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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A STUDY OF FOLKLORE MATERIALS IN THE NOVEL “BIRGWSRINI THUNGRI” BY BIDYASAGAR NARZARY

Jwngdaw Basumatary

Research Scholar, Department of Folklore Research, Gauhati University.

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Abstract

This paper aims to study and identify the various aspects of Bodo folklore as depicted in the novel “Birgwsrini Thungri” by Bidyasagar Narzary. It is also an attempt to analyze and critically examine the significance of folklore materials found in the selected novel in contemporary Bodo society. “Birgwsrini Thungri” is a Bodo historical novel of Bidyasagar Narzary, which fetched him the Sahitya Akademi and Rangsar Literary awards. The novel’s main theme is based on a legendary Mech female warrior and martyr, Birgwsri, who had fought against the British to liberate the Duars and establish a new Mech kingdom. Birgwsri served as a tax collector under the British government, and later she sacrificed her life for the noble cause of the Mech or Bodo people. The novelist vividly and beautifully reflects the realistic socio-cultural and religious life of the Bodo community. Various elements of Bodo folklore, including charms, proverbs, handicrafts, food habits, folk medicine, rituals, festivals, customary law, judicial systems, etc., are found to be reflected in this novel. Therefore, it is hoped that the study shall help the readers know about the relationship between Folklore and literature, as well as the folklore materials of the Bodo community.

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Introduction:-

Folklore is an integral aspect of culture which emerged as an academic discipline only in nineteenth century. The word “Folklore” was first coined and suggested by William John Thoms, a British antiquarian, in a letter signed with a pen name as Ambrose Merton published in the *Anthraeneum*, a London-based popular literary magazine on 22nd August 1846 (Dorson, 1972). Folklore is a compound term of ‘folk’ (people) and ‘lore’ (knowledge). Thus, Folklore may be defined as people’s knowledge or wisdom. Folklore includes a wide range of concepts. A renowned American folklorist, Archer Taylor, has defined Folklore as “The material handed on by tradition, either by word of mouth or by custom and practice. It may be folksongs, folktales, 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 one’s shoulder or knocking on wood. It may be traditional beliefs like the notion that elder is good for ailments of the eye. All of these are Folklore” (Dundes, 1965, p. 34). The elements of folklore are listed in William R. Bascom’s definition of folklore. According to him, “Folklore means ‘folk learning’; it comprehends all knowledge that is transmitted by word of mouth and all crafts and other techniques that are learned by imitation or example, as well as the products of these crafts.... Folklore includes folk-art, folk crafts, folk tools, folk costume,

Corresponding Author:- Jwngdaw Basumatary

Address:- Research Scholar, Department of Folklore Research, Gauhati University.

folk belief, folk medicine, folk recipes, folk music, folk dance, folk games, folk gestures, and folk speech, as well as those verbal forms of expression which have been called folk literature but which are better described as verbal art” (Bascom, 1981, p. 215). Folklore elements are as old as human society. The study of Folklore was first initiated by the German Brothers Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm (popularly known as Grimm Brothers) at the beginning of the 19th century.

Folklore is an interdisciplinary subject that is closely related to literature. Literature would be incomplete and undeveloped without the usage of folkloric aspects. Although written literature is the product and process of society’s elite groups, it does include folkloric elements for various reasons. The Bodo is an ethnic group in North-East India. They are called Bodo or Boro or Boro-Kachari in Assam, Mech in West Bengal and Meche in Nepal. They are mainly scattered in Assam and some parts of North-East India, West Bengal, and some neighbouring international areas such as Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. Like many other ethnic groups, the Bodos also have distinct folklore materials handed down from one generation to the next in their community. Their folklore elements may be found orally in their everyday lives and in written literature. Therefore, the author aims to study and highlight the aspects of the Folklore of the Bodos as reflected in the novel “Birgwsrini Thungri” written by Bidyasagar Narzary.

Bidyasagar Narzary: Life and Works

Bidyasagar Narzary is a prominent Bodo litterateur of Assam. He was born in the Bhaolagury village under the Gossaigaon Sub-Division of Kohrajhar district of Assam on 12th February, 1954. His father’s name is Late T. N. Narzary, and his mother’s name is Late H. Narzary. He started his education life at Silbhaji L.P. School. He completed his undergraduate degree from St. Anthony’s College, Shillong, and his postgraduate degree from North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU), Shillong. Initially, he worked as a Junior Auditor in Central Excise Department for a few months. After that, he worked as a Probationary Officer with the State Bank of India. In 1982, he appeared for the Indian Civil Services Examination and joined the Indian Information Service in June 1984. Later, he was appointed as the Additional Director General of the Press Information Bureau in Guwahati. He started his writing career from his school days. He has made many contributions to Bodo literature with his numerous and remarkable literary works. He has authored several poems, short stories, novels, etc., in the Bodo language. His first anthology of poems, entitled “Ang Baonw Haya” was published in 1969 while studying in Class VIII. Since then, he has gradually progressed in his writing career. His first Bodo novel “Birgwsrini Thungri” appeared as a book in 2004. This novel was translated into English in entitled “The Sword of Birgosri” by Krishna Dulal Barua in 2012. Besides this novel, Narzary has written several books, such as “Khwirwm Dwirwm” (1983), “Khaspurni Hangma” (2005, novel), “Urang Pharang” (2005, novel), “Goblani Sao” (2006, novel), “Langdang Bilai,” “Jaolia Dewam,” “Jwhlwao Dwimalu,” “Mithinw Gwnang Khourang,” “Bharatni Hadorgiriphwr,” and others. It is worth mentioning that he has more than 45 publications to his credit. For his novel “Birgwsrini Thungri,” Bidyasagar Narzary received the Rangsar Literary Award (a literary award of Bodo Sahitya Sabha) in 2007 and the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2008.

