



## **Transfiguring Boro orality to textuality: A study of Boro folk narratives in Pre-Independence period**

**Dipul Baro<sup>1</sup>, Bhupen Narzaree<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Bodo, Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam, India

<sup>2</sup> Professor, Department of Bodo, Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam, India

### **Abstract**

The history of Boro literature depicts that the rich original Boro folk narratives were confined only in oral form till the last decades of 19<sup>th</sup> century taking gradual path to eliminate permanently from the society due to ignorance from the side of native speakers towards transfiguring their rich oral folk narratives into text for everlasting preservation. This juncture happened in Boro society, most probably, due to darkness of illiteracy in the society to write and preserve their rich traditional oral folk narratives during that period. In the present paper an attempt has been made to study how and when rich oral Boro folk narratives got the privilege to be transfigured in the text for their everlasting preservation and to discuss how those textualised folk narratives motivated proper Boro written literature to be emerged in pre-independence period.

**Keywords:** Boro folk narratives, Boro literature, British Administrators, Christian Missionaries

### **1. Introduction**

The textual or proper written Boro literature came into existence from the 2<sup>nd</sup> decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century, but prior to that some Christian Missionaries and British Administrators published books on Boro language and literature in English language. With an aim to propagate and preach Christianity among Boros the Christian Missionaries entered Boro-speaking areas. They confined themselves not only in preaching Christianity among Boros, but also took initiative to collect Boro folk narratives from Boro village people orally circulated among them and transfigured them into text in its own language as well as transliterated them into English language. Orally they collected information and knowledge regarding culture, religion, life styles, language, tales, rhymes, songs history, etc. from Boros and transformed those knowledge and information into text. In the present paper an attempt has been made to carry out a study how and when Boro oral folk narratives got the privilege to be transfigured in the text for the first time and motivated the emergence of proper written Boro literature in pre-independence period.

### **2. Methodology**

The data used for this paper are primarily based on books written about Boros by British Administrators and Christian Missionaries. To study this paper, data are mainly collected from secondary sources available in books, journals etc.

### **3. Discussion**

Boro language is an ancient aboriginal language of Assam of North East India having a huge treasure of folk narratives. But this language and its folk narratives were confined only in the spoken form until the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, due to which this language began to decline by the influence of its neighboring developed Aryan languages mainly Bengali and Assamese languages and consequently its rich oral folk narratives also gradually began to eliminate from the society, as during that time the entire Boro community was under the darkness of illiteracy

to write and transfigure its rich oral folk narratives in the book for its everlasting preservation. Folk narratives bear not only entertainment, moral values and knowledge about the nature, theory of the occurrence of natural phenomenon etcetera but also reflect the culture of a community as a whole. So preserving folk narratives by means of written documents is very essential, as preserving folk narratives by means of handing over them orally from one generation to another cannot be guaranteed. At that juncture the British Administrators and Christian Missionaries who came to India for the purpose of colonizing India and spreading Christianity entered in Boro villages for preaching Christianity and worked towards the development of Boro language and literature through writings and took initiative to collect Boro folk narratives orally circulated among the Boro village people and transfigured them in the text in its own language as well as transliterated them in English language for the first time before some one of the native speakers came forward to work on it. They learnt Boro language and wrote books on Boro vocabularies, grammar, literature, culture, folk-tales, folk songs, nursery rhymes etcetera in English language where many translations in Boro language are observed thereby giving this language a scope to develop through writings. Since Boros, traditionally, have no script of its own, hence the Roman script was used by the European writers to write in Boro language with many diacritic marks for the exact pronunciation of Boro language. Following are the some of the books carried out by the British Administrators and Christian Missionaries where many Boro folk narratives are witnessed to have been textualised during pre-independence period.

