CHAPTER -II
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2.1 UNDERSTANDING GENDER

The development of frameworks and models that better capture the dynamism and multiple levels of gender has been an unfolding process. Hess and Ferree (1987) in Analyzing Gender: A Handbook for Social Science Research, observed 'the study of men and women as such has moved through three distinct stages in just the past 20 years, from an emphasis on sex differences through preoccupation with sex roles to the centrality of gender' (Hess and Ferree 1987,14). This latter emphasis goes beyond a simple identification of differences between women and men to an analysis of gender as a historically developed social system that operates interactively on social, political, economic and cultural levels. Judith Lorber (1997[1994]) conceptualizes gender as an institution that acts as a key organizing principle in human social life. It not only defines a structured set of relations, statuses, and norms of behaviours, this scheme incorporates (1) process (2) stratification (3) structure.

Lorber (1994) argued that gender is an institution that is embedded in all the social processes of everyday life and social organizations. She further argued that gender difference is primarily a means to justify sexual stratification. Gender is so endemic because unless we see difference, we cannot justify inequality. Lorber provided much cross cultural, literary, and scientific evidence to show that gender difference is socially constructed and yet is universally used to justify stratification. She wrote that 'the continuing purpose of gender as a modern social institution is to construct women as a group to be subordinate to men as a group (p.33). Martin extended Lorber's (1994) use of the term 'institution' in her argument that gender should be conceptualized as such. She identified the criteria for a social institution as follows- 1) characteristic of groups 2) persists over time and space 3) includes distinct social practices 4) constraints and facilitates behaviour/ action 5) includes expectations, rule/ norms; 6) is constituted and
reconstituted by embodied agents 7) is internalized as identities and selves 8) includes a legitimating ideology 9) is contradictory, rife with conflict 10) changes continuously 11) is organized by and permeated with power 12) is mutually constituted at different levels of analysis.

Understanding gender as a process focuses attention on the dynamic way that gendered patterns and relationship are continually constructed and reconstructed through human interaction. According to Lorber and other scholars who appreciate the dynamism of gender, we are constantly ‘doing gender’, that is, creating, recreating and reinforcing norms and behaviour associated with gender. We constantly use these gendered categories as basic assumptions in our analysis of the social world, our relationships, and ourselves. It is a process of negotiation in which the boundaries that demarcate the separate ‘genders’ are contested and reinforced.

Social Stratification has a special place in the study of Indian Society as observed by Dipankar Gupta in *Hierarchy and Difference: An Introduction*. India has long been reckoned as the most stratified of all known societies in human history. Social stratification deals with the ways in which the human population is socially differentiated. As a system of social stratification gender involves the expressions of social inequality and hierarchy associated with men and women in societies. Differences in the allocation of resources, distribution of power and opportunity structures are associated with the construction of gender categories. While the extent of inequality and the relative position of women and men vary from society to society, gender hierarchies that privilege men and masculinity over women and femininity can be found to different degrees, all over the world (Peterson and Runyan 1999).

The concept of gender as we now use, came into common parlance during the early 1970s. It was used as an analytical category to draw a line of demarcation between biological sex differences and the way these are used to inform behaviors and competencies, which are then assigned as either “masculine” or “feminine”. In human society gender assignments are culturally and socially powerful and produce fundamental differences in world view for
women and men, girls and boys. The purpose of affirming a sex/gender distinction was to argue that the actual physical or mental effects of biological difference had been exaggerated to maintain a patriarchal system of power and to create a consciousness among women that they were naturally better suited to "domestic" roles.

Though folklore is primarily traditional culture it gets modified along with the progress of society and takes on the colour of the times. 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 external factors then upon its traditional form. Though tales travel and are adopted, some of the tales and motifs are rather fairly old and are closely linked with the modes of life and belief of particular communities. Hence M. J. Herskovits has observed: “a substantial body of folktales is more then the literary expression of a people. It is in a very real sense, their ethnography which if systematized by the student, gives a penetrating picture of their life”.

The structural dimension of gender, on one level, refers to the way in which it organizes social life and divides labor into separate spheres associated with women and men- as for e.g. in some societies the private and public spheres, respectively. Reflecting a gendered division of labor, women and men in a society are not only assigned different roles and responsibilities, these positioning are valued differently and placed in rank order. Gender roles that accompany each status consist of realms of responsibility and sets of expectations of women and men in a society.

Primary attention to gender surfaced in folklore, as in other social sciences and humanities fields not long ago. Margaret Mills, a prominent folklorist has pointed out that it is ironic, if not alarming that the “new perspectives” reformulation of the concept of “the folk” articulated in Dan Ben-Amos’s “Towards a Definition of Folklore in Context”(1972) and Bauman’s “Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore”(1972) is striking in “its total non address of gender as a rather persistent and visible cultural resource in folk and popular modes of difference” (Mills, 1993:176). In the 20th century
gender difference is not only acknowledged by scholars but also came out for discussions and became a subject of research. Margaret Mead realized that the difference between the sexes is one important condition upon which mankind has built the many varieties of human culture that gives human beings dignity and stature" (Mead, 1949). Simone de Beauvoir was creating the genesis of the view of gender that sex is biological identity, gender is a social construct when she has written her famous statement: "one is not born but rather becomes a woman.....it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature..." (Beauvoir, 1972).

The academic study of gender has a relatively short history. Its emergence can be dated as recently as the late 1960s, and its development triggered by second wave of feminism. Along with developing a critique of gender inequalities in both personal relationships and in social positioning (especially economically and politically) second wave feminism began to draw attention to the ways in which academic disciplines and sets of knowledge acted to exclude the experiences, interests and identities of women. For e.g. prior to the 1970s, the social sciences in general, and sociology in particular, largely ignored gender. The "people" it studied were mainly men and the topics it focused on were aspects of the social world especially significant for men. Women were almost invisible in pre-1970s gender blind sociology, only featuring in their traditional roles as wives and mothers within families.

Folklore, assigns an independent domain to the women where they enjoy temporal autonomy. In the elite society, knowledge, truth and reality are constructed from the perspective of the dominant gender which is obviously male and female voices are either ignored or given less importance in writing culture. But traditionally, women in India perform the role of the tradition bearers and instrument in the cultural field. The recent discourse on folk narrative research has recognized the gender factor in cultural studies and women's personal narratives are primary documents for analyzing gender issues. The folk narratives performed and perpetuated by women provide a vital ground to study the female voice in cultures. These personal narratives of women are based on women's lives and want to analyze the role and meaning of gender in women's lives and society. These narratives deal with women's experiences and also present and
interpret women and their concern. Through these stories of their own, women try to negotiate their exceptional gender status throughout their entire life span. Women centered narratives can be defined as those stories which are told by women, owned by women and which are centered on the women. (Ramanujan, in Dharwadker, 1999). While narrating their story, from their own point of view, the stereotype notion of the female in the service of male is questioned and defied in some form or the other. Although in reality, women can do nothing to challenge the male domination and are forced to observe the values and norms of the patriarchal society, but in their own way through their narratives, they try to demolish the boundaries and reduce the gender imbalance and to live imaginatively in their aspired egalitarian society.

