



A Survey on Translation of Bodo folk narratives in pre-independence period

Dipul Baro

Ph.D. Research Scholar, Dept. of Bodo, Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam, India

Abstract

The history of Bodo folk literature depicts that the Bodos had a rich store of folk narratives which had been being transmitted from one generation to another only through oral means until the middle part of 19th century, due to which, many of the Bodo folk narratives started to get extinct from the society permanently for not being preserved in written form. This was happened in Bodo society, most probably, due to darkness of illiteracy in the society to write and preserve their rich traditional oral folk narratives in the book during that period. At that juncture, some of the Christian Missionaries and British Administrators, who came into contact to Bodo society, showed the first interest to collect orally circulated rich Bodo folk narratives and published them in the books showing their equivalent English translation. In the present paper, an attempt has been made to carry out a survey on the translational activity occurred in the field of Bodo folk narrative during pre-independence period and study its impact towards the emergence of proper written Bodo literature.

Keywords: Bodo folk narratives, Bodo literature, British Administrators, Christian Missionaries

1. Introduction

The history of Bodo literature depicts that the proper written Bodo literature emerged from the 2nd decade of 20th century. The process of translation in proper written Bodo literature began in the *Bibar-Alongbar* era of the literature, mostly with the translation of Bengali plays into Bodo. But prior to emergence of proper written Bodo literature also, the translation in Bodo literature was prevalent, mostly in the field of folk narratives. Entered with an aim to propagate and preach Christian religion among Bodos, the Christian Missionaries and British Administrators were confined themselves not only in preaching Christianity among the Bodos, but also showed interest to collect orally circulated Bodo folk narratives from the mouths of Bodos and published them in the books. First they transfigured the collected Bodo folk narratives into written form in original Bodo language and translated them in English language and published them. In the present paper an attempt has been made to carry out a survey on the translation of Bodo folk narratives occurred during pre-independence period and study how those translational activities stimulated the emergence of proper written Bodo literature.

2. Methodology

The data used for this paper are primarily based on books written about Bodos by British Administrators and Christian Missionaries during pre-independence period. To prepare the present paper, data are mainly collected from secondary sources available in books, journals etc. Descriptive method is used in preparing the present paper.

3. Discussion

The Bodo language, which is recognized to be one of the rich and ancient indigenous languages of Assam of North East India, had a huge treasure of folk narratives which had been passing from one generation to another through oral means. Since this language was confined only in the spoken form until the 5th decade of the 19th century, this language

began to decline by the influence of its neighboring developed Aryan languages mainly Bengali and Assamese languages and consequently many of its rich orally circulated folk narratives also gradually began to get extinct from the society permanently. The history of Bodo literature depicts that the proper written Bodo literature came into light from the second decade of 20th century with the emergence of book entitled '*Boroni Fisa O Aiyen*', 1915. It is natural that the newly developing language attempts to enhance its literary production by translating from its neighboring languages. Anil Kumar Boro says, "The process of translation from other languages into Bodo started in the *Bibar-Alongbar* epoch with the translation of Bengali plays into the Bodo language."^[1] Thus, the process of translational activity in proper written Bodo literature started in the *Bibar-Alongbar* epoch of Bodo literature mostly with the translation of Bengali plays into Bodo. But the data of the present paper depicts that prior to emergence of proper written Bodo literature also; the process of translation in Bodo literature was prevalent mostly in the field of Bodo folk narratives. The history of Bodo literature depicts that prior to emergence of proper written Bodo literature; Christian Missionaries and British Administrators initiated to write and publish books on Bodo language and literature in English language. They were the ones who carried out writing work in the field of Bodo folk literature in pre-independence period. Besides their religious campaign and administrative works, they collected some of the orally circulated Bodo folk narratives from the Bodo village people and transfigured them in written form in original Bodo language and translated them in English language. Now, let the author of the present paper to discuss the survey result of translation of Bodo folk narratives occurred in pre-independence period as below:

