CHAPTER - IV
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If we look into the culture of the Rabhas who are one of the major ethnic groups of Assam, we find that although at present the Rabhas follow the patriarchal system of family structure there are evidence in their folklore material, particularly in their folktales that they were once a matrilineal tribe. Even today they trace the line of decent through females and children after marriage are inducted into the mother’s clan. Goddesses are worshipped in the community religious festivals like Baikho Puja, meaning the worship of the goddess of wealth and prosperity, propitiation of goddess Kechai Khanti, the deity which protects all humanity and controls the evil spirits and Marai Puja, propitiation of goddess Manasa (serpent goddess). Child marriages are not practiced by the community and divorce and widow remarriages are allowed in the community. This shows that women are in an advantageous position and enjoy some breathing space and freedom in this tribe. But we also have to mention the fact that as per their customary law of inheritance all sons are entitled to get a share of the father’s property whereas a daughter generally gets none of this unless her father arranges a share for her before his death. The presence of matrilineal clans in their patriarchal society theoretically provides considerable importance to women among Rabhas in comparison to other tribal women (Bordoloi, 1987). However it is not confirmed that the theoretical possibilities offered by it actually gets translated into higher position in their society when compared to the other tribal and non-tribal groups. Empirical studies in recent times show that while enjoying higher status than in the caste societies they are not treated equally as per men. Though the social system conditions women’s status, one cannot state unconditionally, that her status deteriorates with patriarchal set up or improves unconditionally with matrilineal structure. The nuances of the systems have to be studied. For that purpose we are going to study some of the folktales of the Rabhas and thereby trying to form a clear picture of women as perceived in the community.
Instead of arranging the tales according to some classificatory scheme (e.g. Romantic tales, tales of magic, etc.), I have tried to arrange the tales according to the dominant theme or trait represented by women as characters of the tales under different headings. But sometimes some tales feature more than one trait or themes.

Ramanujan observed in his Introduction to *Folktales from India* that if quests and tasks are part of the life story of the hero in a male-centered tale, a different focus makes itself felt in women-centered tales. Saving, rescuing or reviving a man or bringing back to life (husband or fiancé or beloved) often solving riddles on his behalf, becomes the life task of a heroine. In such tales women play the dominant role but she needs the help and support from other male or female to successfully accomplish the task or the mission she undertakes.

**4.1 WOMEN IN HER NORMATIVE ROLE**

The accepted norm in societies runs along the patriarchal lines. The discrimination against women is so deep rooted in our societies that a girl is conditioned to accept all the trouble and injustice happily by the time she matures into a woman. A woman is praised for the compromises she makes for the welfare of the family. Patriarchy’s set standard is internalized by women. She was assigned roles determined by her gender. Thus womanhood is associated positively with the values of hard work, motherhood, chastity etc. All these values are related to the integrity of the household. Skilled and hardworking woman is symbolically associated with making the reputation of the household. Thus women’s roles in tales after tales revolve around being mother, daughter, wife, sister or a beloved. Socialization process which is a continuous one helps to learn the normative behaviour and that mostly happens to be stereotypic behaviour assigned to women.

**4.1.1 Dyumakchi (the Chaste Woman)**

The influential and principal sage of heaven, Krimisung cursed the young boy Dadrang and damsel Chikchi to be born as human beings

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1. Sarma, 2010:51-54
   Rabha, 1977:37-40
on earth as they were involved in love affairs which the sage considered to be a sin. The curse of a sage is considered irreversible. It comes into execution in due time in the house of Queen Hu-Hu and King Ha-ha. Dadrang was born as a son. He was named Dadan. Likewise Chikchi was born in the house of sage Jinjiram and Jinari on earth. She was named Dyumakchi.

Ha-ha was said to be the first king of Rabhas. After his death, Dadan came to the throne. He was popular among his subjects. When the king of a distant land came to know about Dadan’s enormous wealth, he proclaimed war and attacked the former’s kingdom almost suddenly. King Dadan’s dexterous general Marukshetri killed the King of Kashi in the battle. After that, king had conquered almost all the opponent kings with the help of Marukshetri. But after killing the king of Kashi, Dadan’s kingdom began to face odds one after another. The king lost all his mental balance and became indifferent to the royal duties. Complete anarchy prevailed in the kingdom as a result of that. The king was seen wandering through the forest with bows and arrows in hand. He roamed day in and day out.

