

PROSE NARRATIVES OF THE BODOS AND ITS SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE

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Abstract

The speedy development of the society in digital era has influence almost every aspect of human life in all over the world. It has affected mostly the smaller linguistic and cultural group of people. Hence, the smaller group of people is always in the threat from existence in this world. People are adapted to new environment and neglecting their roots. The Bodos a largest tribal group of people in Assam are also not away from this race. The Bodos are also constantly facing serious treat in sustaining their language and cultural traditions in today's digital era. But the folk literature always play role as guide in sustaining the language, culture and identity of a community. The prose narrative, folk song, riddle, proverbs have deep rooted connection with socio-cultural foundation of a community. The Bodos had also rich tradition of practicing oral tradition which helps directly or indirectly in forming the society. Thus the present study on prose narratives of the Bodos and its social significance has been carried out with the help of both observation and descriptive method.

Keywords – prose narratives, significance, myth, legend, tale.

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1.0 Introduction: Prose Narrative or folk narrative is an integral part of folk literature. The tales which had been practiced by means of mouth and passed it down from one generation to the next generation can be said prose narrative. These narratives reflect the traditional belief, customs and conventions, knowledge, ways of living of one community. According to Bascom – “Prose Narrative is an appropriate term for the wide spread and important category of verbal art which include myth, legend, and folktales”.¹ No authentication can be traced who and where the tales were told first. The tales are primarily told for entertainment. But these have secondary purposes too. Prior to the development of progressive education system as of today the folk literature was the primary device of imparting education to the people of illiterate society. The prose narrative was also manipulated to indoctrinate moral lesson among the children. The folk epic of India *the Ramayana* and *the Mahabharata* are the two major epics which have the deep influence in building the Indian society. *The tales of Panchatantra, Hitopadesha and Jataka tales* are few to mention which might have pivotal role in making the Indian Society.

The Bodos who are the largest tribal group of people inhabiting in the North Eastern part of India in the state of Assam are the owner of the rich cultural heritage. They are called son of the soil and aboriginal tribe of Assam. They maintain distinct linguistic and cultural identity to their Assamese counterpart. Despite having prosperous stock of folk literature it remained in the dark world of uncertainty. The folk narratives of the Bodos remained adamant till the beginning of the colonial regime in India. The English Missionaries have contributed a lot in collecting and recording the Bodo folk narratives. J.D. Anderson a British Scholar made the first attempt and pioneered to collect and bring out the Bodo folk tales and rhymes. He published the book “A Collection of Kachari Folktales and Rhymes” in the year 1895. This meticulous work of J.D. Anderson encouraged some of the Bodo nationalist and some Assamese scholar to work more of this kind in the later part of 19th century. P.C. Bhattacharya, Praffula Dutta Goswami, Mohini Mohan Brahma, Sukumar Basumatary, Modaram Brahma, Rohini Kumar Brahma, Madhuram Boro are few names who rendered service in collecting Bodo folktales and publish Books thus enriched the treasure of Bodo

1. Bascom, William (1981): Contributions to folkloristics, Meerut, India: Folklore Institute: Archana Publications, P. 96

literature. The elderly persons of the Bodos tell stories thereby perpetuating a rich tradition of storytelling in the Bodo society. They have the habit of storytelling in the work place, fire place, in funeral ceremony and in many other occasions. The Bodos may have store of tales which are not fully explored and yet to bring out in the light.

1.1 Aims and Objectives of the Study:

- i) To introduce the Bodo prose narratives and to bring it out in the light to popularize by circulating among the people.
- ii) To highlight the possibilities of how the prose narratives can be the tool of strengthening the society.

1.2 Importance of the study:

The folk literature is the foundation stone in initiating the cultural identity and source of literary creation of any society. But this has been overlooked due to emergence of science and technology. These are not counted as priority by the people of modern society. The younger generations are in the dark about their roots. The impact of globalization has uprooted the basic elements of nation building and the folk literature is on the way to extinct from the practice. The Bodo prose narratives have drawn limited attention to study in broader perspective. The treasures of our ancestors are now in chaos and uncertainty. Since the Bodo prose narratives possess immense societal value, a study is much needed to help people to have a general idea about the resources that have been inherited from their ancestors.

