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THE ROLE OF ORAL TRADITIONS AND FOLKLORE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF BODO LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE: A CULTURAL AND LITERARY PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The oral practices through which communities transmitted songs, narratives, rituals, knowledge and collective memory cannot be separated from the history of Bodo literature. Before the onset of print culture, oral performances enabled verbal expression while linking generations through shared performances of creation, belonging, work and religious life. The current paper takes a look at the significance of folktales, songs, myths, proverbs, riddles and ritual performances in the development of Bodo language and literature. The article references Bodo-specific historical and ethnographic studies published before 2015 and on foundational scholarship in folklore and orality. It argues that oral traditions supplied narrative patterns, expressive vocabulary, symbolic images and cultural themes that subsequently informed written literary activity. Also introduced is the shift from performance to print, collectors and missionaries, and the problems of translation, preservation, and changing contexts of transmission. The oral heritage is not something static that existed before literature; it is an ongoing resource for imaginative and interpretative use.

Keywords:Bodo language; oral tradition; folklore; folk songs; storytelling; cultural memory; literary history.

1. Introduction

Bodo is a widely spoken language in Assam. In the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) area, it is an official language of the state of Assam. Linguistically speaking, Bodo refers to a member of the Tibeto Burman family. Bodo-speaking communities reside in parts of Meghalaya, especially the Garo Hills and Tikrikilla, northern West Bengal, and bordering areas of Assam with Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland. Bodo speakers in the neighbouring country of Nepal, especially in the Jhapa and Morang districts, also live in the Mymensingh region of Bangladesh. Consequently, Bodo is mainly spoken in Assam and its adjoining region along with its neighbouring communities.The history of literature is often told through printers, periodicals and institutions. An account like this is incomplete unless it takes cognizance of a long history of oral expression. Before a wider readership existed, knowledge was carried by ways in which stories were told within families, songs performed during festivals, and so on. Endle's early account of Kachari social and religious life highlights the significance of communal rites and social customs, while subsequent studies delve deeper into their cultural significance (Endle; Kameswar Brahma, A Study of Socio-Religious Beliefs).Oral tradition is no less sophisticated than writing, not a flaw. The forms of drama rely on repetition, performance, memory and interaction between speaker and audience. The Lord demonstrates that traditional singers may compose through inherited, formulaic patterns, rather than mechanically reproducing fixed texts. Ong explains that oral expression has distinctive ways of organizing knowledge and transmitting knowledge (Lord; Ong). These suggestions provide helpful parallels for Bodo verbal traditions but they cannot replace analysis of Bodo-language performances. The oral traditions played a significant role in sustaining the language, shaping the literary imagination and continued to shape the writing even after the print began.

2. Objectives and Methodology

The aim is to study the major types of Bodo oral expression, their linguistic, aesthetic and cultural functions and the relationship between oral transmission and the formation of modern writing. Finally, it will look at the issues raised by documentation and archiving. The paper employing a historical and interpretative method combines Bodo-specific ethnographic and literary sources with comparative theories of oral literature. This does not mean that the Bodo-speaking communities employ the same motif or genre. There is a need for attention to differences in locality. As many historical collections exist mainly in catalogue or later references, we will refrain from giving exact page numbers or verbatim lines where editions weren't directly consulted.

3. Folktales and Narrative Memory

Folktales talk about social conduct, cleverness, danger, kinship, and relationships between human beings and their surroundings. They may amuse the audience while allowing them to examine acceptable behaviour and the impact of certain choices. Bascom proposes that folklore may serve the function of education, validation of culture, and social regulation. However, these are merely analytical possibilities, not rules that apply to every story (Bascom). This is beneficial for Bodo narrative traditions to explain how storytelling can have a meaning outside schooling.

Tellers bring their own interpretation to events. The performer may alter dialogue, length and emphasis for a particular audience, with listeners interjecting through questions or cues. Verbal art refers not simply to the words produced, but their situational performance (Bauman). It is important for folktales that have been collected often and printed by outsiders. The written version may offer a plot but it loses voice, timing, gestures, and more importantly the audience's participation. For this reason, Endle and other early-colonial period accounts are useful historical records. But one must also read them critically. For their description was produced in unequal colonial relationships (Endle).

The narrative patterns of folktales offer subsequent authors materials to build plots and characters. Various old themes like repeated journeys, tests, transformations, animal speech and dilemmas can be modified in new writing, copy not the other. Dundes's structural approach invites attention to recurrent sequences, but the meanings of those sequences must still be interpreted in their local cultural context (Dundes). Oral storytelling can contribute both a stock of themes and a flexible method of storytelling invention.

4. Folk Songs, Festivals and Poetic Language

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5. Myth, Ritual and Cultural Worldviews

Beliefs and religious stories offer insights regarding, among others, the beginnings of things, sacred relationships, moral obligations and humankind's place in a wider cosmos. They are not just fantasy tales needing rectification by history. Eliade argues that myth has an active social and religious meaning for the community that transmits it (Eliade). In Bodo contexts, descriptions of Bathou-associated beliefs and ceremonies show how verbal expressions may be linked with ritual acts, offerings and collective participation (Kameswar Brahma, A Study of Socio-Religious Beliefs; Liladhar Brahma). The language used in rituals frequently retains proper nouns, phrases, and titles. Even if colloquial speech varies, they may continue. Through religious reform, schooling, and migration, a ritual's purpose may be re-interpreted. Kameswar Brahma's studies of social customs and cultural heritage provide historical evidence of practices that cannot be interpreted by a single and immutable tradition (Kameswar Brahma, Aspects of Social Customs; A Study in Cultural Heritages). The link between myth and literary writing tends to be productive rather than automatic. A recent author may retell a sacred story to talk about belonging, responsibility or cultural change. This kind of writing maintains recognised symbols and asks readers to rethink them. The shift from public practice to printed writing thus features continuity and change.

