

Folklore of the Bodo Community: A Theoretical Perspective on Myths and Legends

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INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction:

Myths and legends form an integral part of traditional oral prose narrative, which is an important genre of folklore. Prose narratives as a verbal art have played seminal roles in the formulation of human history, culture, religion and literature. The advent of scientific and technological tools had have strengthened the reliability and durability of human

perceptions in myriad forms. As human history progressed, civilization gradually spirited towards the possibility of attaining perfectibility and acclaimity, resulting into many human centric narratives and discourses. This narratives and discourses emanated various stories originating from diverged cultural and religious forms and nature of societies. This human narratives centering on its history and culture produced and consequently recorded many forms of myths and legendary prose narratives, earlier in oral form and now it has been adapted in script. Since time immemorial, people have used narratives to voice their experience, to throw light on the secrets of the physical world and to describe human nature and society. The narratives have been entertaining and lucid which is deeply rooted to the social environment and sentiment of a community. It plays a vital role in shaping one's behavior too.

1.1 Introducing and Defining Folklore:

In attempting to work upon the myths and legends of a community we need to understand what folklore is because myths and legends are the important genres of folklore. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "Folklore is the traditional beliefs, customs, and stories of a community, passed through the generations by word of mouth." (216) By this definition we can understand that it is the traditional beliefs and customs of a particular community which is practiced by the people in their daily lives. The people follow and practice them because it has been followed since antiquity by their older generations, which can also be said that it has been handed down from generation to generation. It has become more like a habit to them in their daily lives.

Basically, as interpreted by Richard M. Dorson in *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction* (1972), it is known that folklore as a new discipline emerged in the nineteenth century when the German philologists as well as the British antiquarians

started to take interest in the tales, songs and traditions of rural and rustic people. It first started when the German Grimm Brothers collected tales and published their collection entitled *Kinder-und Hausmarchen* (1812) which they termed as *Volkskunde* or popular culture. But later after three decades a British antiquarian, William John Thoms coined the term ‘folklore’ in an 1846 letter to *The Athenaeum* (a literary magazine) as a replacement of the term ‘Popular Antiquities’ or ‘Popular Culture’ which was widely accepted. By the term folklore, Thoms meant the “Lore of the People comprising the manners, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, proverbs, etc. of the olden time”. (*American Folklore: An Encyclopedia*, 594) Since then Folklore emerged independently as a field of learning which involved the study of traditions, customs, habits, etc. of a community. Gradually, this present term “folklore” has been accepted universally although studies covering oral traditions of the people of various cultures of the world appeared under different names in the past. In the later centuries, it also started including ‘the lore of modern, the urban and the technologically advanced times’. (ibid, 594)

However, even though the term folklore acquired a huge recognition in its meaning, it also had lots of controversial definitions. Generally, folklore is considered as the lore of the illiterate rural folk by many. We also tend to think that folklore is something of the past and old. Scholars and folklorists therefore, attempted to define folklore in their own ways which resulted in debate and disagreements to find a suitable definition of the word. In the midst of controversial definitions, twenty one definitions each from various folklorists were published in *Funk and Wagnalls’ Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend* (1949), since their definitions were agreed to be common. They have contributed immensely to the domain of folklorists and the difficulties experienced in defining folklore are real and legitimate. Some of the definitions are cited as follows:

An American folklorist and anthropologist, William R. Bascom defined, “The term folklore has come to mean myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, riddles, verse, and a variety of other forms of artistic expression whose medium is the spoken word. Thus, folklore can be defined as verbal art”. (256) Through this definition, it can be understood that folklore is a form of prose narrative which has been transmitted orally since antiquity.

Theodor H. Gaster defined, “Folklore is that part of a people's culture which is preserved, consciously or unconsciously, in beliefs and practices, customs and observances of general currency, in myths, legends, and tales of common acceptance; and in arts and crafts which express the temper and genius of a group rather than of an individual”. (258)

R. D. Jameson defined, “Folklore is a branch of cultural ethnology. The data of folklore are the myths, legends, traditions, narratives, superstitions, religions, rituals, customs, dances, and explanations of nature and man, acceptable to individual ethnic groups in each part of the world at any historical moment”. (259, 260)

Archer Taylor, an eminent folklorist's definition of folklore according to Mazharul Islam in his book, *Folklore, the Pulse of the People: In the Context of Indic Folklore* (1985) is the most reasonable than all the others. He defines:

“Folklore is the material that is handed on by tradition, either by word of mouth or by custom and practice. It may be folk songs, folk tales, riddles, proverbs or other materials preserved in words. It may be traditional tools and physical objects like fences or knots, hot cross buns, or Easter eggs; traditional ornamentation like the walls of troy; or traditional symbols like the Swastika. It may be traditional procedures like throwing salt over ones shoulder or knocking on wood. It may be traditional beliefs like the notion that elder is good for the ailments of the eye. All of these are folklore.” (12)

After going through some of the definitions and observations by some well known critics and theoreticians belonging to folklore study it can easily be understood that to define folklore is a difficult task because of various interpretations but in order to understand folklore and its area thoroughly I intend to include some more definitions and observations which may lead towards concrete understanding of this discipline and may provide proper framework for this research work.

Folklorist Y. M Sokolov in his work *Russian Folklore* (1950) defines it as the wisdom of the people, the people's knowledge. (91) On the contrary, to broaden the scope American folklorist Dan Ben- Amos in his popular essay "Toward the definition of Folklore" (1971) rejects the idea by describing that "folklore does not contain knowledge, it is an expression of thought, formulated artistically, but at the same time it is also a unique phenomenon...". (6) that cannot be reduced to be categorization. Folklore studies share abstract boundaries with cultural studies. It acts as an intermediate link between literature and history. The conventional construction to explicate the idea that surrounds folklore has shifted to new dimension by merging with contemporary body of theories such as structuralism and post structuralism. Alexander Haggerty Krappe in his work *The Science of Folklore* (1965) defines folklore as "an historical science, 'historical' because it attempts to throw light on man's past: a 'science' because it endeavors to attain this goal, not by speculation or deduction from some abstract principle agreed upon a priori, but by the inductive method which, in the last analysis, underlies all scientific research, whether historical or natural." (xv) Krappe's inductive method cannot be efficiently put into folklore research because of paucity of folk information that has both fact and fiction.

Barre Tolken in his work, *The Dynamics of Folklore* (1979) observes that to consider folklore only as 'verbal art' is to limit the term to oral art forms whereas folk arts

like dance forms, painting or sculpture fall outside of the purview of such a term. He further explains that folk beliefs, customs, chants and charms are verbal and not art. Similarly, we have elements of folklore, which are neither art nor verbal namely, folk games, folk technology and folk medicine. This is one of the approaches that suggests paradigm shift from 'verbal' to larger canvas of art forms which are visible and performed. In the 'pre-literate society', the art of orature played a prime role in preserving the traditions but as society evolved to larger population and industrialized civilization, the displacement of people to find a new habitat in an urban setting led to economic, social and cultural crisis.

Barre Tolken categorizes the elements of folklore into four categories, the first is 'folk literature' which comprises of important and popular components such as folk tales which includes myths, legends, fairytales, anecdotes, short stories and also proverbs, riddles, ballads, songs, rhymes, etymologies, folk titles metaphors, chain letters, poetry, etc. The second category is 'folk Practices' which means folk beliefs, customs, superstitions, rites and rituals, folk festivals and also folk games, folk sport, animal sports. The next category is 'folk arts or artistic folklore' which includes performing arts like folk dances, folk theatre, folk gestures and non-performing arts like painting, sculpture, embroidery, weaving, carpet making, costumes designing and archery. The last one is the 'folk science and technology'; under the term 'folk science' he labels the methods of folk treatment, folk medicines, preparation of dairy products, fertilizers, methods of agriculture and seed technology. Under folk technology, folk architecture, tool making, ornament and making pottery, Thus, he concludes based on these characteristics that 'folklore' can be defined "as the sum total of human creativity." Tolken's categorization of folklore is diametric to Dan Ben- Amos's idea of folklore as "expression of thought" and "unique phenomenon" that cannot be categorized. Tolken's proposition does not

prove to be a groundbreaking because all such units of characteristics existed in association with folklore even earlier. However, it proved to be helpful in clearly distinguishing the patterns that governs folklore.

Thus, most of the definitions focus on the concept 'lore' rather than 'folk'. The term 'folk' can be referred to a group of people and the term 'lore' can be referred to the various activities of that particular group of people or a community, such as verbal lore, material lore and customary lore. So, it can be said that the various lore of a community is something that creates folklore. And after reading the various definitions of folklore, it can be said that folklore is something which creates people, it binds people together, and it is there in every being and every community. We may be unaware of various lore that are within and amongst us, but we should understand that folklore is 'an expressive body of culture shared by a particular group of people' in our day to day life. So, the common features of the various definitions of the concept of folklore by the folklorists are described in Jan Harold Brunvand's *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia* (2006). Firstly, the elements are transmitted orally or by means of informal demonstration. Secondly, these elements are traditional in form and content. Lastly, these elements always exist in different versions or variants. (594)

1.2 Introducing and Defining Myths and Legends:

It is now known that folklore as an expressive body consists of various lore of a community, and myths and legends are a part of it. Since our childhood, we have been told about mythical stories and legendary tales which seem to be true to us. In fact, they really existed in the past and they now exist in which we call myths and legends. Myths are stories which are fictional in context. It is a story which presents as having occurred in a previous age explaining the cosmological and supernatural traditions of the people, their gods, heroes, cultural traits, religious beliefs, etc. Myth as a narrative was told during the

earlier times in order to provide moral values to the people as myths have deep philosophical meanings. William Bascom in his journal, *The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives* observed, "Myths are prose narratives which, in the society in which they are told, are considered to be truthful accounts of what happened in the remote past." (4) He further explained that they are accepted on faith; they are taught to be believed; and they can be cited as authority in answer to ignorance, doubt, or disbelief. Myths, he says are the embodiment of dogma; they are usually sacred; and they are often associated with theology and ritual. Their main characters are not usually human beings, but they often have human attributes; they are animals, deities, or culture heroes, whose actions are set in an earlier world, when the earth was different from what it is today, or in another world such as the sky or underworld. Myths account for the origin of the world, of mankind, of death, or for characteristics of birds, animals, geographical features, and the phenomena of nature. They may recount the activities of the deities, their love affairs, their family relationships, their friendships and enmities, their victories and defeats. They may purport to "explain" details of ceremonial paraphernalia or ritual, or why taboos must be observed, but such etiological elements are not confined to myths. (Bascom, 4)

According to Bascom, myths are stories which have happened in the ancient period and are now told to the people to be believed. They are often sacred stories which serve to explain about the acts of supernatural beings to create Earth and all the other aspects of nature including the creation of human beings, celestial objects, geographical objects, plants and animals, growth and death. It also explains the social aspects of a culture such as moral, roles, customs. So it can be said that myths documents shared beliefs that help a community to maintain common identity.

While legend is another prose narrative genre of folklore which is a story and has been passed down from person to person. It is a story that explains mostly about the heroes and

their heroic deeds for the good of the people. It has important meaning or symbolism for the culture in which it originates. A legend usually includes an element of truth, or is based on historic facts, but with mythical qualities. They are partly historical and true. Legends usually involve heroic characters or fantastic places and often encompass the spiritual beliefs of the culture in which they originate. Bascom defines legend in his journal, *The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives* (1965) that,

Legends are prose narratives which, like myths, are regarded as true by the narrator and his audience, but they are set in a period considered less remote, when the world was much as it is today. Legends are more often secular than sacred and their principal characters are human. They tell of migrations, wars and victories, deeds of past heroes, chiefs, and kings, and succession in ruling dynasties. In this they are often the counterpart in verbal tradition of written history, but they also include local tales of buried treasure, ghosts, fairies, and saints. (4, 5)

Through this definition, it can be understood that legends are also traditional narratives grown out of mythology but have its focus on stories of humans as heroes. These are of an explanatory nature consisting of an exaggerated or unreliable account of some actual or possibly historical figures often a monarch, saint and popular hero. These stories are related as facts and concern a specific time and place. Most of the legends are associated with the divine and miraculous activities that are believed to be true and focuses on religious belief, natural and cultural surroundings, such as hills, valleys, forests, wetlands, lakes, rivers, fields, stones, old trees, graveyards, chapels, churches and other objects. The people who inherit this tradition share their narratives, beliefs and customs with the younger generations, newcomers and visitors. In this way the legend lives from one generation to the next.

Thus, myths and legends are an integral part of many cultures. In particular, it can be said that many Asian societies have preserved and developed numerous collection of myths, legends and tales since inception. Every individual even though they may be living in an advanced technological world has their own culture which dates back to their ancestors, and they have known of their own myths and legends. The myths and legends may be stories explaining about something that occurred in the past and they may be told for entertainment to the children, but it also has deep symbolic and philosophical meanings which serve to shape human behavior. In this dissertation, attempts will therefore, be made to interpret and analyze select Bodo myths and legends by implementing theories on them which will try to discuss how relevant it is to our contemporary time. The emergence of colonialism, post-colonialism leading to globalization in the present era dismantled the boundaries and various between and among cultures and history, unearthing hidden treasures of human expression embedded in folktales, folksongs, myths and legends. The emergence of literary theories, and other humanistic discourses created fertile soils for discussions and interpretations of these genres in new light. This newly propounded literary discourses assigned new meanings and methods for its vitality, durability and relevance. Contemporary social, psychological, anthropological etc. theories attempt to re-read and re-visit these myths and legends in various theoretical articulations in various parts of the world.

