



# Exploration of Folkloric Elements, Ancient Indian Literary Sources and Epic Narratives in Contemporary Bodo Poetry

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**Abstract**— This research paper explores the interplay of folklore, ancient Indian literary sources, and epic narratives in contemporary Bodo poetry, highlighting how these elements have shaped contemporary Bodo literature. Bodo poets have creatively adapted and reinterpreted folklore and mythological references to address modern existential realities and cultural identity. By examining the works of key poets such as Samar Brahma Choudhury, Prasenjit Brahma, and Charan Narzary, the paper illustrates the ways in which these writers draw from rich traditional narratives, integrating them with Western poetic influences to create a unique literary expression. The study emphasizes the transformation in themes, prosody, and religious perspectives in Bodo poetry, underscoring its dynamic evolution and the poets' role in blending indigenous genius with external cultural elements. Through detailed analysis, the paper asserts the importance of originality and assimilation in literature, showcasing how contemporary Bodo poets articulate their ontological experiences and contemporary issues by harnessing the power of folklore and ancient literary traditions.



**Keywords**— *Folklore, Narrative, Space, Contemporary Bodo Poetry.*

## Introduction

The relationship between folklore and literature is much discussed field of interest in folklore research. Folklore generally studies tales, songs and traditions of the lower classes of people. In his famous essay 'verbal art' Bascom refers to two distinct dimensions of the relationship between folklore and literature. One he calls 'literary of folklore in which the utilization of folklore materials can be found in the writings of established writers. (Bascom, 1973)

Undoubtedly the relationship between folklore and literature must be a complicated one and it is necessary to study thoroughly. In the modern literature of the world there is ample evidence of use of folklore. Various types of popular literature during recent years have used the materials of folklore. No literature can avoid society and society is essentially related to its tradition,

rituals, celebration and of course folklore. Folklore in literature opens many possibilities.

Bodo literature has been significantly influenced by its interaction with distant cultures and literatures. These influences have impacted both the thematic content and the forms of expression in Bodo poetry. This literature now exhibits a rich blend of new influences, particularly in its prosody and phrasing, which owes much to Western poetry. Nature, once seen merely as a backdrop, is now perceived as an active agent in human affairs. The most profound change has been in religious perspectives, with a new mystical conception emerging alongside a historical outlook.

## Folkloric aspects and Ancient Indian Literary Sources in Contemporary Bodo poetry:

In contemporary Bodo literature, especially poetry, writers often draw upon folklore from various

cultures to articulate their ontological experiences. These poets reinterpret, modify, revise, and transform folklore to reflect contemporary realities.

Samar Brahma Choudhury was the first significant Bodo writer to extensively use folklore in his work. As a leader of the Bodo political movement and a public figure, he was familiar with popular beliefs and incorporated extravagant tales, proverbs, and maxims into his writing. He drew from mythical and *Puranic* sources, enhancing them with his intelligence.

Oh dear, my *ajwli* (beloved)  
The owl, the messenger of  
*Yamraj*  
Is scared to hoot  
Tonight, there is no wind  
No peace  
No sleep  
I am awake all alone  
In the stillness of the dark night  
In the stony graveyard  
To stare the footsteps of the  
dark night  
With my eyes wide open  
I am awake  
In wait of the *Daushrigwba*  
In my bosom rests  
The wound of endless suffering  
of the mother world  
In my eye nests  
The wide mouthed leech of  
*Yaksha* in banishment at the  
*Ramgiri* Hills  
(Choudhury)

There is also a reference of another mythical character *Yaksha*, is the name of a broad class of nature-spirits, usually benevolent, who are caretakers of the natural treasures hidden in the earth and tree roots. Thus, the poet Choudhury was optimistic and he dreamt that one day a saviour or protector will appear to rescue this community.

