CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

The folktale is one of the genres of folklore, which is also popular in printed forms, and some oral versions exist as active tradition in many areas of the world. This genre has been appearing in the printed form since the 18th century (Stein 2000: 167). Publication of collections of oral folktales in printed forms are drawing a large number of readers. Blackburn (2003) argues that in India printing helped in the popularization of folktale. Scores of animation films are being made on popular old folktale plots. Folktale plots are also a favourite subject of children plays. Weighty statements on the importance of folktales to the development of children's mind are being made by the social scientists, psychologists and child psychiatrists (Apo 1995: 13).

Folkloristic research of folktale has shown just how important folktales were in the old folk-culture based on oral tradition.

"The need for a form of entertainment set apart from everyday life is no doubt as old as human culture in general, likewise, the ability to invent stories, to create fiction, to unleash the imagination by means of speech, pictures or writing. Inventing, performing and listening to imaginary tales have many functions: to provide aesthetic experiences, joy at the commanding and varying of form, to express and concretise the problems and conflicts arising in a culture and to suggest imaginary solutions; to crystallise the prevailing concepts of the fundamental phenomena of life and to pass them on to future generations; to break the daily monotony and to transport the narrators and listeners to a different reality, a world of narrative. Sometimes, the telling of folktales also acquired magic overtones" (idem).
Apart from these functions, scholars have suggested some other functions folktales seem to have performed in the primitive folk-culture. According to Dimitri Zelenin, hunters in the hunting cultures of Eurasia used suggestive narration in order to transfix game animals or their spirits (Lauri Honko 1986, cited by Apo 1995: 255). Leela Virtanen says that narrator’s comments have been recorded in Russian Karelia indicating that the telling of folktales was believed to protect the house and its inhabitants from evil (Virtanen 1978, cited by Apo 1995: 255).

Traditionally, folktale is the domain of the tellers or narrators. A good narrator or teller has a place in the society.

"Whether among the peasants of Western Ireland or among the natives of Lapland, India or Alaska, folktales are much more than a casual part of the life of those who tell them and hear them. Even where the reciting of tales is to be expected of everyone, there is every effort to make a story interesting and pleasing to the audience. And where tale-telling is the function of a chosen few, professional or semi-professional, it is cultivated as a serious art. Voice, gesture and narrative effects are carefully studied and practised. The man who excels, is rewarded with the esteem of his fellows and with much coveted prestige" (Thompson, 1977:449).

The narrative techniques of folktales of different people can be studied. Thompson writes, "It is possible with considerable success to make comparative studies not only of the themes of folktales, but also of the narrative techniques among people of very diverse cultures, from the simple Australian Bushman to the peasant of Modern Europe and even the professional story tellers of the bazars of Cairo" (Thompson, 1949: 409).

Folktale is a universal phenomenon. Although according to some
research into folktale narrators, the need for folktale is particularly felt in communities, where life was harder and burdened with numerous restrictions, mental and physical pressures. Juha Pentikainen says that Marina Takalo of Russian Karelia found her most rewarding audiences among the men at a winter logging camp in Russia (Pentikainen, 1978: 266-67). But folktale telling has not always been accompanied only with the harsher side of the life. Its chief attractions—the chance it provides of breaking free from the everyday reality and certain universal problems in a positive way, has drawn all groups of people, and not only the lowest strata of the society, as its listeners. Folktale is also able to bridge the boundaries between social classes and eras as it strives as a form of entertainment among the children of different classes (Apo 1995: 14). Thompson says, “All people, irrespective of age, sex, colour and religion, like to listen tale and a good teller of stories has everywhere and always found eager listeners. His tale may be a mere report of a recent happening, a legend of long ago, or an elaborately devised fiction, people hung to his words and satisfy their yearnings for information or amusement to heroic deeds or religious education, or release from the overpowering monotony of their daily lives” (Thompson 1977:3) He adds, “In villages of Central Africa, in outrigger boats on the Pacific, in the Australian bush and within the shadow of Hawaiian Volcanoes, tales of the present and of the mysterious past, of animals and gods and heroes, and of men and women like themselves, hold listeners in their spell or enrich the conversation of daily life. So it is also in Eskimo igloos under the light of seal oil lamps, in the tropical jungles of Brazil, and by the totem poles of the British columbian coast. In Japan too, and China and India, the priest and the scholar, the peasant and the artisan, all join in their love of a good story and their honour for the man who tell it well” (idem).