1.3 Introducing Bodo folklore:

Likewise folklore of the Bodo community is rich with numerous myths and legends related to its religion, culture, music and literature. The Bodos or Bodo-Kacharis of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam who belong to the Indo-Mongoloid race are considered as the largest plain tribes in Assam. They have their rich verbal arts and prose narratives which consists of tales, myths, legends, songs, rhymes, etc. The origin of Bodo folklore is

unknown but it can be assumed that it originated throughout the history of human evolution. There are rich stores of Bodo folk-lore which has not been fully explored and brought in to the light. However, some of them have been written and published by some enthusiastic folklorists. James Drummond Anderson's *A Collection of Kachari Folktales and Rhymes* (1895) is the first ever significant collection of Bodo folklore which has unfolded the hidden treasures to the world. Other Bodo writers, to name the few like Mohini Mohan Brahma, Kameswar Brahma, Bhaben Narji, Anil Boro have also collected and preserved some folklores of the community that contributed immensely to the Bodo folklore. In a Bodo traditional society some of the folk songs, rhymes and riddles are still orally transmitted. The folksongs can be heard more often during seasonal and agricultural festivals and ceremonies. Besides that, other folk materials and verbal arts could be found in a Bodo culture as well. All the forms of verbal arts still exist among the simple Bodo folk which echoes and vibrates green fields, hills, streams and mountains. The folklore of the Bodos can, therefore, be said that it is still echoed equally fresh in every nook and corner of the Bodo society. But to some extent, the folk-lore of the community are being replaced due to the impact of modernism.

While they are rich in oral tradition Bodos did not have the tradition of writing in the early period. It was only during the second decade of the twentieth century, Bodos started their writing tradition when Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma (1860-1938) introduced the socio-religious reform movement which aimed at reforming the Bodo society socially and literarily. It is described in *A History of Bodo Literature* (2010) by Anil Kumar Boro that the journey of Bodos' writing tradition started widely only after the publication of *Bibar* (1920), the first ever Bodo literary magazine. As mentioned earlier, the publication of this magazine brought a huge transformation to the Bodo literary society. People felt the urge to write as it gave a platform to every individual and encouraged them to express

their thoughts through writing. As a result, a great number of young poets and novelists emerged who contributed their writings for the society. Their writings were mostly poems which focused on patriotism and nationalism, hymns to gods and goddesses, love for Nature, satirical poems and many more. The early phase of writing was preceded by more writers in the later phase who wrote short stories, novels and dramas, and they are still writing and contributing largely to the Bodo literature. Thus, myths and legends were also collected and written during these periods, though it existed in oral form earlier.

Myths and legends of Bodo folklore have received quite an attention by contemporary folklorists and scholars of human sciences. They have collected, recorded and preserved some of them and their contribution to the Bodo folk literature is immense and praiseworthy. Bhaben Narzi, Mohini Mohan Brahma, Kameswar Brahma, Anil Boro et al. are some of the noteworthy writers who have contributed immensely to the Bodo folklore. Myths and legends has always been an important part of Bodo culture. They constitute an integral part of the folk literature of the Bodos. In the Bodo society, which Anil Boro in his book, *Folk Literature of the Bodos* states, "Storytelling has been found to be an integral ingredient of their oral tradition. They take immense pleasure in telling and listening to tales which have been handed down from generation to generation" (155) And indeed, in the Bodo society stories relating to the legendary Bodo heroes and some mythical stories are often heard.

The emergence of science and technology and their application have changed the pre-existing notions of human life and have attempted to appropriate old days' belief system and knowledge. Through the application of scientific devices human life has become easy and comfortable on this planet but it has, at the same time, has multiplied human desires and human emotion is no longer definite, it has acquired the spirit of questioning its own reliability and has projected itself as the agent to address arising

historical and other problems. The study of myths and legends in humanities and other sciences have been redefined and appropriated by questions and abrogation of certain ideologies related with the study of mythology. Contemporary literatures, particularly based on myths and legends, no longer seem to hold the meaning and applicability of the ideologies of old days. The contemporary literary philosophical and political discourses have largely attempted to appropriate the discourses concerning myths and legends for their own motive. These attempts have deconstructed and consequently mythified the relevance of myths and legends for audience and reader.

1.4 Review of Literature:

Contemporary literature has given serious attention on reading, re-writing and re-visiting folklores. But Bodo folklore in general, and myths and legends of Bodo prose narratives has not yet been explored extensively in a theoretical perspective. Renowned folklorists like Alan Dundes, Richard M. Dorson, William Bascom, et al. has studied and presented folklore in a very remarkable way. In this context, the folklore of the Bodos has also been studied by many scholars in different ways. As already known, Bodos have a very rich and vast cultural tradition, it is important to look into the Bodo folklore carefully and preserve it for the socio-cultural and religious study of the nation.

The first ever attempt to collect and write the Bodo folk tales and rhymes were made by James Drummond Anderson who published it in a book, *A Collection of Kachari Folktales and Rhymes* (printed in 1895). It is of groundbreaking significance as it unraveled the hidden treasures of Bodo folklore. He has written in Roman Bodo script and has translated it into English. Though this book has a collection of Bodo-Kachari tales and rhymes, not all of the traditional folktales and rhymes, but the tales and rhymes written before 1895 were present. It was only in the twentieth century, folksongs and

folktales were written by some enthusiastic Bodo writers who took the initiative to preserve it.

The Kacharis (1911) written by Rev. Sidney Endel, is a monograph of the Bodos. His contribution for the people is noteworthy for this document he has written about them. The book briefly describes about the social and domestic life, laws and customs, and religious practices of the Kachari or Bodo community including folklore, traditions and superstitions. But even though the author emphasized on the folk tales of Bodos, he has ignored detailed and in-depth study of the folklore of the Bodos.

In Anil Boro's *Folk Literature of the Bodos* (2001) various aspects of the Bodo folk literature have been discussed such as folk songs, folk tales, proverbs, riddles etc. As a part of his discussion on folk literature he has fully explored the new dimension of Bodo folk literature. But Boro's focus on this book was on other aspects and thus, has made only a stray reference regarding folk literature of the Bodos.

Halfdan Siiger's *The Bodo of Assam* (2015) is another monograph on the Bodos of Assam. Though a monograph just like Sidney Endel's *The Kacharis*, there are differences between the two, as Siiger has documented it in 21st century after a gap of eighty years from the other monograph. The author of this book briefly describes about the periods of life of men and women in a Bodo community, Bodo autobiography, religious practices, legends and myths, and Bodo folk tales. But as the monograph emphasizes mostly on the functioning of the Bodo community than the folklore, not much have been written vastly about the folk literature of the Bodos.

A Significance of the Sifung by Shri Dhananjoy Brahma is another article which talks about the myths related to the origin of flute. *Bag Duarni Birgwsfri Sikhla* by Rupnath Brahma is a story which discusses about the legend related to a woman warrior.

Likewise, there are a couple of prominent Bodo writers such as- Bhaben Narzi, Mohini Mohan Brahma, Kameswar Brahma, Birendra Giri Basumatary, et al. who have collected and published different genres of Bodo folk literature. They are considered to be the pioneers of the Bodo literature who had contributed immensely.

The term 'folk literature' in Bodo society is known as *khuga thunlai* or *chubung thunlai*. The word *khuga* means mouth and the word *thunlai* mean literature. And the term *chubung* means man or people. It therefore, means the oral literature or folk or popular literature of the Bodos.

1.5 Research Questions:

The present study attempts a theoretical discussions and interpretations on myths and legends of the Bodos by taking up theories like structural theory and psychoanalytic theory. It would also attempt to interpret in feminist perspective. Therefore, the research questions of this study would be:

1. How will this study bring to light the aspects of Bodo myths and legends in a broader perspective and help in better understanding of the culture?
2. How do myths and legends help people shape the moral values?
3. How will myths and legends help people understand it in a broader perspective rather than just viewing it as fictional stories?

1.6 Aims and Objectives:

The aim of the present work is to study the myths and legends of the Bodo folklore which will be on a theoretical perspective. It will attempt to analyze and interpret select myth and legend by applying theory to it. Being the largest group of tribal community in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam, Bodos have their rich culture and tradition which dates back to the ancient oral traditions and customs of their ancestors. But due to the impact of colonialism, modernism and consequent cultural exchanges the verbal lore and various other lore of the community seem to be disappearing. Myths and legends of the Bodos are

rarely studied, especially on theoretical perspective. It has only been told for entertainment or knowledge, but never had it been studied in a broader way. Though it may be told for entertainment, it has deep moral values which provide insights and moral guidance to the people. It also shows the people how they should conduct themselves in the society. When told, they also act as an entity to strengthen a community. Therefore, the aim of this research is to look into the myths and legends of the Bodo folklore and establish its literary relevance by reading and analyzing myths and legends of this community in literary theoretical discourses. Furthermore, the attempt is to read and analyze Bodo myths and legends in structural, psychoanalytic and feminist approaches.

1.7 Limitations of the Study:

Since this study is based only on the myths and legends of the Bodo community, it will not add the other genres of the folklore. It will include only the selected prose narratives of the Bodo folklore thereby, theoretically interpreting them with structural and psychoanalytical theories only. It also attempts a feminist discussion opting out the others.

1.8 CHAPTER DIVISION

Chapter One- Introduction

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part attempts to define and theorize folklore in general and in this process it also takes into account some of the dominant folklorists and their seminal works in discussion. The second part of the chapter attempts to map out Bodo folklore from antiquity to modernity in brief with particular emphasis on myths and legends of the community. It also records the review of literature concerning thrust area of the research. The third part briefly discusses research questions, aim and objectives, limitations and chapter plan of the dissertation.

Chapter Two- Bodo Folklore: Myths

This chapter attempts to define and understand myth on the basis of its applicability and relativity in context of literature. It mainly focuses on selected myths of the Bodos connected with the origin of religious worship and dance and the origin of musical instruments and consequently attempts to see them from the literary point of view. Lastly, it attempts to establish linkages with Bodo myths and literature in context of literary discourses and its contemporality.

Chapter Three- Bodo Folklore: Legends

Chapter three attempts to look into the Bodo folklore closely and tries to analyze and interpret the Bodo legends. This chapter is divided into three subsections. The first section concentrates on understanding the Bodo legends. Second section tries to read and analyze Bodo legends from orality to textuality. And the third section focuses on the tradition and modernity of Bodo folklore with special reference to Bodo legends.

Chapter Four- Bodo Myths and Legends: From Theory to Practice

This chapter is divided into four sub-sections and each section of the chapter takes one theory in order to read and analyze select Bodo folklore genres from structuralist, psychoanalytic and feminist point of view. The first section of this chapter attempts to interpret select Bodo myths in structuralist approach. The second part of the chapter attempts to study some of the selected Bodo legends from feministic point of view. The third section would mention the significance of select myths and legends through feminist perspective.

Conclusion:

This chapter would summarize the various ideas and viewpoints that emerge throughout this dissertation while attempting to study the Bodo folklore genres in psychoanalytic perspective. It also attempts to link the folklore study with the contemporary literature which may help in opening up further discussions on folklore genres in theoretical perspective in the coming days.

Chapter One

Bodo Folklore: Myths

2.0 Introduction:

This chapter attempts to undertake and discuss human possibilities at understanding myth, focusing on myth's definition and its gradual conceptualization leading to its theoretical and literary formulations. In its attempts, it takes into account some of the definitions of myth, from Eastern and Western literary and philosophical discourses, in order to map out myth's clear understanding, its singularity and significance in literary discourses. The chapter seriously engages Western and Eastern discourses on myth leading to its contemporary applicability and its impact in contemporality of postcolonial India's cultural and literary discourses, particularly focusing on Bodo myths.

Myth, though a story in general has been studied and interpreted in various ways. The term 'myth' is said to have derived from the Greek word *mythos*. According to the Greeks, *mythos* means story, fable and speech. While myth in a straightforward or simple way means stories which were once told in the society in truthful manners; the past things or the happenings were told to the ignorant people and they believed it and considered as true. During the primitive era these myths were viewed as something which is very sacred and associated with ritual, and still they are today. It was considered as something which always has a connection with the deities and their creation of the world and everything that is present in this cosmos whether living or non-living things. Myth was also a form of education to the people during the primitive era which shaped the conduct and moral of an individual in the society which conveyed strong message with a lesson through the use of symbolism and creative license. And now due to varied interpretations and contemporary discourses in various fields of study, myth has been elevated to higher status, although its purpose remains the same. It can be seen in poems and novels such as *Paradise Lost* (1667) by John Milton, *East of Eden* (1952) by John Steinbeck and many others. It also echoes in theoretical studies of various fields which attempts to find out how it affects the society or an individual. However, myths as we can see now are either written down or recorded, though it was a prose narrative transmitted by word of mouth in the earlier period. It is a type of speech and communication.

Western conceptualization of myth and its consequent application could not remain intact with the civilizational progress of western philosophy, technology, medicine and human senses. Literary and philosophical discourses from Renaissance to Victorian, from primitive to enlightenment till postmodernism and globalization have attempted to liberalize aesthetic meaning and application of myths in their various forms of endeavors.

These attempts resulted into making it more democratic and liberal in its attitude impacting western minds and society extensively.

Eastern philosophical and literary articulations are no less effective and influential as far as its comparisons with western mythical patterns. But there are huge differences as far as its applicability and uses are concerned. An eastern mythical pattern infuses human faith and human activities as parallel methods for establishing myths, singularity and significance. Contemporary Indian (Bodo myth) mythical discourses have attempted to sideline history assigning greater significance to mythical narratives. These narratives have invited certain possible conflicts in the uses of myths resulting into various disgruntled vices assimilating them in multiple mythical narrative tales.

2.1 Defining Myth:

In order to arrive at the concrete/clear understanding of myth, this section focuses on some selected definitions of myth, and in this process it also attempts to link these definitions of myth with theoretical discourses so that its larger concept and application could be understood extensively.