2.2 GENDER DISCOURSE AND ROLE OF FAMILY AND SOCIETY

Public discourse on gender is recognized both through formal teaching and informal messages from folk stories, folk songs, riddles and proverbs, conversation with friends etc. Moreover when people talk and interact with different members of the family, they co-construct their own family-level gender discourse. While performing regular day-to-day works of the family like feeding, bathing, washing, cooking, dressing, clothing — we communicate to infants, children, and adolescents, thereby a set of meanings about appropriate gender behaviour in a particular family is constructed. More often than not parents and children’s gendered behaviour are sex-typed, or consistent with stereotypes about their biological sex, particularly when parents of young ones converse more to girls than to boys. Many scholars have suggested that the strongest influence on children’s gender occurs within families when parents communicate their beliefs—sometimes unconsciously — about sex and gender (Eccles, 1993, Leaper, 2000; Maccoby, 1998). Researchers have demonstrated that family interactions often reveal implicit gender ideologies, scripts, or rituals that prompt them to co-construct shared understandings of the dominant gender discourse in society. (Ben, 1993; Coltrane, 1998). Parents typically scaffold the child’s gradual understanding of the world as gendered, either confirming or rejecting the dominant gender discourse (Coltrane and Adams, 1997).
According to Huston and Alvarez (1990) families can contribute to an understanding of gender and at the same time, can encourage divergence from social stereotypes. Sociologists theorizing gender have suggested that culture and society are more powerful explanatory mechanisms than nature and biology. Many traditional sociologists, however, have subscribed implicitly to a model in which the binary categories of male-female and of normal-deviant are assumed to be natural dichotomies upon which most societies are based (Lorber, 1996).

Families undoubtedly have a lot of influence in the creation and transmission of gender. Social constructionists asserts that every family evolves a set of shared assumptions that serve to organize both their family-level discourse and their experience of the larger cultural discourse (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Reiss, 1981). The embodiment of gender norms in some families may not be carried out as per society's expectations, parents generally ask their children to reenact the dominant social discourse in contexts outside home.

Over the past decade, scholars increasingly have used social constructionist approaches to study gender (Fox and Murray, 2000). From a social constructionist perspective, cultural discourse, or the institutional and social practices through which our experience of gender is organized, is seen as constituting gender (Leaper, 2000). In most gender scholarship since the 1970s (Connell, 1999), the term sex is used to refer to physical differentiation (female-male) whereas the term gender is used to refer to social construction (i.e., masculine-feminine). Public discourse on gender is recognizable both in formal teachings and informal messages from folktales, conversation with friends and communication media. At the same time, as individual family members interact with each other they construct their own family level gender discourse.

2.3 UNDERSTANDING FOLKTALE

Cristina Bacchilega, in *Encyclopedia of Women's Folklore and Folk life*, translating the German Volksmärchen (the people's 'little story' or 'news'), opined that the term 'folktale' refers to one of the main prose narrative genres that folklorists study. In contrast to belief narratives like myth and legend, the folktale features fictional characters in culturally meaningful situations, centers
on the ordinary, and is primarily for entertainment. Classified into tale type by the Finn Antti Aarne and the American Stith Thompson in the early 20th C., the folktale groups a number of subgenres, including the animal tale, magic tale, religious tale, joke, and formula tale. But the most prominent is the 'tale of magic'-also known in English as the 'wonder tale' and more commonly as the 'fairy tale'. Women as characters, tellers, writers, listeners and readers- have historically engaged with and been powerfully associated with this particular kind of folktale, found in both oral and literary traditions.

While for the most part folktales were collected for print in the 19th C. and later they also were part of much older and classic literary texts ranging from the Panchatantra and the Arabian Nights to Apuleius's 'The Golden Ass' and Italian 'Pentamerone'. While 'fairy tale' from the French Conte de fees, is a misnomer in that fairies are scarce in these stories, magic does play a distinctive part in them. Once upon time signals that a story- some will call it a folktale, others a fairy tale-is coming our way and we would suspend disbelief because whether told or printed, this story will not conform to realism. But the German and French terms, Volksmärchen and Conte de fees, also point to different genealogies: the folktale is firmly rooted in orality and a group's tradition and aesthetics, while the fairy tale is identified with printed texts that may or may not emerge from an oral tradition and are often signed by an author when a literary fairy tale has no counterpart in oral tradition, it is not a folktale. However the oral traditions of story telling and the literary traditions of authored texts have been intertwined throughout history, which has made it problematic to draw a sharp distinction between, 'authentic' folktales and 'inauthentic' literary tales. For example, "Cinderella" is a widely told folktale-classified as ATU 510 by folklorists- with hundreds of versions recorded all over the world, but it has also been part of literature since Giambattista Basile's 16th C Pentamerone. Most modern performances and adaptations of it are based on the French literary version by Charles Perrault. In common usage the boundaries between folktales are often blurred and increasingly in scholarship, that blurring is accepted and results in a fruitful probing of the dynamic relationship between folklore and literature.
While expressions like ‘old wives tales’ and ‘Mother Goose’ point to women as the traditional tellers of folktales, it is through collections edited by men like Charles Perrault in France, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in Germany, Andrew Lang in England and through Walt Disney’s movies that these tales are now best known. Feminist writers and scholars have worked to expand and transform this limited canon wherein “persecuted heroines” abound by producing more women centered anthologies, recognizing the varied and coded art of women storytellers, rediscovering neglected women writers of fairy tales, reevaluating and revising well known tales and performing and writing new ones. Continuing to serve both normalizing and emancipator social functions and articulating diverse aesthetics, the folktale keeps on performing magic—especially for women—into the 21st century in different media.

Usually set in distant times and generic places, tales of magic most commonly tell the story of a rather unpromising male or female hero who often supported by a magic helper, tackles extraordinary challenges and is rewarded, with royal marriage, fame and fortune. Within these tale worlds, a mix of the supernatural and the ordinary is viewed as normal, and the hero’s magically achieved success coincides with the restoration of a naturalized order. Leaving home is often required for the test to start; at other times something is missing and it must be found. “Departure” and “lack” are two of the narrative “functions” that the formalist Vladimir Propp identified as constitutive of folktale plots. The journey is transformative. Protagonists are often children or young men and women who assume a new social role and sense of being once they have proven themselves.

Symbolism and transformation are key elements that allow for imagining change and for recognizing hidden resources. This paradox works on multiple levels of meaning, from the psychological to the social, so that in different historical or cultural contexts and in specific performances or retellings—a tale may tip toward either subverting or reproducing stock social arrangements; however wonder and convention are both consistently at play.
Folklorists have relied on two important reference tools for the basic study of folktales and more specifically of “tales of magic”. The Aarne-Thompson (AT) Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography (1910; 1928; and 1961) catalogued Indo-European folktales based on plot, identified tales of magic as tale types AT 300-749. It was revised in 2004 into the more comprehensive Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography, edited by Hans-Jörg Uther (ATU). Stith Thompson’s six-volume Motif-Index of Folk Literature (1932-1936; sec. edition 1955-1958), identified small but significant narrative units recurring in folklore and across tale types. While specific categories and headings for tale types and motifs have been criticized by women scholars as embodying a male view of the world, useful regional and national indexes for tale types and motifs have since appeared.

