

## Folklore elements as reflected in the novel “HAINA MULI” of Manoranjan Lahary

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**ABSTRACT:** Folklore is as old as the mankind. Every society or community has its own distinctive folklore. Folklore consists of all aspects of social behavior like customs, traditions, rituals, food habits, dresses, folk beliefs, folk song, folktale, folk medicine, folk speech, singing, dancing, religion, worship etc. which has come down through the year. Manoranjan Lahary was one of the renowned writers in Bodo literature of Assam. He was a great novelist, poet, dramatist, editor, scholar, professor, critics, translator, and writer. He has contributed eight Novels to the Bodo literature. “Haina Muli” (1985) is the chronologically second Novel of Manoranjan Lahary. It is a social Novel written depending on the Bodo society of remote villages. Folklore and literature is very much related to each other. Literature depends on a society and society is essentially related to its traditions, rituals, customs and celebration as well as of course, folklore. Therefore the present paper is an attempt to analyze the reflection of folklore elements in his Novel “Haina Muli” (The love potion).

**KEYWORDS:** Folklore, Rituals, Customs, Folk beliefs, superstition, folk medicine.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Folklore is as old as the mankind. The word “folklore” is combination of two words –“folk” meaning people and “lore” meaning the knowledge. Hence the word folklore summarily means the knowledge or wisdom of people. The traditions, knowledge, customs, rituals, beliefs, dresses, foods, narratives, arts, crafts, and other traditional substances of a society which is transmitted through the generations is called folklore.

According to W. R. Bascom, “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, 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.”<sup>1</sup>

Every society or community has its own distinctive folklore. Folklore, much like a river, keeps flowing through the people from one generation to the next in the society. It covers almost our entire life experience. It consists of all aspects of social behavior like customs, traditions, rituals, food habits, folk beliefs, folk song, folk tale, folk medicine, folk speech, singing, dancing, religion, worship or other materials preserved in words or in writing. We cannot deny the presence of folklore in our everyday life. Like different societies or communities have their own folklore, the Bodos have also many folklore materials of their own which are transmitted through the generations by word of mouth from time immemorial. The traditions, social customs, rituals, food habits, folk songs, folk beliefs, folk medicine, folk speech, etc. of a community is called the folklore elements of that society.

Folklore and literature is very much related to each other. Literature is like a mirror of a tribe or community. The pictures of the traditions, social customs, rituals, society, culture, livelihood, etc. of a community are reflected through the literature. Therefore, literature depends on a society and society is essentially related to its traditions, rituals, customs, and celebrations as well as of course, folklore. Therefore the present paper is an attempt to analyze the reflection of folklore elements in the Novel “Haina Muli” (The love potion) of Manoranjan Lahary.

#### 1.1 Manoranjan Lahary (1936 – 2008):

Manoranjan Lahary was a prominent Novelist in the field of Bodo literature of Assam. He was born in 1936 at village Bamunkhura under Kokrajhar district of Assam, India. His father’s name was Late Basanta Kumar Lahary and mother’s name was Late Deubari Lahary. In the field of Bodo literature, Manoranjan Lahary

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<sup>1</sup> Bascom, W. R. (1981). *Contributions to Folkloristics*. Archana publications, Chanakya Puri, Meerut (India), p. 215

was popularly known as a Novelist, Poet, Dramatist, Editor, Scholar, Professor, Critics, Translator, and Writer. The worth of his literary contribution to the Bodo literature is incomparable. He has given lot of contributions by his literary work to the Bodo literature in different fields of literature like Novel, short story, poem, drama, prose, criticism etc.