1.3 Methodology and Data Collection:

The present study topic has been carried out primarily with the help of descriptive method. Both the primary and secondary data has been collected to materialize the present study. Primary data are collected through the field observation method since the research scholar is the native inhabitant of study area. The secondary sources of data are collected from the written materials such as books, unpublished thesis and internet sources etc.

2.0 Discussion and Findings

2.1 Classification of Bodo Prose Narratives:

The Bodos have their ethnic terms to denote the meaning of prose narrative and folktales. Folklorist P. Goswami, P. Bhattachacharya, Bhaben Narzi and M.M. Brahma and many other scholars have used the ethnic term “colo” or “colobatha” to denote the meaning of prose narratives and folktales. P. Goswami in the Book “Boro Kachari Colo” a book of collected Bodo folktales by Mohini Mohon Brahma have used the word “Colo” to denote the meaning of prose narratives.

Anil Boro have classified the Bodo prose narrative into the following three subtypes –²

- i) Myth (Gōzam colo or Modai Daodaini colo)
- ii) Legend (cubun° colo)
- iii) Tale (colo)

2.1.1 **Myth (Gōzam Colo):** The Bodos ethnic term “Gozam colo”, “Modai Daodaini colo” have been used to indicate the meaning of myth. Myth is the integral part of the Bodo prose narratives. Bascom defines myth as – “*Myths are prose narratives which in the society in which they are told, are considered to be truthful account of what happened in the remote past.*”³ The presence of myth in the society depends on the belief of the people. The tales which are being told to the people are believed to be true and sacred by that specific society. The teaching of god and goddesses, origin of cosmological world, creation of man and nature predominantly occupies the place of myth. The myth is closely related to religion and rituals and associates with the way of worship, convention and belief of a community.

2.1.2 **Legend (Cubun° Colo):** The legend is another important subgenre of prose narratives. The ethnic terms “Cubun° colo” has been used to suggest the meaning of legend. God and goddess, plant and animals did not find any place in the legend. The character and the events of legends are the hero and heroines who did not find place in the history. All the happenings in the legends are considered to be in the recent past. Sometimes legends are considered as history but no authentication. Legends are believed to be true because instances can be found in the actual world. Therefore, legend can help in finding and investigating the history. Linda Degh says, “*The reason for telling a legend is basically not to entertain but to educate people to inform them about an important fact, to arm them against danger within their cultural environment. Therefore, as Mathias Zendar expresses it, understanding of the legend is possible if one views it through the general living conditions, belief and ideology of a culture.*”⁴

According to Anil Boro a folklorist among the Bodos, there are three types of legends prevalent in the Bodos (i) Etiological legend (ii) Historical legend and (iii) Religious legend. “Etiological legends tell the origin of things or the creation of the world. Historical legends include narratives trying to explain the pre- history of some locality of region and the hidden body

2. Boro, Anil (2010): Folk Literature of the Bodos, N.L. Publications, A.R.B. Road, Panbazar, Guwahati, p.155

3. Bascom, William (1981): Contribution of folkloristic, Meerut, India: Folklore Institute: Archana Publications, P.98

4. Degh, Linda, Legend Genres in Dorson ed. (1972): Folklore and Folklife An Introduction, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, P.73

of folk history. Religious legends are on gods and heroes related to religious rituals".the myths exist in the Bodos can be categorized as ethological and religious legend. Most of the place legend and the legendary hero and heroine which did not find place in the history predominantly occupy the place in the historical legends. The place legend tells about the name of a place. There are many current instances which manifests the historical legend among the Bodos – Following are some of the current legends among the Bodos

- i) The Legend of Gambari Sikla.
- ii) The Legend of Birgwsri Sikla.
- iii) The Legend of Jaolia Dewan.
- iv) The Legend of Daori Gathwn.
- v) The Legend of Baokhungri.
- vi) The Legend of Sikhna Bir.
- vii) The Legend of Basiram Jwhwlaio.

