CHAPTER-VII

CONCLUSION

Assam has a rich tradition of folktales like other Indo-Aryan language zones of India and efforts have been made to study them systematically. However, little attempts have so far been made to study the 'form' or the 'structural patterns' in Assamese folktales. Keeping this in mind, an attempt has been made in this work to study and examine the formal and structural patterns in Assamese folktales. In this work, Vladimir Propp's morphological method of narrative analysis, and the modifications, developments and extension of it by later scholars have been applied to a corpus of Assamese folktales. The study has tried to examine the applicability of Propp's morphological-structural approach in the light of the later developments and modifications by contemporary researchers in the context of Assamese folktales. Scholars like Jason, Holbek, Bremond, Meletinskij, Apo. Ramanujan and Handoo have modified Propp's scheme to a considerable extent and their method of analysis along with Propp's scheme have been applied to a corpus of Assamese folktales (see chapter I and II).

After going through some of the most reliable, well known and popular collections of Assamese tales both in Assamese and English altogether 69 Assamese printed folktales have been selected and considered as the materials for study in this work. The tales analysed in this study could be classified as follows :

a) Wonder tales : 54 tales
b) Religious tales : 7 tales
c) Tales of the stupid ogre : 3 tales
d) Novellas : 5 tales
It has been noticed that the number of printed and systematically published Assamese wonder tales are more in number than the other sub-genres of tales. That is why, in this study, major emphasis has been given on wonder tales. The other reason of giving more emphasis on wonder tales is that Vladimir Propp worked on wonder tales. The other sub-genres, although having a smaller number of examples in anthologies, have also been studied in this work for gaining a tentative understanding of their morphological patterns in comparison with wonder tales. The study shows that there are some continuities among these genres along with certain differences. The range of comparative materials is very narrow and limited.

The study has been approached from the theoretical development that fairytale as a whole is not a ‘monotype’ but they are multiple types (see chapter-I). Although at the beginning Propp maintained that ‘all fairy tales are of one type in regard to their structure’ (1968 : 23), he later in a limited sense accommodated four classes of fairy tales depending upon the presence of two pairs of mutually exclusive pairs of functions. These two pairs are ‘struggle-victory’ (H-I) and ‘difficult tasks-resolution’ (M-N) and the four classes of fairy tales thus appear are: development through H-I, development through M-N, development through both H-I and M-N, and development without either (1968 : 102). He also said that further division of fairy tales may not proceed any longer according to purely structural features as except these two pairs, none of the other remaining functions are mutually exclusive. Consequently, it is necessary to choose one of the two obligatory elements of the tale, ‘A’ or ‘a’, to make the division according to its varieties. Further classification can be made according to the varieties of these two obligatory elements (Idem). Thus fairytales can be classified into ‘villainy and its liquidation’ (A-K) and ‘lack and its liquidation’ (a-K). However Propp said that this division of fairy tales is applicable to only one-move tales (Idem). He himself conceded that division of multi-move tales is no easy task (Idem). To him, there can
be only one way here, "it should be stated, in reference to each multi-
move text, that the first move is such and such, and that second move is
something else again" (ibid: 103).

In our corpus of materials, we have wonder tales of both single move
and multiple move combination. Of the 54 wonder tales studied in this
work, 33 are single move tales and 21 are multiple move tales. Maximum
number of five moves has been observed in one tale in the materials.
Following Propp, in our 54 wonder tales, we have encountered the pair H-
I four times, the pair M-N two times and in the rest 48 tales, we have not
encountered either of the two. We have encountered the pair H-I two
times in single move tales and two times in multiple move tales. Similarly,
we have encountered the pair M-N two times in tales with more than one
move. Thus, according to Propp's theory of division of fairy tales, we have
three types of Assamese wonder tales: tales that develop through H-I;
tales that develop through M-N; and tales that develop without either. The
wonder tales are of villainy-villainy liquidation (A-K) (28 tales), lack-
lack liquidation (a-K) (12 tales) combination, and some tales are
combination of both (A-K+a-K) (14 tales). Various types of villainy/lack
are observed in Assamese wonder tales.