Starting in the 19th C, the collection, study and classification of folktales dominated European folkloristics for a long time. Scholars have persuasively shown how this interest in folktales- of which the collection Kinder-und Hausmärchen (Children’s and Household tale, 1812, 1815) by Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm is a foremost example- was tied to the rise of nationalism, the establishment of bourgeois values, the increasing domestication of women, and the production of children. Whether studying multiple versions of a tale type or a range of folk and literary tales in a specific context, scholars of folktales in the 1970s became increasingly attentive to their variable social and ideological functions.

Feminist scholarship has played an important part in this development. Scholars of folktales and fairy tales have also given much consideration to the role of gender in both the tellers and the audience of folktales. When 19th C. male scholars collected oral tales from women, these tellers were primarily seen as bearers of a tradition, not of knowledge. Their ‘uneducated’ words were then edited and interpreted within an aesthetics and narrative of history that demanded the ‘disenchantment of the world’ for the sake of modernity. The confinement of “old wives’ tales” to the pre modern meant that they held a privileged spot as records of the past but were nevertheless trivialized and othered.
The sexual politics of folk and fairy tales as well as their representations of gender will continue to surprise as such narratives are still emerging in new contexts and media, and our knowledge of oral and literary traditions—esp. when it comes to women's—is limited. As narratives characterized by "pleasure in the fantastic" and "curiosity about the real" (Warner 1994: xx), folk and fairy tales have over the centuries and in different social contexts offered an imaginative outlet for desire while maintaining a strong grip on ordinary social life. Women have much to say and much at stake both in the re-evaluation of "old wives tales" and in the ever-multiplying transformation of the genre.

Ramanujan had a keen interest in the folktale as a genre, he saw folktale as a whole, as a fully formed unit, beyond the motifs and (Proppian) moves. But Ramanujan did not seek the performance context of tales and worked almost exclusively on a textual level. Ramanujan in his article "A Flowering Tree: A Woman's Tale" observed that Indian folktales told around the house have usually animals, men, women and couples as central characters. There may be other secondary characters like supernatural beings, both divine and demonic, but they are not the focus of domestic oral tales.

2.4 FOLKTALES: FORM AND NATURE

We know that folktales are popular and anonymous. Folktales unite the miraculous with the natural, the near with the far, and the ordinary with the incomprehensible in a completely natural way. Max Lüthi in his The European Folktale: Form and Nature wrote elaborately on folktales and its form and nature. He observed that the secret power of folktale lies not in the motifs it employs but in the manner in which it uses them—that is in its form. Folktales tell of many beings who could be called ethereal: witches, fairies, clairvoyant women, trolls, giants, dwarves, good and evil sorcerers, dragons and mythical animals.

Lüthi maintained that folktales not only lack any sense of gap between the everyday world and the world of the supernatural, but also lack the dimension of depth. Its characters are figures without substance, without inner life, without an environment, they lack any relation to past and future, to time altogether. The
person and animals depicted in folktales lack psychological depth. Only rarely does the folktale mention sentiments and attributes for their own sake or to create a certain atmosphere. It mentions them when they influence the plot. Attributes and sentiments are expressed in actions. The whole realm of sentiment is absent from folktale characters and as a result they lack all psychological depth. Individual narrator may interject a word about the hero’s sorrow or joy. If this happens, this is only incidental embellishment and does not pertain essentially to the folktale as a form. The hero and the heroine who find one another after many wild adventures celebrate their reunion or wedding simply and without emotional outburst. Folktales show us flat figures rather than human beings with active inner lives as nowhere is this internal emotional state expressed. A heroine succeeds in observing a command to keep silent for seven years, but the folktale does not say anything about the psychological distress and conflict that might have aroused in her as a reaction to the situation. Folktales break down the rich complexity of human beings. According to Lüthi one cannot speak of the characters of the folktales as being intelligent. The tasks of cleverness that occur in the folktale are not truly tests of intelligence, as Charolotte Bühler has observed because “they are derived from such a specific situation that no cunning could hit upon it. The solution depends on very specific aids that do not depend on the sagacity of the person but are offered to him by lucky chance” (Lüthi, 1986).

As in other disciplines, the study of folk-narrative has been deeply colored by the gendered views of its theoreticians. The very tools of folk-narrative research like the Aarne-Thompson tale type and motif listings are subject to gender bias, as many researchers have established. Women are listed as ‘wives’, women’s accomplishments disappear in to male listing, women’s courage become ‘help’ for a man, and capable princesses are maddeningly listed under the form of their temporary imprisonment (Lundell, 1983: 149-163). In his ‘Deutsche Mythologie’ Jacob Grimm speaks of “a vast number of stories and customs handed down through lengthened periods from father to son”. He here simply ignores the fact that in the ‘kinder-und Hausmarchen’ (1812-1815) at least eighty percent of the tales were collected from female informants. We find a similar proportion in tales from a number of European collections.
Folktales have been attacked as escapist fantasies, as a basic reinforcement of conservative social structures and of patriarchal values. Active heroine in folktales represents the utopian strain in such stories. For women in traditional societies a utopian situation was one where a woman was free to choose or not to choose her own life partner, and where marriage meant love but more importantly, equality and respect. The active heroine in folktale sets out to make her own life, to change the rules in her own favour. Morgiana, the active and powerful heroine of “Alibaba and the Forty Thieves”, does not make war upon society, she simply uses her intelligence to make her master’s space her own. A woman and a slave, she changes the rules to achieve equality. Her marriage is itself a transgression.

The tradition of folk literature is quite ancient in our country. Folk literature consists of women’s songs, tales, sayings and proverbs, riddles, folk dramas, ballads and many such literary traditions. Songs of marriage, birth ceremony, naming ceremony, cradle songs, farmer’s songs and many other folk songs for different occasions constitute the rich heritage of our literature, which represent our culture. These songs and tales were transmitted from generation to generation through oral tradition, which is mainly preserved by women folk of our society. It was the women who composed and sung the folk-songs and narrated the folk tales in the domestic sphere as well as in social gathering.

Socially constituted gender roles form stereotypes. A stereotype, according to the Webster’s New World’s Dictionary is defined as an ‘unvarying pattern, specially a fixed or conventional notion or concept of a person, group or idea etc, held by a number of people and allow for no individuality or critical judgment’. This streotypification of gender, with the help of socialization process, has a sort of biological determinism, which starts with reproductive ability of women. Sigmund Freud said, for women “anatomy is destiny”. Women are characterized with a lack, the lack of the genital. Thus they are incomplete. They stand inferior to man biologically, even physically, they are weaker. This sort of biological determinism has been used till date, to justify the submissive position of women. (Bhasin 2000:10). Women, for a long time, themselves did not question this stereotyping of women.
Individuals are converted from biological male and biological female into man and woman respectively with the process of socialization which takes up the task of gendering individuals. Speaking on socialization, Ruth Hartley (Hartley cited in Bhasin, 2000) believed that socialization takes place through four processes, namely, manipulation, canalization, verbal appellation and activity exposure. The idea of gender is constructed through these four processes and slowly permeates into the psyche of the individual. We know that gender is socially constructed, and so does one’s personality. It is important to note here that the basic differences in a man and woman do not seem to have any genetic foundation. It is a result of one’s culture, which is injected in an individual through socialization process.

