



Present status of folklore in the hand of the working women living in contemporary urban society of Assam: a sample survey

Pallavi Bora Saikia, Department of Folklore Research, Gauhati University, Ushanagar, Tezpur-784001, Assam

Abstract: *It is remarkable that significant changes occurred in social economic and political status of women during the 19th century in India as well as in Assam. Over the last few decades there has been tremendous change in laws, attitudes and norms affecting women status, role and development in Assamese society as a result of which women have ventured beyond the traditional role of wife and mother and sought employment and career outside the home. Impact of education is responsible for bringing these vital differences in the position of women. This transformation has brought about self-reliance, confidence and a sense of identity in the woman which in turn affect their traditional values and norms or folklore. Thus, to find out present status of folklore in urban society a sample survey has been made in urban setting like Tezpur. The article throws light on the status, way of change and transmission and formation of new folklore in the new working habitat.*

Keywords: *folklore, norm, self-reliance, status, traditional values*

Introduction

Folklore is the asset of a community. It is the mirror of a society. To know a community and their society we have to know their folklore like folk literature, social folk custom, material culture and performing folk art. Assamese society is also not exceptional, folklore is their identity; under folk literature comes myth, legend, folktale along with folk poetry, proverb, riddle etc.; social folk custom includes agricultural rites, behavior, institutions and festival. Material culture is the physical folklore like techniques, skill, recipe and formula; performing folk art is folk music, folk dance and folk drama. Though men and women both play vital role in maintenance of folklore, women are primarily expected to maintain folklore in patriarchal society of Assam. Their roles in relation to cultural heritage are of particular significance and encompass

what may be described as fundamental realm of culture which is often indispensable in transmitting folklore. Traditionally women are considered as the principal transmitters of values and therefore their conduct, following their cultural and religious guidelines, must be irreproachable. But the changing world has brought many new interests into a woman's life now a day and altered the pattern of her traditional life too. Pundit Nehru remarked "*today because of the national need, the changing pattern of society and desire to contribute towards the general goods and their own satisfaction and economic relief, women are emerging in various fields of services*".

As time drags most Assamese women feel that they are more than just housewives. Impact of education is responsible for bringing these differences in the position of woman. But as a result



of this a working Assamese woman is faced with dual responsibility, one of the homemaker and other of career woman. Being overloaded with heavy workload is it possible to equally maintain this dual responsibility? May be not. Sometimes it is difficult to be a "good mother and a wife". Reasons for it are of three viz., environmental, social and psychological. These problems emerge due to the tainted situations at home and workplace. In turn these are due to two factors, one is the inner conflict due to dual commitment and the other is the practical difficulty of maintaining the dual commitment.

Objectives

The objectives of the study are to know:

- Whether a job is really becoming obstacle in maintenance of folk tradition.
- What are the forms of folklore which are still present amongst the Assamese working women.
- What sort of changes have come about in folklore in town area.

Materials and methods:

The sample consists of 100 Assamese working women with salaried job only. Primary data have been collected through semi structured interview method from informants of 6 occupational groups. The questions to be asked have been set first. Except the scheduled questions, questions that came to my mind during the conversation have also been asked to the informants giving them full freedom to answer. Secondary data have been collected from books and web. Information collected have been systematized and ordered according to the topic and sub topic and then

tabulated according to Occupational status and Age wise distribution of knowledge of folklore using Microsoft word and excel. After this systematization it becomes easy to give a logical expression of interpretation.

Results and discussion:

After the survey it is found that the urban women are becoming more job oriented whether salaried or non-salaried; reasons are-

- absence of principal earner,
- inadequate income of the principal earner due to gradual price hike,
- increasing standard of living,
- a woman's desire for economic independence,
- the question of woman right, status and empowerment

But society expects a woman to fulfill duties connected to her various social roles and when she cannot, she becomes socially isolated and depressed. A day off for a working woman would usually mean either staying at home to relax or to spend quality time with family. After the days toil she cannot make her mind for social get together, performance of folklore and not even the household works. Use of heavy traditional ornaments and cloths is also limited amongst the working women due to safety and comfort issue. Urban women engaged in industrial job are more used to English language instead of their mother tongue. In some festivals like Bihu urban working women are often seen in traditional food stalls to buy the traditional food items instead of making at home.¹ Reasons are sometimes lack of time and sometimes continuous



detachment from the art of making traditional foods. A traditional weaving tool called *taat sal* and traditional grinding tool called *dheki* are hardly seen in urban houses. Traditional gender role has also been radically changed. When the husband is not working the wife has to go out for work. In that case the husband performed the entire household core if they share a nuclear family. Earlier it was thought that education system does not offer the knowledge suitable for carrying out the responsibilities of a mother. It was believed that the level of education of women should be lower than that of their husbands. It was also thought that educated daughters-in-law are less willing to adopt the rules, values and discipline of the in-laws. But today it has been found that these views have changed; the tradition of early marriage of girls has become restricted; being concern of dignity girls now a day want to get marry late after completion of education or after getting a job.

