Translating Folktales for Children into Multimodal Forms: A Study of "Silonir Jiyek" by Lakshminath Bezbaruah

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Abstract

This paper analyses the intersemiotic translation of the Assamese folktale "Silonir Jiyek" (The Kite's Daughter) from Lakshminath Bezbaruah's Burhi Aair Xadhu (1911) into the comics adaptation illustrated by Robin Baruah in Sobit Burhi Aair Xadhu (1984). Using a multimodal framework that integrates Jakobson's notion of intersemiotic translation and Kress & van Leeuwen's multimodal discourse analysis, the study compares narrational structure, thematic emphasis, and socio-cultural representation across modes. This paper shows how visual strategies (panel sequencing, scale, symbolic imagery) both preserve and reconfigure the tale's ecological motifs and cultural markers, and interrogates editorial and translational choices that foreground some regional narratives while marginalising others. The paper argues that the illustrator-translator operates as an explicit translator-editor whose semiotic choices both preserve and reshape the tale's moral and cultural valences, with consequences for cultural preservation, readership formation, and the politics of regional folklore.

Keywords: Intersemiotic Translation, Multimodal, Comics, Folktales, Assamese Children's Literature, **Translator**-illustrator.

Introduction

Assam, a linguistically and culturally diverse region of Northeast India, possesses a rich oral repertoire in which folktales serve as repositories of collective memory and cultural self-definition. As scholars such as Hasan-Rokem (1999) and Toelken (1996) argue, the textualisation of oral traditions often coincides with moments of

cultural consolidation, when folklore is mobilised to shape identity and national consciousness. In Assam, a notable milestone in this trajectory was the publication of Lakshminath Bezbaruah's *Burhi Aair Xadhu* (Grandmother's Tales) in 1911.[1] This collection, drawing on folktales from various regions/communities of Assam, signalled a decisive shift from the oral to the print tradition and sparked an increasing interest in intersemiotic translations, as seen in multiple comics and films. These adaptations signal not only the canonical status of *Burhi Aair Xadhu* but also the capacity of Assamese folklore to be continually reworked within changing media ecologies.

The adaptation of folktales into new media plays a crucial role in cultural transmission, reflecting changes in readership, narrative authority, and socio-political contexts. Zipes (2006) emphasises that folktales evolve in response to contemporary ideological needs, while Holbek (1987) demonstrates their potential to subtly challenge normative power structures. Building on these insights, this paper argues that the 1984 comics adaptation of "Silonir Jiyek" (The Kite's Daughter) from *Burhi Aair Xadhu*, illustrated by Robin Baruah and published in *Sobit Burhi Aair Xadhu*, constitutes a politically inflected act of intersemiotic translation. We consider it an urgent intervention given the marginal position of Northeast Indian folklore in Children's Literature and Translation Studies, fields that have historically privileged Euro-American corpora.

[1] Following the Anglo-Burmese War (1824-1826), Assam came under British administration, a period marked by economic restructuring and linguistic intervention, including the introduction of Bangla as the medium of instruction (Biswas, 2014). These policies altered existing cultural and literary practices, prompting a renewed interest among Assamese intellectuals in documenting oral traditions. It was within this climate that Lakshminath Bezbaruah compiled *Burhi Aair Xadhu* (Grandmother's Tales) in 1911, drawing on orally circulating narratives and giving them a stable printed form. In his "Preface," Bezbaruah notes the growing interest in folklore as a source of cultural knowledge and emphasises the need to record tales that might otherwise disappear if oral transmission weakened. For Bezbaruah, folktales functioned not merely as entertainment but as repositories of cultural memory. His engagement with wider intellectual currents of the period, including those circulating through Bengal, helped situate Assamese folklore within broader debates on regional identity and cultural continuity.

