



“A Study On Bodo Folktales Compiled By Missionaries”

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ABSTRACT

Folktales are passed down from generation to generation orally which means by word of mouth. They are prose narratives or oral narratives which are works of Fiction. It constitutes an important genre of Folklore. Eventually, they are published in books. They tell us about a culture's moral lessons and their beliefs, cautions and even foolish behaviour. Bodo folktales are stories that have unbelievable events. Herein we see the vast grid of the incredible men and women who built our great tribe. These folktales are based on exaggeration figuratively known as hyperbole. They have their origins the people were undergoing a difficult time back then and the settlers viewed their surroundings as filled with unimaginable dangers that needed to be conquered. We see the touches of tales that show the end of the Kachari Kingdom and their gradual contact with the foreigners. These folks had to be a cut above regular people to expose themselves to such harsh conditions and they almost had to be superhuman. That's how the heroes of the tales became as super strong and ferocious. These folktales were a reflection of their circumstances. There were several instances of their struggle against poor economic conditions; their search for food and water and even fire. There is the Old Man and the Old Woman and a personified evil. These tales represent the power and strength of the Bodo spirit. They also have the male chivalry power and control of the environment by dominance with their physical strength and cleverness. This paper will focus on Bodo Folktales as Compiled in the books of J.D. Anderson and Rev. Sydney Endle and data have been taken from primary and secondary sources.

Keywords: Structure of Folktales, Moral Lesson, Use of Language, Social reflection, Beliefs and Customs.

Introduction:

Historically it is said that the Boros are known to be the oldest inhabitants to occupy the Brahmaputra valley. They are known to have thrived and ruled these places gloriously. Historical relics and monuments of Dimapur, Khaspur and Maibong are witness to their glorious past. They belong to the Tibeto-Burman language family and race of Indo-Mongoloid, whose abode is traced to the valley between Hoang Ho and Yang-Tse Kiang River. They have their own rich socio-cultural heritage. But they didn't have any written records about their language, literature and culture before the entry of Christian Missionaries. By the passage of the Charter Act of India in 1813 CE, the Christian missionaries got permission to propagate their religion in India. In this way, the missionaries entered into the Boro-Kacharis in the early years of the nineteen century CE and did some charitable works as well.

The missionaries were the first to come into contact with the Boro people. (Basumatary 201) Among the leaders of missionaries Rev. Sidney Endle and J.D. Anderson took the main role in preserving the language, literature and culture of the Boro-Kachari. Firstly they published some books about the Boro Kacharis. Among their published books, “A Collection of Kachari Folk-Tales and Rhymes” 1895 by J.D. Anderson is one of the most famous books. Through this book, we can find some folktales, Folk-song and Children's rhymes of the Boro Kachari.

Objectives of the study:

1. To focus the Social reflection.
2. To find out the moral lessons in the folk tales compiled by J.D. Anderson.

Methodology:

Since it is a theoretical study the paper will have empirical approaches. Analytical method has been used in this paper and the study has followed both primary and secondary sources. The data and information have been collected mainly from books.

Folk-Tales compiled by J.D. Anderson: J.D. Anderson was an ICS officer and he was doing as D.C. in the district of Darrang. (Brahma 52) After retiring as D.C. he published the book 'A Collection of Kachari Folk-Tales and Rhymes'. In this book, he compiled 16 Boro Folk-Tales as well as some Boro Folk-Songs and children's Rhymes. The Folk-Tales are viz.

1. Dùimâ dùisâ ni khorâng (How the rivers were made).
2. Sâse *olsiâ* gâthâ nê khorâng (The Story of the Lazy Boy).
3. Gâthâ mâmra ni khorâng (The seven Champions).
4. Sase phalange gathani khorang (The Story of the Merchant's Son)
5. Bîdâ bînânauni khorâng (Brother and Sister).
6. Embu Bonglâ ni Khorâng (The story of the Toad).
7. Mui aru daukha danda ni khorang (The Story of the Doe and the Raven).
8. Brai sase ni khorang (The Old Man and the Tiger).
9. *Mùkhrâ* ârù Sessâ ni *Khorâng* (The Tale of the Monkey and the Hare).
10. Khusung aru Mukhra (The Tortoise and Monkey).
11. Bâmun deâru bînî sâkor ni khorâng (The Brahmin and his Servant)
12. Abra ni khorang (The Story of the Simpleton).
13. Sa-sni abra ni khorang (The story of the seven Simpletons).
14. Khana khuza ni khorang (The Story of the Blind Man and the Hunchbank).
15. Sâse âbrâ brai ni khorâng (The Story of a silly old man).
16. Brai biruini khorang (The Story of the four Thieves). (Anderson 8-49)

