Article-3
Representation on Stage: Deconstructing Folk-Elements in Arun Sharma’s Buranjipath.
- Namrata Pathak

Abstract
The word representation carries overtones not only of accurate imitation or exact replica of reality, but also of illusion and lying. All cultural narratives and texts are concerned with modes of representation. In Assam, the representation of the semi-theatrical folk form, Ojapali depends on the evocation of material space of the stage. While framing the theatrical space, the acts of representation impel a signal location, with emphasis on its wings, sound effects, props and actors in a fictive locate. The place of a play and the place of its playing entail not only the space, but modes of active disruption and rearrangement of multiple spaces. But somehow we cannot deny the solid, earthbound, stagey foundations of theatre, but what captivates us is the displacement of the temporal and spatial coordinates of the play itself. In the Assamese play by Arun Sarma, Buranjipath, the representation of Ojapali can no longer be regarded as self-contained; rather the onstage space can be termed as a place of disclosure, framed by the haunting of potently dangerous forces. Representation of folk culture, with its allegiance to the political, can occlude the twists of partiality, through a combination of insights. Nevertheless, it should not blind us with a chimerical sense of an all consuming complexity. In Assam, there is a capitulation to a new consciousness in terms of progress, articulation of the self and political investments. Representation of folk culture, treated in a magpie fashion in theatre, is another interesting manifestation of the feedback loop between the actors and the spectators. But, capable of being less political or more political, does representation of folk culture meet the contingent demands of each singular conjunction of the “here” and “now” in performance? A mourning or melancholic morality is seen in the contemporary folk performances in Assam. This is due to the ability to live with a paradox of not taking a position. Representation, in certain risky ways, has a tendency to deny, disavow, exclude or otherwise downplay. These urgencies and anxieties can paralyse the scope of relying on it. It has a corner for ambivalent, complicated, remaineder and uncertain theories.
Folklore performance is conditioned by life-functions and experiences such as hunting, food gathering, agricultural activities related to sowing, reaping and harvesting; peasant songs and dances for the propitiation of cosmic and magical forces and sorcery or participatory acts of village communities. According to Kapila Vatsyayan, the evolution of a group of professional singers, dancers and actors differently classified as Bhadras, Nats, Gandharvas, Bairagis, Binkaras, Yogis etc. estranged performance from its social, tribal or agricultural function and established it as a vocation. The puppeteers, acrobats, story-tellers, balladiers, impersonators, picture-showmen, clowns, and reciters helped in the spread of a motley of performances and a cultural web across various regions. These professionals move from place to place, and have been responsible for the mobility of ideas, forms, and styles between the village and urban centres. Vatsyayan observes, and social comment and thus the instruments of socio-cultural change (1980: 3)

However, the folk elements in Assamese scenario are to be studied against the historical development of the state as the Assamese community as a whole is determined by the Caucasian, Austric, and Mongoloid influx in the ancient times. Other factors that are noteworthy are the migration of Tibetans from the Himalayan belt before 1000 B.C; the influence of Tai-Ahom in the 11th and 12th century; the relocation of tea-garden tribes from Bihar, Orissa, and Andhra Pradesh to Assam; and the Muslims who occupied the fertile terrains on the bank of Brahmaputra and other river/tributaries for plantation and other economic ventures.

The folk performance in Assam proliferated in a period of marked decentralization and democratization. This phase saw a transition in the emergence of distinctive performance cultures. On the other hand, the artistic activities slowly shifted from the royal houses to the community centres and temples. Soon, the organised village society whose origin can be linked with the Vedic concept of grama, started following a planned sociological and architectural structure. The scenario is a bit tricky in Assam as the focus on the aspects of violence through foreign intrusion, communal or communitarian negotiations, personal or individual re-moulding of dramatic structures render the chronology (codified pattern) of history dubious. Thus, the creation of such forms in Assam is a hotchpotch that gives birth to a diverse cultural geography. Such folk performances of Assam are Putala Nach, Dhuliya, Khuliya Bhaoriya, Bharigaan, Kuhaangaan, Maregaan, Raimon, Bhaira and so on. Further on, some other popular folk forms in various parts of the region are – Harsinghoo, Farkanti, Jaarigaan, and Seroja Gabron. In Goalpara, the Bodo, Rabha, Koch Rajbanshi and other communities are responsible for the popularisation of these mentioned forms. Apart from this, Seu-Sapori, Nangeli Geet, Paseti and Matheni are very much in vogue in the Darrang district, whereas in the entire area of Kamrup, we can trace the performative tradition in folk forms like Deudhani, Nagara Gaan, Jhulan and Dol Jatra, Hejari Bhaona, Jeng Bihu and so on. Dr. Maheshwar Neog, while mapping the roots of some ancient folk performances like Dhuliya and Ojapali, unravels the lateral and genealogical perspectives in tracing the diverse pathways of their inception in religious places. The sacred space of
the temple or prayer hall, as linked to forms like Dhuliya and Ojapali, is responsible for generating knowledge on local(ized) experience. Says Dr. Neog in this regard:

