CHAPTER VI

CREATIVITY OF THE STORYTELLERS AND THE MEANING OF THE TALES

To contribute to the listener’s enjoyment and to show the storytellers’ own ingenuity a storyteller knowingly or unknowingly uses his/her creative imaginations in telling a tale. With that creative imagination a storyteller can shape and formulate a tale in his/her own way under the influence of his tradition and social environment. Besides that storyteller’s talent play a major role in their creativity. Sometimes, “Each form, even each repetition of the same narrative content, constitutes a creative process and functions as a distinctive expression of happiness, desire, fulfillment, laughter, fear, or awe” (K. Ranke 1978: 46 cited by Dégh 1995:130). So in telling a tale, it much “depends on the ability of the conteur, who can maintain a vital form or make a hash of it” (Goswami 1980:XXII). Conscious and unconscious at these two levels the process of creativity takes place (Gizelis 1973:169). Not only by the narrators but also the audience takes part in the creation of variants (Lüthi 1976:19)
Every tale has its meaning. Meaning expresses the ideas and attitudes of the storytellers about their stories. But “the meaning for the tale teller is not necessarily the same as the meaning for the audience. Or rather the different meanings for different members of the audience” (Dundes 1978:45).

In this study I have tried to show the creativity of the storytellers and the meaning of the stories from the narrators point of view.

CREATIVITY OF STORYTELLER PURNIMA DEVI

Purnima Devi can compose her stories, according to her own creative fantasy. She acquired most of the stories from her grandmather, Janaki Devi in her childhood. Some of the tales she got from other sources also. Purnima Devi is an illiterate woman. So she is totally dependent on oral transmission process. She is a woman of admirable memory. I went to her house for the second time for this purpose on 27th October 1999. That night she told me six tales from her memory within a sitting. Besides the stories she can recall some marriage songs and some poetries also which she heard in her childhood.

Generally Purnima Devi tells her tales as a grandmother to her grandchildren. But her other relatives and children of her neighbour also like
to listen her stories. Once I met some of the children nearby their house.

I asked them, "Did you ever heard your Puni ‘Barma’s (father’s brother’s wife) tale? They replied immediately, “Yes, we listen to her stories very frequently.”

Purnima Devi always pays attention to the needs and desires of the listeners. She creates her characters of the tales on her own way. “The character of a tale at a particular point of time depends no less upon the quality of the narrator and the social changes brought about by extraneous factors than upon its traditional form”. (Boas 1948:147 cited by Goswami 1970:5-6).

Among Purnima Devi’s folktale repertoire we found a tale titled ‘Buddhimatir Sādhu’ (A tale of an Intelligent Woman). The main character of the woman here is very intelligent. By her intelligence she became a wife of a rich family. So Purnima Devi gave the tale name “Buddhimatir Sādhu”. We have got this tale among the other two storytellers tale also. But their title is different. But Purnima Devi’s title is more related to the story and topic.

There is her another story The chåti måti Bāi. This story is found in Lakshminath Bezboruahs Burhi Ār Sādhu [Bezboruah 1999:(1911) 133-136] and in Prafulladatta Goswami’s ‘Tales of Assam’ (Goswami 1980.
In *Bhrī Air Sadhu* it is found as *Tikhar āru Chutibāi*.

In first telling of this tale Purnima Devi told that the sisters chāti and Māti lived by working at other’s house. After a few months in her second telling of the tale she told that they were living by begging. Most of the times she likes to draw the poor people’s condition in her tales. She made these characters by her own creativity. In Bezboruah and Goswamis tale also they were poor but they were not begger there. In this tale of Purnima Devi the tiger didnot die. In her tale the tiger and the bear ran off frightend by the sound of ‘Broken wind’ by thinking that as the sound of firing. It is worthy to mention that the allusion of firing is not found in other versions.

In *Burhi Air Sadhu* and “Tales of Assam Tikhar and Chutibāi or Chāti and Mālt are brother and sister but in Purnima Devi’s tale both are sisters.