Translating "Silonir Jiyek" (The Kite's Daughter) into the medium of comics restructures both its narration and its economy of meaning. Whereas the oral tale relies on rhythm, vocal performance, and communal participation, and the prose version on descriptive elaboration, the comics foregrounds visual resources such as panel sequencing, symbolic imagery, *mise-en*-page, and culturally specific material artefacts. These shifts illustrate what Bassnett (2002) conceptualises as translation's role in cultural negotiation, what Jacobson (2005) defines as intersemiotic translation, and what Kaindl (2013) theorises as intermodal translation, wherein meaning shifts across verbal, visual, and spatial modes. Although multimodal translation theory has advanced (Kaindl, 2013; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001), its application to Indigenous and regional South Asian folktales remains limited, leaving the politics and aesthetics of such shifts insufficiently theorised.

This paper addresses three interrelated research questions: how the comics adaptation reconfigures the folktale's ecological motifs, how Assamese cultural markers and identity are visually encoded in the comics, and what specific intersemiotic translation strategies the illustrator employs, along with the ideological consequences of those strategies. In doing so, this paper contributes to debates on adaptation, the mediation of oral literature in modern cultural economies, and the formation of regional identity through visual storytelling. In doing so, it foregrounds the ideological work of intersemiotic translation in shaping both cultural memory and ecological consciousness.

Intersemiotic Translation and the Adaptation of Folktales into Comics

Translation and adaptation facilitate a critical re-examination of authenticity, textuality, authorship, audience agency, age-appropriateness, and storytelling, issues that are intensified for folktales whose oral origins destabilise the idea of a single "original" and a straightforward source-target binary. The movement of *Burhi Aair Xadhu* from oral to written form constrained its characteristic fluidity, but later translations, retellings, and Robin Baruah's 1984 comics, "Silonir Jiyek," restored that mutability, demonstrating that

re-writings are interpretive acts that reveal what is preserved and what is transformed (Benjamin, 2005).

For decades, Translation Studies remained a predominantly "monomodal discipline," focusing almost exclusively on linguistic translation in both synchronic and diachronic contexts (Kaindl, 2013, p. 257). However, with the rise of the multimedia age and the "iconic turn," scholars have increasingly recognised that texts comprise more than just linguistic elements (Kaindl, 2013). Kress and van Leeuwen define "multimodality" as the integration of multiple semiotic modes in the creation of meaning (2001, p. 20). Jakobson, one of the earliest scholars to propose a typology of translation, termed it "Intersemiotic Translation", which is the transfer between different sign systems (1959, p. 233). Expanding on this, Kaindl distinguishes between "Intramodal Translation" (within the same mode) and "Intermodal Translation" (across different modes, such as text to image) (2013, pp. 261–262). Hence, the adaptation of "Silonir Jiyek" (The Kite's Daughter) into a comics format falls under intermodal translation, as it blends linguistic and visual elements to construct meaning.

The translation of children's literature has consistently intersected with visual storytelling, both its aesthetic and semiotic dimensions (O'Sullivan, 1999). Given the significance of illustrations in children's books, the interplay between verbal and non-verbal elements is central to their communicative function (Oittinen, 2003). Several key factors shape the translation process. Firstly, translators bring their own ideological frameworks, including their perceptions of childhood, which influence their adaptation strategies (Lefevere, 1992). Secondly, translation is a teleological activity, meaning that translators adapt their work according to the anticipated function of the text. Unlike adult literature, children's literature is often read aloud, introducing an additional performative layer that affects translation choices. Moreover, children's literature inherently involves a dual audience: adults, who create, translate, and curate books, and children, the intended recipients (Wall, 1991). Oittinen (2003) applies Venuti's concept of "Domestication" to children's literature translation, arguing that texts are frequently adapted to align with the cultural