In this study we have masculine and feminine wonder tales of direct
and embedded move combination. Most of the tales are of direct move
combination. However two tales contain both direct and embedded move
combination (tale nos 26, 56). In these tales, before the lack/villainy in the
first move is liquidated, a fresh move begins and the lack/villainy in the
previous move is liquidated in a subsequent move. It has been observed
that when wonder tales are divided into moves, elements of realistic tales
and novellas are incorporated in fairy tales (tale nos 19, 45). These elements
can be incorporated in the later part of the tale also, the first part being
entirely wonder tale material. In the tale 'kanchani' (tale no 19), we notice
the first part is in wonder tale style with a villainy-villainy liquidated theme,
however, the second part is in romantic tale style with the death of both the protagonists. It has been observed that the tales in the other sub-genres studied in this work are of single move combination.

THE MAIN MORPHOLOGICAL PATTERNS DISCERNED IN THIS STUDY

The study has considered the viewpoints of male and female hero, and therefore, these two types of tales have been dealt separately in three different chapters, in chapter IV, V and VI, respectively. The tales have been classified into masculine and feminine tales depending upon the gender of the main protagonist of the tale. This has been done following the classificatory and analytical insights provided by Holbek (1998) and Ramanujan (1994). Out of these 69 tales, 33 are masculine tales and 36 are feminine tales.

The tales in each of the two types (masculine and feminine) have been classified into separate and exclusive plot patterns. The plot patterns have been determined depending upon the outcome of the tale from the perspective of the protagonist of the tale. Accordingly, several plot patterns have emerged, particularly in the wonder tales (the main material of the study). Some of the plot patterns have again been subdivided into subtypes keeping in mind the way in which the hero/heroine of the tale has achieved his/her goal. (See chapter-I).

Further, a particular pattern or sub-type has been segmented into different episodes or pattern of sequences. These episodes or pattern of sequences have developed from the initial situation to the final situation of the tale. This has influence of Bremond’s (1970) short chronological episodes in fairy tales that show formal consistency and proves that there are inner organisations in tales. This has also confirmed Holbek’s (1998) analytical insight that from the end of a move, it is possible to look back and explore how the situations develop in a tale (see chapter-I).

Propp’s ‘functions’ have been clearly identified and enumerated in the
analysis of the tales with their specific varieties or manifestations. However, it has been observed that it is not always possible to discern the exact variety or manifestation of the ‘function’ as identified by Propp in Assamese folktales. Attempts have been made to identify and enumerate the nearest/closest variety or manifestation in these cases as far as possible. Also many other variations and difference in this respect have been observed in the Assamese tales. (See chapter-I).

(i) MASCULINE TALES

The morphology of the Assamese masculine tales have been dealt in chapter IV and V. Out of the 33 masculine tales studied in these chapters, 27 are wonder tales, 3 are religious tales and 3 are tales of the stupid ogre. Eight exclusive plot patterns are discernable in these 27 wonder tales. They are:

1. Hero marries princess : 5 tales.
2. Hero is transformed into human shape and consummates marriage : 2 tales.
3. Poor hero wins fortune : 6 tales.
5. Hero and heroine meet tragic end : 1 tale.
6. Hero fulfils father’s wish : 4 tales.
7. Hero’s relatives face threats of life from monsters and the hero rescues them : 3 tales
8. Hero overcomes misery faced in childhood : 1 tale.

Pattern nos. 1 and 3 have again been subdivided into two sub types each.

Pattern no : 1

(i) Hero wins and marries princess by performing ‘Suitor’s tasks’ : 4 tales.
(ii) Hero wins and marries princess through his cleverness and determination: 1 tale.

Pattern no : 3
(i) Poor hero wins fortune through his determination and intelligence: 4 tales.
(ii) Poor hero wins fortune after overcoming threats of life: 2 tales.

Plot of the tales of the stupid ogre examined in this work are similar to the plot of the tales classified in the pattern ‘poor hero wins fortune’ (pattern no.3). However, the presence of a stupid ogre in these tales and the humorous way of liquidation of the lack (of wealth) in them give these a separate identification and entity.

It has been observed from the above that the chief motive of the hero in the 27 wonder tales examined in this work is varied and ranges from a poor hero winning and marring a princess and thereby winning fortune to a hero overcoming the threats of a monster to the hero who risks his life to fulfil his father’s wishes. The largest number of tales (6) have been classified in pattern no. 3. ‘Hero wins fortune’. The varied and exclusive plot patterns show the real and true flavour of wonder tales. In most of these tales in these eight patterns, the hero seeks something, chases it and achieves this.