We found the tale *Sādhu Āru Bowārir Sādhu* (A tale of Mother-in-law and Daughtar-in-law) of Purnima Devi in Trailokeswari Devi Baruani’s *Sandhiār Sādhu*. There the name of the tale is *Kulokshani Tirotā* (Devi Baruani : 2003 (1937). 80-84]. Storyteller Lahari Hazarika also told the same tale as “A tale of Mother-in-law and Daughter-in-law”. In Purnima Devi’s tale we found that the son was not staying at home because of his job. But in other versions of this tales the son stayed at home.
One of the Purnima Devi's sons staying out side of the state for his job. May be she reflected her that kind of motherly feelings by mentioning that.

Every storyteller has her art of storytelling. That art makes the tale more interesting. Most of the time before telling a tale, Purnima Devi says, “Now-a-days I have forgot everything. What has happened I do not know.” But when she begins to tell the tale she can tell spontaneously. She does not use any closing formula. But after telling the tale she always says, “Now that is the end There is nothing more.” In her tale repertoire, there are varieties of tale. She always compares the tales with reality.

Storyteller Purnima Devi sings sometimes in the midst of storytelling for which the children likes her stories. Sometimes she uses some phrases and idioms from her dialect. Some of them are –

_Dahekiā parā_ (beginning to ripen).

_Golmal kara_ (discussion).

_Rājā pātā_ (make success).

_Sukhiyā_ (who is happy always)

_Chāule carui talak jāwā_ (Everything has been lost).
It is observed that she chose her maximum tales from her personal feeling. In the tale of Raja Chitraketu (The king Chitraketu) her motherly emotion is found.

Purnima Devi told me tale from the Ramayana, according to her own feelings. She chose this tale which is related to destiny and consequences of action. She has a great faith in *karma* (consequences of one's action). This attitude is related to her devotion and attachment to the religious tales.

**CREATIVITY OF STORYTELLER TARUNI DEVI**

Taruni Devi is a talented storyteller. From a single idea she can compose many stories. She passes some comments during storytelling and has interpreted the tales on her own way. Generally, her tales are short. Though the tales are short, we found nicely her personal feelings and attitudes in the midst of her tales.

She is a woman of positive mind. So her comments are very impressive. In her childhood she listened the stories from her father. Those same stories she likes to tell according to her own way. Her grandchildren are the main listeners of her tales. In the midst of her domestic drudgery
and her physical and mental tiredness she likes to tell the tales.

During my fieldwork, I have observed that she can recall her stories only from her memory. She does not take any help from others to remember the tales. Her style of telling is very fast. Sometimes, I could not understand what she had said. At that situation, I used to disturb her by asking again and again. But she was never upset for that. Without hesitating she can recall a told story again and again and she shapes the tales in her own way. We can say as has been observed by Linda Dégh, "The special gift of any storyteller consists in his being able to shape a tale. He is able not only to narrate well, however, but to keep in his memory a great number of tales from the traditional supply" (Degh 1969:171-172).

Taruni Devi's repertoire is small but extremely tenacious. She can rearrange the components of a tale without changing the substance. Also she can modify a tale either by making it longer or shortening it. I hope that a few examples I present will be sufficient to illustrate the point.

One day I listened a tale of Taruni Devi at her residence. The title of the tale was *saru bowari* (The youngest daughter-in-law).

The same tale she has told another day. That day she named the tale as 'Lakhimi Bowari'. But this tale is very short. Only the substance of the tale she kept. Again, on another day she told the same tale. Again
said, "O I have remembered a tale of 'Lakhimi Tiroti'. Then she began to tell the tale. But it is observed that the tale 'Lakhimi Tiroti' is a version of already told tale "Saru Bowrari". This tale is longer than the other two versions told by her. She weaved some new elements in this tale. She tells same tale in three different ways in different patterns.

From her this type of storytelling we can say that Taruni Devi can tell a same tale in different patterns. She likes to weave new elements in a story.