These stories were collected during his tour of only six weeks' duration in the Kachari Mauzas of Mangaldai and cost only the effort of taking down the tales as they were dictated. (Anderson 5) From the collection of his folk-tales we can learn lots of knowledge. There are many moral lessons in every folk-tales and reflected social pictures, beliefs and customs of the Boro Community.

Story and Moral Lesson:

In the book by JD Anderson, there was respect for water and all that lives in it most importantly fish. This was a very surfacing fact among the tribal people of Assam in those days; the scarcity of water. This scarcity of water and being thirsty in the mid-forest hunt made the Kacharis of those times hanker for water in uneven ways a manner. In the story of *Dùimâ dùisâ ni khorâng* or "How the rivers were made," we see how water was treated as a natural resource which the people had very little right to mingle with. In that tale, the god *Sri* made rivers for the fishes to travel up to the Brahmaputra and the fishes in return gave him medical help and riches. The rivers were always a source of food and wealth in terms of the many valuable things found in the waters and the Kacharis revered the rivers as a separate substance that has a godlike attribute.

The folktales of the Kacharis also seemed to have a great respect towards the old people. Several instances have related matters to some old man or an old woman. The Old ones were thought to be wise with all the knowledge of the age-old days in which they have suffered, endured and learned the ways of nature and to survive in it without destroying it and angering Mother Nature. In the story of *Sâse olsiâ gâthâ nê khorâng* "The Story of the Lazy Boy," we see the exact seasons when crops ought to be planted and the negligence of it brings starvation to the person. This was because the Kacharis were a kind of seasonal cultivator in matters of their principal food items. Being lazy or full of slots in one season means going on some rough days in the next seasons to come. The boy in the above-mentioned story couldn't bring back the lost season as much as he had tried to do so.

There was a great enmity between Tularam Senapati and the king Govinda Chandra, The British took the Kachari Kingdom under them but they destroyed the original nation and replaced it with the English instead of bringing the chaotic Kingdom together. This is reflected in *Bîdâ bînânauni khorâng* "Brother and Sister" which tells the story of the enmity between a Brother and his sister. The Brother and Sister in the tale is the Kachari brethren who lived in close help proximity to each other. But it was others who came in between this brotherly and sisterly bonding among the Kacharis and split them apart. And the Kacharis instead of seeing through the misfitting plans that the foreigners near them have been plotting, fought among themselves within their own Kingdom. The maiden of the water tank seems to be the Kachari representation of the British who helped the Kachari Kingdom only in those manners in which they would be beneficial to the British even if it meant destroying the Kachari Kingdom in little charcoals.

Embu Bonglâ nî Khorâng "The Story of the Toad" story shows how the tribal girls in those times had to marry a time marry against their will. The usually young husbands used to have a hard time finding for their families. However, the girl in the story had her revenge by making the toad jump into a pot of hot water. This was the voice of the subaltern of those times. It doesn't matter whether the voice will be heard or not but the girl committed an act of an open rebellion to force a wedding which in other books too becomes more explicit.

Many other instances of false friendships surface in many of the tales. The words of the old and the wise tell that people should be careful in choosing their friends, the more of whom will be eager to see the downfall and some friends will even be happy if they get some type of direct benefit from the loss that his friend may have suffered. *Mui aru daukha danda nî khorang* "The Story of the Doe and the Raven" is a perfect example that is a fable created to make the Kacharis morally aware of the dangers that come with friendship. The Kachari King however failed to do so by misplacing the wrong people in the right places.