The three masculine religious tales studied in this chapter have been classified into two patterns:

1. Hero makes villain realise his misdeeds: 2 tales
2. Hero is rescued from corrupt preceptor: 1 tale

In these tales the contribution of heavenly characters are more important than the role of the protagonists.

The examination and study of the three Assamese masculine religious tales reveal that these tales do not fit into the Proppian scheme of analysis. Certain morphological sequences are discernable in these tales which have been identified. These morphological sequences are in someway akin to Dundes’ ‘Motifemes’ observed in his study of American Indian tales (1964).

(ii) FEMININE TALES

Chapter VI of this study has dealt with the morphology of 36 Assamese
feminine tales studied and examined in it. Of these 36 feminine tales, 27 are wonder tales, 4 are religious tales and 5 are novellas. Eight exclusive plot patterns are discernible in these 27 wonder tales from the point of the heroine of these tales. They are:

1. Persecuted heroine overcomes villainy: 2 tales.
2. Heroine overcomes misery faced at parental home: 2 tales.
3. Heroine overcomes misery in marital life: 9 tales.
4. Persecuted heroine overcomes villainy combined with misery in marital life: 2 tales.
5. Heroine is transformed into human shape and wins spouse: 3 tales.
6. Heroine wins spouse and overcomes villainy of false bride: 3 tales.
7. Heroine overcomes villainy from co-wives and the anxiety of giving birth to a child: 2 tales.

Pattern nos. 2 and 3 are again subdivided into several sub-types.

Pattern no. 2.

(i) Heroine overcomes misery faced at parental home for displeasing parents: 1 tale.
(ii) Heroine overcomes misery faced at parental home for violating interdiction of parental figure: 1 tale.

Pattern no. 3.

(i) Heroine overcomes villainy from co-wives: 4 tales.
(ii) Banished heroine achieves wealth and recognition in marital life: 3 tales.
(iii) Heroine overcomes threats of adultery: 1 tale.
(iv) Heroine overcomes villainy through relative: 1 tale.

It has been observed from the above that in all the 27 Assamese feminine wonder tales studied in this work, the heroine faces villainy/ misery in one way or the other and overcomes it. In the largest number of tales (18), the heroine faces villainy/ misery after her marriage, which to a great extent
confirms the contention that women tales begin after the marriage of the main protagonist (Ramanujan, 1999). In six tales she faces villainy/misery at her parental home. In four such tales she faces villainy from her stepmother (Pattern no. 1 and 4) and in the other two tales, she faces villainy/misery either for displeasing her parents or for violating an interdiction addressed to her by a parental figure (Pattern no. 2). In three tales she takes birth in a non-human shape and is transformed into human shape by her spouse and her marriage is consummated (Pattern no. 5).

The examination and study of the four Assamese feminine religious tales reveal that these tales, like the masculine religious tales, do not fit into the Proppian scheme of analysis. Certain morphological sequences are discernable in these tales which have been identified. These morphological sequences are in someway akin to Dundes’ ‘Motifemes’ observed in his study of American Indian tales (1964).

The four novellas studied in this chapter show that they more or less fit in the Proppian scheme with certain functions (like the ‘donor’) being absent.

It has been observed in this study that in terms of plot complexity, the plots of masculine tales are more complex than the plots of the feminine tales, particularly in case of the wonder tales. Majority of plots in masculine tales are laden with various sub plots and the hero’s course of action is full of conflicts and struggle.

In this study, limited examples of several types/patterns raise a curiosity that whether other examples of the type/pattern exist, or even the validity of identification of a type/pattern sometime on a basis of the single version. However, the study is based on the assumption that it may be possible to locate more versions of a type/pattern if an extensive survey of oral tales is undertaken in Assam. The existence of a single example can also not nullify the existence of a type/pattern.