Taruni Devi told an another tale 'Agat Uthi Gurit Kata'. This tale was told by the other two storytellers Lahari Hazarika and Purnima Devi also. Moreover it is found in Trarailokeswari Devi Baruani’s published folktale it in the collection Sadhukatha (Devi Baruani 1934: 22-31). But the title of the tales are different. Lahari Hazarika’s title is ‘Kharikatiar Sadhu’ (A tale of a wood-cutter); Purnima Devi gave the title Buddhimatir Sadhu (A tale of an Intelligent Women) and ‘Chaulpuria’ is the title of T. Devi Baruani’s tale.

In this story Taruni Devi told that the wife of the wood-cutter bought a goat with her money which she got by selling their surplus things. After a few months the goat gave birth to some baby goats. By selling them she bought a cow and began to sale the milk of the cow. By that way
she bought a cow and began to sale the milk of the cow. By that way she 
improved her family's economic condition.

May be, this part of the tale she created herself. The storytellers 
Lahari Hazarika and Purnima Devi did not tell about buying goat and cow 
in their tales. In the 'T.Devi' Baruani's tale she did not mention about goat. 
But she mentioned about buying a cow. The reflection of her (Taruni Devi's) 
own life is found in this creative portion. She had improved her own family's 
economic condition step by step on that way. Sometimes she compared her 
tales with the reality. It is argued, "In every society there is a unique patterned 
mode of perception of reality. Any artistic work, in so far as it is the product 
of a specific culture, has unique characteristics. An individual's creativity 
ranges within the confines of this set cultural pattern". (Gizelis 1973:168).

Sometimes in the midst of storytelling Taruni Devi says, "This 
happend to me." That means she sees her own lifes reflection in a tale. 
In the context of her tale lakhimi tirota she told, " The other daughter-in-
law of the house did malice to the youngest daughter-in-law. But she was 
honest. So God was in favour of her. Because of that they could do nothing 
harm to her." Here Taruni Devi told, "This happend to me. My husbands 
elder brother's wife didnot like me. She always reported to my mother-in-
law against me. But I did not do anything wrong. So she could not do any 
harm to me."
Again in the context of the same tale she said, "We should always think good. Who thinks bad at any time the influence of bad thinking goes to their children. So especially a woman, during her pregnancy period should always think good. The youngest daughter-in-law always thought good so she got a child who could make them prosperous." In the same context she told me another incident which occurred in her own life. She told, "Then I had come to my husband’s house just a few years back. One day a begger came to our house. When I went to give his alms, he asked me, "Bāidew (Madam), are you a teacher of school?. I replied, No. The begger went away by taking his alms. But what he asked me, that never had gone from my mind. I thought always, why I did not study more! If I would have studied more perhaps, I would become a teacher. This thinking was always in my mind. May be for that thinking all of my children have become educated.

CREATIVITY OF STORYTELLER LAHARI HAZARIKA

Lahari Hazarika is a learned women. She is a retired L.P. School teacher. There was a weekly class of storytelling at her school. So as a teacher she was bound to tell the stories to her students. Besides that as a grandmother she tells her stories to the grandchildren. She learned her maximum stories from her grandfather in her childhood.
She is an occasional storyteller. She can recall the tales from her own memory when the necessity comes. During my field observation I saw that storytellers personality plays a major role to choose the tales. Though Mrs Lahari Hazarika heard maximum tales from her grandfather, the reflection of her own personality is found in the tales. Her most of the tales has depicted the higher class of people of the society. It may be because she comes from a rich family.

Lahari Hazarika is a cheerful woman. She used to enjoy singing marriage songs in the marriage ceremony. But a few years back one of her daughters died. For that great weariness of her life she has given up singing.

She acquired the tales from a male storyteller. But she has chosen the tales of patience, endurance, devotion or women’s virtue.

Her tale the ‘tale of a wood-cutter’ is found in an Assamese folktale collection Sadhukatha; the title of the tale is Chāulpuriā (Devi Baruani 1934, 22-31). Lahari Hazarika’s title is creative and it is related to the story and the theme. According to her, in the tale, the name of the daughter is Sakuntala. She has given the name creatively using the name of the character of the Sanskrit classic.