and linguistic expectations of the target audience. This process reshapes the narrative, ensuring that it resonates with the sociocultural values of the readers while also conforming to dominant ideological structures. When translating folktales into a comics format, the relationship between verbal and visual elements becomes even more complex. Oittinen describes comics as an "iconotext," where verbal and visual components interact to create a unified narrative (2003, p. 30). Sometimes, illustrations reinforce the text, while at other times, they introduce contradictions or alternative interpretations (Schwarcz, 1982). Lewis terms this dynamic "interanimation," emphasising the fluid and multifaceted relationship between the two modes (2001, pp. 31–45). In comics, visual storytelling can extend beyond linguistic expression, offering additional layers of meaning through symbolism, composition, and colour. This interplay is particularly significant when adapting culturally embedded folktales, as visual elements must effectively convey traditional motifs, ecological consciousness, and cultural symbolism. The challenge lies in preserving the oral storytelling essence of folktales while ensuring accessibility within a new semiotic system.

The connection between comics and folklore has long been recognised. As early as 1941, scholars likened comic books to modern expressions of mythology, fairy tales, and puppet theatre (Levine, 1992). Both forms engage audiences through episodic storytelling, heroic exploits, and subversions of established authority. This adaptability of traditional narratives across media underscores their cultural continuity while enabling innovation. Assamese folktales, such as "Silonir Jiyek" (The Kite's Daughter), exemplify this fluidity, weaving ecological concerns with deep-rooted cultural symbolism. Their moral underpinnings and vivid imagery lend themselves seamlessly to comics adaptation, allowing for an enriched multimodal reading experience. However, this process also raises questions about fidelity, reinterpretation, and the potential shifts in meaning that occur when translating oral narratives into a highly visual format.

The Politics of Intersemiotic Translation in the Comics

Comics and pictorial books were influential vectors in popularising vernacular narratives in India from the 1920s onward, in various Indian languages such as Tamil, Marathi, Hindi, and Bengali, to name a few. However, in the Indian context, comics are largely synonymous with *Amar Chitra Katha*, which has also translated many of its titles into various Indian vernacular languages. This pictorial turn, which was strong in Bengal's visual-literary culture and gradually visible in Assam's own comics traditions, created a new marketplace and pedagogy for the circulation of folktales. When we analyse it through the lens of intersemiotic translation, moving a tale like those in *Burhi Aair Xadhu* into comics form is an ideological intervention, where the illustrator-translator decides what becomes visible, what performative communal elements are economised and what visual motifs are amplified.

When we discuss intersemiotic translation, translating between semiotic systems is not merely a formal act of recoding; it is an ideological process in which choices about what to show, what to omit, and how to frame have real cultural and political effects. Jakobson's (1959) concept of intersemiotic translation describes transfer across sign systems, but, as Venuti (2008), Lefevere (1992), and Kaindl (2013) remind us, such transfers are embedded in power relations between the centre and periphery, the editor and illustrator, and the intended and incidental readerships. In picture books and comics adaptations of oral material, the figure who draws and edits (here, the illustrator-translator) functions simultaneously as translator, gatekeeper, and cultural curator. This triple role raises questions of visibility (whose voice is heard and credited), selection (which variants of a tale are deemed "picturable"), and pedagogy (what model of cultural identity is transmitted to children).

Two political processes are particularly relevant for our paper. First, editorial gatekeeping: the decision to adapt particular folktales into comics both valorises certain narratives and marginalises others; such selection shapes the regional canon for younger readers (Bassnett, 2002; Lefevere, 1992). Second, mode-based erasure and amplification: intersemiotic transfer routinely economises performative elements (songs, refrains, communal call-and-

response) while amplifying visually salient motifs (flora, fauna, emblematic objects. Bringing these political dynamics into analysis requires attending to the positionality of the illustrator-translator (what social or institutional vantage informs their choices) and (b) the semiotic economy of loss/gain created by the intermodal move (what communal practices are displaced; what ecological symbols are amplified). Making these moves explicit reframes the adaptation not simply as a question of fidelity, but as an instance of cultural mediation with consequences for identity formation, pedagogical practice, and the politics of regional visibility.