Suddenly one day, he saw God’s daughter Dyumakchi who sat drying her long tresses of hair. The king got passionately attracted towards beautiful Dyumakchi. They fell in love. The king brought her to the palace and decided to marry her royally. The whole palace found itself in a quandary with her arrival. Intoxicated with his new love, the king began to belittle his Queen Toba. Taking advantage of the situation Marukshetri, the army general hatched a conspiracy. He took many royal officials, councilors, ministers and generals into confidence and sent Dyumakchi to jail. He even held her hair and strapped her with a cane. Only the old minister protested against such inhuman tortures. For this Marukshetri imprisoned the minister along with the king.

Marukshetri’s mother Princess Nemanukkini became furious when she heard of the inhuman tortures meted out to Dyumakchi by Marukshetri. She cursed her son and accused him as a sinner as he tortured a weak and chaste nymph. She also asked him to fear about the consequence of touching a chaste woman. According to her, a king is entitled to have two or more queens, and none could interfere in that. She accused him of bringing disgrace to their race. Finally she told him that he lost all right to continue as the royal general of king Dadan and asked him to give up the post immediately or else he would die certainly
in the coming war. She did not withdraw her curse although Marukshetri asked for her forgiveness.

Meanwhile taking advantage of the chaotic situation Dyumakchi fled from the prison. Marukshetri was killed in a battle. King Dadan now out of jail, was searching frantically for Dyumakchi. Dyumakchi was also wandering in search of Dadan. But they could not meet each other. Dadan got so exhausted that he died instantly. Dyumakchi, too hit by affliction and melancholy, assumed the shape of a stone in a hill. Because of the curse of celestial sage, their longing for union remained unfulfilled even in this birth.

Chastity as a power is recurrent theme that runs through many folkloric texts. Tribal folktales also incorporate this theme in abundance. The word chastity includes all the qualities “good” woman should possess, apart from the imperative virtue of chastity such as “service” (to one’s husband) and the spirit of loyalty, self-sacrifice and modesty in bearing.

Hart makes the interesting observation that the Karpu (chastity) of the wife “consisted of a sort of asceticism, the restraining of all impulses that were in any way immodest. Clearly the more sexually attractive a woman is, the more power her chastity endows her with” (Hart 1975, 97).

Dyumakchi, an exceptionally beautiful woman was held in high esteem as a chaste woman. When Marukshetri unleashed inhuman torture on her, putting her in prison by pulling her hair, the mother of Marukshetri, Nemanukkini, cursed her son. She asked her son to fear the consequence of ill treating a chaste woman. It is believed that from her innate chastity comes the secret power of woman which can destroy the most powerful and strongest person. Thus the mother told her son that power of chastity is to be feared and revered as it could elevate a person’s position as well as can prove extremely destructive if threatened. Curse is something to be feared and the person receiving curse is believed to live a condemned life. This tale reflects on the issue and reasserts the fact the Rabha society believes in the heavenly curse and its effect needs to be feared.

Although passionately in love with each other Daran and Dyumakchi could not get united at the end as they were cursed by celestial sage for loving
each other in their previous birth in heavenly abode. This is important because as human beings their power is limited and they cannot challenge or overthrow divine wish.

In Marukshtri’s mother, Nemanukkini we find a strong and sensible woman who is compassionate about a woman is distress. As a woman she could not tolerate the suffering and pain of a chaste woman. Having failed to guide her son in the right direction, she went to the extent of cursing her son to be dead for his misdeed. But Dyumakchi and Daran’s first wife Toba are passive victims silently bearing atrocities and injustice meted against them.