Objectives of the study:-

The main aims and objectives of the present research paper are-

- a) To study and identify the various folklore materials of the Bodos as depicted in the novel “Birgwsrini Thungri” of Bidyasagar Narzary.
- b) To analyze and critically look into the significance of Folklore portrayed in the selected novel in contemporary Bodo society.

Methodology:-

For this present paper, the necessary data have been collected from two main sources: primary and secondary sources. This study is primarily based on the novel “Birgwsrini Thungri” of Bidyasagar Narzary. Therefore, first-hand data have been collected by studying the original copy of the selected novel “Birgwsrini Thungri” (2009, third edition). The English translation novel “The Sword of Birgosri” by Krishna Dulal Barua of Bidyasagar Narzary’s Bodo novel “Birgwsrini Thungri” is also studied and many examples are cited from this novel. The secondary data have been collected by studying the relevant published books and journal articles through the library work. The methodology of the study is qualitative in nature, primarily based on descriptive and analytical research methods.

Results and Discussion:-

A Brief Summary of the novel “Birgwsri Thungri”

“Birgwsrini Thungri” (The sword of Birgwsri) is a historical novel written by Bidyasagar Narzary and first published by Bodosa publication in 2004. This novel is written based on a legendary Mech (Bodo) female warrior and martyr, Birgwsri, who had fought against the British to liberate the Duars and establish a new Mech kingdom. The novelist wrote this novel in the narrative style to avert the monotony of reading a historical entity, combining historical facts with imagination strips. The novel portrays the legendary heroine Birgwsri as a skilled sword-fighter, horse-racer, and patriotic lady. It is difficult to ascertain the birth date and place of birth of Birgwsri. However, it is assumed that she was born in the first decade of the 19th century in Batabari village under Bijni. Thengfakhri is the first name of Birgwsri. Her father’s name was Monbaru, and her mother’s name was Alaisri. She had a younger brother named Thebla. Birgwsri was born into a low-income family. During that period, Bhutanese ruled the plains of northern parts of Assam. The majority of Bijni area belongs to the Bodo community. At the same time, the British East India Company began defeating small kingdoms in India and establishing a colonial empire. The people of Bijni region had to pay taxes to both Bhutan and the United Kingdom, resulting in double taxation. In the meantime, Jaoliya Dewan governed the civic territory.

In 1830, the Central Losar Festival was organized by Druk Desi (Bhutanese king) in Chirang on the advice of Jaoliya Dewan. The Bhutanese Buddhists used to enthusiastically celebrate the Losar festival every year. In that year (1830), the Druk Desi organized many competitions, including wrestling, sword fighting, horse racing, sprinting, jumping, singing, dancing, and drama-showing programs. In the sword-fighting competition of that festival, Thengfakhri could defeat Jaoliya Dewan. Druk Desi presented her with a sword as an award. Thengfakhri could fight like a bird, hence she was also given the name ‘Birgwsri’ by Druk Desi. As per their tradition, Druk Desi gave Birgwsri the post of Dewan of the Duars, but she did not accept it. Instead, she requested Druk Desi to let Jaolia retain the title of Dewan. After finding no other option, Druk Desi had to give back the Jaolia’s title of Dewan. The sword became a protective arm of Birgwsri. Birgwsri’s father, Monbaru, worked as a boatman at the Batabari ghat under United Kingdom. Birgwsri also had learned from her father the art of rowing the boat across the Bima river (Ai river). One day, while ferrying the people across the Bima River, Monbaru and Alaisri had been drowned during the storm. After her parents died in a cyclone, Birgwsri was given the job of Ghatowal (boatman) of the Bima river to help people cross the river. Later, she was appointed as Tehsildar (tax collector) of the Birjahar area by Ambrith Narayan. She collected taxes from Bodo villages by riding on her horseback. She adored the poor people who could not pay taxes in due time. Birgwsri could not bear the tax burden of the Bodo people. Therefore, she planned to drive the British out of Bijni and the civic area with the support of Jaolia Dewan.