The social and cultural construction of gender refers to processes of articulating sexual differences socially and culturally. The argument against women is very obvious. Women’s role in procreation (pregnancy, childbirth, and nursing) makes them weaker and thus the popular belief is that they require male protection and control. As a result of these procreating roles, women behave differently than men, becoming more caring, emotionally bounded to other people-and thus incapable of handling hard public tasks, which require investment in general interests, sometimes even ignoring individual needs. On the other hand, what women do in their day to day life, taking care of the children, home, men, sick and old people in addition to their household works like cooking, weaving, washing, cleaning, and also working at the paddy fields, remain unaccounted. They are seen as those people who do not produce, but only reproduces and consume resources which men produce- women’s hard work is simply ignored and taken for granted as their duty. The general conception is that women do not need to be paid for their work and in any case men are their to support them and their children. The system appears natural and based on one fact that cannot be changed: women’s role in procreation.

2.5 FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE AND FOLKLORE

Feminist scholars (e.g. Bohan, 2002; Epstein, 1997; Leaper, 2000), in turn have focused on the question of whether dichotomous sex-typed gender
distinctions reinforce biological essentialism and therefore sustain gender inequalities. Feminist researchers increasingly argue that two categories are not adequate to describe variations in sex and gender experienced by individuals across their lives.

The realization of self identity is the root of the feminist attitude, which out-broke spontaneously due to suppressed position of women in the society. The agony and plight gradually took form of bold thoughts and protests. It gradually transformed into self esteem and praises for women folk. It displayed concern for women's problems. Therefore position of women as reflected in folktales is worth studying in this context, because in its oral tradition folktales are the integral part of a country. Children grow up listening to these folktales and thus have a deep rooted effect on every child and play a vital role in the making of the ethos and the aesthetics of a person. These tales have texts which carry some or the other cultural context in them. They are moving metaphors which gain new meaning in this context.

With the publication of her book *The Second Sex* in 1949, Simon De Beauvoir emerged to be known as the founder of feminist criticism. In the beginning part of her book *The Second Sex* Beauvoir explains the difference between the Sex and the Gender. According to her the gender difference is created by the system of society and the term ‘feminine’ is a social construct. Gender based role differentiation is basic to the understanding of women’s status because women’s studies today take power as central to role and status differentiation. The context of role and power is essential to understand women's status in general and of tribal women in particular. Gender is a major but not the only differentiating factor conditioning divisions in human societies. Basically biological it is reflected in cultural norms that assigned specific roles to man and women in a society. Both were thus socialized to bear the responsibilities of the roles assigned to them. Men were to be bread winners and custodians of property and of women and children who depended on them. Women were to produce heirs, socialize children, be 'homemakers' and thus be confined to the domestic arena while men dealt with the world outside. A set of norms was associated with
these roles to which a status was assigned, according to a person's position in the hierarchy (Mair, 1972:59).

At the end of the 20th century, from the social, critical and particularly feminist viewpoint it is the Grimms' handling of women which has led to the greatest criticism. The fairy tale has been accused of being woman hating and misogynist and it has been pointed out that the role of the woman is passive and unemancipated. The expectations from the characters are those of a patriarchal world in which the man is expected to perform great deeds and woman has a servile function. She is humiliated as a goose girl or leads a Cinderella like existence in the scullery. A woman is encouraged to be passive, tread the well-worn path, not deviate to the right or left and not to do any thing dangerous. She is expected to sit and wait for her prince charming or some gracious man who may lead her out of danger. There lies the success of the heroine in the world of the folk tales and fairy tales. A shining example of feminine passivity is Sleeping Beauty who spends a hundred years lifeless in the castle before the prince wakes her up by kissing her. Thus the roles played by both men and women are clearly defined in the tales. A beautiful girl does not need to act, but to wait patiently until the right man comes her way. That decision of who is right and who is not is decided in most of the cases by the male guardians of the girl in question. A girl’s role is just to be beautiful, just as Snow White lies unconscious in her coffin until a prince turns up, and Cinderella requires a prince to set her free from the situation. Dependent, coy, shy, women catch the fancy of the men who want to be the hero in their life. Woman having a mind of her own is not accepted with an open mind by the society as she refuses to be treated as a doormat. Such women are termed rebel by the society.

'One is not born a woman but becomes one'. This is a famous phrase coined by Simon de' Beauvoir. This statement underscores the basic distinction between sex and gender. In most societies, biological differences are translated into socially institutionalized roles and positions. Gender refers to socio-cultural definitions of man and woman; the way societies distinguish between them and assign different roles to them. Society takes up the task of converting a biological male into a man and a biological female into a woman by prescribing masculine
and feminine qualities to them respectively. According to Ann Oakley ‘gender is a matter of culture’. She asserts that gender distinction is constructed by society, based on sex differences, which are biological in nature (Oakley 1985:16).

2.6 FOLKTALES AND ROLE OF GENDER

Women happen to be the source of much of what has been collected and published about traditional folklore genres. Folklore is an accessible tool of subversion because the vernacular-common knowledge-belongs to the people. Folk art forms do not require special training or certification from outside the community. Easily accessible folk arts and folklore are critical tools for disrupting, challenging and resisting powerful social systems and social injustice. Because folk genres are accessible, fluid and used contextually, individuals and groups can use them to reformulate cultural notions to comment critically and persuasively on social life.

For women different genres of folklore have been especially important because women traditionally have had very less avenues than men for expression and participation in the public sphere. In many cultures, women and girls have less access to education than men and boys and may not be able to read and write but still they produce material culture, oral culture, dance and rituals. Through their cultural expressive traditions, women define alternative social ideas and knowledge, articulate opposition to social injustice and give voice to their creativity and aesthetic values. Even when done from a relatively disempowered position, this resistance is an exercise of power in the social construction of meaning. Culture as we know is not a fixed, unified or clearly bounded whole, but rather is part of an ongoing process of revision and negotiation. Through their expressive culture and despite various constraints, women actively participate in this process to produce culture and social knowledge.

Culture often involves subversion which can be realized in several ways. One of the ways is how women have used their folk genres to define an alternative cultural space and to critique and subvert patriarchal gender relations. For women sharing stories and personal experience narratives may be a means of mutual affirmation and mutual recognition that reflects the experience of being
gendered - that is being situated as female within a particular society. When women meet and present a world view that they know is contradictory to men’s, it can be seen as an act of rebellion and subversion. In many cultures, women have their own expressive genres through which they comment on their lives in all women settings. These forms of women’s expression may serve to channel anger, sorrow, and trauma in ways that offer a strategy for dealing with life’s hardships.

The history of our society reveals that for ages and ages women were subjugated by man to secondary status and were suppressed in all walks of life. The patriarchal systems of our society compelled women to safeguard the patriarchal values throughout their lives. In each of their act and even in their thought they had tremendous tension of men’s authority. Women were not allowed to live and think independently. Depressed and frustrated, under such circumstances women expressed their anguish and plight, their wishes and expectations through the songs they composed and sang and through the stories they told. Through these folk literature women expressed themselves and their views and wishes and revealed their identity in various aspects of life.

A women’s life is perceived almost entirely within a framework of hardship and suffering. The perception and organization of life as a chain of crises and stresses is particularly true of rural and older women. A wife’s patience and ability to endure suffering are also put to test. If the woman has with God’s power withstood these trials, she recovers her former rights and is rehabilitated.