The study of folktale as a subject of folklore began at the beginning
of the 19th century. Of the three main oral prose genres, myth, legend and folktale, folktale has received the most critical attention in folklore scholarship. Although orality is the forte of folktale, however, for the purpose of study, scholars have always depended on printed or literary sources of folktales. Folktales are mainly collected from oral sources, then rewritten and edited by the collector. Folktales, like legends and myths, have been noted down at a period of cultural history, when oral narration was complemented by written communication in the form of newspapers and journals, popular books and magazines. Oral folktales blossom out into rich lively narrative when collected or recorded in an oral performance, or when written down by a writer editor, as was the case with the creative editing of the Grimm Brothers and Eero Salmelainen (Apo 1995: 15). Stein writes, "From the beginning, fairy tale research was text-centered: oral tradition was rendered as text, preserved in archives and published in collections for general as well as academic reading audience. Only towards the middle of the 20th century did the paradigm, with the aid of modern recording technologies, yield to more context-sensitive and performance centered aspects of story-telling (Stein, 2000: 168).

The structural analysists of folktale by and large ignored the issues of context and performance. Propp himself analysed Afanasyev’s printed collection and developed his theory of morphology. In this study also, a similar attempt has been made notwithstanding the understanding of the importance of performance and context. The above discussion shows the importance of folktale all over the world and as most of the collected texts cannot be taken back to performance situation, this study limits itself to the study of literary texts of folktales and argues that it also helps to gain access to the plot structure and culture of the tellers to a certain extent.
Folktale as a genre of oral/printed oral literature has been drawing the attention of the scholars since the inception of folklore study. The English term 'folktale' is very inclusive and no attempt has ever been made to define it exactly but it has been left as a general term to refer to all kinds of traditional narratives (Thompson, 1949: 409). Thompson defines it as "... the story, which has been handed down from generation to generation either in writing or by word of mouth" (Thompson, 1977: 4). The characteristic features of folktale are: it is traditional, it is handed down from one person to another by words of mouth or sometimes by written words, and there is no virtue in originality (Thompson, 1949: 409).

Different terms have been used to denote folktale. Often in English, the term 'fairy tale' is used to denote folktale. But, in spite of their frequent interchangeability, the terms have distinct etymologies and meanings. The term 'fairy tale' can refer to both a category of oral folk tale and a genre of prose literature. It is used by folk narrative scholars while referring specifically to 'Magic Tales', tales listed under the tale-type numbers 300-749 in the Aarne-Thompson tale-type index. Stein writes, "The term folktale is reserved for any tale deriving from or existing in oral tradition and is generally preferred by folklorists and anthropologists. Literary scholars tend to use the word fairy tale to refer to a genre of prose literature, which may or may not be based on oral tradition" (Stein 2000: 167). The word 'fairy tale' is a translation of the French word 'conte de feée', a form of oral narrative, that became popular among the men and women in the French court in the late 17th century. It first appeared in the title of Mme d’Aulnoy’s 1697 collection of tales. It is in the English language since the middle of the 18th century (idem).

The Germans use the word "Marchen" in academic and popular usage to refer to the literary fairy tale as well as the traditional folk-tale. This word is a diminutive form of the old High German ‘Mar’—meaning
The word ‘folktale’ is a translation of the German “Volksmarchen” and first appeared in the English language in the 19th century. Although the word was not coined by him, ‘Volksmarchen’ first appear in Johann Karl August Musaus’ *Volksmarchen der Deutschen* (‘Folktales of Germany’) published between 1782-1786. (idem). The Grimm Brothers published *Kinder-und Hausmarchen* (‘Children’s and Household Tales’) in 1812, where they included fairy tales, fables, legends and anecdotes. This shows their holistic understanding of folk literature. In their collection, they distinguished between ‘Volksmarchen’ (‘folktales’) and ‘Kunstmarchen’ (‘artistic or literary fairy tales’) in their effort to establish the authenticity of their material and to set themselves apart from contemporary writers of fairy tales (idem). Stein writes, “With the Grimms, the folktale became exclusively associated with a narrative of anonymous origin existing in oral tradition” (idem).