Myths abound in the rich cultural background of every traditional society. It has been accepted by many as a narrative which portrays the truthful accounts of the happenings in the remote past. These prose narrative or the myths were not told by individuals like the stories of now are authored by an individual, but it evolved naturally and instinctively by unconscious process in oral traditions. It can be said that it took its origin by true stories, dreams or revelations, real or imagined incident or event that was worth repeating, something so intriguing that it was compelled to be repeated. It was then passed along orally from person to person and from generation to generation until it has been told and retold *millions* of times and existed in a hundred different versions around

the world. This can be demonstrated through Claude Levi Strauss's definition of myth in his famous book *Structural Anthropology* (1963) where he stated that- "Myth is language, functioning on an especially high level where meaning succeeds practically at taking off from the linguistic ground from which it keeps on rolling". (210)

The various forms of myths be it in the Western thought or Indian, give credence to its scope of encyclopedia. The thoughts of myths are imbued with various types of universal experiences of the infant stage of humanity, its intimations of immortality and happiness. The relation of myth has not been with the individual mind, but it has been with the universal mind. So, myth can be called as the collection of experiences of mankind since such incidents were experienced and later transmitted among them. Just as Henry H. Peyton III in his article, *Myths and Legends* (1969) interpreted "myths and legends represent man's desire to explain his fundamental ideas about natural phenomenon, supernatural occurrences, the goodness and order of the universe." (32) Myths, in this way were being formed by the human kind in the primitive era. Nonetheless, these myths have moral and religious values for the people to safeguard morality and provide social norms. Since they did not have any other sources of education they adopted it as a kind of rules or ritual amongst them for the smooth functioning of the society, and therefore, they are still known and has been preserved ever since.

Romila Thapar in her *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations* (1979) quoted that "Myth is at one level a straightforward story, a narrative; at another level, it reflects the integrating values around which societies are organized." (260) It is indeed true that myth codifies belief, seeks to protect morality and provides social norms to every individual. Myths, as a belief act as an important tool for the society; they are stories based on tradition of a particular group which have deep symbolic meaning and moral values. A myth is considered as conveying a truth to those who narrate it and hear

it, rather than recording a true event. There are myths which are the accounts of actual happenings and events, but in course of time and place they have been transformed or shifted by symbolic meaning. They are often used to explain the universal and local beginnings and also involve supernatural beings. For instance, the function of myth is to narrate the story of the creation of the world, the origin of mankind and other supernatural beings. The powerful meaning of these stories to the culture shapes the ignorant mind of an individual in the society. When one accepts it as a belief or as long as it is seen as a system of belief it remains socially important, but it becomes useless when one sees it just as a myth without any belief.

As described by Padma Malini Sundararaghavan in her preface to *Fictionalising Myth and History* (2013) she observed that the very word ‘myth’ exists in itself two contradictory meanings which are truth and false belief, and says that the writers exploit this irony and tension of myth. (v) This happens because the writers are stuck in the concept which tells them that myths are true tales and at the same time they are false stories, which eventually creates chaos among the writers. In such a situation there arises an exploitation of the expression and meaning of myth. So Sundararaghavan further tries to give us a clear picture of what myth really is. She states -

“Myth is a narrative that tries to explain transcendental truths in symbolic form, which in turn gives rise to a system of beliefs and culture codes. It becomes evident that if someone is situated within the belief system, be it religious belief or political belief, ‘myth’ is truth, whereas, if one is situated outside the belief system, ‘myth’ becomes false belief.” (v)

Her statement on myth gives us a clear understanding of how myth situates within a person’s belief circle. For instance, some people even now have a strong belief on some

myths which let them to believe and practice it. For example, the taboo myth of the Hindus; in a Hindu culture there is a myth that still exists in the societies today saying that women cannot enter holy temples during menstruation because it will contaminate the place and make the atmosphere unclean. Most of the women from the Hindu background have accepted this norm since ages because they have a strong belief on this norm, but the fact is that they are ignorant of the reality on why they are actually restricted from entering temples. However, this kind of social and cultural norm or say it the taboo myth which is prevalent in the Hindu culture creates a bizarre feeling among the women folks who are outside the belief system and who are aware of it. While myths and other prose narratives which have been accepted by a particular society in their culture as real, fascinate and shape our contemporary consciousness in other way.

Myth therefore, can be said as a cultural reality since every culture has its own myths and practice it in their own ways which prevails in every culture, and it can be studied and interpreted from various points of view. Myth tells the tale of earlier sacred history where it relates something that might have occurred at the very beginning in the earliest period. In other words, it narrates how the earth, nature, human being etc. came into existence by the deeds of some supernatural beings. Besides that myth also gives us insight about the activities of deities. Since myths are tales that narrates about the origin of anything in this universe by a supernatural being, people accept that being as the all powerful god or goddess and therefore, 'they are mostly related to rituals and religion' (Boro, 156). Bascom too stated that 'myths are embodiment of dogma and they are usually sacred.'(98) When we come to see a particular ritual of a community or religion there is always a myth behind it for which they practice and believe it.

The first definition of myth according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* is always that the myth is a traditional story, especially one concerning the early history of a people

or explaining a natural or social phenomenon, and typically involving supernatural beings or events. But this meaning can also be expanded by adding that myth is a way of communication that implies a particular ideology or ethos. In that sense the term myth can be used to describe much more than just traditional tales about gods, human origins or creations. We find myths in modern books, modern art, television advertisement and magazines. So, anything within a culture- story, film, object or person can be the vehicle of myth. According to Roland Barthes, the famous French philosopher, Myth is a type of speech. Though this Barthes meant that a myth is not just a genre of prose narrative but it is a way of saying something. According to him the special trick of myth is to present an ethos, ideology or set of values as if it were a natural condition on the world, when in fact it is no more than another limited, man-made perspective. A myth does not describe the natural state of the world, but expresses the intentions of its teller, be that a storyteller, priest, artist, journalist, filmmaker, designer or politician.

2.2 Relevance of Myth in Literature

Myth in literature plays an important role. They are essentially the integral part of contemporary literary analysis. Myths are not merely invented stories; they were preserved by the primitive man as his priceless possession. These myths played the same crucial role for the psychological needs of primitive man just as the food did for his physical needs. Myths and images were not used as imaginative indulgence by the writers with archetypal vision in their works, but they were used as living parables. For instance, it can be seen in the significant works of John Milton, John Steinbeck, and T.S. Eliot which represent the uses of myth in a proper manner without any imaginative indulgence. This use of myth in literature has been trending since ages. In an age that emerged with scientism, technology and loss of spirituality, many of the major modernist writers

realized and asserted the implementation of integrative mythology in order to give shape and significance to the contemporary fragmented reality. The use of myths in contemporary literature thus, highlighted the classical tone of the age. Myth has a symbolic value which condenses emotions and experiences. John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) is perhaps the most representative of modernist works with an abundance of mythical usage. It can be seen that through this epic poem Milton tries to justify the ways of God to men. Myth is therefore, a tale which is applied in literature to shape the conduct of an individual in the society. As Richard Chase in his *Forward to Quest for Myth* (1969) interpreted "Myth is literature and, therefore, a matter of aesthetic experience and the imagination, and as such it has fictional character which is imaginatively true." (vi)

On the other hand, myth has also been used as a tool to help describe various psychological thoughts or a theory developed by an individual in order to explain them precisely. Myth is an oral prose narrative which can be used to explain or narrate one's imagination in a literary form. Just like Sigmund Freud, the psychologist used Greek myth such as the story of Oedipus to help explain his theories of psychosexual development. By using this myth of Oedipus he attempted to portray a child's unconscious desire for the opposite-sex parent. Freud believed that people have strong desires that are restricted in the society to be expressed. For instance, the story of Oedipus includes incest and patricide. Freud saw that most societies had these taboos against incest and patricide, but many if not most societies also had myths and legends that included these taboos. According to Freud, taboo desires and fears expressed themselves in dreams or in myths. So, Freud's idea about myth is that it emerged due to unconscious, forbidden desires and fears of an individual. But it is not mandatory to believe everything of Freud's ideas because every individual has his own interpretations. What matters most in here is how myth is relevant to literature.

Myth, as opined by M. H. Abrams in *A Handbook of Literary Terms* (2009) is that-

In its central modern significance, however, a myth is one story in a mythology- a system of heredity stories of ancient origin which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group, and which served to explain (in terms of the intentions and actions of deities and other supernatural beings) why the world is as it is and things happen as they do, to provide a rationale for social customs and observances, and to establish the sanctions for the rules by which people conduct their lives. (179)

Abrams' definition of myth delineates the hereditary nature of myth which has been transmitted orally from generation to generation in a particular cultural group who has a belief in myth. It also explains how myth acts as an important tool in shaping the moral behavior of an individual.

2.3 Myth and its Contemporality:

In the contemporary era, where the world is in chaos, confusion and absurdity, people often seek to know why the things are as they are or how things came into origin. Same is the reason with the writers who often goes back to myth in order to explain their complex contemporary situation. Since myth is an oral narrative that narrates the stories of the beginning and creation of the world, it becomes easy for a writer to understand the complexities and by using this literary device in their work; they are capable to explain things precisely. Myth is like an answer to every doubt or question that arises every now and then. It has therefore, been used extensively by the writers to add more meaning to their works. For instance, Greek myths, Indian myths and Biblical stories and myths have played an important role in shaping English literary works. The writers used these myths and stories in their own ways. John Milton in his epic poem, *Paradise Lost* (1667) made

use of the story from Genesis about the Fall of Man and the subsequent expulsion of the first man from the Garden of Eden. Milton's use of Biblical stories is extremely religious in nature because it was written during the period when a religious conflict occurred. Through this use of Biblical story in his work Milton attempted to interpret the disobedience of man to superiors; if a man disobeys the right suggestions by an elder it results into complications or destruction. Milton's writing however, does not end with the idea of the act of disobedience. He further goes on to explain the ways of God towards human beings or as Milton states to "justify the ways of God to men." (Book I, Line 26, p.1) Here, Milton is trying to show the justification of God towards mankind. He is trying to depict that fall, death and salvation of man are the acts of God. But he argues that the fall of man because of his faults is fortunate, though its result would be bad. Nonetheless, he reiterates that human beings would endure as it is the execution of God's purpose. Humankind would suffer the consequences for their faults but they would also find the mercy and grace of God through knowledge and experience. While John Steinbeck too in his novel, *East of Eden* (1952) used one of the stories from Bible and engaged on the same idea in which he presented Eve as a seducer who is responsible for bringing sin into this world. We can also see many other literary critics who have made use of Biblical myths in their works.

A number of writers thought that an integrative mythology, whether they were inherited or invented, is immensely essential to literature. Therefore, they have tried to link the complexities of modern man with a similar experience to the human history of other ages, turning the present crisis into a perennial problem of man, bringing the past and the present into common embrace. Some writers, on the other hand, have felt that traditional myths are not adequate to represent their own visionary systems. For which poets like Blake and Yeats invented their own mythology on the pattern of old mythology.

One can be curious to discover what is going on inside the modern man. In fact, the civilized well-dressed people are as brutal and incestuous as savages in the past. Literature uses symbols of myths to contrast the people of the past and the present to depict their social conditions, and to understand the real which is hidden in the array of civilization. By assimilating the disciplines like anthropology, history, religion, philosophy and science into its layers, myth represents a broader point of view. Hence, myth as a genre and archetype is significant in literary theories.

2.4 Bodo Myth

The Bodo ethnic term for myth as mentioned by Anil Boro in his book, *Folk Literature of the Bodos* (2001) is *mith* or *gozam colo*. The Bodos have rich collection of myths in their society which reflects the culture and tradition mostly through the religious and origin myth. For instance, the origin myth of *kherai* worship and dance. *Kherai* is a form of traditional dance which is performed during religious festivals or on some specific occasion in honor of the god and goddesses. This validates that the myths reflect the culture and tradition of the society because they are still performed. There are also various myths which reflect the culture and tradition of the Bodo society such as the origin myth of the musical instruments. The musical instruments which are narrated in the origin myth are still present in the society which is often used and performed on occasions. Hence, the Bodo myth can be said as rich and prevailing.

Myth exists in every community since they are the basic elements of human culture. Myth through its mythical tales can also work as a tool in helping people in numerous ways. One of the primary roles of a myth in every society is to convey moral lessons and explain historical events. Others would be to bring people together and pass on knowledge. In this context, the Bodos also have their own oral prose narratives or

myths which are mostly associated with socio-religious beliefs and practices. This kind of oral narratives may be classified as religious myths. The oral narratives or myths which are religious includes the stories about the creation of the universe, gods and goddesses, human beings, ghosts and spirits, natural objects, birds and animals and so on. There are also myths which narrate about the creation of musical instruments which are closely associated with the religious ceremonies and festivals. Besides that, there are some stories which are related with the origin of the social systems, social customs and traditions. All these myths of the Bodos represent their culture and thus they are brought together by such myths which are present in original. Since myth represents the creations of objects by supernatural beings and happenings of the earlier period, they are believed by the particular group of people as true. Myths play an important role in their society; they are an integral part of a community. Bascom's definition of myth would add more meaning to it- "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." (Contributions to Folkloristics, p. 98) He further adds that "myths are accepted on faith: they are taught to be believed; and they can be cited as authority in answer to ignorance, doubt or disbelief. Myths are embodiment of dogma; they are usually sacred." (98) Here, Bascom's definition on myth gives us a clear idea on how myths act as an important tool in helping an individual to believe something which has been mistaken as wrong. In the Bodo myths too, there are stories about creation which narrates the origin of man and world. There are also some myths which narrate the origin of natural phenomena. In this way, there are various other myths that narrate about the happenings of the earlier period which has been transmitted orally from generation to generation, and later it was recorded and preserved. One such myth that narrate about the origin of man, birds and animals, gods and goddesses, ghosts and spirits and the Nature is as follows-

In the beginning, it is said that god, *Aham Guru* created two birds, a male and a female bird. The female bird is said to have laid three eggs, soon after which there was a voice from god *Aham Guru* saying that three different lives would be born from each individual egg. Thousands of years passed, but there was no sign of birth to be seen. Therefore, out of curiosity the female bird broke one egg to see what was inside the egg, but there was nothing to be seen. Then there came a voice again which ordered the bird not to break the other two eggs, and if broken the universe would be destroyed. The voice then advised the bird to spread around the broken pieces, from where the evil spirits, ghosts as well as insects and plants were born. From this part of creation story, we get to know that if we disobey the superior beings, we often fall into trouble or complication, but then to keep things in balance the natural objects are also created. This is comparable to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, where God banished the first man from the Garden of Eden for his disobedience, but then He also gave salvation to man through the crucifixion of Christ for their sin.