2.1.3 **Tales (Colo/colo Batha):** Tales are another branch of prose narratives. The ethnic term “colo/ colo batha” has been used by different scholars to suggest the meaning of tales or folktales. Folktales don't have any analogy with the actual world. All the events are created out of fantasy in folktales. Even though they proclaim to narrate the real incidents, they are all works of fiction. The animals, plants, birds and men are the most prominent characters of the folktales. One fascinating feature of the folktales is that the animals, plants and birds do speak and work as humans. Man is seen as having super natural power although they find plays in folktales. Therefore, the folktales are called fiction. Linda Degh says – “Like novels and short stories their sophisticated counterparts, folk tales are told primarily for entertainment although they may have secondary purpose. They are believed to be factious and are cited as lies by storytellers and commentators who mean that tales are the creation of human fantasy”.⁵

The prose narrative of the Bodos is very rich in regard of folktales (colo or colobatha). Anil Boro has classified the Bodo folktales based on their character and nature of the tales in the following subtypes.⁶

- i) **Animal Tale (Zunatni colo)**, Eg- The story of toad, the story of Doe and Raven, The tale of the monkey and hare, the tortoise and the monkey, the tale of the cat and the fox etc.
- ii) **Supernatural Tales (Gömōthao colo)**, Eg- Alciacron Zwholao (The Idle Hero), Belimuthi Sikla, Dimashron (Hero Born from egg), the tale of Alaridamra etc.
- iii) **Jokes or Humorous tales (Zōngkhainai eba minicri gonan ° colo)**, Eg- The Brahmins Servant, The Story of the Simpleton, The story of Seven Sempleton etc.
- iv) **Trickster Tales (Cian Zamba colo)**, Eg- The old man and the tiger, the Brahmin and his servant, the story of four thieves etc.
- v) **Tales of Folk History (Cubun ° Zariminary colo)**, Eg- The Simple minded Kachari, How the three sons become separated.
- vi) **Cumulative Tales (Ban lan ° gra colo)** Eg- (A Hare and the sky burst)
- vii) **Dilemma Tales (Zethō Gōnan °)**. Eg- The Tale of four brothers, the fruit of toil.
- viii) **Incestuous Tale (Bun ° thaoyi colo)**, Eg- The Tale of Raona Raoni, Obonglaori (Zarapagla).

2.2 **Social Significance of the prose narratives of the Bodos:**

No authentic recorded history is obtainable as to how and when the tradition of folk literature has come into existence in the human civilization. But the fact is that the folk literature is the social product created by men itself to serve multifarious purposes in the human society. The study shows that the prose narrative of the Bodos which is the integral part of folk literature reflects the socio-cultural images, family structure, socio-political set up and value system. It is apparent that the prose narratives are connected unambiguously with the human society like other genres of folk literature do. The folk literature might have played pivotal role as guiding force to govern the society in ancient period when there was no methodical arrangement. Thus the social significance of prose narratives may be discussed under the following heads –

2.2.1 Prose Narratives Reflects Culture: Like the other genre of folk literature the prose narratives reflect the culture of the community that belongs to. Regarding this Anil Boro says, “It reflects the cultural details of the people unveiling their minds and providing due to past events and their achieve customs.”⁷ The way of living, food habits, craft, belief, ritual of communities are contemplated through the prose narratives. The prevailing myth among the Bodos plays an important role in reflecting the culture of the community. The myth of *kherai* worship and the myth of musical instruments have deep rooted interpretation of social philosophy, Social behavior, custom and tradition of the Bodos. Most of the current Bodo folk dances have its origin from the *kherai* worship having distinct interpretation on the social life of the Bodos.

2.2.2 Prose narratives impart education: As there was no formal set up of school education the folk literature was only the medium of imparting education in the ancient period. Oral tradition was a very strong weapon of mass education. The oral narratives played role as method of teaching and as elements of education in the past. The myth among the Bodos instill about the origin of cultural traditions thereby encouraging the young generation to preserve and promote their cultural heritage. The

5.Ibid, P.60

6. Boro, Anil (2010): Folk Literature of the Bodos, N.L.Publications, A.R.B.Road, Panbazar, Guwahati, PP.173-174.

7.Boro, Anil(2010): Folk Literature of the Bodos, N.L.Publications, A.R.B.Road, Panbazar, Guwahati, P.222

narratives of legends provide opportunity to investigate about the history of the legendary hero, heroines and places that belongs to a specific culture.

Folktales are widely known as mechanism of teaching moral lesson to the children in every society and its prominence is still felt vastly even by the modern society. Although the mode of storytelling by elderly persons have changed today the creative industry has received the technique and the mode of storytelling and started to make cartoons of folktales for the T.V. Programmers' thus providing entertainment and moral lessons to the children and adult. Realizing the significance of the prose narratives the learned person and the educationist never detach the narratives from the school textbook beginning from elementary up to secondary section. The prose narratives of Bodos find place in the textbooks of school children in language subjects with the purpose to teach moral lessons.