(i) DEFINITION OF A GENRE

Since the inception of folklore study, scholars have attempted to define “Marchen” from different vantage points. Their definitions are not exhaustive, but, nevertheless, their definitions indicate the extent to which the problem of description and definition reflects emphases in folk narrative reaserch. The earliest statement on genre was Jacob Grimm’s observation that ‘the fairy tale is more poetic the legend more historical’ (1812) (cited by Stein 2000: 167). This is an idea that remained largely undeveloped. Following the idea of the Grimms, Johannes Bolte (1913) observed that, since Herder and the Grimms, “the ‘marchen’ has been understood as a tale created from poetic fantasy, particularly from the world of magic, it is a wonder story not concerned with the conditions of real life” (Bolte as cited by Stein 2000: 167). Kurt Ranke, (1975) founder of the *Enzyklopadi des marchens*, has adopted a similar view. He defines the folktale as “a magic narrative that is independent of the conditions of the real world with its categories of time, place, and
casuality, and which has no claim to believability” (Ranke as cited by Stein, 2000: 167). The American folklorist, Stith Thompson was convinced of the centrality of the motif as an element of folk tale analysis. He defined it as: “a tale of some length involving a succession of motifs or episodes. It moves in an unreal world without definite locality or definite characters and is filled with the marvelous. In this never-never land, humble heroes kill adversaries, succeed to kingdoms and marry princeses” (Thompson, 1977: 8). The Russian formalist Vladimir Propp, who viewed fairy tales morphologically (1928), suggested that “any narrative can be a wonder tale that develops from an act of injury or state of lack, through certain mediating functions to an eventual wedding or other concluding function” (Propp, 1968:). The Swiss folklorist, author of *The European Folktale: Form and Nature*, Max Luthi (1982), held that *marchen* was a ‘universal adventure story with a clever and sublime style’ (Luthi 1982 cited by Stein 2000: 168). Stein writes, “The style of the folktale, according to Luthi, is characterised by one-dimensionality (the unproblematic movement between real and enchanted worlds); depthlessness (absence of psychological feeling or motivation on the part of the being tale characters); abstraction (lack of realistic detail and a tendency toward extremes, contrasts, and fixed formulas); and isolation and universal connection (abstract character types with no sustained relationships to other characters)” (2000: 169).

After nearly 200 years of study, interest in folktale has not been exhausted, and more scholarly definitions will continue to be evolved, as new perspectives and approaches will be explored in the field of folktale study.

(ii) **UNDER TALE**

Wortale is an important subclass of folktale. In the Aarne-Thompson tale typology, this sub-class has been termed as ‘Tales of Magic’ (AT 300-7) and has been placed under the broad class ‘Ordinary Folktales’
analysis. In the classical structural analysis of folk narratives, no attempt is made to understand the semantics of the narratives in relation to any extratextual phenomenon. The structural analysts have not usually debated what a folktale tells us about people and their culture. Lauri Honko says, "The future of structural analysis in folkloristics to some extent seems rather uncertain. There is no denying the fruitfulness of the structural approach, but the usefulness of the results of the analysis appears from time to time to pose a problem. What to do with a structure once it has been discovered?" (Honko 1980: 29, cited by Apo 1995: 20). The present study adopts a morphological approach, but leaves scope for approaching the cultural world through formal patterning. The assumption of the study is that there is a relationship between morphology and semantics, and this will be one of the major orientation of the study.

