

## The Incorporation of Folk Dramatic Elements in Modern Assamese Plays with Special Reference to Arun Sharma's *Buranjipath*

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### ABSTRACT:

Folk traditions and Folk drama constitute the essence of our cultural identity, and it provides the foundation for the evolution of modern drama. However, overtime the significance of the traditional forms diminished. In response to this decline, a dedicated group of Sanskrit enthusiasts have endeavored to revitalize and present this rich folk art to the audiences in a new light. Renowned for skilfully incorporating elements of folk drama into his work, such as his celebrated play, *Buranjipath*, Arun Sharma stands out as a remarkable playwright in Assamese dramatic literature. Through this play, Sharma artfully intertwines traditional storytelling techniques with contemporary themes, enriching the cultural tapestry of Assam with his creative vision.

**KEYWORDS:** Folk Drama, Folk Art, Modern Assamese Drama, Culture, Indigenous Identity.

### Introduction

Drama is considered to be the preeminent form of art within the spectrum of sixty-four artistic expressions. Similar to other branches of literature, drama serves as a mirror reflecting human life, and the complexities of human relationships, emotions and experiences are portrayed through dialogue, action, and performance. This connection with human emotions is what distinguishes drama and makes it a powerful medium for storytelling and expression.

This research paper attempts to explore the “**The Incorporation of Folk Dramatic Elements in Modern Assamese Plays with Special Reference to Arun Sharma's *Buranjipath***” through an in-depth analysis of Arun Sharma's play *Buranjipath*. The aim is to explore the utilization of the traditional folk-art form known as Ojapali within the context of this play, and how *Buranjipath* incorporates and adapts the elements of Ojapali in the narrative.

Arun Sharma is distinguished dramatist in Assam. He is recognized for introducing the Absurd Dramatic form into Assamese drama. His notable works include *Sri Nibaran Bhattacharya* (1961), *Parshuraam* (1961), *Aahar* (1968), *Purush* (1964), *Kukurnesiya Manuh* (1965), *Chinyor*(1972), *Agnigarh*(1996) etc.

Beyond his contribution to Assamese play, Arun Sharma has also made significant contributions to various other literary forms. In his 1974 play *Buranjipath*, he draws upon the rich tradition of Assamese folk plays, specifically the Ojapali form. The incorporation of this folk drama technique enhances the artistic appeal of his work.

### Purpose of study

The main purpose of this paper is to explore the incorporation of the folk dramatic structure into the modern Assamese drama, and to explore that it has found resonance in modern creative expressions, even though the ancient dramatic forms are seemingly lost. The focus is specifically on the text

**Buranjipath** by Arun Sharma and how it has embraced and utilized the structures of traditional folk drama.

### 1.02: Scope of study

Our discussion focuses on the folk art of Assam, with a particular emphasis on Arun Sharma's **Buranjipath** as a key reference point. It aims to explore how Assamese playwrights have introduced a new trend in Assamese dramatic literature during the mid-20th century by integrating techniques from Assamese folk drama.

### 1.03: Methodology

Analytical method and descriptive method have been used while preparing the research paper. Primary sources like the texts and the secondary sources like research papers and articles have been used for the study.

## Folk Dramatic or Folk Theatrical Art

"Folk-drama" encompasses theatrical performances rooted in the daily lives and traditions of ordinary people, often reflecting their customs and experiences. The term "folk" denotes the common populace or indigenous inhabitants of a particular area, while "drama" refers to the art of performance. Thus, folk-drama embodies theatrical expressions created specifically for and by the common folk, showcasing their way of life. "*Folk mane jonosadharan aru drama mane natok orthat jibur natok lokojibonor babe rosito ji natokor jogedi lokojibonor xarthok protifolon xombhob hoi uthe heye lokonatok*" (Nath 41). It represents a refined iteration of earlier forms of play, evolving from the cultural fabric of communities worldwide. Across the globe, folk festivals serve as fertile ground for the emergence and celebration of folk-drama, nurturing this rich artistic tradition.

Folk drama emerges from the fusion of acting, music, and dance, as highlighted by Jagadish Chandra Mathur and supported by scholars in the field. This artistic form embodies a harmonious blend of theatrical performance, rhythmic melodies, and expressive movements, reflecting the rich cultural heritage and traditions of a community or region.