Manoranjan Lahary has a significant identity in the field of Bodo Novel. He has written eight Novels in his life. These Novels are – (1) **Kharlung (1976)**, (2) **Haina Muli (1985)**, (3) **Dogri (1996)**, (4) **Rebeka (1999)**, (5) **Alaishri (2003)**, (6) **Dainee? (2005)**, (7) **Jom (2006)** and (8) **Phami (2008)**. The Novels of Manoranjan Lahary are generally reflected all the socio-economic, cultural, traditional, religious aspects, ethnicity and womanhood character of the Bodos. He received “**Bishnu Prasad Rabha**” award from Assam government in 2004 and “**Sahitya Academy**” award for his Bodo Novel “Dainee?” in 2009. The Novel “Haina Muli” (The love potion) is the chronologically second Novel of Manoranjan Lahary. It is a social Novel written depending on the Bodo society of remote villages where he has presented a picture of real life and manners as well as the real incidents of life.

## **II. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The main aims and objectives of the present study are:

1. To study and display the folklore elements as reflected in the Novel “Haina Muli”.
2. To analyze how the folklore elements have been used in the Novel “Haina Muli”.
3. To examine how the use of folklore elements have enriched the overall texture and beauty of the Novel.

## **III. DATA AND METHODOLOGY**

Descriptive and analytical methods of study have been adopted for this study. The adopted method for sample design is random sampling. For the purpose of present research paper, the data have been collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data have been collected from comprehensive perusal of an original copy of the Novel “Haina Muli” (2015, reprint). The secondary sources of data have been carried out through library works, referred journals, articles, books, etc. All kinds of existing written materials in the form of books, journals, criticism, and articles on the Novel “Haina Muli” have also been studied critically.

## **IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 About the Novel “Haina Muli”:**

“Haina Muli” (The love potion) is chronologically the second Novel of Manoranjan Lahary. It was first published in the year 1985. It is a social Novel based on the social life of the rural and superstitious Bodo society. In this Novel, Lahary has depicted the real pictures of the rural Bodo society where superstitions and beliefs in the spell of charms or magic are predominant. The traditional practice of using the love potion was prevalent in the context of the rural Bodo society. The plot of the present novel “Hana Muli” deals with the use of herbal medicine Haina muli which has the power to manipulate people’s emotions.

The story of the Novel “Haina Muli” begins with the introduction of the Gorgoram Mahajwn’s family. Gorgoram Mahajwn, who lived with his wife Deushree and only daughter Manasee, was the richest person in the village Dwikhorguri. Gorgoram Mahajwn had three servants namely Rago, Jwngbau and Thibau and a cowherd named Chensla; and three maid-servants namely Dabathi, Nani and Sheuwari. In the beginning of the Novel, the rich head of the family Gorgoram Mahajwn was living in peace and unity with his wife and their only daughter as well as servants and maid-servants who were employed by him to help him in agricultural works.

Rago, (good name is Rogen) the domestic helper or servant in the house of Gorgoram Mahajwn, plays an important role in the plot of the Novel. After the death of his father, he worked as a servant at the house of Gorgoram Mahajwn. Rago fell in love with his master’s beautiful daughter Manasee. But it was not easy on his part to convince or win over the heart of Manasee, therefore he approached Udli and pleaded her for a love-charm. The main aim of Rago was to have a right over the property of Gorgoram Mahajwn by marrying the beautiful Manasee.

One day Rago went to the village Khaowimari and brought the muhuni mantra (Haina muli) from the village medicine woman Udli. He mixed the love potion in a cup of tea and fed to Manasee with the help of the maid-servant Nani. The potion worked very quickly and Manasee started to reciprocate Rago’s feelings. Rago and Manasee consummated their love and Manasee got pregnant. This incident spread towards the members of the village. After knowing of this incident, the Gambiwrai (head man of the village) named Lalcharan called a meeting at Gorgoram Mahajwn’s house and justified their guilty. As a result of the judgment declared at the end of the meeting in the village council, Manasee and Rago had to pay a penalty of 500 rupees and 700 rupees respectively. Gorgoram Mahajwn’s family had to perform penance (udrainai) with Khoulbwbd bad (a kind of offence); however Rago was banished from the village Dwikhorguri.

One day Gorgoram Mahajwn called for a shaman named Thopsa so that his daughter might forget her love for Rago and then married her with another suitor named Baten with the help of match-maker Japsing, stipulating that Baten stay with their family as gwzriya (the groom who after marriage lives in his in-law's house).