**AIM OF THE STUDY**

Assam has a rich tradition of folktales and efforts have been made to study them systematically. However, little attempts have so far been made to study the structural patterns in Assamese folktales. Therefore, the present study is an attempt to examine these formal features in Assamese folktales. In this study, primarily, an attempt is being made to apply Vladimir Propp’s morphological method of narrative analysis and the modifications of it by later scholars to a corpus of Assamese folktales. The study will try to examine the applicability of Propp’s morphological–structural approach in the context of Assamese folktales with the help of the works of the scholars who developed Propp’s model and modified it to a considerable extent.

Propp’s method of analysis has been carried out in different areas of the world. In the above discussion, it has been noted that there exists some differences in spite of the validity of the model to a significant extent. This study makes an attempt to analyze Assamese tales as stated above, and observes these points of departure from the general Proppian
scheme. The intention is also to move towards some theoretical conclusions in the light of later works in similar directions.

A series of hypotheses is discernible in the subsequent works and can be examined in this study. This work mainly addresses the following hypotheses.

i) There are shorter sequences in fairy tales, which show formal consistency, and fairy tale as a whole, is not a monotype (Bremond 1970, Apo 1995: 130-131).

ii) The structure of fairy-tale as a 'Single type' can be called 'Macro structure', and it is possible to categorise it into further plot types (Apo 1995: 24).

iii) Propp's scheme fits more to masculine tales (Apo 1995: 130-131).

iv) A classification of fairy tales is possible according to the initiation and conclusion of sequences from the point of view of the Hero (inc).

v) The structural analysis of plots also reveals the 'dramatis personae' of the fairy tales at two levels of abstraction: as 'actants' (recurring roles) and as 'actor' (their realisations). It is possible to discern the main socio-cultural categories of characters dealt with in fairy tales by studying them. The semantic features of 'realistic' actors identify them as representatives of different sexes, generations, family roles and social classes. The 'marvellous', 'unrealistic' characters can be described by comparing them to the religious and folk belief images. An examination of the actor classes and their features in fairy tales clarifies and enriches the picture of the semantic structures frequently recurring in fairy tales and provides access to the area of cultural consciousness like to the level of recurring, collective concepts and related attitudes (Apo 1995: 20-21).

(VI) There is a cultural impact on the structure of fairy tale. Structural analysis is a means of gaining insight into the cultural determination of content within the frame of transcultural form. Unlike the geographical-
historical method, structural study of folktale analyzes more than one tale at a time. The advantage of this is to study a number of historically unrelated but structurally identical tales in a given culture simultaneously. Structural analysis is also a prerequisite to study folktales borrowed from one culture and adapted to fit the borrower’s local folktale patterns. (Dundes 1980 : 99-100).

These issues raised in the last 40 years will be examined in this thesis along with a comprehensive description of the structure of Assamese folktales.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

1. This study has been limited to published sources. Materials for analysis have been collected from various available published and printed texts – both Assamese and English.

2. In this study, major emphasis has been given on wonder tales. The reasons for giving major emphasis on wonder tales are:
   i) Most of the published Assamese folktales are wonder tales.
   ii) Propp worked on wonder tales (1928). His scheme of analysis is based on wonder tales.

3. In this study, a few Novella, Religious tales and tales of the Stupid Ogre have been analyzed, because, in some cases, a group of such tales are close to wonder tales. This probably shows some continuity among these genres.

METHODOLOGY

The word ‘structure’ has been applied in different ways in the study of folklore. Sometimes a distinction is made between the formalistic approach of literature and folklore and the anthropological approach of structural analysis of folklore and culture developed by Claude Levi Strauss. However, in this work, the word ‘structure’ mainly refers to ‘morphology’. Nevertheless, it is noticed that morphology is also closely connected with the structures of meanings (Dundes 1964 and Apo 1995).
i) SELECTION AND EVALUATION OF SOURCES

