I went to Mrs Lahari Hazarika’s home for the first time on 12th Sep 1999. The name of her village is Barigaon, It is located in the North-East side of Jorhat town. One of our college students Bikram told me about Lahari Hazarika. He also went with me. He introduced me with her. I asked her if she knew folktales. As soon as I asked she narrated her first story Atijar Rojâ Rânir Sâdhu. Instantly she could narrate the tale like any other expert teller. According to Mrs Hazarika Sâdhukathâ (folktale) is a form of virtuous advice of the people.

She is a very pious woman. She is actively related with many religious and social organisations of her place. She is also a leader of the women of her place. Though she likes to tell the tales to small children, she tells to other people also. Her grandchildren often listen her stories.

She says that tales are necessary for every child. Because every tale has some moral teachings. According to her even elders should know some tales for moral education.
PLATE VI

Storyteller Mrs. Lahari Hazarika
A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF LAHARI HAZARIKA

Lahari Hazarika was born at her maternal uncle's house on 4th April, 1928. The name of her maternal uncle's village was 'Kownarpur'. It is located in the Sivasagar district of Assam. Her family is 'Kaivarta' (a caste of Assam) by caste.

She comes from a rich family. Their family's economic condition was very good. In her childhood they had no want of anything. Her father was a service holder. He was a member of local school board. Her grandfather, Raimedhi Hazarika, was a 'medhi' (A leader of the village) of his village. She herself says that her father's family is a 'high stander' (standard) family.

She is a mother of eight children: five daughters and three sons. After passing Higher Secondary examination one of her daughters died. So now, they are seven. Three of the daughters married and they are staying at different places of Assam. The another one is at home now. The eldest son is staying at Raraiya, Jorhat, with his wife and children. Another two sons and one daughter is staying with her at home. Her husband died in 1983. Now she is staying with her two sons and one daughter.

I have collected fourteen folktales from Lahari Hazarika. In an interview she told that maximum stories she listened from her grandfather.
in her childhood. A few stories she listened from her grandmother also.

She likes both to tell and listen to the stories. In her time as a teacher in a school there was a class (once in a week) of storytelling. So as a teacher she was bound to tell the tales.

She is a very pious woman. In the month of Bhâda (August-September, A holy month of the Vaishnavas) she regularly goes to the namghar (prayer hall). At home also she reads some holy books like the Kirtana, the Bhâgavata and the Gita. She is also a nâmâti (leader singer) of the place. As a bilaniâ (distributor of consecrated food) she works at the nâmghar (a prayer house). Once I went with her to the nâmghar of her place. At the age of seventy seven she performed an excellent performance as a namati in the nâmghar.

Earlier she used to sing marriage song also in marriage ceremony. But after her daughters death she avoids that. When I go to her house for her story sometimes she tells but oftentimes instead of telling she writes. Once she wrote some stories for me and her son copied it. Her son named the stories as Burhi Âir Sâdhu, in the style of famous folktale collection by Bezborua. Laharî Hazarika is the focus of an intensive filedwork for the period of seven years from 1999 to 2006.

She says that Sâdhukathâ (folktale) has a nice beginning and ending formula. Now-a-days written stories are called galpa (short story). But
galpa and Sadhukatha has a vast difference, according to her. She tells her stories as a grandmother to her grandchildren at home and before she told the stories as a teacher to her students at school. She does not tell any ritual tale. So her tales can be told at any moment without any time bar. Here I present both oral and written (She wrote only to give me) stories of Lahari Hazarika.

Though my original task was to collect her folktale repertoire but during my field work I observed her other behaviour also. She is a very lovely and cheerful woman. She herself says that she is very happy both in her family life and social life. Now-a-days she has become very close to me and she treats me as her own daughter.

She told me that she has only two dukh (sorrow). One is her daughter has died and another ‘dukh’ is she has an unmarried daughter. Again she says that though she has these pains she cannot say that she is an unhappy person. Because no one is in the world without any pain. Even lord Krishna also was not without pain.

Mrs. Lahari Hazarika was born in her maternal uncle's house at Sibsagar district. After a few years she came to her own home. It was on the bank of the river Brahmaputra. She had grandfather, grandmother, four sisters and two brothers. She was the eldest among them. She listened
most of the stories from her grandfather in her childhood.

Lahari Hazarika says that in her youth they had no want of anything. They had three maid servants in their family. So it was not necessary to do the household works for her. Only her duty was to weave the clothes. She knew the different styles of weaving.

She got married when she was nineteen years old. She was the eldest daughter-in-law in her family. So she had to do all her household chores. Her mother-in-law loved her very much. So in her in-laws family she was very happy. She had joined in her job after marriage. At first she joined as an assistant teacher of L.P. school. Afterwards, she became the Head-Mistress of 81 No. Barigaon Nimna Buniadi School of Jorhat.

As a mother she had to put up with many troubles to bring up her children. Her husband, Sabharam Senapati was a police inspector. So he could not stay all the times with her. For that she took up all the responsibilities of her children and home.

In 1965 the river Brahmaputra eroded their village. At the time of such adversity she took shelter in one of her brother's house with her children at Jorhat town. She had stayed there for one year. Then she came to this village where she is staying now.
As a wife she maintained her family very sincerely. Her husband loved her very much. He was very gentle and calm and quiet person. He was a police inspector; later he became a CID Inspector. She is proud of her husband. As a mother-in-law, the relationship with her sons-in-law and daughter-in-law is very good. She treats her daughter-in-law as her own daughter and son-in-laws as her own son. Once I met her one of the son-in-laws and asked him about Lahari Hazarika. He told, “she is a very kind hearted women. She loves us as our own mother. She is a tradition-oriented woman. So my wife and children also learned some traditions, beliefs and customs form her. She always likes, *milâ-priti* (the concord).”

She retired from her job in 1989. Now-a-days most of the time she spends by reading some holy books. She says, “By the grace of god I have a sound health. Only this old age makes me somewhat weak. What I have gained from God is enough for me.” Till now she cooks her rice. She does not take the rice cooked by others. Even at home also she cook rice herself.

She is a religious person. She respects her own Hindu religion but she does not hate other religions. During our conversation sometimes she said, “We all are equal ‘Mahapurush Sankardeva’ also told like that way,” In her view, if we donot think so it will be a sin.
PLATE VII

Lahari Hazarika (right) as a namati (leader singer) at the Namghar of Barigaon, Jorhat.

PLATE VIII

Lahari Hazarika as a bilaniya at a Namghar, Barigaon, Jorhat.
She does not believe in *jāti-ved-prathā* (caste divisions). She says, "No one can say about birth and death. I myself donot know where was my soul before my birth. Her caste background probably made her so sensitive to this issue.

She recites a *sloka* (a verse) from the *Gita* in her own language and says, "The soul does not die. Only the *bhel* (the body) dies". She has a great faith in the *Gita*. She regularly reads this holy book.

Lahari Hazarika is the lady of silver tones. The art of storytelling of Mrs. Lahari Hazarika is very impressive. Usually her tales are long. Some times she uses some habitual ending formula.

Like -

`kathāla pelāle muchi
āmi gharalai āhilo guchi
chun, tomal, pān
dāki bolā Rāma Rām".
(The Jack tree bore fruit and We returnened home Lime, betel-nut, betel-leaf Call out the name of Rama).