2.2.3 Prose Narratives as medium of entertainment: One of the primary functions of the prose narratives is to offer entertainment to the listener. The unfamiliar and the comic event which occurs in the myth and the tales fascinate the children and adult thus providing pleasure to the listener. To perform the story telling a teller must put extra effort to his physical gesture, voice modulation, facial expression, images and if possible rhythmic music, to create an environment and passion to the listener.

The practice of storytelling was a popular means of entertaining in those days. The elderly person in the Bodo society use to tell stories to the children and adult primarily for entertaining. There was a form of storytelling in the Bodo society called '*Serja Gaon*'. Some of them told stories even for the whole night along with the rhythm of '*Serja*' a musical instrument of the Bodos. The rhythm of '*Serja*' mesmerizes the moment and the listener takes pleasure from it. The peace loving and hard working Bodo people tell stories among themselves in the work places for relaxing and entertainment. That is how the narratives serve the society as a means of amusement.

2.2.4 Prose narratives as a tool of socialization: Man is considered as social animal and lives in the circle of society till death right after the birth. Every individual is called biological beings at the time of birth. Socialization is important because the society is lead by the man and the man has to be accepted by the society with good conduct sanctioned by the society. The prose narratives had vital role in the process of socialization in the illiterate society of our ancestors. The social customs were revealed through the narratives to the younger generation.

Family, school and the society are the three agencies through which the socialization is materialized. Family is the first agent and is called mini society of socialization. The folk narratives can reach the children very first. The home story telling by parents and grandparents by using the prose narrative was of great help in forming the character, attitude and behavior of the children. The school is another agent of the socialization. The school provides formal education in socializing the children. School is the centre of exchanging ideas among the children from different family background. A teacher can make use of the prose narratives as a tool to influence the students in socializing. The society or the social institutes is another influencing agent of socialization. The prose narratives current among the Bodos especially in myths have certain unifying elements which have the potential to bring the community in one platform thus teachings the lesson of maintaining the sense of brotherhood and mutual co-existence.

2.2.5 Personality Development in Children: Personality is a set of character, attitude and behavior of an individual which display the distinctive identity of a person. Man is not born with complete agglomeration of personality. Man since the inception of the civilization had been constantly keep on changing in the way of thinking, attitude and behavior and makes it to the present states. The young children are fascinated towards the fictional character of the folktales having special magical skill. The folktales yield entertainment and impart education in numerous ways to transform a man into a complete human being.

Reading listening and retelling of folktales may enrich the personality of a children in many ways. The children discovered new ideas get exposed to the cultural diversity of the society thereby learning to value and respect their roots by reading folktales, while listening the folktales a visual journey takes place in their mind thus enriching the sense of imagination skill. The practice of storytelling and exchanged of ideas boost the vocabulary skills, level of confidence, critical thinking, creative thinking in the children which are invariably indispensable parts of man's practical living. It is said that the creative person are the backbone of development and progress of any society. Thus the role of prose narratives of a culture is inevitable gimmick in the process of man making.

2.2.6 Prose Narrative as Tool of Social Control: The modern civilization of human society has reached in a very complex stage. The younger generations is losing the direction of their roots. Constant conflict between old ethics and modern ethnics is apparent in today's modern society. The wave of globalization has shaken the foundation of every culture. Globalization has turned to be a serious concern for the smaller group of people in sustaining the cultural tradition. The younger generation is predominantly victim of the modern life style who is supposed to be the ancestor of the cultural heritage. The invention of science and technology has also its impact on the younger generation in derailing them from their roots. However, the modern technology has offered an easy access to digital preservation. Constant assimilation is noticeable predominantly in the North Eastern Part of India in the tribal group of people thereby creating treat to the community survival with dignity and fraternity.

3.0 Conclusion: Since the present study is based only on prose narratives of the Bodos. The study did not add any subgenre of folk literature. The study attempts to discuss the deep rooted connection between prose narratives and human civilization. Despite having rich stock of narratives rare studies has been done in the broader perspectives among the Bodos. This brief and precise discussion has made an effort to highlight some of the significant aspect of the social construction by manipulating the prose narratives. The study also will help people in better understanding of the Bodo prose narrative rather than just considering it as fictional stories. The current study presents only the introductory piece of the prose narrative of the Bodos and social values have been discussed in a very brief mode.

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