Analysis

1. "Silonir Jiyek" (The Kite's Daughter): The Folktale and Its Structure

The Assamese folktale "Silonir Jiyek" (The Kite's Daughter)[2] incorporates familiar motifs found in global storytelling traditions. The motif of a girl's long hair as a bridge between her secluded life and the human world echoes Western folktales, such as "Rapunzel." This folktale also aligns with Vladimir Propp's structuralist analysis of folktales, which identifies recurring functions across cultures. The father's abandonment of the daughter is a clear instance of "absentation" (Propp, 1968, p. 27). This abandonment sets the narrative in motion, as the infant is cast into the river and subsequently rescued by the kite, marking a significant example of "intervention by a magical helper" (Propp, 1968, p. 26). The moment when the merchant discovers Silonir Jiyek's (The Kite's Daughter) hair embodies Propp's "unrecognised arrival," a stage

[2] The folktale follows a baby girl, abandoned by her father, who desires a son. Cast into the river in a basket, she is rescued by a kite and raised in its nest. She grows into a beautiful maiden with long, flowing hair, living at the top of a tall tree. One day, her long hair falls into a merchant, who marries her. Raised by a bird, the girl, Silonir Jiyek (The Kite's Daughter), is unfamiliar with human customs and only knows a bird's call to summon her adoptive mother for help. Though she marries the merchant, his seven jealous wives ill-treat her, eventually killing the kite, who had been her protector. They subsequently sell her to a fisherman in exchange for jewellery, forcing her into servitude. Eventually, the merchant rescues her upon hearing her lament one day, and the villainous wives are punished.

where the protagonist is reintroduced to society through a transformative event (1968, p. 28). Furthermore, the merchant's wives embody Propp's "villains," whose cruelty leads to the heroine's suffering but ultimately results in their downfall through the "recognition and reward" functions (1968, pp. 34–45). Thus, *"Silonir Jiyek"* (The Kite's Daughter) exemplifies Propp's observation that folktales, while shaped by their cultural contexts, share universal structures and motifs. Its themes of abandonment, magical assistance, transformation, and eventual recognition offer a vivid reflection of how Assamese storytelling traditions intersect with and enrich the broader corpus of global folklore.

2. The Comics Adaptation of "Silonir Jiyek" (The Kite's Daughter)

2.1 The Illustrator as Translator in "Silonir Jiyek"

Illustrator Robin Baruah, who began his career with the Assamese magazine *Prantik*, joined *Mouchak*, an Assamese monthly for children edited by Santanu Tamuly, in 1984, where he illustrated various tales from *Burhi Aair Xadhu*, which remains his best-known work to this day. Robin Baruah's illustration is not just a neutral pictorial rendering of Bezbaruah's prose but an act of intersemiotic translation in which the illustrator functions as an explicit translator-editor whose semiotic choices reconfigure narrative emphasis and cultural legibility. Crucially, this intersemiotic translation must be read in conjunction with the broader political movement that shaped the trajectory of Assamese politics, society, and culture – the Assam movement (1979-1985). As a result of this movement, Assamese identity, language, and culture were publicly foregrounded, which inadvertently made visual reiterations of "Assameseness" especially resonant. By translating the tale into images, Baruah both amplifies Assamese markers (so that the pictures repeatedly signal local language, dress, objects, and spatial relations) and designs those markers to be legible to non-Assamese readers as well, in such a way that the visuals assert regional identity while also functioning as explanatory signs for outsiders.