"kachuwe melile thor,
*mor sadhur paril or.*
bārir tāmul kechā,
*mor sadhukatha misā.*
(The arum has opened its leaf My tale has come to the end The betel-nut of garden is unripe and My tale is false).
Folklorist Juha Pentikäinen sketches a psycho-portrait of her folklore informant Marina Takalo as a tradition bearer, religious person and idiosyncratic personality (Pentikäinen 1987:75-76).

Juha Pentikäinen shows many contrasting or even contradictory features of Marina Takalo. Pentikäinen says that she was at the same time frank as suspicious. In her character and behaviour there was some masculine features. Furthermore, she was 'a homo religions' and 'homo tradens'. Pentikäinen says "She was decidedly tradition - oriented. Everywhere she moved, she drew upon tradition and attracted people interested into her like a magnet" (Pentikäinen 1987:76). Besides those "Manira Takalo did have self-esteem, but she was also anxious to enhance her prestige" (Ibid.)

Like Marina Takalo we can say as to Lahari Hazarika also is a tradition bearer, religious person and has an idiosyncratic personality. She has strong self-confidence. She always likes to show her happiness and prosperity of life. When she tells about her own family, she always says about the bright side only. She never says about the dark side. According to her, all the people in this world are same but at the same time she prefers the rich people.

One day she said to me, "Dukhiar ghainio nânibâ, dhanir beti janio ânibâ." That means, "Don't bring the girl from a poor family as wife also but you can bring a girl from a rich family's servant also".
There are fourteen tales in Lahari Hazarika's repertoire. Most of the tales are ordinary folktales. There are some supernatural elements in the tales of Atijar Rajā Rānir Sādhu, Princess Hāhichampā' and Phulkownar.

The main characters of her eleven tales are women. Though the title of some tales are named after male characters, inside those tales also we found women as the main characters in the following table classification of the tales in her repertoire is presented.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>No. of Tales</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Magic Tale</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novella</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>Numskull Stories</td>
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Once upon a time, there was a king—he had six wives. One day, when the king was roaming in the town, he saw a very beautiful girl. She was from a very poor family. The king brought her home with the permission of her mother. At first, the mother was reluctant. However, the king brought her home. At home, he told his other wives to live in peace and harmony.

One day, the king went to visit the town. At the time of departure, the king gave a ‘rang singa’ (joy harp) and a ‘khong singa’ (anger harp) to the youngest queen. He loved her very much. He said to the youngest queen that if she played the ‘rong singa’ he would visit the town with joy and if she played the ‘khong singa’, he would come back home with anger. The king was visiting the town. Meanwhile, the delivery time of the queen approached. The other queens had no children. The elder ones tied her eyes with a gamochā (towel) at the time of delivery. When she gave birth to a child, they immediately ordered the soldier to take it to the forest and kill it there. They kept a broom in the place of the child at home. In this way, they ordered the soldier to kill six boy child and one girl child, which the youngest queen delivered. However, the soldier did not kill them, but buried them in the forest. The youngest queen played the khong singa. The king returned home made with anger. Every time, he came home and saw that his youngest queen was giving birth to broom, Kittens, etc. So, he banished her to the cleaning place in the back of the house.
On the other side, out of the youngest queen's seven children buried in the forest, the girl became a *keteki* flower. The boys grew up and remained inside the box in the hole, where they were buried.

The king had a parrot. Everyday, he went to the forest to eat fruits. One day he saw the *keteki* flower. He approached the flower to pluck it. When the parrot was about to pluck the flower, it said,

Chai kakâi bhâi!
ki kaisâ keteki bhani?
rajar gharar bhâtou etâ âhise,
phoolpah dim ne nidim?
nidibâ nâgeswari nidibâ phool
jetiâ âhiba âmâr âi
tetiâ dibâ mâthâ dowâi
(Oh my six brothers,
What are you telling, our *keteki* sister"? A parrot has come from the king's house, Shows I give the flower or not?
Don't give *nagesari*, don't give the flower, when our mother will come, then give it to her bowing your head).

Hearing this, the parrot became surprised, flew to the king and said to him that there was a *keteki"* flower in the forest, but when it (the bird) went to pluck it, it (the flower) said in this way.

The king became surprised and send his ministers to the forest to see and pluck the flower. When the ministers were about to pluck the flower, it said as before. They came back and said everything to the king. Then the king thought about the matter and went himself
to the forest along with the six queens. He asked the eldest queen to pluck the flower. When the queen was about to pluck the flower, it said —

"choi kakāi bhāi, 
ki kaisā keteki bhani?
Lorā māri kuwnari āhise, 
phollpāh dim ne nidim"?

(Oh my six brothers" what are you telling, keteki sister? The murderer queen has come, should I give the flower or not?)

The boys said —

"nidibā nāgeswari nidibā phool 
jetiā āhiba āmār āi 
tetiā dibā māthā dowāi"

Don't give nageswari, don't give the flower .When our mother will come, give it to her bowing your head)

Hearing this, everybody became surprised. A meeting was held in the forest itself. A decision was taken and a palanquin was send to bring the one who was living in the cleansing place. However, she refused to come in the palanquin and said, “If I have to go, I shall go by walk" and came by walking along with the people who went to bring her. When the woman was about to pluck the flower, it said —

"choi kakāi bhāi, 
ki koisā keteki bhani? 
āmār āi āhise, 
phoolpāh dim ne nidim"?

("Oh my six brothers What are you telling, our keteki sister? Our mother has come, should I give the flower or not?)
The boys replied –
“diā nāgeswari, diā phool
parbatar samān hobō kon?
āir samān hobō kon?
jetiā āhise āmār ai,
phool pāh diā mātha dowai”

("Give Nageswari, give the flower. Who can become equal to a mountain, who can become equal to a mother? When our mother has come, give the flower bowing your head)

Then, the mother stretched her hand and the flower turned into a beautiful girl. The girl said to her mother about her six brothers. When the hole was dug the six boys came out. The King returned to the kingdom with everybody. The mater was tried in the king’s court. There, the youngest queen told everybody how the other queens tied her eyes at the time of delivery. The eldest son also told everything.

The king killed the six elder queens by giving in ‘suF Then he lived with the youngest queen and the children in happiness.

In the connection of the tale, Lahari Hazarika said “They could not tolerate the youngest queen due to their co-wife’s jealousy. When a man marries for several times, he has to face such unhappiness.

“ejani ānile lodor podor
dujani ānile gātar endur”

(When one woman is married and brought home, it is all happiness. Married to two it becomes full of unhappiness).

Her grandfather said this proverb to her in her childhood.
Tale No 2.

An Auspicious Daughter-in-law

[Lakhimi Bowari (Novella)]

There was a household in a village. They had five sons. Their parents brought them up with lot of problems. The parents always discussed about their marriage. One by one, all the boys were married. The family had many labourers to work in their paddy-fields. The old woman felt tired for cooking rice for so many people. She used to say to the old man "The charge of the kitchen should be given to one of the daughters-in-law". The old man thought in his mind, "which one should be made the cook?" One day, the old man was sitting outside of the house taking tea. He wanted to test and have proof of the daughters-in-law and said, "The crow has taken away the 'potaguti' (the grinding stone)" Hearing this, the old woman and the four daughters-in-law came out. But the youngest daughter-in-law did not come out. The old man called her and asked, "Daughter-in-law, why you did not come out"? Father, it is impossible for a crow to take away the 'potaguti'. So I was doing my work and did not come out. If I have done anything wrong. Please excuse me".