The foolish and gullible wife, the scheming and resourceful mistress of the house, the helpful beggar women, and the victimized girl, are some of the figures that we come across if we look into the folktales. In the article ‘Folktale Heroines and the Type of Motif Indexes’ Torborg Lundell has pointed out that careful investigation of the folklore material shows that the model for female conduct reflected in folklore over a wide geographical area is far from confined to the submissive beauty. There is one type of tale (Armor and Psyche type) where heroines must undergo a series of ordeals and prove her intelligence and
resourcefulness before she rediscovers her lost husband. But the semantic of the type index, however fails to recognize the adventurous aspect of the heroines’ activities. Lundell here points out that Aarne and Thompson downplayed female activity that this folktale type witnessed with its aggressive and capable female protagonist. The adventurous and leadership qualities of a folktale heroine are ignored and independent characters are also unrepresented. It is important to note that there seems to be different standards for evaluating behaviour of women and men. And in some labeling male is given credit instead of the female in the title. In most of the cases women are ignored as far as giving credit in the title. Here an animal or something else will find a place in the title than a woman with all her specialty or peculiarity. This kind of gender discrimination is noticed in the labeling of the type and motif index of the folktales.

The study of folklore in general and folk tales and fairy tales in particular gives us the impression that women and men are in most of the cases not treated equally. One and the same action can under some situation label a girl as naughty and a boy as good. (R.Bottigheimer). The first requirement of a heroine in a fairy tale or folk tale is that she must be beautiful. According to countless fairy tales she is the fairest in the world. This definitely fits in with men’s wishful thinking. There will be very few men who would not be interested in fair and beautiful woman. Even in this 21st century there is tremendous public interest in beautiful princesses and their love affairs. If a member of a royal family marries someone below his rank and status then correlation with a fairy tale is always made, still today. While a woman is judged by her beauty and looks, the same qualities are not expected of a man in our society. This is the reason why in our society even today a dark girl is not welcome in the family. The colour of her skin is so important that the parents of a dark skinned girl are always worried about finding a match for her. Added to this is the kind of insult the girl receives also speaks for society’s double standard in treating a man and woman differently. But in spite of the usual stereotypes inherent in the genre, the portrayal of women is very diverse. The woman is seen in all social positions and classes, from the queen and princess to the scullery maid, beggar woman, and demoness to the Goddess, intelligent old woman, powerful mother etc. We find women playing all sorts of
different roles in the family: child, young girl, and sister, bride, loving mother, cruel stepmother and both loving as well as cruel grandmother. The spectrum of their outward appearance ranges from stunning beauty to unbelievable ugliness, of their intelligence to the one who is unbelievably stupid, to the riddle princess for whom none of her suitors are a match intellectually. There is the servile, patient, modest woman, the hard working and the lazy, the fertile and the childless woman, the cruel and the cunning woman. Her moral qualities can be a help to others. Even the position of the woman within the family can differ a lot. On the one hand she is completely subservient to the will of her husband and has no chance of standing up to his despotic dogmatism in order to prove her innocence. On the other hand we sometimes see her as her husband’s second wife who as the real boss of the household holds all the power in her hand.

Fundamental character traits of the woman, which are often decisive for the plot of the story, are her unwavering loyalty, unflinching selflessness and self sacrifice, her long suffering determination. These are the qualities that are required of the wife who wants to rescue her husband or from the sister who wants to save her brother. This duty to find her lost husband or win him back from the evil co-wives is often the fate of women in folk tales and fairy tales. These tales concern themselves more with the maturing process of women than that of men. Female characters whose attributes are grounded in the feminity schema lead happy lives if their behaviour revolves around beauty, passivity and dependence on outside forces. This is so implicated in the narrative that it constitutes a cause and effect relationship and the drastic consequences of breaching this formula imply a misogynistic view of women.

2.7 CULTURAL CONTEXT AND FOLKTALES

Though closely linked to power, gender differentiation is legitimized through a culture based on biological differences. Men and women are socialized to bear the responsibilities of the role assigned to them through a superior or inferior status. Inequalities are thus legitimized by attaching roles and responsibilities to specific social positions that determine an individual’s social position. Thus a gender based concept of status denotes women’s legal, social
and psychological position and rights and privileges in a given social setup. It is conditioned by the prevalent ideas and functions in that society, the attitudes, the behaviour of men towards women and their own acceptance or rejection of these roles. The development and corresponding changes in their status is linked directly with social and cultural tradition, stages of economic development, level of education and political participation. Such factors affect the national as well as regional characteristics of women.

The examination of women in their relationship to culture has received its impetus and its direction from feminism as a political movement. There is a growing awareness that the nature of the oppression of women is cited both in material conditions as well as in social and cultural attitudes and practices and so needs to be combated at both levels. To understand the position of women, folk tales can play an important role as the vital medium of expression of folk culture and tradition. The themes of tales differ according to the demands of the culture. Culture decides the form and content of tales. In the context of Indian culture, we observe that the views held by the culture towards women are generally reflected in the tales. Almost all the story types in one way or the other tend to establish the typical Indian image of women. Here women have always been subordinate to male interests and a woman is always regarded as the possession of man and their duty is to safeguard patriarchal values. Because of these cultural hegemony only the tales of chaste women, childless women, jealousy of co-wives, daughter-in-law, mother-in-law conflicts, projection of beautiful and cunning women and tales projecting the supremacy of motherhood are found in large numbers. Thus the study of tales in their cultural context is very much necessary to understand their uniqueness. There is no denying the fact that in our country women are exploited everywhere but the nature of exploitation varies from culture to culture. To have an unbiased view of women as represented in folktales we need to take into account the particular culture to which a woman belongs. Isolated study may not give us a proper understanding of the position of women. For the purpose of our study, our attempt would be to analyze the folktales of the two tribes of Assam. They are - Rabhas (patriarchal now), and Garos (matriarchal). The two tribes under study have a lot of similarity but some differences do exist among
them. One prominent and clear difference is that Garos being a matrilineal society, their culture tends to be different from the other one which adhere to patriarchal culture. It would be interesting to find out the position women enjoy in these two different setups. It is popularly believed that women enjoy a better position in the matriarchal society as women forms the centre of the family and inherits the parental property. Whether this assumption is a myth or a reality needs to be seen in the course of the study through the help of the folktales. Here we need to study the theory that the matriliny in itself confers a higher status on women. Though the social system conditions the women’s status, one can not state unconditionally that her status deteriorates with patriarchy or improves unconditionally with matriliny. The nuances of these systems have to be studied.

Folklore unlike the elite tradition assigns an independent domain to the females where they enjoy complete spatial and temporal autonomy. In the elite perspective, knowledge, truth and reality are constructed in terms of dominant gender and female voices are ignored or given less importance in writing culture. But in traditional societies women are seen as the tradition bearers and instruments in the cultural continuum. Male dominance exists on different cultural level and needs to be understood as a relative concept. It is expressed in various ways and its content differs in various historical and cultural contexts. The process of gender construction is a life long process of interaction where gender is evolved and confirmed in relation to several sets of norms. Norms of gender prescribe how men and women are supposed to act, behave, look like etc. These sets of norms are relatively stable but not static. Individuals are not simply reproducing norms of gender, but transforming them and producing new ones. Thus we are influenced by and we also influence the gender culture.

