CHAPTER -1

INTRODUCTION
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The ethnic situation in the North-Eastern states of India is a unique one. It is generally believed that the status of women in North Eastern region is slightly different in comparison to those living in the rest of the country. For example, we can see the mobility of women in Assam is far higher. This may be due to factors like absence of purdah, absence of occupational caste groups resulting in caste flexibility and a long standing influence of tribal work pattern where village economy revolves largely on women's labour and female entrepreneurship. Having said this, I do not mean that women in Assam are on an equal footing with men. Thus my attempt here is to see how women are represented in the folktales of the two tribes of Assam—the Rabhas and the Garos. To understand woman's status, folktales can give us a new perspective because in traditional societies women are seen as the tradition bearers and instruments in the cultural continuum and folktales are mostly passed from one generation to another through women and while telling and retelling of folktales society's views including women's own opinion get incorporated in them. Position of women as reflected in folktales is worth studying in the context that the agony and suffering, problems and bold thoughts and protests, weaknesses and qualities, expectations, hopes and fears of women get reflected in the folktales in some form or the other.

1.1 AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study is to find how women in the tribes like Rabhas and Garos were represented through a content analysis of their own folktales. Folk literature reflects the social and cultural life of a community. Role played by women in these two cultures is discussed, thereby the exploration of the society, where women form an integral part and how women are represented in the tales. The songs and tales are transmitted from generation to generation through oral
tradition, which is mainly preserved by women folk of any society. It was the women who composed and sung the folk-songs and narrated the folktales mostly in the private domain.

1.2 LAND AND THE PEOPLE OF THE STUDY AREA

For the purpose of the study the folktales of the Rabhas and the Garos have been selected. My area of concentration has been Kamrup (Both Rural and Metro) and Goalpara, districts where these two tribes have numerically better strength than the other districts of Assam. According to census Report (2001) the percentage of Garos in the Goalpara district is higher at 7.8% (64,114) when compared to 0.5% (1,43,257) Garo population in the state. Similarly the percentage of Rabhas is 6.8% (56,255) in the district against the overall 0.5% (1,30,875) in the state. In the district of Kamrup the Garo population is 1.1% (28,699) as against the 0.5 % (1, 43,257) in the state whereas the population of Rabhas is 0.9 % (22,492) as against 0.5% (130,875) overall Rabha population in Assam.

In the study area the villages are mostly backward and deprived of advanced transportation and communication facilities. Although the people in general are simple, honest and easy going, the majority of them still suffer from superstitions related to witches, incantation, and belief in evil spirit. The prime reason may be the lack of education. Moreover women are at the receiving end of the ill effect of traditional home made liquor.

Pati Rabhas and Rangdanis are found to be advanced among the Rabhas. Interestingly, quite a few numbers of followers of Chaitanya sect. among the Rangdani Rabhas of Bardamal are found.

During the field study it was observed that Garos are mostly controlled by the Mahari. Although a lot of change has occurred in their traditional life, still

1. Nital Ch. Rabha, 64 of Village Bardamal, Balijana Block, Dist. Goalpara, a follower of this Vaishnavite cult informed that in their village itself, there are 15 families of this cult. Pankaj Rabha (25) his son added that this section has given up traditional rice-beer and pork. They opted for vegetarian food.
2. Mahari is the functional unit of Garo Household, consisting of smaller group of kins, closely related by common motherhood to carry out different responsibilities.
everyone stresses the influence of mahari in their family and social life. Garos are better educated than the Rabhas in the two districts. This is probably because almost all Garos in these two districts are already Christianized and with the spread of Christianity, education reached even to the most interior Garo villages. Thus there is a shift from traditional life style as we know that Garos used to be shifting cultivators. Now they have opted for permanent settlement although jhum cultivation is still in practice.

1.3 ETHNIC SITUATION IN ASSAM

From a social perspective Northeast of which Assam is an integral part is the habitat of diverse ethnic groups. The tribal who constitute a large chunk of its inhabitants are a heterogeneous group, all of them with a rich heritage. So in discussing women’s status in the region one has to go beyond its economy to understand its strong tribal culture that has probably influenced even non-tribal societies like Asomiya and Meitei who like most tribes consider themselves the indigenous people of the region. Women’s position in the tribal societies is characterized by socio-economic and political heterogeneity. Disparity in women’s status among them arises from their different historical experiences. Most tribal groups of the region are patriarchal. Matriliny prevails among Khasis, Garos and Jaintias of Meghalaya. Although the social system conditions women’s status, one can not assert without hesitation that matrilineal set up bestows a higher status on women while their status deteriorates in the patriarchal system. The presence of matrilineal clans in their patriarchal society theoretically provides considerable importance to women among Rabhas in comparison to other tribal women (Bordoloi et al., 1987: 36-39). However one is not certain that the theoretical possibilities offered by it actually translate in to higher position in their society when compared to other tribal and non-tribal groups. Patriarchy is common to most tribes of the region. Inheritance and succession rules follow the male line. Women whether married or unmarried do not have the right to inherit clan property.