MORPHOLOGICAL FEATURES: SOME OBSERVATIONS
Some of the morphological observations and features noticed in this study are given below. It has been observed in the analysis of these 69 Assamese tales that the nature of misfortune/villainy/miseries/problems faced or encountered by the hero of the masculine tales differ from those faced or encountered by the heroine of the feminine tales. The hero of the Assamese masculine tales mostly is a seeker hero. He is heroic and either chases wealth or princess and wins them eventually; or faces threats of life/victimisation from monsters/ demons (in some cases even his family members face the same) and slays the monsters/ demons and overcomes the threats and rescues himself or saves his family members from the clutches of the demons. In some cases, he even risks his own life to procure the object of his father’s desire and gets it. In most of the cases, he gets the throne as the reward (along with the princess).

On the other hand, the misfortunes/problems faced or encountered by the heroine of the Assamese feminine tales are of different nature. She faces villainy/misery mostly from inside—from some body in the family, either from her stepmother or co-wives and overcomes them through various ways. Except in pattern no. 8, the heroine in all other tales is a victimised hero (ine). Only in the tales in this pattern, she is a seeker heroine, where she rescues her victimized spouse from his villainous stepmother. In most of the tales, after the liquidation of the misfortune, the heroine is reunited with her spouse or her parents and other family members.

Our analysis of these Assamese tales, particularly the wonder tales, shows that the Proppian scheme mostly fits the masculine tales. We have observed that the Assamese feminine tales studied in this work also more or less fit into this scheme. However, there are certain feminine tales which do not fit into fit into this scheme. The first part of the tale ‘The Cat’s Daughter’ (tale no. 55) in pattern no. 7 does not fit in the Proppian scheme. This raises the possibility of the existence of non-Proppian tales and modifies the contention that the Proppian scheme mostly fits into the
masculine tales because a large part of Assamese feminine tales follow Propp's scheme. The Assamese feminine religious tales discussed in this study also do not fit in the Proppian scheme.

It is interesting to note that in some feminine wonder tales, as well as in one or two masculine tales, in the preparatory part, we observe a number of functions which cannot be ignored as connectives. In many cases, we notice these functions prior to villainy which prepare the ground for the main villainy. This sharpens and intensifies the main villainy (tale nos. 42, 46). In some cases, instead of prefix functions, we observe that attempts of villainy are foiled by the heroine herself. These instances of preparatory attempts of villainy and the foiling of these by the hero (ine) highlight the virtues of them. Logically this is a different type of preparation for occurrence of villainy, which does not conform to Propp (tale nos. 42, 43, 44).

We have observed certain instances of 'tale transformations' (Handoo, 1978: 89) in some masculine wonder tales studied in this work (tale nos. 26, 28). In these tales, the hero begins his journey as a seeker hero to procure the object of his quest and procures it. However, on the way back home, he faces victimisation, mostly from his brothers and loses the object as well as his spouse(s) whom he procured in the course of the action. He again transforms to a seeker hero and regains both the object and the lost spouses, and also wins the throne as the reward. It is interesting to note that Propp did not encounter any such instance in his material (1968: 36). His heroes are mostly seeker heroes. Handoo (1978: 89) says that such instances are normally not encountered in the European tales.

It has been observed that in certain Assamese masculine wonder tales, the hero obtains the magical agent much before the actual villainy takes place (tale no. 14). He liquidates the villainy with the help of these magical agent—something not in conformity with Propp. In this instance, the villainy is prolonged and is liquidated in the final move.

In certain instances in masculine wonder tales, we have observed the
occurrences of two villainies in the same tale committed by two sets of different villains (tale no. 11). The second villainy begins after the liquidation of the first villainy. However, the magic agents to liquidate both the villainies are procured in the first move—the second villainy is also liquidated with the help of the magic agent procured in the first move. This is something noticable as the nature of the villainy in the second move is entirely different than in the first move.

In the tale ‘Minister and the Barber’ (tale no. 11), we notice the hero obtaining the magical spouses in the first move, with the help of which he overcomes the villainy in both the moves. In the first move, the villain is the hero’s elder brothers who try to snatch away the wondrous object procured by the hero and his wives by killing him, whereas in the second move, the villain is the king’s barber, who cannot bear to see a poor man becoming the king’s minister. Instances of this is possible in tales analysed by Propp also.