On the foothills of Bhutan, Jaolia served as a collector and was in-charge of the Bhutanese government’s soldiers. He was constantly working in his master’s favour. On the Bhutanese foothills, Jaolia maintained a close eye on the movement of British troops. Therefore, the Bhutanese Government was impressed with his role against the British. Meanwhile, Birgwsri discussed with Jaolia Dewan about establishing a Mech state. The Mech is an ethnic group. They are called Bodo or Boro in Assam and Mech in West Bengal. Birgwsri thought that the Mech state would be in Bhutan’s foothills; therefore, she joined with Jaolia Dewan. Jaolia accepted Birgwsri’s proposal. On the bank of the Sonkosh river, the combined armies of Birgwsri and Jaolia Dewan carried out a big operation against the British army one night. One day, Jaolia attacked Bijni and destroyed the Raj Palace. Bijni Raja shifted the royal residence to Abhayapuri as a result of this.

Birgwsri fought against the British to provide people with tax relief. She started visiting villages to recruit and train soldiers to fight against the British. She fought against the British and killed many British forces with her sword. But she couldn’t hold out against the British rifle and cannon attacks for long. On the other hand, Jaolia Dewan was also killed by the British troops. After being defeated in the war, she fled from the battleground to hide in the Birjahar hills to save herself from the British troops. But Birgwsri couldn’t escape on the hills for long days. Her throat was dry out of thirst. She came down from the Birjahar hills to the Ai River’s bank to drink water one day. She just stopped beside the river to drink water with her cupped palms. In the meanwhile, she was shot dead by the British army. That was the end of the great Bodo heroine’s life.

Folklore Materials as depicted in the novel “Birgwsrini Thungri”:

The novelist tries to illustrate various aspects of the folklore of the Bodo or Mech community in the novel “Birgwsrini Thungri.” The elements of Bodo folklore reflected in the selected novel may be studied as follow:

Incantations or mantras (mwynthwr):

The Bodo people use verbal charms or incantations as part of their healing practices. The one who practices chanting mantras is called Oja (the medicine man) among the Bodos. The Ojas use different mantras for various purposes, such as mantras used in religious practices, in healing sickness, to attract someone, etc. The mantras used in religious practices get highlighted in this novel. One day, the villagers of Batabari organized the Kherai Puja, the biggest religious festival of the Bodos. During the Kherai worship, the Oja is seen chanting mantras for the well-being of the village folks. The novelist portrays the mantras as follows-

“O’ Aahaam,
Up in heaven, there’s God,
Down in hell is the God of death;
Beyond these, there’s none that I know about.
Hark, hark,
O’ Mugasong tree by the road,
Listen to me awhile,
The Sun-God is in the east,
The God of other Gods and Goddesses is Siva,
The Bwrai Bathou Maharaja;
Bathou is said to have five fastenings,
The Sijou tree has five veins,
The Bodos have five ideals,
Listen, listen,…….” (Narzary, 2012, p. 42).

These mantras depict the worshipping Bathoubwrai (the supreme God of the Bodos) and other Gods. The Oja chants these charms to the Bathoubwrai and other Gods and Goddesses for the sake of the villagers’ protection and freedom from diseases and ailments. Such charms or incantations are recited at the time of Kherai worship. It is worth mentioning that such charms are still chanted during the performing of Kherai Puja among the Bodos.

Likewise, the Bodos use charms during Garja worship, which is well depicted in this novel. The Oja of Doikhorguri village recites as-

“Aahaam, Mohadev, O’ great God,
Fagla takhur, Aie Bormali,
Forji-Forja Sainasi Thakur.
Tell, O’ Mothers and Fathers,
Who are in this side?
Asu Mainao is here.
Borai, Raja, Jomon Jola,
Jekhai Mara, Khobai Mara,
There are Gambari, Dhonsri and Monsri.
Tell, O’ Mothers and Fathers,
You’re not just angels of today,
You’re the Gods and Goddesses forever.
Tell, O’ Mothers and Fathers,
Please keep all the youngsters, men and women
In peace and happiness,
All children safe and sound;
The women of the village will go to far-off places
For Fishing and hunting,
Please don’t scare them away;
Men will go to the jungles
For hunting and fetching wood,
Don’t frighten them in the guise of tigers and bears,
Or by sorcery;
………….”(Narzary, 2012, pp. 47-48).

These mantras reflect worshipping different Gods and Goddesses of the Bodos during Garja worship. The Oja chants these charms at the time of Garja worship for the well-being of the village people. In this way, the chanting of charms or incantations at performing Kherai and Garja worships is reflected in the present novel.

Proverbs

The proverb is an essential sub-genre of folklore. Proverbs are a component of a language and a decorative element. In a language, proverbs serve as an ornament. The Bodos have many proverbs in their language used during conversations and speeches. The novelist refers to some Bodo proverbs in his novel. The following are the proverbs or sayings identified in this novel:

a) “Mwdwmanw mwini suthur” (Narzary, 2009, p. 23).

English translation:

(Flesh spells doom for the deer). (Narzary, 2012, p. 23).