The old man was thinking in his mind, and in the evening, at dinners, told infront of his sons and daughters-in-laws, "From to-day onward, I have given the "Lakhsmi charu" (virtuous cooking pot -symbolic of auspiciousness) of the family to the youngest daughter-in-law. If anybody has anything to say, can say". The sons said, "Whatever you think as good, is also our opinion". From that day onward the youngest daughter-in-law became the cook of the household. But while going to become the cook, she said, "Everybody must bring something home while coming back from field or outside. Then only I shall become the cook. Everybody agreed to her.
Days went by. One day, the eldest brother could not get anything and brought a piece of firewood smeared with human excrete. He came and said to her, "Today I did not get anything I got only this thing and have brought it". The daughter-in-law said, "Brother, please keep it on the fence in the back of the house". He kept it. Days went by in this way.

One day, the daughter of the king of that country came to take bath in a river. She removed these and kept the packet on the bank of the river and went to take bath. Meanwhile, a crow came and picked up the packet and flew away. It came to that fence, left the packet on it, and started to eat the human excrete. Hearing the sound, the youngest daughter-in-law came out and saw that a packet was lying there. She drove away the crow and took home the packet. She kept the packet in the box and did not tell anybody about this when the loss of the ornament was discovered, the king announced beating a drum that whoever had found the ornaments, he would be given half of his kingdom. The father-in-law heard about this and said to the daughter-in-law. She said, 'Father, I have found it". The old man asked, "where you got that"? Then she told him everything.

The father in-law was afraid and he said about this to some people. The matter reached the king's ear. His messenger came and called them to the king. Everybody – the father-in law and the mother in-law, husbands, all appeared in front of the king. Then the king asked, "How have you got it"? Then the daughter-in-law told the truth. Hearing this, the king became very pleased. Then he gave them half of his kingdom. He also gave the woman some gold coins. That king named her the 'virtuous daughter-in-law'.

After telling the tale, Lahari Hazarika said, "If there are many brothers in a family, they must live in peace and harmony. By cleverness,
the old man made the youngest daughter in-law the head cook to keep peace in the family. Then the other daughters in-law nothing to say.

Her granddaughter was listening the tale. She said, "The old man's cleverness was really pleasing. Afraid that there may be quarrel in the family, the old man by his intelligence, made the youngest daughter in-law the head cook. As it is, I like my grandmother's tales about old man and old women".

Tale No. 3

The Tale of the Cat's Daughter

*Mekurir Jiye bask Sadhu* (Magic Tale) AT 403

There was a household in a village. The family had a lovely cat as pet. The cat as well as the wife of the man was pregnant at the same time. One day, the cat said to the woman, "Mother, I want to eat fish". The woman said, "I find it difficult to manage the rice, wherefrom I shall give you fish? If you can bring fish, I shall cook and give it to you". Hearing this, the cat stole fish from anywhere and gave to the woman. However, the woman cooked the fish, ate the meal themselves and gave only the bones to the cat. Like this, some days went by one day, the cat broght a big fish and said, "Mother, please give me some meat, donot give only the bones". But, that day also, she was given only the bones. This made her very unhappy and she prayed to the God, "Oh God, give me whatever is in her belly and give her whatever is in my belly." It happened as it was thought.
After some days, the cat gave birth to two girls and the woman gave birth to two kittens. The cat somehow brought up the girls will love and affection. She left the girls at home and went in search of food. One day, the girls said, "Mother, if somebody kills you when you go in search of food to a distant place, how would we come to know?"

The cat gave them a pot full of milk and planted a *tulsi* plant. She said, "If I die, the milk will become black and the *tulsi* plant will die. Then you go to search me." It really happened so — the milk became black, the *tulsi* plant died. The girls started crying and went in search of their mother. After going for many distance, they felt thirsty. While searching for water, they reached a river. The elder sister drank water to her heart's content. But when she wanted to bring water for her younger sister, the river became dry. The elder sister was surprised and was thinking about it. Then the princess of the river said, "If you want water, then give me your necklace". Finding no other way, she gave her necklace and brought water for her younger sister. But when she went again to bring back her necklace and approached the river, the princess of the river kept her. When the younger sister saw that her elder sister was not returning, she sat there and started crying.

At that time, a merchant was going in a boat in that river. He saw the beautiful girl and brought her home. He already has two wives. They could not tolerate the youngest one. As she was very young, the merchant loved her very much. They elder ones thought how to harm her. Meanwhile, the youngest one's delivery time approached. They tied her eyes with a *gāmochā*. She delivered a boy child, but they threw it in the river. They said to the Merchant that she delivered a 'dhekithora'. After that, she again gave birth to a boy child, but they threw it in the river. This time, they said to the merchant that she gave birth to a 'ou-tenga'. The Merchant threw the youngest wife out of the house. She went away and took shelter in a hut in the cleansing place of a neighbour. She begged for a living.
One day, the merchant was going on trade by the same river and in the middle of it, his boat was stopped, it was stopped by the princess of the river. While he was thinking what to do, she said, "Merchant, you agree to held a big feast and leave your gâmochâ and shirt here".

The merchant agreed to held a big feast and left his gâmochâ and shirt and immediately his boat was freed. On the other hand, the aunt of the two boys, who were thrown in the water of the river, brought them up. She explained everything to them and instructed what to do. The Merchant reached home and made preparation for the big feast. The aunt sends the two boys to the feast with the merchant's gâmochâ and shirt, and also told them where their mother was living. Accordingly, the boys went to their mother and asked for water. But their mother could not recognize them and wanted to drive them away. Then they explained everything to her and she recognized them. She fed them and send them to the feast.

The feast began. In the meantime, the people, one by one, started telling that two boys have come to the feast after taking rest and meal in the house of the woman, whom the merchant drove away from his house. The matter is to be tried. The boys should also give their identity. Then the elder boy stood up and said, "I don't know anything about this". Then both the boys showed the gâmochâ and the shirt to the people gathered there and told them everything as instructed by their aunt. The people became surprised The Merchant recognized them and embraced them. Then he bowed in front of the people and confessed that the gâmochâ and the shirt were his. The people realized that these were all the creating of the co-wives. The merchant called his two wives and asked them in front of the people, but they could not say anything. The people did not create any scene ate the feast and went home. The merchant cut the nose and ears of the two wives and drove them away from his house. Then he lived happily with his two sons and youngest wife.
Tale No. 4.

Tale Of a Wood Cutter

[Kharikatiār Sādhu (Novella) AT 923B]

There was a king in a country. In the king’s house there was a woodcutter. He always gave a load of firewood in the king’s house. He got some eatables in exchange of that. The woodcutter was very poor and untidy. He had only a broken house. Except that he had nothing else.