The ethnic situation in the seven North Eastern States of India is a unique one. It is generally believed that tribal women of the North East are egalitarian. It
is considered that purdah is not imposed on women. There is no restriction on women's physical movement, nor on food habits or attires, no case of bride burning, no female infanticide, no dowry (instead cases of bride price has been found to be prevalent), no ban on widow's remarriage. Here women seem to enjoy a fairly high status. But reality is of course different. Though status is high compared to their non-tribal counterparts, men in their own society do not treat them as their equal. Image of women in the North Eastern tribal societies is not a bright one as it has been perceived from outside. Earlier many mainstream scholars used to argue that women in NE India enjoy better status than women in mainstream India mainly because of the absence of Hindu caste structure.

1.4 WHY THE TOPIC HAS BEEN SELECTED

While reviewing literature related to folklore and particularly tribal folktales, it came to my notice that not much study has been done on women and their presence in tribal folktales of Assam. We only get stereotyped women as characters of folktales. This study attempts to see how women are represented in folktales of theses tribes. Because it is through women that folktales are carried from one generation to another and with it the beliefs, traditional customs of a society are also carried forward.

1.5 SELECTION OF THE TRIBE

This thesis is an attempt to understand representation of women in the tribal societies of Assam; however it is not possible to work among all the tribes. Therefore, two tribes living in southern part of Assam were selected. The reason of selection is that they are neighbouring tribes and one tribe is matrilineal and the other adheres to patrilineal set up. Moreover they have linguistic affinity.

1.6 OBJECTIVES

The present study is carried out keeping the following objectives in mind-
1. Status of women as reflected in the folktales of the Rabhas and Garos,
2. Man-woman relationship as reflected in the folktales of these two communities,
3. Exploration of the society through the eyes of the women,
4. Role played by women in culture of these two communities under study.
1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The history of our society reveals that for ages and ages women were subjugated by men to secondary status and were suppressed in all walks of life. The patriarchal system of our society compelled women to safeguard the patriarchal values throughout their life. In each of their act and even in their thought, they carry the tremendous tension of men's authority. Expectation from women is the same everywhere in India where society is rigid in maintaining and safeguarding the patriarchy.

Women in the patriarchal set-up are not allowed to think, decide and hold opinion independently even when they can. The present study is an attempt to investigate whether women in tribal communities under study enjoy better status with respect to societal power and position as compared to non-tribal societies. It is envisaged that the findings from this study will generate important information regarding the role and status of women in tribal societies.

1.8 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study is focused to have a better understanding of tribal life and the position of women in the tribal societies. Since folktales pass from one place to another, from one generation to another, this gives a clue to understand how women are represented in the society. Since this area is largely ignored, our study gives a different and fresh perspective on the representation of women in folktales and thereby their role, status, and place in the said society.

1.9 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

With the advancement and inroads of electronic media into more and more households even in interior villages, story telling tradition is in transition. Women who are active bearers of these tales and children who form the major chunk of the audience are lured away to the glare of TV sets. Thus story telling as a form of entertainment and education is losing its ground and with it ever decreasing number of story tellers. Gradual disappearance of folktales in oral circulation has limited the scope of the study. The study would have been better
had I been able to meet more storytellers/narrators during my field work. The study could have been more extensive.

1.10 METHODOLOGY

This study is based on secondary data collected from published sources and primary information gathered from field work. Oral versions of some of the published tales and some new tales not found in the existing published materials have been collected from the field.

a) Sources of data

I have collected a few Rabha and Garo tales in the field. But I mostly depended on published collections of tales for the content analysis giving stress on women characters. Some tales which are used for analysis have more than one version.

b) Methods of data collection

During my field study I used camera and recorder while talking with informants and listening tales. I have followed non-directive interview technique while meeting people and gathering information in the field. Some of the tales are collected in the field from the story tellers in their own languages i.e. the Rabha and the Garo languages and then got it translated through collaborators of the respective languages.

c) Data processing

I. Selection of tales of the two tribes

II. Classification of the selected tales on the basis of

- the presence of women characters in the tales
- the special traits/features/qualities/weaknesses/limitations as possessed by women characters in the tales

III. Identification of stereotyped characters
d) Methods of Analysis

In analyzing the tales Folkloristic analysis of tales depicting women is followed. While doing the content analysis of tales I have used perspectives propounded by famous folklorists like A.K Ramanujan who worked on Indian folktales, Zack Zipes, Torbong Lundell, Aarne and Thompson, P.D. Goswami, J.L. Fisher and some others. Feminist thinkers of different schools as for instance Bell Hooks, Gilbert and Gubar, Irigaray and some others' views and observations are also used in interpretation. Kirin Narayan’s concept which she used in her “Mondays on the Dark Night of the Moon” while dealing with how narrator/informant reacted on particular tale is also taken into account in the course of analysis. In a few tales psychological approach as propounded by Sudhir Kakar is also used for analysis of characters. Analytical clues were taken from the women of both the tribes during my field studies.

