

## **Proverbs, The Strategic Social Use of Metaphor, The Capsule Wisdom of Illiterate Intellectuals: A Study with special Reference to Proverbs of North Kamrup Area,**

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### **Abstract:**

Owing to the development and rapid change in all aspects the folk culture is fast shrinking. Its relevance is overlooked and replaced by systematic but complex social structure. In this context at a time when the government has adopted National Education Policy 2020 to develop sustainable development to provide equitable and vibrant knowledge based society through high quality inclusive education to all, discussion of proverbs is relevant. Proverbs are the short pithy compressed expression specially used while preaching important life skills in order to establish the importance of the expression derived from the school of life. Proverbs contain material for holistic and all round development of the people for any age. Most of the proverbs have local connotations however there are many proverbs that have universal acceptance. Proverbs are the influencing tools for the users or speakers of that particular language. The word 'Proverb' has originated from the Latin word *Proverbium*. Assamese proverbs contain valuable preaching on the different personal and social issues. There are many proverbs available in the North Kamrup area however frequency of its use is gradually decreasing. In the present study an attempt is made to present a few proverbs available in the north Kamrup area and to analyse its context and inherent significance from sociological perspectives.

**Key Words:** Proverb, society, maxims, verbal art, folk

### **Introduction:**

Before discussing Proverb as a Strategic Social Use of Metaphor, The Capsule Wisdom of illiterate intellectuals we must know what is a Proverb. Folklorist Wolfgang Meider describes proverbs as short, generally known sentences of the folk which contain wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorable form and which is handed down from generation to generation. <sup>1</sup>

Proverbs are the pithy, compress, advice-giving sentences that are similar to maxims and possess scope for further detail interpretation. The word is coined from the Latin word 'Proverbium' that incorporates within them valuable lessons of life offered by the primitive intellectuals who were normally schooled from the institution of life. John Russel rightly labeled proverbs as 'One man's wit and all men's wisdom'. Assam is called 'the land of *TerakuriFakara*. Except all the *BhakatiaFakara*, all *Fakara* are incorporated among the Proverbs' <sup>2</sup>

Proverbs are categorized as Verbal Art which is an important branch of folklore. However folklore materials have always occupied the prestigious position so much so that often folklore has been taken to mean nothing but Oral Literature or Verbal Art. It is mostly used as an alternative term for Folklore narrative, or folk literature. This is the literature of the masses. R.M.Dorson has classified the Oral Literature or Folk Literature in the following ways-

- I. Folk Narrative
- II. Folk Songs or Folk Poetry
- III. Folk Epic
- IV. Proverb
- V. Riddle
- VI. Folk Speech <sup>3</sup>

Prafulla Dutta Goswami categorized the Oral Literature in the following ways-

- A. Imaginative Tales, Myths, Legends and Jokes
- B. Folk Songs
  - i. Ballads
  - ii. Religious songs
  - iii. Love Songs
  - iv. Work Songs
  - v. Nursery Rhymes
- C. Proverbs and Aphorisms
- D. Riddles and
- E. Charms<sup>4</sup>

Proverbs are thus the valuable oral resources to display deep intelligence of social life experiences. It contains elements of wise thoughts that help in spending a happy life provided the people follow as per the intellectual sayings.

**Objectives of study:**

Objective of the present article is to collect and analyse the proverbs that are available in North Kamrup area.

**Scope of study:**

The scope of this research work is delimited into the study and analysis of proverbs available in the North Kamrup area and it covers proverbs prevalent in the area of Assamese speaking community.

**Methodology:**

Methodology is an important part of any research work. In this study the researcher has applied field work, analytical method, theoretical concept and content interpretation. The researcher has visited District Library, Gauhati University K.K.H Library, Asom Sahitya Sabha Library for collection of information. The study is based on both field work and work on secondary sources.