4.1.2 Tore-Tophre

A sage named Tura was engrossed in meditation in the forest. It so happened one day that two sisters- Dikhaiba and Nadaba went to him for his blessings so that they can bear child. The sage blessed them and said both of them would have a daughter each. But the meditation of the sage got disrupted by the two girls’ extraordinary beauty. Suddenly he felt a great desire for them and wanted that his desire be fulfilled. Unwillingly they satisfied the sage, as they did not dare to refuse the sage for fear of incurring his wrath. After being satisfied in his desire, the sage once again got immersed in meditation. In due course of time Dikhaiba and Nadaba gave birth to one female child each. Dikhaiba named her child as Tore and Nadaba named her as Tophre. Tore was elder and Tophre was younger.

The girls became extremely beautiful with the attainment of youth. They were wildly passionate and even reckless. One day they went out in search of their respective grooms without the knowledge of their mothers. They found two exceedingly handsome young men named Phanindar and Nanindar, who were brothers. Tore and Tophre were enamored by their beauty. They were looking through the chink of the forest at the young men without a wink.

After finishing the work in the field the two brothers went to a fountain to bathe. Tore and Tophre were expert in the art of enchanting. Their mothers too were enchantresses. Their young minds became

2. Sarma, 2010:55-60
Rabha, 1977:41-48
Hakacham, 2009:115-120
Patgiri, 2005:406-411
restless. By dint of magic, they turned themselves into two “ghilas” (a knee cap shaped seed normally with which children play) set on two arum leaves which flowed down the fountain. The two brothers, on seeing the approaching “ghilas” on the arum leaves were very eager to pick them up. Both of them picked one “ghila” each and carried it home with them. They would wash their hands with its shell or play with it. Overjoyed Phanindar instantly broke his “ghila” to wash his hands. To his utter surprise huge quantity of blood splashed out of the ‘ghila’ and congealed mass turned into a green pigeon which flew into the sky. Nanindar on the other hand kept his ‘ghila’ carefully in a place in his house. Next day as usual they went to the field. When they returned from the field after extensive hard labor, they were taken by surprise. Everything in the house was neat and clean, their meal too was cooked for them. Somebody must have done their household work without their knowledge.

One day Nanindar was hiding in a corner of the house to find out the actual fact. To his astonishment, he saw that the ‘ghila’ was split into two automatically and a beautiful damsel, coming out of it, was instantly busy doing domestic chores as if she was part of the family. With utmost courage Nanindar approached the damsel, caught hold of her hand from behind and asked, “Who are you? Whether a goddess or a human being?” she said, “I am the daughter of a sage. I had another sister. Both of us out of our youthful passion were enamoured by you, the two brothers. We turned ourselves into two “ghilas” and thereafter you took us into your possession. But your elder brother killed my elder sister. Providence, as though disposed our will”. Tears rolled down her cheek as she remembered her sister. She continued, “You have held my hand today. Thus my body goes impure. I shall not be able to go into ‘ghila’ any longer. What will be my way out?” Tophre’s touching words shocked Nanindar. When his brother returned and came to know the story, he was repentant as he inadvertently killed the other bride who was to be his. He was also bewitched by the bride’s extraordinary beauty. The village elders held a meeting and were moved by the touching story. Nanindar and the girl agreed before the congregation to tie the nuptial knot. Everyone endorsed their agreement and decided that marriage would be solemnized after the harvesting season.

Phanindar was repentant but he cannot amend his action. But now he totally became engrossed in the beauty and attributes of his
brother's bride. He felt jealous. He could not bear to think that his brother should get such a beautiful girl while he pined. He decided that he would kill his brother before his marriage so that there would be no bar to accept her as his wife.

One day while going in the forest, taking a chance, Phanindar who was stronger than Nanindar, knocked his brother down and set a heavy boulder on his chest. After that he returned home and declared that Nanindar felt prey to a tiger. Meanwhile the bride reared a “salika” bird that could speak well like a human being. The salika used to go with Nanindar whenever he moved away. That day too, it witnessed the entire incident and narrated it to Tophre. She then went in search of her would be husband as directed and guided by the ‘salika’ and rescued Nanindar.

Fearing further danger to Nanindar’s life she reared a dog too. With training the dog became the other life savers of Nanindar. Both the ‘salika’ and the dog kept close watch on Nanindar and reported everything to their mistress.