In that same country, there was a cultivator. He had seven children. One day he called all of them near him. He had innumerable property. So he asked them, "By whose fortune’s favour you have been living? The sons said in one voice, "Father, by your fortune’s favour only, we are living." But the youngest daughter, Sakuntala kept quiet. Then the father said to her, "Why have not you told anything?"

She said, "I have been living by my own fortune’s favour." Then her father got angry and took her into a forest.

In that forest, the woodcutter was cutting wood. The father said to him, "I have given this girl to you. You take her," Then the woodcutter said, " I have only a broken house. I have nothing to eat. Whatever I get from the king in exchange of this firewood, that much only is my earning. How will I take her." But the father said, "She will live by her own forutune." By this way the father gave his daughter to the woodcutter and went away. Without getting any means, woodcutter took her to his home. Though she saw his broken house she did not feel bad. She thought, " Whatever is in my destiny I will get that much only."
Whatever things the woodcutter had brought from the king's house, she cooked nicely half of that and both ate. The other half she kept hidden. Before he was very dirty. She bought soap and bathed him regularly and his health became better than before. The people nearby them were discussing, "What a 'Lakshmi' she is!"

Afterwards, they became the parent of two children: one son and one daughter.

Once the king called his ministers and told, "I am going to visit the people from village to village. So all of you take your horses, elephants, chariots and other vehicles to go with me."

The woodcutter's wife came to know about that. She said to her husband, "You bring some dogs for me." He did so. She had bathed the dogs and tied them together with a rope. She told her husband, "The king will go to visit the people. So you will go with these dogs in front of him. When he will ask about you and your dog then you will tell that you do not know anything, only your wife knows everything."

He went with the king's party along with the dogs. Then the ministers asked him, "Why are you doing such an evil work?" The woodcutter said, "I do not know anything. Only my wife knows everything."

After coming from visiting the people, the king called the woodcutter. He came to the royal court with his wife and the children. The woodcutter prostrated in front of the king and said, "Swargadew, you can cut or kill me; I do not know anything. Only my wife knows everything."

Then king asked his wife, "Why did you send the dogs with my party?" She said, "Swargadew, my husband does not know anything. We had nothing to send with you except the dogs. So I told him to go
with the dogs. I thought that then only you will ask us about our distress." Then the king said, "I am satisfied with your words. Now you can tell me, what do you need?

The king continued, "I did not know that the wood-cutter had changed after marriage." Then the wife of the woodcutter said. "Swargadew, if you want to give us something then you can give a good official job to my husband." The king and the ministers were satisfied with the wife of the woodcutter. So they made her husband 'Baruah' of the king's office.

From that day onward the condition of their family had improved.

On the other side, Sakuntalā's mother always said to her husband, "You should go and see how our daughter "Sankunatala" is".

Meanwhile, they had become very poor after they threw out their daughter 'Sakuntala'. One day, Sakuntalā's father came to see their daughter. He saw that the house of the woodcutter was not there. Then he asked the neighbours. They said, 'Donot tell him as woodcutter. He is a 'Baruah' of the king now. There is the building of the 'Baruah'."

The father went to that building. But the doorkeeper did not allow him to go. Then he said, 'I am the father of the wife of 'Boruah'. Then the doorkeeper called the wife of 'Boruah' to see her father. 'Sakuntala' recognized her father and took him inside the house. She gave him clothes to change and told to take bath. Then she asked about her mother and home. Her father told, "After you came here we became very poor. Our properties and household animals all have gone. We have nothing at home now. Then 'Sakuntala' said, "I have been living on my own fortune. All of you also come here and stay with me. 'Baruah' will make a house for you."
Then all of them came and lived happily with their daughter 'Sakuntalā'.

Then the father said, "Oh god, what is the power of fortune,!

With that power —

Nichalā may become achalā and
achalā may become nichalā.

After telling this tale Lahari Hazarika said, "Nobody knows about his fortune. With the power of one's own destiny a very poor man may become a rich person and a very rich person also may become a poor. So we should believe in our own fortune.

She told that we can tell this tale as Chāulpuriār Sādhu also. The woodcutter ate one 'purā' (a measure of grains) rice in one meal. So his another name is Chāulpuriā.

In this tale the protagonist is a woman who improves the material condition of their lives and her husband's position with her intelligence and savings. This tale also reflects independent character of the protagonist. The narrator however regards it as a tale of fortune. This observation shows that prevailing religious discourse of faith and destiny has influenced the narrator to find meaning in the tale.
Tale No. 5.

Litikāi

(Novella)

There was an old couple in a certain village. They had no children. So they were always in anxiety. Many times had gone by that way. After many years they got a boy child. He was very lean bodied. So everyone in the village called him Litikāi. His parents also did not consult any astrologer for his name and he went by that name which was given by the villagers.

Gradually Litikāi had grown up. At that time schooling was not compulsory. So he did not go to the school. He did the work of a cowherd. To earn money by selling milk, his parents bought a cow for him. He always went to graze the cattle with a stick in his hand. The other people of the village asked him to graze their cattle. He got some money for that work.

In this way he became a youth. His parent wanted to get him married. They fixed an auspicious date for his marriage. The name of the girl with whom Litikāi was married, was Miliki. Miliki was very expert in weaving. She was skilful in other course also.

Meanwhile the Māgh bihu had come. Like other sons-in-law, Litikāi also went to his father-in-laws house with his wife to show them respect. He went, stayed, saw, heard and did respect to his in-laws.

There was a rang pathār (an arena) nearby his father-in-law's house. Every year in the Māgh bihu the villagers organized some games like buffalo-fight, wrestling, cock-fight, and tiliki dance. Both Litikāi and his wife enjoyed those. After staying some days there they returned home. Miliki enjoyed the tiliki dance very much. So she
learned that from her father. Litikâi also learned from Miliki. When they were returning home Litikai began to sing like this -

\[
\text{Sahurar gharat phuribalai gaichilo} \\
\text{tîiki etâ pâlo heitou.} \\
\text{sahurar gharat phuribalai gaichilo} \\
\text{tîiki etâ pâlo heitou.}
\]

(I went to the father-in-laws house; I have got a \textit{tîiki} there.)

All the people on the road laughed at them. When they reached home Litikai's mother asked him, "Where have you got this \textit{tîiki} dance?"

He said, "Our Miliki has brought this \textit{tîiki} and he showed them a \textit{tîiki} and other monkey dance. From that day he showed the dance everywhere and made the people laugh.

But, how cruel is the God! One day Litikai died of asthma. All the villagers cried a lot in grief, on his death.

According to Lahari Hazarika the meaning of the tale Litikai is that a man can make himself a true man by virtue of his own deeds.

She again tried to give an explanation, which illustrate the role of virtuous acts in human life. However, the texts of the tale show three different aspects; 1) childless old couple at the beginning, 2) the birth of a child and affection of the parents and neighbour and 3) happy married life of Litikai. This could be summarized into three symbols of women-hood; motherhood, affection and conjugal life. The ending of the tale is tragic. However the teller does not stress on this aspect in her explanation.

In everyday conversation she expressed her sorrow for the death of her daughter. Similarly Litikai's death also evoked her to comment
on the cruelty of God. Inspite of that her explanation took a different ideological term.

