CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

This study attempted an analysis of repertoires of Assamese women storytellers. It has also studied the creativity and life history of the women tellers. The meaning of the tales told by them have been interpreted by listening their views.

STORYTELLERS AND THEIR REPERTOIRES

In folklore studies the role of individual storytellers has been recognized since the middle of the last century. Such studies has drawn attention to the fact that folktale is not the product of static tradition but is the outcome of the interaction between individual talent and social heritage. The emphasis has been given to sociological and anthropological dimension of a tale. Gradually stress was given to understand repertoires of individual artists. The idea was that the all folklore items in individual memory is developed by individual life history and tradition.

This departure was steps ahead of conventional research. The teller thus conceived is not a general category but an idiosyncratic
representative of a culture. This conception is not rigid or mechanical. Researches have shown that tellers are fairly creative. Dégh highlighted that personality of the tellers influence their creativity. The artistry of telling has also become an important aspect of study (Dégh 1995).

THE WOMEN STORYTELLERS

The role of women storytellers and their tales has special significance. Folklorists have distinguished masculine and feminine tales since the days of Russian formalists. In recent years, A.K. Ramanujan (1991) and Bengt Holbek (1987) regenerated the discussion. It has been argued by scholars like Margaret Mills (1993) and Kirin Narayan (1997) that gender relations are often shaped in such a way that voices of women are muted. However, those voices are expressed in certain genres.

The folktale is one of the media where alternative voices are heard. Themes of women tales have also been distinguished by Linda Dégh and others including Ramanujan. The functions of women tales and the role of women tellers in socialization and release of stressful experience have been discussed. It has been argued that recounting is a form of lightening the burden of distressing and sorrowful experience. For understanding the meaning of folktales or folklore one very important tool is ‘Oral literacy
criticism'. The meaning is a part of lived experience. In this study such theoretical developments have been used (See CHAPTER I).

FOLKTALE STUDIES IN ASSAM

In the first half of twentieth century some interested persons collected tales from different parts of Assam. Lakshminath Bezbarua is the pioneer of the study of folktales in Assam. After Bezbarua the systematic study of Assamese folktale was started by Prafulladatta Goswami. Prof. Goswami proposed a classification of types and motifs using AT index and motif index. After Goswami's study some attempts have been made by different scholars of Assam to interpret tales. But detailed and contextual study has not so far begun. This study followed repertoire analysis, socio-cultural analysis and oral literary criticism to understand creativity and meaning of the Assamese women tellers tale (See CHAPTER II).

THE THREE WOMEN STORYTELLERS AND THEIR REPERTOIRES

For this study, efforts were made to select three tellers from different places and two different castes, namely the Brahim and the Kairvarta, two castes represent upper and lower rung of hierarchy in Assam. The storytellers are Purnima Devi, Taruni Devi and Lahari Hazarika. By collecting
their folktale repertoires mainly with the help of participant observation method the creativity of the storytellers and the meaning of the tales were studied.

Purnima Devi is a storyteller of Darrang district of Assam (lower part or Assm), She is a Brahmin. Eighteen tales were collected from her repertoire. She is an illiterate and tradition oriented personality. (See CHAPTER III).

Taruni Devi is a storyteller of Jorhat district of upper Assam, and is Brahmin by caste. She told fifteen folktales. She is a woman who can read but cannot write. She is also a tradition-oriented personality (See CHAPTER IV).

Another storyteller Lahari Hazarika is from Jorhat district of Upper Assam who is Kaivarta by caste. She is a learned woman. She gave me her ten tales in writing. She is a very pious and independent woman. There are fourteen tales in her repertoire (See CHAPATER V).

Purnima Devi told seven women-centered and ten male-centered tales. Taruni Devi told eight women-centered tale and seven male-centered tales. Lahari Hazarika told seven women-centered and seven male-centered tales.

Purnima Devi learned her maximum sotires from her grandmother Janaki Devi. But in her repertoire there are some tales which she listened
from other storyteller also. Comparatively her repertoire is larger than the other two storytellers. Taruni Devi listened her maximum tales from her father. But she got some tales from other sources also. Lahari Hazarika learned her tales from her grandfather.

The repertoire of three women are not uniform. Purnima Devi is a more versatile storyteller whereas other two also have variety. They have more magic tales and novella then other tales like animal tales numskull tales, Jokes and anecdotes and religious tales. It has been observed that sub-generic variation create dialogue between the sub-genres. This is most evident in the case of Purnima Devi. A comparative description of their repertoire is presented below:

Table 5

The Type of Tales in Storytellers' Repertoire.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Purnima Devi</th>
<th>Taruni Devi</th>
<th>Lahari Hazarika</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Magic Tale</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novella</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numskull Stories</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Tale</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jokes Anecdotes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legend</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myth</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mythical tale</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Folktales are not only fictional stories, they are also based on experience of life. This point is not only found in recent scholarly literature but also resonates in the comments of Purnima Devi and Lahari Hazarika.