One day both the brothers went out hunting and entered a thick forest. There was a big banyan tree and its lower part was a huge hollow. The elder brother asked his younger brother to find iguanas, if any and the latter did it. Taking advantage of his posture, the elder brother tied his younger brother with a creeper forcefully and stuffed him into the hole. The dog and the ‘salika’ bird informed about the incident to their mistress. This time she rescued Nanindar taking the dog as her companion. Again one day Phanindar tried to kill his brother by forcefully tying him to the trunk of a tree with the creeper. Once again Tofre saved his life with her two companions.

Nanindar was very simple and upright. He did not disclose about his ordeals in the hands of his brother to anyone. He only kept enduring silently and complied with his brother’s direction with respect and without any question. Both Nanindar and Tofre did not think of taking revenge on Phanindar.

Once they cleared jungle for cultivation and piled the logs in a heap. One day they set fire to the dried logs which were inflamed easily. Nanindar was busy with turning the burning logs upside down for their easy blazing. Taking a chance the elder brother thrust his brother into the fire and put a raw log upon him to mark his cremation. The dog and the
‘salika’ bird witnessed the horrible incident and informed it to Tofre. This time she arrived at the spot and with great difficulty, picked up Nanindar from the charcoals. But her betrothed would-be husband was already dead being half burnt. She began to wail clasping the dead body. All her hopes are destroyed now. With great pain and agony she swooned for a long time. When she regained her senses she revoked the life of her half-burnt betrothed with the help of occult power. But he did not get the form of man: what he got was the form of a kind of fish called Na-ner.

With tears in her eyes and with a heavy heart she released her fish shaped betrothed into the midst of a lake. After that she took leave from her most obedient and helpful bird and the dog.

She thought over her future course of action and decided that it would be dangerous to put up with Phanindar. It would also not be proper to return to her mother’s home. She came back near the lake and transferring herself into a “To-maykhow” bird, she began to live beside the lake as a mark of her love for Nanindar. They were not married, separation was their destiny.

Rabhas believe that when the “To-maykhow” bird chirps on the side of the lake, the “Na-ner” comes out from beneath the water and both enjoy themselves to the hilt.

In one version found in two different collections (Juju Budini Sastar and Asom Anchalar Janajatiya Sadhu) the tale ends here.

But in another version (collected by Rajen Rabha and Joykanta Sarma) the story does not end here. We find the following portion-

Tore and Tophre’s mothers searched for them frantically throughout hills and forests but could not find them. But later when they came to know about the sad consequences faced by their daughters, they were furious and rushed to teach Phanindar a lesson. Having seen them Phanindar tried to flee to save himself. They followed him. They were enchantresses themselves, so they created a deceptive river before Phanindar to counter him. He did not realize the impending danger, and jumped into the river to save him. But he was turned into a crocodile. Dikhaiba and Nadaba could take their revenge and were satisfied that nemesis had worked for Phanindar. Finally the two mothers returned home with a heavy heart having lost their daughters.
As we know tales have been used as a genre for educating or civilizing children more particularly girls. These tales are important because they set standards for sexual and social conduct which complied with inhibiting forms of socialization and were to be internalized by listeners and tellers of tales. (Zack Zipes, p.33). Though the narrative perspective may vary, the starting point for the discourse on manners and sexual and social conduct through fairy tales and folktales affirm the dominant Hindu view regarding the regulation of inner and outer nature in favour of male hegemony and rationalized male domination. In this tale the two young unmarried girls became the victim of desire of a sage. They obliged him unwillingly because they were always taught from the very childhood to be submissive and to obey figures who command power and control over the society by virtue of belonging to the dominant group. They have internalized and accepted the domination in such a way that the thought of protesting did not come to their mind. They obliged, satisfied him and left the place still having reverence for him. Since women are expected to live passively, so repression of their mind can be seen as to please and perpetuate male domination. Like most women who are patriarchal conditioned, these two girls are victimized by what Mitchell calls the “‘inferiorized’ and ‘alternative’ (second sex) psychology of women under patriarchy” (Mitchell, Psychoanalysis and Feminism, pp 404-5).