1.11 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

While dealing with the topic of my study I have gone through related material pertaining to traditional narratives, oral literature, general folklore, concept of feminism and ethnographic study of the tribes to have a comprehensive understanding of the topic and its related areas.

Traditional Narratives

• “The Socio-psychological Analysis of Folktales” (1963)-in this article Fisher deals with the term ‘folktale’ and classification of folktales into types according to their social function, content, structure, typical audience etc. He maintained that a growing popular interest in local traditional culture included an interest in folktales as a major facet.

• “The Image of the Woman in the African Folktale from the Sub-Saharan Francophone Area” (1976)- Sonia Lee

While discussing faults exhibited by women in folktales, Lee observes that the faults no doubt based on some truth, are likely due to women’s subjection by males than lack of intrinsic female character. For
this reason the satire of the tale is concentrated on the moral weaknesses of the women.


Thompson here deals with most of the great folktales of the world, not only for their own interest as stories, but as elements of culture. He discusses about the nature and form of folktales, gives an account of tales from Ireland to India, and devotes a special section to the North American Indian tales and myths, another to the method of collecting, classifying, studying folktales as a living art. He also discusses a wide range of story motifs and retells their basic patterns.

- *Essays on the Folklore and Culture of North-East India*, (1982)
  a) “Women in Assam’s Folklore”- This essay is a rapid survey done by P. Goswami on the folklore material of Assam in order to see how women folk have appeared in the songs, sayings and tales of the land.
  b) “Folktales of the Miris”- Here P. Goswami highlighted the similarities between Miri folktales and tales recorded in other parts of Assam, thus showing evidences of give and take among the various sub-cultures of the state. This fact is observed in my study too as some Rabha tales are also found in Assamese and is equally popular.

- *The European Folktale*, (1986)-Max Lüthi

Max Lüthi’s *The European Folktale* has been regarded as a classic, a definitive statement about the nature, style and form of the folktale genre in its European variety. Here Lüthi attempted to identify what makes the folktale a folktale (page 3). He offers ‘a sort of phenomenology of folk narrative as we find it in Europe...a literary interpretation of the folktale whose goal (is) to establish the essential laws of the genre(page107), yet he has not confined himself to form alone. Instead Lüthi finds evidence of these laws in the ‘formal traits’ or ‘stylistic features’ of the folktale. Lüthi here developed descriptive concepts of analysis that enable us to continue our explorations into the essential laws of the folktale.

This article points to the observation of Jacob Grimm where he speaks of "a vast number of stories and customs handed down through lengthened periods from father to son", where he simply ignores the fact that at least 80% of the tales were collected from female informants. Folktales have been attacked as escapist fantasies, as a basic reinforcement of conservative social structures and of patriarchal values.

• Folktales and Society-Storytelling in a Hungarian Peasant Community (1989) – Linda Dégh

Dégh's book is a richly informative ethnographic study of the role of storytelling and storyteller in a Szekler community in Hungarian Transylvania. The emphasis in this book is on the function of the tale repertoire in daily life and on the personalities of the narrators rather than on the tale texts.

• "Folktale Heroines and the Type and Motif Indexes", (1993)-

In this article Torborg Lundell observed that model for female conduct reflected in folktales over a wide geographical area is far from confined to the submissive beauty promoted by popularization of selected material. Here the writer also dealt in with the concept of 'helper' in the folktale world. It was pointed out that there seems to be different standards for evaluating behaviour of women and men and in some labeling male is given credit instead of female in the title.

• Folktales from India, (1994)- Introduction by A. K. Ramanujan

Ramanujan maintained in Folktales from India, that wherever people live, folklore grows; new jokes, proverbs, rhymes, tales and songs circulate in the oral tradition. Both public culture and domestic culture cannot be fully understood without knowledge of the folk idiom. He pointed that in a folktale that goes on changing from letter to letter, the structure of the tale may remain constant while all the cultural values
change. Instead of arranging the tales according to some classificatory scheme (eg. Romantic tales, tales of magic etc), Ramanujan arranged tales in this book in eleven cycles or sessions, each consisting of 8 to 11 tales.

He concluded by mentioning one or two other aspects of the folktales such as special phrases found in folktales as characteristic endings in folktales of many languages.