Culture is a learned way of behaviour, which is transmitted from generation to generation. In fact it is the social heritage which an individual receives from his/her group. It is something which accumulates over a period. There are certain norms, values and beliefs in any society, which are culturally determined and socially transmitted. The culture of a society can be tangible and intangible at the same time. The tangible aspects pertain to the objects, symbols, and technology of a particular society while the
intangible aspects refer to the beliefs, ideas, values and expectations in any society. Ideas on one’s gender identity are also a learned way of behaviour, which is a contribution of our culture, especially one’s intangible culture. When a child is born the mother is usually in most cultures in charge of breast feeding the baby, taking care and socializing it (Ortner 1997:16). Infant and children are considered a part of nature. Women with their association with infant and children are tagged together with ‘nature’. Since men lack a natural basis for family orientation i.e. since they do not reproduce, the cultural reasoning seems to go that men are the ‘natural’ proprietors of religion, politics and other realms of cultural thought. Thus men are associated with culture i.e. higher form of human thoughts involving art, religion and law. Children right from a very tender age, internalize the traits of masculinity or femininity that reflects in their behaviour, attitude and roles they take up. That gender is a matter of culture as mentioned by Ann Oakley, and that it has nothing to do with one’s biology becomes clear if we look at Margaret Mead’s work titled “Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies”. Mead, an anthropologist, has tried to prove that sex is not a determining factor for gender. The qualities of being masculine or feminine have nothing to do with one’s biology and the root of these differences lies in one’s culture. Mead found from her study that the Arapesh tribe from New Guinea is gentle, mild and affectionate and soft. Both men and women behaved in a so-called feminine manner. While the Mundugumor tribe of New Guinea who were cannibalistic, lived in a hostile environment and there both men and women were masculine. Both are expected to be aggressive, harsh, violent and competitive. Nevertheless, in the Tchambuli tribe, male and female behaviour was contradictory to the normative roles assigned to man and woman in most societies i.e. women were masculine and men were feminine in nature. Women were more dominating and managed all the major works of the family while men were less responsible than women were. They went for shopping, wore curls and gossiped which are considered to be womanly habits. The study conducted by Mead proves that human behaviour is conditioned by the demand of the situation in which one is placed irrespective of male or female. Patriarchal social set up is
responsible for assigning submissive role for women and dominant role for the men in our society. (as cited in Biswal, 2006)

Socialization as a process of transmitting culture, consists of complex processes of interaction through which the individual learns the habits, beliefs, skills and standards of judgment that are necessary for effective participation is social groups and communities. A child comes to learn about the norms, expectations, and different roles to be played in the group through the process of socialization. A child learns about his/her gender identity by learning what is she or he is expected to do by others. An individual learns about his/her gender identity by knowing what she/he is not, or in other words by about the other which helps in the emergence of one’s self. For example a male child learns to confirm to his own gender group by negating all the activities that a girl child does. A male child is always encouraged to play with a gun or a car and a girl child with doll or kitchen utensils. Thus a male child becomes violent and plays with hazardous games and keeps away from girlish items fearing that he would be branded a girl. Similarly comments like girls can cry but boys should not cry in public or in other words should not show their emotion also has a lot of impact in the sensitive minds of the young ones. Socialization is a continuous process that helps to learn the normative behaviour, which mostly happens to be stereotypic behaviour already mentioned. The very first thing the child is socialized about is the idea regarding his/her gender identity. Thus a girl child is generally associated with the colour ‘pink’ while a male child is so often associated with the color ‘blue’. Although there is no harm in girl liking the blue color or for that matter any other color and vice versa. No one can explain this color association logically but a notion has already been formed and carried forward traditionally. In one study, it was found that words such as “handsome”, “sturdy” and “tough” were used to describe boy infants and “dainty”, “sweet” and “charming” for girl infants though there was no difference in the sizes of the babies. (Giddens 1984). A girl is expected to reach home before it was dark but no such time binding exist for a boy. Thus a boy grows in life without any inhibition and can deal with the problems of life in a much more practical way. Compared to this a girl is not free to deal with life. She grows but
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along with her grows her fear, inhibition, resulting in lack of confidence in herself. Thus gender discrimination continues as she crosses each stage in her life. By the time she reaches a point in her life where she could question certain prevailing norms of the society she herself starts believing that men are superior and almost willingly accepts the subordinate position. Thus male hegemony continues. Discrimination which was traditionally done against women by society is sustained by women themselves.

When we talk about universal devaluation of women, Sherry Ortner rightly links women's secondary status to the tendency, in almost all cultures to view women as closer to nature and men as responsible for cultures. In the nature-culture debate, nature is often seen as subordinate to, lesser than, culture. The ability of human beings to transform the givens of nature into cultural artifacts and tools, together with the arts of ritualizing nature invests them with glory and social significance because they are able to transform and transcend the given, the raw, i.e. nature. Because of their 'natural' roles of childbirth and lactation and the resulting social and psychological roles of domestication and child rearing, women are considered closer to nature or intermediate between nature and culture. This attitude is common to all cultures, with of course, variations according to history, political and socio-economic conditions. (Ortner, 67-74).

2.8 PATRIARCHY, GENDER AND RELIGION

In gender politics, the word patriarchy refers to any form of social power given disproportionately to men. In other words patriarchy stands for power and authority. The word has a number of affiliations and goes on to symbolize possession, control and belonging. And its arms extend to almost every field-philosophy, law, governance, society itself, and the more modestly constructed family. Many construct this to mean a gender hierarchy in which men dominate or exploit women. The patriarchal mindset wants women to be objects, totally under the control of men.

Much of patriarchy has its roots in religion. The roots of patriarchy lie in the myths of creation and the religious order based on them. The initial
relationship between the creator and the created world has located itself in the
tower of man and the subordination of woman. Thus intent has been
camouflaged by other myths—myths of protection, of punishment for
transgression, of the power of women, their indispensability and the glory of
motherhood. Thus any questioning of the patriarchal stronghold has to contest
this domain of belief and begin with the experience of women, their emotional
strengths, intellectual abilities, and capacity to resist and endure, to conceptualize
and to transcend the body even as they realize its centrality.

The patriarch stands for Father Right, the right of ownership over the
seed. He is not a person but an institution, a mindset, a practice, hegemony, and
thus an oppressor. Religions which believe the Manusmriti, Bible or other
religious text often follow it faithfully by its every word, which puts the men in
charge. The Bible, which most Christians live by states boldly that every woman
should be submissive to man. In Manusmriti, it is said that every woman should
treat her husband as her God and her chastity is known from the fact that how
much faithful is she towards her husband. With that in mind and those beliefs
instilled in cultures, Women do not stand a chance at gaining strength in their
gender. But interestingly enough, for a variety of complex reasons women also
support and perpetuate patriarchy. This is called internalization of domination.
Women continually renegotiate their bargaining power. There is no doubt that
women often treat their son better, become partial towards them at the cost of the
daughter, deprive their daughters of education, restrict their freedom, encouraging
daughters to sacrifice for the family and be happy with that, mistreat daughter-in
laws and so on. But all these need to be understood in the context of the
respective power and position that men and women have and enjoy in family and
in the society.