### 2.01: General idea of Indian Folk Drama

The evidence of ancient dramatic forms can be found in various texts like the Vedic literature, *The Ramayana*, *The Mahabharata*, Panini's *Astadhyayi*, Patanjali's *Mahabhashya*, along with the literary works from the Buddhist tradition. Indian folk art, particularly drama, reflects a diverse, vibrant, and delightful culture. Across India, one can witness a plethora of beautiful dramatic traditions, each unique to its region. From the graceful movements of Kathak to the lively performances of 'yashgan' and 'yatrabinay', these are integral components contributing to the colourful tapestry of India's performing arts heritage.

### 2.02: General idea of Assamese Folk Drama

Assam stands as the rich repository of diverse folk arts, representing a rich cultural tapestry. Throughout the region, the folk performing arts play an integral role in preserving and celebrating local traditions. Time-honored folk-art forms such as **Ojapali**, **Puppet Dance**, **Kushan Gaan**, **Dhuliya Bhowna**, **Khuliya Bhowna**, and **Bharigaan** have long served as cherished sources of entertainment for communities across generations. Some of the folk dramatic festivals that exemplify the richness of Assam's cultural heritage, have been discussed below-

**Puppet dance** or "**Putola Nach**" has been cherished since the 10th to 11<sup>th</sup> century AD, as documented in the ancient text *Kalika Puran*. Typically, a puppet dance troupe consists of approximately five to six participants. These include a 'bayon' (lead dancer), a 'daina-pali' (supporting dancer), two 'pali' (additional dancers), and one 'sutradhar' (narrator or puppeteer) who orchestrates the puppet's movements, bringing them to life by dance and storytelling.

**Kushan Gaan** is a traditional religious performance that originates from the Goalpara district of Assam. It features a blend of music, dance, dialogue, and acting, all of which play significant roles in

the event. While the exact origins of Kushan Gaan are not documented, it is widely believed to have been a part of the local cultural heritage for many centuries.

**Bhari gan**, similar to Kushan gan, is a form of folk drama that originated in the southern regions of Goalpara. It serves as a companion piece to Kushan gan, offering audiences a unique cultural experience. This traditional dramatic event has garnered popularity in its own right, particularly among communities in the southern parts of Goalpara.

**Ojapali**, a semi-dramatic performative art form of Assam, has enjoyed enduring popularity among the people of the region since ancient times. Emerging from the esteemed 'Indian Margi Sangeet' tradition, Ojapali predates even the renowned Ankiya Naat. Its essence lies in a harmonious blend of music and dance, captivating audiences through vibrant performances. As one of the most beloved forms of folk dramatic festivals, Ojapali reflects Assam's rich cultural heritage, showcasing the abundance of folk arts that have flourished throughout history. As an integral component of Assamese culture, Ojapali continues to uphold pride within the community, preserving the enduring legacy of folk arts in the region.

### The use of folk drama in Modern Assamese plays:

The utilization of folk drama in Assamese plays has a rich history stemming from the influence of Shankardev, the pioneering figure in Assamese drama. Over time, Assamese drama has evolved through various phases, encountering numerous challenges. Following Shankardev's era, modern plays began to emerge, influenced by Western styles. However, a significant shift occurred during the mid-20th century when Assamese playwrights introduced a new trend: incorporating folk dramatic techniques into their works. This marked a pivotal moment in the history of Assamese drama. For centuries, Assam has been rich in traditional performing arts such as Ojapali, puppet dance, and Dhulia Bhowna, which have not only entertained but also served as vessels for cultural expression. The incorporation of these techniques into Assamese drama marked a significant departure from previous practices and contributed to its vibrant and diverse theatrical landscape. The style and methods, imbued with the scent of the national soil that resonates with the national identity have already captivated the attention of playwrights across India. Much like their counterparts, the Assamese playwrights are increasingly drawn to employing indigenous styles and techniques that resonate with the essence of our nation. "Dekhor matir gundho thoka saili, angik, adiye itimodhye bharotiyo natyokar porisalok hokolor Drishti akorshon korat asamiya natyakar hokoleu ane angikor proto mononobekh kora dekha jaay" (Nath 72). Inspired by the allure of folk cultural festivals, playwrights have dedicated themselves to crafting and presenting contemporary plays infused with the rich techniques of performing arts like ojapali, dhulia bhowna, khuliya bhowna, and bharigaan. This creative fusion has resulted in the growing popularity of Assamese dramatic styles and techniques, paving the way for noteworthy productions such as Jugal Das' *Bayonor Khol* (1982), Satish Bhattacharya's *Maharaja* (1983), and Akhil Chakrabarty's *Ejon Roja Asil* (1985), which have successfully garnered the attention of the people. Other modern plays, including Munin Bhunya's *Jorourouwa Proja* (in the format of Husorigeet), Ram Goswami's *Madol* (in the form of Jhumur and other folk music), Anukul Sharma and Karuna Deka's *Luit Koina* (in the form of Ojapali), Karuna Deka's *Xuna Xuna Xobha Xodo* (in the form of Thiyo Naam), and Paramananda Rajbongshi's *Tejimola* (in the form of Kushan Gaan) have also utilized folk drama and art techniques in their composition. These plays mark a significant shift towards an indigenous identity in Assamese theatrical landscape in the 1980s, which have already commenced in the Indian dramatic scene during the 1960s.