In some Assamese masculine wonder tales, it has been observed that the ‘donor’ function is absent—the hero achieves his goal or liquidate the villainy/misery himself with his determination, cleverness and foresight (tale nos 4,33). The same thing has been observed in the tales of the stupid ogre and in the novellas studied in this work. In one tale of the stupid ogre, we have observed that Destiny or God (tale no. 23) plays the role of the donor which is not explicit in the tale. In the novellas studied in this work, the hero (ine) achieves her goal or liquidates the villainy/misery faced by her herself using own intelligence, courage and presence of mind. Moreover, it has been observed that the number of tale-roles are more in novellas and these are more realistic than wonder tales. In one masculine wonder tale we have observed the donor himself playing the role of the magical agent also (tale no. 33).

In some Assamese wonder tales, both masculine and feminine, we observe the instances of ‘disenchantment’—where the hero (ine) takes birth
in a non-human shape or is discovered in non-human shape, is married to a human spouse and the spouse disenchantes him (her), and the marriage is consummated (tale nos. 6, 7, 49, 50, 51) In this way, the lack of the hero (ine) or his (her) spouse (married to a non-human spouse and the marriage remaining incomplete as it is not yet consummated) and the lack of the first sexual encounter is also liquidated. We have observed that in Assamese wonder tales the hero (ine) takes birth in non-human shapes mostly as animal (fish) or bird (duck) or as some fruit ('ow') and they are disenchaned by their wife or husband. Blackburn (1995) says that Swahn distinguished male and female centred animal tales (AT 425 to 428, 430, 433D, 441). He observed that in women centred animal tales, the woman searches for her lost husband performing tasks, and restores him. But in male tale, animal husband is the main actor (Blackburn, 1995: 47). We can observe similarities of this statement in context of Assamese wonder tales featuring an animal husband studied in this work. In tale no. 6, the hero taking birth as a fish is the main actor. Similarly, in the feminine tales, the heroine in non-human shapes ultimately wins her husband.

We have observed that 'Recognition' is an important morphological element in many of the Assamese masculine wonder tales studied in this work (e.g. tale nos 26, 28, 29), particularly in the tales where the hero procures the object of his father’s desire and the false hero (es) snatches it from him and present himself to the father as the real hero.

An interesting morphological feature observed in some masculine wonder tales (tale nos. 15, 16, 17) is that the role of the hero becomes prominent very late, almost in the middle of the tale. The villain enters in the beginning and creates havoc. The hero comes to slay him.

It has been observed that in Assamese masculine wonder tales, where the hero has several brothers, it is always the youngest brother who is the hero (tale nos. 11, 26, 27, 28, 29). Very often his elder brothers play the role of the villain and attempt to harm their youngest brother (the hero). Here,
jealousy and sibling rivalry are the motives behind this brotherly villainy.

In some Assamese masculine wonder tales (tale nos. 26, 27, 28, 29), we have observed that the hero’s father desires something and his son (the hero) procures it. The hero in this respect is the agency who liquidates his father’s lack (of the desired object) by procuring it. The identification of the hero with his parents or brothers in such instances is perhaps related to the social and cultural context (see chapter V).

There are certain feminine wonder tales (tale no. 47) where two separate and independent plots seem to be clubbed together. One interesting observation in this type of tale is that the function ‘wedding’ takes place repeatedly. Villainy from two sets of different villains also occurs separately in both the parts of the tale.

In some tales, the heroine has to overcome the jealousy of co-wives or villainous sisters and also the anxiety of giving birth to a child, which she overcomes through her children (tale nos. 55, 56). The morphology of the tales focus such aspects in several feminine tales.

We have observed in one Assamese feminine wonder tale that the heroine of this tale (tale no 37) faces misery, but not from any distinct villain. She visits a forbidden place and consequently faces misery. This form of villainy and is identified as ‘X’ (Propp 1968 : 64). Propp also observed that these are ‘forms’ transferred from other genres. In this case there is a resonance of epics and religious tales. In certain instances in feminine wonder tales (tale no 34, 35), the heroine after facing victimisation, herself intimates about the villainy.

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ASSAMESE WONDER TALES AND RELATED FORMS

After analysing the Assamese wonder tales in this study, we have noticed that many inter-generic elements are discernable in Assamese wonder tales. Many elements from sub-genres like religious tales and novellas can be noticed in Assamese wonder tales.
In one feminine wonder tale (tale no 55), we notice elements of religious tales in the preparatory move of it. The protagonist of this type of move commits some offence which is immoral and consequently, is punished by God (in the form of changing fetus). This part of the tale is purely a religious tale and does not fit into the Proppian scheme. However, the rest of the tale proceeds in a typical marchen style.

