

Research on Folklore in Sylhet Region of Bangladesh: A Study of Chowdhury Harun Akbor

Sofe Ahmed

PhD Fellow, Islamic University of Kushtia

Abstract: *Folklore seems to be a deep-rooted tree in the garden of world literature. Its origin, appeal, and practice are quite antique and popular in the realm of literary culture of Bangladesh particularly of Sylhet region. Sylhet has a diversified geographic, cultural, and literary tradition from early stage of 'Sylheti' as well as Bengali literature which vividly influence the language and the theme of 'Charjapod', the oldest symphony or sign of Bengali literature (Ali, 2002). This affluent and progressive literary convention pervades and enlightens the mind of dwellers of every level of this area. Consequently literature becomes an inevitable part of the life of 'Sylheti' people. Folklore is the child of that masses' mind of aptitude. 'Sylheti' folk-poets basically belong to religious commoners and self educated class, and thus their works thematically largely cover the arena of socio-religious functions of the inhabitant of this region. The modern higher educated successors of those traditional folk-poets get greatly impressed by the folk tradition of predecessor and they feel indebted and obliged to pursue research on their works for making eternal them in the memory of their generations. And they are contributing in this field successfully through continuous efforts. Mr. Harun Akbor is one of those competent and successful successor scholars. He inherits this trend of research on folk by birth and family as his father Mr. Gulam Akbor Chowdhury skilfully led his time of folk-research, and discovered lot of unknown of folklore showing the ideal path of research. The current paper aims at investigating the success and contribution of Mr. Akbar in his long term (approximately 34 years) research on 'Sylheti' folklore and its significance lies with the object of finding out some probable ways of further development and research in the field of folklore particularly 'Sylheti' Folklore. The impact of the research is thus assumed to be a new door or gate way of expected practice, standardization, and progress of folklore.*

Keywords: *Folklore, Research, Sylhet, Harun Akbar, View, Role, Approaches*

1. INTRODUCTION

Folklore has natural relation with universal appeal and feeling human life. It is the brain-child of masses. . It is one of the fundamental literary compositions of Bengal, particularly of Sylhet, (Akbar, 1995). Folk poems are the expressions of commoners basically in vocal form other than in written form of composition. 'Sylheti' people of rural and agriculture class mainly deserve the credit of innovation of folklore in Sylhet region of Bangladesh. They composed this genre of literature as a part of entertainment or psychological pleasure of their traditional rural cultural life. But folklore doesn't merely serve the purpose of entertainment but also purpose of education. Studies show that 'Sylheti' Folklore has significant socio-educational and religious lessons within it which play vital role for building and leading a self-educated society. It therefore draws the attention of educationists and researchers to be evaluated, analyzed, and investigated for finding its values and lessons for humanity. In this case eminent Bangladeshi researcher Harun Akbar deserves lot of credit. He has conducted many successful attempts of research on 'Sylheti' folklore and identified its unique nature, characteristic, and fruitful role for society. In this study it is tried to evaluate the contribution and views of Mr. Akbar regarding research on folklore particularly of Sylhet region of Bangladesh.

2. AKBAR'S VIEW OF FOLKLORE

Harun Akbar has developed his own way of thinking on folklore through his skilful and dedicated efforts of research in this field. He adds and advocates new notions in folklore in terms of its nature, characteristics, theme etc.

2.1. Nature of Folklore

According to Mr. Akbar, folklore conveys thought, feelings, and spirit of masses. It is developed through commoner's natural verbal skill and ways of expression and thematically it is simple or plain representative of the plain life of the commoners. They are the innovators, and the developers of this genre of literature. This is why folklore is called mass literature or basic literature, (Akbar, 1995). However, Harun Akbar along with his notion of folklore also shares similarities with the views of international folklorists like A.R. Wright, F.S.A's "It (Folklore) might be defined as the science which studies the expression in popular beliefs, institutions, practices, oral literature, arts, and past times of the mental, spiritual life of the folk, the people in general in every stage of barbarism and culture. It is at the base of all other science and appears in all them at this early stage and often services to a told one, thus astronomy as scientific medicine is the child of medical folklore", (Akbar, 2005).

2.2. Innovation

Akbar opines that originally folklore is the outcome of nature or man's natural living, and thinking. The innovation of folklore also follows the very ordinary laws of nature. It is not the outcome of any planned or systematic procedure of writing. Masses express their feeling and experiences spontaneously and subconsciously in simple words and settings. Folklore can be viewed as 'sophistication in simplicity'. Common people think and express their notions in common words but these appear to be uncommon philosophy of life to thinker or researchers. People practiced these notions in their conversion for lessons, entertainment etc purposes. In this way, folklore got a socio-educational ground for its cultivation.

2.3. Development

Development of folklore also follows the natural order as its innovation. Folklore develops gradually in the discourse of commoners, though it is individual composition. The fertile land of cultivation of folklore in Sylhet is 'ayeshi maslis' (idyllic sittings), traditionally in countryside. It is needless to say that idyllic sitting is common part or scenario of countryside in Sylhet. It can also be called gift of season. Villagers pass busiest time of year in winter and summer season for farming. Rainy season followed by summer with a lot of joy, entertainment and ceremonies. Idyllic sittings are most common events at every houses of village. And folklore is the most commonly practiced in those meetings. Besides, some other gatherings of village like meeting 'panchait' (village council), marriage etc. are also the fertile land of cultivating folklore. Leaders of village often use folk poems as the ornament of decorating their speeches. These are some of common ways of developing folklore in Sylhet.