In contrast to the prose, which employs a performative voice, temporality, and refrains from creating communal resonance, comics

utilise visual economy techniques such as scale, framing, and cropping to both highlight and obscure certain cultural markers (Jakobson, 1959; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). In the case of "Silonir Jiyek," an animal helper is transformed into a visual symbol of Assameseness through the kite's repeated enlargement (utilising high-angle framing and exaggerated scale), highlighting the significance of nature in Assamese culture. This redistribution of semiotic load exemplifies Kaindl's (2013) intermodal translation, which results in both gains (increased ecological salience and immediate affect) and losses (diminished performative and communal memory) as meaning moves across semiotic systems rather than just between languages. Readers are drawn to visual empathy with the heroine rather than shared enactment because the comic's emphasis on visual salience and closure narrows temporal duration and reframes ritual time as pictorial instant, individualising what the oral tale staged communally (McCloud, 1993).

Baruah's choices are both editorial and aesthetic: the choice of the story for pictorial adaptation and the focus on vivid motifs (bird guardian, hair, river) enact gatekeeping that favours easily visualised, morally tidy narratives (Lefevere, 1992; Venuti, 1995). The illustrator-translator thereby both preserves and reshapes cultural memory, deciding which voices become visible to young readers. In short, the comic's visual grammar, namely the tight multimodal coding of scale, framing, sequencing, and selective verbal omission, simultaneously translates and rearranges the story's social ontology, and must be unpacked to reveal its ideological work (Kaindl, 2013; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001).

2.2 Ecological Representation and Cultural Markers in Translation

The eight states of Northeast India (earlier known as the "Seven Sisters")[3] form part of the Indo-Myanmar biodiversity hotspot, one

[3] The term 'Seven Sisters' was first coined by journalist Jyoti Prasad Saikia in 1972 during the inauguration of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Assam as separate states following the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act of 1971. The phrase gained popularity through his book *Land of the Seven Sisters* (1984). Sikkim was not included in this designation because it was an independent kingdom until 1975, when it became

of the thirty-six global biodiversity hotspots recognised today (Baruah & Dey, 2005). This ecological richness is reflected in the region's folktales, which are deeply intertwined with natural elements (Dey, 2015). The comics adaptation emphasises this connection through its dominant portrayal of natural elements, such as the kite, rivers, and flora, which occupy a significant portion of the visual space in the panels. In "Silonir Jiyek" (The Kite's Daughter), the kite's protection and the river's transformative role mediate the protagonist's journey from abandonment to reintegration, thus underscoring the inseparable bond between nature and human life.

The kite, an agent of nature, is portrayed as a maternal figure, transforming a seemingly cruel act of abandonment into one of protection and salvation, which reinforces the cultural belief that nature actively shapes human destiny. The kite's importance is further emphasised in the comics by its portrayal as equal in size to the human characters, symbolising its prominence within Assamese folklore. This visual choice reinforces the cultural reverence for the bird, aligning with McCloud's argument that "the manipulation of scale in comics can convey symbolic meanings, elevating certain elements to a status that transcends the narrative" (1993, p. 95). This portrayal transforms the kite from just a character in the folktale into a cultural emblem, linking the comics to nationalist ideals that celebrate regional heritage and ecological harmony.

Similarly, the river in "Silonir Jiyek" (The Kite's Daughter) symbolises the cultural significance of watercourses, such as the Brahmaputra and its tributaries in Assamese life. As Eriksson notes, rivers in folklore often symbolise transitions and liminality, acting as both physical and metaphorical boundaries that separate and connect disparate worlds (2009). Here, the river not only serves as a space of abandonment and peril but also becomes a site of rebirth and transformation, echoing motifs seen in tales such as those of Karna in the Indian epic *The Mahabharata* or that of Tejimola in *Burhi*

the 22nd state of India through a referendum. Despite being geographically and culturally linked to Northeast India, Sikkim was historically treated as distinct due to its separate political trajectory, leading to the continued use of the term 'Seven Sisters' even after its inclusion in the Northeast Council in 2002.

Aair Xadhu (Grandmother's Tales). Rivers, in this context, do not simply represent geographical boundaries. Rather, they are imbued with cultural and social significance, which serve as lifelines that facilitate communication, trade, and the formation of identity. As Massey argues, spaces like rivers are not just physical constructs but are also deeply social and cultural entities that mediate human interactions and exchanges, both real and symbolic (2005). In this way, the river becomes a vehicle for transformation that mediates between the realms of nature and human civilisation.