**Discussion:**

Proverbs are the precious oral resources of folk literature. These are the first hand experience of an individual and social group. Proverbs are the sayings, identity of talent, of intellect, of depth of knowledge of a social group. A proverb is one man's wit and wisdom of many. The bearers of proverbs disseminate knowledge and guide the society through proverbs. The role of proverbs in a society is like an institution that educates the young community who are taught in the school of life through the curriculum of proverbs. Proverbs are universal and touch the heart of everybody. It focuses on different aspects of social life. It exposes human nature, attitude, character and lives of the people. Proverbs are the most easily observed and collected genres of traditional expression but least understood.

In this study collected proverbs are found to be more or less similar to the proverbs prevalent in other parts of the Kamrup district or of the state with slight variation and difference in language and expression.

Proverbs advocate for honesty and religious mentality. The primitive people were God fearing. They did not dare to go against the interest of nature. They feared the magical powder of nature and sinful activities. There is a proverb that reiterates the powder of being religious.

*Dharmor Joy; adharmarkshoy.* Captain P.R.Gurdon has interpreted this proverb with English equivalent as *The victory of religion is the decline of wickedness.*<sup>5</sup>

A few Proverbs have highlighted the importance of Perseverance and Hard Working. In lifethese are the characteristics important to be successful.

*Dukh NakalliMukhnabhore. Or  
Dukhhutemukhbhoreburagilei koi  
Sakalo suni Sali mise nohoi*<sup>6</sup>

Here *Dukh* refers to pain. People must have to bear pain to establish a comfortable life. Until work diligently a person cannot succeed and live a happy and sophisticated life. A student must burn midnight oil and read to pass with flying colours. Without involvement in creative activities a person has to live like a parasite.

More diversified the experience a person acquires, the more he or she gets confidence in life. Confidence keeps our spirit high and we feel confidence when we are high spirited. When a person is confident he or she possesses will power enough to move a mountain. He possesses inner power to transform unfavorable circumstances into favorable ones. Confidence makes people healthier, happier, smart decision makers and resilient. It helps to develop reciprocal relationships and acquire respect. Other ways without self confidence this is just the opposite. Confidence takes birth amidst positive thoughts. The folk community learnt these traits very nicely and disseminated among the offspring. How could they resist against the severe odds of hard life can be felt from the proverb mentioned below-

*Kholamukhutmakhi pore, seiolabharbhit*<sup>6</sup>

Even for people of positive attitude, trifling things are also profitable. They do not lose heart and mostly keep faith in divine providence. Most of the folk people depend on agriculture for their day to day living. Mostly during the rainy season floods damage their crops but with the same enthusiasm they come back and resume planting seeds once flood subsides. Therefore they have the instinct to say as it is said in the above mentioned proverb that a flea perched on a toothless mouth has also its benefit.

The rural intellectual folk community knew very well about the importance as well as evils of fortune. They deeply understood that a good human never hankers after easily earning money. In spite of being poor possessing limited resources there exists a need to go ahead and feel the positive aspects of life. One must work well ahead to reap the benefit of one's toil. However there are a few people devoid of fortune but still nourished desire to achieve impossible targets. They forget that the target must be viable and feasible. They build castles in the air.

*Jar naidhan bit*

*Mone kore pit pit.*<sup>6</sup>

The said proverb is ironic. It refers to the state of some poor people who possess an uncontrollable gluttonous mind that instigates him or her to accomplish impossible things. They never realize the ground reality and take risks as a result face irreparable loss. The proverb is the witty as well as time tested expression to point to the circumstance of a bankrupt man's baseless excitement to build a castle in the air. Similar other proverb available in North Kamrup area is-

*Peratnaidhon*

*Barsabhalai Mon.*<sup>6</sup>

Such proverbs are rhythmic and sometimes metrical. These short poetic lines are similar to some poetic works of *NingniBhaori* the clown character from Barpeta, the social reformer and torch bearer for the rural community who with his sarcastic remarks drew the attention of the British officers as well. Through his oral poetic expressions he confused many persons in west Assam.

In certain proverbs the ancient intellectuals have emphasized on the importance of teamwork in personal and social characteristics. These salient characteristics viz. Team work, communication skill, Interpersonal relation, persuasion skill, leadership skill, problem solving skill, critical thinking skill etc are taught in detail in several skill development, Leadership Development and Life skill programs in modern time.