Purnima Devi comes from a poor family. So maximum characters of her tales are from general people. Purnima Devi struggled much in her life. By her own initiative she improved her family's condition. Most of the time she tells about *karmafal* in her tales because she is not only believe in work and results but also a pious woman. Taruni Devi gives emphasis on intelligence. In her own life we see that by her intelligence she has improved her family's economic condition. So in some tales she told about the role women's intelligence in family life. She believes in destiny also. In Taruni Devi's tale both upper class and lower class peoples appear. Lahari Hazarika believes in destiny so in maximum tales she talk about the role of destiny in human life. Lahari Hazarika sees the world from the rich people's perspective.

In Chapters III, IV, V and VI, we have observed that their interpretation of the tales are based on their experience. Purnima Devi believes in both the destiny and *karmafal*. She always believes in God. As the reference of a tale she discussed the importance of God's favour in people's life. Sometimes she said about the importance of intelligence in
human life also. She interpret the tales in the light of her outlook, experience and understanding. Taruni Devi is a religious person. So in her tales we found her religious beliefs. She also gives emphasis on intelligence.

As a tradition-oriented person Lahari Hazarika always believes in destiny. The reflection of an independent character is found in her tales. Her experience and Worldview has influenced her interpretation of tales.

AN OVERVIEW OF OBSERVATIONS

In this study, some observations have been made on the repertoire and creativity of Assamese women storytellers. The meaning of their tales have also been investigated. The storytellers interpret the tales briefly which make a post-modernist slightly sceptical. In their interpretation, there is a tendency to relate them with their own attitudes towards life. Some of them take moral stand and to them, these tales are didactic. The transmission of the women tales cut across the genders and this creates scope for creative realignment of the stories the tales inherited from male relative are re-cast and reinterpreted by the females. This creates a creative dimension.

The folkloristic interpretation of stories vary from the folk commentaries. The tellers present a phenomenological understanding of the
tales which are not inconformity with standard interpretation. This tale do not present an antithesis of structure of power and that in favour of woman on the contrary, they express feminine anxiety, tensions and their interpretation in moral language. They also re-evaluate of power of women.

Ramanujan said, there is no role of *karma* in folklife where the impact of fate is more evident (Ramanujan 1991:41). However, corpus of tales of Purnima Devi and her own explanation defy that. This particular case suggests that the influence of religious ideology can sometime pervade in the realm of folktale of an individual teller. It is observed that in male-centered tale the role of man in the management of household is highlighted. The women centered tales ideologically contest this standpoint. He said, "*karma* seems to belong to another tradition altogether -- With its complex interviewing of individual personality, multiple lives, the exorable chain of ethical judgment and causation. The characters of these folktales live in a different ethos" (Ramanujan 1991:41).

Ramanujan and Holbek stressed the role of women character and outcome to the tale as indicators of feminine tale. However, Lahari Hazarika stresses on the role of destiny in human life.

Creativity of a woman storyteller is reflected in their style of language and textualization of a tale type. A teller shows his innovation by
using traditional speech pattern, proverbs and idioms. One of the tellers has the habit of inserting songs to present a tale in the form of cante fable. She creates lot of enthusiasm among the audience. Lahari Hazarika has the habit of writing down her stories. But this habit does not hamper the flavour of oral language and donot get affected by literary editing. Literacy here is only a mnemonic device. Moreover, there are enactment and dramatic modulation of voice. Texualization and encontextualization is also another creative process. This study has not adopted performance approach as an analytical tool. But has depended on observation at much simpler level complemented by 'Oral Library Criticism' (CHAPTER VI).

In sum, the study reveals that the repertoire of three women tellers are inherited from relatives of the same or opposite sex. At the level of retextualization of a story at hand of women tellers some modification take place the women tellers reflect on tradition, life, society and culture, though their tales. Cultural ideology - mainly religious, moral, ethical-influence the tales as the gender as Ramanujan commented is genre the life of woman is interpreted and constructed in cultural terms. But there are some levels of contestation where woman become active agency overthrowing structural prescriptions of the society. The meaning of the tales lies in ideology, emotion, sentiment and aspirations of the tellers.
This become completely meaningful at the backdrop of personal experience. The tellers are creative agents who artistically invest linguistic, musical, dramatic and gestural values to their tales. The vision of life of the tellers also create an added dimension of meaning. Thus tales are not static texts but creative entextualization and comments on life. Repertoires of Assamese women tellers are not totally exclusive and those are intersected by common ideology and worldview but creatively interpreted by the tellers for recounting their tales.