The second part of this myth narrates about the creation of earth and some of the natural objects. It is said that the god *Aham Guru* felt the necessity to create the earth since he created the other objects. He sent two old fishes *Magur-Maguri* to the nether world to bring some soil. The two old fishes managed to get only a small quantity of soil because of the tough journey. With that small quantity of soil god created the earth; it is believed that the area of land is smaller than the area of water since the earth was created by less amount of soil. After the creation of earth, god sent a small bird to check the soil if it has become hard, the bird then informs god that it is not yet hard. Then the god leveled the earth, which left some portions of the earth high and low. From this high and low portions of lands emerged the hills and mountains and plains, rivers, streams respectively.

The last part of the story narrates the origin of human beings. After waiting for many years human beings were said to have born from the other two eggs. From the first egg, it is said that *Mansin-sin bwrai* (male) and *Mansin-sin burwi* (female) were born and from the second egg *Diba bwrai* (male) and *Dibi burwi* (female) were born. That was the beginning of the human beings on earth and it is believed that the Bodos are the descendents of these human beings. There is also another version of myth which tells us about the origin of mankind. These myths in general narrates us a story of the earlier history and gives us insight about the unknown. Myths therefore, are an active force of human civilization. They give practical account of primitive faith and moral wisdom by being in literary work as an artistic imagery. The stories found in myth are the statements of reality of the ancient times by which the present life, fates and activities of mankind are determined. They are therefore, extensively significant in the contemporary era too which help people to clear their doubts and add meaning to the complexities of human life. Myth, not only plays an important role in literature, but it is also equally important and plays an active role in various other fields of study such as history, psychology, science and others.

In this context, the Bodo myths are also very important in its own way and play an important role in revealing the religious worships and dance of the Bodo community. Since the Bodo myths are mostly related to religion, they tell us about the dance worship, which means that in a Bodo community they have a religious form of dance to worship the deities. One of such myth which narrates the origin of *Kherai* worship and *Kherai* dance among the Bodos is as follows- It says that there was once an old man who was named Zara Phagla. People humorously called him *phagla* but he was not *phagla* (mad). He had five sons who were all married during the course of time. But as the family grew bigger in size, the old man found it difficult to maintain the family since his granary

became empty. He then sent his sons to search for a fertile land and set up a farm there to which the sons obeyed accordingly. They went to cultivate in a fertile land which was far away from home. So the old man who was in charge of the home was supervising his family and daughter-in-laws at home. It is said that he loved and cared all of them as every old man or a guardian of a family does. But then, he also loved one of them the most that is said to be the youngest of them all. He loved her because she was good at household activities and beautiful. It is said that the old man wanted her to stay by his side and took good care about what she did and what she ate. Seeing this type of behavior from the old man's side, the daughter-in-law misinterpreted his intention and away from home. When the old man found her missing he went in search of her from one place to another, but was in vain. Though the old man could not find her, he did not give up his faith and continued his search without food and rest; he even forgot to care about his outfits. So he looked like a mad man and therefore, people called him *phagla* (a mad man). After some days the old man had a dream where a man appeared before him and told him to perform the *Kherai* puja with the help of musical instruments like *kham* (drum), *siphung* (flute), *serza* (Bodo traditional violin) and *jotha* (cymbal). The old man then invited all his sons and performed a *kherai* worship in the full moon night. As the musical instruments were played during the worship, a woman appeared and started to dance as the *doudini* (female shaman). This woman was none other than the lost daughter-in-law of the old man. Thus, it is believed that the dance performed by the woman is *kherai* and is said to have originated in this way. *Kherai* is basically a traditional ritual which is performed by a male priest and female shaman for the peace and prosperity of the society. In this ritual, the priest chants some mantras and prays to god and in response to it, the shaman invokes god and dances around the worship place along with the music of drums, flutes, traditional violin and cymbals. But now this dance is elaborated in a

broader way and during the festivals and occasional ceremonies this form of dance called the *kherai* is being performed.

Through this myth, it can be known how and for what reason a form of dance that is popular in Bodo community originated. If there did not exist a myth, our life would have been too complex without any meaning. Myth is therefore, an important part of human civilization. Through myth, we receive what is unknown to us and it educates us for our own good.

Thus, myth in Bodo society constitutes an integral part of the folk literature. Story telling in the society is found to be the essential part during the remote and recent past or still now. This impulse to tell a story and to listen to them has made this narrative an important companion of man throughout the human civilization. The Bodos have their own version of myths which narrate about the creation and beginning of the world. This narrative also plays a major role in Bodo literature which explains us about human values and morals. Besides that myth and the other forms of oral narratives of the Bodos plays a vital role in creating the history and construction of the society as well. These oral narratives or the folklore is the storehouse of identity of a community which helps in bringing them together. In the contemporary era, due to the emergence of science and technology, some of the folk materials have started to disappear. Therefore, collecting and preserving them in this global era is also important because if all the folk materials of a community disappear we may be left in despair in this chaotic world in search of our identity.

Chapter Two

Bodo Folklore: Legends

3.0 Introduction:

The term 'legend' is said to have derived from the Latin word *legenda* which means "things to be read". It is believed that the word "legend" entered into English language around 1340, perhaps transmitted through French. Before the invention of the printing press, stories were passed on through oral tradition. It is said that the English speaking Protestants of the 17th century were the pioneers of non-historical and unrealistic "legends" of the saints and what they propagated became a foil to the "real" saints and martyrs of Reformation whose authentic narratives can be read in Book of Martyrs by

Foxe. Therefore, legends gained the connotation of "undocumented" and "spurious" accounts. In simple terms, the stories of deities and heroes all come under the broad umbrella term "myths and legends". However, we can make a distinction between myths and legends and also categorize them further into fairy tales and folktales. But it is possible that the same story may have elements of folk, myth, legends and even fairy tales, therefore shifting between these classifications. Legends emphasize the story more than the significance of the story. We might gain a philosophical and moral meaning from a legend. Legends are different from genre of chronicles in that they are mostly didactic with a moral at the end. This makes the legends universal and they have the quality of being handed down through generations. Legend is separated from history by the fact that its content, once believed to have been true, turns out to be fictional. The heroes of legend in this sense are sometimes fictional heroes or real people whose exploits are not quite what they are made out to be, who were either so lifelike or so admirable that people wished they were real. This description fits the works and heroes typically associated with the genre. Nevertheless, the belief of the people on legend that they were real continues to keep the legend tales alive.

Legend, in simple terms is a prose narrative which narrates the heroic human actions that occurred in the recent past; and they are regarded as true by the teller and the listeners. It is believed that the actions happened in recent human history demonstrates certain human values and qualities. These human actions inspired the people then and made them to pass those actions in an oral narrative form to the younger generation. These narratives were then documented in the course of time and have been termed as legends.

The oral narratives such as folktale, myths and legends are as old as mankind. They existed long before the form of writing was invented. The desire of man to tell a story and to listen to them has made oral narratives relevant throughout the human history. The narratives help people to know about the history and science, about how things came to being, about land and culture of a particular community and so on. They are an important genre of folklore that provides much information about the past which we do not know. They give us an insight of the unraveled facts which we are unaware of and help us in understanding the contemporary world much better. In the present modern society, scholars and critics has come up with various theoretical concepts on studying the oral narratives. Since the narratives contain persistent and reinterpreted ideas, they have helped us to understand the problems and complexities of the people and discuss it in various theoretical ways. Narratives as a tool have been used extensively in literary works in order to add meaning to the concepts. They not only play an important role in literature, but they are also equally important to other disciplines.

As already known folklore, the comparative study of folk knowledge and culture is often created out of the traditional beliefs, practices, myths, legends, and tales of people, transmitted orally through generations. It is generally a body of widely accepted notions about a specific place, ethnic group, or particular institution. The terms legend and folktale are sometimes used interchangeably with myth. However, these are not the same. Hence, in this chapter, the term 'legend' will be discussed as a whole and Bodo legend will particularly be focused. The first section concentrates on defining the folklore legend in a broader perspective. In the second section, Bodo legends which evolved from orality to textuality will be read closely and analyzed critically.

3.1 Defining Legend:

The term legend has been defined and interpreted by numerous authors in various ways. But the definitions have been vague, elusive and not up to the mark, although it has been defined numerously. Defining legend has always been a difficult task for the folklorists and the scholars just as the other oral narratives, myth and folktale are. In studying the individual genres of folklore in a precise way, there in fact arises the crisis of defining each of them precisely. Yet there are a lot to be studied and unraveled of the traditional prose narratives. Because these narratives are rich in content and enriches us with the moral and philosophical values which we are often unaware of.

Legend, as it is known comes under the broad umbrella term 'folklore' which is assigned to the genre of prose narratives and are distinguished from the other two related forms of myth and folktale. It is an important sub-genre of prose narratives as folk legend which has been viewed as historically true. But when it is considered that transmission of these narratives in the contemporary era can occur through print, audio, media as well as oral tradition, a lot of complexities arises which ultimately make it difficult to even define legend. Still, the prose narratives are widely accepted throughout the world as the important genre of folklore, since it fulfills the doubts of individuals through the stories in whatever condition they may be. Therefore, by picking some of the definitions by the folklorists and the writers, the term legend will be discussed in order to convey the meaning and significance of folk legend of oral literature.

Generally, legend is considered as semi-true story which has been passed on from person to person orally; and they are said to have important meaning and symbolism for the particular culture in which it originated. It usually includes an element of truth since it is based on historic facts with mythical qualities. Legends, as a narrative involve heroic characters and often bound the spiritual beliefs of a culture. In comparison to myths,

legends are certainly more of a secular than sacred since legend narrates stories mostly of the heroes and great warriors of the ancient past. Kameswar Brahma in his work, *The Oral Tradition: Myths and Legends etc.* (1987) also described that “The principle characters of legends are human and they are more secular than sacred. Legends tell the stories of activities of the past heroes, chiefs and kings. Besides, they also narrate the tales of ghosts, fairies and saints.” (1) These legendary stories which involved real characters rather than a fictional character inspired lots of people and made them to pass those stories. Therefore, the folk legends have been transmitted orally from earlier period and have continued to evolve still in the contemporary era. Most of the early literature began as legend which were told and retold in epic poems that were transmitted orally, then at some point was written down. These epic poems which are believed by the researchers as originally transmitted orally and are written down are now being studied in different perspectives. Basically, the significance of most of the legends is to convey a moral lesson to the person who participates and believes in it. Some of these writings that narrate the heroic human actions include the classical epic poems such as, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* attributed to Homer, *The Mahabharata*, *Ovid* and *Beowulf*. The oral narratives or so called legends reflect the human actions that occurred in a certain period of time among the certain group.

Therefore, a modern folklorist, Timothy R. Tangherlini in his article, *A Survey of Legend Theory and Characterization* (1990) defined legend as -

Legend, typically, is a short (mono-) episodic, traditional, highly ecotypified historicized narrative performed in a conversational mode, reflecting on a psychological level a symbolic representation of folk belief and collective

experiences and serving as a reaffirmation of commonly held values of the group to whose tradition it belongs. (385)

Through his definition of legend, Tangherlini described that legend is a much localized and traditional type of story that was being told among a particular group of people or a community as believable in a conversational mode. It is well known that the stories narrated basically included the incidents that occurred in a particular place of a community, and the method of narrating the story was conversational because at that period of time there did not exist any system of writing. Psychologically, legend as he said is 'a symbolic representation' of belief among a group of people and reflects the collective experiences and values of the group to whose tradition it belongs. Thematically, legends often deal with the supernatural or remarkable phenomena. These events typically are said to occur in a specific place and time with named characters. Hence, legend is in fact a narrative which is being narrated in a traditional oral form about the actions of a specific legend that occurred in the recent past or which is history of a particular community in which it originated. A legend is basically a story which is told as if it were a historical event, rather than as an explanation for something or a symbolical narrative. A legend is a story from the past about a subject that was, or is believed to have been, historical. Legends concern people, places and events. Usually, the subject is a saint, a king, a hero, a famous person or a war. A legend is always associated with a particular place and a particular time in history. The legend may or may not be an elaborated version of a historical event. Thus, examples of legends are the stories about Robin Hood, which are set in a definite period, the reign of Richard I of England (1189-99), or about King Arthur, which were perhaps originally based on the exploits of a Romano Celtic prince who attempted to resist the expansion of the Anglo Saxons in what was to become

England. The stories about Robin Hood and King Arthur have been elaborated and expanded on down the years.

During the nineteenth century or the Victorian era, when science and technology emerged, new theories came up which urged the scholars to analyze and interpret the oral narratives in a different way. Before that the early scholars and the philologists focused only on collecting and archiving the oral narratives all over the world ‘with disregard from social context, performance and psychological motivations’. As described by Timothy R. Tangherlini in his article, “*It Happened Not Too Far from Here...”: A Survey of Legend Theory and Characterization* (1990), Jacob Grimm, a German philologist is said to be the first who began the process of legend characterization which influenced and changed the entire course of legend scholarship. Hence, during the 1950s and 1960s, scholars began to consider legend from a broader perspective; and the new era visualized the development of legend internationally and the new approaches to legend also included anthropological and psychological perspectives. Contemporarily, a number of scholars and folklorists have also therefore, made the effort to take up these legends and has focused on interpreting them in psychological, anthropological and many other literary perspectives.