By choosing the tale Litikai Lahari Hazarika expressed her own distress of life. The untimely death of one of her daughters always give much
trouble to her. So in that tale when Litikai died suddenly, she told, "How cruel the god is!" That is her own feelings of mind.

Lahari Hazarika's *Jownair Sadhu* (Tale of a Son-in-law) is similar to Lakshminath Bezbaroa's *Jownair Sadhu* [Bezbaroa 1999.(1911) 48-509]. But in the last portion of the tale Lahari Hazarika introduces additional elements. A mother always likes to send something to her daughter's house. As a mother she expresses such feelings is shown at the end of the tale. The last portion of her version in the tale of 'A tale of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law' is also different. This tale is told by another storyteller Purnima Devi in her tale the daughter-in-law got punishment. The same tale is found in Prafulladatta Goswami's folktales collection 'Tales of Assam'. The title of his tale is 'The fish Head'. (Goswami 1980:93-95). In this tale also the daughter-in-law got punishment at the end. In both the tales the daughter-in-law was driven away from home. This tale is found in Trailokeswari Devi Baruani's folktale collection *Sandhiyar Sādhu* [Devi Baruani 2003 (1937):80-84] as *Kulakshani Tiroti* (A woman who shows signs of misfortune). In this tale also the daughter-in-law got punishment for her evil work. But in Lahari Hazarika's tale she told that in a public meeting, on behalf of the daughter, her father prayed for forgiveness and she also took oath in front of a meeting that she would not do such work in future. So she was forgiven by the
public and with blessings they advised them to live happily together as before.

Actually Lahari Hazarika always likes concord. So instead of giving punishment she ended the story happily. Her maximum tales have ended happily. One of her sons-in-laws told me one day, "My mother-in-law always likes Mila-Priti (Concord)."

She uses many proverbs, phrases and idioms in 'Assamese', in the midst of storytelling.

Some of them are like -

1. \textit{Balam balam bhågya balam}
   \textit{nichalåo achalå hay}
   \textit{achalåo nichalå hay}. (A Tale of a wood-cutter).
   (With the power of destiny
   A very poor man may become rich and
   A rich person also may become a poor.)

2. \textit{Dhan lobh, måsh lobh}
   \textit{årù lobh tiri}
   \textit{sarbajane jânibå}
   \textit{ei tinioti bighini} (A Tale of the King Sål.)
   (The avidity of property, fish and woman, these three can bring misfortune to a person. So we should be careful about that.)

3. \textit{‘Lobhei påp, päpej mrîtyu’}. (The King Silabhadra)
   (Greed is sin, sin is death.)

(Malice ushers destruction)

Sometimes -

She uses phrases and idioms in the midst of storytelling. Some of those are like -

'Atou pitou'
Adhyā parā

'Khojā borā Karā'

'Hiyā dhākuri kandā'

'Ānat - bina't

'Pāng-pata'

Chakut parā

Tayā mayā ran etc.

It is observed thus the use of proverbs and phrases makes her style distinctive. She likes happy ending of the story and her embellishment of the story both show that a teller creativity works in the story telling events. Her attitude towards life and her use of language has given a distinct character to her story.

MEANING OF THE TALES

Every tale has a meaning and significance to the tellers for themselves. The teller and audience find meaning of tale in the context of their life and tales can play significant role in the life of the people. In folktale
studies, the exploration of meaning evolves diverse approaches running from completely analytical exposition to the commentary of the people.

Storyteller Purnima Devi herself said, "Without a meaning a tale cannot exist. Actually tales are made from people's own experiences only. So it must have a meaning".

Purnima Devi always relates her tale with her personal feelings. According to Purnima Devi, unless the God's favours everything is in vain. People's life depends upon his own destiny. She has a great faith in Karmafal (consequences of one's action).

In her second tale 'A Tale of an Elephant', she showed the role of action in people's life. According to her the meaning of the tale is that the oldman worked hard so he could go to heaven directly.