- *From Mondays on the Dark Night of the Moon,* (1997) (Himalayan Foot Hill Folktales, Kirin Narayan, in collaboration with Urmila Devi Sood)-

  This is a collection of stories narrated by Urmilaji to Kirin Narayan. The stories are associated with women’s rituals as representing a ‘Kangra women’s point of view’, but the emphasis here is on upper caste Women’s traditions. In the stories performing rituals differentiate observant and fortunate women from non-observant and unremarkable women or men. There are certainly sons, husbands, brothers, fathers, father-in-laws and saintly men in these stories but all these men tend to play out the scripts determined by women’s pious actions.

- *Folklore and its Motifs in Modern Literature* (1998)—Dr. Kishore Jadav

  Here Dr. Jadav traced the growth of folkloristic studies, focusing on the scholarly works done in Asia, particularly in India.


  In these essays Ramanujan wanted to bring the best of western theorizing to bear on Indian folktales and also the best of Indian storytelling to the attention of international folklorists. He did more than simply serve as a two way translator because in the process he proposed innovations in the very western theories he originally hoped to apply to Indian material.

- *The Flowering Tree: A Woman’s Tale:* Here A.K. Ramanujan presents a story about a woman, told by women in the Kannada speaking areas of South India.
Then he offered a reading of it for discussion and suggested certain characteristics of the genre of women-centered tales.

- **Feminist Elements in Marathi Folk Literature**, (2001) (from Indian folklore: edited by Indira Goswami and Prakash Pattanayak) - In this article Lalita Mirajkar tried to explore the elements of feminism which try to identify women as human beings and try to fight for the cause of women with the help of some Marathi folk songs and tales.

- "**Women in Assamese Folktales**" 2008-Manashi Bora analyses here the gender roles played out in the Assamese folktales and through this an idea of the status of women in Assamese society can be made.


  The writer observed that women’s folklore is thematically centered on issues of intimacy, family relations and household prosperity whereas men’s folklore emphasizes broad political themes.

- "**Re-visioning Gendered Folktales in Novels by Mia Yun and Nora Okja Keller**"(2009)-Sung –Ae Lee

  This article is concerned with the relationship of the folktales to the narratives within which they are embedded, and some of the functions of retelling and reinterpreting, particularly the role of traditional stories in shaping possibilities of meaning for the lives of the principal characters.

- "**Folktale**" (2009)-Cristina Bacchilega (from Encyclopedia of Women’s Folklore and Folk life)

  Here Bacchilega started with defining ‘folktale’ and how it is different from myth and legend. She also dealt in with different sub genres of folktales. While concentrating on its background history, she discussed about feminist scholarship that has played a crucial role in the development of folktales and the study of role of gender in the teller and the audience of folktales. She summed up the discussion by saying that women have much to say and much at stake both in the reevaluation of
"old wives tales" and in the ever-multiplying transformations of the genre.

Gender and Folklore

- *Folklore and Gender* (1999) (edited by Lalita Handoo and Ruth B. Bottigheimer)-
  a. *Women in Indian Folktales* - In this paper K.R. Sandhya Reddy focused on Kannada folktales and her analysis developed on the following three levels
     i. Women narrators and tales they tell.
     ii. Depiction of women in the tales, and
     iii. The inter-relationship of tales and the culture in which they are told.
  b. *Construction of Gender and Kinship in Assamese Folktales* - In this paper Dr. Kishore Bhattacharjee has analyzed Assamese folktales, particularly those tales reflecting gender relations.

- *Understanding Gender* (2000) - Kamla Bhasin here lucidly discusses on the concept of 'gender' in feminist discourse and deals with the questions like the relationship between 'gender' and 'woman'; the difference between "women and development"; "gender and patriarchy"; and between gender, caste and class.

- "*The Discourse of Gender: Power and Practice in Folklore as Discourse*" 2000 (in *Theoretical Essays in Indian Folklore*) - Lalita Handoo.

Handoo observes that gender disparity is culturally maintained, learned and internalized in practice both through cultural concepts and discourse, verbal and non-verbal. Language being a product of culture and the only means of verbal communication, not only reflects the socio-cultural structure of the society, but also reinforces its ideological practices in various ways. System of language, at every level, projects
sexist bias. Speakers, narrators, writers actively construct the inequality that exists between sexes in society, consciously or unconsciously. Patriarchal worldview of a culture is reflected in the attitudes and language behaviour of its speakers, its social practices and discourse, which results in male activities being evaluated positively and female activities negatively.