In some tales we encounter some epical and mythical elements and motives. In one tale (tale no 47) we notice the heroine urging her husband to show the universe inside his mouth and the husband showing it to her by opening his mouth. This resembles the seeing of the universe inside lord Krishna's mouth by Arjuna in the 'Gita'. In another tale (tale no 31), we encounter hero's father imposing an interdiction on his wife (the hero's mother) by drawing three lines on the ground and asking her not to cross these lines. We see how the subsequent violation of this by her results in her abdication by the villain. This remind us of the episode of the abduction of Sita by Ravana in the Ramayana. We also encounter 'Yamraj' (God of Death) in a few tales (tale no 11). In some tales we observe destiny or God performing the role of 'donor' (tale nos 8,9,42,45). The instance of dice game (tale no 30) is also another epical motif. We also observe some etiological features like the introduction of mice in the earth (tale no 26).

In some Assamese wonder tales, we notice the influence of realistic tales or romantic tales or novellas (tale nos 7,19,45) in them. In some of these tales (tale nos. 19,45) these romantic or realistic elements are clearly discernable. In some tales, the first part is clearly novella materials (tale no 45), but the second part proceed in typical marchen style like some tales having elements of both religious tales and wonder tales. However, in one tale (tale no. 19), these realistic and romantic elements may be incorporated in the second part of the tale, the first part being a typical marchen.
We have attempted to apply our methodology to a corpus of Assamese wonder tales and its related forms (structurally) in this study. We have seen that except the Assamese feminine religious tales and a few move in wonder tales (tale no. 55), it is possible to apply Propp’s scheme of analysis and the later developments, modifications and extension of it. It has been noticed that structurally, these forms of tales are more or less akin to wonder tales, although in some forms (novella and tales of the stupid ogre) certain functions ('donor') are absent.

**STRUCTURAL PERSPECTIVES AND SOCIOCULTURAL ASPECTS**

It has been established that an important benefit accruing from structural analysis is that it is a means of gaining insight into the cultural world of a community or society (Dundes 1964) (see chapter I). We have observed frames of many cultural aspects of the Assamese society through the morphological study of these 69 tales. This has become possible by studying the Assamese tales with the help of the contemporary morphological researches along with the Proppian scheme of analysis applied in this work. Mere application of Propp's scheme would have not facilitated the study of the cultural world of the Assamese society.

In this study a tale has been divided into a number of action blocks which depict outcome of an action. This has brought into light that there is a scope of relating morphological emphasis with cultural preoccupations. For example, tales presented in chapter V when contrasted with the tales of chapter IV, it is revealed that there are episodes and themes which give focusses on hero's relationship with his parents and brothers. This might be regarded as a feature of Assamese and Indian tales as in the Aarne-Thompson typology we do not find tales which at the level of the plot present action blocks involving family members (except AT 303 and some of the tales, see chapter V).

Similarly, the heroine after liquidation of the misfortune faced by her, is not content with reuniting with her lost husband which is not complete
reconciliation to her. She strives to meet her entire marital family lost in
the course of the action. This shows the Assamese society’s cultural desire
to live jointly as a family and enjoy the fruits of good fortune together.

The preponderance of co-wives jealousy is encountered in the Assamese
 tales (in 5 tales of the sample of 27). The co-wives’s motive of jealousy
is mainly that they feel vulnerable in front of the heroine. It has been
observed in the study of these Assamese tales that in Assamese society' the
heroine in most cases faces villainy/ misery from somebody in the
family—either her stepmother or co-wives [in one case, she faces villainy
from her own sisters (tale no 56)] It is noteworthy that in only one instance
(tale no 47), the heroine faces villainy from her mother-in law, which is
otherwise a common feature in Indian societies. The fairy tale discourse
and morphology do not tell about this. We have one instance (tale no 46),
where the heroine is given a very high place in the family—she is considered
the ‘Lakshmi’ of the family and everybody obeys her. The plot of the tale
proves her efficiency and argues that she is indispensable. It has been
observed that such a tale is perhaps a literary wonder tale created in the
early twentieth century (Bhattacharjee 2001).