After four days of the wedding, Baten learnt about his wife's pregnancy and her indiscretion with Rago. Angry at this, he started treating Manasee with contempt even to the extent of physically abusing her. Manasee suffered in depression and lost her mental stability. This depression cost Manasee her life, after she gave birth to two children. Listening to Gorgoram Mahajwn's advice, Baten married again to a lovely girl named Nalep. Ironically, Baten's second wife turned out to be the daughter of the witch Udli, whose love potion destroyed Manasee's life. Nalep also learned some knowledge of making medicine from her mother Udli. One day Nalep killed Manasee's son Rojen by poisoning him in the curry while taking dinner. Gorgoram Mahajwn's family was thus destroyed and the property of Gorgoram Mahajwn was destroyed by time.

Meanwhile, Rago also delved into depression as the Haina Muli created a negative impact upon his psyche. He had also been fed poison and killed by Gorgoram Mahajwn's maid-servant Nani. The brutal female character of the Novel Udli was recognized as a practicing witch in the surrounding society. She became the target of common people. The society declared her as a witch and separated from the village society. She lost her mental stability living in solitude and contempt and died alone.

The Novel "Haina Muli" presents the destructive power of the love potion that creeps into the social life like a malevolent virus. The superstitious beliefs of the Bodos, which have been being practiced in the Bodo society from time immemorial, are reflected in this Novel. Application of herbal medicine Haina muli was very prevalent during those days among the Bodos. The superstitions on Dayna and Dayni (male and female witch) were also a very common practice in the Bodo society. Even after getting the light of education, those beliefs and superstitious acts were not banished from the society. In the rural Bodo societies, such superstitious acts are known to happen once in a while even in this age of science and technology. Lahary has depicted the character of Rago as a person of brutal and avaricious character who applied the love potion under the guidance of Udli. Such an evil practice destroyed the fabric of the Bodo society during those days. Characters like Udli destroyed the family lives of many and spoiled the honest life of the Bodo people. The Novel depicted these real pictures of the Bodo society where Rago destroyed Gorgoram Mahajwn's family with the help of love potion. He not only destroyed the life of Manasee but also spoiled Gorgoram Mahajwn's entire family.

#### **4.2 Folklore Elements in the Novel "Haina Muli":**

Manoranjan Lahary's "Haina Muli" (The love potion) is a social Novel written depending on social life of the rural and superstitious Bodo society. In this Novel, Lahary has presented many traditions, customs, rituals folk beliefs, and superstitions, which were very prevalent in the traditional Bodo society of that period. Here, folklore elements as reflected in the Novel "Haina Muli" are discussed below:

##### **4.2.1 Oral literature or verbal art:**

###### **(a) Proverbs:**

The verbal art of the Bodos is rich in proverbs (bathra bhao). In this Novel, the use of proverb is reflected through the character of match-maker Japsing. During the time of talking with Gorgoram Mahajwn about the marriage of Manasee, Japsing used the proverb, "zerao thuri nuyw beohainw bathi garw". (Haina Muli, 2015, p.14). (English translation: Where there is thatch, a piece of stick is dropped). Among the Bodos, this proverb is used in marriage deal. It is still very prevalent in the Bodo society which is being used from time of immemorial.

Another proverb used in the Novel is "nangwobla haizeng gwrankhwo onsai phinlwli". (Haina Muli, 2015, p.93). (English translation: In times of necessity even a dry ginger is adored). It is also a kind of proverb used among the Bodos.

