darrang, Nalbari, Barama and Bajali in Kamrup district during 1892-94.

There was a popular uprising at Rangia on 24th December 1893 where both Hindus and Muslims protested against the enhanced rates of land revenue. There is a popular ballad in this region depicting the massacre in a pathetic way.

Ki mote banchibo hari Kompany shasane!
    Buddhi kari lawe mari praja gane!!
    Kembel chahabe purat pas adhali loi!
    Chari taka lowe ebe natun chahab hoi!!
    Chari taka nedeo buli raije ojar dila!
    Tathapito kompanir daya najanmila!!—
    Pache raije khajana nedi ache theh pati!
    Kompanir chahabganar harila churuti!!
    Hena dekhi pache ahi chahab deputi!
    Ojar suno buli raijāk rangiak nila mati!!
    Gnani guni pandit mahanta ache jaia!
    Chahabar agat sabe hoila upashtha!!
    Mukhya mukhya prajagarār ojar suhila!!
    Jane jane raijāk chahabe biday dila!!
(Oh god, how will we get rid of the rule of the East India Company who exploits the laymen by tricks? Campbell took Rs. Two and fifty paia as revenue in one pura (3.) of land. But the new officer enhances it to four rupees. The peasants complained against it. But the company paid a deaf ear. The officers of the company were horrified at the deliberate refusal of the peasants in paying the revenue. The deputy collector arranged a peasants’ congregation to have their voice. He listened to the verdicts of the knowledge ables, wise and chiefs of the subjects and gave farewell to them. But the offended mob remained there discussing the burning question. The deputy collector being shocked at their behaviour, sent a troups of soldiers armed with guns. Then the angry peasants jumped over them with furious sentiments.

(b) DALI PURAN ASSOCIATED WITH PATHARUGHATAR RAN (THE BATTLE OF PATHARUGHAT):-

The popular movements of the period began with the Phulaguri Dhewa and were rounded off, as it were, by the Patharughatar Ran (battle of Patharughat), also called the Dali Ran because of the use of clods of earth (dali) as weapons against the British on 28 January 1894. Patharughat is under the Mangaldoi sub-division of the Darrang district. Bamboo sticks and clods of earth were no match for the volleys of British gun-fire. While official figures put the number of dead at 15 and the injuries at 37, according to unofficial later estimates, 140 persons died and 150 persons sustained injuries when the police fired along the Mangaldoi road. "The Patharughat tragedy was invested with popular glory and it came to be remembered as the Dali Ran. Such was its hold on the people’s mind that several verses commemorating the incident, came to be composed and these became very popular as the Dali Puran, the work of folk poets, in the classic manner of the Puranas"
The Dali Purana collected by Dr. Nabin Chandra Sarma, an eminent folklorist of Assam, has been quoted as below

\[
\begin{align*}
Namo Namo narayan nitya niranyan \\
Brahma Hare chinte jar Aruna charan \\
Namo namo narayan charan jugal \\
Jahaka sebile pai moksha pada phal \\
Sadhu mahantak moi karo namaskar \\
Dali puranar pad karibo prachar \\
Taju nabhi kamalata brahma bhaila jata \\
Kaleigaonar bar bagichat hoila hata
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
Gaone gaone dhani hol kuli anba naro \\
Jenke tenke dukhiya hok khajana bechi karo \\
Ei buli maharanik repot dila likhi \\
Maharani hukum dila kagaz khan dekhi
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{raije uthi hujur khajana dibu naro} \\
pahhitakia bole khajna ami kenke aday karo \\
Pachsinkia khajanake dibar upay nai! \\
ei buli raije koy agbarhi jai!!
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Sakal raije ojar karei chahhabat jai!!} \\
\text{Raije uthi bole hujur khajna dibu naro!} \\
Pachtokia khajna kenke aday karo!!
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{chahabak theli raij agbarhi goila!!}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
ei buli chahabe katha koy bhedi! \\
\text{Chipahiye raijak pache nila khedi!!} \\
\text{Kheda khowa raijar gat nai uli!} \\
Dheki thora loi gel ujar karo buli!! \\
\text{Hena dekhi chahabar gat tat nai!}
\end{align*}
\]
I am paying homage to Lord Narayana who is even worshipped by Brahma
and Shiva Saluting the wise and nobles; I am explaining the verses of Dali
Purana. A big market (hat) was held at that time at kaleigaon of Darrang
district.