6. Proverbs, Riddles and Everyday Linguistic Knowledge

Proverbs and riddles are forms of short verbal art. They can distill practical observation, social criticism and humour into pithy phrases. The importance of proverbs is partially dependent on context. A proverb can advise, warn or even challenge, depending on who's speaking and the situation. The social meanings of proverbs with Mieder and the importance of form and repetition in folkloric expression with Dundes (Mieder; Dundes).

For the development of language, these forms preserve idiomatic turns of phrase, figurative associations and concise patterns. Linguistic competence comprises more than grammatical competence, they reveal. A speaker should be aware of the appropriateness of expressions as well as their likely interpretation by listeners. Hymes's account of communicative competence is relevant here because it directs attention to socially situated language use, according to Hymes.

When documenting proverbs and riddles, it is important to remember their use in teaching and lexicography, as well as to acknowledge that other forms of documentation will not fully capture their force, especially not dictionaries. To preserve the pragmatic dimensions of speech, it is essential to have recordings and explanations as well as information on the performers. These materials can contribute to the contemporary value of language through literary criticism.

7. From Oral Performance to Written Literature

The rise of print brought forth new institutions, new readerships, and new expectations of textual stability. Early attempts to describe the Bodo language were made through missionary scholarship, most notably the grammatical work of Endle in 1884, followed by an ethnographic description (Endle, Outline Grammar; The Kacharis). The language was placed in print through these resources, but these author's perspectives and classifications demand historical interrogation. The journal Bibar which belongs to the 1920s was an important stage in the development of modern Bodo literary activity. The organized literary development became a major feature after the establishment of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha in 1952. However, the historical distinction between oral and written stages should not have meant that oral creativity ended with the advent of magazines. Traditional songs, narrative images and collective memory could be the basis for printed writing, though this can lead to the formation of different genres and audiences. Goody talks about how writing changes the practices of organisation and reflection while Ong examines the difference between the oral and literate modes (Goody; Ong). When applied carefully, these theories shed light on the way printing can change the circulation and power of stories. A written-down folktale may be read in faraway places and classrooms.However, the fixed text may belie variation among storytellers. A responsible literary history has to take account of both gains and losses.

8. Language, Identity and Cultural Continuity

Oral heritage assists the language by providing opportunities for meaningful inter-generational usage. Family storytelling and singing together can expose children to useful vocabulary, metaphor, narrative sequencing and culturally valued forms of address. Fishman emphasizes the significance of the transmission of languages between generations, particularly in spheres where a language is still symptomatic along the life of a language (Fishman). The power and institutions also shape language identity. New uses of Bodo can be achieved through recognition, education and publishing. But they might not displace the intimate settings of Bodo language learning and performance. The verbal tradition has a long history of operating in diverse social domains. This is evident from Kameswar Brahma's accounts of cultural practices and Narzi's song collection (Kameswar Brahma, A Study in Cultural Heritages; Narzi). Folklore is not a romanticised perfect, unified archive of community identity. Societies have distinctions in gender array, generation array, region array and religious practice array. What one performer considers authoritative another may see differenly. By being attentive to these differences, we make relatedness a more inclusive practice and avoid assuming that one collected version is the definitive expression of Bodo culture.

9. Preservation, Translation and Contemporary Relevance

It is not sufficient to publish transcripts of oral traditions to preserve them. The relationship between words and the social occasions in which they are uttered can be documented if recordings of performances, notes on the context, accurate identification of speakers and their consent to the circulation of the recordings are maintained. Finnegan's comparative work and Bauman's performance-centred analysis both suggest that recordings and ethnographic description should invariably accompany written texts when possible. Translating the text creates a greater chance for a wider readership, and although not without issues, appears to be beneficial. When you translate word for word, the text may look similar but the meaning will be different. Bilingual sections with annotations can promote understanding of the local without exoticising it.Schools, colleges, literary organisations and community archives can partner with performers and language experts. Documentaries are good not to treat narrators and singers as knowable sources. While

preserving information digitally makes it easier to access, there should be guidelines to best and long-term stewardship.

10. Conclusion

The expressive vocabulary, cultural memory, narrative patterns and collective practices of Bodo Language and Literature have been preserved through oral traditions. Riddles preserve forms of everyday verbal intelligence; songs connect together language and music; folktales are useful adaptable narrative resource; and, myths and rituals sustain construction of symbolic frameworks. The evolution of written texts changed the circulation of these materials without halting their creativeness. A cultural and literary history of Bodo must therefore look at the combination of oral performance and print. Although early records are useful, they should be treated with much caution, and greater attention needs to be paid to local variants. The ongoing collaboration between the performers, the scholars, the teachers, and the institutions can help sustain oral knowledge and enable new literary interpretation. The future of Bodo literature is not only determined by books but also the living conversations, songs and stories through which the language is used.

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