India's first work of creative poetry, the epic *Ramayana*, remains one of the highest achievements of the Indian genius. If the next great epic, the *Mahabharata*, has exposed the readers or listeners to life in its picturesque magnitude and immense range, the *Ramayana* with its quiet lyrical flow and simple story has moved them to

pathos and has led them closer to the characters, helping them to draw from the characters comport and patience. Rama and Sita, though Divine, suffer like human beings the unforeseen and abrupt turn of events, the pangs of personal disaster, but at the same time represent the assurance of the ultimate triumph of truth over all obstacles created by the forces of evil. The story of *Ramayana* really fascinates the modern Bodo poets to compose a good poem.

Prasenjit Brahma's poem "Bima" (Mother) praises women by referencing ancient mythological figures like Sita, Draupadi, and Shakuntala, highlighting their resilience and strength. Sita represents all women striving for existence and silently bearing grief. Draupadi and Kunti's polyandry in the *Mahabharata* is also noted. Urmila, the lesser-known wife of Lakshmana in the *Ramayana*, symbolizes neglected women, and modern feminist literature has reimagined her role. Through these allusions, Brahma encourages Bodo women to be brave and kind.

Thus, he writes-

The Sita of the paddy field  
Wife of Pandavas  
Kunti's daughter in law  
Draupadi too  
I won't mention the unwise  
Urmila  
Kalidas Sakuntala is the  
Hemamalini of yore

In the above poem Sita, Draupadi and Sakuntala is the living character of the ancient epics, but Urmila is less known woman who was the wife of Laxmana one of the brothers of Rama in *Ramayana*. Sita is the representative figure of all women who are striving for their existence and who have been shouldering their grief silently and she is symbol of all mothers. Draupadi is also a woman character of *Mahabharata* who has five husbands and in the same way by embracing six gods Kunti has brought up six children. These are the fine examples of polyandry in the Indian civilization. On the other hand, everyone knows about the wife of Laxmana in *Ramayana* who is none other than Urmila, she is a symbol of all neglected and deprived women. Valmiki also ignored to narrate her stories. But now Urmila is a strong weapon for the feminist authors and she is a creation myth of the feminist literature. By alluding all those characters of the ancient myths and literary sources the poet Prasenjit Brahma comes to the context of Bodo women who are also mother, sister, mentor, friend, caring and goddess of the family and

mankind. By praising women, he encouraged them to be braved and kind in the world.

Eminent Bodo poet Charan Narzary frequently uses Indian myths and tales in his poetry. In "Wanderer," he references Durvasa, a sage known for his anger, to urge the Bodo community to pursue their rights through intellectual means rather than violence. (Boro)

Wanderer  
In your eyes  
I could see  
The indomitable anger of  
Durbasa Muni,  
Wait; do not set the fire with  
your curse  
Else everything will turn into  
ashes  
Where shall we live?

In the above poem the author has mentioned a character Durvasa of Purana. Durvasa is one of the most intriguing and fascinating characters from the world of the Rishis and he was the son of the great sage Atri and his equally powerful consort Anasuya. Durvasa is widely remembered for his role in the Dushyant-Sakuntala episode, popularized by Kalidas's immortal play. He cursed Sakuntala who, engrossed as she was in the thoughts of her lover, neglected to greet him when he entered the hermitage of her foster father, saying that the one in whom she sat absorbed would not even recognize her, a curse which of course was subsequently modified by him so that all was well that ended well. Therefore, the poet Charan Narzary urged the Bodo community to be calm so that they can pursue their legitimate democratic rights with intellectual pursuit rather than violence.

Brajendra Kumar Brahma's "Balmikini Somaijung" (By the Promise of Valmiki) reflects on the transformation of Ratnakara the bandit into Valmiki the seer, symbolizing the potential for progress and change. This theme is echoed in his other works, which blend imagery and symbolism to address contemporary issues and spiritual aspirations.

There!  
Again, the birth of Ravana.  
There are your plunders again!  
Blessed by the power of demon  
You are insolent and haughty  
In your fiery eyes on one score

Which are blazing out of ten  
heads

The snow of the Himalayan  
Mountain

Are broken to pieces

At these startles the mind of  
humanity

You don't know

The world has various aspects

But you have seen only one

By your twenty eyes

So won't the ladder to heaven

Be built now?

But we haven't lost heart

For we know

There's hole even in demon's  
blessing

We still dream of

Building a dyke in the sea

Together with Rama

Let another Ramayana be born.