The British people felt the need of increasing the land revenue in
order to compel the peasants to work as kuli in the teagardens. They reported
it to the Empress Victoria and the latter consented it with

The furious peasants refused to pay the enhanced revenue from Rs. 1.25 to Rs. 5.

People from all walks protested to the officer against the unprecedented enhancement of land
revenue. The agitating peasants proceeded forward keeping a side the officer. Then at the
command of the officer the British soldiers chased after the mob armed with
guns. Then the peasants went mad with anger and jumped over them. The
officer ordered the soldiers to fire.

The ignited mass lacking sophisticated battle crafts, attempted to
attack with pieces of fuel sticks, pebbles and soils. The well armed soldiers
fired left and right and created a heap of dead bodies including innocent
children.)
The East India Company rule began in Assam as a consequent of the great Yandaboo Treaty on 24th February of 1826. The downfall of the Ahom dynasty made the aristocracy and the local gentry unemployed and frustrated. Maniram Barua, who was serving under the Ahom king, determined to fight for the restoration of the Ahom prince. Earlier he served to the East India Company as Sheristadar Tahsildar. He started tea plantation nearby Jorhat. He was an efficient administrator and an enterprising man. He went to Calcutta to present the condition of the Ahom king to the Governor General of India in 1857 when the entire North India was engulfed by the Sepoy mutiny. Being failure to convince the Calcutta bureaucrats, Maniram made elaborate plan to strike against the firingies in collaboration with the Indian sepoys. He wrote to the Ahom prince, Kandarpeswar Singha and his close aides. But Maniram's conspirational activities leaked out and he was arrested there after. In the name of justice, the officials held prompt trials and sentenced him to death along with his close associate Peali Barua.

A shade of grief spread throughout the province. This collective grief came out in the form of ballads from the very core of their hearts.

*Sonar dhowa khowat*  
*Khali oi maniram*

*Rupar dhowa khowat khali*

*Kino rojaghanat*  
*doroh achorili*

*Dingit chipejari lol*

(You smoked on silver hookah, oh, Maniram  
You smoked on golden hookah  
What offence did you commit to the royal family  
that you had to take a rope round your neck).

*Athia Kolore*  
*atha oi moniram*

*Athia kolore alha*

*Moniram dewanak*  
*phachi kathat tulile*

*Karo nelagil betha*

(The gum of Athia (a species of banana) is so sticky oh, Maniram!  
so sticky it is!  
Maniram Dewan has been hung brutally,
but none has sympathy for him).

Deshare karone marano barile
Dukhiyar dukhaloi chai
Hera moniram swargalo gola goi
Pichaloi chaonta nai.8

(Oh Maniram! You embraced death for the cause of nation,
to remove misery of the poverty stricken people.
You have set out for the heaven
and none to look behind)

Atikoi chenehor mugare mohura
.Tatokoi chenehor mako
.Tatokoi chenehor maniram dewan oi
Nekandi kenekoi thako9
(Dearest is Maniram Dewan
Is it possible to stop weeping).

Man aniboloi goichili maniram
.Batot kati khale jara
Maniram dewanar amangol milil oi
Olal nejloga tora10
(Maniram went to earn fame
and had taken jara (a specis of lemon) on the way
curses (ill fates) accompanied him
as tailed stars had started twinkiling).

Chalat malangile chaldol komora
Tekelit malangil lon,
Matit malangile maniram dewan oi
Nekandi thakiba kon.11
(The chaldol gourd (a specis of gourd) melts on the roof
Salts melt in earthen jar
Maniram melts on the soil of the native land
None without shedding tears).

Toraboti gabharur sendur mohar khale
So chaku, son-hat lore
Kowai ramaliyai phechai kuriliwai
Saponat agdat sare
(The Vermillion of damsel Torabati gets rubbed
the right hand and right eye begin to quiver
The crows cow, the owl coos
And the tooth get disrooted in dream).