As the meaning of her tale 'A Mother-in-law and Daughter-in-law' (Tale No 14); she told that who thinks ill he always will get the punishment from God. Again in the context of another tale 'Tale of the cunning husband and wife', she told that the works which we cannot do from our physical/material capacity those can be done by our intelligence In another tale. 'A Tale of an Intelligent Woman" (Tale No. 6) also she shows the same
meaning. So it is observed that her faith on destiny, consequences of action and intelligence and motherly emotions are found as the meaning of her entire folktale repertoire.

According to Taruni Devi folktales are fictional and imaginary. It is imagination, related to the reality. So it must have some meaning. It is observed that she finds and relates the meaning of her tales from her personal life. Storyteller Taruni Devi always gives emphasis on intelligence. As the meaning of some tale like "A Tale of the Son of a Widow(a) (Tale no 4) and "The Tale of a man who climbs a tree and cuts its bottom"(Tale No 6), she stresses on role of intelligence of the people.

Taruni Devi is a woman who has strong will power. In the context of ‘The tale of a man who climbs a tree and cuts its bottom (Tale no 6) she said, “If you have a strong will power than nothing is difficult in this world”. She always gives the examples from her personal life.

Taruni Devi is a religious person. The influence of her own Hindu religion is found in her tales, myth and mythical tale.

Some of her tales are women-centered. Taruni Devi always says that the prosperity of a home depends on a woman. She tells about that
as the meaning of her five tales in her repertoire. These women centered tale depicts qualities and struggling spirit of a woman. As the meaning of another tale 'A Tale of Demon' (Tale No 15) she said about a boy who could save a family. Not only women centered tale she has some of the tales which are totally male-centered. Sometimes she says about the power of destiny in her tales.

Lahari Hazarika is an educated woman. She is a woman of independent character. So the reflection of independent character is found in her tales. She is also a tradition oriented woman. She has much faith on fortune. It is observed that the religious discourse of faith and destiny has influenced her to find the meaning in some tales. She illustrates the role of virtuous acts in human life in her tale 'Litikai'(Tale No 5). Some masculine tales also are found in her repertoire. Lahari Hazarika sometimes gives emphasis in her tales on the bitter relationships that normally exist among the co-wives and daughter-in-law and mother-in-law.

As the meaning of the Hahichampa she said that Man is the greatest enemy of mankind. That is her personal observation. She says the meanings of the tales sometimes are related to the society. Members of a family should be intelligent to maintain smooth relation among each member.
One of the audience of her storytelling is Uddipana, her grand daughter who is seventeen years old, said, "Really it is a very interesting story. From this type of story people can learn some important idea about how to maintain a family."

It is seen that the thematic foci of the three tellers slightly vary. The role of destiny in human life has been focused by them. But the meanings are not a single strand but of multiple perspectives. All the tellers regard intelligence as the cause of improvement in women’s life. Moreover, intra gender conflict is more common in their tales than the intergender conflict. A comparative table about the major foci of the tellers is given below:

**Table 4**

**List of Meaningful Themes in the Tales of Three Storytellers.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purnima Devi</th>
<th>Taruni Devi</th>
<th>Lahari Hazarika</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Destiny</td>
<td>Religious belief</td>
<td>Role of fortune</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karmafal</td>
<td>Luck and intelligence as the cause of improvement. Struggle, conflict among co-wives</td>
<td>Intelligence as the cause of improvement motherly feelings. Conflict among co-wives conflict among mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Punishment for greed and unethical.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligence as the cause of improvement</td>
<td>Jealousy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conflict among mother-in-law and daughter-in-law</td>
<td>Conflict among</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict among sister-in-law.</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The above table shows that three tellers are concerned with sufferings and the solution of that. These tales are not concerned with adventure like masculine tales. The role of intelligence has been projected as the instrument of improvement of the conditions in women's life. The tellers are concerned with intragender conflicts. But the three tellers have not questioned the male hegemony ambated in the relationship of husband and wife. There is a subtle assertion in the form of claim of the male contribution towards the management of household. Women tales cannot be studied in isolation from the male centered discourse of the society.