### The incorporation of traditional folk dramatic methods in Arun Sharma's play *Buronjipath*:

In his play *Buronjipath*, Arun Sharma skilfully incorporates the traditional folk drama techniques of Ojapali. The narrative explores the repercussions of abusing power and exploiting the common populace. It illustrates a timeless truth that tyrants cannot maintain their rule indefinitely without facing repercussions, as evidenced throughout history. In the story, the character Priyorani symbolizes



unchecked power and exploitation. Continual mistreatment of the people leads to widespread dissatisfaction and eventual revolt. Ultimately, Priyorani and her associates meet their downfall at the hands of the people. This narrative serves as a powerful reminder of the inevitable consequences of oppression and injustice.

Throughout the entire narrative, the author employs the traditional Ojapali storytelling technique, through the character of Bairagi, who serves as the storyteller, to engage the audience. By utilizing Ojapali methods, the author adds depth and cultural richness to the play. This traditional method allows the audience to experience the story in a lively and engaging manner.

The story unfolds as “Bairagi” converses with her “two friends”, effectively mirroring the traditional roles of “Oja” and “Pali” in Ojapali performances. Through the interactions between Bairagi and her friends, the author propels the narrative forward, demonstrating the application of folk dramatic techniques in the play.

Right from the start, the name Bairagi evokes a sense of folk culture. In the first scene, the playwright directs the dialogue between Bairagi and her friends to be delivered in the rhythmic style of Ojapali. This choice demonstrates the author's incorporation of folk theatre techniques from the outset of the play.

Additionally, the characters reveal that the Choudhuri lineage has successfully reclaimed their village Kachanguri after gaining independence. This highlights the significance of heritage and lineage within the narrative, further immersing the audience in the rich cultural context of the story.

**“Bairagi:** *Xuna-xuna, moi Bairagi koisu*

*Xuna-tomalokexuna-*

*Mor jolongar khobor:*

*Bohut notun khobor:*

*Tar majere basi basi kou*

*Xuna xuna-mon di xuna- chit di xuna*

*Bhab di xuna-dhyaan di xuna-bandho xuna*

**Logoriya:** *Koa-koa-Bairagi*

*Kolehe xunim.*

*Dekhisa kiba*

*Anisa kiba*

*Notun khobor.*

*Kowa-kowa Bairagi-begaikowa”* (Sharma 259).

Every art form possesses a unique cadence and tempo that are integral to its expression. Similarly, folk arts resonate with their own distinct rhythm and rhyme, captivating audiences with their allure. “Protyek kolare logot jenekoi chondo onibarjyo bhabe xonjog hoi thake tenekoi lokonatyor logoto chondor xonmisron oporiharjo” (Goswami 15). This is exemplified in the enchanting play *Buranjipath*, which draws upon the rich traditions of folk drama. Composed using the rich techniques and traditions of folk drama., *Buranjipath* stands as a significant contribution to the genre. Within its narrative, Bairagi assumes the role of ‘Oja’ from Ojapali, seamlessly weaving together dramatic elements and themes for the audience's enlightenment. Through the exchanges between Bairagi and her companions, the playwright's deep-rooted connection to history and heritage becomes palpable. “Nat khonot Bairagi aru logoriyar kotopokothonor pora natyokaror oitijyo aru itihakh setonar abhakh powajaay” (Nath 48). Within the rhythmic framework of Ojapali or Ojagaan, the play seamlessly weaves together moments of joy and sorrow, capturing the essence of human emotion. In particular, the poignant depiction of Narahari Choudhury's demise captures the audience's hearts with its melancholic melody and rhythmic storytelling.