Women and oppression against them vary from culture to culture. Feminists are convinced that patriarchy is the greatest enemy of women. It is a
kind of false consciousness that makes them accept all form of oppression
unconditionally. Women in the west waged their war against patriarchy and held
men as oppressor and are headed towards achieving an egalitarian society. Unlike
west, situation in India is quite different. The custom, the value system and the
traditional heritage that Indian women are expected to uphold are the greatest hurdle in fighting out patriarchy and getting emancipated. The ideology of ‘pativrata’ and ‘chastity’ which Indian women have been made to cling contributes to the factors responsible as to why women find it difficult in encountering patriarchy face to face. Service to one’s family is considered to be the ultimate duty of a woman. The ideology of ‘pativrata’ has been popularized among Indian women through folklore, religious and other mythological scriptures and certain rituals which are considered to be the mines of Hindu traditions. For instance the mythological characters like Savitri, Sita, and Damayanti has been valorized as the ideal image of an Indian woman. Such images which symbolize suffering perpetuate the impression that the destiny of a woman is to tolerate all kinds of injustice without any complain and always be ready to sacrifice anything they are asked for. The concept of Pati Parameswar says that the husband should be given the position of the almighty. A religious sanctity has been attached to women’s subordination. Thus a woman internalizes such values from the very childhood and as a result of these values imbibed in her she considers all kinds of atrocities on her as natural in the name of obliging her dharma. Society also holds such timid and obliging women in high esteem. Although it is a different matter that in the process of negating herself and bearing all kinds of wrongs committed towards her she is only safeguarding the patriarchal values which are more often than not highly one sided and tries to protect the male interest. The male –centered view of life which goes on to privilege one gender over another has led to an inability to work towards holistic development. The discordant note of conflict and opposition to the other, of want and disease appear to be rooted in the basic concept of power which is one-sided and does not respect other perspectives and needs. It has spilled over into all areas of life: myth and culture, religious practices, folklore, physical geography, philosophical and epistemological quests and frameworks, socio-economic constructs, and history and art, and above all language.

Man has not only been viewed as the ‘master’ but also as the protector and the bread earner, a belief which in large measure is a myth. Epics and folktales alike throw up examples of how women have been abandoned or left
unprotected either because of the turn of events or because of male rejection, persecution or authority. There are also sufficient examples in real life, almost in every society, of women struggling to support their families—orphaned women, single or widowed women, abandoned wives, persecuted or rejected women, and those who support sick husbands and many who earn the bread while the men spend their earning in drink or self indulgence or women who take the charge of the family in the absence of the father and sometimes at the loss of both the parents sacrificing her own dreams. But while man gets recognition for his contribution or sacrifice towards the family, a woman’s contribution goes unnoticed and unrecognized. These are realities which compel one to discern between the prevalent myth and its social face. But this myth has also constructed its own idea of masculinity, of men as strong, infallible creatures, as those who have a right to authority, respect and dignity.

India’s obsession with a male child is a result of our religious obligations where the ‘putra’ connotes to the one who can bring the parents out of hell. The rescuer from put or hell happens to be the son because there are certain religious rites, which has to be performed by son only. Women simply do not have any space there. Otherwise one would not attain salvation. Besides, there is a firm belief in our traditional society that the son comes as a support to the parents in their old age. The son is considered an asset whereas the daughter a liability. Opinion regarding daughters is culturally constructed where she is a parayadhan who has to be married off someday. Neglect of the girl child starts from her birth itself. When it comes to taking decision on behalf of one—between the boy and the girl of the family, it is always the male born of the family who is preferred. The son gets the preferential treatment, getting best of the available resources, whereas the girl needs to settle down with whatever comes her way as bonus. The upbringing of the girl is such that she is more or less conditioned to accept her fate without raising a hue and cry. The one who protests is again termed a rebel and faces different obstacles from the society. A girl is always a secondary member both in her parental family and her marital family. Her whole life passes in adjustments, compromises. Our tradition and culture puts pressure on the girl
to behave in a certain way and she is conditioned to depend on her brother, father before marriage and on husband and his family after marriage.

Religion which forms a greater aspect of one's culture carries even its gender related bias in its texts. For instance, Hindu religion is an embodiment of patriarchal dominance. In fact, most of the Hindu Mythology focuses on the sacrificing nature of women, for instance, the uncomplaining image of Sita, who worshipped her husband Rama, and could tolerate all atrocities of the society and her husband. She could jump into fire and even went on exile to the forest all alone to prove her chastity. Thus she was elevated to the position of Goddess and her example was given to every woman as the role model for inspiration. Through the character of Sita, what society wants and expects from every woman is unquestioning loyalty, ability to suffer pain, suffering, humiliation silently and total obedience towards her husband. These are of course expectations of the patriarchal society. Again Draupadi was shared by five brothers and was disrobed by her husband's cousin because her husbands had lost her to their cousins in game of dice. Yet after this great humiliation in public, she followed her husbands to the forests, leaving behind all comfort just like Sita. It seems Indian society has nothing but expectations from women. She is someone who is always ready to sacrifice and needs to forgive and forget all the injustice committed towards her. This is the ideal image of woman in India which is projected in our mythologies. The most interesting part is that in both the cases of Ramayana and Mahabharata, war was wagged between men because of women like Sita and Draupadi but nobody even looks into the faults or weaknesses of men. Women are either eulogized or criticized and both contribute to her repression. Such criticism and eulogism escalates the expectation level of the society and creates an unseen barrier around the women. Women on their part also strive hard to meet high expectations and when they fail to fulfill such high expectation, they feel guilty and blame themselves. So does the society. But men are portrayed differently. Lord Krishna was portrayed as a great musician and women fell for him. That he was flirtatious with the ‘gopis’ has been made insignificant. The loyalty and integrity of Lord Krishna's character was never questioned because chastity as a value is to be maintained by women. It has to be safeguarded by the
feminine gender. Men stand beyond it. One can also see that men won women in battles with force, sometimes for own self and sometimes for others as Bhisma won Amba, Ambika and Ambalika (but not marrying anyone of them) but women had to win men with austerity and penance. Gender stereotyping is immense in Hindu mythology. We cannot deny the influence of mythology in forming the psyche of both men and women in the long run. Knowingly and unknowingly people tend to idolize the heroes and heroines of the mythologies and in the process totally ignoring their faults.

Even Christian mythology perpetuates such gender stereotypes portraying the woman as inferior. It says that Adam was first created by God and Eve was created latter, to fulfill Adam’s needs. Thus she was the secondary creation, the inessential, the other, who has been created to keep men at ease. Christianity preaches, God as the father, a male. Jesus was a man. Christianity has always given importance to men in its biblical texts. One can hardly see women in the post of priests. Priesthood requires lots of erudition and jurisdiction, so women are not fit enough to occupy these posts, as far as the traditional opinion on men and women goes. Thus they are kept in such jobs that suit their so-called ‘nature’. Therefore they take the job of nuns, which involved nursing and teachings that were controlled by religious institutions. Nevertheless the Catholic Church still debars women from it although Church of England opened priesthood to women in 1992. When we glance at the different textbooks available to young children we find the same gender discrimination. Women are represented as teacher, nurse and when it comes to a leader or a pilot or a scientist the picture is invariably of a man. The perceived notion is that the so called soft jobs are for women which again is related to her emotional side and practical and bold field is left open to the men folk. Women are seen as caring but this does not mean that men cannot go for nursing or teaching or women cannot fly or work in a laboratory. But the suggestive pictures create some kind of impression in the young and impressionable mind and stays with him/her unconsciously. Mothers teach daughters to learn cooking, and other household jobs because these are the qualities that will be counted after marriage. All other qualities and qualification will be meaning less for a girl as she is judged by her abilities in cooking,
knitting, nursing etc. Achievements of the woman outside the four walls of the house are immaterial as no one is seriously interested in her growth as a person. A woman who steps outside and works and achieves like a man is seen as a threat and thus in every step a woman is discouraged in our patriarchal society. What comes easily to a man is not as easy for a woman as she needs to prove herself doubly compared to a man to win respect and acceptability for herself. Gender comes her way and she needs to work her way out against all sorts of discrimination resulting from gender bias.