Tale No. 6.

A Tale of the King Sāl

[Sālrājār Kāhini, (Novella)]

Once upon a time there was a king in a country named ‘Sāl’.

He was very indomitable and greedy. The things which came to his sight once, he wanted to make these his own. So the people of his country did not like him.

One day the king went to visit another country with some of his ministers and soldiers. The name of the king of that country was ‘Mani’. His wife’s name was Ābudou. She was very lovely and beautiful to look at. King Sāl made friendship with king Mani. One day the wife of the king Mani had come into the king Sāl’s sight. He became mad after seeing her beauty. So he wanted to marry her. He could not keep it inside anymore and told everything about his desire to his minister. Then the minister said, “Maharaj, it is a foreign country. We can not take her from here by force. So you can do one thing. You invite them (the king and the queen) to visit our country. Then we will see what we can do;”
According to the minister's vile advice the king 'Sâl' invited the king 'Mani' and his wife 'Abudou' to his own country.

After coming home he could not stay in peace. He always dreamt of the queen 'Abudou'. Immediately the dream of the king Sâl became true.

One day king Mani and the queen 'Abudou' came to visit the country of king Sâl. The minister of the king wanted to show their places to the king Mani and by means of that he took the king with him to show some places. There, the minister killed him by piercing in 'Sul'.

At that time 'Abudou' was praying in front of the idol. Suddenly, the earthen lamp, which was lighting in front of the idol extinguished. That was an inauspicious sign. So the queen was frightened a lot.

At that moment a crow came nearby her. The beak of the bird was smeared with blood. There was a belief that the crow had the power of divination.

So the wife of the king 'Mani' cried in front of the crow

\begin{verbatim}
Kâuri kâuri ajâtik Kâuri
kino khái bolâli thot,
gosâi châki jwalâote amangal miliche
mangal châi janâi de mok
\end{verbatim}

(Oh crow, casteless crow, what have you eaten to redden your beak. An inauspicious sign has been
Then the crow replied —

'Majāli chāparit Manik pingat dishe
 tāke khāi bolālo thot,
 kān chāi keru ānishe
 maniyē mātishe
 tāke pindhai dība tok.

(Mani is pierced in a 'Sul' in 'Majāli Chāpari' I have painted my beak by eating that. He has bought an earring for you and has asked you to put on that.)

By hearing the reply of the crow she became impatient and again told to the crow —

Kabāgai kabāgai manire kataki
 Sāl rajāi napathāi mok
 ku-buddhi kari
 Manik hatyā kari
 sālar patni banāba mok.

(Oh the messenger of Mani! you tell him the king 'Sāl' will not send me. He will make me his wife by killing Mani with evil design.)

By this way king Sāl killed king Mani and made 'Abudou' his own wife.

Lahari Hazarika told, - "The experiences of life of the people can make a tale". With respect to this tale she told a proverb, as -
“Dhan lobb, māsh lobb
āru lobb tiri
sar bajana jānībā ei tinioti bighini.”

(The avidity of property, fish and woman, these three can bring misfortune to people. So all should know about that).

The king Sāl did not know about that but he should know that she commented.

The interpretation given by Lahari Hazarika is critical of the King Sāl who for marrying king Man’s wife murdered him. This tale is a masculine tale found in the repertoire of the teller. However the interpretation offered is critical of the lust of king Sal.

**TALE NO. 7**

**The King Silabhadra**

[Rajā Silabhadra]

Once upon a time there was a king named ‘Silabhadra’. He had no children. So always he was in an anxiety. He was a very pious king. He always respected the pious and honest people. He patronised them by giving gifts sometimes. So there were few people who were not honest in his country.

After many years they got a boy child by the grace of God. So, in his happiness, he wanted to give some things as gifts to the poor people of his country. He ordered his ministers to inform all the people
by beating drums. Immediately, it was done as was ordered. As soon as they heard the news the poor people of the country reached the king's palace. The king gave them gift one by one. At last a very poor man came to take his gift. The king gifted him a full gunny bag of Jahâ-dhân. After getting the rice bag, he blessed the king and went back home. He kept his bag at home and went to cut firewood in the jungle. The wife of the poor man opened the bag and saw that there was a gold coin with the rice. She felt very happy and kept it very carefully with great enthusiasm. After a while the man came back from the jungle. Then his wife told him, "I have got a gold coin inside the rice bag. Where did you get the gold coin?" Then he became a very surprised and said, "Actually the king gave me the bag of rice only. I think it has come with the rice by mistake. So we should return it."

Hearing this, the wife of the man got angry. She said, "I think there is no such idiotic person in this world like you. By stroke of good luck only we have got this coin. Now I will not give it to you to return." But the man did not care, to her saying.

He went to the king with that coin and told him everything. The king praised him for his honesty and gave him more gold coins as gift. By those coins the man became owner of a huge property.

One of his neighbours had been watching him for many days. He thought, "How this poor man has become so rich?" One day he asked him, "How have you earned these money in such a short time?" Then he told everything to his neighbour, how he became such a rich person.

The neighbour was very greedy. So one day he went to the king's palace with a gold coin and said to the king, Mahâraj, I am a very poor person. As a gift you gave me a bag of rice. But in side the
bag I found this coin. I think by mistake it has gone to me. I have not any avidity for that, so I have come to return it." He thought that by hearing his words, The king would think him an honest person and he would get more coins by showing his honesty.

But the king watched at him nicely. Then he saw that he was wearing some gold rings in his fingers. Actually at home he forgot to take off the rings. So the king understood that he was not a poor man but a liar. So, the coin that he brought from home was kept in the king's treasury, and the king ordered his sentry to kill man.

Kachuwe melile thor
mor Sadhur pari or
barir tamol kecha
mor sadhukatha misa.

Lahari Hazarika told a proverb, Lobhei pāp, pâpei mrityu. (The greed is sin and sin is death), in the context of this tale.

TALE NO. 8

A Tale of Abegetiā

[Abegetiār Sādhu (Novella)]

There was an old couple in a certain village. They were very poor. The old couple had seven children. The youngest son was very short. His height was only a span long. But he was very intelligent. By dint of his intelligence he was leading his livelihood depending on his brothers.

After some years his parent died. One day he and his brothers went to cut and gathered the firewood in a forest. When they were cutting
a big tree, the tree had fallen down on top of his elder brothers head and all of them had died. He cried and cried. He did not find any other means except that. Luckily a cultivator was going somewhere on that way. He heard his crying and asked, "Who are you? why are you crying? What was happened to you? Tell me eveything. If I can, I will help you. Then he came infront of him and described about his grief.

Then the cultivator felt regret and took the boy to his own home. From that day the boy stayed there by helping the cultivator's work.

The cultivator was a lonely person. So the boy helped him in his every-works.

One day the boy went to plough in the field. He stood up on the grip of the plough and began to ploughing. After ploughing he descended from there to make embankment across the field.

At that time a king was coming to visit the people of his courtry by that way. The king and his people trempled his ploughing field and destroyed that. ‘Abegetiā’ got angry for the act of the king and abused him by some harsh words. ‘Abegotia’ was so short that the king couldnot see him. He was hiding behind a clod of earth. So the king’s man took his cows to the king’s house.