CONCLUSION
Folklore serves as the weapon for the exploited mass to protest against
the dominant authority, landlords, feudal lords as well as the kings when all
ways of safeguarding one get interrupted or obsolete, yet folklore expands, its
wings to defend the same with optimum vigour. The latent potentiality of
folklore can only be realized. When in Russia, people could hardly express
their agony for the fear of the tyrant tsars; folklore continued its function as
the media of self expression and upgrowing agitation. According to Richard
M. Dorson "I.G. Prizov had recognized that folklore reflected the real life of
the people in their struggle against the tsars, clergy, and land owners: I.A.
Xudjakov had pursued the themes of Social Protest and class satire in popular
tales and historical folksongs".

Modern political movements have sometimes inspired the rural poet to
compose songs and ballads, but these do not seem to have the wide currency
which comparatively earlier specimens had. Songs and ballads of this type
however did considerable service in the national movement in the early
twenties of this century.

Ballads are livelier for, its verse and melodious singing. If the same
story is described in prose, it would be lengthy in size, may harsh to listen and
most probably would have lesser appeal in human sentiment. As a consequent, it would be confined to the written script only or would have distorted or would be restricted to a small pocket of people. The peasant movements of Rangia or of Patharughat, no doubt, have a wider proliferation for the mass involvement for a genuine cause. But Maniram Dewan who was designated as Bar bhandar Barua by Purandar Singha, the then Ahom King and later as Dewan by the East India Company, deserves no uniform popularity among all sections of people. He was blamed for welcoming the company in the initial phase for instance,

Kelei enekuwa
holi oi Maniram

Kelei enekuwa holi

Desh pati bore
nahal charidine

Raijar dorohi holi\textsuperscript{14}
(Why have you become such a fellow?
Oh; Maniram! Why have you become so?
Reconstruction of the motherland has just been completed
And you have been turned to a foe of the subject)

Again,

Maniramak marili
Bhalake karili

Piyolik marili kiya\textsuperscript{15}
(You have done nice by killing Maniram
But why piyoli was killed?)

However, people sighed in grief in his hanging as he wanted to augment the fire of the Sepoy mutiny (the first freedom movement in India in 1857) to liberate the motherland from the hegemony of the British. Verses of his ballad are so well fabricated with sense and native imagery that any movement for the sake of nation would take sufficient nutrients in further course of action.

The ballads of Rangia and Patharughat start with panegyric to Lord Krishna (Narayan). This adds a feeling of divinity which indicates to perform these in auspicious occasions like Myths. Malinowski, the anthropologist though addressed the myths as charter and warrant of the society for the cultural conformity and control of the society by the myths by displaying
divine or human characters to appreciate—the valiant and benevolent and to curse the demoniac and irresocial figures. But a scarcity of unification of various people possessing different professions is realized in Myths. Ballads are extra-ordinary in this sense. In the Ballads of the peasant movements, insolvent persons residing in a remote corner movements, of the district could feel the strength of unity and so ventured to rush towards the gun-fire with a fuel stick or a piece of soil. Books are published, movies are produced and initiative has been taken by government institutions and non-government, organizations to encourage the present-day youths by the lessons of those martyrs.

Before creation of the above ballads, these were merely historical events, critical points or turning points of history. But these events were so heartrending and thought provoking that the pathos sprinkles in the form of melodious tunes. Later, harbingers of nationalism took resort to it for propagandizing the affairs of mass mobilization. They had regenerated and sprad the ballads being overwhelmed with nationalistic sentiments. So it can be concluded that——

1. Historical Ballads are created and proliferated for Nationalistic craze.

2. Nationalism is fabricated and highlighted by historical ballads.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


3. Nabin Chandra Sharma, Lokasanskriti, (Guwahati: M/S Chandra Prakash, 1997), 31-32


5. Nabin Chandra Sharma, op.cit, 32-33.


7. ibid, 27

8. ibid, 27

9. ibid, 28

10. ibid, 30

11. ibid, 31

12. ibid, 46


14. Lila Gogoi, op.cit, 29

15. ibid, 35