Although legend has been collected, archived, published and studied in different perspectives, it has added only a little to this ‘concise statement’. Scholars often faced the crisis mainly of classification while trying to categorize legend, since it is still viewed as *Marchen* (often referred to as folk tale or fairy tale in Germanic term) by the folklorists in contrast. Describing legend in a polished literary way has been quite difficult. And there appeared many debated definition of legend which goes on.

Another opinion on folk legend is by Linda Degh in her chapter, “Folk Narrative” in *Folklore and Folklife* (1972). She described that legend as characterized by Grimm is ‘related to the *Marchen*; it is localized, down to earth and has historic validity’. (73) She explained that the legend does not have a sophisticated and refined style whose form and frame do not coordinate narrative elements into a logical chain. The legends are more local than the tales which are likely to develop local patterns in spite of its tendency to migrate and spread cross-culturally. In attempting to explain what legend is in depth and how it is an important genre of folklore, Degh further writes that-

“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 own cultural environment. Therefore, as Matthias Zender expresses it, understanding of the legend is possible if one views it through the general living conditions, belief, and ideology of a culture.” (73)

Through her description of legend, Degh attempted to explain the importance of legend in the society because through a legend we can attain a moral and philosophical meaning in the end of the story which often unravels the unknown.

A renowned American folklorist, William Bascom also tends to give us a clear understanding of what legend actually is. In his article, *The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives* (1965), he opines that “legends are prose narratives which, like myths, are regarded as true by the narrator and his audience, but they are set in a period considered less remote, when the world was much as it is today” (4). In defining legend, Bascom gives us a simple yet precise meaning of what legend is. He explained that legend like myth is an oral narrative which narrates stories about the earlier happenings and which is by far regarded as true by the narrator and his audience. The only difference he says is

that legends are stories that narrates the historical happenings of our near past which does not belong to the ancient times, rather they belong to the period which are less remote, while myth belong to far remote. For example, the Greek mythology or the story of Zeus which is a myth is considered as belonging to the period most certainly before Christ (B.C.) which is far remote, yet is assumed to be true by people. While legend on the other hand, is considered as belonging to the near past which are believed as almost always true and consisted real human beings.

Through all the above discussions, it is obvious that the legend is an oral narrative that narrates about the happenings of the past which are often religious, historical, or supernatural in subject matter and are frequently attached to specific events, persons and places. On these ground, legend has been classified in three different categories by the earlier folklorists during the wake of Grimm brothers. These legends are the local, etiological and historical. These legends may be distinguished differently for their different roles in the society in which they originated, but it does not always make sense because sometimes all the three elements are present in the same story. For instance, a story may narrate the attachment to some locality; it may also mention about a historical character with great deeds and later conclude by natural phenomenon or etiological narration. The classification of legend continued increasingly by various folklorists and scholars. And as mentioned by Linda Degh in her chapter, "Folk Narrative" in *Folklore and Folklife* (1982), an international committee in 1963 came up with four tentative categories of legends which were based on the collection that was available. The sub-classification of legend that the committee came forward with were similar with the earlier classifications done by the folklorists during the Grimms' period. Their classification consists of four sub types which are-

- (i) Etiological and Eschatological Legends,
- (ii) Historical Legends and Legends of the History of Civilization,
- (iii) Supernatural Beings and Forces or Mythical Legends and
- (iv) Religious Legends or Myths of Gods and Heroes.

The Etiological and Eschatological legends consisted stories which narrated the creation of the world, the origin of things, the natural phenomenon, the unusual geological formations and the nature of animals and plants. Usually, this material is considered as folk-wisdom because it is said to have accumulated by oral transmission through many generations. The Historical Legend and Legends of the History of Civilization consists the local historical accounts which narrates the events that occurred in the recent past. Supernatural Beings and Forces or Mythical Legends include the stories that are concerned with supernatural beings, person with supernatural power, and the protection and destruction of one's family and property. Religious Legends or Myths of Gods and Heroes consist of tales which narrate about the gods and mythical heroes that constitute our religion.

All the above mentioned categories of legends comprise huge amount of traditional knowledge and wisdom that contributes immensely in the field of folk literature. They are significant in literature because the stories add meaning to the subject matter which is sometimes vague and unclear. They most of the time works as a material in providing moral guidance and social awareness to a group of people. Besides these types of legends, there emerged a new type of legend in the form of modern folklore during the twentieth century which is the urban legend or the contemporary legend. This legend has become popular in the present era.

The term 'urban legend' is said to have originated in print since 1968. It became popular when Jan Harold Brunvand, an American folklorist introduced the term in one of his books, *The Vanishing Hitchhiker: American Urban Legends and Their Meanings*

published in 1981. The urban legend or the contemporary legend generally consists of stories which are fictional, and are often presented as true with humorous element that are rooted in contemporary popular culture. Perhaps, the contemporary urban legend may consist the stories which narrate about the events that have happened to someone either due to their carelessness, unawareness or foolishness. These events often results to be scary and sometimes humorous. For instance, the recent tragedy which has happened in some part of the countries about the 'Blue Whale Game' or 'Blue Whale Challenge' has left the public and the world astonished. This incident may not be termed as legend now but it teaches people to be aware of the gruesome incidents that keep on happening in the contemporary world. Apart from being viral and frightening, the contemporary urban legend can teach us a lot to keep ourselves aware before doing something which we do not know. Another example about the urban legend would be the vanishing hitchhiker which is popular in the modern folklore. It narrates the story of a hitchhiker who accompanies a person travelling in a vehicle and eventually vanishes without explanation from a moving vehicle or vice-versa.

Usually, urban legends are the stories which are spread by Medias such as social media, email or newspapers. As opined by the folklorists, urban legends are an important part of popular culture, offering insight into our fears and the state of society. They are also good fun. Just as the variations in the stories itself, folklorists have their own definitions of what makes an urban legend. Most of the academics have disagreed on whether urban legends by definition, are too good to be true or partly based on fact. However, discovering the truth behind urban legends is not as important as the lessons they impart, urban legends as said by the scholars are not easily verifiable, by nature. Usually transmitted by word of mouth or more commonly today in through internet, they often invoke the clause "it happened to friend of a friend" that makes finding the original

source of the story virtually impossible. According to Jan Harold Brunvand, an urban legend is "a strong basic story-appeal, a foundation in actual belief, and a meaningful message or moral." It can be seen that most urban legends tend to offer a moral lesson that is always interpreted differently depending on the individual, but the lessons may not always be of the deep meaning of life.

Urban legends are also said to be good indicators of what is going on in the current society. But urban legends are not all serious life lessons and conspiracy theories with the scariest; they are often framed as funny stories. Those stories can spread like wildfire in today's internet world, but they have been part of human culture as long as there has been culture. Hence, it can be said that any type of legend though it may be contemporary urban legend or the folk legend, the tales and stories of these legends always binds the human culture. The folklore of Bodos is also rich with numerous legendary tales that narrates mostly the events that occurred in the recent past or history. Besides that the legends of Bodos can also be classified in different categories such as the religious legend, mythical legend and etiological legend.

3.2 Bodo Legends:

The Bodo legends have a significant role in historiography and literature of the Bodos. The Bodo legend which is an important sub-genre of prose narratives consist of stories that narrate the heroic actions of the great Bodo heroes and heroines in the earlier period. Generally, in the Bodo folklore, the legends mentioned are mostly related to the heroes fighting against their enemies for a cause. But, although the Bodo legends mention mostly of the war fare, they also teach us the virtue of human life. While there also consists some legendary tales which narrate about the origin of places due to the deeds of the heroes. During the ancient period, the Bodos fought against their opposition group who tried to

capture their land or tried to keep them under their control. But among the Bodo folks were some of the great personalities who fought back bravely against those forces, and some has also sacrificed their lives for their land. The brave deeds of these heroes and heroines inspired the people and compelled them to transmit among the people of the community which later came to be known as legends when classified. Some of the legendary heroes and heroines that are mentioned in the Bodo folk literature are- *Dwimalu Jwhwlao*, *Zaolia Dewan*, *Sikhna Jwhwlao*, *Birgwsri Sikhla*, *Gambari Sikhla* and so on. The legendary tales of Bodos are named after these characters, and they play an important role in the Bodo society by reminding them about the deeds they have done for the society.

Usually, Bodo legendary tales are considered to be true events which occurred in the recent past and were transmitted in an oral form by the older generations to the younger generation. To validate this statement we can highlight the legend of *Birgwsri Sikhla*, *Gambari Sikhla* and *Zaolia Dewan* which narrates the stories about war against the Mughals and the Britishers; hence, it is quite obvious that they are true events according to the story tellers. And since the Bodos did not have the tradition of writing until the second decade of the twentieth century, the remarkable occurrences in the community were transmitted orally among them. Later in the twentieth century, it was the monographs written by Christian missionaries on Bodos and published in 1911, which made the people aware of writing. Until 1920, not much have been written about the Bodos, but the reform movement started by Kalicharan Brahma in the first decade of the twentieth century urged the people to write and preserve their culture and tradition. It is mentioned in *A History of Bodo Literature* (2010) by Anil Kumar Boro that the first ever writing of Bodos published was in 1920 which is a Bodo literary magazine, *Bibar*. It was only then the Bodos started to write widely.

It is also important to mention that the transmission of oral narratives among the community in the earlier period has kept the oral literature alive in the community still, where we can find huge amount of oral narratives enriched with folktales, folksongs, myths, legends, proverbs and other narratives. Had it not been the tradition of oral transmission among the people, the traditional oral narratives would have disappeared and a specific identity would not have been there. Hence, archiving and preservation of one's own oral narratives is also very important in the contemporary era because traditional oral narrative of every community is the back bone which describes the history of one's culture and tradition. Eventually, it also plays a vital role in the construction of history.

Legend, which is a traditional narrative associated with a particular person or place and is told as a matter of history is often attempted by the emerging scholars to analyze in various theoretical perspectives, rather than only collecting and preserving them. For instance, the story of a particular legend can be studied to analyze on what ground that legend can shape the moral and virtue of an individual in the society, or by studying a legend closely we can attempt to analyze a particular legend as to what assets it implies to the people. Most often in a rural traditional society or say it in Bodo traditional society, we can see people telling folktales, proverbs and other oral narratives among them just for entertainment or fun; we also often hear people singing the traditional folk songs during the festivals and traditional occasions. But they have never been told about what the tales signify or what lesson it provides. The people perform the songs because it is their tradition to do so. Some folk songs are performed for some particular reason which they believe. Or else the traditional oral narratives are seen by a community just as their history and backbone of identity; and they are simply told for entertainment or just to let the people of the community know about what had happened during their ancestor's time. They are not told in an educational way as to what we can

learn from them. Since legend have a multiple symbolic meanings and functions, a philosophical and educational knowledge can be achieved and imparted to the society while analyzing a legendary tale.

The Bodo legendary tales such as the legend of *Zaolia Dewan*, *Birgwshri Sikhla*, *Daimalu Jwhwlao*, *Sikhna Jwhwlao*, *Gambari Sikhla* are some of the tales which provide important lesson on patriotism and heroism, love and respect for one's culture and race. These legends narrate us about the heroic exploits of local heroes and chiefs, and play a vital role in the history of Bodo society. Briefly presented below is the legend of *Birgwshri Sikhla* collected and recorded by Kameswar Brahma in his work, *The Oral Tradition: Myths and Legends etc.* (2016) which tells us about the heroism and patriotism of the legendary heroine, Birgwshri:

During the regime of British in India, Birgwshri Sikhla was said to be the mauzadar or choudhury of the Bodo community who collected revenues from the tenants. She was also known by the name *Theng phakhri*, and was very courageous and straightforward. There was a system that the mauzadars had to collect revenues and deposit it annually along with valuable goods as a present to the British India Government. But if the mauzadars fails to deposit the fixed amount of revenue along with valuable goods, the British government would impose penalties on them. Later Birgwshri was determined not to pay the revenue to the British government. Thus, as a result of this she was regarded as defaulter and was forced to pay the arrears. When she denied paying the arrears and revenue, there was a clash between the British India government and Birgwshri. She was then compelled to fight against the British soldiers and fought bravely on the horseback. But in the long run, she had to flee and rest in a small hillock which is said to be near the present town of Bongaigaon. Then one day, when she came out to drink water from the nearby stream, she was unfortunately, shot dead by the British

soldiers. It is said that her sword was later found by a priest who took the initiative to build a temple where the sword was placed with belief that the sword belong to some deity. The temple at present is known as Bageswari Mandir. It is said that some people of the area believe that the sword belonged to the legendary heroine Birgwsfri Sikhla.

Through this story, a message can be imparted in multiple ways. It is also not difficult to grasp the implicit message of the story. The message that it imparts is to love and respect one's own race and protect it from the bad forces. It also provides a lesson to be confident and courageous in one's life no matter what the situation comes our way.

Thus, the Bodo legendary tales can be seen as imparting psychological lessons to the society when looked deeply. It also plays an important role in shaping and construction of the Bodo history and culture.

Chapter Three

Bodo Myths and Legends: From Theory to Practice

4.0 Introduction:

This chapter attempts to take into account some of the select Bodo folklore genres and consequently examine them in the theoretical context of psychoanalytic criticism and feminism. It is divided into four parts. The first part of this chapter conceptualizes and theorizes aforesaid theories according to their contemporary affiliations with myths and legends. The second part of the chapter maps out Bodo myths and legends according to the demand of aforesaid theories according to the objective of the chapter. The third and fourth part of the chapter focuses on selected Bodo myths and legends theoretically.