4. Translation of Folk Tales

Anil Boro says, "Folk tales are told mainly for entertainment; but they are also told to serve some other

purposes. These cannot be traced back to any real history or dogma. They are timeless and placeless. Some folklorists have called them fairytales or sages. Folk tales can again be classified into the following sub-types e.g. human tale, animal tales, trickster tales, dilemma tales, formulaic tales, moral tales or fables etc.”^[2] Here, the question is from when the process of translation in Bodo folk tales came into being. The data of the present paper has depicted that the process of translation of Bodo folk tale was first occurred in a journal entitled ‘*Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*’ published in the year 1849. In the journal William Robinson wrote an article entitled “Notes on the language spoken by the various tribes inhabiting the valley of Assam and its mountain confines”, where he added a Bodo folk tale showing it word for word interlinear translation into English. Since it is unknown, if there was prevalent of translation in the field of Bodo folk literature prior to 1849, hence it can be said that the process of translation had begun from 1849 thereby opening the door of translational practice in Bodo folk literature. The story of the folk tale in brief goes as below:

“A man had two sons. The younger son asked his father to hand over him the half share of money and goods and accordingly father distributed the same to his two sons on equal portion. Taking his share, the younger son had left for far away country. After a few days, he spent all his money uselessly, due to which he had to live starving. Finding no way to survive, he reached a home where he was assigned to herd pigs. When he took the pigs in the field for feeding, he wanted to fill his hungry stomach by eating the food of pigs. But no one gave him. Then remembering his wealthy home and father he said, “My father had more than enough foods for his servants than that family all had”. Thus, realizing all these and before dying on being starved he decided to return to his father”.

Here, the author quotes a few lines of this folk tale which the writer William Robinson carried out word for word interlinear translation from Bodo into English as quoted below:

Sáche mánsehá psárla sánái dangman. Psárla godái sthángni
To a certain man two sons there were. The younger son to his
 bipháhá ktábái, Hele Áphá! Thákná chijchárá jidange ángbháche
father said, O father! the goods that will fall
 mangan ángni hó, Sthángni bóstu bisurni ránnánnái hóbái.
to my lot give to me. His own goods to them having divided he gave.^[3]

After this folk tale, the next process of translation of Bodo folk tale occurred in large number is witnessed to have taken place in a book entitled “A Collection of Kachári Folk-Tales and Rhymes” published in the year 1895 by another European writer non-other than Mr. J.D. Anderson. This civil servant of British India, besides his administrative works, devoted his time in writing field also. In the realm of Bodo literature he is very popular for publishing the above mentioned book. It was the publication where original Bodo folk tales are witnessed to have been published in large

numbers for the first time having their equivalent English translations in the history of Bodo literature. There are 16 nos. of folk tales in this book. The folk tales published in this book can be classified into following sub-genres:

- A. Animal Tale (Zunathni Colo)
 - i. The story of the toad (Embu Bonglá ní Khorâng)
 - ii. The story of the doe and raven (Mùi ârù Daukha Dandân ní Khorâng)
 - iii. The tale of monkey and the hare (Mùkhrâ Arũ Sessâ ní Khorâng)
 - iv. The tortoise and monkey (Khusung ârù Mùkhrâ)
- B. Human tale (Subung Colo):
 - i. The story of the lazy boy (Sàsè Olsiâ Gâthâ ní Khorâng)
 - ii. The seven champions (Gâthâ mâmra ní Khorâng)
 - iii. The story of merchant lad (Sâ-Se Phâlāngī Gotho-nī Khorāng)
 - iv. Brother and sister (Bîdá bînânaunī Khorāng)
 - v. The old man and tiger (Brai Sâse ni Khorāng)
 - vi. The Brahmin and his servant (Bâmun ârù Bînî Sâkor ní Khorāng)
 - vii. The story of simpleton (Abrâ ní Khorāng)
 - viii. The story of seven simpletons (Sâ-snî âbrâ ní Khorāng)
 - ix. The story of blind man and the hunchback (Khânâ Khujâ ni Khorāng)
 - x. The story of a silly old man (Sâse âbrâ brai ní Khorāng)
 - xi. The story of four thieves (Brai Bùrùini Khorāng)
- C. Nature’s tale (Mithingayari Colo):
 - i. How the rivers were made (Dùmâ Dùisâ ní khorāng)