The Bodos use this proverb to express the inconvenience that girls face in life. Generally, deer are hunted for their flesh. Deer meat is considered to be a delicacy. Therefore, many people prefer to eat it. Hence it is said that the body of a deer is its own enemy. In other words, many people desire to marry a gorgeous girl even though she isn't interested in them, which might lead to violence or a terrible incident. When Birgwsri went boating to the Bhutan hills without informing her parents, her father, Monbaru, was worried about not having his daughter with them during their lunch hour. In such a condition, Mwnbaru's thoughts were gripped by fear as he remembered the aforementioned proverb.

b) “Or khathiyao thabla moma goliyw” (Narzary, 2009, p. 34).

English translation:

(A candle melts near the fire). (Narzary, 2012, p. 35).

The novelist highlights this proverb in the 8th chapter of the novel. Before they married, Birgwsri and her lover Jiu used to go around and talk all the time. When elderly people see them, they think their relationship is wrong since a young girl moving around all the time and staying together with a boy cannot be justified. So, the novelist mentions that, as the saying goes, a candle melts near the fire.

Folk crafts

Since ancient times, the Bodos have depended on the environment for numerous necessary objects and materials used in their daily lives. They generate various household materials, agricultural tools, musical instruments, fishing tools, hunting tools, etc., from wood, bamboo, and cane, which are available in nearby forests. In this novel, the use of some musical instruments like Siphung (flute), Kham (wooden drum), Jotha (cymbal), and Jabkhring (a kind of musical instrument made of wood and metal used to produce clapping and jingling sound) get highlighted. The novelist describes that when the Kherai puja was organized in Thuribari village, the Doudini (priestess) performed different Kherai dances to the tune and beats of Siphung and Kham. The novelist further mentions that after the Garja worship, the villagers of Batabari danced to musical instruments such as Siphung played by Swmho, Kham played by Maldang, and Jabkhring played by Sonathi. Jiu is also associated with the constant use of Siphung. Gambari Khamflai (a low wooden stool made of Gambari tree) has occupied an important place in the socio-religious life of the Bodos. Among the Bodos, Gambari Khamflai is used during the marriage ceremony to wash the bride's legs at the bridegroom's entry gate before entering the home. It is also used to sit by Doudini during Kherai worship. In this novel, the usage of Gambari Khamflai during Kherai Puja is also reflected through the Kherai worship organized in Thuribari village.

Food habits:

Rice is the staple food of the Bodos. They supplement it with a plentiful supply of vegetables and non-vegetables. They collect various vegetables from their garden as well as the nearby forest. They are very fond of fish and meat. They are at liberty to eat almost any meat, including pork, goat, cock, and duck. In this novel, eating rice gets exhibited several times. Omabedor (pork) is one of the delicious food items of the Bodos. They entertain their guest with Jou (rice beer) and Omabedor. Jou and Omabedor are also provided during marriage, ceremonies, festivals, family functions, etc. In this novel, when Birgwsri defeats Jaolia Dewan in the sword-fighting competitions organized in the Lossar festival, her father, Monbaru, arranges a feast for the village people. He slaughtered a pig for the feast and also offered Jou. Na Bathwn (fish chutney) is one of the delicious food items of the Bodos. Eating rice with fish chutney is reflected in the novel. The Bodos prepare fish curry with a variety of vegetables. Mwithajwng

Na (fish with rosella) is one of the popular curries among the Bodos. In the novel, Birgwsri and Jiu are observed to be eating rice with the curry of fish prepared with rosella. Onla (a kind of curry made out of rice flour), Khardwi (alkali), and spices) is also a famous traditional cuisine of the Bodos. Sometimes, it is cooked with chicken, pork, silkworm, shrimp, dried fish, bamboo shoots, drumstick leaves, papaya flowers, elephant apples, and other ingredients. In this novel, the novelist depicts the curry Onla prepared with pork. During the Garja festival, the people of Batabari village prepared Onla with pork for the community feast. It is worth mentioning that Onla has occupied a special place in Bodo culture. In the Bodo traditional marriage system called Hathasuni, Onla is prepared with chicken without applying turmeric powder, and it is served in the meal to the villagers present. Such acts of practice are still prevalent in Bodo society.