The developments in literary theories within the periphery of folklore studies can be envisaged following the early twentieth century that inaugurated revolutionary ideas and influenced different school of thoughts. Literary discourse became language-centered and more attached to scientific investigation. It was no longer an object for reflection of reality but a reality in itself. The notion of language took a paradigm shift through Saussure, who considered language as a living phenomenon to be dealt with scientific approach. Similarly, a wave of literary movement stirred up during the political crisis in Europe which is known as Russian Formalism. It began around 1915 led by Viktor Shklovsky and other group of scholars such as Osip Brik, Boris Eikhenbaum, Roman Jakobson, Yury Tynianov, and Boris Tomashevsky .They gave importance to the form and structure shaped by language. The Formalists expounded their new approaches in two groups mainly the Moscow Linguistic Circle founded in 1915 and the Petrograd “Society for the Study of Poetic Language” formed in 1916. Some scholars argue that it was an opposition against hermeneutical approach which breaks away from finding the meaning of the text to what text is composed

of. Russian Formalists used ‘Art as a device’ and focused on the forms and structure of the text by practising the toll of ‘defamiliarisation’. Eichenbaum in his article ‘The theory of the formal method’ observes that “Formalist movement was characterised by a new passion of scientific positivism – a rejection of philosophical assumptions, of psychological and aesthetic interpretation.” This movement was however thought to be against the rising Soviet political interest and therefore a new government led by Lenin suppressed Formalism which compelled the Formalists to shift its centre by migrating to Prague in Czechoslovakia. Both Russian formalism and Structuralism is a product of science of linguistic that provided theoretical bases in a wide variety of other disciplines.

As new theories gradually emerged to supersede the conventional approaches, Vladimir Propp, a Russian philologist and folklorist widened the scope of folklore studies with new structural approach to the study of folklore in his popular work *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968) an elaborate introduction to Propp and his works are given through various editions on his translated *Morphology*. In the fifth volume of *Theory and History of Folklore* (1984), a work that contains various articles of Propp translated by Ariandna Y. Martin and P. Martin, a brief account on Propp has been given by Anatoly Liberman informing the readers about the background of the work with its reception. Liberman highlights :

One of the first to accept Propp’s principles and apply them to a new body of material was Alan Dundes (Dundes 1962 and 1964). In France Propp became known through Levi-Strauss's critique, in the United States it was Dundes who made Propp famous. The terms of the acceptance a dissemination of Propp's heritage were also determined by these two scholars. The most active French structuralists (Roland Barthes, Algirdas Greimas, Tzvetan Todorov, Claude Bremond) discussed *Morphology* in terms of semiotics and, following Levi-Strauss's cue, kept improving Propp’s scheme, whereas Dundes and those who learned

about Propp from him were interested in the practical application of the new method, rather than in the criticism of Propp's epistemological foundations.

Morphology stirred great controversies on the underlying principle that it was based on the foundations of Formalist method. It received heavy criticism in the political arena as it was thought to be diametric to Marxist approach because socioeconomic background is not dealt primarily and rather it stresses on the form and structure. Before one consider the book *Morphology of the Folktale* as a theoretical tool for various interpretations into the study of folklore, it is important to be familiar with the clarification of the title of the book. Vladimir Propp points out “I called it *Morphology of the Wondertale*. To make the book more attractive, the editor replaced the word wondertale and in this way led everybody . . . to believe that the book would concern itself with the general laws of the folktale. . . . But my intention was not to study all the various and complex types of the folktale; I examined only one strikingly distinctive type, viz., and the folk wondertale.” (*The Structural and Historical Study of Wondertale*, 70) This would be a note of disclamation if Propp’s same method turns out to be irrelevant while using it as a yardstick on different folklore research. Vladimir Propp’s idea gives a new dimension to focus not on the origin or by making comparison and classifications, but primarily to study the course of events and actions which shaped the folklore. This idea influenced structuralist mode of enquiry whose activity is not to interpret what the work means or evaluate the quality. Lois Tyson’s structuralist activity also reflects the same motive as he proposed the role as:

i) To examine the structure of a large number of short stories to discover the underlying principles that governs their composition, i.e. principles of narrative progression (order of plot events occur), principles of characterization (the functions each character performs in relation to the narrative as a whole).

ii) To describe the structure of a single literary work to discover how its composition demonstrates the underlying principles of a given structural system.

Propp examines the narrative progression of the Russian folktales through a device which he calls ‘functions’. While describing the functions of the *dramatis personae* as basic components of the tale, he points out that “Function is understood as an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action.” (8)

What methods can achieve an accurate description of the tale? Let us compare the following events:

1. A tsar gives an eagle to a hero. The eagle carries the hero away to another Kingdom.
2. An old man gives Súcenko a horse. The horse carries Súcenko away to Another kingdom.
3. A sorcerer gives Iván a little boat. The boat takes Iván to another kingdom.
4. A princess gives Iván a ring. Young men appearing from out of the ring carry Iván away into another kingdom, and so forth.¹

Both constants and variables are present in the preceding instances. The names of the *dramatis personae* change (as well as the attributes of each), but neither their actions nor functions change. From this we can draw the inference that a tale often attributes identical actions to various personages. This makes possible the study of the tale *according to the functions of its dramatis personae*. This notion is supported with an elaborated example in his rejoinder to Levi-Strauss ‘The Structural and Historical Study of the Wondertale,’

If the hero jumps to the princess's window on horseback, we do not have the function of jumping on horseback (such a definition would be accurate only if we disregarded the advance of the narrative as a whole) but the function of performing a difficult task as part of courtship. Likewise, if an eagle takes the hero to the country of the princess, we do not have

the function of flying on a bird but one of transfer to the place where the object of the search is located. The word "function" is a conventional term that was to be understood in this and no other sense. I deduced the functions from detailed comparative analyses, (73-74, below)

Propp is of the view that eventually all plots are based on "the recurrence of functions" and it consists "of identical functions and had identical structure." (C) Like Saussure's systematic study of language, it also implements similar method on the premise that folklore phenomena can be understood through 'systematization'. Therefore, he limits the number of 'functions'; the elements linked to it are to be 'strictly uniform' too. It is based on empirical analysis of fairytales/ folktales, which are classified by Aarne under numbers 300 to 749. (C) Propp reduced the entire construction of folktale into thirty one elements of 'functions' based on the actions and qualities. These 'functions' has an associative meaning with 'seven spheres of action' on which folktales are reduced to. It is a role played by respective characters that corresponds with their actions:

- 1 the villain
- 2 the donor (provider)
- 3 the helper
- 4 the princess (a sought-for person) and her father
- 5 the dispatcher
- 6 the hero
- 7 the false hero.

This morphological stance on folktales under thirty one 'functions' are classified by a given designation such as 'Interdiction' is given a symbol 'β' and the course of actions similar follows a sequence β¹, β², β³ and so on. Levi Strauss condenses this principle by using a formula for a simple tale summarized by Propp as:

β³δ¹A¹B¹C↑H¹-I¹K⁴↓w^o

The eleven symbols read so: “A king (father of) three daughters”—“the daughters go walking”—“stay late in the garden”—“a dragon abducts them”—“call for help”—“quest of three heroes”—“battles with the dragon”—“victory”—“rescue of the maidens”—“return”—“rewarding” (C)

J Greima’s in his work, *Semantique Structurale* (1966) chose his own method over Propp’s theory and methodology. Finding Propp’s scheme too empirical proposes his concept of ‘actant’ over Propp’s seven spheres of action. By actant, he meant a structural unit and not narrative or character. Folktale is reduced to six actants namely 1. Subject and object 2. Sender and receiver 3. Helper and opponent.

4.1 Bodo Myths and Legends:

Myths and legends constitute an important sub-genre of folklore. They are the verbal lore that has shaped cultures throughout history. Every group of people in this world has their own form of lore which brings them together as one specific community with vibrant cultural traditions. The verbal lore or say it the myths and legends here, abound in the rich culture of every traditional society. The popularity of these oral narratives and the way they are read and studied till today in the contemporary era suggest that these narratives are not just stories but they have an important purpose in this world, just as they were important in the ancient period. Myths and legends are therefore, seen as still prevailing in the societies no matter how ancient they may be or even if they are considered a story which is unreal. Despite that it can also be seen that they have been functioning effectively in the literary field with their intrinsic value since ages. A number of writers and scholars have used *myths* and legends in their works to add meaning to it and give a clear explanation of the concept as to what actually they are trying to convey. Most often people fails to understand the deeper meaning of the concept that are being written down, but when an example is given in favor of the topic it can be understood easily. In this way,

myths and legends too work as a form of example which adds meaning to a piece of work. Generally, myths and legends functions as an element which explains about how things came into being, their purpose is also to teach lessons and virtues, to unite a group of people or to define a group's identity, to explain social or religious ritual, and to entertain people. Hence, Biblical myths are seen in some of the poems such as *Paradise Lost*, *East of Eden* etc. which are added to teach a lesson and convey messages to the people. While legends too, are put in some stories or poems to provide moral lessons.

Quite interestingly, through the use of symbolism and metaphor, myths and legends have played an important role in shaping the contemporary chaotic mind of an individual. They are the prose narratives which narrate the happenings of the remote and recent past. But the narratives contain valuable elements that are essential for human life. Myths narrate the events or happenings which are mostly untraceable; they narrate the creation of the world by the acts of supernatural beings. While legends are stories which narrate the historical events that occurred in the recent past, they are traceable and the characters are not supernatural beings but are human beings. Both myths and legends are significantly important in the contemporary literary works. By using myths and legends in a piece of work one can provide ethical values and moral lessons to every individual. Some writers allow myths and legends to express the language of religious consciousness which is therefore, heard lucidly. While, there are also many other forms in which myths and legends can be used.

However, in the contemporary literary discourses, myth and legend not only mean the stories which has been passed on from person to person that explains about the origins and creation of the cosmos by the act of supernatural beings and the stories of legendary man with their heroic deeds respectively, but this meaning can be broadened by adding that a myth is a way of communication that implies a particular ethos or ideology. Roland

Barthes in his book, *Mythologies* (1957), stated that “Myth is a type of speech” (107). Through this phrase, what Barthes wanted to explain is that, myths are not just a genre of oral narrative but it is a way of saying something. According to Barthes, myth is said to be ‘a system of communication’ through which messages can be conveyed. But myth is ‘not defined by the object of its message’; rather it is defined ‘by the way in which it utters the message’ (107). Another renowned anthropologist, Claude Levi Strauss also termed myth as a ‘language’ in his book, *Structural Anthropology* (1963). There are also various other interpretation about myth which has emerged in the contemporary modern society. While legend has not been interpreted in a literary form yet, but its stories has been studied and analyzed in various theoretical ways.

4.2 Psychoanalytic Theory and Bodo Myths and Legends:

This part of the chapter examines selected Bodo mythical story from psychoanalytic perspective and attempts to connect it with the contemporary relevance of psychoanalytical criticism and literature. Since myth speaks about tales which humans have acquired through their imagination or psyche, the study of myth in psychoanalytic perspective is essential. While the legend or the selected legendary tale that narrate the story of Bodo heroine for the heroic deeds will be studied in a feministic point of view. In attempting to study a myth in psychoanalytic perspective, understanding of the psychoanalytic theory or psychoanalysis is very important. Many of the scholars have also attempted to interpret psychoanalysis in their own ways. Generally, psychoanalysis is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as -

A therapeutic method, originated by Sigmund Freud, for treating mental disorders by investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the

patient's mind and bringing repressed fears and conflicts into the conscious mind, using techniques such as dream interpretation and free association. (444)

In simple terms, psychoanalysis is a method to treat mentally disordered people and it also mean the theories on human mind and its various complexities. In discussing about the psychoanalytical theory of myth, Sigmund Freud and his theory comes to the forefront. Carl Gustav Jung is also no less influential in the psychological treatment of myth. Since both were connected to the psychoanalytical movement, and their perspectives on man and myth search deeper into the psyche than mere emotions or instinctive stimuli, we could call their thoughts on myth, psychoanalytical. Stefan Stenudd in his article, *Psychoanalysis of Myth* (2006) described that “the term depth psychology is often used in this framework, but that would imply an existence of a shallow counterpart, which can be questioned, and it also suggests a grading of the components of the psyche that is theirs, but not necessarily shared by other psychologists”. (2) Hence psychoanalysis, which is a tool by what we can analyze the meaning of the various forms of prose narratives plays a vital role in the literary discourses. Myths and legends are the verbal lore of the people which can be said to have been acquired by a particular person through his imagination and assumption or sometimes real, but they are incomplete without the interpretation of psychoanalysis. It is important to understand the origin of the verbal lore as to how they came into being, and this can be possible through psychoanalytical approach and other methods.

According to Sigmund Freud, the oral narratives such as the myths, legends, folktales and other forms of folklore looked like dreams and the myths and tales are nothing but sex symbols. 'Many of the folklorists following Freudian principles believed that the "dream is the myth of the individual" some even declared that myth is the dream of a culture; and therefore the same psychological mechanisms operated in dreams and

myths were subject to the same interpretations. According to those scholars if the dreams expressed the infantile desire of one human being, myths revealed psychic repressions of the whole race or culture. While Carl Gustav Jung, like Freud also studied myth in a psychoanalytic perspective. When Freud was mainly interested in the origin of religion and explanations to ritual, Jung focused on myth and legend, the stories told within religions. To him, these stories were the essence of any religion, and therefore, he was keener to explore the origin of myths, than of religion as a whole.