*DohorLakhuti, etarboja*<sup>7</sup>

The proverb mentioned above implicates the benefit of unity or importance of teamwork in life. The staff of ten men is a load to a single man or many hands make light work. Thus teamwork is a collaborative work process that helps in accomplishing hard tasks easily. It reduces stress of work and makes a task joyful.

There are certain proverbs that contain allusion to Hindu Mythology.

*Log holilonkaloiojaba pari.*<sup>7</sup>

The proverb while reiterating the need of company in life alludes to Hindu Mythology 'The Ramayana'. Lanka is the ground of the epic war of Ramayana where Lord Rama fought against the notorious demon king Ravana. Lanka is the present day Sri Lanka. During the time of Ramayana the land was ruled by LankeswarRavana, the king of Rakshasa, who abducted Sita, wife of Ramachandra from Dandaka Forest. Srilanka had been the habitation of the demons and ferocious rakshasa and there was no route to go to Sri Lanka, the journey to Srilanka was full of obstacles. To reach Sri Lanka was not easy for a common man during the period of Ramayana. Only superhuman personality Lord Ramachandra along with his followers could go to Sri Lanka with the aid of his Bhakta Hanuman. The witty primitive folk poets could imagine the circumstance and wittily contributed to the language a proverb to explain the fact that with help of company it becomes easier to accomplish tough tasks. So with good company it is possible to travel even to Lanka.

Human mind possesses enormous possibilities and capabilities. It can transform an opportunity to obstacles or obstacles to opportunity. Subconscious mind plays a major role and 95% of mind power comes from the subconscious mind that controls every need of the body. Perfect handling of mind power is the secret of all revolutionary activities in human history. Norman Vincent Peale said-*Change your thoughts and you change your world*. In Assamese proverb the concept is rightly expressed in the following aphoristic sentence.

*Banarbaghenakheliomonarbaghekhai.*<sup>7</sup>

Tiger that is nourished inside or mind is more ferocious than the tiger hiding in a jungle. Lack of confidence originates amidst the human mind. A person needs to control self thought or channelize the thoughts towards a positive path in such a way that the negative thoughts might not overpower the positive thought process. The folk scholars well understood such juncture and made the people aware creating such valuable but pithy sentences.

In a mutual communication system there is technique of turn taking and turn switching. In the communication process everyone should possess self respect for each other. Keeping self esteem as well as mutual respect is a priority for successful communication. Positive self esteem helps in a person's personal well being, personal decision making and maintaining positive emotion management leading to happiness. Everyone has his own self esteem and nobody else can deny the fact. In this regard we all have to live together happily and without any antagonism. The wise say in proverbs...

*Tor gharattoiroja*  
*Moargharatmoi raja*  
*Toar barit moarghar*  
*Ji kora take kor*<sup>8</sup>

Laughter is one of the best medicines to cure ailments. It has therapeutic use. It increases the power of tolerance. However to laugh neglecting others or harmful Katagelasticism is unbearable. A psychological condition in which a person excessively enjoys laughing at others-Wikipedia.<sup>9</sup>Such a habit gives rise to intolerance and disbelief that leads to strife and hinders national progress. People with low self esteem criticize or make fun of others. This practice only destroys the image and self esteem of the speaker who laughs and cuts jokes at others. In this regard they say in proverbs-

*Nahahibimoakkhucharibatok*<sup>10</sup>

Don't laugh at me, it will scratch you.

To personal growth a person must come out of their comfort zone. One must be equipped to adjust to doing uncomfortable tasks. One must be disciplined and involved in continuous growth so that he never remains dependent and becomes ready to face any danger that may come his way. If one fails to do personal growth a time might come when he will be ignored even by his near and dear ones. To explain this wise say-

*Moarpoarbori hobo*  
*Moakchulitdharibatot thabo.*<sup>10</sup>

'My son will marry, I shall have a daughter in law and I will be thrashed out to the roads.'