The copper plate inscription of Dhareswara Temple (Hatimara Hill, Kamrup, 1660, Saka, 1738 AD) was donated by king Siva Singha. The epigraphs give the number of priests and paiks along with Dhulia, Kalia, Ojapali etc. (Rajbonshi, 2009: 13).

This historical reference posits the emergence of such forms in a polito-geographical space.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Assamese literature mostly flourished at the hands of the Vaishnava saints and poets. Strangely enough, a strong deviation is further traced here. Soon a group of four poets came to prominency in this era. But this group did not fall within the orbit of the Vaishnava influence. The compositions and poetical expressions of this group of four poets namely, Pitamber, Durgabar, Mankar, and Sukani Narayana were characterized by a distinct folk flavour and a local colour. This category of poets refused to lean on the aesthetic imperatives of the Neo-Vaishnavite poets. These four poets were held responsible for the evolution of semi-religious institutions like Ojapali, consisting of a band of four or five singers, the chief of which is called ojha (upaahyaya) and the rest of the associates are called pali (Sanskrit palita, meaning assistants). The Ojapali sing the stories of religious mythological texts like Ramayana, Mahabharata, and some Puranas by emulating a specific manner of Western and North-Western Assam. Befitting the rasas of these stories, they sing in chorus on the basis of some ragas. Further on, a split in the oral text can be seen depending on the subject-matter of the songs; Biyahar (Vyas) Ojha sings the stories from the Mahabharata and the Maroi Ojha sings the stories of the Goddess Manasa (Snake Goddess).

In Asomiya Natak: Oitiya and Parampara (2009), Dr. Pramananda Rajbonshi opines that the folk-performance in Assam comprises of the following ingredients: “Badya-Bajana” (accompanied musical instruments), “Prastabana” (proposal), “Badya-Sangeet,” “Mangalacharan or Bandana,” “Main-Story or Pala,” “Abhinaya” (acting), “Nritya” (dance), “Gaan or Geet” (song), and “Hasya-Koutuk” (laughter) (Rajbonshi, 2009:9). However, he has allotted a semi-dramatic space to Ojapali whereas he designates other myriad folkdramas consisting of putala nach (puppet-dance), dhuliya, bharigaan, kuhaan gaan and khuliya-bhaoriya as authentic folk drama (Rajbonshi, 2009:8). The manifestations of Ojapali can be traced back to biyahor ojapali, hukonani ojapali, raimon, bhaira, Paddapuranor gaan, mare gaan, and bhaasan gaan popular in different geographic areas of Assam like Goalpara, Nagaon, Darrang, Nalbari, Kamrup and so on. Again, by echoing Rajbonshi we can say that the religious structures of Assam and the site-specific rites and rituals that emerged in different forms of offerings to Gods and Goddesses; the circulation of oral culture; and the prominence of myth have played a pivotal role in the emergence and development of Ojapali (Rajbonshi, 2009:13). Moreover, the emergence of Ojapali has numerous references in different scriptures and ancient texts. A mythological reference is traced in Arjuna’s act of initiation of this art and its subsequent establishment in “prithivi” (earth) in the epic Mahabharata. The epic holds him solely responsible for bringing this aesthetic form from “heaven” to “earth.” From the woman-centric angle, its creation has a feminist affiliation too. It is said that a woman named Parijat acquired this art in her dream-vision and further perpetuated it by
imparting intensive training to her learners/ students. In the thirteenth century, various data and materials alluding to the famous scholar Vedacharya’s Smriti Ratnakar, the extant copper-plates that chart out historical strands, Guru Charit Katha and passages in numerous Vaishnava texts directly pose as evidential proof of the existence of Ojapali since the ancient times. Prevalent in various communities of Assam, this art is not only infused with a vein of entertaining and providing delight to the audience, but at the same time it appropriates narratives, sagas, and stories from Vishnu Purana, the epics as well as other kavyas and presents them through the modes and media of dance, song, and acting. However, we can further differentiate Ojapali depending on its secular and religious ingredients; the ossified religious structures determine whether Ojapali is based on “mahakavyas” or not, accordingly Ojapali is bifurcated as “mahakavya ashrayee” and “mahakavya an-ashrayee.” Further on, the constituent elements of pali can be “daina” pali and “sadharan” pali. Apart from this, the Dhulia is a distinct form of collective singing in Assam, which is accompanied by drums, while the Bhaoriya is the indigenous ballad form involving both solo and group artists.