Folk medicine:

The Bodos practice traditional healing practices for various diseases and ailments. The use of both natural or herbal folk medicines and magico-religious folk medicines is seen among Bodo people. Traditional medicines and treatments are widely used in Bodo society. They have a tradition of treating illness and diseases through the Oja (medicine man) instead of doctors. The novelist highlights treating sickness through magico-religious folk medicinal practices in his novel. One day, Birgwsri suddenly got sick in the middle of the night. Monbaru, the father of Birgwsri, called Thebgang Oja, the medicine man of the village. Thebgang Oja started chanting incantations over the patient by shaking a handful of Saldaokhumwi (a kind of fern) leaves. He also sprinkled holy water on Birgwsri, but her sickness did not decrease. Later, Thebgang Oja quickly detected the causes of illness through the divination method that the forest spirit had entered her body. He says that she can be cured only by sacrificing a red cock. Later, Thebgang Oja, Monbaru and Thobra went to the Bima river taking along the red cock. They performed certain rituals on the riverbank. Thebgang Oja invoked before the unseen force as quoted below-

“O, Mighty spirit of the woods! Birgosri is yet to tie her nuptial knot. She hasn’t experienced the sweet and bitter tastes of life. Have mercy. What’ll happen if she dies a premature death? O, spirit of the woods! Please leave the body of Birgosri. We’re offering a red cock in her place. Please accept our humble offer and return to the forest” (Narzary, 2012, pp. 28-29).

Thebgang Oja sliced the red cock’s neck and offered it to the forest spirit after sprinkling it with holy water. Birgwsri surprisingly recovered after just two days. In such a way, the novelist vividly reflects the magico-religious folk medicinal practice of the Bodo people. Such beliefs and practices are prevalent among the Bodos even today.

Folk belief:

The Bodos, like many other ethnic groups, have their own folk beliefs concerning daily life. They have several folk beliefs about their rituals, festivals, dreams, and other living and non-living creatures that are still present in their society. The novelist presents certain folk beliefs in this novel. These are discussed below-

Belief in Deity or Spirits

The Bodo people like to reside near forest areas where birds and animals may be found. According to their beliefs, many deities (mwdai) live in the jungles, rivers, and hills, including ‘hagrani mwdai’ (deity of the forest), ‘dwini mwdai’ (deity of water), ‘gwthwisalini mwdai’ (deity of the graveyard), ‘bira mwdai’, (mammon), ‘harai bangkhwi’ (a kind of ghost of water), etc. These deities harm people whenever they come across these deities on their journey. Therefore, mothers or pregnant ladies usually carry a knife whenever they go outside of the home. The Bodos believe that spirits are scared of weapons made of iron and fire (Dey, 2019).

The Bodo mothers pray to the Gods and Goddesses before crossing rivers, and sometimes they offer a rupee coin so that the deities do not harm them. Whenever they carry any food, the Bodos put a few chili pieces inside it so that the deities or ghosts cannot harm them. The Bodos believe that people fall into illness whenever they meet the deities or spirits on their way. To get relief from such cases, they call conjurors and ask for their help. The Bodos believe that the spirits dread mustard seed, chillies, and lemon. The novelist vividly depicts the belief in deities in the 6th chapter of the novel. One day, Birgwsri fell into illness after coming from the jungle. Her body temperature started to rise in the middle of the night as if her body were on fire. Monbaru called Thebgang Oja, the village’s medicine man, to heal her. The Oja chanted incantations by shaking a handful of Saldaokhumwi (a kind of fern used in worship) leaves. He also sprinkled holy water on Birgwsri. However, her fever did not decrease. There was no chance of recovery. Instead, her health worsened. The Oja applied the Naikhangnai (divination) method, a special way of finding out the cause of ailments. The Oja soon detected that the forest spirit had entered her body. Later, the

Oja could save Birgwsri's life after sacrificing a red cock on the bank of the Bima river. Since they live in the village society, the Bodo people still believe in God, ghosts, and spirits even today.

Belief in Witchcraft

The Bodos, like other ethnic groups of Assam, believe in the power of witchcraft and are scared of it. Belief in witchcraft is a significant issue in their society that exists even today. The Bodo people depend on Oja to get relief from various diseases and ailments. The medicine man finds the cause of diseases and offers prayers in the name of Gods and Goddesses and chants mantras. Some Bodos believe the witch if someone dies of an unknown fatal illness. The magic practitioners have been referred to as witches, magicians, and sorcerers. The witch is called daina or daini (male or female witch) among the Bodos. The man or woman who practices injurious medicine or black magic is considered a witch among the Bodos. They believe witches can harm or kill specific people using their medication and mantras.

The superstitious belief of the Bodos in witchcraft is reflected in the present novel through the character of Daosri Burwi. As mentioned in the novel, Daosri Burwi was a witch of Batabari village, for which the village society boycotted her. Jiu, the husband of Birgwsri, became mad one day after being poisoned by Ramonda. He brought the poison from Daosri Burwi. The novelist describes in the novel that during the Garja festival, at the time of taking a community feast, Ramonda sprayed poison on the curry of Jiu while pouring the Onla curry over the rice on Jiu's plate. Ramonda had already brought the poison from Daosri Buri two days before the festival. Daosri Burwi's poison began to work on Jiu within one week. He started to behave strangely. After six days, Jiu's condition worsened, and he died. Such superstitious beliefs and practices sometimes exist in Bodo society, even in this age of science and technology.