- "The Gender of the Trick-Female Tricksters and Male Narrators" (2001)-Margaret A. Mills

Western theories of myth (Radin, Babcock-Abrahams) have defined the trickster as a particularly complex and ambivalent mythological figure involved with creative cosmological events and with mythical moments when the order of things, physical or social, is undergoing transformation. Tricksters in folktales are akin to but not identical with the mythological forms. While one prominent feature of the trickster's personality is gender ambiguity, the trickster is almost always conceived in western comparative theory as a male who can transfer or disguise himself as female, usually comical and highly disorderly results. These theories do not adequately address the very rich topic of female tricksters in Middle Eastern popular literature and folklore genres. Mills here compares two female trickster tales performed by a single adult male narrator in Heart, Afghanistan, particularly the portrayal of female agency by a male speaker, with reference to theories of the trickster and of gender centeredness in texts.

- Gender and Social Movements (2003)- M.Bahati Kuumba

Here author Kuumba maintains that the development of frameworks and models that better capture the dynamism and multiple levels of gender has been an unfolding process. Understanding gender as a process focuses attention on the dynamic way that gendered patterns and relationships are continually constructed and reconstructed through human interaction.
"Towards a Dialectical Model of Family Gender Discourse: Body, Identity and Sexuality" (2003)-Libby Balter Blume & W.Blume

Here the authors have traced the development in the gender discourse through different standpoints taken by different schools of scholars and also how families can contribute to an understanding of gender and at the same time can encourage divergence from social stereotypes. The article points to the need of a dialectical model representing gender discourse in families. Deconstructing gender theories from a postmodern feminist perspective, the authors discuss agency and context in families' gender discourse.

Songs, Stories, Lives- Gendered Dialogues and Cultural Critique, 2003 (edited by Gloria Goodwin Raheja)- The Essays in these volume highlight theoretical and ethnographic issues concerning oral traditions and women's speech in diverse South-Asian communities in northern and southern India and in Nepal, and situated in Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist Milieus.

"Gender as a Social Structure: Theory Wrestling with Activism" (2004)- Barbara J.Risman

In this article the author argues that there is a need to conceptualize gender as a social structure and by doing so we can better analyze the ways in which gender is embedded in the individual, interactional and institutional dimensions of our society.

Oral Literature/folklore and society

Ballads and Tales of Assam ,(1970)- P. Goswami

This is a work of pioneering character, carrying the methods of analysis and indexing of motifs into a study of the old ballads and Märchen of Assam.

Folklore and Folklife, (1978)- Richard M. Dorson

Here Dorson deals with the concepts of folklore and folklife studies, the fields of folklore and folklife studies, the skills of the folklorists, current theories of folklore etc.

This vol. consists of scholarly articles on status of women in plains Tribal societies of Assam, stressing on their tradition and change. Particularly important is Kishore Kr. Bhattacharya’s “Studies on Status of Women: A Resume of Anthropological View Points”.

• *“Dimensions of Oral Literature Of North East India”*1997-98: B. Datta

Here B. Datta discusses Oral Literature, a component of folklore. The meditating role of folklore, along with the Oral Written connections and commonness of folklore material across cultures is stressed in the article. “Narratives, particularly folktales have been found to be inveterate travelers. It is amazing how folktales have crossed geographical, political, cultural and linguistic boundaries and migrated across continents with the result that the same or exactly similar tales have become integral parts of the cultural heritages of diverse communities in different parts of the world”.

• *Theoretical Essays in Indian Folklore*, (2000)- J. Handoo

Essays in this vol. are analytic in nature and examine many theoretical issues in folkloristics and at the same time focus on Indian folklore as an important, shared and dependable source of knowledge. The idea to depart from obsolete and borrowed paradigms and treat Indian folklore and oral tradition as discourse and an important source of alternative knowledge is, perhaps, the main objective of researching and writing these essays.

• *“Folktales: A Tradition, a Culture”*(2001)-Santosh Goyal

Goyal starts with a discussion on folklore and particularly with folktales and its different sub-heads and concluded by stressing that folk literature is the better projection of the social and cultural life of a society.
The Encyclopedia of Women’s Folklore and Folklife is in many ways a pioneering work of scholarship. The four leading overview essays—“Women’s Folklore”, “Folklore about Women”, “Folklore of Subversion” and “Women Folklorists”—represent a broad survey of folklore scholarship about and largely by women. More specifically focused subject entries follow in alphabetical order. The overall tone of the encyclopedia is unabashedly feminist in its perspective. Feminist scholarship has enriched the entire field of folklore, not only in those areas pertaining to women, and it was feminist scholars who first made a concerted effort to turn the field’s attention to women’s concerns.

Women and Patriarchy

- "Theories of Patriarchy" (1981)- Lindsey German

German observed that the common contention to all theories of patriarchy is that male domination has remained the same regardless of other changes in society. More influential are the sorts of argument put across by people like Hartmann, who see capitalism and patriarchy as two different forces that ally against women. Heidi Hartmann defines patriarchy as “a set of social relations between men, which have a material base and which, though hierarchical, establish or credit interdependence or solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women.” She further argues that “the material base upon which patriarchy rests lies most fundamentally in men’s control over women’s labour power...(it) does not rest solely on childbearing in the family, but on all the social structures which enable men to control women’s labour”.