In the religious tales studied in this work, we have observed the influence
of religious discourse on the Assamese society. These tales show the
Assamese peoples observance of religious duties and the belief that
violation of religious duties calls for punishments from divine bodies. They
also believe that bad acts bring punishment and good works are always
rewarded. The gods love the virtuous and the faithful and punish the wicked.

In the basic structure of the episodes, the cultural pattern is not always
noticeable except in the cases discussed above. In the feminine tales, at
the level of sequences, we observe the problems of women in patrilinial
Assamese society is reflected in the structure. For instance, the heroine
faces domination from the father figure before marriage and after marriage
she faces villainy from co-wives, and such villainies are liquidated in course
of the development of the plot. In pattern 3 of feminine tales, heroine’s villainy is liquidated by wonder child. This brings the issue of mother-son relationship in Assamese and Indian society. In a few instances, husband also helps in the liquidation of the villainy.

The characters of the tales reflect cultural notions about them. The slots of tale roles are realised with the characters who carry cultural images. For instance, the image of ‘sannyasi’ (holyman) as a donor (masculine tale) or villain (feminine tale) in different tales represent different images associated with them. The villains in masculine tales are represented by barbers, monsters, kings, and other kins. In case of feminine tales, the villainy of the heroine’s feminine relatives have been discussed above. Villainy also comes to her from sannyasi and other strangers. The donors are aged persons or persons endowed with religious and mythological significance along with other characters (For details, see page no 468). Thus, there is a scope of detailed investigation of these cultural images and metaphors.

CHARACTERS AND MAGIC AGENTS IN ASSAMESE FOLKTALES

It is possible to study the characters of folktales as socio cultural categories dealt in the tales through structural analysis (Apo 1995) (see chapter-I). With the help of this morphological study of the Assamese folktales, we can have some glimpses of the characters in Assamese folktales in their socio-cultural context. We have observed in Assamese tales that the hero is either a common, simple young man of humble origin, or a prince. The tales with common man as the hero rotate around the theme of winning fortunes and marring princesses—these are ‘rags to riches’ stories. He is a seeker hero seeking wealth and recognition (through marriage to a princess) in the society. The tales with a princes as the hero are the tales of heroism, courage and bravery, where he slays monsters and saves himself and/or rescues relatives and others from the clutches of the monsters. In some cases, he (the prince) even risks his life to procure the
object of his father’s desire. However, common men also in some instances is portrayed as monster-slayer.

The heroines of Assamese tales may be a simple, meek, innocent, young woman who suffers silently in the hands of the villain, or a woman who after facing victimisation, becomes active and seeks her rights back by pursuing the villain and achieve these. In many cases, the heroine after facing victimisation, intimates about this herself and paves the way for liquidation of the villainy (tale nos 34,35.). In some cases she bears a strong personality. However, in most cases, she is a victimized hero (ine) and her spouse or parents liquidate the villainy faced by her. The heroine of the novellas is her own saviour.

The villains in Assamese masculine and feminine tales are different. In the masculine tales we encounter two different kinds of villains — human beings as villains and monsters and demons. The human beings acting as villains are normally the hero’s elder brothers motivated by a strong urge of jealousy to their younger brother (the hero). They are jealous of his ability and achievements. The other kind of villain is the powerful, ferocious, fearful and magical monsters having supernatural powers. Their chief motive is to devour the hero and his people as they are human flesh eaters. In one case, the monster wants to marry the beautiful mother of the hero (tale no 31).

The villain in most of the Assamese feminine tales is a woman, interestingly somebody in the family itself. She may be the heroine’s stepmother or co-wife or in some cases, the trusted maid servant. This conforms Ramanujan’s contention that women-centred tale are usually centred around woman and their main characters are women (1999 : 429-30). In a few instances, she faces villainy from an external agency like monster or a magical ‘fakir’ or a sannyasi (tale nos 54,46,45,68).

In most of the Assamese wonder tales, the donor is a supernatural being or a human being endowed with supernatural power and qualities. In
our study, we have come across some characters who help the hero (ine) in overcoming his (her) villainy, but do not transfer any magical agent. We have termed these characters as ‘Helper’ (Apo 1995).

We have encountered holymen like the ‘sannyasi’ in some Assamese wonder tales. In masculine tales he is a beneficiary helping the hero in overcoming his misfortunes by giving him magical agents or helping him in obtaining that. However in some tales he does not behave in a holy way but in a most unbecoming manner— he casts evil, lustful eyes on the heroine, and meets a gruesome end (tale nos 45,68).