Tore and Tophre are young girls full of life and passion. To realize their dream they left their homes without informing their mothers. But incidentally the elder one got killed. Tophre, the younger one now became the center of attraction for both the brothers. She was loyal to her would be husband. Chastity and loyalty are qualities highly desired in women. But unfortunately her beauty and qualities became a cause of rift between the brothers and danger loomed large on her groom. Phanindar got jealous of his brother and tried to kill him out of sheer jealousy. He thought that by removing his brother from her life he would be able to get her.

Here Tophre became an active heroine. Chastity of women is valued and Tophre was chaste, loyal, dedicated bride to her would be husband Nanindar. When Phanindar attacked and tried to kill her would be husband she came to his
rescue many a times and saved his life although she could not save him fully from the final assault. She was helped in her endeavour by two animals- one ‘salika’ bird and a dog whom she reared to protect her beloved. Tophre quite intelligently made herself strong with the active help of the animals as she knew only too well that she is up against a formidable enemy, a man who is physically powerful than her and at the same time her would be husband’s elder brother. She tried to negotiate with her apparent weakness with mental toughness and strength and thereby qualifying as an active heroine. She is active, intelligent and willing to face the problem and try to solve it too. Although she could not save him from the final assault, yet she was successful in bringing him back to life though she was unable to give him a full human shape. So an active heroine is assisted in her mission by occult power and animals. She cannot stand alone against the society. She needs outside help in some form to face the challenge.

We also see two strong mothers who are vulnerable at the beginning of the story. They were exploited at the beginning of the tale but came out strongly at the end to take revenge on the person who spoilt their daughters’ happiness. Women taking revenge that too successfully, is not very common in folktales unless they are equipped with some sort of occult power. Possessing special power gives them the edge on their rival who became a victim to their special power. Other wise women are generally shown as suffering as passive victim of male aggression. Here sexual exploitation of the two young girls were shown as normal and natural as the person committing the crime was held in high esteem by the society- a sage. So the girls needed to make him happy. Patriarchal society exploits women according to their need and women in turn take it as their destiny to fulfill the unjust demand. Women are oriented to think that way because any protest or show of individuality or assertion of their mind would term them as rebel and eventually society would brand them as evil and negative. In this tale we see gradual change from a weak, vulnerable character to strong women who could take revenge on the man who troubled their daughters. At the beginning they were shown as victim to a sage’s lust. But towards the end we see
transformation in them as Propp (1958) mentioned that in folktales journey is transformative.

Marie Maclean in her essay “Oppositional Practices in Women’s Traditional Narrative” observed that active heroine in folktales represents the utopian strain in such stories. For women in traditional societies a utopian situation is one where a woman was free to choose or not to choose her own 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. This can be seen in this particular tale where Tore and Tophre went out in search of their grooms without the knowledge of their mothers. They got passionately attracted towards two exceedingly handsome young men. Since both of them were expert in the art of enchanting they used this particular power to transform themselves into two *ghilas* in order to get close to Phanindar and Nanindar. Thus they were active in realizing their dream, in finding their life partners and also finding ways and means to fulfill their dreams. They tried to change rules in their own favour and became almost successful till tragedy strike them and the elder one of the sisters got killed. The fact that they ventured out to fulfill their passion and search for the men of their dream is itself a big step for a woman in this tradition bound male dominated world.

4.1.3 *Surya and Chandra*³

**Version one**

Surya (Sun) and Chandra (Moon) were brothers. One day they got ready and came to request their mother for her permission to attend a feast arranged by creator Brahma. The mother gave permission but before allowing them to leave she told them a thing or two. She told them that she had attended one such feast long back with their father. The brothers asked, “Our father? Mother, where is our father? When will he be back? The mother replied that he would not come back as he has gone for *Mokshadhama* (abode of the free soul). As a caution she informed them that the feast requires discipline. The gods, humans, *asuras* (demons) and in fact everybody sits in his or her demarcated

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³ Rabha, 1977:107-115
Sarma, 2010:96-102
place. Nobody can touch the other. If one does he or she is considered 
impure and is either expelled or punished. The mother asked her son to 
be careful in their behaviour, manners, movements and all. "Remember 
we belong to the god's class". Finally she asked them, "After eating, 
bring the portion of the food, normally meant for gods for me. And don't 
forget".