### **4. A Collection of Kachári Folk-Tales and Rhymes**

In the history of Boro literature J. D. Anderson is known to be the first man to work in the field of transfiguring Boro oral folk narratives into written or textual form in pre-independence period. Anderson was member of Indian Civil service from 1873 till 1900. Besides his administrative

works he devoted his time in various social reformation works in Boro rural areas. Mr. Anderson once travelled to Kachári Mauzas of Mangaldai district of Assam for six weeks where he met Boro people and collected some Boro folk narratives orally circulated among them and transfigured those folk narratives into text in its own language as well as transliterated them into English by publishing them in the book entitled “A Collection of Kachári Folk-Tales and Rhymes” in the year 1895 thereby giving the Boro folk narratives a scope to be documented for permanency in the book for the first time. This book was intended as a supplement to Reverend Sidney Endle’s Kachari grammar. Regarding the collections of the Boro folk narratives the writer says, “*This little collection of Kachari folk-stories and rhymes is intended as a supplement to the Reverend Mr. Endle’s Grammar of the language, and as a reading-book for those who have acquired an elementary knowledge of Kachári. I have added a rough translation, thinking that these specimens of folk-lore of a very simple and primitive people may be of interest to some who do not care to learn Kachári, and that it may stimulate others to make fuller and more successful excursions into an unexplored field. These stories were collected during a tour of only six weeks’ duration in the Kachári mauzas of Mangaldai, and cost only effort of taking down the tales as they were dictated*”. This book is witnessed to have three categories of original Boro folk narratives viz. folk tales, folk songs and nursery rhymes. Following are the Boro folk narratives that are incorporated in the book:

#### 4.1 Folk tales

Boros have numerous folk tales that were handed down from one generation another only by oral means until the Christian Missionaries and British Administrators took initiative to give them a written form. The book “A Collection of Kachári Folk-Tales and Rhymes” is witnessed to have collections of 16 nos. of original Boro folk tales to be textualised in two languages i.e. Boro as original and English as transliterated as given bellow:

1) Dùmâ Dûisâ ni khorâng (How the rivers were made), (2) Sâsê Olsiâ Gâthâ ni Khorâng (The story of the lazy boy), (3) Gâthâ mâmra ni Khorâng (The seven champions), (4) Sâ-Se Phâlângi Gotho-ni Khorâng (The story of merchant lad), (5) Bîdâ bînânaunî Khorâng (Brother and sister), (6) Embu Bonglâ ni Khorâng (The story of the toad), (7) Mûi ârû Daukha Dandân ni Khorâng (The story of the doe and raven), (8) Brai Sâse ni Khorâng (The old man and tiger), (9) Mûkhrâ Arû Sessâ ni Khorâng (The tale of monkey and the hare), (10) Khusung ârû Mûkhrâ (The tortoise and monkey), (11) Bâmun ârû Bînî Sâkor ni Khorâng (The Brahmin and his servant), (12) Abrâ ni Khorâng (The story of simpleton), (13) Sâ-snî âbrâ ni Khorâng (The story of seven simpletons), (14) Khânâ Khujâ ni Khorâng (The story of blind man and the hunchback), (15) Sâse âbrâ brai ni Khorâng (The story of a silly old man), (16) Brai Bùrûini Khorâng (The story of four thieves).

Here, to prove the authentication of work of transfiguring the Boro oral folk tales into the text the authors of this paper have quoted a few lines of a folk tale from the above mentioned folk tales as bellow:

#### **Boro**

*Bîdâ bînânaunî khorâng.*

Sâse razâ ârû râni dangman. Bisûr hâ hoâiâ

thoi-grû-naise. Bî thoibâ hingzauâ modomau dangman. Sâne-sû thânanai hingzauâ sâse zânaise. Ârû bisûrhâ hoâsâ bù sâse dangman. Phâre sân-ne-sû thânanai, bisûrni bimâiâ thoinaise. Thoibâ hingzauâ ni bidâiâ bikhô gâkhrî daunânai fidet-naise. Phâ unau bisûr zânû-gûie zâlângânai unau gâmi gâmi bîbainânai zânânaise. Bîbaidînu thâbai-ûi thâbai-ûi sâse râzâ ni nâ-i-au hâp-hûi-naise. Beaunû Razâiâ onânai bisûrkhô bîni nâ-i-au dinnai.