Also contrary to Freud, Jung saw myth and its meaning within the individual psyche. In spite of myths and their components being shared by all members of a society, and essentially by all mankind, their workings are strictly personal. According to Jung, man is on a quest towards self-realization, and myths serve as clues to this process. Although every person has this quest, fulfilling it in various degrees, it is a solo venture, each man for himself. As opined by Stefan Stenudd in his article, *Psychoanalysis of Myth* (2006) “this difference between Freud and Jung can be compared to the generalizations of hinayana and mahayana in Buddhism. The former is to find one's way to spiritual perfection in solitude, the latter as a joint effort together with people of the same conviction”. (5) Freud saw the individual as deeply dependent on society and anxious to conform to it, while Jung saw society as little more than a number of individuals of similar nature. Therefore, to Jung the myths contain messages to the individuals, not the group, no matter how many people are involved in retelling and listening to them. Myths speak to each individual in the same way, but have to be dealt with individually.

Jung pointed out other differences to Freud himself, mainly those in how to interpret dreams and fantasies. He said- “I did not reduce them to personal factors, as Freud does, but - and this seemed indicated by their very nature - I compared them with

the symbols from mythology and the history of religion, in order to discover the meaning they were trying to express.” (*Jung on Mythology*, 56)

Jung also objected to the sexual themes Freud mostly found in dream interpretation. Jung stated- “Whereas he will always look for sexual causes, I trace the origin of dreams back to age-old mythological influences. Deriving from our remotest ancestors, there slumber in all of us subconscious memories which awaken at night and seek to compensate the false attitude modern man has towards nature.”

The above quotes demonstrate what utter importance Jung put on myths. According to him they were little less than manifestations of a world premise from the dawn of man. To Jung, myths emerged from the unconscious and contained archaic truth about existence: "Myths are first and foremost psychic phenomena that reveal the nature of the soul." Jung believed that myths and dreams were expressions of the collective unconscious, in which they express core ideas that are part of the human species as a whole. In other words, myths express wisdom that has been encoded in all humans. A Jungian analysis of classical mythology would claim that the main god and goddesses express archetypes that are common to human thinking everywhere.

Therefore, by taking the Jungian psychoanalytic theory, Bodo myths will be discussed. Carl Jung believed that the events of nature were not simply put into fairytales and myths or legends as a way of explaining them physically. Rather, the outer world was used to make sense of the inner. Jung noted that in his time, the rich well of symbols art, religion, mythology which for thousands of years helped people understand the mysteries of life, had been filled in and replaced by the science of psychology. What psychology lacked, ironically given its borrowing of the ancient Greek term, was an understanding of the *psyche*, or the self in its broadest terms. For Jung, the goal of life was to see the

'individuation' of this self, a sort of uniting of a person's conscious and unconscious minds so that their original unique promise might be fulfilled. This larger conception of the self was also based on the idea that humans are expressions of a deeper layer of *universal* consciousness. To grasp the uniqueness of each person, paradoxically we had to go beyond the personal self to understand the workings of this deeper collective wisdom. Jung admitted that the idea of the collective unconscious "belongs to the class of ideas that people at first find strange but soon come to possess and use as familiar conceptions." He had to defend it against the charge of mysticism. Yet he also noted that the idea of the unconscious on its own was thought fanciful until Freud pointed to its existence, and it became part of our understanding of why people think and act the way as they do. Freud had assumed the unconscious to be a personal thing contained within an individual. Jung, on the other hand, saw the personal unconscious mind as sitting atop a much deeper universal layer of consciousness, the *collective* unconscious – the inherited part of the human psyche not developed from personal experience.

The collective unconscious was expressed through 'archetypes', universal thought-forms or mental images that influenced an individual's feelings and action. The experience of archetypes often paid little heed to tradition or cultural rules, which suggests that they are innate projections. A newborn baby is not a blank slate but comes ready to perceive certain archetypal patterns and symbols. This is why children fantasize so much, Jung believed: they have not experienced enough of reality to cancel out their mind's enjoyment of archetypal imagery.

Archetypes have been expressed as myths and fairytales, and at a personal level in dreams and visions. In mythology they are called 'motifs'. German ethnologist, Adolf Bastian referred to them as 'elementary' or 'primordial' thoughts that he saw expressed again and again in the cultures of tribal and folk peoples. But they are not simply of

anthropological interest; usually without knowing it, archetypes shape the relationships that matter in our lives.

The myths, legends or the other forms of folklore as described by Jung emerge from the mental image present in collective unconscious. The creation myth of the Bodos, which narrates about the story of the creation of the universe, the humans, the gods and goddesses, birds and animals exist in the folklore of the Bodos just like the creation stories of other communities. There also exists Bodo legendary tales which describes mostly about the origin of place. These creation or origin myths and legends can be said as the archetypes which the community shares among them in order to bring them together as a one. Psychologically, these archetypes or the myths and legends of the Bodos are basically the imagination which they have acquired while trying to find something new to add meaning to their life or society; or when they felt like creating a place which they wanted to be in case of place legends.

4.3 Psychoanalytic Study of the Creation Myth

Psychoanalysis is defined as the set of theories and therapeutic techniques related to the study of human unconscious mind. One of the Bodo creation myths is about the creation of universe and all the other living and non-living beings. This myth narrates how god *Aham Guru* initially created two birds- one male and one female. Then the female bird laid three eggs. From the first egg is said that all the spirits and ghosts as well as insects and plants were born. Out the other two eggs were born *moncin-cin* and *diba-dibi* were said to have created. This myth can be seen as acquired through imagination and psyche of an individual. It is seen that this myth reflects unconscious memory and active imagination from which the imaginary objects has been created.

4.4 Feminist Approach: Bodo Women in Myths and Legends

In patriarchy, male privilege is marked as having control over production, circulation and representation of pleasure. Cultural representations have been designed to accommodate male preferences and patterns of gratification. Women's pleasures have been relegated to a marginal position to disallow circulation, gratification and to be enfranchised. The women's body too has been inscribed or 'imprinted' by 'his-story'. The woman in the Western/Christian culture has suffered the male gaze as a virgin or a whore. In the Indian context, Manu's law and the *Dharma Shastras* have inscribed the image of the woman within the parameters of the 'Sati-Savitri-parampara'.

However, such enfranchising of the woman's body and such prohibitive structural laws of the Western/Indian patriarchies has led to enhancing of the desire of the subject (woman), to speak.

The woman has always been the subaltern across cultural boundaries. Men need her, love her, adore her and write about her, but they do so in relation to their own lives. In this respect, the woman has always been the 'second sex'. Her representation in history has always defined 'negation'. To quote Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 1929, "Imaginatively she is completely insignificant, she pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history". (2)

Feminism concerns about the urge to break the silence and the taboos on the woman's body and on her pleasures, to disintegrate the male version of the woman and repair the psychic damage in society. Such an urge for social transformation holds within it a regenerative vision of history, which Kristeva terms as 'monumental history'. The woman in finding her voice spills her desire for transcending the prohibitive barriers of race/class/colour/religion to expose the complex web of power structures operating in

society. These concerns of race and colour etc most often overlap each other and defy any singular identity.

The word “feminist” is defined as one which advocates equal rights for women. The feminist movement appeared in an organized form during the late nineteenth century. *The Second Sex* (1949) by Simone de Beauvoir is one of its major theoretical works. The feminist movement in an organized form was in fact a consequence of an older tradition of thought and action expressed by different authors such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf.

The legend of *Birgwshri Sikhla* is a legendary tale that allows a variety of critical approaches. It may be regarded as a tale which is closely related to the name of a place. In *Folk Literature of the Bodos* by Anil Boro, a place named *Birjora* and *Bageswari Mandir* is said to have originated from her name. She was also known as *Thengphakhri*. Generally, this legend narrates the story of a Bodo woman who gave her life in fighting against the ruling British government to end the collection of revenue from the poor Bodo farmers. Inspired by the story, this legendary tale was also transformed to a novel by Indira Goswami which was entitled, *The Bronze Sword of Thengphakhri Tehsildar* published in 2013. This legend can also be analyzed from feminist perspective, given its significant statement about the issues central to women and their lives during the nineteenth century.

Birgwshri was not a modern feminist in the sense of claiming her feminist ideals in the streets, but she expressed these ideals through her action. She was a fierce young woman who was courageous and straightforward. For these qualities she was appointed as a woman warrior cum tax collector by British officials to fulfill their needs. Birgwshri used to ride her horse from village to village to collect taxes at a time when, elsewhere in

the sub-continent, women seldom stepped out of their homes, child marriages were common and in a kingdom nearby, queens were burned on their husband's pyre.

Birgshri did not possess extraordinary strength, but her prowess in sword fighting and horse riding propelled her to a position which a very few women could dream of at that time. It was her family who helped her in attaining this strength. Her grandfather was an employee of the British and taught her how to hold the sword as a child. Birgshri impressed the British in Bijni (a town in lower Assam) when she shot a man-eater while it tried to attack on an unsuspecting villager on the banks of the Brahmaputra. They first appointed her izaradar, and promoted her to tehsildar (tax collector) within a year. Birgshri was initially in favor of the British because they protected the people from being attacked by the Bhutanese army.

However, she soon faced an inner conflict when she found the colonial taxes were squeezing the poor farmers of their last pennies in a drought-hit year. She denied to collect and pay the revenue and as a result was regarded as defaulter. She was then compelled to fight against the British soldiers to protect her community and fought bravely. But in the long run, she had to flee and rest in a small hillock which is said to be near the present town of Bongaigaon. Then one day, when she came out to drink water from the nearby stream, she was unfortunately, shot dead by the British soldiers.

This Bodo women figure shows the power of the postcolonial the colonial Assam woman and thus establishes an acknowledgement for the "historically muted subject of the subaltern woman". In an Introduction to Indira Goswami's, *The Bronze Sword of Thengphakhri Theisildar* Aruni Kashyap, wrote that- "As a person who had always championed women's causes, Thengphakhri was no doubt a figure of inspiration and awe for the young Indira Goswami." (viii) Indeed she can be considered as the inspiration of

all young women. She was a fierce feminist character who sacrificed her life for the sake of her countrymen which none other women could have done.

Women are being perceived as important tradition bearers in contemporary folklore scholarship. The feminist perspective in folklore can be said to promote a commitment to understand the lore as it arises from and promotes a women-centered-ideology. Attitudes towards the image of women in folk narratives have ranged from the ideas that they reinforce gender stereotypes to the concept that they allow space for articulation of a different reality. Simone de Beauvoir feels that tales like *Cinderella*, *Snow White*, and *Sleeping Beauty*, encourages the young girls to expect fortune and happiness from some Prince Charming rather than to attempt by herself, their difficult and uncertain conquest.

The male domination of the public narrative has often made the women and her role subservient. A.K. Ramanujan points out that in Indian tales, unlike the European, the story often starts after marriage and the woman generally go through a phase of separation and tribulation in life which is being finally restored through a 'rite de passage.'. According to Ramanujan, women's narratives are mostly about "mothers and daughters, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, wives and concubines, fathers and daughters."

N. Sudhakar Rao, opines that women are often being subjected to the golden chain of tradition. The metaphor 'golden chain' speaks about the hegemony of traditions in which women are glorified by equation with goddesses like Sita, Lakshmi and other various deities and subservient women serving the selfish interest of their husbands and promoting male chauvinism, much to the detriment of their own welfare. The Golden chain of protection and prestige confines them to house.

Women issues have become an area of interest among the researchers in the field of social sciences. Studies on various issues related to women reflect that nearly half of the world's population constitute of women. Women are still suppressed and oppressed in different forms of social, economic and political spheres in many parts of the world. Consequent to the discrimination and marginalization of women in the society have also become the issue of debate among social scientists, researchers, social reformers, planners and women activists at different levels particularly at the international level.

Women constitute an integral part of the society and actively participate in the socio- economic development process of the society. However, the role played by woman has almost always underestimated and has not been assigned sufficient importance. Nowhere in the world woman receive equal treatment with man. Therefore, the problem of gender inequality has been urgently felt. "Women and Development" as a subject appeared in the international arena around 1970, leading to the declaration of the year 1975 as the International Year of Women by the U.N. General Assembly. This has led to the serious thinking on women empowerment among the social scientists since the 80s. A few years ago, the term 'empowerment' has been applied to woman, meaning charity from a hierarchical patriarchal system taking pity on the homebound, powerless, downtrodden woman. It was aimed at easing out her burden of dependency and helplessness. Such charity was rooted in the traditional belief that women are not worker in the sense that men are. They are unskilled, weak and do not contribute much towards national productivity. When work is defined in terms of activities performed for pay or a profit motive, a lot of activities remain outside the domain of work. Consequently, to a great extent woman's work like selfless rearing and caring of the family members remains unaccounted and reflected in the process. The cultural construction of woman's work and

status in the traditional society has always been a big constraint towards equality and empowerment of woman.

Empowerment of women does not simply mean granting some rights or access to them rather they should be able to acquire power to enjoy these rights of their own in all spheres of social life. Empowerment is related with development process. For development, including others, the primary requisite is resource and therefore women's action should aim at access to resource and multiplying it for self-sufficiency. In traditional Indian society, women's access to resource is mostly restricted because of the practiced social norms of patriarchy and this has institutionalized women's subjection in the family as well as in the society. This is more so in the context of rural India. Women in rural India lagged behind their counterpart in urban areas, as opportunities for development especially in economic aspects are very much limited with them. Although different developmental projects have been undertaken for women, these have not been able to raise the status of the rural women and their dependency has been hardly reduced. Empirical studies, revealed that women's contribution to their household activities and agricultural work has never been counted as a workforce. Their works always remain underestimated.

4.5 Women in India and Bodo Women

Women in Vedic period participated in all fields like men and took active part in every sphere of human life. Woman was man's best friend, his co-worker and never his inferior; she had enjoyed the property rights, discussed political and social problems and took part in all religious activities. There was no bar on the marriage of widows or women remaining unmarried. But with the passage of time women in India have to face the brunt of various problems of the social processes like *purdah* system, polygamy, child marriage,

sati, *dowry*, and female foeticide, deprivation of education and property rights. Nevertheless, women did not shy away from taking part in any movement for the good cause. One of such is their participation in the national freedom movement during the colonial period. Women from different corners of the country irrespective of their ethnic identity came out of their traditional four walls in response to the call to show their solidarity, courage and sacrifice in saving their motherland, India from the clutches of the alien rulers.