In the above poem if Valmiki lived in a heroic age that reveled in the romance of war consequent upon the unsettled state of society and looked upon its heroes as objects of evolution, Brajendra Kr. Brahma lived at a time when people were tired of wars and their horrors and badly needed a spiritual message to smooth on the agony of the human soul that had realized the futility of mutual annihilation. In another poem he writes-

In search of Amrit

We fetched the sea

But now we are in trouble

As if he is deaf

Where is Nilgrib Bathwu Bwrai  
now?

Whether he is in graveyard or  
sleeping drunk?

The poison is spreading over  
the sea

Here in the poem the poet with the reference of Hindu mythology compares the Bathwu Bwrai, the supreme soul of the Bodos with Siva or Nilgrib. The Hindu religious books have also established Siva as non-Aryan God. In the poem the poet has not talked about religion but he is talking about the evil which has

overlapped the virtuous among the Bodos also. This is an imagery of the poet.(Boro)

Brajendra Kr. Brahma as a Bodo poet is not only concerned with contemporary Bodo life but also known for his exploration and upholding vision; sometime, he appears to be in between modernity and post-modernity. For some time, his poetic life appears to be autonomous and the next moment his poems appear to be based on references. In one hand his poems are based on aesthetic sense and on the other the same poem seems to be celebrating freedom, thereby promoting pleasure shared by the common mass. His poems are complex and mobile as they go beyond life and at the same those are explorative. That he is a poet who truly represents the common mass and expands the inner-self is very clear. In his poem, "Beyond the Bodhidrum' Criss cross of the strains of modernity and post-modernity is noteworthy, as a modern poem it begins with contemporary Bodo life, full of sorrow and suffering, and gradually moves towards the world beyond life. That is an aesthetic life where reality turns infinite.

I want to untangle the knots  
Of heaven and hell  
And life before and after now,  
Taking all responsibilities in  
my hands  
I want to fathom  
Life  
And this real world

Untangling the 'knots of heaven and hell' refers to the struggle that the Bodo people carried on for a long time for creating their own identity. The wretched life they had been living without dignity was as good as 'hell' and the life the poet envisions, of energy, vigour and high self-esteem is as good as 'heaven'. Thus, what the poet calls as heaven is no different from his vision. Each and every Bodo the poet represents is a Buddha moving gradually from suffering to liberty: the united movement of the Bodos takes them from 'margin' to 'centre'. The difference is there in their way only. But the goal is same: liberation.

The body sweats blood  
By fighting all along  
For sustaining the solitary life;  
Picking the drop of eternity  
I begin to tread the old road  
Taken by the myriad people

The poem implies that attainment of nirvana' is not meant for the seer like Buddha only, it could also be

attained by the common people. If Buddha could achieve it through meditation, they could achieve it through karma'. The poet tries to tread the old road/taken by the myriad people (the great seers) have already achieved.

An uprising young Bodo poet, Uthrisar Khungur Basumatary, among the poets of young generation, is a true modernist. His theme and techniques are based on experiment and the deep experiences of life. He uses complex images drawn from the complexities of life. As a modernist he looks upon the contemporary Bodo socio-political issues with liberal thought and ideas. He sees the contemporary life with globalized attitude and outlook because of his study and association which are forward and up-to-date. The theme of social and political evolution is predominant in his poems. The Liberalization, globalization and loneliness of modern, urban life are being picturized from the background of his poetry. That the poet yearns for a space without being clumsy is obvious enough in his poetry, Uthrisar Khungur Basumatary has also written a beautiful poem on Buddha. An illustration of the metonymic use of myth is provided for us by Basumatary's poem "I shall wait for you". In the poem Siddhartha, as a young boy, dissatisfied with the spiritual complacency of those around him goes ahead with a spiritual quest:

The Prince Sidhartha  
confronted with several  
questions  
Before decided to seat under the  
Bodhidrum tree  
Now I'm also confronting with  
the same queries  
To know  
What is there beyond the sea  
covered with mists?  
(Basumatary)

The poem suggests the spiritual quest of the Bodo people ought to go for and from post-modern point of view the unseen spirituality in each and every one, leading them from "invisibility to visibility.