Until and unless the parents never think of their self growth they are at risk in their imminent old age. With the passage of time and infiltration of western culture the offspring are also changing mentally and emotionally. The above proverb ironically exposes the bitter truth of unfortunate old persons who are deprived of love and care from their daughter in laws.

*Jujatparikole halo*  
*Tel nohaifapora pollo*<sup>10</sup>

The proverb shows the plight of lack of growth and prosperity. Here *tel* refers to oil that is symbolic of money. Being poor his skin is damaged as he can't afford to apply oil in his body so his skin color is faded away similarly he fails in the battle of life. To amass oil one needs to work and grow. Therefore a person needs to know the following proverb coined by the ancient folk intellectuals-

*Ghumeithakasiale hah dharbenore*<sup>11</sup>

'A sleeping fox can catch no poultry'

Emotional intelligence has appeared to be a part and parcel of modern people. In the present century from a lay man to a royal person must possess the life skill of emotion management. This is the root of happiness and lack of its control triggers trouble. The proverbs available in Assamese society already have warned the people about the need of emotion management. Some examples of such proverbs are as given below.

*Hatatmaidhanborsabhaloimon*

*Kotharmurat kotha, kotharmurat bota*

*Gharat mil naiitirsitir*  
*Patibakhojeanatmitir.*<sup>12</sup>

Milton said the mind can make a heaven of hell and hell of heaven. Mind affects human thoughts. It is essential to learn the art of harnessing the mind for progress, good health and happiness. Mind plays a major role in the transformation of life.

*Bandhlimonsilarkhuti*  
*Mellimonghorarsuti*

*Monokbandhiba, monokchatiba, monoknidibalai*  
*Durjoy manak bandhibo nori zen ki dameri gai.*<sup>12</sup>

Uncontrolled emotions sometimes put people in distress. Excess of anything is evil. One should learn to live a balanced life giving equal attention to everything. Parents love their children very much but such love must not cross the limit else it will be like sparing the rod and spoil the child. In a proverb it is said-

*Senharchumainaktochinge.*<sup>12</sup>

Positive thoughts give value in the life of individuals. It has a positive impact on health as well as amassing wealth. It reduces stress and keeps humans energetic and increases creativity thereby impacting productivity and progress of the society. This is one of the secrets of being successful. Positive thoughts encourage an individual to go beyond the comfort zone and positive thoughts combined with positive actions lead one to achieve a goal whichever is set. A person obtains relentless motivation from positive thoughts. In north Kamrup area there are certain proverbs of positivism-

*Nomore mana saba, nubure mane baba*

*Naaimomatkoikonamomaibhal*<sup>12</sup>

These proverbs always focus a ray of hope even in distress upon an individual. It helps man not to lose temper even during distress.

Human attitude is diversified. In our society we come across individuals with godly qualities as well as demonic nature. There is a need to safeguard the future generation from the clasp of the scoundrels who leave no stone unturned to drag the innocent children into the drain of crime or the dark world. Some individuals or groups impose false accusations upon the innocent individual and make them suffer and the innocent have to pay the price for being honest. In this regard the wise preaching mentioned below is worth-

*Khaikarsoladalotuthil  
Kathi selekarmaranmilil*

*Khal khandigharelsapoa.*<sup>12</sup>

In life, time plays a significant role. Time is precious, time is money. One cannot stop the passage of time therefore time management is important in a students' life. Efficient time management helps in stress control as a result provides support in getting success. It is said that delay is dangerous. The proverb mentioned below reiterates satirically the fact that time is precious.

*Nangal SasoteMahorbotorjoa*

*Pale soreipelbipakhi  
Bara bhatnothbi rakhi*<sup>12</sup>

Fifteenth century distinguished Indian mystic poet Kabir Das too wrote in his verse

*Kal kore so aajkor, aaj kore so aab  
Pol me proloihoege, bahurikarega kab.*<sup>13</sup>

The intellectual unknown poets kept vigil on each and every aspect relevant to a successful and happy life. They encouraged work culture among fellow humans and provided suggestions through different proverbs. The few proverbs are similar to the *DakorBosan* where Dakithe mythical figure in Assamese folklore, the one who imparts wisdom to people about experiencing everyday reality.<sup>14</sup>

*Krisiktumikaribasara  
Durbhikhakkrisirekariba nistar*<sup>15</sup>

In some contexts, especially in matters of agriculture and human behavior *Dakar Bosan* and proverbs cross the thin line of difference.