Islam with its cultural practices like polygamy and purdah system is an epitome of objectification of women. One can find the gender discrepancies in case of Islam marriage practices where men can have more than one woman at the same time. One can also see patriarchal domination in Buddhist religion. Like Christianity, Buddhist women are also allotted the role of nuns.

History is an aspect of one’s culture. History registers only those aspects which are highlighted in one’s culture. Indeed history talks of the interaction between gender and culture. Various feminist writers have claimed that history denotes ‘his-story’. In fact it has not adequately made much statement on women or rather remained silent on them. The silence maintained on women is too conspicuous through the pages of history. Our culture is such that only men and their activities have been highlighted. One would not find women outside the feminist context i.e. they have been in focus as somebody’s daughter, mother or sister. History was the story of great kings and individuals. Similarly the world of folktales is also male-centric. We see kings and princes, rich merchants and well-to do individuals as well as poor men as the principal characters of the tales where women play the supportive role of the wife, sister, daughter, mother etc. There are very few women characters in the folk tales who stand independently on their own. Although these tales are told chiefly by women and the audience is also women, there are very few positive and inspiring heroines. All we get is the portrayal of submissive beauties, ill-fated heroines tortured by step-mothers or by someone else, heroines who can have the only option of crying hopelessly in the majority of the tales. This kind of portrayal of course impresses the mind of the young ones, though negatively. Listening to these tales, the girls from the
very young age, start believing that it is natural on their part to suffer without uttering a word. These stories somehow impress their mind and psychologically they become prepared to accept the submissive role, the role prescribed by the patriarchal society.

2.9 STUDIES ON GENDER AND FOLKLORE

Gender has long been formally ignored as a relevant category in the study of folk-narrative. Paper devoted to gender questions has emerged with increasing frequency and urgency in the 1980s and 1990s. The 1989 Budapest Congress of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research, for example was devoted to questions of folk narrative and cultural identity; the 1990 Societe Internationale d’Ethnographie et de Folklore meeting in Bergen included many gender-related papers as did in 1992 International Society for Folk Narrative Research meeting in Innsbruck and the 1993 Nordic Folklore Symposium in Seattle, where papers by Torunn Selberg, Anikki Kaivola-Bregenhoj, LeeanVirtanen, and Bente Gullveig Alver explored gender questions within the context of folk narrative and world view. Independently several ongoing projects have incorporated ‘gender’ as an ancillary or central concern: gender studies in the Finnish Folklore Fellows Summer School; Aili Nenola’s Finnish Research project, ‘Culture, Tradition and the Gender System’; her proposal for an international network of ‘Folklore Fellows in Gender Studies’ which has found deep resonance among folklorists and folk-narrativists around the world; and ‘Folklore and Gender’ (volume of essays) which recognizes the importance of the subject by bringing together and publishing papers from sessions devoted to gender in folk narrative.

In the process of folk-narrative production, every story component and every analytic process is fundamentally conditioned by gender. Voicing within tales depends to a very great extent on the gender of the voice that tells a tale. Does the heroine speak? What does she say? Is there a heroine at all? Is there a hero? What does he do? Each of these narrative acts depends on social patterning within a society (Fox, 1987: 565-567; Kodish, 1987: 574-575). A tale can be male or female by virtue of its having a male protagonist, a male teller, a male
collector and a male scholar who analyses the resultant text could be quadruply male (Bottigheimer, 1993: 267 ff). The same can be true of a female tale that has a heroine, female teller, female collector and female analyst. The act of story telling itself is highly sensitive to gender issues. Women protagonists in tales told by men occupy a special position, one that differs from their position in tales told by women. Men and women also tell the same tales differently (Köhler-Zülpch, 1991: 109). These are all aspects of gender-based ‘filter-effects’ (Dollerup et al, 1984: 241-265) that emerge in the act of story telling.

Recent discourse on folk narrative research has recognized the gender factor in cultural studies. Gender is perceived not only as an enduring variable for the study of folklore matters but also as a potential factor for performing a particular narrative either for recitation or for memory.

The increasing participation of women in academia has broadened scholarly inquiry in all disciplines. Women have brought new perspectives to many old questions in folklore and folk narrative. But the results of the contemporary women’s scholarship are to be integrated into the mainstream so that the full range of human experience male and female can be recognized and appreciated from women’s as well as from men’s perspective. Folk narratives after all are ...............

"sites of competing, historically and socially framed desires... (they)...continue to play a privileged function in the reproduction of various social construct including gender and narrative"

(Bacchilega, 1993: 11)

The preoccupation with the subject of women in the fairy tales and folk tales was dormant for many years but recently the interest in this area of research has surfaced at different conferences, seminars and in articles. The movement towards the emancipation of women together with the currently fashionable interest in gender studies played their role in making people aware of this subject. In these studies centering women in relation to their status, position in society
through the help of folklore material the researchers examine the active and passive roles of the woman.

In the 20th Century gender difference is not only acknowledged by scholars but also came up for discussion and became a subject of research. Margaret Mead realized that “the difference between the sexes is one of the important conditions upon which mankind has built the many varieties of human culture that give human beings dignity and stature” (Mead, 1949). Simone de Beauvoir was creating the genesis of the view of gender that sex is biological identity, gender is a social construct when she had written her famous statement: ‘one is not born but rather becomes a women... it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature...’ (Beauvoir, 1972: 295). Another definition of gender formulated by Bonnie Kime Scott (as cited in Das, 2005:7) is also worth mentioning here:

‘Gender is a category constructed through cultural and social systems. Unlike sex, it is not a biological fact determined at conception... gender id more fluid, flexible and multiple in its options than the... unchanging biological binary of male and female’. (Scott 2)

Gender relations are always complex. While women may critique men through their expressive tradition, they may simultaneously strive to preserve the honour of their households and the same men they criticize. Further while men might be culturally defined as superior to women within a particular group, they might hold an oppressed position relative to other men within wider society.

It is also necessary to recognize that women’s culture is not always subversive. Folkways may communicate messages regarding how women should conform to their social roles and sometimes warn about the repercussions of violating cultural norms. However clearly throughout the world women articulate their resistance to male dominance, present alternative social interpretations and offer practical knowledge through folkways and cultural expressive traditions that are specific to various collectivities of women.
Time and again folklore about women returns with the obsession with distinguishing them from men. The qualities associated with men and women tend to be polarized into binary oppositions. It is sometimes difficult to remember that women and men have much more in common than in differentiation, and that the biological and cultural possibilities of each are by no means exhausted by the two categories.

We must acknowledge the fact that traditional folklore is not restricted to any one particular group of people but crosses culture, classes, and sex/genders.