In spite of all these bias the survey also showed that Assamese women consciously or unconsciously have been performing folklore although there was glimpse of change and modernity. One cannot deny the presence of stories, jokes, proverbs, slang and other forms of folk literature in work place. A very definite trend seen amongst the writers today is to search for the genuine tongue or the language of the people. Various folk beliefs whether in conversation, behavior or food habits are still centered round working women though women belonging to various age groups profess diverse traditional faith. Contemporary society is more inclined towards science and technology. For them, folk beliefs mean traditional taboo and superstition.

Similarly the social folk customs are celebrated in diverse faith and beliefs of the inhabitants of urban area. Institution like marriage has been shifted to marriage hall as a result of which elaborate performances of marriage customs have been minimized along with the singing of folk songs associated with it but have not wipe out totally. The practice of pan Indian ceremonies is comparatively more amongst these people. Religious aspect of social folk customs is quite flexible and there is no rigid caste hierarchy. According to some working women elaborate performance of social folk customs is nothing but wastage of time and money. For these busy working women to supplement one's income is more a growing necessity with growing expectancy of life. So they prefer to minimize the performance of the customs and not to get lost. In many upcoming organization traditional way of hospitality, another kind of social folk customs has been replaced by foreign culture. Art of Material culture has also been forgotten due to continuous detachment from the age old practices, impact of technology and the unavailability of raw materials. In Assam and whole North-Eastern India, the rising costs of raw material, decline of indigenous crafts, price structures, diversification of crops etc. have adversely affected both women workers and women entrepreneurs (*Lokayan Bulletin* July- October 1995). In spite of this some women have been trying to hold these artistic skills in cloths and ornaments using traditional design, motif and pattern on it as a fusion of both tradition and modernity. It becomes their source of money too.

Assam has a flourishing textile industry due to the rearing of eri paat muga



silkworm. Classic mekhela chador made of silk is enchanting and ever elegant. The quintessential grace of Assamese traditional attire is accentuated by their rich weaves in subtle shades, pattern and motifs. The grace of Assamese traditional dress is unsurpassable. Fabrics are very decisive factor to determine the elegance of these silk ethnic wear and its usage is growing today as different stylish ethnic fashion apparel. Paat muga is the immaculate choice of contemporary designers for stylish comfortable ethnic wears. Like ornaments, fusion of tradition and modernity has also been seen in women wears when salwar kurta and other women wears are made of paat muga materials with traditional design in them.

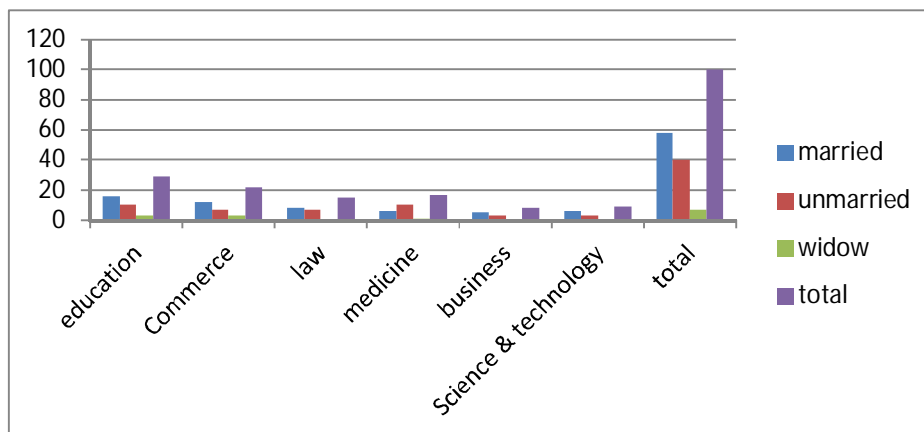
Craft fair now a day display the items of material culture. It is a mass art event drawing on groups and regions that lie outside the metropolitan elite circles over

Table 1: Occupational status of the sample:

Occupational field	married	unmarried	widow	total	percentage
education	16	10	03	29	29
Commerce	12	07	03	22	22
law	08	07	nil	15	15
medicine	06	10	01	17	17
business	05	03	nil	08	08
Science & technology	06	03	nil	09	09
total	58	40	07	100	100

the years, become an integral part of the 'national public life'. A number of craft fares have been organized in Tezpur every year to which women workers of Assam contribute a lot. Of late, interest has also been evinced by female health managers, planners, opinion-makers, social and medical scientists in the system of folk medicine practiced among the Assamese people.