Perhaps the most important lessons that come with Kachari folktales are the record of wits. The people dwelt in a hostile environment in those times and they had to use a lot of wit to survive in the game of survival. In *Brai sase nî khorang* "The Old Man and the Tiger" the old man by the use of his wits makes the wild tigers do his threshing without it being able to rearm him in return. The use of super wits by the Kachari people that we see in those stories cannot be ignored. The Tigers were just a small example; there are many other wit and tactics that the Kacharis use to survive. The natural qualities that plants and animals had were used by the Kacharis for their own benefit to be able to survive in an uneven world.

Physical strength was not always used by the Kacharis in those times to deal with someone. In the story of *Mùkhrâ ârù Sessâ nî Khorâng* "The Tale of the Monkey and the Hare" the Hare uses different types of tactics to take revenge on the monkey for gobbling up all the plantains that both of them had acquired by a collaborative effort from both of them. The revenge was not a physical assault but in a much more simplified manner in which the one given the revenge made himself responsible for the suffering that he had to endure. This is just the way that many Kachari people even today think of getting revenge.

The tales compiled by JD Anderson also contained many instances which depicted that the majority lot of the people were uneducated and there were only a few handfuls of educated people. In *Bâmun deâru bîni sâkor nî khorâng* "The Brahmin and his Servant" we see how the servant of the Brahmin took advantage of the mass of the uneducated people to punish his master. The servant used to bet what a plant of a thing was called and it turns out that the loose words of the real original words used by the Brahmins came to the rescue of the servant. However, in the latter passages, the servant of the Brahmin also takes the help of an educated person for his advantage.

There were also many Simpletons and their livelihood is discussed in great detail in the Kachari folktales. Sometimes they surged their brainy counterparts and sometimes they were a nuisance to the people around them. *Abra nî khorang* "The Story of the Simpleton" forgetting how to finger crack and searching for it in the fields may amuse any reader but to see life as lived by those simpletons is not funny rather it is heart-catching. There are many instances in *Sa-sni abra nî khorang* "The story of the seven Simpletons" where the seven simpletons did some great losses for their master. Being a simpleton was common phenomena in the Kachari society and the way they were to be kept secure among the normal-minded people was discussed in many instances in order to fit with the situations directly.

There was a Hunchback and a blind man who set out to do some business together. All the things collected by the blind man seem very much useful later in the story. The Kachari habit of using things in an economical manner and seeing the essence and importance of ordinary things is much reflected in the story. Even a piece of rope comes in handy sometimes or the other. The fight of words and the wonderful business and managing skills that they had mesmerized the children and also made the adults thoughtful in imagining the wit that Kacharis possessed even though they may be physically challenged.

There were also other instances like *Sâse âbrâ brai nî khorâng* where there was an old man who was very poor in Arithmetic. He was so dull in it that it took him almost whole day to divide the deer meat and he would have taken longer time had not his wife intervened just in time to a brilliant solution. The Kacharis did not take it very seriously with arithmetic; they were often engaged in a simple manner like a barter system. The people in those times went by quantity and not quality; this was the reason why many of the latter Kachari people were robbed off their wits by the more quick-minded people who came to mingle and co-exist with them in their valley.

However, the simpleton mind was not the all in a Kachari folktale. There were also several instances where there was the use of wit to defend their property. In *Brai bùrùini khorâng* "The Story of the four Thieves" the old man makes a fool of his thieves who comes often to steal from the old man. Just like in the Hollywood "Home Alone" script so thus the old man uses various wits created in his Kachari mind in order to keep the thieves away because he doesn't have enough strength to face them off physically. This also saved him a lot of energy and advanced his creative defense analyses.

Reflection of the Social Picture of the Bodo:

In the tales compiled by Anderson, we find many situations that portray the social livelihood of the Bodo people. For instance, in *Sâse olsiâ gâthâ nê khorâng* and *Sa-sni abra ni khorang* we see the pictorial ploughing scene during the season of monsoon which is the major time of their food items.

The book again shows many instances of farming. There is also the bringing in of sheaves by the seven simpletons in this book. In the *Mùkhrâ ârù Sessâ nî Khorâng* “The Tale of the Monkey and the Hare” we see the traditional threshing of grain that is another cultural method of the Bodo people since those times and beyond.

