CULTIVATION AND FARMING DICTUM AS REFLECTED IN THE ASSAMESE ORAL PROVERBS

Dr. Ataur Rahman
Associate Professor, Department of English, Dhemaji Commerce College, P.O. Aradhal, District: Dhemaji, Assam, Email: ataurdhemaji99@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Assam is rich in oral traditions. The Assamese proverbs or the Fokora jojana have enriched the treasure of Assamese language and literature. These beautifully rhyming verses with excellent use of similes, metaphors, and hyperboles are wise sayings on almost every aspect of human life. They are also called Daakor Boson, after Daak, a wise counsel who had the solution to every human problem. The proverbs are based on people's experience and observation of nature over the years. The Assamese society has been agrarian and hence there has been a good reflection of cultivation and farming in almost all the oral literature. The Assamese proverbs are the storehouse of the traditional knowledge of cultivation and farming. The present write-up is a humble attempt to analyse some of the proverbs associated with cultivation and farming. Not having a paddy field is considered inferior in society, the proverb says. There is mention of varieties of paddy cultivation, the season of sowing seed, preparing the 'Kathiya' (nursery bed), water management, space required between the crops; tiltation required for different rice varieties are wonderfully explained. The proverbs also give wise lessons on growing different trees and vegetables in the kitchen garden. Here, mention is made to the betel nut, pepper, and banana plant. The pit size for banana, types of organic manures needed for different varieties of banana, and how a person can become rich by cultivating banana is found in the proverbs. Good crops depend entirely on good weather. The proverbs give tips to farmers to understand suitable weather for crops from mother nature.

Key words: Assamese proverbs, cultivation, farming, indeginous-knowledge

DOI Number: 10.14704/nq.2022.20.9.NQ44595 **Neuro Quantology 2022; 20(9):5139-5144**

Introduction:

Proverbs are traditionally simple and insightful oral statements or advice that express a perceived truth based on common sense or experience which reflects traditional views in easily understandable and memorable form. They are often metaphorical and use formulaic language. Lord John Russel defined the proverb as "the wit of one, and the wisdom of many". According to folklorist Wolfgang Mieder, it is "a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed, and memorizable form and which is handed down from generation to generation".

Assam is rich in oral traditions and the Assamese proverbs (Fokora Jojona) have enriched the treasure of Assamese language and literature since time immemorial. People also call these proverbs 'Daakor boson'. It is believed that there lived a wise person called Daak who had the solution to every human problem and was regarded as a dependable counsel. There is also a group of scholars who claim that the provers are not the wisdom of a single individual but are accumulated teachings of a group of learned men. Proverbs are the experiences people gathered down the ages and transmitted from one generation to another. These proverbs not only give lessons on human nature, character, and the relationship between man and man but also are recommendations based on experience and social research in every aspect of life-cultivation of rice and vegetables, fishing, advice on health care, food habit, house construction, care of domesticated animals and maxims of leading life applicable to all men and women, young and old, rich and beggar, wise and the fool, thief and the burglar. The beauty of the proverbs lies in their use of rhyme and rhythm, wonderful deployment

of similes and metaphor, alliterations, hyperboles drawn from human nature and activities as well as from non-living objects. There are remarkable differences found in tone, pronunciation, and language of the Assamese proverbs as they have evolved from different parts of 'Bor Axom' (Undivided Assam) where several linguistic communities, religious sects, castes, and creed lived together for ages.

Over time some of the proverbs have become obsolete due to their irrelevance in the modern context and though some of the proverbs are gender-biased, caste and class disparity is also evident, yet are in vogue.

Objectives:

The Assamese society has been following age old rules of cultivation and farming which they believe to be authentic guidelines. which when ignored bears no fruit of the toil. In this paper, an attempt has been made to analyze some of the Assamese traditional oral proverbs related to cultivation and farming.

Analysis and Discussion:

Like other human societies across the world, the Assamese society, too, largely relies upon agriculture as the source of living. They plough with a pair of bullocks in the rainy season, bring home the ripe grains, separate the straw and hay yards from grains and grind the grains in the traditional '*dheki'* and when the season becomes dry and unsuitable for rice cultivation, they plant different varieties of vegetable seeds in the fields. The kitchen gardens are normally put on the campus of their house. This was the life of the common Assamese people for ages. Having no paddy field was considered inferior in society. "*jar nai dhan, tar nai man",* (He who has no paddy has no social status), one of the Assamese proverbs says. Even, rice finds more important than god, "*agote chaul kotha, pachothe hari kotha*"(First think of rice then utter name of god).