Recitation and singing play a pivotal part in Ojapali performances. There has always existed a class of professional reciters bent on supplementing the activity of the actor-performer. The reciters, called “pathakas” recite the Sanskrit texts whereas “dharakas” explain and elaborate on the themes and subject matter. These kinds of additional expositions offered by the “pathakas” and “dharakas” help the rustic people to understand the complex ancient scriptures better. Traditionally, the “suta” or the itinerant wandering bard is regarded as the principal reciter of the epics like Mahabharata. He dramatizes the epic by fully exploiting the marginal directions of the text. Usually, it is the ballad form of the epic (akhyan) which is propagated through oral transmission. Gradually the sole reciter “suta” was joined by other reciters as helpers and musicians. As mentioned by Suresh Awasthi in Performance Tradition in India (2001), “kushilava” was the first person to accompany the “suta” for the popularization of histrionics, declamation, gestures and movements. The “suta” and his group perform in a grand scale in festivals like Samajas and Jatras (Awasthi, 2001:2). This ancient performance tradition has some connections with Ojapali in Assam.

In Assamese Literature, India-The Land and People (1965), Hem Barua opines that the architects of classical Assamese drama were aware of the techniques of local traditions like Ojapali dances. These dances contained most of the primary requisites of theatre. However, through an acknowledged form of abhinaya, this choral dance provided limited scope for character delineation. However, we cannot negate the claim that a mute character, popularly known as devadhani, introduced under the auspices of the Sukananni performance, served as the precursor to the sutradhara, a key character of Sankardeva’s Bhaona. By borrowing the outline frame of his plays from Sanskrit sources, Sankardeva filled it up with traditions of “histrionic representation available in the existing reservoir of people’s art” (Barua, 1965:77).

This paper aims to discuss the use of the elements of folk culture (especially Ojapali) and their representation in the play Buranjipath by Arun Sharma. In a way, the paper intends to interrogate the expression of a contemporary Indian situation after the
independence as a reaction against the hegemony of Western discourses or rather a search for our roots. The question, however, is complicated. Are these kinds of plays successful in representing and eulogizing the indigenous knowledge systems as ‘superior’ and fruitful? Can they retrieve “Eastern” art from being denigrated as ‘superstitious’ and ‘irrational’? Can they combat the Western outlook that assigns them the space of the “other”? Is Buranjipath a burning example of how folk culture, when circumscribed within a utilitarian motive and the confines of a modern genre, gets mutated and transformed due to the manner and effect of deployment on the structures of the play? Is it possible to appropriate folk-culture from a specific context and graft it in a new, unfamiliar, peculiar and “different” locale? Does Buranjipath unequivocally, generate a “hybrid” and “polyphonic” space that amalgamates the ingredients of “high” culture and “popular” culture by reclaiming the lost voices, by reviving the lost cultures, and by lying bare the fluidity of the line of demarcation between the rural and the civilized?

In Appropriating Folk Culture, a Study of Post-Independence Indian Drama (2008), Guru Charan Behera has pointed out that folk culture cannot be employed only as a tool in the framework of performance to resist the Western and elitist hegemony. At the same time, it does not belong to a pure nativist Indian literary tradition. Such a tradition smacks of cultural exclusiveness that goes against the basic concept of culture as a network of interconnections and differences: a dynamic, living, growing, animating and an eclectic entity. However, the same is true for the two traditional theatre forms in Assam, Ankia-nat and Ojapali. Representation of folk elements and folk forms like Ankia-nat and Ojapali on the stage is a tricky affair, a dicey business; a slippery terrain. We all know that the universe on the stage, as well as the categories out of which that universe is created, are the products of both experience and enumerative practices. Henceforth, the universe/ universes on the stage can be expanded or contracted, segmented or merged, depending entirely on pragmatic as well as veridical considerations. The techniques employed in a performance-space allow one to jump from representing social types in folk forms towards representing the variational patterns of a population. According to Talal Asad, the systematic power of economic, military, political and ideological forces dictate the modes of representing the spatio-temporal complexities of a region or an area (Asad: 68). These complexities are often conceptualized as being internal/ external to the locally observable behaviour and discourse of folk culture, the abstract system of belief, the conduct of people as represented on the stage.