Belief in Medicine man (Oja) and Divination practice (naikhangnai):

Divination is one of the folk practices embraced by the common people. In Bodo society, divination practice has been continuing since ancient times. The Ojas mainly use divination to discover the causes of diseases and ailments. They also employ divination to select a good homestead for house building, find out the reason for any inauspicious incidents and discover the action of witches. It is believed that only Ojas can cure diseases caused by witches (Dey 2019: 64). The belief and practices of divination are portrayed in the present novel. The Bodo people prefer to treat illness and diseases through the Oja instead of doctors. They call the Oja when someone suffers from any disease. The Oja detects the causes of sickness through divination by tossing the Khauri (conch shells). In the present novel, when Birgwsri suddenly got sick in the middle of the night, her father Monbaru called Thebgang Oja, a village medicine man, to heal her. Thebgang Oja detects the causes of Birgwsri's sickness by divination, which is reflected in the 6th chapter of the novel as quoted below-

"The Oja was surprised at the futility of his incantations. Finding himself at his wit's end, he applied the divination method, a special way of finding out the cause of ailments. The medicine man was soon able to detect that the forest spirit had entered her body. He grew concerned. The spirit had to be driven away from her body as early as possible. Otherwise, her life would be in danger. Birgosri might be lost forever" (Narzary, 2012, p. 26).

Likewise, when Birgwsri's husband Jiu became mad and started to act strangely after being poisoned by Ramonda, Monbaru again fetched the Hongla Oja from Narabari village to cure Jiu. After coming to Monbaru's house, the Oja used divination methods to find out the causes of Jiu's sickness, which is depicted in the novel as follows-

"The Oja came out of the house and went to the Bathou altar, and he then took out some conch-shells from his bag. He chanted incantations over them and tossed them in front of the Sijou (Euphorbia Splendens) tree. The Oja noticed that the conch-shells got scattered, and not a single shell remained near the tree. Seeing this, the Oja declared, "Somebody has applied the Fagla ban (madness exorcism) on him- the magic that causes madness, Monbaru. It won't be possible to cure him" (Narzary, 2012, p. 50).

After detecting the cause of the sickness, the Oja said that somebody had applied madness exorcism on Jiu and that nobody could cure him. The Oja decided to give the person responsible for Jiu's illness the taste of his own medicine at the request of Birgwsri. The Oja chanted mantras on a skull and bone and then he invoked- "Let the person responsible for Jiu's condition be affected by the same Fagla Ban (the magic that causes madness) and face death" (Narzary, 2012, p. 55). In this way, the belief in medicine man and divination practice is well reflected in this novel. Such beliefs and practices are still prevailing in contemporary Bodo society.

Traditional Religion “Bathou”:

According to Anil Boro (2014), “Bathou is the traditional religion of the Bodos, which has been current among them since time immemorial, is invariably linked up with the worship of Bathoubwrai or Sibrai, the supreme God of the Bodos” (p. 11). Therefore, their religion is known as the Bathou. The novelist reflects on the Bathou religion and worshipping of Bathoubwrai in the present novel. Every family of Bathou followers has a Bathousali (altar of Bathou) in the North-East corner of the courtyard. A Sijou tree (*Euphorbia splendens*) is planted in the middle of the altar as a living symbol of Bathoubwrai and is surrounded by round fencing of split bamboo. In the selected novel, the Bathousali can be seen at the house of Monbaru. The Bodos worship the Bathoubwrai and other Gods and Goddesses during their religious functions and festivals, such as Kherai Puja and Garja Puja, depicted well in the novel.

Customary Law and Judicial System:

The village court operates the village society of the Bodos using certain customary laws that have been practiced since ancient times. In Bodo society, if someone commits a crime, they are justified in the village court meetings. If the person is found guilty, they are given punishment depending on the offense. Gamibwrai or Gaonbura (the village headman) is the administrative head of the Bodo village. He looks after the problems and presides over any meetings of the village. A sexual relationship without marriage is considered a severe offense among the Bodos. Suppose a boy and a girl are found to be staying together or having sexual relations before their wedding. In that case, the villagers punished the scandals after justifying the matter in the meeting. The Bodo people believe that if such incidents bring disgrace to the village, the village becomes impure. The customary law and judicial system of the Bodos get exhibited in the 8th chapter of the novel.

After Jiu’s father and mother died, Birgwsri brought him into their house. Birgwsri and Jiu love each other. They roamed together and talked to each other all the time. Wherever there was Birgwsri, Jiu was also there. She would not go out anywhere without Jiu. This behaviour caught the eyes of the villagers. Rumors began to spread among the villagers following the two being seen together in and day out. Witnessing these, Ramonda, the village leader, could not allow such a relationship since he had been nurturing plans to have Birgwsri as his second wife. Ramonda filed complaints against them to the village headman. Accordingly, one evening, a meeting was convened to discuss the matter in the village. As soon as the villagers assembled, the meeting began. The village headman presides over the meeting. He explained the reason behind holding the meeting and said-

“My dear people. Ramonda has complained that Birgosri roams around the whole day with a young man. This is not a healthy precept for unmarried boys and girls. Such activities infect young minds. The honor of our village is at stake. What could be done about it? And so the objective of the meeting is to discuss the matter and arrive at an acceptable solution” (Narzary, 2012, pp. 36-37).