Rice is considered even more precious than gold and silver-

"Sona rupa kiba kore

Bhaat nakhale bhokot more

Hira monik thake opar

Khud gal nakhale morone saar"

(What will one do with precious metal like gold and silver, if one does not have rice to eat? If you do not produce paddy you will die of hunger. Precious stones and diamonds are useless unless you eat rice.)

"Dhanor madhyat dhanyashe shobha

Dhan nohole mora totikhyane

Ateke krishit koriba saar

Durbhikhyat krishi kore nishar"

Rice is the most precious of all properties, without rice, one will die instantly. Hence, importance should be given to growing more rice to eradicate famines. In ancient Assam, famines occurred frequently due to natural calamities and other factors.

There is a good reflection of rules and the 'do's' and 'do not's of rice cultivation in the Assamese proverbs. Regarding the showing of sapling seed and cultivation of *'shali'* rice, there are many proverbs.

"botor sai kothiya para"

The seeds of rice (kathiya) should be shown by observing the weather. The seeds need a moderate climate to grow into good saplings, too much rain and too much heat would spoil the seeds. There is a similar proverb that talks about timely sowing of the seeds (of '*mah*'- black gram)

"Faal susute mahar botora jua"

(The harvesting time is near and the farmer still mending his plough)

"Mah" is a kind of black gram which is shown at the end of the rains and is reaped in the cold weather. The *'faal'* is the plough often made of wood and hardened with fire. Sometimes it is also made of bamboo. The ploughman consumes so much time in making *'faal'* that the time for showing the 'mah' seed has gone. The meaning of the above proverb is similar to that of the well-known English proverbs. *"Strike the iron while it is hot / make hay while the sun shines.* When it's time to take action or do work it should be done immediately. Likewise, the sowing of seeds should be done when the weather is conducive for the seeds.

Another proverb tells us the time of sowing the *mah* seeds-

"Bhador sari ahinor sari

Mah boba jiman paari"

The last four days of the Assamese month of *Bhado* (September) and the first four days of *Ashin* (October) are the best time for the sowing of *mah* (pulses). Another proverb warns sowing in the month of *Shawn* (August) and planting in the month of *Ashwin* (October) cannot bear crops. Therefore, delay in planting will reduce crop productivity.

"Saunor kothiya nohoy dhan ahinor gosh biphole jai"

Plantation of the pointed gourd (*Potol*) should be done in the month of Phagun (February/March) will give a bumper harvest, another proverb says-

"Potol ruba Phagune Fal bahibo dugene".

The paddy field should be supervised by the owner himself after planting the saplings and the responsibility of the cow should be given to a close associate, either to relatives or trusted friends. Entrusting these responsibilities to other people could be disastrous-

"nije koriba khetir todarok, gorur dayitta apon lokok"

(Supervise yourself the paddy field; give the responsibility of cow to kith and kin)

Regarding cultivation of '*Shali dhan'* the Assamese proverbs suggests-

"Tini parbat ruba shali, ghon ghonkoi diba ali

Jadi nahay shali , tene pariba Daakok gali."

It means while planting '*shali dhan*' (shali rice sapling) one needs to make *'alis'* (divisions) in the paddy field as close as possible, if '*shali*' does not grow well then abuse *Daak*. In *'shali dhan'* cultivation, it is necessary to keep the water level balanced, therefore, making *'alis'* (divisions) close to one another is good for the healthy growth of the crops.

" nakhoa shali dhanor bhat, bukatu nidiu haat"

(Neither shall I eat 'shali' rice, nor give hand in mud)

For the cultivation of *'shali'* rice the field should be well ploughed making the ground soft and sticky. The sapling of '*shali'* rice grows well in muddy ground. The above proverb is used to mean one must toil to get a good result. One who finds the work too difficult to accomplish declare that he would discard both; the effort as well as the result.

Water management in the rice field, especially *shali* is essential for the healthy growth of crops. One of the proverbs talks about the height of the bunds to maintain water depth.

"Ali oporat diba ali kheti hol buli janiba bhale"

(make bund over bund and be sure to reap a good harvest)

"Ahin katit rakhiba pani

Jenekoi raakhe rojai rani"

(Keep water in the field in *Ahin -Kati* as king adores his queen)

Up to the months of *Ahin* and *Kati* (September-October), the *shali* rice should be with sufficient water as a king cherishes his queen with all luxuries and comforts. Also, the water level needed for both varieties of rice is different. The knee-deep water level is suitable for *shali.*

"Athur upore thake paani hat garte gos diba jani"

(When water is knee-deep, plant rice in wider spacing)

Spacing between the plants is also important. The planting space of *ahu* rice (autumn) rice is different from the *shali* rice. While *shali* need to be planted closer, *ahu* requires wider space.

