Reflection of Folk Culture in the novels of Birinchi Kumar Barua

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Abstract:

Folk culture refers to a rich and diverse body of traditional knowledge, beliefs, practices, custom etc that have been rooted in the indigenous communities. The novels '*Jivanar Batat'* and '*Seuji Patar Kahini*'written by Birinchi Kumar Barua portray various aspects of folk culture of Assamese and Tea Tribe communities. The novelist presents the forms of folk culture such as Bihu songs and dances, Zhumur song and dance, traditions, customs, proverb, riddles, folk medicine, folk wine etc. This paper is a modest attempt to explore the various elements of folk culture reflected in the novels and the knowledge of these how they are transmitted from generation to generation. In this research paper the original text will be taken as primary data and various articles of different books, research papers of journals, internet sources etc will be taken as secondary data. Analytical and descriptive research method will be used for the study.

Keywords: folk culture, Bihu sons, tradition, customs, analytical.

Introduction:

Folk culture constitutes an essential component of community identity, collective memory, and traditional knowledge. Folk culture is the identity of man in the society. It encompasses traditions, customs, food habits, dress, festivals, dance, folk songs, traditional knowledge, social values etc. In Assamese society, folk culture has historically played a significant role in preserving collective memory and expressing relationships among individuals, families, and communities. Festivals, agricultural practices, marriage ceremonies, religious observances, and oral traditions constitute important dimensions of this cultural inheritance. The customs and traditions are transmitted informally from one generation to another generation. Cultural heritage, identity and even cultural diversity have been preserved and promoted through the use of folk culture. It can encourage a community to unite along with the process of socialization. Besides, it has a significant role to impart moral lessons and values. People can understand the history and culture of a community through the folk culture and it helps a community to develop various economic development projects like tourism. These artefacts help the society to move forward in many ways. To sum up, these are the driving force of

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society. The novelist presents various forms of folk culture such as Bihu songs and dances, traditions, customs, proverb, riddles, folk medicine etc.

Objectives: The paper has the following objectives:

1. To examine and analyze the major forms of folk culture represented in the novel.
2. To investigate the relationship between folk practices, collective identity, and social organization in rural Assamese society
3. To investigate the ways how people of Assam observe and preserve the different forms of folk culture.

Research Questions

The study addresses the following questions:

1. How does *Jivanar Baatat* and represent the everyday folk culture of Assamese society?
2. In what ways do songs, rituals, food practices, and traditional medicine function as forms of community knowledge?
3. What does the novel reveal about the relationship between cultural preservation and social change?

Methodology: In this research paper the original text will be taken as primary data and various articles of different books, research papers of journals, internet sources etc will be taken as secondary data. Analytical and descriptive research method will be used for the study.

Review of literature:

Many literary works are worked out on the novels of Birinchi Kumar Barua by the research scholars, critics and other writers. A brief description for the same is given below:

Dr. Madhusmita Boruah Changkakoti has written an article on the novels of Birinchi Kumar Barua in the collection of essays entitled 'Asamiya Upanyas Parikrama' edited by Amal Chanda Das (2012). She discusses the following areas:

*She highlights the folk culture of Assamese society in the novel '*Jivanar Batat'* pointing out 'Bongeet, Lukageet & Bihugeet' etc.

Porag Kumar Bhattacharrya in his book 'Adhunik Upanyash'(1999) has discussed the different angles of the novels of Birinchi Kumar Barua. He brings out the following points:

*Dr. Bhattacharrya underlines the picture of folk life of Assamese people in the novel 'Jivanar Batat' and the society of tea tribe in the novel 'Seuji Patar Kahini'.

*He also points out the degradation of value and ideals of folk life after the second world war and independence of India which is reflected in the novel Jivanar Batat'.

Lakshi Kanta Mahanta in his book 'Tinikhan Bharatia Upanyas' (1995) has discussed the different issues of the novel entitled '*Jivanar Baatat'* written by Birinchi Kumar Barua. He throws light on the following matters:

*He points out that the novel '*Jivanar Batat'* expresses the real picture of village, town, agricultural field, belief, tradition, value, ideals, and folk culture of Assam.

Discussion:

In the very beginning of the novel' *Jivanar Batat'* the novelist highlights some old traditions, custom, folksong, folkdance, rituals of marriage through the characters and setting of the novel. They are the part and parcel of the Assamese society and they are very necessary to lead the society as well as folk people well. In short, they are called the mirror of the society. The setting of the novel is based on the rural places of Assam during the pre- independence period. The names of the places are known such as Morongi,(Gulaghat District), Roha (Nagaon District), Dibrugarh etc and the livelihood of village life is depicted well in the novel by the novelist. Traditionally in a rural village a wedding is observed like a festival in which people use to enjoy with the recreational activities even by arranging '**Vaona**' also. It is delineated when Mouzader Bhugadutta arranges and prepares the wedding ceremony of his daughter hastily. The following sentences express it-

''The Young men desire to perform the drama of the killing of Abhimunu or the killing of Rawan,'' (Barua 1).