‘Abegetiā’ became greatly afflicted for their work. So he went home and told everything to the cultivator. He also regreted for that. Sometimes had gone by that way. But Abegetiā had always a thought, how he could bring the cows from the king’s house.

One day he went to graze the cow to the field. He was hanging on the tail of the cow. But the cow suddenly evacuated the bowels on his head. So he fell down from the tail and had hidden under the cow-dung.
At that moment a flock of elephant came to the field to eat the paddy. By the trampling of the elephant he came out from the cow-dung. Then he began to scold the elephants and told, "Who are you to break my religious austerity?" To day I will reduce you by the curse." Then the elephant told, "Brother, donot curse us. By mistake only we did such an evil work. So kindly forgive us."

Then Abegetiâ told, "If you can help me to do some work then only I will forgive you." Then the elephants were agreed with him. Abegetia told about his cows, how the king's people took them and he also told to fight with king's man to get the cows.

The next day Abegetia went to the king's palace to fight with the king's man by rising on the back of the elephant. When they reached at the gateway of the king's palace he descended from the back of the elephant and straight way he went to the royal court. He told to the king, "Will you give my cows or not? If you will not give my cows than come to fight with me;"

Then the king wanted to fight with him and gave an announcement for fighting. The battle had begun amongst both the party. Many soldier's of the king had died with the help of the elephants in the battle. Even the prince also died there. So the king submitted to Abegitiâ and gave in marriage his daughter to Abegetiâ.

By his intelligence Abegetiâ lived happily forever.

Lahari Hazarika said that God helps all the people. Though Ebegetiâ was a very small man, instead of bodily strength god gave him much intelligence and mental strength. By that power he could fight with the king.
TALE NO. 9

Phulkownar

[Magic Tale]

Once upon a time there was a couple of Brahmin and his wife in a certain village. They were very poor. The Brahmin sometimes went to beg and sometimes consulted for people's fate to support his family. They had a boy child. The Brahmin died when his child's age was only five. After his father's death, his mother admitted him into a school but he did not like to go there.

He was a very intelligent boy. In that time people could fly by wooden Pakhi ghorā and he wanted to visit other country by that Pakhi ghorā. At first his mother did not allow him but on his request finally she permitted him to go. By getting mother's permission he flew with that ghorā. After flying sometime he got a flower garden of a lady garlan-maker. But the flower of that garlen was dry. When the boy landed in the garlen the flowers of the garlen became fresh and glittery. The people of that place surprised to see that. The garlen-maker also heard that news. She was quite surprised to hear that news and came to see the garlen. Then she saw that, that was true.

She entered in to the garden and met the boy. She asked the boy, 'who are you? Any deity or a human being? Or a ghost?'

Then he told, "I am neither a ghost nor a deity. I am a human being.

The garland maker took him to her own home. She gave him a new name Phulkownar and from that day he went by the name of Phulkownar.

There was a very beautiful girl of the king of that country. The garland-maker always gave her a nice garland to put on her. In exchange
of that she got something. Phulkownar always looked at her when she made the garland. One day Phulkownar wanted to make a garland for the princess and told the garland maker, “Today I will make the garland.” She allowed him to make. The garland which was made by Phulkowar was more beautiful. The princess liked that garland more and asked the garland-maker, “Who have made this garland?” Then she told everything to her. Then the princess wanted to see him. When they saw each other; they fell in love. They were married at last by mutual consent.

After somedays the king heard the news of their marriage. The king was very oppressive. He ordered his sentry to kill Phulkowar.

There was an astrologer in that country. He was very kind hearted. He liked the princess as her own daughter. When he heard the news of that distress of the princess, he made a device and went to the king and said, Mahārāj, any person, whom your sentry will kill with in tonight will be a very lucky person. As soon as you kill him, he will be the king of the heaven. The stupid king thought that, that was true. So he told, “Why will I give the chance to Phulkownar, such a contemptible man to be a king of the heaven?” It is better to kill myself. Then I will be able to become the king of heaven."

He called the sentry and told him not to kill Phulkownar. Instead of that he told him to kill the king. That night the sentry killed the king. The princess and the Phulkownar lived happily forever.

Kathâle pelâle muchi
āmi gharalai āhilo gushi
chun tâmol pân
dâki bolâ Râma Râm
(The jack tree bore fruit and
We returned home
Lime, betel-nut, betel-leaf
Call out the name of Rama).
This tale depicts how a lady after her husband's death brought up a child. The child with the help of certain fantastic aids and exceptional skills marries a prince. Lahari Hazarika we have observed is a self-dependent woman with strong motherly feeling. Though she did not pass any comment after the tale session it seems that the tale reflects another feature of her personality and repertoire that is motherly aspiration for offspring's success.

**TALE NO. 10**

**The Princess Hāhichampā**

*Rajkumari Hāhichampā (Magic Tale) AT 510*

Once upon a time there was a king in a certain country. He lived with his daughter, named 'Hāhichampā'. 'Hāhichampā' was very beautiful to look at. She was as bright as pure gold. Her lips were like the colour of henna. She had a strange power that, where she spat out by chewing betel nut, a lotus was grown there. She was affectionate to all for that power. She had only a distress that she had no mother. Her mother had died, when 'Hāhichampā' was only one year old. So no one was at home to look after her when the king was out. The king could not go anywhere. So the king married again. Day by day 'Hāhichampā' had grown up.

One day 'Hāhichampā' went to take bath to a river with her friends. At that same time a prince of another country was going for hunting on that way. Then he saw that the princess was dancing on top of a lotus that she made herself from her spit. The prince had charmed on her beauty and fell in love with her.

One of her friends informed everything about her to her stepmother. Her stepmother did not like her.
Once the king went to visit some places in his kingdom for some days. The princess stayed with her stepmother. After a few days Hāhichampā went to her maternal uncle’s marriage ceremony. On that ceremony she wore her stepmother’s clothes. After a few days she returned home. Then her mother saw a very little stain in her cloth. For that negligible fault her stepmother punished her much.

The queen always thought to kill her. One day the queen went to roam about with Hāhichampā. After going a short distance the queen fell tired and both of them sat under a tree. A river was flowing near the tree. The queen called her to the bank of the river for drinking water. When Hāhichampā stood near the river her stepmother pushed her and she fell down in to the river. The current of the river floated her somewhere. The queen thought she had died and she went to her palace with a great pleasure of mind.

A washerman was washing clothes on that river within a short distance. He saw that a very beautiful girl was floating on the river. He took the girl to the bank of the river and the other people nearby him also came to help him.

At that moment the king was coming from the places where he went to visit. He saw that something was happening on the bank of the river. He went near them and that the girl was his daughter Hāhichampā. He was quite surprised to see her there. The king took her to the washerman’s house. After two or three days treatment she became normal. Then the king went alone to his royal palace and kept his daughter in the washerman’s house.

By going home he asked about his daughter to the queen. Then she told that she had gone to her maternal uncle’s home. At that time Hāhichampā reached there with the washerman and his villagers. Then the queen got unnerved.
The king wanted to kill the queen. But Hāhichampā requested him not to kill her. So the king turned out her from the palace.

Then the king called the prince to whom Hāhichampā loved and gave in marriage her with him.