The villagers kept quiet for a while. Nobody uttered a single word. Seeing this, the village headman again said-

“Has anybody got anything to say on the matter? We can’t hold anybody guilty without proof. Their guilt can’t be established without evidence” (Narzary, 2012, p. 37).

Ramonda had already fixed three persons to speak against Jiu. However, they remained silent. Seeing their silence, Ramonda grew restless and angry. Finding no other way, he said- “Tell us whatever you saw on that day, Thengna” (Narzary, 2012, p. 37).

After some time, Thengna, Dabari and Abani reported against Jiu and Birgwsri. The village headman also asked some questions to Jiu. Later, the village headman asked Birgwsri-

“Are the reports of Thengna and others true?” (Narzary, 2012, p. 38).

“They are totally false, Uncle. We have not done anything in the way they have stated.” -Birgosri replied. She also stated that he loves Jiu. After hearing this, the village headman said-

“What can we do if she loves him? We have nothing to say. Monbaru, any comments?”

“I have nothing to say,” - Monbaru replied (Narzary, 2012, p. 38).

The village headman concluded the meeting after instructing Monbaru to marry off Bwirgwsri with Jiu as early as possible.

In Bodo society, the guilty individual is punished according to the announcement made by the village headman after any judgment. Based on the crime, punishments may include a penalty, penance, boycott from society, etc. In the novel, Daosri, an old witch of Batabari village, had been ousted from the village five years ago. Nobody was allowed to visit her since she was an outcast. If someone is detected, he would be held guilty and penalized. Such customary law and judicial system are still practiced in Bodo society.

Marriage system:

Marriage is an essential social system in the life cycle of the Bodos. Traditionally, the Bodos have six distinct types of marriages. These are- Swngnanwi Laynai Haba (Arranged Marriage), Gwrjia Lakhinai Haba (marriage by service), Kharsonnai Haba (girl flees away to boy's house), Bwnanwi Lainai Haba (marriage by force), Dwnkharlangnai Haba (marriage by elopement), Dongkha Habnai Haba (widow re-marriage) (Brahma, 1989, p. 55).

Gwrjia Lakhinai Haba is portrayed in the novel with the marriage ceremony of Birgwsri and Jiu. This marriage is solemnized at the bride's house, and the groom remains at the bride's house after marriage. After meeting in the Bhutanese hills, Birgwsri and Jiu gradually fell in love with each other. After Jiu's parents passed away, Birgwsri brought Jiu into their family. Birgwsri and Jiu were married after a month, and Jiu remained at Birgwsri's house after marriage. Such marriage is still prevailing in Bodo society. This system of marriage is rare in the present Bodo society.

Bihari Lanay Haba gets reflected in the novel through the character of Ramonda. Retaining two wives was prevalent among the Bodos in earlier times. In this novel, Ramonda, the village leader of Batabari, can be seen trying to marry Birgwsri as his second wife. He also tried to marry Gambari as his second wife, but he could not succeed. Although polygamy was prevalent in Bodo society in earlier times, it is no longer encouraged by the Bodo people. Nowadays, it is known to happen once in a while.

Death Ritual:

The novelist presents the death ritual of the Bodos in this novel. The Bodos use both burial and cremation methods to dispose of the dead body (Brahma, 1989, p. 10). Every Bodo village has a specific place to bury the dead body, which the Bodos call Gwthwisali. The practice of the Bodos' burial system is portrayed in the present novel with the burial of Jiu's dead body. After being given a poison of Daosri Burwi by Ramonda, Birgwsri's husband Jiu became mad. Monbaru, the father of Birgwsri, brought Hongla Oja from Narabari village to cure him, but he could not cure him. After seven days, Jiu died in the evening. The news of Jiu's death brought the villagers rushing to the house. Birgwsri broke into a wail, thumping her bosom. After seeing Birgwsri's condition, the village headman, Gobda, said to Monbaru- "We have to bury the dead body as soon as possible, Monbaru. Or else, Birgosri's condition will deteriorate further" (Narzary, 2012, p. 55). Through these words by the village headman, the practice of the burial method can be found. In contemporary Bodo society, it is seen that when someone dies in the village, the village people come to the deceased person's family and execute the ritual.