In the novel, the marriage ceremony operates as a collective social event rather than merely a private agreement between two individuals The guests are invited to the wedding ceremony by giving betel-nut which is still a tradition in the Assamese society. Hum Pura Biya is arranged for the wedding ceremony of Bhugadatta's daughter which is also an ancient tradition of Assamese society. Some other traditions and customs are observed strictly in respect of the rituals of wedding ceremony. The daughter of Mouzader Bhugadutta observes the custom of fasting for three days consecutively. The works of different activities are assigned to the specific persons by the host for well preparation. The novel presents rural Assamese life through familiar social practices and community relationships. The following speech expresses the participation in community works.

'The works are to be done by whom for which works are all fixed before by the Mauzader. Who will supply foods to a group of people by whom…'' (Barua, 13)

The exact time for marriage between bride and groom is generally fixed by the Astrologer which is expressed through the marriage ceremony of the daughter of Bhugadutta. It is one of the popular prevailing customs of the Assamese society. Ring ceremony is considered as a vital part of marriage ceremony of Assamese society which is also a famous tradition. The ring put on by someone to a girl is a serious custom which is reflected through the character Tagar. The following speech of Tagar expresses:

'Tagor screamed covering shame of eye with the corner of the shawl, ''Why did you destroy me?'' (Barua, 24)

Casteism as an ancient tradition plays an important role in terms of the marriage ceremony particularly in the Assamese society. The marriage between high caste and low caste is not fixed and arranged by the concerned community. In the novel, Dharani master is belonged to high caste and Tagor is belonged to the low caste .The marriage between Dharani and Tagar

is not morally accepted by the relatives of Dharani;s family. The following speech of the character Sunad reveals it:

‘‘Your son has not done the work well. ‘The punishment will be imposed on you along with your son by the society’’ (Barua, 59)

Bihu geet can be regarded as the most popular traditional song in the Assamese society. It is portrayed in the novel when Dharani and Tagar arrive at the village as newly married people. The young boys haltered the cart and they start singing Bihu song and they dance with joy. Besides, many other traditions and customs in terms of marriage ceremony are exposed in the novel. For example, a small banana plant is planted at the yard and some leaves of mango are hanged for decoration. A small wooden chair is kept under the banana plant. Moreover, a bell-metal pitcher of full water and a brass plate are arranged as per customs of marriage ceremony. The taking of the veil is a tradition of new bride in the Assamese society. The new bride takes the blessings from the elder relatives by kneeling upon them. The procedure of respecting is guided and led well by her mother in low. At the time of serious illness of Ahini Sunod reads loudly a few lines of religious scriptures so that Ahini can listen to it and feels like eternal peace. Besides, water of Ganga and a religious food i.e. ‘Panchamit’ are arranged to offer her as per the religious practices. All are the religious beliefs and customs of the Assamese community. The third part of the novel ‘Jivanar Batat’ begins with a folk song i.e. oral song or Lokgeet. The following lines of an oral song:

‘‘Someone calls mother, someone calls sister, mother becomes the wife of house’’ (Barua ,115)

Another religious rite of Assamese people is the redemption from the sin named ‘Puhkar’ which is the religious custom in respect of the expired person. It is exposed in the novel through the death of Ahini. All are the religious superstitions of Assamese people.

In the novel ‘*Jivanar Batat’* the novelist artistically portrays the folk food and folk medicine well which are normally different from one culture to another culture. Through the character Ahini the novelist wants to come out some special folk foods which are still popular in Assamese community. The dishes are such as the broth of peppermint and termenthera sessilis, frying of soft leaves of a medicinal creeper, curry of arum plants with a few small pieces of a garcenia pedunculata, and curry of phaseolus radiates with alkali etc which are sometimes cooked by Ahini to give her son Dharani when he is at his serious illness.

In the novel ‘Seuji Pator Kahini (1959)’ Dr. Barua has skillfully focused on the various dimensions of folk culture. In the very beginning of the novel Dr. Borua expresses some old ideas and customs of common people of rural area which affect everybody directly or indirectly. These thoughts of rural people are based on hatred, inhuman, filthy thought, illiteracy, ruthlessness etc which are the common behavioral mechanism of rural society. The novelist has successfully exposed the poisonous environment of village through the plot construction and characters like Naren, Malati, Debeswar, Nareswar etc. Besides, the novelist reveals some folk beliefs which are at present converted to the folk tales. Hareswar, one of the characters of the novel, stands for folk belief and folk medicine. He is a famous physician as well as magician who acts as a doctor in the ancient time. He is called as Kabiraj or Bej in