Storyteller Lahari Hazarika said, "The Princess Hāhichampā was the queen's co-wife's daughter. So the queen had a great dislike for her. But she had no fault. So god helped her".

Lahari Hazarika give emphasis on the bitter relationship that normally exist among the co-wives. Various interpretations of this international tale type. AT 510 has been given one is psychological given by A.K. Ramanujan (Ramanujan, 1991) and others which is stepmother is split representation of the good and bad side of a mother. However, Lahari Hazarika says 'Man is the greatest enemy of mankind'. Basically her reaction shows that it is rivalry between co-wives and an issue of human behaviour that are important in the tale.

TALE NO. 11

A Tale of Mother-in-Law and Daughter-in Law

[Sāhu āru Bowārir Sādhu (Novella)]

There was a couple of old man and old woman in a certain village. The had a son and a daughter. When the daughter had grown up
they gave her in marriage and after a few years their son also got married. The daughter in-law was very beautiful to looked at. But one day suddenly the old man died. After her husbands death the old woman became more old and unhealthy.

The daughter in-law did not treat her well. Even she did not give her to eat properly. One day the son brought three 'Kurhi' fish from somewhere. Then the old woman told, "Bowari, today you will give me the head of the fish to eat. Though I have no teeth I will suck it." But at night when she went to take rice she saw that her daughter-in-law did not give the head of the fish to her. So she asked to her daughter-in-law, "Bowari, why did not you give the thing which I told before." Then the old woman's son asked to his wife, "What is she asking for?" Then his wife told, "She told me to cut and cook your head. But how will I give that. Always she tells me to give that."

Then the son got angry and thought, "It will be better to give her banishment." So one day he took her for banishment to a forest. They entered in to a deep forest after going sometime. His mother could not understand anything. But the son told, "You are always giving annoyance to our family. So you should stay here forever. Then only the peace will come to our house."

He told that way to his mother and went away from the forest. But after going sometime he heard that someone was telling something to the God. Then he wanted and heard the voice. In the mean time the rain had come with thunder. So she was praying to God like that way, "Oh God I donot rain until my son reached home safely. For one head of the 'Kurhi' fish I got this banishment." When he heard his mother's prayer to God then he went to his mother and asked about what she was telling.

Then his mother told everything to his son. By leaving from his mother he regreted himself and again he told her to go with him.
There was a couple of old man and old woman nearby that forest. The son took his mother to their house and by keeping his mother there, he returned home.

At home his wife asked him whether he kept her in the forest or not. Then he replied, "Yes, I gave her banishment." That night he slept by abstinence from food. The grandchildren asked to their father about their grandmother. He told, "I kept her in your aunts house." One day his sister came and asked about her mother. When she began to cry without seeing her mother then he told everything to his sister.

After a few days he was cutting a whip of spiny bamboo. Then his wife asked, "Why are you cutting the whip? He replied, "To beat you." Then she told, "If you beat me then my brothers will also will come and beat you. I did not do anything bad to you. You have seen, After your mother's banishment how smoothly my family is running!" As soon as she told that he began to beat her. He sent the message to his in-laws house that she was sick. If they would come soon then only they could see their daughter. As soon as they got the message her parents and brothers had come. Then they saw that their daughter was not ill. They beat her badly. So they called a meeting. Her husband told everything about her in the meeting. Then on behalf of daughter the father-in-law prayed to forgive her daughter in the meeting. His daughter also took oath in front of the meeting not to do such as evil work in future. With blessings the public of the meeting told them to live happily as before.

They took their mother from the old man's house and lived happily forever.

In the context of this tale Lahari Hazarika told, "Malice goes before a fall".
There are other variants of this tale. Goswami has collected one variant and that variant is shorter and does not contain the later part of the tale. Where a public meeting sets issue. In this tale conflict between the authority of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law to expressed. It is more a question of power relations within the gender that the inter-gender conflict. However, one point is to be kept in mind that in the patriarchal power structure of Assamese family mother’s power to co-related with some power and the wife or daughter-in-law becomes a scape goat or reject of coercion.

TALE NO. 12

A Tale of a Crab

[Etâ Kekerâr Kathâ (Magic Tale) AT 433]

Once upon a time was an astrologer in a certain village. He was very simple by nature. There were only three members in his family; he wife and their daughter.

The astrologer consulted other's fate. That was their only mode of living.

Like other day, one day the astrologer went to consult someone's fate. That day he got a goat as the gift.

When he was coming home with the goat he met a crab on the road. Then he thought, "It is better to kill this crab and will take at dinner." So he wanted to kill that with a stick. Then the crab spoke out, "Brother, sonot kill me, I will graze your goat." Then the
astrologer did not kill him and took him to his home. Next day the crab went to graze the goat. In the grazing field he freed the goat and with great pleasure he began to eat the insects of the field. After sometime slowly the goat entered in to a forest.

There was a demon in that forest. He wanted to eat goat but at that moment the crab reached there by searching the goat. When he saw that demon the crab spoke up, "Don't kill my goat, otherwise I will kill you." The demon could not tolerate his bustered voice. So he wanted to kill him and grasped the crab by his hand. Then the crab squeezed in his hand. The demon could not tolerate his squeeze and shouted a lot and told the crab, "If you release me I will give you what you need." Then the crab told," What will you give me tell soon. Then only I will release you." Then the demon gave him a stick, purified by incantation and told, "If you beat the goat with most request to the stick and tell the goat to evacuate the bowels with gold or silver then the goat will do that, You could be rich by that way."

Then the crab released the demon and came home with that purified stick and the goat. At home the crab descripted everything to the astrologer. The crab beat the goat with that stick and told to evacuate the bowels with gold. Then the goat did so.

By that way within a short time the astrologer became an owner of huge property. With great pleasure the astrologer gave in marriage his own daughter to the crab.

There was no peace in the daughter's mind for her husband. Many years passes by that way. By the curse of an ascetic he was made a crab. Actually the crab was not an real crab. One day he went to take bath in a river. He changed his slough on the bank of the river and went to take bath. His wife was looking him from far. As soon as he changed the slough his wife went there and took the
slough home and burnt that. Then he had become a handsome man.

Afterwards he told about his life and how he had became the crab
by the ascetic’s curse. From that day they lived happily forever.

After telling this tale storyteller Lahari Hazarika said, “We
should respect our elders. It is good for ownself.”

This particular tale is variant of At 433 and is a tale of
disincentment. Some scholars are discussed such tales as psychoanalytically
significant. It has been argued the breaking of shell is related with the element
of sexual maturity. However, Lahari Hazarika regards it as a moral tale
upholding the authority of elders.

TALE NO. 13

A Tale of a Merchant

[Ejan Sadāgarar Kāhini (Magic Tale) AT 433]

There was a merchant in a certain village. He had two wife. The
elder one did not have any child. The younger one had only a
daughter. The Merchant always lived in an anxiety, because he had
no any boy child. He had a huge property- but no heir of that. So
he was always disturbed with that anxiety.

Once the merchant went to visit some place. There was a widow
in another village. She had a very beautiful daughter. The girl came
in to the merchant's sight and married her. After a few months the
merchants youngest wife gave birth to a handsome boy and a beautiful girl. They brought up the children with lot of love and care.