###### **(b) Charms:**

In this Novel, the use of charms or mantra is also seen. The Medicine man Thopsa tried to reverse the spell of the love potion on Manasee with his mantra which is reflected in the Novel as mentioned below:

"Phu- holdong moldong zaridong  
ang oza dong.  
Dohai amukhi mwdai zw, omukh mwdai  
Manaseeni beramkhwo gahwnangwo  
Omukhi hwnai mulikhwo phirai phinnangwo  
Angni khoroni thwi mwnlwngwn  
Phu—tin sot." (Haina Muli, 2015, p.84)

English rendering of the above charms or mantra is as follows:

'Haldang' 'Maldang' are the charms  
The charms I say  
I am the Kaviraj.  
You male deity, you female deity  
Cure the illness of Manasee;  
Revert the spell of the love potion on her  
You will have the blood of my head in return.  
And so mote it be.

#### **4.2.2 Material Culture:**

##### **(a) Folk Craft:**

The folk crafts have a deep significance to Bodo society in day-to-day life of the people. The Bodos have their traditional craft form or folk craft which have been prevailing from generations. They make their household, agricultural, handloom, fishing and hunting implements in their own form. Bamboo and wood play an important role in preparation of their folk craft. The picture of using some folk crafts is reflected in the Novel.

- (i) The Bodo people use gisib (a small hand fan made of bamboo) in summer session which is still very prevalent among the rural Bodo people. Its use is represented in the Novel by Deushree who was using gisib to fan herself when she was sleeping at night.
- (ii) The use of musical instrument siphung (flute) also reflected in the Novel through the character of Gorgoram Mahajwn's cowherd named Chensla. Among the Bodos, siphung is made of a particular bamboo, called owazlaw (a kind of bamboo).
- (iii) The Bodo people use many household materials which are made from bamboo and wood. In the Novel, the picture of using khamphlai (a small sitting tool made from wood which is used for seat), mora (a kind of small sitting tool made of bamboo), masi (chair), ruwa (axe), etc. are reflected.
- (iv) Like many other tribal people of North East India, the Bodo are also mainly dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. They use various kinds of tools for agricultural works which are mainly made from bamboo and wood like nangwl (plough), zungal (a kind of yoke), hasini (rake), laothi (a stick used while Plough), etc. So, in this Novel, Gorgoram Mahajwn's servants used laothi, khophri (a kind of umbrella like wicker hat made from leaves and bamboo), etc.

##### **(b) Food habit:**

The Bodos are very fond of zumai or zou (rice beer) and oma bedor (pork). Consuming of zumai is the common scenery in the Bodo society. It is used in various social functions as well as offered to the different gods and goddesses and also to guests. They welcome their guests offering a full cup of zumai and they become delighted if they can entertain their guests with zumai and oma bedor. In the Novel, this picture is reflected through Gorgoram Mahajwn's family. Gorgoram Mahajwn offered zumai and oma bedor to the medicine-man Thobsa and to the match-maker Japsing when they visited Gorgoram's house.

##### **(c) Folk costumes:**

The Bodo women use the clothes like dokhona, phasra, phali, etc. The bride wears a special type of Dokhona in marriage ceremony known as dokhona thaosi (a kind traditional dress for female). No girl wears dokhona thaosi before marriage in the Bodo society. When one is seen in this dress she is regarded as married. In the Novel, the use of dokhona thaosi in the Bodo marriage is reflected by Manasee. She wearied dokhona thaosi, blouse and Sadri at her marriage ceremony.

#### **4.2.3 Social Folk Custom:**

##### **(a) Marriage:**

Marriage is a social institution and is considered as second cycle of life. There are six kinds of marriage system among the Bodos. In this Novel, marriage custom is reflected through the marriage ceremony of Manasee and Baten as well as Baten and Nalep.

**(i) Gurziya Lakhinai Haba (marriage by service):** In the Bodo social system, there is a marriage known as gurziya lakhinai haba, it is solemnized at the bride's house. Basically families which do not have a son bring a male to their house and solemnize the marriage with their daughter. In this marriage, bridegroom enters in bride's house as son-in-law. In this Novel, such picture is also reflected through the family of Gorgoram Mahajwn. Baten entered Gorgoram Mahajwn's house and married to Manasee. Although this kind of marriage system is approved by society, it is found very rare in the present Bodo society.