#### **English**

*Brother and Sister.*

A certain king died, and soon after his death his wife bare him a daughter, as she had heretofore borne him a son. And then she too died. But before she died, she bade her son “Strike hard, but once only!” And she committed her daughter to his care. And, though they lost their kingdom and were forced to beg their bread, the brother was a good brother, and took care of his sister until they came to a certain kingdom, the king of which took pity on them and kept them in his own palace.

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#### 4.2 Folk songs and nursery rhymes

J. D. Anderson collected 17 nos. of original Boro folk songs and nursery rhymes orally circulated among the Boro village people and transfigured them into textual or written form in Boro language showing them word for word interlinear translation in English language for the first time by publishing them in this book. The writer put the titles of these folk songs and nursery rhymes only in English language as shown below:

(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.

Here, to prove the authentication of work of transfiguring the Boro folk songs and nursery rhymes into text or written form the authors of this paper have quoted a folk song and a nursery rhyme from the above mentioned folk songs and nursery rhymes as bellow:

*A Woman to her Lover.*

Sô mâlibai, sôbai.

Come, my lover, come.

Gangâ zâliâ.

O! Ganges fisherman.

Thâkânî kheru manâbâ.

If I don’t get silver earrings.

Âng-bù thângliá.

I, too, cannot go.

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Addressed to a spoiled Child.

Derâ lù derâ, derâ lù, Âfâ Fanzâlù

Build house, build house, Father Fanzalu.

Dai nâng, fùdù nâng, Âfâ zuzinâng.

If trouble come, or worry come, Father will help.

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### 5. The Kacháris

A Monograph written by Rev. Sidney Endle in the year 1911 entitled "The Kacháris" is also witnessed to have some Boro folk tales to have been transfigured in its original Boro language and English language viz. 1. Dùima Dùisá ni khoráng (How the rivers were made), 2. Sásè Olsia Gáthâ ni Khoráng (The story of the lazy boy), 3. Bámun árù Bini Sákori ni Khoráng (The Bráhmín and his servant), 4. Kachári Theory of Thunder and Lightning, 5. Ābrâ nī Khorāng (The Story of the Simpleton), 6. Mūkhṛā Arū Sessā nī Khorāng (The Monkey and the Hare) and 7. Sāse phālāngi Gotho-nī Khorāng (The Story of the Merchant Lad). Except "Kachári Theory of Thunder and Lightning" rest six folk tales are not original collections of Mr. Endle but were provided by J. D. Anderson from his already published book "A Collection of Kachári Folk-Tales and Rhymes" showing them a word for word and free translation in the Monograph "The Kacháris". Mr. Endle was Pastor who preached Christian religion among Boros in the district of Darrang of Assam. He had good sense of humor to be attracted by the rural Boro people and could preach with equal ease and eloquence in English, Boro and Assamese languages. He used to mingle with Boro folks with ease and whole heartedly and acquired the knowledge of culture, religion, life styles, customs, and rituals etc. of Boro community and transformed them into book. A few lines of a folk tale from the above mentioned folk tales have been quoted from the book:

### 5.1 Word for word interlinear Translation from Boro to English of a folk tale

MŪKHRĀ ĀRŪ SESSĀ-NĪ KHORĀNG.