- "Women’s Collectives in Assam-A Short History of their Status and Present Day Realities" (2002)-Dr. Monisha Behal (Changing Women’s Status in India: Focus on the Northeast, edited by Walter Fernandes and Sanjoy Barbora. Publisher: North Eastern Social Research Centre, Guwahati)
Behal maintained that an anthropological analysis of rural women’s lives in Assam has indicated instances of greater mobility in their work pattern and social position. An interesting feature of intra-household power nexus in various communities such as the Karbi, Rabha, Bodo kacharis, Misings and the Assamese is the relative autonomy that women enjoy with regard to their incomes. Women earn through pigs, goats, or weaving.

- *Modernization and Women's Status in North East India*, (2002)- a collection

  This collection stresses on how modernization and religious changes have resulted in the assertion of patriliney even in matrilineal tribes like the Khasi and Garo and strengthening of patriarchy among most tribes. Some tribes have experienced these processes because of the ongoing attack on their culture and identity as well as migration of non-tribals to their region.


  Jain stresses in the Introduction on the concept of patriarchy and its influence on every field. All marginalized categories whether men or women get caught in its web of authority. The rest of the vol. deals with the myth of patriarchy and the number of affiliations associated with it. The book stresses on the fact that the roots of patriarchy lie in the myths of creation and the religious worlds based on them.

- “Understanding Patriarchy”- Suranjita Ray (web)

  The write up starts with ‘what is patriarchy?’ She referred to Gerda Lerner in ‘The Creation of Patriarchy’ (1986) where she has argued against looking for one historical moment when patriarchy was established. Despite a common range of themes within feminism, disagreement exists amongst feminist in understanding patriarchy. The author went on to discuss patriarchy quoting different scholars like Michele Barrett, Sylvia Walby, Suma Chitnis, Sharmila Rege, among
others. She noted that feminist historiography made radical breakthroughs in redefining gender and patriarchies in the context of hierarchies of caste, class, community and ethnicity. Therefore it is pertinent to underline several perspectives of feminism for a comprehensive understanding of patriarchy in terms of its origin, characteristics, nature, structure and persistence. She mentioned that feminist theorists generally share four concerns (Jaggar and Rothenberg, 1984 in Mandell, 1995:4) I) they seek to understand the gendered nature of all social and institutional relations which determines who does what for whom, what we are and what we might become ii) gender relations are considered problematic and as related to other inequalities and contradictions in social life. "Family education and welfare, worlds of work and politics, culture and leisure are socially structured through relations of gender, power, class, race and sexuality." iii) gender relations are not viewed as either natural or immutable but as historical and socio-cultural productions, subject to reconstitution. In particular feminist analysis deconstructs errors and myths about women’s empirical realities, and constructs theories by and about women. iv) Feminist theories tend to be explicitly political about their advocacy about social change. They challenge the traditional race-class-sexuality-power arrangements which favour men over women, white over non-whites, adults over children and their struggle to embrace inclusivity continues (ibid, 4-5).

To conclude she pointed that feminists provide explanation for a wide range of particular issues and have been enriched by different approaches and perspectives. The feminist movements need to draw on the strength of all feminist theories as each one on its own is incomplete. In fact feminism will survive as long as patriarchy persists.

- “Disempowered Gender: Status of Women in North-East India” (2005) - Binayak Dutta The article seeks to interrogate the notion of women empowerment and gender justice that prevails in popular discourse on North East India. While celebration of matriliny in mainstream discourse has led to the construction of such notions, here the author seeks to
question such notions by studying the jural position of women in the region.

**Ethnographic Study of the Tribes**

- *The Garos* (1975)- Major A. Playfair

  Here Playfair gives a detailed description of the origin, affinities, dress, jewellery, weapons, domestic life, occupation, agriculture, houses, villages, musical instruments, crops, hunting, fishing, food, drink, games, dancing, manufactures, laws and customs, marriage, divorce, inheritance, decision of disputes, head hunting, religion etc of the Garos.


  This book makes a pioneering study of the different aspects of the Garo, a matrilineal tribe in transition of North East India, and provides for a departure from the usual monographic study of a hill community. It covers subjects like social polity, political administrations, educational and literary developments, traditional religion and spread of Christianity, successive searches for self-identity and concludes with a chapter on the changing features of the Garo society.


  This book contains ethnographic write ups on seven tribal communities -five from the plains, namely Bodo kacharis, Deoris, Lalungs (Tiwas), Mishings and Rabhas and two from the hills, namely Dimasa kacharis and Karbis with sufficient number of plates representing their life and culture.