The merchant plays an important role in Assamese folktales. We observe in many Assamese tales the merchant playing the role of the head of the family—the father or spouse of the hero (ine).

The farmer is also an important character in Assamese folktales, and a rich farmer is an authoritative parental figure in Assamese tales. This is a contextual feature because farming and cultivation was a main occupation of the Assamese people. In many tale we notice cowherd boys in some characters. They are metaphors for simple village boys.

The ‘Brahmin’ encountered in Assamese tales in most of the times appears as a simple, scholarly, but a poor person, playing the role of a parental figure. Many published tales have been collected from the Brahmin informants, this figure does not persist in all levels of the regional society (Bhattacharjee 1999: 128-29).

The supernatural and marvellous characters observed in Assamese tales are mostly demons, monsters and demonesses. Except in a very few cases, the demons and demonesses are harmful elements—who are always in the look out to harm the hero (ine) and his people. The demon’s motive is to devour the hero where as the demoness wants to marry the hero or his relative using her magical power to enchant him. However, in the tales of the stupid ogre, he appears as a stupid, brainless, humorous figure whose activities creates laughter. Other marvellous characters encountered are the
gods and goddesses in the religious tales and also in some wonder tales (tale nos. 8,9,43).

Total number of occurrences (a character may adopt multiple roles in a tale) of various characters as realisation of the three main roles in wonder tales, viz, the hero, the villain and the donor, separately for masculine wonder tales and feminine wonder tales, encountered in this study are presented below:

**Masculine wonder tales:**

- **Hero:** Prince — 11, Common men — 16.
- **Villain:** Elder brother — 7, Wife — 1, Sister in law — 1, Stepmother — 1, King/Prince — 2, Barber — 1, Monster — 10.
- **Donor:** Old man — 2, Sannyasi — 1, Housewife — 1, Earlier victims of the monster — 5, Ghost/Monster — 5, Snake king — 1, Apasra — 1, God — 3, Supernatural father-in law — 1, Animals and birds with supernatural power — 6.

**Feminine wonder tales:**

- **Heroine:** Daughters — 9, Sister — 2, Wives — 5, Daughter-in law — 5, Princess — 3, God's daughter — 3,
- **Villain:** Stepmother — 8, Co-wives — 5, Mother-in law — 1, Sisters — 1, Maid — 2, Sannyasi — 3, Florist and woodcutter — 3, King — 1, Faqir — 1, Demoness — 2, Foster brother — 1, Husband's brother's wives — 1
- **Donor:** Parents — 3, Children — 1, Spouse — 5, Old lady — 3, Maid — 1, Beggar woman — 2, Heroine's well wisher — 3, God — 3.

The frequency of realisation of tale roles by different characters show that feminine tales mainly project kinship world and the masculine tales present characters from various spheres of life. The donors of the masculine tales include religious and other characters; whereas as the donors of feminine tales are either parents, husbands or women or divine characters.

Some common and frequently observed magic agents in the tales studied
in this work are: magic jewel, magic weapons, magic objects like bag, rope, stick, charmed thorn, and magic birds. Some common items of peasant life like fan, bamboo tubes, traditional towel also assume the character of a magic object in tales.

This work has observed that the morphology of Assamese tales to a large extent conforms to Propp’s model of wonder tales. However, certain tales show deviation from his model. This deviation is more prominent in feminine tales than in masculine tales. Another observation is that religious tales do not follow Propp’s model of composition, whereas novellas with certain variations follow Propp’s scheme. It has also been observed that the segmentation of wonder tales into episodes reveals their internal variety and the interface between structure and cultural meanings. This study argues that Propp’s scheme of moves provide an insight into the composition particularly to the complexities of plot. Further research can explore the possibility of integration of move by correcting the limitations of analysis into moves suggested by some scholars.

Assamese wonder tales reflect certain socio-cultural and psychological aspects at the level of patterning of the tale. It has been shown above that this is observed in slightly higher degree in case of feminine tales. Characters of the tales reflect cultural notions and view points. This thesis contends that the analysis of morphology of folktales reveals socio-cultural patterning to a significant extent.