The data of the present paper depicts that these folk tales were collected by J.D. Anderson during his six weeks tour to Kachári Mauzas of Mangaldai district of Assam from the mouths of Kachári/Bodo people of that area as dictated by them and transfigured them in written form in original Bodo language and translated them into English and finally published them in the book ‘A Collection of Kachári Folk-Tales and Rhymes’ in the year 1895. These folk tales are not only entertaining but also provide some moral lessons. Mr. J.D. Anderson is highly appreciated for carrying out translation of these folk tales from Bodo into English, as the English translations of these folk tales had provided a scope to non Bodo speakers to read and enjoy the taste of folk tales of simple primitive Bodo people. To show the occurrence of translation on folk tales from Bodo into English, a few lines of a folk tale from the above listed folk tales have been quoted from the book as below:

BodoSâ-snî âbrâni khorâng

Sùrbâ âbrâ sâsnî dangman. Bîsùr sân se dâpseau onkhâtlang-nai-au nâmâ-au-nù dùì-slùng bāngai mannānai bîkhônù mâbrũi bātgan hannānai khorāng zālai-naise. Beaunù bîdá gederâ bungnaise “Boibù zānzî khâphrâ-nānai bātñù nāngbai;” hannānai, boinùkhrî bî âglâ zānānai, bîní khithiāu sâse hom-hù-naise. Bebaidî-nù bîní zānziau bî, bîní zānziau bî homlainānai dùìslungau sânsrîlaineise. Beaunù âthengmani zerbâ-mâni sânsrînai-au thoi onkhâtlineise. Phâre bebaidîñù zenthen ùi bātkhāngnānai bîdá gederâ sâse-se lāngkhâtbai nungnānai sân-naise. Sānānai sārâ bùâ mannaise. Ârù unau bîní godāi sânnaise. Bî bù sâ-râ bùâ mannaikhai, sâfrimbù khonse khonse sānnānai sārâ bùâ

mannai. Bínkhai boibù sâse lánghâibai hannânai zingâsî-nânai khorâng zâzlaibai thâdangman. Ereaunù bething Bâmun sâse thângnânai besùrkhô nunânai sùngnaise: "Gotho-für nung-sùrhâ mâ zâdang?" Bîsùr bungnaise "Áfâ, zangfür bîdá bîfong sâsnî man. Dâ be dùisâ bânai zangfürhâ sâse lánghâibai. Bínkhai beaunù zangfür zingâsi-lai-bai thâdang," hannaikhai Bâmunâ srî srî sânnânai sâsnî khòbù nudang. Bínkhai bî "Besùr âbrâ zânù nânggô" nungnânai, besùrkhô khithânai, "Gâthâfür, nangsùr ângnî nâi-au bûibâ, âng nangsùrmî mânsùikhô dîhonnânai hùnù hâgan," hannaikhai, bîsur mânthî zânai. Unau Bâmun goe khândisnî khaunânai bîdá gedernî âkhâiau hùnânai "Be goe-â-khândi bese dang, nang sân." Hanbâ, bî sânnanai khândî snî mannâise. Beaunù Bamunâ bungnaise: "Nangsùr be goekhô rânlainânai zâ," hanbâ, rânai-au gâgai gâgai grup-gagai-naise. Beaunù bîsur rong zânânai Bâmun-nî nâiau bûinò-lâgi Bâmun zang thâng-fâ-naise.^[4]

The English translation of above quoted folk tale The Story of the Seven Simpletons