Arun Sharma’s Buranjipath uses non-linear modes of narratives in representing the fissure between the past and the present; the haves and the have nots; the male and the female. On the centre-stage is Bairagi, the Oja or the Chief Singer who is both a narrator and a character; a man who loiters from one zone to another in the play to re-member, re-inscribe, re-configure and re-store the past. However, the Oja in Ojapali has the prime duty of singing and narrating the stories, mainly from mythology. Here, in the play, Bairagi enters unannounced in different scenes accompanied by his ‘logoria’s (companions); and colours the psyche of the audience/reader by his subjective moorings and interpolations. Bairagi gives a bird’s eye view of the locale and the context, the village Kanchanpur which consists of 42 hamlets. He also holds a mirror to the present.
day tyrants with autocratic tendencies and prepares the audience/reader for the future unfolding of action. The play has a ramification of the imposed Emergency in India in 1975, when individual rights were curtailed and the press was muzzled. The allegorical significance of the situation is heightened when after regaining the mauja from Jalaluddin, Kulahari Chowdhury handed it over to his son Narahari, especially the latter’s sudden death passed the charge of handling the mauja to his widowed daughter Priyarani and her vicious son Chandan. What is important here is the active incorporation of historical data and raw material of the West in the narrative progression of the text in the form of story-telling. Kulahari Chowdhury reads out highlighted and selected passages of deviation, uprising and rebellion from the pages of history and to some extent, by enacting them with exaggerated gestures, animated postures, lively facial expressions and high-pitched verbal felicity, tends to assimilate these historical structures to the present context of Kanchanpur. The auditors/narrates are his grandsons who, quite unable to move outside the politics of representation, redirect, reformulate, and recreate history in the native soil by counterattacking Priyarani’s ploy to oppress the poor people of the village. As such, repeated enactments of history (the regular history-reading sessions imparted by Kulahari) takes on the form of a circular ritual in which the aesthetic, social, religious and mystic coalesce, played out in an actual physical space. To put it in simple terms, there is an evolution of a form of a participatory ritual which the Indians perform in Kulahari’s repetitive maneuvers. However, a repetition of an experience gives us possibilities to alter and modify it, be it a ritualistic rendering of an event or enactment of folk culture. On the other hand, Bairagi, the Oja, through his repeated strains, contents, songs and acts generates certain operations of representation, in which subversion and being- complicit are inextricably intertwined. But questions are many in this part of the play. Are Kulahari Chowdhury and his rebellious grandsons unscathingly safe from the operations of the dominant social system or power and politics of representation, even though they managed to upturn the structures of aggression and dominance? Is there any Archimedean objective point or site which is “outside” the problems of representation from which Kulahari, Priyarani and others can judge others and speak on behalf of a community?

Threatened by Bhuyan and other aides of Priyarani, Bairagi is commanded to sing the false praises of the woman, to which he complied out of fear of death. If so, this modern vocabulary of representation induced on the traditional figure of the Oja is polluted by political phenomena, but at the same time, such a temporal event interspersed with subjective contaminations, glossing-overs and ellipses give way to a “schizophrenic art.” This art reflects a shattered and fragmented culture: hence, how influential is the Oja in moulding the psychological set-ups of the dwellers of Kanchanpur? How and in what way a traditional folk-figure is reduced to a mere instrument or a pawn in the hands of the powerful majority group? Can we say that in the figure of Bairagi, Sharma traces a transition from “what” of culture to the “how” of culture – how the social, psychological, political or linguistic data are created, accumulated, valorized and changed by transforming folk culture? In a way, Bairagi in Buranjipath becomes a cultural hybrid occupying a liminal space, he moves between the civilization and the wild, the past and the present, the imaginary and the real. He is both displaced and reinstated.
Moreover, the usual places and geographical locations in Buranjipath in which Bairagi resurfaces symbolize the circular labyrinth of Borges. Interestingly, Bairagi is never denied access to any private/public space in the text, be it an open spot beneath a tree, the village cross-roads, the mansion of Priyarani, the house of the maujadar Kulahari, the alleys and lanes of the rural setting and so on. The idea of demarcating a sacred space for the Oja in the traditional Ojapali is undermined in the text, especially when Bairagi’s space is punctured by profane motives. Thus, we can say that the place not only assigns an identity to Bairagi, but it fulfills a twofold function. Firstly this constricted space confines and encloses possibilities. But then this aspect is subverted to create a new stance. Soon, it provides a proliferation of alternatives, a network of multiple entrances and exits and a non-linear progressive narrative. Likewise, representation of folk culture on the stage vacillates between immobility or discontinuity and slippage. As a sign, the Oja and his paraphernalia can represent more than one thing at the same time. Bairagi’s body is a carrier of signs that symbolizes a shift in equation from a “given” and “natural” body to a body which is a social construct. He ironically becomes a symbolic marker that heralds the death of a unified character, decenters the subject and contests the active gaze of surveillance (akin to Foucault’s concept of Panoptican). As Derrida says, the removal of a center or a fixed locus of original meaning brings all discourse, all action, and all performance into a continuous play of signification. Signs differ from one another, but a final authenticating meaning of any sign is always deferred. Combining differing and deferring, Derrida creates one of his best – known neologisms, “difference.” Moreover with the advent of cultural studies, there is an amalgamation of categories, ideas and genres. The same is true here in the play, Buranjipath.