"Ahu ruba khujot buri

Sali ruba begot juri"

(Plant *ahu* at step distance, plant *shali* at hands distance)

On making seedling-bed, another saying is-

"Hisatkoi chera dhorar tan"

The Assamese people generally prepare the '*kathiya'* (paddy nursery) near their home. The ground is well ploughed and then water is applied all over the surface before sowing the seeds. Such a plot is easier to work than a '*Chera dhara'* (hard plot) which has been abandoned for a long.

There are tips for taking care of the paddy field after the saplings have been planted in the Assamese proverbs. The quality of seeds, fertility of seeds, right time of sowing the seeds, suitable maintenance will only yield good crops-

"Krishi kariba ekanto mone

Nofole kirishi bina jatane"

(Cultivate with full dedication to reap good harvest)

"manile dhan, namanile potan"

(get good grains when you take care or else get blasted rice)

This proverb has its English counterpart-*"as you sow so shall you reap".* This has a universal appeal that the way we act in life will affect the treatment we shall receive from others.

The quality of the crops/vegetables can be predicted from their tiny leaves. The proverbs that support this idea are-

"ji mula barhe, tar dupatote sin"

(two tiny leaves of radish speaks about its growth)

"Kalah sai kaan, nora sai dhan"

(Mouth of pitcher depends on the size of the pitcher, growth of the grains can be determined from the hay sticks)

The quality of radish can be known from its two leaves; the plant that shows its early healthy leaves certainly bears good radish. The second proverb says the hay stick tells about the quality of grains similarly a small pitcher has a small mouth while a big pitcher has a big mouth. These Assamese proverbs are the same in meaning to the English proverb *"morning shows the day*." which means that as morning predicts the atmosphere of the day, the inner qualities of a person can also be known from his childhood; he who will do something worthwhile in life will show signs in his childhood.

Simultaneously the proverbs also say

"Odhik pator gos prye pholhin

Rupohi romoni prye xantanhin"

Tress which gives more leaves seldom bears fruit and beautiful women are often childless.

On buying land, there is good advice-

"Mati kiniba maj khal, suwali aniba maak bhal"

Lands should be purchased which slopes towards the centre because it can keep water necessary for cultivation. And a girl whose mother possesses a good moral character should be made wife as she inculcates the social behavior of her mother.

The harvesting time is well explained in the proverbs. Ripen paddy crops are brought home in the Assamese month of *'Ahin'* while the 'Pan' plant gets maturity in three '*shawon*' i.e three years-

"Ek Ahine dhan, tini shawone pan".

The ripen crops when brought are separated from the hay sticks by oxen (*morona)* but sometimes it has to be done by foot. People whose feet are soft and delicate get pinched with the sharp beards of the crops and are unable to walk. This proverb talks about the struggle Assamese people underwent in the process of cultivation.

"Kumaliya bharit dhan, shunge phutiloi phure atah pari".

Strict warning is given to farmers not to traverse through the paddy fields, it destroys the crops as cows when kept in others' house turn hostile and disobeys their owner. Grass in the paddy field destroys the crops; hence walking in the middle of the field should be avoided until harvested.

"Goru nosto hoi poror grihot thole, kheti nosto hoi maaj baat lole"

"pothar gosoki nokora bon, haluwai diye khetir gom"

Regarding planting trees in the appropriate direction of the house the following proverb is significant.

"Khal dale teteli pach dale oou

Hei gharar manuh uthilene nou"

A house owner that plants a tamarind tree in front of the house and an '*owtenga'* (elephant apple) tree behind is surrounded by darkness as sunlight doesn't pierce because of the thick leaves of the trees. Not knowing the sunrise time they wake late in the morning. Therefore, big trees should not be planted very near to the house as they obstruct sun rays from entering the house.

As regards other agricultural products, there are abundant proverbs that not only give wonderful guidance to their plantation but also care for better yielding. Banana trees are common in all Assamese households. Every part of the tree is useful. Therefore, banana trees have special

significance. Many proverbs guide the ways of planting banana trees-

"Ahat amuthon kolor put

Tehe saba Kolor thuk"

(Plant banana tree by digging at a hand and fist length that gives a banana a healthy shape)

Banana trees should be planted by the pit size of one's elbow and a fist length that will give the bananas a healthy shape.

Plant a good number of banana trees (three hundred and sixty), clean the plantation area monthly or fortnightly, doing so will bring wealth to the family in addition to good leaves and *'posola'* (curry made from young banana suckers. The application of organic manures in different varieties of banana trees is suggested in the proverbs. For '*Athia*' cow-dung is good for growth, '*Manohar*' needs vegetable waste-turned-manure while the *'Purakol'* requires kitchen waste with water. On the other hand, wood ash is good for the *'Malbhog'* variety.