Bijoy Baglary's poetry intertwines various themes, capturing the nuances of Bodo life. His modernist approach reflects the uncertainty and chaos of contemporary life, using references to both Western and Eastern mythology.

Lakshmi is wife of Bishnu-  
having thousands of looks  
Shiva's wife Sati-turned into  
fifty-one pieces

In the name of her husband  
Ganesh's beloved Swaha-the  
symbol of happiness  
My wife the *Mwsaphakhri*  
(spotted tigress)  
One and only during my  
sorrows  
If I could meet you, I would  
have asked  
What do you want from me"?  
What is intellectual beauty?  
Where lays your happiness?  
In the bosom of lives or in  
separation  
Or in the endless end  
Or in having all

Though he praised women in many of his poems he also blamed the women for ruining many kingdoms and families. He has cited many references from different myth and tales to prove that only because of women the country and kingdom have to face with harsh consequences.

Bishnujyoti Kachari, known for his humanitarian appeal, incorporates characters from the Mahabharata to advocate for social and national integration. His poem "Dengkhw: Injur Swusinaini" (Songs of Breaking the Wall) calls for breaking the walls of division and hatred.

There's a starving octopus  
In my heart  
Hundreds of imprisoned lions  
are roaring  
In my heart  
In every drop of my blood  
As if echoing  
The songs of breaking the wall  
Kumbhakarna-  
Now it's time to your death

Here the author wants to break the wall of divisions and hatred. Therefore, he warns the inhuman people by referring Kumbhakarna.

Dhiraj Basumatary's poems focus on Bodo aspirations and often reference historical and mythological tales. In one poem, he invokes the story of Joymati, an Assamese historical figure, to discuss the silent endurance of women in a male-dominated world.

You should know

How the prostitutes become  
nude  
Only for a mouthful food  
And you should recite  
The sad poems of Anupama for  
me  
If you want to be my beloved  
By looking up the bright sky  
Silently bear the punishment of  
Joymati.

In the above poem by mentioning the tale of Joymati, a popular Assamese historical tale, where Joymati sacrifices herself for the survival of her husband and in the poem the poet also says that it is better to bear silently all the pains and sorrows in the male dominated world.

## CONCLUSION

Originality in literature lies in its ability to absorb universal elements and express them uniquely. It is essential to assimilate the best from various literatures while grounding it in indigenous traditions. Modern Bodo poets have infused new ideals into their tradition, reflecting a blend of native genius and external influences. By harnessing folklore and ancient literary sources, contemporary Bodo poets articulate their ontological experiences and address contemporary realities.

Originality in literature lies in its capacity to absorb the universal in all literature and give a unique expression suited to its native genius. It is meaningless to get involved in the controversy of the tradition and influence of the other languages for the growth of modern poetry. We must try to assimilate what is best wherever that may be, and offer it to the eternal being. In this endeavour we shall not confine ourselves to the west but to the literature of other countries too. The modern Bodo poets have tried to infuse new ideals into their tradition. No mere foreign grafting can ever thrive and flourish, unless the tender plant on which the grafting is to be made to first germinates and send its roots deep into its own indigenous soil.

Thus, in the contemporary Bodo literature, especially Bodo poetry, writers often harness folklore of other language and culture to articulate intensely their ontological experience. The poets re-interpret, modify, revise and transform that folklore to articulate contemporary reality. Bodo poetry has a long and glorious heritage. A study on Bodo poetry has offered scopes to read a few modernist Bodo poets as inheritor of a poetic tradition which comprises the aspects of folklore as Bodo

poetry has a consistent and coherent connection with folklore. Ancient Bodo literature was basically oral and pastoral songs, ballads and myths made the key foundation of that literature. Such tradition continued to the time of modern Bodo poetry. Charan Narzary, Samar Brahma Choudhury, Vikram, Brajendra kr. Brahma, Bijoy Baglary, Anju and many other modern Bodo poets have alluded to the various Puranic, Vedic and mythic characters of India and abroad in their creative writings.

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