The Oja, Bairagi is shown to be superstitious. He regards the owl perching on the Nahar tree on the courtyard and quivering of the left eye or the muscle of his left chest (common Assamese beliefs) as bad omens. Thus, the appropriation of superstition as an open-ended text of oral culture, the vast repertoire of folk culture in Assam, in theatrical representation doesn’t substitute one kind of reality with another, but it totally abandons the notion of reality through roles and their seductive and manipulative appearances. By showing Bairagi as a ‘subjected’ body that bows down to the totalitarian regime of the woman Priyarani, Arun Sharma reverses the gender roles in Buranjipath. A domineering woman intimidates a “powerless” and “weak” Bairagi; the binary of “male / female” exposes the fact that the Oja’s sexual identity is a social straitjacket. In Buranjipath, more attention is given to the appropriation and attempted devaluation of the dominant culture. The Oja’s predicament is not only about an erasure of identity or obliteration of meaning, but it is also about re-inscribing a dialectic alternative to the existing system. In traditional folk theatre, the Oja is allotted a superior position as he is the man who controls the knitted structures of Ojapali. But, in Buranjipath, the folk elements are twisted and distorted in a self-reflexive engagement to suit the needs and demands of the contemporary setting. The play questions for whom, by whom and to what end representation of folk elements is taking place. If seen from another perspective, Priyarani, the self-asserting woman dismantles the stereotypical construction of woman in the society and challenges male sexuality as the universal norm and thus radically subverts the social relations of gender and gender ideology in everyday life. The other
problem is to alter the frame of representation and visibility – of what can be seen. Accordingly to Peggy Phelan, in her important book *Unmarked* (1993), the concept of visibility or putting something to the forefront needs critical inquiry, especially when representation on the stage is not created by someone for someone, but is the expression of a plurivocal world of communicating bodies. For Peggy Phelan, traditional representation, committed to resemblance and repetition attempts to establish and control the “other” as the “same.” This is the strategy of voyeurism, fetishism, fixity, or in brief the ideology of the visible. But theatrical representation can disrupt the attempted totalizing gaze by opening up a more diverse, interactive and inconclusive representational landscape. It exemplifies the Derridean notion of “trace” as it approximates the idea of a presence that is not fully visible, nor totally absent. In the matrix of Derridean trace, we find the sedimental dualities of both absence and presence together. According to Sharma, the primary function of representation is precisely cultural and social. Drama/theatre provides an opportunity for a community to come together and reflect upon itself. It also shapes the perceptions of that culture through the power of imagination.