2.4. Characteristics of Sylheti Folklore

Sylhet is an antique and culturally enriched region of Bangladesh. Its cultural antiquity has a deep root in 4000 B.C. Harun Akbar's research proves that Sylhet region is culturally more affluent than other regions of Bangladesh. It has unique literary elements and composition; songs, probers, poi, 'baromashi' etc. which were found in comparative studies on Bangladeshi folklore (Akbar, 2005). In terms of language, Sylheti folklore also differs from other localities of Bangladesh. Its language is simple, lucid, smooth-tongued, colloquial and local 'Syloti' language, whereas, other regions' folk poems and songs etc. are composed in Bengali language.

2.5. Theme

Theme of Sylheti folklore covers a wide range of arena e. g marriage, marriage ceremony, environment, weather, livelihood, social relation, social dealings, philosophy of life, dressing up, criticism of literary and linguistic view, moral lesson, attitude, behaviour, poverty and prosperity, journey by boat, love-episode, beauty of women, separation in love affair, Islamic values and beliefs, eminent 'sofi' (saint) Hazrat Shahjalal and his companions, sweet and bitter experience of life etc. Besides, the arrival of hundreds of Arabian Muslim 'sofis' (saints) provides a rich ground for the practice and promotion of folklore in Sylhet.

3. AKBAR' VIEWS OF FOLKLORE RESEARCH IN SYLHET

Mr. Akbar's researches find that the history of research on folklore in Sylhet is not older than 100 years. In his opinion before 20th century Bengali researchers were not only callous about folklore-

research but they also neglected it to consider as an issue of research. With the beginning of 20th century some researchers were encouraged by international researches on folklore to take initiatives. Among them Chandra komar Dey, the first collector of sylheti folklore, Ashraf Hussain, Rajmuhan Nath, Muhammad Abdul, Bari, Gulam Akbar, Assddar Ali, and so on are remarkable.

4. INFLUENCE OF FATHER

Harun Akbar's father has a vivid influence upon him (Harun Akbar) in terms of applying research methodology; both the father and the son follow modern methodology of research. Though Chowdhury Golam Akbar's attempt was at the very early and traditional stage of research, but he opened the door of modern and systematic approach of research on folklore in Syllhet region and his apposite successor Harun Akbar followed his path appropriately. (Kayes, 2012)

5. FUTURE AND PROGRESS

Harun Akbar through his sincere and dedicated efforts of research made an appeal of building a progressive future of folklore in Sylhet. He tries to draw the attention of the authority of society and state to come forward in this case for the desired progressive and enrichment of Sylheti as well as Bengali literary culture and heritage. He himself also personally initiated some steps for a better and prosperous future of folklore in Sylhet.

6. ROLE AND CONTRIBUTION

Mr. Harun Akbar has been playing quite vital role in various ways for finding out the unknown of Sylheti folklore and introducing them to the nation as well as world. His contribution differs in many ways from his contemporaries' why he is unique and more successful in this case. His contribution, however, can shortly be divided in to three steps.

- i. Organizational Approach towards Preservation and Research of Folklore:
- ii. Writing : books, and essays :
- iii. Editing

(Sharma, 2013)

7. ORGANIZATIONAL APPROACHES

Among the contribution of Harun Akbar in research on folklore, his folklore research-organization "jalalabad lokho shahitto porishad"(Council of Jalalabad for folklore research) is notable. This kind of organizational approach in research of folklore is quite rare not only in Sylhet but also in Bangladesh. Because of this of his systematic and organizational effort "jalabad lokho shahitto porishad" has published several memorandums including valuable research works on folklore of Sylhet.

8. WRITINGS

One of Harun Akbar's contributions in research on folklore is his dynamic and continuous effort of individual writing on folklore. He has spent three precious decades of his life for this purpose. His remarkable works on this issue are:

- i) Ashraf Hussain Shahitto Ratno: Life and Works(1982)
- ii) Dewan Adom Khan(1989)
- iii) Lokho Shahitte Sylhet (Sylhet in Folklore)(1995)
- iv) Syleter Shahitte Syleter Monisha (intellectuals of Sylhet in Sylheti Literature)

9. EDITING

Researcher Harun Akbar doesn't only keep himself in organizational activities and individual research on folklore but he also edited a number of researches on the issue. He is still continuing this effort vigorously. Mr. Akbar has been editor of a number of publications; books, articles, memorandums etc. on folklore.

10. CONCLUSION

Finally, it can be concluded that Harun Akbar is a precious and inseparable chapter in research on folklore in Bangladesh particularly in Sylhet. History of folklore research in Sylhet will keep him everlasting for his memorable contribution of modern approach of research on Sylheti folklore. His research is expected to enrich world folklore by opening new doors of research for further researches in this field. If researchers come forward and continue his shown approaches of researches by following his foot, lot unknown of folklore will be discovered in future inshallah(if Allah wishes).

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AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY



Writer with Mr.Harun Akbar (sitting at middle)