  This book concentrates on the change of culture in a society which is brought about by various factors. When two societies of two cultures come in contact it is expected that the weaker culture will borrow elements from the dominant one. He elaborated on this by citing the
example of the Pati Rabhas, who follow Hinduism to a great extent as a result of the influence of the dominant Assamese culture.

• *Asamar Janajati* (1991)-(ed.) P.C.Bhattacharya

This book consists of scholarly essays written on different social and cultural aspects of the various tribes of Assam, and the rest of North East. The two most important articles are – “Garo” by D.N. Majumdar and “Rabha” by Dr. B.M. Das.

a) “Garo”-D.N. Majumdar

In this article Majumdar gave a brief introduction to the Garos, their origin and ancient history, differentsects., *barai*\(^3\), their social life, livelihood pattern, religious beliefs and different festivals, judicial system and their language and dialects.

b) “Rabha”-Dr. B.M. Das

Dr. Das stressed that Rabhas form a part of the greater Bodo community and tried to find out its affinities with other tribes of Northeast. He also mentioned the uniqueness of the community and its different sections, population, livelihood mechanism, different Khel and gotra, social structure, marriage system, religious life, popular beliefs, physical features etc.

• *Women in Meghalaya* (1992)(ed. Soumen Sen)

The articles in this collection provide information regarding traditional status and role of women in both the Khasi-Jaintia and Garo societies and place this information in a temporal framework to understand the processes of change.

a) “*Status of Women in Garo Culture*”-Caroline R. Marak

Marak maintained that in the myths women enjoy so much respect that an insult to a woman can cause conflict and war. In legends women

---

3. A ‘*barai*’ is alternatively called ‘*bar’/ ‘housug*’, which is equivalent to ‘*gotra*’ in Assamese, Tribes Of Assam part-1,p-131
are portrayed as pure, beautiful, brave and noble and faithful wives. In the history of the tribes women figure prominently though they did not assume leadership during their course of wanderings from Tibet to their present homeland. Women are also respected as progenitresses of the clans of the tribe. Though a Garo woman’s status is normally expected to be much better than her sisters in patriarchal societies, her position has not been favourably affected by the matrilineal system. She quoted another scholar of repute, D. N. Mazumdar to bring home her point.

- *Asomiya Aru Rabha Samaj-Sanskritir Sarup* (1999)- M.D. Rabha
  
  This book is written by M.D. Rabha on socio-cultural analysis of the Assamese and Rabhas.

- *Rabha Janajati* (2002)- Rajen Rabha
  
  This book gives a glimpse at the social and cultural aspects of the Rabhas.

- *Axamar Janajatiya Sanskriti* (2005)- Dr. U.R. Hakacham
  
  This is a collection of selected articles by Dr. Hakacham on various aspects on folk-culture of the various tribes of North East India in general and Brahmaputra Valley of Assam in particular.

  
  This collection of articles endeavours to present an authentic write up on vibrant life and culture of the ethnic groups of Assam covering origin of the tribes, historical retrospect, both cultural and religious practices, festivals, languages and dialects, myths and words, typical tribal administrative pattern et al.

  a) *“Garo Janajatir Parichay”*- Dr. Bimal Kr. Mazumdar

  Here Dr. Mazumdar started the discussion with how the word ‘Garo’ came into existence and different viewpoints regarding its origin and creation. He then dealt with its history of migration from the beginning to its present settlement. He observed that there is some
difference between the Hill and plains Garos regarding their physical structure. This happened because of mixing of different species and geographical variations.

b) "Rabha Jamnogostir Bivinna Upagosti aru Teulokar Samaj Byabastha"-Dr. Upen Rabha Hakacham

Dr. Hakacham noted here the geographical distribution of the Rabha tribes over different areas. He mentioned the 8 main division of the Rabha sect. and gave a detailed description of different sub tribes (Khel) pointing to their uniqueness.

c) "Rabha Janagosti: Ek Abalokan"- Heramba Kr. Rabha

H.K. Rabha started the article with the daily life of the tribe. He continued with life cycle, marriage system and finally their festivals. He concluded with the observation that the name ‘Rabha’ or ‘Raba’ (bring along, loi ana) is given to them by Garos.

- Assamar Janajati Aru Sanskriti (2011) (ed. Dr. Malina Devi Rabha)

This is a collection of selected articles on tribals of Assam and their culture, particularly the contribution of different tribes in the creation of greater Assamese community.

a) "Rabha Janajati: Samikhyatmak Adhyayan"-Mani Rabha

Mani Rabha here talks about the original habitat of the Rabhas and their descent to their recent geographical distribution, referring to different legends.

b) "Garo Janajati: Samaj Sanskriti"- Dr. Pranita Devi

Here Dr. Devi analyzed the matrilineal Garo society. She discussed the concept of Gotra (chatchi), Upagotra (machong), Mahari, aking, Nokma etc. she also mentioned that in their social life Garos follow the traditional system based on customary laws prevalent in the society.