Additionally, the flora depicted, including banana plants, fig trees, Colocasia leaves, and betel nut trees, are not only visually significant but also culturally integral to Assamese society. The integral relationship between flora and Assamese society is further illustrated in the song sung by the protagonist to summon her kite mother: "The fig leaves stir and swirl in the breeze, while my kite mother soars effortlessly towards me" [translation ours] (Baruah & Tamuly, 1984, p. 6). This lyrical connection to nature underscores the symbiosis between humans and their environment, a recurring theme in Assamese folklore, which is amplified through the comic's visual and textual integration.

2.3 Visual Storytelling and Cultural Identity in Translation

While the comics successfully integrate ecological and cultural elements, their visual storytelling is equally important, and this aspect merits further exploration. The early pages effectively use panel transitions to convey the emotional weight of the protagonist's abandonment and rescue. The juxtaposition of human and non-human elements, such as the protagonist's human form and her connection to the kite, blurs the rigid boundaries between nature and culture, thus emphasising an interspecies bond and the nurturing role of nature as a surrogate parent. As Chute (2010) argues, comics excel in portraying layered narratives where visual and textual elements interact to create complex meanings. This interplay is central to the comic's ability to evoke emotional responses and to engage readers with the protagonist's journey.

The adaptation is rich in cultural markers that are deeply significant to Assamese heritage, reflecting the region's traditions

and identity, which further enriches its authenticity and situates it within the context of Assamese traditions. For instance, characters are depicted wearing traditional Assamese attire, such as the *mekhela-chador* (a two-piece garment worn by women comprising a cylindrical skirt and a drape), the *dhoti* (a long cloth wrapped around the waist and covering most of the legs, worn by men), and the *gamosa* (a handwoven cotton cloth with distinctive red or maroon patterns). The inclusion of these elements deepens the cultural specificity of the comics, aligning them with Assamese traditions.

Moreover, the act of weaving traditional Assamese clothes, a practice tied to the celebration of *Bihu* (Assam's major ethnic festival), is a metaphor for the preservation of heritage and the continuity of tradition. The protagonist is shown weaving garments for her husband, reinforcing the theme of continuity between past and present traditions. Toelken notes, "cultural artefacts often carry deep symbolic meanings that resonate with both insiders and outsiders, depending on their familiarity with the cultural framework" (1996, p. 14). The inclusion of traditional Assamese markers in the comics reflects this dual purpose, catering to Assamese readers while offering external audiences an authentic glimpse into the region's ethos. Furthermore, McCloud emphasises that "the power of comics lies in their ability to blend text and image to convey layered meanings" (1993, p. 89). The comic's use of traditional visuals and cultural symbols exemplifies this potential, as it bridges tradition and storytelling through the interplay between visual elements, such as clothing and weaving, and the narrative. The deliberate inclusion of these elements enhances the narrative's depth and situates it within a broader cultural framework.

2.4 Suspense, Justice, and the Climax

The comics adaptation skilfully employs visual techniques, such as panel design and strategic page turns, to build dramatic tension and mirror the narrative strategies of Lakshminath Bezbaruah's original text. For instance, the first page concludes with a poignant panel of the baby adrift in the river. The uncertainty of her fate, juxtaposed with the reader's awareness of impending danger, creates suspense that is resolved only with the page turn, where the kite

emerges as her saviour. The interplay of peril and rescue evokes a similar tension and release, which enhances the emotional stakes of the story and encapsulates the comic's ability to manipulate pacing and anticipation to enhance storytelling. As Nodelman (2008) notes, children's literature often creates suspense by revealing just enough to intrigue while leaving gaps to be filled by the imagination, a technique that is powerfully replicated in this adaptation.