Assamese dialect. Hareswar could cure any disease during the reign of Ahom king, Gaurinath Singha. For example, once he gained an opportunity to cure the snake biting of Rangdoi' son, the most favorite woman servant of this king and there after he receives a special reorganization in the royal family. He cured her son by using supernatural magical words which is at present regarded as folk belief or superstitition. Moreover, he provided the herbal medicine of abortion as per the requirement of the princes, princesses and female servants of the royal house. In this way, he plays as a special officer in the royal family. After the death of Hareswar, Jogyeswar, son of Hareswar also took the same profession and rendered his service in the reign of Ahom king, Kamleswar Singha. This king renovated many temples in the village of Jogyeswar and observed the sacrifice of three bulls in the temple during the Shaaradotsava. The sacrifice of animal is still prevailed in the temples which is a kind of custom and tradition. The method of worship to the Goddess was observed as per the order of Jagyeswar which is prevailed in the Ahom and Tea Garden community yet. Maheswar could cure many diseases like his father. He provided many herbal medicines in terms of snake biting, pox, abortion etc and he once gave a herbal medicine of abortion to a female servant named Sahita as per the petition of the prince, a relative of the king, Chandrakanta Singha. Maheswar himself noticed the pathetic condition of Sahita and later on, he decided to forsake this Kabiraj profession in future.

The contemporary society is based on the patriarchal system which is deeply rooted in the old tradition and custom. Barrenness in women is considered as the curse of God in rural area which is a folk belief. In the novel, Malati is condemned by everyone for her infertility but they don't want to know her genuine reason. The right or advantage of remarriage of widow is not permitted in such society. So, Malati has been a victim for the both issues. Malati is an educated girl in the village who completed Lower Primary education successfully. Her husband was died after four years of their marriage without child. The marital life of Malati was just begun and eventfully collapsed in a moment. Instead of making hatred nobody has come to inspire or suggest her to do needful as per her will. Besides, other female characters such as Mohuwa,Sonia, Alumoni, Malati etc are brutally oppressed by this system. They are not able to protest against their own allegations and oppressions imposed by male counterparts. It is the cause and effect of patriarchal system. For example, Mohuwa was brutally raped by Armstrong, a British person who was the former manager of the Naharani Tea Estate. Eventually Sonia was born by this sinful action of Armstrong Sahab, and she was introduced as an orphan in the novel. Through the characters like Malati, Mohuwa, Sonia etc, the novelist conveys the message of reformation and protest in terms of old orthodox customs and traditions.

The novelist brings to light the performance of Zhumur song and dance extensively in the novel. Zhumur song and dance performed by the tea tribe communities are well known folk song and dance not only in Assam but also in Odisa, Jharkhand, Bihar etc. The use of cymbal, flute, dhol or trumpet makes the Zhumur song and dance more sweet and alluring to hear. Alumoni's courtyard is the main spot in the Naharani Tea Estate in which Hukhram,Alumoni, Durjan Sarder, Budhu, Dumki, Lakhu, Radhu, Nareswar, Sonia, Sabitri, Sukumoni,Sohagi etc perform their Zhumur song and dance regularly. Alumoni is forty years old woman who provides and sells rice beer to them. Rice beer is also called as 'Sariya'

by tea tribe community which is still continued as folk wine in the most of the gardens of Assam.

The novelist brings to light the performance of Zhumur song and dance extensively. Nareswar have to learn how to perform Zhumur dance and he is first trained well by Alumoni and Radhu. Later on, he gets good opportunity to learn it well through Sonia whom he loves heartily. In the course of time Nareswar has been an expert person in drinking rice beer along with dancing skill. The environment turns into a habitual action of drinking wine for Nareswar in due time. The whole socio- cultural scenario of tea tribe communities are based on the old custom and tradition.

Findings: The study produces the following major findings

1. Folk culture of Assamese society contributes to cultural identity by producing diverse practices and habits.
2. Some old traditions and customs of Ahom and Tea Tribe communities help to transmit the knowledge system from generation to generation.
3. Assamese folk songs and dance, folk medicine, folk wine etc have been reflected through the characters in the study.

Conclusion:

Both the two novels 'Jivanar Baatat' and 'Seuji Patar Kahini' reflect the social values and cultural heritage of the Ahom and Tea tribe community respectively. Birinchi Kumar Barua's '*Jivanar Baatat'* highlights a significant literary representation of the everyday cultural life of Assamese society. Through its portrayal of marriage ceremonies, folk songs, oral traditions, food practices, religious observances, and customary social relationships, the novel illustrates how folk culture is embedded in the ordinary experiences of individuals and communities. In contemporary era people of rural areas have to face and victimize sometimes in some issues due to many reasons like illiteracy and poor economic livelihood. The clash between mother in low and sister in low, inciting someone in village are common features of village life which are emphasized in the novel 'Jivanar Batat.' The regular performance of Zhumur dance and singing by Durjan Sarder, Alumoni, Radhu, Lakhu etc are splendidly illuminated in the novel 'Seuji Patar Kahini'. The regular use of Sariya or rice beer in the tea gardens has been vehemently displayed and criticized by the novelist. Under the impact of modern education, globalization, urbanization some traditions, superstitions, customs etc are changed and some need to be reformed for better prospect of all communities of Assam. To sum up, these socio cultural dimensions are very necessary to promote the society constructively. This study will offer a platform for the readers and academic pursuits for understanding different aspects of folk culture of Assamese people and Tea Tribe communities. There are still many scopes to study this theme in depth.

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