Materials for the study have been collected mainly from various published sources. Tales have been collected mainly from Assamese texts like *Burhi air Sadhu* (1993) and *Kakadeuta aru Natilora* (1991) by L. Bezbaroa; English collection *Tales of Assam* (1980) by P. Goswami; and many other published texts in both Assamese and English (See Bibliography for tale collections used in this study). For the purpose of analysis, the Assamese texts have been translated into English by the researcher. The collectors of Assamese tales have often admitted that they have edited the language of the tales (e.g. Bezbaroa 1993: iii). Moreover, some tales have been borrowed and introduced as Assamese tales (Bhattacharjee 2001: 2). However, the general structure of most of the tales have remained close to folktales as Apo has claimed in case of Finnish tradition. There are certain instances (Goswami S., Hazarika, A.) of reworking with the texts for enhancing their literary qualities. Since it is difficult to recover the 'original' variants/texts for comparison, these statements may be regarded as assumptions.

ii) METHODS OF ANALYSIS

The corpus of Assamese folktales have been approached from the viewpoints of male and female hero. Therefore, these two types of tales have been dealt separately in three different chapters. This has been done to address the relevant hypotheses mentioned above. Folklorists have observed differences in masculine/feminine tales. Holbek (1998: 161, 417) distinguishes masculine/feminine tales on the basis of the gender of the main active character. According to Ramanujan, women centered tales are usually told by women and in these tales, main characters are women (Ramanujan 1999: 429-30). Masculine tales have been further divided into two types (See chapter IV & V) for focussing the morphology of the tales which include episodes in which members of family play major roles. This classification has been adopted because
it is supposed to have some connection with the place of family values concerning solidarity in Indian culture. However, this is a provisional proposition and needs to be examined in other regions of India with more samples of Assamese tale.

Secondly, the tales of each category have been classified into separate plot patterns. The use of the term ‘pattern’ has been taken from Jason and Segal (Jason & Segal, 1977). The patterns have been classified depending on the outcome of the tale from the perspective of the protagonist. Further, a particular pattern has been segmented into different units or episodes, which reminds Bremond’s short chronological sequences (1970), which also develop from an initial situation to a final situation. Thus, there are inner organisations of tales. Holbek gave the analytical insight that from the end of a move, one can look back and explore how the situation develops in a tale (Holbek, 1998 :482 ). Thus inner units of a pattern are the sequences which build up the framework of the pattern.

At the time of analysis, it has been examined to a what extent a particular pattern is morphologically homogeneous and interconnections among different patterns have also been explored on the basis of similarities of patterns of sequences and overall framework.

Some of the main plot patterns have been further sub-divided into sub-types by taking a look at the way in which the hero (ine) achieves his (her) goal. (Apo. 1995 : 25).

Finally, Propp’s ideas of ‘functions’ and ‘move’ have not been dispensed with. Like Apo (1995), Propp’s functions have been incorporated in the analysis to explore the morphology of Assamese folktale. However, in this work, Propp’s ‘functions’ have been clearly mentioned along with the presentation of the text. And the idea of ‘move’ has not been abandoned, although some later scholars like Jason and Holbek preferred different kinds of analytical use of the concept. The outcome of using
the concept of move will be observed in the following chapters.

The patterns and the sub types, which have more than one tale as example in the materials, have been described by means of a characteristic representative tale. The representative tale contains one of the possibilities of realisation of the plot observed in the morphology which other examples of that particular pattern or sub-type also embody. Complete texts have been presented in case of the representative tales and summaries have been used for the other tales classified in the same pattern or sub-type.

In this study, 33 masculine tales and 36 feminine tales have been analyzed. Out of the 33 masculine tales, 27 are wonder tales, 3 are religious tales, and 3 are tales of the stupid ogre. Out of the 36 feminine tales, 27 are wonder tales, 5 are novella, and 4 are religious tales.

An appendix has been included in the thesis to refer the tales in the conclusion. In the body of the thesis, tales have been separately serialised in different patterns. The comprehensive list included in the appendix will be useful for locating a tale and its analysis in the thesis.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The present study of Assamese folktales has certain limitations.

i) In this study, the main focus is on wonder tales, although some other classes of folktales have also been taken into account.

ii) The study is based on printed/published sources. Tales analyzed to study have been collected from various printed published sources ( See Bibliography).

iii) No fieldwork has been done, and so, the study is not based on fieldwork.