There were, once upon a time, seven simpletons. And once they were going down the road, and meeting a puddle, were in great distress as to how they should cross it. And the eldest said "I will go first, and you all follow, holding one another's loin cloths." So they held one another's cloths and crawled through the puddle on their hands and knees, getting very muddy and dirty in doing so. But when they had fairly got across, the elder set to work to count; and, as he failed to count himself, behold, there was one missing. Then the next brother counted; and, as he, too, found one missing, they each in turn counted. And so it became clear that one was lost; and there they stood debating this deplorable business. Just then a wily Brahmin came up, and asked what the matter was. And they told him that they had been seven, but that in crossing the puddle, one of them had been lost. On which, the Brahmin, quickly counting them, found that they were still seven, and, judging them to be simpletons, said to them "My sons, if you will come to my house and work for me, I will find you the missing man." To which with one accord they agreed. Then the Brahmin split a betel nut into seven pieces and put them into the hand of the eldest. "Now count them," said he, "and tell me how many there be." And he counted and found that there were seven. "Now take each man a piece," said the Brahmin, and, behold, to each piece there was a man. So in great joy and peace of mind they went to the Brahmin's house to work.^[5] From the survey, it has been found that some of the folk tales published in 'A Collection of Kachári Folk-Tales and Rhymes' are again witnessed to have been published having Bodo into English translation in the book entitled "The Kacharis" by Rev. Sidney Endle in the year 1911. This book is witnessed to have 7 nos. of folk tales as listed below:

1. How the rivers were made (Dùima Dùisâ nî khoráng)
2. The story of the lazy boy (Sâsè Olsia Gâthâ nî Khoráng)
3. The Bráhmín and his servant (Bâmun árù Bini Sâkor nî Khoráng)
4. Kachári Theory of Thunder and Lightning
5. The Story of the Simpleton (Âbrâ nî Khoráng)
6. The Monkey and the Hare (Mûkhrâ Arû Sessâ nî Khoráng)
7. The Story of the Merchant Lad (Sâse phâlângi Gotho-nî Khoráng)

Out of these seven folk tales, the folk tale entitled 'Kachári Theory of Thunder and Lightning' is the original collection of Sidney Endle and rests are taken from J.D. Anderson's 'A Collection of Kachári Folk-Tales and Rhymes' which bear translation from Bodo into English language. English translation of one of the above listed folk tales is quoted below from the book:

Kachári theory of thunder and lightning

There was once a king who had one son and one daughter. The son's name was Ráoná and the daughter's Ráoni. As they gradually grew up together, Ráoná wished to marry his sister. One day Ráoná remained alone in an outhouse unknown to his father; and when the latter wished his son to come to dinner, the young man could not be found. However, a servant saw the youth in the outhouse and told the king, who going to the boy asked him what was the matter. "If," said the king, "you want an elephant, I will give you an elephant; if you want a horse, I will give you horse; but do not abandon yourself to sorrow in this way." And then Ráoná replied, "I am in no special want of anything, but if you give me a promise on oath, I will tell you what is the matter." Thereupon, the king, seeing that there was no help for it, took an oath saying, "Whatever you want, I will give it to you." And then Ráoná said, "Give me permission to marry Ráoni, and then I will eat my food." On hearing this the king was sorely troubled in his mind; but remembering the terms of his oath, he took steps to bring about the marriage, at the same time forbidding anyone to mention the matter to Ráoni, who, therefore, heard nothing about the proposed marriage with herself. But one day Ráoni went to the village stream to clean the rice for the daily meals, when an old woman met her and inquired, "What is going on in the palace to-day?" And Ráoni replied, "The son of the house is to be married to-day." And when the old lady asked farther "But to whom is he to be married?" Ráoni replied, "Mother, I cannot say." And then said the old dame, "Ráoni, it is you that he is going to marry." And when Ráoni inquired, "Mother, can this be true?" the old woman took an oath to confirm what she had said. And then Ráoni at once flew right away up into the sky, and when Ráoná saw Ráoni thus flying away, he shouted after her, doing his utmost to catch her. It is these loud shouts and threats of Ráoná that men call "thunder"; and when Ráoni occasionally looks back to see if her pursuer is gaining upon her, she in so doing reveals for an instant the brightness and beauty of her face, glowing like fire; and it is this bright, dazzling beauty of her countenance that men call "lightning."^[6]