On Femininism

- The Second Sex (1972)-Simone de Beauvoir
Simone de Beauvoir’s classic manifesto, *The Second Sex* (1949) provided the theoretical basis for the emergence in the 1960s and 1970s of feminist activism in both Europe and North America. With her famous remark that ‘one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman’, Beauvoir inaugurated social constructionist critique of essentialism that occupied feminist literary theory in the 1980s and 1990s. while her uncompromising rejection of any notion of a female nature or essence finds echoes in the writing of later feminist theorists such as Julia Kristeva, Monique Witting, and Judith Butler.

- *The Second Sex* is a wide ranging multidisciplinary essay that draws on and critiques history, biology, anthropology, literature, psychoanalysis, Marxism and existentialist philosophy as means of understanding the lived experiences of women. Beauvoir argues that throughout history, women have been reduced to objects for men. Because men have imagined women as the ‘other’, women have been denied subjectivity.

   To illustrate her theoretical insights, *The Second Sex* employs a number of different perspectives. In the first part Beauvoir examines woman ‘objectively’ that is as object of analysis-through a series of cultural lenses. In the second part she examines women ‘subjectively’ from the perspective of their own lived experience, showing the processes through which women internalize the ideologies of otherness that relegate them to immanence and to the position of being man’s Other.

- *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1979) - Shulamith Firestone

   Firestone here attempted to take the class analysis one step further to its roots in the biological division of the sexes. Attempts is made to correlate the best of Engels and Marx (the historical materialist approach) with the best of Freud (the understanding of the inner man and woman and what shapes them) to arrive at a solution both political and personal yet grounded in real conditions.
• Madwoman in the Attic (2000)-Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar

Gilbert and Gubar's Madwoman in the Attic is a landmark of 1970s American feminism. The book represents both the strengths and limitations of that first decade of 'second-wave feminism' (first wave feminism produced the Declaration of Women's Rights of 1848 and culminated in the ultimately successful campaign for female suffrage during the early 20th C.). They have assumed that every woman shares a set of similar experiences and that patriarchy—the male dominated social order—is everywhere essentially the same. These assumptions became problematic later on, and they have been challenged by feminists such as Barbara Smith, Bell Hooks, Gloria Anzaldúa and Judith Butler.

In the work Gilbert and Gubar examine the notion that women writers of the 19th Century were confined in their writing to make their female characters either embody the 'angel' or the 'monster'. This struggle stemmed from male writers' tendencies to categorize female characters as either pure, angelic women or rebellious, unkempt madwoman. They stress the importance of killing off both figures because neither are accurate representations of women or of women writers. Instead Gilbert and Gubar claimed that female writers should strive for definition beyond this dichotomy, whose options are limited by a patriarchal point of view.

• Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center (2000)-Bell Hooks

Throughout the book, hooks uses the term white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy as a lens through which to both critique various aspects of American culture and to offer potential solutions to the problems she explores. In the preface to the first edition of the book, hooks discusses the meaning of her title "From Margin to Center"- 

‘Living as we did-on the edge—we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked from both the outside in and the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as the margin. We understood
both. This mode of seeing reminded us of the existence of a whole universe, a main body made up of both margin and center.’

For any defined group, especially one with any power, influence, or control, there is a center and a margin, where the center has more power, influence or control than the margin. The way to move towards the center is to use those with influence in the community to get at the center.

- “Luce Irigaray”- Sarah K. Donovan in Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (web:July 2, 2005)

Irigaray is a prominent author in contemporary French feminism and continental philosophy. Irigaray’s departure from Lacan in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, where she critiques the exclusion of women from both philosophy and psychoanalytic theory, earned her recognition as a leading feminist theorist and continental philosopher.

Irigaray alleges that women have been traditionally associated with matter and nature to the expense of a female subject position. While women can become subjects if they assimilate to male subjectivity, a separate subject position for women does not exist.

Irigaray believes that men are subjects and women are ‘the other’ of these subjects (non subjective supporting matter). According to her, the phallus as the master signifier (that can be traced back to male anatomy) is evidence that the symbolic order is constructed and not ahistorical.

- “Feminist Perspective on the Body-Standard Encyclopedia of Philosophy” (web, June 28, 2010)

In developing philosophical frameworks for making sense of sexual difference feminist scholars have provided accounts of the relationship between subjectivity, corporeality and identity which are applicable to other aspects of our corporeal existence. The article discusses the historical background, the second sex, sexual difference, maternal body, the semiotic and the abject, the productivity of discourse.