The technical structure of the comics, particularly its use of gutters (the spaces between panels), plays a crucial role in shaping how the reader constructs meaning. These gutters, often regarded as "the most important element in the comic's visual syntax," allow the reader to engage actively with the narrative, filling in the gaps between images and text to build the story's continuity (McCloud, 1993, p. 101). The spaces between panels serve not just as transitions but as sites for potential meaning-making, where time and action unfold. For a child reader, this technique of reading between the lines, literally and figuratively, becomes a bridge to connect this text with others they may have encountered. This is particularly significant in Assam, where "Silonir Jiyek" (The Kite's Daughter) may be one of the earliest examples of comics. Still, it was published after the rise of popular series like *Amar Chitra Katha*, which gained prominence and became a staple of childhood reading across India. This kind of intertextual connection with other comics of that time enriches the child reader's experience, making the adaptation more resonant and offering a layered reading experience that spans generations of comic culture.

2.5 Resolution and Affective Impact

The narrative progression following the protagonist's marriage transitions to the merchant's mansion, where the body language and spiteful dialogues of the other wives foreshadow their roles as antagonists. Their disdain for the protagonist is conveyed through spiteful remarks in the speech balloons, such as "The husband's other wife has come!" and "Wait and see how well we will feed you" [translation ours], paired with hostile expressions (Baruah & Tamuly, 1984, pp. 16–19). These cues are reinforced by their oppressive actions, such as forcing her to cook, clean the cowshed,

and weave clothes for the husband. Despite their efforts, the protagonist excels in every task with the assistance of her kite mother, which intensifies the other wives' jealousy and drives them to plot the kite's murder.

The page depicting the kite's death is one of the most emotionally charged moments in the comics, concluding with a heart-wrenching image of the protagonist singing tearfully to summon her mother one final time: "The fig leaves stir and swirl in the breeze, while my kite mother soars effortlessly toward me" [translation ours] (Baruah & Tamuly, 1984, p. 21). This lament evokes profound sympathy in readers, underlining the depth of the protagonist's loss and the cruelty of her oppressors. As Nikolajeva highlights, "[t]he interplay of visual and textual elements in children's literature serves as a tool for evoking empathy and shaping the reader's moral perspective", preparing the readers for the climax (2017, p. 113). The climax unfolds in the last two pages, as the merchant uncovers the wives' treachery and delivers their punishment. The imagery of the deep well surrounded by thorny bushes effectively conveys a dual sense of fear and justice. Readers are gripped by the tension of the impending punishment while feeling relieved that the protagonist's suffering is nearing its end. The final panels depict the narrator reflecting on the happiness she ultimately achieves, fulfilling the emotional arc shared by both the protagonist and the readers throughout the story.

What is Gained or Lost in the Translation?

The comics adaptation of *Burhi Aair Xadhu,* as an act of intersemiotic translation, consistently economises the performative and ritualised elements sustained in oral and prose versions. Songs, refrains, and extended descriptive passages are frequently condensed into single captions or omitted altogether. For instance, whereas the oral and prose traditions foreground a repeated song-refrain used to summon the kite, the comics replace this sequence with a single evocative panel showing the girl calling out, thus condensing an extended performative act into a moment of visual signification (Baruah & Tamuly, 1984, p. 6). This economisation may be understood as the production of an afterlife, a new linguistic (or

here, visual) existence in which the original's temporal, communal performance is reconstituted as a static but resonant image (Benjamin, 2005).