"Tinikho satthi jupa ruba kol

Mahake pokheke sikunaba tol

Pat-posola labhot khaba

Lankar banijya gharate paba

Athiyat gobar, Manoharat jabor

Purat khai, Malbhogat sai"

Banana cultivation can make one rich. A farmer can fulfill all his wants (food and cloth) by selling bananas only if the green leaves of the banana plant are not cut indiscriminately for ceremonial and religious purposes.

"Kol rui nakatiba pat tatei kapor tatei bhat"

Jaluk or black pepper is considered the king of spices. It is cultivated in India since pre-historic times. It is being used as a remedy for cold and cough, fever and pain among other treatments. It occupies a special place in most of the traditional Assamese dishes. Similarly, *Tamul Paan"* is an integral part of social and religious ceremonies in the Assamese society. Rarely any religious functions, rituals, and weeding can happen without *Tamul-paan*. It is one of those significant components that Assamese people can never part away from as long as they exist. Therefore, growing and care of *jaluk and tamul-paan* has been mentioned in the proverbs-

"Jalukot diba gubor, panot mati

Kol puli ruba tinibar kati"

Cow dung is good for the growth of peeper similarly more soil is required near the *paan* plant. On the other hand, the banana sapling should be planted only after harvest three times.

There are some very practical advice on planting betel nut -

"Lage tamul nalage

Nalage tamul lage"

If the areca nut is planted so close to each other there will not be any bearing of nut; if they are planted wider, they bear good areca nut. The exact distance of planting the areca nut plant is also suggested-

"Saate patol, pase ghan soit tamul nadan badan".

(The distance between areca nut tree (*tamul)* of seven *haat* (hands) is wider, five hands are closer, six hands gap bears abundance areca nut).

On ploughing for different crops, the proverbs give wonderful guidelines-

"solla sale mula tare adhay tula tare adhay dhan bina sale paan"

It means sixteen times tilling of the land is needed for radish, half of which i.e, eight times is required for cotton and half of it (four times) for rice and no-tilling for betel vines. Scientific research has proved this maxim to be suitable for the said crops.

There is also a reference to the weather forecast in many Assamese proverbs which are very practical as they are based on several years' observation.

"Uttare gajile janiba khor; Dokhine gajile mariba lor;

Pube gajile janiba Paan; Paschime gajile janiba baan"

(If there is lightning on the north it indicates drought; if it's on the south, run for cover; if it's on the east, there will be good production of betel vine and if it's on the west, there will be floods)

Sunshine and rain prediction can be ascertained from the proverb-

Maghot raudro, baishakat heet

Sasimah alpobristi bhumit

Maghor hekhot borishe paani

Tehe olpo bristi agoloi jaani.

It means, if there is ample sunshine in the month of Magh (January-February) and cold in the Assamese month of Baishakh i.e. April and May , there may e sparserainfall for the next four months. If rainfall starts in the last part of the Assamese month of Magh,there is draught ahead.

People have believed after the proverbs that more production of mango indicated the coming of flood and that of jackfruit signifies good rice.

"Ame baan kothale dhan".

Conclusion:

The traditional Assamese proverbs are the basis of the Assamese culture and tradition. They are believed to be as true as the preaching of the Vedas, the religious texts of Hinduism *(Dakor Boson Vedar Bani).* They are used in daily conversation and may be considered the lifeblood of the Assamese society and the *ready-reckoner* to almost every problem related to agriculture. These proverbs are the indigenous technical knowledge on cultivation and farming which have been adored and practiced by people for generations. Agriculture scientists have found affinity in these wise saying to the scientifically proven norms of agriculture. They are based on years of man's observation and experience which would guide as a beacon to man and woman for generations to come.

Reference:

1. Baishya, P. *Asomiya Phakara Jojana*. Guwahati:.Rekha Prakashan, 2009.
2. Bhagowati, R R B and Neog, M. "Horticulture in Traditional Wise-sayings of Assam" in *Indigenous Technical Knowledge*. Assam: Biswanath College of Agriculture, 2014.
3. Deka, K. *The Roles, Importance and position of Female Gender through the analysis of Assamese Proverbs*. 2020. http://journalstd.com/gallery/17-oct2020.pdf . Retrieved on 15th January 2022.
4. Gurdon, P.R. *Some Assamese Proverbs*. Shillong: Assam Secretariat Printing Office, 1896.
5. K Sharma, K and Gogoi, R ."Dakor Boson: Antique Verses of Assam Enriching Agriculture" in *Indigenous Technical Knowledge*. Assam: Biswanath College of Agriculture, 2014.
6. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proverb . Retrieved on 15th January 2022.