Salami:

Salami is one of the religious practices of the Bodos. The pre-Garja arrangement is called Salami (Brahma, 1989, p. 78). It is observed a day before the Garja Puja. The Oja and Douri (priest) play a significant role in performing the Salami. The Douri of the Garja Puja cuts a chicken and prays to Bathoubwrai. After that, he purifies every household in the village by sprinkling holy water kept ready in a pot called Lotha (lota). The villagers must stay pure and clean at night for Puja to be performed the following day. The novelist portrays the performing Salami in this novel. One day, when Birgwsri suddenly got a fever, her father Monbaru called Thebgang Oja, a village medicine man, for treatment. After performing the rituals in the name of the forest spirit, the Oja left in the morning. Before leaving, the Oja said before Monbaru as- "It's morning now. I've to go to Fakhriguri village to perform the Salami" (Narzary, 2012, p. 29). Through this sentence, the practice of Salami is depicted. Similarly, when Monbaru fetched Hongla Oja from Narabari village to cure Jiu, Hongla Oja mentioned the Salami ritual before Monbaru. He said- "I've to go to Fakhriguri village right now. Baren Mahajan's daughter-in-law is supposed to deliver a child today. They had asked me to perform Salami ritual in the morning" (Narzary, 2012, p. 54). Salami is still performed among the Bodos.

Garja Puja (Garja worship):

Garja Puja is a religious ceremony of the Bodos. They have a particular place to perform the Garja puja, called Garjasali. This place has plants and trees and must be serene and secluded. According to Dr. K. Brahma (1989), "the Bodos perform the Garja Puja to purify themselves and the village after any seasonal festival like 'Baisagu,' etc." (p. 75). They believe that some illicit relations develop during the festival seasons. Sometimes, people eat and indulge in certain activities that go against their social customs and traditions. So, the Garja Puja is performed to apologize for the people's sins. If some epidemic appears in a family or the village, the villagers perform the Garja Puja to protect themselves from the evils (Brahma, 1989). The novelist portrays the Garja worship in the 10th chapter of the select novel. The novelist describes in the novel that there are eighteen different Garja worships among the Bodo

people. These are- Lwkh Garja, Asu Garja, Gaon Garja, Songye Songye Garja, Songye Songye Fwrja, Sibsini Garja, Dibsin Garja, Maoriya Garja, Sem Semali Garja, Dosomali Garja, Samo Ramo Garja, Khalo Dano Garja, Nelo Dano Garja, Daoang Garja, Molan Garja, Thiya Garja, Gu Gu Garja, and Atharo Santhi Garja”(Narzary, 2009, p. 43). Batabari village saw an abominable increase in diseases that year. Altogether fifteen people lost their lives. Immediately, the villagers assembled a meeting where the decision to hold the Garja worship was taken. A working committee was also formed with Ramonda, the village headman- Gobda, the Halmaji- Thengna, the village school teacher- Thobra and many other village people. During Garja worship, the Oja and Douri (priest) play a significant role. The villagers of Batabari sat behind the Oja at the time of Garja worship. The Oja from Dwikhorguri village chants incantations to Gods and Goddesses for the protection and well-being of the devotees.

Kherai Puja (Kherai worship):

Kherai Puja is the greatest religious festival of the Bodos. They have been performing the Kherai festival since time immemorial. The Kherai Puja is performed for the welfare of both private and public life and the excellent harvest crops. Individually, they perform Kherai Puja for personal well-being. However, they perform Kherai Puja collectively once or twice a year for the welfare of the villagers (Brahma, 1989, p. 62). The specific place where the Kherai Puja is performed is called Kheraisali. The Kherai Puja gets projected in the novel through the performance of Kherai by Thuribari villagers. The villagers of Thuribari collectively perform the Kherai Puja for the villagers' welfare to free them from diseases and ailments. The role of Oja, Douri and Doudini (priestess) is significant during Kherai Puja. The Doudini performs the majority of the essential rituals during Kherai Puja with the assistance of the Oja and Douri. Besides the Oja, two beaters of Kham (wooden drum), two players of the Siphung (flute), and two players of Jotha (cymbal) are also required to assist the Doudini in performing the Kherai Puja. The novelist reflects the Kherai worship very beautifully, describing the chanting of charms and dancing of Doudini. The novelist describes in the novel that the Doudini performed different forms of the Kherai dance with the tune and beats of the drum, flute, and cymbals. In the present novel, the Oja is seen offering prayers and chanting incantations to the Bathoubwrai, other Gods and Goddesses during Kherai worship in favor of the devotees for their well-being. The performance of the Kherai festival is still observed among the Bodos.

Conclusion:-

The novel “Birgwsrini Thungri” of Bidyasagar Narzary is a historical novel based on the legendary Mech (Bodo) female warrior and martyr, Birgwsri. The novelist vividly and beautifully depicts various folklore elements of the Bodo community in this novel, such as charms, proverbs, folk crafts, food habits, folk medicine, folk beliefs, superstitions, divination, Bathou religion, marriage ritual, death ritual, Salami ritual, Kherai worship, Garja worship, customary law and judicial system. Although the main issue of the novel is not to draw attention to the folklore materials of the Bodos, the novelist has not forgotten to describe the aspects of folklore elegantly while developing the story. These folkloric components are still prevalent in contemporary Bodo society. The novelist also highlights the celebration of the Losar festival of the Buddhist people of Bhutan, in which different competitions like singing, dancing, and drama-showing programs were organized. Finally, it is concluded that the usage of folklore materials in the novel has enriched its beauty.

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