The illustrator-translator Robin Baruah's manipulation of scale, framing, and sequencing further redirects the tale's affective emphasis. The kite is often depicted nearly equal in scale to human figures (pp. 7–8), elevating the bird from a helper to an emblematic presence. Close-ups of the heroine's face and hands (Baruah & Tamuly, 1984, pp. 17) intensify her vulnerability, encouraging empathetic identification. Moreover, panel composition and strategic page turns are used to stage suspense: the opening sequence, which ends with the baby adrift (Baruah & Tamuly, 1984, p. 5) and resolves only with the kite's arrival on the following spread, creates a cinematic reveal built through visual pacing rather than expository narration. Benjamin's insistence that the translator's task is not to reproduce the original but to allow the work to live on in another tongue, thus revealing the affinities among languages, maps well onto these visual choices as the comics does not attempt to replicate the oral performance word-for-word but to bring forth, in the language of pictures, an analogous expressive truth. In this sense, selection and amplification in drawing function as translation strategies that aim for a kind of fidelity to the tale's inner life rather than to its external, ritualised form (Benjamin, 2005).

The comics additionally rely on visual shorthand to encode cultural artefacts such as the *mekhela-chador, gamosa*, and local flora (Baruah & Tamuly, 1984, pp. 11). Whereas Bezbaruah's prose provides lexical markers or explanatory commentary, the comics depend on readers' ability to visually decode these cultural cues. Taken together, Robin Baruah's visual interventions, such as selection, amplification, and cultural encoding, enact translational shifts that redirect emphasis from communal performance and ritual repetition toward ecological symbolism and individuated affect. These decisions have both ethical and pedagogical implications, as they influence which cultural models are highlighted for child readers and determine how Assamese identity is visually presented to broader audiences.

Despite these shifts, the comics preserve the tale's narrative skeleton. Core functions, such as abandonment, rescue by an animal helper, trials, and recognition, remain intact, as do thematic concerns with ecological interdependence and moral justice. However, the experiential texture changes drastically, as the performative, dialogic voice of oral storytelling is diluted along with the compression/removal of ritual refrains. This is not a neutral loss as it marks a reorientation of cultural memory from collective oral performance to individualised reading experience mediated by images.

The intersemiotic translation thus carries political weight. By privileging certain visual motifs and compressing performative elements, the comics curate a version of Assamese folklore tailored to literate, individual consumers. Such curatorial choices have an impact on shaping curricular circulation, childhood cultural formation, and the regional visibility of particular narrative variants. In this sense, the intersemiotic translation functions as cultural mediation with material consequences for who is authorised to represent Assamese oral traditions.

Conclusion

The multimodal translation of Lakshminath Bezbaruah's folktale "Silonir Jiyek" (The Kite's Daughter) into the comics form exemplifies the enduring adaptability of folklore in contemporary media. Through the interplay of text and visuals, the adaptation not only preserves the essence of the original tale but also extends its reach, offering nuanced insights into Assamese cultural identity, ecological awareness, and moral teachings. By incorporating traditional Assamese symbols, attire, and ecological motifs, the adaptation bridges the past and present, making the folktale accessible to modern audiences while retaining its cultural authenticity. The adaptation highlights the multifaceted nature of folktales, illustrating their potential to educate, entertain, and evoke empathy. The creative use of visual storytelling amplifies the tale's emotional depth and moral resonance, demonstrating how intermodal translations, where linguistic and visual semiotics intersect, can enrich stories. In conclusion, the transformation of

"Silonir Jiyek" (The Kite's Daughter) into comics not only reimagines a classic tale but also underscores the relevance of folklore in addressing contemporary discourses on identity, resilience, and the symbiotic relationship between humanity and nature. By situating Assamese folklore within a global context, this adaptation underscores the universality of oral traditions and their ability to evolve across diverse modes of storytelling. This paper, therefore, contributes to ongoing conversations on the politics of adaptation and the role of translation in reshaping cultural narratives in a multimodal world.

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Cite this Work:

Mahanta Prarthana & Jha Pallavi, (2025). Translating Folktales for Children into Multimodal Forms: A Study of "Silonir Jiyek" by Lakshminath Bezbaruah. *Translation Today*, *19*(2). 1-20.
DOI: 10.46623/tt/2025.19.2.ar5