5. Translation of folk songs and nursery rhymes

Folk songs include those forms of traditional utterance or songs which show repetitive patterns and circulate by words of mouth.^[7] Traditionally Bodos have many folk songs, many of which have vanished due to not being preserved in written form and audio recordings. From the survey, it has been found that during pre-independence period Mr. J.D. Anderson collected some Bodo folk songs and nursery rhymes and transfigured them in written form in original Bodo language and also translated them into English and published them in 'A Collection of Kachári Folk-Tales and Rhymes' thereby giving a great privilege to some of Bodo folk songs and nursery rhymes to be preserved and recorded in the book forever. Following are the list of folk songs collected by J.D. Anderson which he first transfigured them

in original Bodo language and showed them line to line interlinear translation into English:

(1) Addressed to a spoiled child, (2) To a conceited child, (3) Of woman, (4) A Nursery Rhyme, (5) What women sing at wedding, (6) A woman to her lover, (7) An exchange of compliments, (8) What women sing when the bride is taken away, (9) The lament of a mother, (10) Buffalo girls come out to play, (11) A love song, (12) A mother-in-law scolds her daughter-in-law, (13) A woman to her husband, (14) Courtship, (15) A love song, (16) Women's work, (17) Reproach of women.

For example, a folk song is quoted below:

Courtship

Man says-

Ûi bâze, ùi bâze !

Oh! sister-in-law

Em bonânai hù

Spread a mat for me

Woman answers-

Nangni hingzausù nonggâ hai !

I am not your wife!

Em-sù bobai-nù.

To spread a mat for you. ^[8]

From the survey it has been found that besides the books '*A Collection of Kachári Folk-Tales and Rhymes*' and '*The Kacháris*', another notable book entitled '*Linguistic Survey of India (Vol.III, Part-II)*', 1903 by George Abraham Grierson is also witnessed to have a few incorporations of Bodo folk narratives having their English translation. The folk narratives incorporated in this book were taken as the specimens for grammatical and linguistic discussion of Bodo language by the writer thereby giving a repeating scope to original Bodo folk narratives to be written in the book during pre-independence period. The folk narratives incorporated were not the original collection of Mr. Grierson, but were provided by other writers. This book bears a fable and a folk tale in the page nos. 24 and 26 respectively and folk songs and nursery rhymes from page 31 to 35. The folk songs and nursery rhymes incorporated in the book for specimens were provided by J. D. Anderson which Mr. Anderson had already published them in '*A Collection of Kachári Folk-Tales and Rhymes*' backed in 1895.

6. Conclusion

From the result of survey of translations occurred in the field of Bodo folk narratives as discussed above, it comes into conclusion that the process of translation of Bodo folk literature began from the middle part of 19th century by the initiation of Christian Missionaries and British Administrators. The history of Bodo literature claims that the process of translation in Bodo literature came into being only after the emergence of proper written Bodo literature i.e. after 1915, but through this paper, it has been surveyed that the process of translation in Bodo language and literature came into being from the middle part of 19th century mostly in the field of folk narratives as have been discussed above. Had those European writers not taken the initiative of collecting and transfiguring some of the orally circulated Bodo folk narratives in written form and published them in the books in such an early period while almost entire Bodo society was under the shade of illiteracy,

those folk narratives would have, most probably, permanently got extinction from the society. The English translations of these folk narratives have been providing a scope to enjoy the taste of Bodo folk narratives especially to non-Bodo speakers. Most importantly, the publication of these folk narratives stimulated of then a few literate Bodo people to write books in different fields of the society, as a result of which proper written Bodo literature came into existence from the 2nd decade of 20th century with the emergence of '*Boroni Fisa O Aiyen*' published in the year 1915. Today, Bodo literature has a huge treasure of books of different genres of literature written by different writers to be fit a developed literature in the world.

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