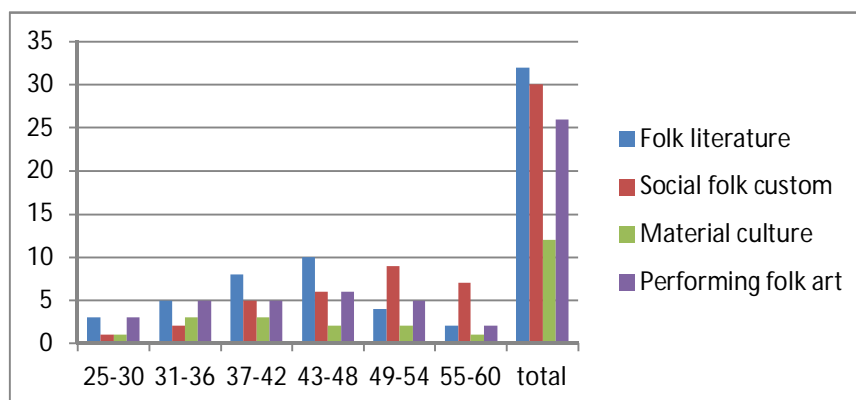
Last but not the least, regarding folk performing folk art, women of 21 century think that while the aim of preservation is to retain the original form, for the sake of wider dissemination, transformation is sometimes necessary, the age old art forms should retain their *pure forms*. Folk music and dance are performed by woman artists as professional and non-professional. It has been observed that while performing the folk art they used the art forms as a tool to inculcate self identity. Individual identity is given today more emphasis than group identity. Folklore is just used as a device for it.



The chart indicates that present occupational status of Assamese woman is quite satisfactory in different fields being Education in its peak.

Table 2: Age wise distribution of knowledge of folklore in the sample:

Age group (yr)	Folk literature	Social folk custom	Material culture	Performing folk art
25-30	3	1	1	3
31-36	5	2	3	5
37-42	8	5	3	5
43-48	10	6	2	6
49-54	4	9	2	5
55-60	2	7	1	2
total	32	30	12	26



The chart indicates that use of Folk literature is maximum followed by the other three. Its highest performance lies in the age group 43-48 years. Practice of



Material culture which is highest in 31-42 year age group is least in the sample.

Conclusion:

At the end we can state that women play significant role in maintaining folklore. In international arena UNESCO, as the only organization within the United Nations System with a mandate covering culture is in a unique position to strengthen its actions to promote the role of women in relation to folklore. In recent years, there has been an increasing recognition of the need to address this role. The UNESCO suggest the need to understand and promote culture as integral to human development on all levels, emphasizing the significance of folklore in maintaining cultural identity, diversity and creativity. This approach was reinforced by the 'Global assessment of the 1989 Recommendations on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore; Local Empowerment and International Cooperation' (Washington 1999).²

In maintaining and passing on folklore to future generations, women often integrate new forms and techniques, thereby recreating and transforming folklore. It has been found that in some work places, going for picnic in winter with colleagues and friends has become a new tradition. In other word we can say that it is an urge to restore the age old tradition of social get together in contact with nature. Regarding the continuity of folklore Alan Dundes even argued "technology isn't stamping out folklore; rather is becoming a vital factor in the transmission of folklore and it is providing an exciting source of inspiration for the generation of new folklore". He also said, "industrialization has created new folklore, for example the

folklore of computers" (1980:7).³ He pointed out that since folk communities do not necessarily need to know each other IRL, computer actually begets new kinds of folk groups.⁴

Internet folklore now a day is well suited to characterize tradition as a means of social self-realization wherein traditions are viewed as a chain of phenomena, a constant process created by the person and whereby the person influences his life. Therein the task of the observer and tradition-determinator is not the finding and naming of single objects, rites and beliefs but following their progression. In the case of internet folklore, it has been observed that the need to make oneself seen and heard, to add one's voice to the general flood of information, to share personal experiences with other and to establish oneself were comparatively more amongst women. It helps the flow of information and heritage between groups. Internet folklore invokes in these women the need to be socially active and gives a chance to explore and transmit folklore.

Thus in contemporary Assamese society folklore does not completely wiped out rather folklore is practiced and transmitted in changed and new form by the new working habitat. Global assessment of the 1989 Recommendations on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore; Local Empowerment and International Cooperation was held in Washington, D.C., to consider protection of the intangible cultural heritage at the end of 20th century and to revisit the Recommendations on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore ten years after its adoption in 1989. Alan Dundes was an American folklorist and regarded as the father of modern folklore.



He anticipated folklore of and about the computer and its transition into cyberspace. Internet slang IRL stands for In Real Life.

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