**(ii) Pre-Marriage Preparation:** In this Novel, Lahary has also portrayed the picture of pre-marriage preparation of the Bodo society. Generally, pre-marriage is only performed in nainanwi laynay haba (arranged marriage). In the Novel, many groom parties visited Gorgoram Mahajwn's house to approach his daughter

Manasee for marriage. After the death of Manasee, Gorgoram's brother named Hadang also visited Udli's house to approach her daughter Nalep for marriage with Baten.

**(iii) Balonda haba zaphinnai (widower re-marriage):** In the Bodo society, a widower can re-marry with any girl who is not related to him. In the Novel, widower re-marriage is reflected by Baten, who married again to a lovely girl named Nalep after the death of his wife Manasee. Although this type of marriage is approved by the society, this system of marriage is very rare in the present Bodo society.

**(b) Death ritual:**

Death is considered as third cycle of life. The Bodos follow both the burial and cremation systems of the disposal of the death body. Every Bodo villages has a graveyard. In this Novel, the picture of death ritual is reflected through Manasee. When Manasee died, the village people carried her dead body into the graveyard and burned it by following the traditional cremation system of the Bodo society. All kinds of materials like cloths, dresses, cosmetic materials (oil, mirror, comb, sindur, etc.), dish, glass, bowl, etc. which were used by Manasee in her day to day life before death were also burned along with the dead body. A few coins were also given to the dead body. These systems of practicing are still exist in the rural Bodo society.

**(c) Folk Medicine:**

The pictures of practicing both natural or herbal folk medicines and magico-religious folk medicines in the Bodo society are depicted in the Novel.

**(i) Natural or herbal folk medicines:** In the Novel, the using of natural or herbal folk medicines is reflected through the character of Udli. The medicine woman Udli, she sought folk medicines from herbs, plants etc. from local jungles and treated various diseases like Jaundice, diarrhea, malaria, typhoid, etc. in her village as well as neighbor villages. Such kind of practicing is still prevalent in the rural Bodo society.

Another aspect of folk medicine found in the Novel is Haina Muli (the love potion). Basically this Novel has been written depending on Haina Muli. In the Novel, the herbal medicine Haina muli had spoiled the lives of all the family members of Gorgoram Mahajwn. Such picture is seen very rarely in the present Bodo society.

**(ii) Magico-religious folk medicines:** In the Novel, practicing of magico-religious folk medicines is reflected through the characters of Thopsa, the medicine man. When Manasee suffered in depression and went out of her wits, after being fed Haina Muli by Rago, Thobsa tried to remove Manasee's feelings towards the Rago by using his spell words and folk medicines.

**(d) The Social offence and Penance system:**

In the Bodo society, if someone is found to be guilty particularly, there is a system to justify whether he or she is actually guilty or not and if he or she is found guilty then he or she is obliged to perform penance (udrainai) with some strict social customs. In every Bodo villages, there is a village head man called Gamibwrai or Gaonbura who looks after all the issues of the village along with the other members of the village. He will call a meeting at the village for such type of incident to ascertain and render justice to the guilty fellow. In the Novel, when Rago and Manasee consummated their love, the Gamibwrai named Lalcharan called a meeting at Gorgoram Mahajwn's house and justified their guilty. As a result of the Judgment declared at the end of the meeting in the village council, Manasee had to pay a penalty of 500 rupees and perform penance (udrainai) with Khoulbwd bad (a kind of offence); however Rago also had to pay a penalty of 700 rupees and he was banished from the village Dwikhorguri. Such type of folk justice is very prevalent in the rural Bodo society still.

**(e) Folk belief:**

There are various folk beliefs among the Bodos which are still prevalent in the present scientific age. In this Novel, Some folk beliefs which are traditionally being practiced in the Bodo society are reflected.

(i) For indication of time the Bodo villagers follow the crow of the Rooster at different parts of day and night. The Bodo tillers get up very early following the crow of Rooster and go to the paddy field with bullocks or buffaloes for tilling the field. They believe that when the Rooster crows at night after midnight, there is no longer time to be Morning. In the Novel, such belief is reflected through the actions of Gorgoram Mahajwn's family.