The creator of proverbs made the descendents aware about the intrusion of the foreign nationals and taught the human to remain alert. Because of personal weakness and fault people often suffer and get involved in trouble. People need to be strong economically, politically, physically and mentally. If they become weak other powers will overtake and take control. The rural anonymous poets gave warning through the proverb-

*Thai dibar gun toptoponi soon.  
Kumaliaada pai bharire mohair khai.*<sup>15</sup>

The proverbs offer guidance as well-

*Jagithakilesuroloikobhoinai.  
Basi khabajagisuba*<sup>15</sup>

The folk poets warn the youth not to be parasites rather to work hard and be independent. For example-  
*Paror uproot khoa, Bhatia naotjoa. Or*  
*Parataashbonot bash.*<sup>15</sup>

The consequence of a dependent person is never satisfactory. Parasite persons become a laughing stock in a respected society.

Folk poets have never forgotten to educate the youth about the importance of practicing morality. Practice of moral nature like honesty, truthfulness, compassion, forgiveness and fight shy of hatred, jealousy, revenge etc. help in getting a happy life as well as achieving success in the long run. They say-  
*Asare swarga, anasare narka.*<sup>15</sup>

Here *Asare* refers to practice of virtues that leads to salvation and practice of vices *anasare* refers to vice that leads to damnation.

The poets made the offspring educated, giving education on finance and health. World Health Organization says that a person to be called healthy must be economically, physically, socially and mentally healthy. The poet's advice in proverbs-

*Rahitmidibi hat*<sup>15</sup>

Thus the folk poets and scholars of aphorisms advocated for saving and preserving money for further investment. They were also health conscious people. They suggested...

*Apaapikloghonenothabi*  
*Dibigodhletebhar*<sup>15</sup>

That was a good practice that was followed by almost all the village people. The parents in earlier times used to feed their children in the early evening so that they can sleep early and get up in the early morning. Moreover eating food in the early evening is a healthy practice as during this practice the stomach remains empty for a long time and gets rest which improves digestion and keeps our body toxin free.

Affectation, like a scar degrades, distorts self respect and disseminates hatred and disbelief. Authenticity is appreciative. Instead of being blindfold followers of the foreign culture, the people of a nation should be engrossed in creativity, innovation and invention rather than being a blind imitator. Folk poets were smart enough to observe affectation and darker facets of blind imitation among fellow human beings. Therefore they have warned-

*Rajhonshorkhojdhari*  
*Ghansirikarokhojpaharili*<sup>15</sup>

The said proverbs mention about the plight of those people who deprives of his present opportunity in the process of blind imitation.

It can be ascertained that most of the proverbs available in the North Kamrup area are based on human behavior; social issues viz. habits-bad habits, selflessness-self-centeredness, prosperity-adversity, happiness-sadness, rules-regulations, rural life imageries etc.<sup>16</sup>

In order to know the proverb clearly one must know the context or social situation in the proverb used. Therefore in proverb, *What is unsaid is much more important than what is said.*<sup>17</sup>

### Conclusion:

Proverb contains several figures of speech viz, irony, allusions, sarcasm, alliteration, hyperboles etc. It carries with it a vivid imagery of the people and the place as well as the language of that particular ethnic group of speakers. Proverbs are a transparent method of communicating sensitive things in an indirect, pithy, compressed and humorous but effective way. This is a matter of importance that the proverbs cover all the conditions of human life. Although proverbs do not contain lofty thoughts, theories, and ideologies, some of the proverbs have universal appeal in their actual context and with relevant meaning. Proverbs are not the sentences of pedanticism but expression of long earned experience through pithy sentences. It is expected that the study will help in spreading the academic and social value of the proverbs available in the North Kamrup area.

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