Coming to the North East India, the region comprises of the contiguous Seven Sister States, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura, and the Himalayan state of Sikkim, having diverse ethnic groups speaking different languages, having different history, traditions, costumes and beliefs. Women in North-East India are enjoying a better position in the society particularly the tribal women compared to their counterparts in the rest of the country in the absence of social evils like dowry, infanticide and *sati*. However, we cannot deny the fact that women in North-East have to face various social and economic problems such as illiteracy, poverty, landlessness, poor health, alcoholism, drugs, eve teasing etc.

Studies on women in North-East till the late '80s were very limited and those available are scattered in different sources. Here, this part of the chapter concentrates mainly on women of Assam, specially the Bodo women of Assam. Throughout the centuries, the Bodo settlements are predominantly in the rural areas and their economy is based mainly on the typical agriculture and allied activities. In fact, this situation is still prevalent with only a minor deviation in some urbanized pockets in recent time. The man and woman equally laboured hard in all agricultural activities. In all agricultural activity, the women of the family had to take major portion of burden as worker. They were very laborious and a strong workforce to support all domestic activities. Besides agriculture,

another related economic activity in which the Bodos had a natural prosperity was animal husbandry, particularly rearing of pig and poultry farming but hardly meant for commercial purpose.

In the Bodo society women were entitled to activities like child rearing, kitchen activities, washing clothes, weaving, collecting firewood, taking care of health of the family members. On the other hand men were expected to go for hunting, house building and agricultural activities. This division of labour on the basis of biological sex is based on what a society expects a man or a woman should do. It values the products of male labour more than those of women, thereby compounding gender discrimination or differentiates.

Weaving and sericulture is an integral part of the women folk of the Bodo community. Every young woman knows the art of weaving, which they learn from the early childhood within the family. Traditionally, they weave all the required cloths for the family members, which include, 'dokhona', 'aronai', 'gamocha', 'eri chadar', 'maharar' etc. They use to produce 'eri' and 'muga' cloth besides cotton clothes in their handlooms for family use. 'Eri' and 'muga' clothes were very popular among the non-bodos also. The 'endi' cloth is very popular as warm wrapper till now. In the Bodo society a girl who is not well versed in weaving was severely castigated. It is said that a Bodo girl finds it difficult to get married if she does not know the art of weaving. The following song reflects this situation:

Dubli khoayao udan bothorni

Mocou phica lanzay thikhan thkhan

Phekhay bayon loi honoi phekhay baydon

hanoi khola pharani hanphe cikhlayado

cal gondoi zonno dakhary baydon.

agoiya agor rona rona dano rona rona

okha naybolano gandoizon dinthano

loi agoi khola pharani hamphe rago lannay

i.e. Like calves that dance and run about

On the clear days of winter

Look, our young darling Hanphe also

Fights with the beams of the loom.

Oh Hanphe, you know neither to weave

Nor to work flowers there on.

You, darling of the southern village,

Grown up Hanphe,

You quarrel along with your loom. (*Folk Literature of the Bodos, 2010:54*)

It is known that, Bodo women are expert weavers. They are well versed in weaving their dreams through their looms and if they don't then they are castigated in the society. The following song expresses the quality and fineness of the yarn, the design woven and the standard of cloth in the process of production. The song related to the weaving trade gives a picture of the weaving skill of Bodo maidens:

de hay logo bima buroini

danay lunay agor ernaykhon colonodini

cikhiri bidoi cobnay

okharanao dao birnay

agor eroi eroi boinibo ciganao

khinthani logo khinthani

i.e. Come friend

Let us weave the butterfly

And to make the design

Of our mother old.

Let us weave the butterfly

That gathers floral honey sweet

Let us weave the flying bird

On our cloth and display to all (*Folk Literature of the Bodos, 2010:56*)

The following song expresses the affirmation in women folk's expertise in spinning and weaving which are the chief arts for Bodo women,

doi ziri ziri como khinkiri

conani zinziri,

agoi conani zinziri

o loi agoi dano rona rona

honnaia

luno rona rona honnaia

murca gorcezon no dalaibay

indici gancea

i.e. People say,

You are ignorant

Of spinning and weaving,

I have seen you however

Weave one whole Eri chadar

Without breaking a strand (*Folk Literature of the Bodos, 2010:58*)

The hard works of women are hardly considered. From normal household works to the paddy field, they remain busy all throughout the day. Through weaving they contributed a huge amount to the economy of the society but their hard works always remain underestimated. Their contribution to the family economy is enormous. Whatever they add to the total productivity of the family, is always counted in the name of the male head of the family. Even their involvement is always considered as duty, only to be compulsorily performed for the family. Women were always forced to fit in under the norms of patriarchy. They needed to be perfect to be suitable for men. As for Bodo women, they were compelled to learn weaving from a very young age so that later on they could be married off to an eligible bachelor. The life of woman was confined under the four walls of the house. Their life was limited only to household works and marriage, or taking care of children.

As with all other societies the marriage ceremony is one of the most important ceremonies in the life-cycle of the Bodos. The Bodos observe various ceremonies at different stages in the life cycle-birth, marriage and death. Folk songs related to marriage are found in abundance in Bodo society. Like marriage of other parts of India, brides in Bodo society are also selected very consciously. The parents of the bridegroom are very conscious in the selection of a bride. They will have many requirements, for their would be daughter-in-law but the same doesn't go in the case of the bridegroom. They desire to have a daughter-in-law who have long hair, pointed nose, bright eyes, well built and healthy. There is a famous folk song, about the description of the girl whom the young man desire to have as a bride. The folk song runs as follows:

Mokhangao naibola tharilai agoi,

Gonthangao naibola narengsoo.

Khanaiao naibola don Khaorai,

Hathaiiao naibola akhai miji,

Agoi jarou agai phandang...

English translation is,

The face looks like the leaf of the wild cardamom (tharilai),

The nose looks like the thorn of the acid fruit,

The knot of hair looks like a small bamboo basket (Don),

The teeth look like Indian corn,

Dear loving 'Jarou' (*Folk Literature of the Bodos, 2010: 60*)

The following song of consolation expresses the belief of the people that a girl is born and reared up only to be given out in marriage to other:

Oi boini boini oi

Dagabcoi dagabcoi

Goy khandice khou khandinoi khalam naymon

Bicini gongceao undunaymon,

Minibala ronza bala mon

Dinoini phray era eri zabay

Non khou zuli khananoi hobay

Rayzo zado mozanoi

ananoi binanoi.

i.e. Weep not, oh sister, weep you not

We shared the same bed,

Shared even the smallest piece of betel-nut

Amongst us in friendship and unity

We laughed and made merry

From today, you are torn asunder

Your father has given you away

To that youth, to him you go

Keep the family well

And there be happy. (*Folk Literature of the Bodos*, 2010:49)

Bodo women who were poor, and could not accommodate to her needs were made to work as an agricultural labour that were called '*Ruwati*'. It was a customary system of verbal contract with a poor village girl. In accordance with agreement she had to stay in the house of the employer for doing all sorts of domestic work as well as in his paddy fields for a period of six months commencing from the month of Bohag (mid-April) for a certain amount of paddy. The agreement could be extended to another six months on remuneration in the form of *Dokhnas* and a piece of scarf only.

Despite of the immense contribution of women towards the tribal society and economy, yet in all spheres viz. household, social and economic, differentiation based on gender between men and women could always be noticed in the Bodo community of colonial Assam. The voices of feminist movements have not yet reached our societies. We cannot fully say that we are liberated from all the patriarchal norms.

CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters, attempt has been made to study the folklore of the Bodos closely and analyze the selected myth and legend in a theoretical perspective. One selected Bodo myth is studied closely and analyzed in psychoanalytic perspective and one selected Bodo legend is studied and analyzed in a feminist point of view. From the study of the Bodo folk literature certain ideas comes to the forefront concerning the origin, evolution and function of Bodo folk literature in the society. Their prose narratives and the other forms of folklore are rich in content. Right from the inception, the oral narratives of the Bodos can be seen as vibrant and colorful. Later on when they started the tradition of writing at the second decade of the twentieth century, Bodo folklore gained a higher position. It was documented by various new writers though the Christian missionaries wrote a little about them earlier. Hence, these folklore genres and the other folk materials play an important role in construction of the society. Needless to mention, the folklore genres of the Bodos in the contemporary era has received huge recognitions in the field of literary discourses too. Scholars from various disciplines have attempted to study it in different perspectives as well.

The emergence of colonialism, post-colonialism leading to globalization dismantled the boundaries and barriers between and among cultures and history, unearthing hidden treasures of human expression embedded in folktales, folksongs, myths and legends. The emergence of literary theories, and other humanistic discourses created fertile soils for discussions and interpretations of these genres in new light. This newly propounded literary discourses assigned new meanings and methods for its vitality, durability and relevance. Contemporary social, psychological, anthropological etc.

theories attempt to re-read and re-visit these myths and legends in various theoretical articulations in various parts of the world.

Folklore of the Bodos is rich with myths and legends related to its religion, culture, music and literature. These myths and legends have also received serious attention by contemporary folklorists and scholars of human sciences. Folklore, as it is known is the repository of traditional knowledge and cultural belief which had no written literature at the earlier period but was transmitted orally from generation to generation. But in the recent years folklore has been looked upon and preserved by many scholars in the form of written literature which consists of all the artifacts of a community. Many scholars and folklorists defined in their own ways, but it ultimately hold the same meaning as the traditional belief and customs, tales and songs, rhymes, ballads, proverbs, riddles, etc. of a particular community which was transmitted orally for many generation. Folklore as a study is linked closely to literature as many writers include folk materials in their novels, poems and drama in order to preserve their culture or for pleasure reading of the text. Folklore in contemporary time has also been studied widely in various disciplines by implementing theories in it. In this context, psychoanalytic and feministic approach was taken to study the selected folk genres of the Bodos.

As already known, myth and legend are the oral narratives which were transmitted orally and passed on from one generation to the next generation since inception. In studying the myths and legends of the folk literature as a whole, it can be noticed that both myth and legend are elements that can be used in various literary discourses. They are the prose narratives which act as an important tool in adding a meaning to a particular text. For instance, while attempting to explain his theory of psychosexual development, Sigmund Freud used a Greek myth such as the myth of Oedipus to help explain it lucidly. According to Freud, people have strong desires that are taboo which cannot be expressed

in the society. This taboo desires and fears are therefore, expressed in dreams and myths. For example, the story of Oedipus narrates us about incest and patricide and most societies also have these taboos against incest and patricide. Despite that, it can also be seen that most of the societies also have myths and legends that consists these taboos. So, these myths and legends narrating incest and other sexual stories is said to have emerged from tabooed desires by an individual in his conscious mind. In this way myth and other forms of oral narratives functions as a tool in literary discourse.

Myth and legend with their unique mythical and legendary tales have also been discovered as imparting moral and psychological lessons to the individual as well as the society. In studying the mythical tales and legendary stories intensely than just reading for entertainment, we can get a moral lesson at the end of the story if we attempt to look it in different perspective. In a simple way, they reflect the idea of good and evil. Many of the stories mostly contain a moral, which can be used in understanding and helping us in our day to day life. Hence, this oral narrative which imparts us great virtue and moral lesson is necessary and important for every society. The wide variety of prose narratives such as the myths, legends and folktales can be used in all kinds of contexts. It can be used at all levels of language competence and with groups of different ages. And also there are numerous ways which makes the oral narratives in teaching and learning.

The myths prevalent in Bodo literature are religious in nature. The myth of creation, the myth of the origin of kherai worship and dance, the myth of *magur maguri*, the myth recounting the origin of musical instruments are some of the examples. There mythical tale of raona raoni reveals how the primitive people tried to explain the phenomena of nature. These myths are significant in so far as they explain the cosmological and supernatural traditions of the Bodos, the gods, heroes, cultural traits and religious beliefs. These myths play a crucial role in validating their culture and tradition.

From the analysis of the myths and legends in Jungian psychoanalytic perspective, it is evident that myths and legends emerge from the unconscious mind which is shared among beings of the same species. Hence, in a psychoanalytic perspective, the mythical and legendary tales has evolved from the assumed collective thoughts and since man is on a quest to self realization, myth is considered as a clue to this process. Jung argued that “the collective unconscious had profound influence on the lives of individuals who has lives out its symbols and clothed them in meaning through their experiences”. (Web)

While the legends of the Bodo prose narratives are significant in the folk literature of the Bodos it holds their history and oral tradition. The legends available in Bodo folk literature are mostly historical and place legends. The legend of the origin of Zam Duar, the legend of Gambari Sikhla, the legend of Birgswshri Sikhla, the legend of Sikhnabir and the legend of Zaolia Dewan are such legends. The legends that existed in Bodo language are authentic as local or regional oral history. These are regarded as true by the narrator and audience, and they are set in a period considered less remote. These may be regarded as the verbal equivalent of history. From the study of this particular Bodo legend, *Birgswshri Sikhla* in a feminist perspective, it is obvious that unlike the other Bodo women, she was one who fought against the British government bravely and single handedly as a woman. She can also be compared to Rani Lakshmi Bai, the great Indian woman who fought against the British.

In the present study, attempts to analyze folk genres of the Bodos have limited only to psychoanalytic and feministic theory. The selected tales taken up were analyzed only in psychoanalytic and feministic perspective though it could also have been studied in structural perspective. In the contemporary literature, all the different forms of folklore genres can be attempted to study in various theoretical aspect.

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