**“Bairagi:** *Narahari Maujadaror porolok prapti hol.*

*Ojasite ghotol dukhor ghotona*

*Ekuri bosor pisot mouja ghurai pai*





*Heidina ahi  
Mouja haulit humaisil mathun.  
Kanchanguri moujar rajor  
Mon horikhe bhora.  
... hridpindok khamusi dhorile teor ---*

**Duyo:** *Nalage nalage Bairagi, imanote hobo  
Bor dukhor, bor karun khobor heya*" (Sharma 282).

The author skilfully employs the techniques of Ojapali to vividly depict Bairagi sharing information about the misdeeds and true nature of Priyorani and her associates with her friends. This narrative device not only enhances the storytelling but also fosters a deeper connection between the audience and the play. By infusing Ojapali rhythms into Bairagi's dialogue, the author effectively heightens suspense and captivates the reader or viewer's attention, adding an extra layer of excitement to the narrative.

**"Bairagi:** *Notun khobor kiba nuxunu janu?*  
**Logoriya (1):** *Xunim xunim kiyonu nuxunim?*  
**Logoriya (2):** *Dahoban eri ahiso Bairagi Khobor xunim buli!*  
**Bairagi :** *Pase khoborbur dukhor, bejaror*" (Sharma 282).

Again,

**Duyo:** *Bor roxal khobor  
Mojar khobor  
Kowasun Bairagi koa.  
Bairagi:* *Xuna xuna xuna  
Nijei xuna nijei sowa,  
Nijei mojatu lowa*" (Sharma 284).

In one part of the play, the script mentions the traditional ritual called "Naam Prasanga." This ritual is significant as it reflects the folk culture ingrained in the community. The author illustrates this by highlighting the blessing ceremony at the conclusion of Naam Prasanga, showcasing the customs and traditions passed down through generations. In Scene V, the character Kulohori Choudhury is depicted fishing with a hook and line, showcasing the local and indigenous presence within the narrative. Additionally, the incorporation of folk music adds another layer of authenticity to the portrayal of the cultural milieu.

Across the ten scenes of the play, Ojapali is featured prominently through the character Bairagi in the first, second, third, and fourth scenes. Through Bairagi's portrayal, the playwright aims to establish a profound connection with the essence of folk life. By delving into the folklores and beliefs of Assamese culture through the medium of Ojapali, the play encapsulates the rich tapestry of traditions and values cherished by the community-

**"Bairagi:** *Mor dekhun bao souk tu nasise,  
Bao bukur mongho sopora thok thok koi lorise  
Kihor ba lokkhon!-*  
*Xoua xoua soasun  
Jonor pohorot  
Podulir nahor jopat  
Dekhun bahiror pora ahi  
Phesa ejoni porilhi.....*" (Sharma 278).

In Ojapali folk events, stories are usually narrated in a lively and theatrical manner, resembling a skit. This theatrical technique is also employed and appreciated in the play *Buranjipath*. Through the artful





portrayal of this storytelling tradition, the author showcases its timeless appeal and ensures its continued relevance in contemporary theatre.

“**Bairagi:** *Buronji eri nohoy khobor.*

*Buronjiye Goroka khobor*

*Buronjir borgosot olomi thoka khobor. Singi...*

*Jolonga bhorai-*

*Suna.” (Sharma 262)*

## Conclusion

Arun Sharma is one of the most esteemed playwrights of Assamese Literature. His 1931 play, *Buranjipath*, stands as a testament to his skilful incorporation of folk art. The folk performing art or folk art, an integral part of folk culture, encompasses various forms such as music, dance, and theatrical performance. Through the fusion of these elements, folk performative art emerges, captivating audiences with its rich tapestry of tradition and storytelling. Within the realm of folk performative arts, folk drama holds a special place, serving as an integral component of cultural heritage, and also inspiring art and literature since ancient times. Various dramatic and semi dramatic folk festivals such as Ojapali, Posoti, and Puppet dance, Khuliya Bhowriya, Dhuliya Bhowriya, Kushan gan, and Bhari gan have long captured the imagination of audiences, their influence stretching back even before the era of Shankardev, a revered figure in Assamese culture. The legacy of these folk dramatic forms, in shaping and enriching the cultural fabric of Assam, is undeniable.

Folk art embodies the essence of Assamese culture, showcasing its beauty and heritage. It's a source of pride that modern Assamese plays are incorporating the techniques and styles of folk art, thus cultivating a unique indigenous Assamese identity. This fusion allows us to present the captivating beauty of our culture to the world, showcasing its richness and diversity.

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