Further instances of social reflection can also be seen in *Abra ni khorang* “The Story of the Simpleton” where there are passages that show rearing animals like goats, and cows and drawing water from the river. Buying and selling of cows as a commodity was seen as it was a great part of the Bodo kachari farming procedure.

In *Sâse âbrâ brai nî khorâng* “The Story of a silly old man” too we see a hunter that has hunted a deer. The hunter lost their game and the benefit goes to the old man who hid the deer in the forest which was the common method of the hunters to keep their kill safe in the forest at night if they cannot bring it home on the same day itself.

In yet another tale called *Gâthâ mâmra nî khorâng*. This tale is clear the heroes didn’t go out for pleasure hunting. There is also an instance in the tale about searching for water. This suggests that they dwelt in a place that had not enough drinking water and they had to move about in search of food and water. This has been explained in another of his collection of tale “How the rivers were made”. There is also an instance that showed the Kacharis begging even for fire; a twist that is not seen often in other folktales as fire is an abstract thing that can be created easily. But there is also a shortage of materials even to make fire. Such was the life and the hardships that were the lot of these tribal people and those resulted in storing these as stories in folktales. The search for food items also led them to settle elsewhere other than their own homes. Unlike other folktales of Northeast India, the Bodo folktales are often found to glorify the ‘land far away’ meaning exactly what the words suggest; the scarcity of their place. Some even went to the extent of marrying raksha women for they dwelt in a place that was more abundant than their own and settling there didn’t matter much even if they had to marry a raksha woman.

Love of Foreign Women in *Sase phalange gathani khorang* very much reflects the fall of the Kachari Kingdom. The tale gives some historical motifs about the Kachari Kingdom. The story involves the dangers and later the disasters that the Kacharis had to face after the Kachari King married a foreign queen which in the long run dissected the kingdom into as best pieces as it could be dissected. The Kacharis somehow had a liking of things from far and far away. The strange in any form becomes an object of interest and a desire to possess follows it. The Merchant boy in the story was enchanted by the beauty of the foreign lass and expensed his family wealth on her by bringing her home. There might have been various other Kachari maidens much beautiful to the eye worth of the merchant boy; but he chose the foreign, the beauty from beyond his own kingdom and the queen of beautiful disaster. And the Kachari king aka Merchant Boy was more than happy to go down along with the disaster rather than do something to prevent the catastrophe. Beauty was measured in foreign standards and not in comparison to home-grown beauties.

Used of Language:

In the folk-tales, compiled by J.D. Anderson used the Bodo dialects of the erstwhile Darrang district. Now it’s inside the Udalguri district after being divided. There was no use of the main or origin vowel phoneme of Bodo language ‘ও’ ‘W’ but in place of this, he used ‘উ’ ‘U’ phoneme. e.g., Aru (arw), Mukra (mwkra), Boibu (boibw) etc. And also we found lots of loan words from these folk-tales. There are many Assamese speakers in that place and the Assamese language has influence among the Boro peoples of Darrang district. With this regard we can find many Assamese words in the folk-tales. Eg, the words ‘sâgoli’ and ‘zanthu’ in *Bâmun deâru binî sâkor nî khorâng* (The Brahmin and his Servant) are in Assamese and likewise there are many such Assamese words.

Conclusion:

In light of the above-mentioned folk-tales compiled by J.D. Anderson, there were lots of important moral lessons about the livelihood of the people and from these folk-tales people may learn many wits and tactics because the illiterate villagers of that time were living by using many wits and tactics. As a part of literature folk-tales also take a very important role in society. People use the folk-tales as entertainment but they teach us lots of basic knowledge, good behaviour and humanity. But nowadays the use of folk-tale is reduced by the influence of globalization. In this regard, lots of Bodo folk-tales are lost from society which are not in the form of books. There are many folk-tales among the Bodos but these are not in written form. So this is the time to preserve their own literature and cultural wealth in everything to be identified as a community. JD Anderson preserved those folktales at a time when the native Bodo people had lost their script and were not literate enough to write in other scripts and had been continuing only on an oral basis; so by writing that book Anderson did a tremendous job in preserving those nearly lost folktales of the Kacharis.

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