*The tale of the monkey and the hare.*

Mā-se sessā ārū mūkhṛā zang fisūkhī<sup>1</sup> man. Bī-sūr  
 One hare and monkey together friendship was. They  
 sã-nūi zang ozai-nū<sup>2</sup> lūgū se thā-i-ū, lūgū se zã-i-ū, ārū  
 two together ever together stayed, together ate, and  
 lūgū se<sup>3</sup> thā-bāi-bai-i-ū. Obāsū sãn-se sã-se Darrang-ārūi  
 together wandered about. Then day-one one Darrang-ite  
 mānsūi goe thālīt lã-nānūi, ālāsī zã-nū thāng-nai nãm-aru  
 man betel banana bringing, feast to eat going on road  
 lūgū man-nānūi, bī-sūr vai-lai-naise,<sup>4</sup> "be mānsūi-nī  
 meeting obtaining, they speaking-exchanged, this man's  
 goe thālīt-fūr-khō zã-nū lāgi zang-fūr buddi man-se khām-nū  
 betel bananas to eat for we scheme one to make  
 mūkhṛā-i-ā hã-grā-i-aru hākhmānai thā-naise.  
 monkey forest in hidden stay-ed.

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### 5.2 Free translation of the above quoted folk tale into English

*The Monkey and the Hare.*

A monkey and a hare were great friends. They ever lived together, ate together, and went about together. One day meeting a man from Darrang going to a feast with a load of bananas and other delicacies, they said to one another, "We must get what that man is carrying by some trick or other." Whereupon the monkey bade the hare stay on the road, while he himself hid in the forest.

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### 6. Linguistic Survey of India (Vol.III, Part-II)

Another book written and published by a British, named George Abraham Grierson in the year 1903 entitled "Linguistic Survey of India (Vol.III, Part-II)" is also witnessed to have some Boro original folk narratives. This book bears a fable and a folk tale in the page nos. 24 and 26 respectively and folk songs and nursery rhymes (page 31 to 35) provided by J. D. Anderson. These folk narratives were taken in the book as the specimens for grammatical discussion of Boro language by the writer thereby giving a repeating scope to original Boro folk narratives to be textualised in the book. An example of a folk song is quoted below:

#### MOTHER-IN-LAW TO DAUGHTER-IN-LAW.

Wā	bi-zō-nī	gāndeolā,		
Bamboo	top-of	butterfly,		
Bir-dau,	bir-dau,	bir-dang.		
Flutter,	flutter,	fly.		
Bauhāri	gā dai	zō	zong-nai-ā,	
Daughter-in-law	younger('s)	beer	brew-ing-(nom.),	
Khūiram-dūiram	zā-dang,			
Helter-skelter	becom-es,			
or				
Bauhāri	gā dai	khām	songnai-ā	
Daughter-in-law	younger('s)	rice	cook-ing	
Sigram	zethram	zā-dang.		
Rugger	mugger	becom-es.		

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### 7. Conclusion

From the above discussion it comes into conclusion that really many orally circulated Boro folk narratives got the scope to be textualised in the book in the last decades of 19<sup>th</sup> century with the bestowing initiations of Christian Missionaries and British Administrators namely Mr. J. D. Anderson and Reverend Sidney Endle for the first time in the history of Boro literature. Had they not have taken the initiative of collecting and transfiguring some of the orally circulated Boro folk narratives in the text by publishing them in the books in such an early period while entire Boro society was almost in the shadow of illiteracy, those folk narratives would have, most probably, permanently eliminated from the society. They contributed tremendously in shaping textual or written Boro literature by transfiguring their collected Boro folk tales, folk songs, nursery rhymes into text thereby motivating of then a few literate Boro generations to write books in different fields of the society. Their pioneering publishing works really inspired of then a

few Boro literate people to write creative literature in Boro language, as a result of which pure Boro written literature came into existence from the 2<sup>nd</sup> decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century with the emergence of “Boroni Fisa O Aiyen” published in the year 1915 by Habraghat Bodo Sanmilani and first Boro magazine entitled “Bibar” published in 1920 as the mouthpiece of Bodo Chattra Sammilani. Today Boro literature has a huge treasure of books of different genres written by different writers to be fit a developed literature in the world.

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