Once again the merchant went for trade for a few months. The merchant liked most the youngest wife. So her co-wives thought that that was the golden chance to kill her.

So one day, they called her to see the house in her head. By means of that, they pricked a spike on her head. Immediately she transformed to a big tortoise.

Her co-wives had thrown that to a big pond. When her children searched for their mother they told that she had gone to her mother's house. Many days had gone by that way.

One day the merchant had come from his trade. He asked about her youngest wife. But her co-wives told that they did not know anything about her. He searched everywhere but did not find any information his wife.

One day the children of the youngest wife of the merchant went somewhere by the side of the pond. Then the tortoise saw them and called. They went nearby the tortoise. The tortoise told everything to them. She told them to bring two leaves of arum and there she gave them some porridge from her mouth to eat. She told them to come everyday there.

From that day, they (the children) went to that pond regularly and ate the porridge from their mother. Within a couple of days they became healthier. So their stepmothers suspected them. They told their another daughter to went everywhere with them.

Then the daughter saw that they told something like- Kāsar mani Banti tomāk Kalo near a pond. Then a tortoise gave something to
eat them. She also asked from them. Then her brother and sister gave to suck the arum leaf only.

After sucking that leaf her health also became nice. So her mother asked her and she told everything to her mother.

Then the co-wives made a device. The eldest one pretended to be ill and called an astrologer and said to him, "Bāpu, when my husband consult with you about my health, Then you will tell him that if he will give a feast with a big tortoise from the pond than only your wife will get recovery from this illness. I will give you what you want for that."

The astrologer did so, but somehow the children of the tortoise came to know about their stepmother’s device. So they went to tell to the tortoise. Then the tortoise told, "Donot worry for that. When the fishermen will come to catch me, you also will come with them. The fishermen will not be able to catch me. I will offer to be seized only by you."

Then next day the children came with the fishermen to catch the tortoise. The tortoise was caught by her children. The merchant gave a big feast with that tortoise meat to the bhakat. Everyone of their home ate the meat but the children of the tortoise did not eat that. The four claws and the head of the tortoise they buried on one side of the pond. At that place a mango plant had grown up. After a few months it beared two fruits. The children ate those fruits, like that way they got the fruits from that tree off and on.

One day an old man saw that they were eating something. By asking them he came to know that those were unseasonal mango. So the old man thought that, that was an evil omen for the village. So he informed to the merchant. The merchant sent a man to cut the mango tree. But the children of the youngest wife of the merchant
requested him not to cut the tree. They said, "Here is our mother in this tree." The man, who came to cut the tree, said, "How will of I come to know about that?" Then the children told him to uproot the tree. He did so. Then he saw that there was some claws a head and some meat of tortoise there. The man informed to the merchant. He came and joined the claws, head and the meat of the tortoise. Then it became a living tortoise. The merchant took the tortoise to his home. At home when he touched the head of the tortoise then he got a spike there. The merchant pulled that. Then the tortoise transformed to his youngest wife.

Afterwards the youngest wife told everything to the merchant. He scared away of the elder wives from his village.

With the youngest wife and their children the merchant lived happily forever.

This tale has other versions which are longer and those are the versions of "three oranges' type. The text of the tale revolves around co-wives jealously and don't contain a fake bride. This tale is centered around co-wives jealousy. When I asked Lahari Hazarika about the meaning of the tale she simply abstained from passing any comment. And neatly said, "this things happened in the world".
TALE NO. 14

A Tale of a Son-in-law,

[Jownāir Sādhu (Numskull Story) AT 1284]

There was a king in a state. In that state there was a cultivator. He had a daughter. The daughter is given in marriage. One day the cultivator called his son-in-law for lunch on the occasion of Bihu. The father-in-law told him to come alone. So the son-in-law came to his father-in-law's house without any company with him.

But after some time he saw that his shadow also was coming with him. Then he thought, "My father-in-law told me to come alone, but my shadow also is coming with me. What will do now?" Then he asked the shadow, " Why are you coming with me? will you need something? If you need something, I will give, but donot come with me." But the shadow didnot reply anything. So he asked, "Do you need my Cheleng chadar. When he shaked his head the shadow also shaked his head. Then he thought the shadow wanted his cheleng. So he gave his cheleng chādar to the shadow and again the shadow was coming with him. He thought that again he needed something. So second time he gave his Gāmochā. Like that way he gave all his clothes to the shadow.

Slowly it became almost dark. So the shadow disappeared. He was a night-blind man. After going sometime he couldnot go anymore because he couldnot see the road to his father-in-law's house.

At that moment he saw a old cow of his father-in-law. He caught the tail of the cow and followed the cow. After some time reach his father-in-laws house. But he had not a single cloth in his body. He felt ashamed to enter in to the house. So he was sitting at the back
of the house, where the leavings and unclean were thrown. The father-in-law was waiting for his son-in-law till mid-night. But he did not come. So he went to after dinner his mother-in-law went to throw the leavings and unclean things poured on top of the son-in-law. Then by hearing a sound of something she went there with lamp their son-in-law was sitting nakedly there. Then the mother-in-law took him in to the house with great love and gave water to take bath she gave him to eat rice, with rice she gave some molasses also. He never eat the molasses before. He found that very tasty so he asked his mother-in-law, “Mother, “Where is it found?” Then the mother-in-law replied, “ It is kept in a receptacle which is on the raised platform of the house”.

After dinner he went to sleep. But when he came to know that his mother-in-law feel in sleep, he climbed to the platform and began to eat the molasses. He ate the molasses by perforating the receptacle of molasses. So he smeared molasses on his body. There was a basket of cotton, nearby that receptacle. To rub the molasses he rolled on that cotton basket. He became shaggy. So hid himself in an enclosure of goat. That night theives came to steal the goat therein. The thieves thought, “The goat, whose hair of the body will be easy to uproot that one. I will steal tonight.” Because everybody knows that that kind of goat is very fatty. By mistake a thief touched the man and thought, “ This goat will be very fatty because it’s hair can easily be uprooted. So they stole him.

On the road, the thiefs got a river. When they crossed over to the other bank of the river his buttocks became soaked with water. So he shouted -

*Dâng dâng chor,*  
*tikâ titil more.*

(Pick up, pick up, oh thief my buttock has saturated. )
The thieves thought, “It is not a goat but something, so better to leave him here.” By thinking that they threw him into the water and ran away. He knew how to swim. He could get the other bank of the river.

In the meantime it became dawn and by searching him father-in-law reached there. He took his son-in-law to his own home. After feeding he sent him to his own home.

The father-in-law and mother-in-law gave something with him like pithā, sāndah and some dresses also to their daughter and grandchildren.

Lalita Handoo (1999.74) in her Analysis of ‘stupid son-in-law’ stories in India commented these narratives constituted counter-system. She also says “Although not female centered, this stupid son-in-law tales seem to be that creation of female fantasy that rejects male hegemony” (ibid). The Assamese tale can also be considered in the same light however, in the field work situation a written copy of the tale was obtained and no analytical comment could be elicited from the storyteller.
PLATE IX

Lahari Hazarika (middle) in a moment of storytelling in her sitting room.