Here, the figure of the Oja fosters an enquiry that seems to bear all the signs of interdisciplinarity so much so that it transforms itself into a site: a shared domain of conversation and debate. This site is burgeoning all over with epistemological crisis engendered by changing world orders, sudden civilizational clashes, exploration of context-specific anthropological methods, destabilization of rigid historical modules and so on. Thus, *Buranjipath* operates from the margins: the narrative discourse revolves round marginalized events and marginalized people whether in terms of the underrepresented or the non-Western/Oriental. While speaking from the margins, the mainstream gestures, seeming more and more naturalized, herald an unremarkable shift in disciplinary centres of gravity. Writing/ Reading from the very margins of colonial archives, and thus producing new centres for the analysis of marginal people, this performance-piece reveals the constitutive power of colonial/ postcolonial anxieties. These anxieties signify not just the perceived threat of the enemies or incommensurable temporalities within the state, but also the act of recognizing the tenuousness of the state and its functions. Therefore, the place and the context (the North East) is significant in conjuring the fragmented subjectivity of the represented people/ social actors on stage as well as for the emergence of a plural, diffuse, and variegated identity. In this regard, the play threatens to reveal the fragile systems of representation and it, in a way, accounts for the social and cultural formations in the past and present. In a way, *Buranjipath* questions the functioning of disciplinary divisions in the volatile North Eastern states which are shaped and moulded by myriad concepts of terror and violence. In the play, public fear is translated on the stage by employing certain strategies to transform data from the category of “what you know” to the axis of “what you communicate.” The play deals with the obsession to represent the chances of danger and the treatments for changing the odds through a mastery/ control of useful information and facts. This is evident in the forceful manipulation of information by the Oja, though he politically induced by Priyarani to do it. There is a relevant connection between what is represented, why it is represented, and for whom it is represented: the observer decides what is significant, selects that major chunk of knowledge, and finally, exhibits it for mass examination.
In other words, the lexias of social life on the stage are accepted as “real” and representable because they are accessible as a totality to the spectator’s/reader’s living experience (the reader/spectator is the active subject in this context). In order to uphold the representational manoeuvres, we begin by reaffirming the centrality of the observer’s eyes in the theatrical enterprise. However, theatrical representation, which is constantly at flux due to the transformation of segments from one form (raw data) into another (an accessible process), undergoes modifications and is directly open to public inspection. The spectator’s gaze is concerned with the recovery of meaningful worlds; with the enmeshing of the collective and subjective, it cannot but rely on the representational tools of theatre. The mind’s eye, by simulating the visual functions, is transposed onto an imaginary plan and is able to inhabit freely the categories of time and space. Moreover, the visual texts on the stage can be termed as partly-imagined and partly-witnessed; existing visual texts are important for different modes of representation, but they play a supplementary part. Nevertheless, it is the directly visible and locatable field that forms the privileged foundations of a spectator’s gaze. Thus, the performance space is a visible ground on which people live, but at the same time it is also a conceptual space within which people interact and meet. The obscurity of interpreting the formats of representation can be resolved if we conclude that the intersection of multiple gazes (the actor’s and spectator’s) enables the construction of a discursive field or a cultural universe on the stage. This universe triggers the communication of knowledge through visible textual forms. The problem of representation on stage exposes the question of how one could grasp a complex and ever-changing whole from knowledge of a part, and the diplomatic answer to that question evolves out of the selection and dissection of variegated strategies employed on the stage depending on schemas of variance, correlation, and, at times, regression. So, folk-culture is somewhat created and appropriated by the spectator’s gaze.

What is at issue is not a desire to uncover or narrate the oppression of the underrepresented people of the North East only, but the analysis shifts to the production of schemas of folk culture through the representational strategies of political discipline. This engagement moves back and forth between the distillation of intricate local moments and the emergence of logics of circulation, politics of comparison, and also the orders of power and knowledge. Thus, we can say that a performance space produces a mobile itinerary of contested knowledges. This space also reveals the constantly changing technologies of rule. Thus, in the performance space there is an invariable localization of catalogued and racialized traits, folk-forms, languages, socio-political traditions, religious rites and so on.

The use of traditional folk elements in modern theatre is an embodiment of the tension between a given form or content from the past and the inevitable adjustments of an ever-changing present. In the similar vein, Buranjipath is all about the wide-spread interest in cultural negotiations; how human patterns of activities are reinforced or changed within a spectrum of culture and how they are adjusted when various modes and forms interact. Sharma’s theatrical representation of folk forms of Assam can be placed in the Derridean double-bind. These folk elements can be labelled as the foundational bricks for creating the text and are, in a reverse turn, being created by the text. Folk
elements in *Buranjipath* are “urging for order” and are unsettling the fixed order of things. In the similar vein, the folk elements are delineated as belonging and being estranged, as acting upon and being acted upon, as a subject and as an object as well. At the deeper level, the play asks some pertinent questions. What kinds of knowledge are privileged or displaced when representation of folk culture becomes a way of knowing, a method of critical enquiry or a mode of understanding? How does representation of folk culture reproduce, enable, sustain, challenge, subvert, critique and naturalize ideology? Is representation of folk culture an act of fiction created between the observer and the observed? Perhaps, these questions are wide open and also seek answers which may generate new questions!

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