(ii) There is another belief among the Bodos regarding the cawing of the crows and crying of cats. If the crow caws continuously in a high voice by sitting on a tree, it becomes a matter of concern because it symbolizes a great danger or any untoward incident to the family. Again if the cat cries continuously by moving around the house, it indicates a great danger to the family. These pictures of folk beliefs are reflected in this Novel as mentioned below:

"Dinwi phungniphrainw daukha donda mathamswa dwikhor serni supari biphangao bananwi ga ga gabsw gardwng. Mauzi bundi maseya no giding giding meu meu gabsw gardwng. Nokhorao phinai swima maseyabw hura hura bheu bheu swngdwng. Gorgorama homnanwi labai bephwr nidanni ishadi." (Haina Muli, 2015, p.150)

(English translation: The tree dark colored crows have been cawing on top of the betel nut tree near the well since morning. One female cat has been mewing and moving around the house. The pet dog of the house is also barking quite often. Gorgoram predicted that it is a sign of sorrow).

(iii) There is folk belief among the Bodo people that, after the cremation is over, the members of the funeral party take bath in the river or stream before returning to their respective houses. Just after bath every member of the funeral party chews a little quantity of dry jute leaves. By doing such, the Bodo people believe that from that time the relation between the dead person and the members of the funeral party is over. Such practices and beliefs are also reflected in the Novel as mentioned below:

"Gwthwisali ise gwzanao lamayao sanwi mansiya narzwi, buntha arw onthai lananwi dongmwn. Gwthwi saogra mansiphra sapha sapha onthai dangnanwi narzai orwi orwi bunthani orkhwo dangnanwi narzwi orgarbai. Boibw gamiyao habbai" (Haina Muli, 2015, p.130)

(English translation: A little far away from the graveyard, two persons were carrying dry jute leaves, a bundled straw and a stone. The people who came to cremate the dead body touched the stone one after another and then chewed the dry jute leaves and left it after touching the fire of straw. Everyone entered the village).

#### **(f) Superstition:**

The picture of superstition of the Bodos on Dayna and Dayni (male and female witch) is reflected in this Novel. As the villagers believe, Dayna and Dayni may harm and kill the person by chanting mantras. In the rural Bodo society, mainly women are targeted for their superstitions. In the Novel; Udli was famous as a herbalist and practitioner of the medicine Haina Muli. She was recognized as a witch in the surrounding society. She became the target of common people. The society declared her as a witch and separated from the village society. Even after the society has been touched by the light of education, such superstitious acts are known to happen once in a while.

#### **(g) Nangwl Zangkhra:**

Nangwl zangkhra is a part of agricultural folk customs of the Bodos. It is the massive celebration of paddy plantation by the Bodo people at the end of cultivation during the season of summer. Generally, it is organized by every single Bodo family who cultivates paddy with the help of other common cultivators of the society. In the Novel, the celebration of Nangwl zangkhra is reflected through the Gorgoram Mahajwn's family.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

The Novel "Haina Muli" by Manoranjan Lahary is a Social Novel based on the social life of the rural Bodo society, where he has presented the traditional practice of using Hiana Muli (the love potion) in the Bodo society. The traditional practice of using the love potion in the Bodo society is the prevalent in the context of the Novel. The plot of the Novel deals with the herbal medicine Haina Muli which has the power to manipulate people's emotions. Lahary has presented the real pictures of the rural Bodo society where superstitions and beliefs in the spell of charms or magic are rampant. He has depicted the pictures of tradition, culture, ritual, custom, superstition and many other important issues of Bodo people in this Novel. From the above it can be concluded that Lahary has successfully presented many folklore elements which still exist in the Bodo society. Folklore elements like folk beliefs, customs, rituals, superstition, folk medicine, folk craft, costume, etc. are portrayed successfully in this Novel and the use of folklore elements has enhanced the texture and beauty of the novel.

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