After reaching there Surya and Chandra sat in a row meant for 
the gods. Chandra did not forget his mother's counsel. Before eating he 
kept aside a morsel and packed it as instructed by his mother. Surya on 
the other hand, was eating voraciously and forgot to take the residue for 
his mother. Instead he threw the left over. When he remembered what 
his mother had asked for, it was already too late.

Since he had eaten like a glutton, he felt an urge to defecate on 
their way back. A wicked idea came to his mind. He collected his stool 
in a packet and as soon as he reached home, he handed it over to his 
mother and hurriedly went away. The mother opened it with great joy 
and reverence but got shocked and horrified at the misdeed of her son 
finding stool in it. She was fuming with indignation and hurt when 
Chandra came out with his packet. The mother threw Chandra's packet 
and slapped Chandra. She abused Chandra, "you, scum of the earth: 
good for nothing boys, go, go away from my presence. At what 
auspicious moment did I conceive you both who have brought nothing 
but disgrace upon the family and race!" she shouted and burst into tears. 
Chandra was too awe-struck to speak. He did not know why his mother 
got so angry. When her anger subsided he asked her the reason behind 
her harsh words. The mother told him what Surya has done. Chandra felt 
bad. He got up and picked up his packet and offered it to her. Now the 
mother also felt bad as her temper was directed towards the son who was 
not at all guilty and who had full of reverence for her. She blessed him, 
"dear son, the example of your reverence for your mother will remain 
shining for years to come. You will be respected and worshipped as a 
god by the people. Your soothing and silky rays would gladden the 
minds of all creatures. But your brother, my son Surya, I curse him. As 
he offered me the packet of stool as meal, so he would have to dry all the 
rotten things of this Universe. With his parching rays he would have to 
touch the shit as a daily routine. People would be annoyed at his 
blistering heat. He would never be soothing". Surya who was hiding 
nearby, heard the curse, and felt sad and repentant at his misdeed. He
came sobbing and fell at his mother's feet and begged forgiveness. He prayed for the revocation of the curse. Chandra also pleaded on his behalf. But their mother said that her curse is irreversible and it was his conduct which compelled her to curse her son. But after continued pleading from her sons she relented and said, "My curse is infallible. But let me lighten your burden. You too would be adorned by human beings".

The mother is very powerful here. In the absence of the father the responsibility and control of the family rests with the mother. She looks after the two sons and guides them well. When needed she is strict and sticks to her point rock-solid. When she is hurt by her son's conduct she was quick to take action against him. She did not forgive her son for his misdeed. Again she did justice, punished the offender (Surya) and honoured the good one (Chandra).

**Version two**

Surya and Chandra were husband and wife respectively. They used to fight and argue among themselves daily. One day the quarrel over their children (stars) reached its zenith. The wife said to Surya, "I do not know what to do. The kids are unmanageable. They do not listen to me and are rowdy. Don't you have any responsibility in this regard? Has it been proper on your part to stay without any responsibility?"

Surya countered, "I have never said that I have no responsibility. But as a mother your responsibility is greater".

"It can never be so. Aren't you a partner in giving birth to such a huge number of kids?" Chandra argued.

Surya countered, "Yes, I am, but the importance and responsibility of the mother who gives birth are greater. My responsibility comes later."

As a mother Chandra was worried, "we have given birth to an unlimited number of children. We do not even know their names. We cannot count how many of them have got perished and under what circumstances."

Surya assured her, "none of them got perished. Our children (stars) cannot go anywhere leaving us behind. Every one of them has his or her orbit and circle. They will again come back to us after playing and moving hither and thither in their own circles. The orders of the creator
will have to be complied with. I have a lot of duties. I shall be monitoring your and the children’s activities from long distance.”

After that Surya took leave of his wife. Chandra was left behind to take care of their children. Thus we see stars with their mother Chandra.

In this version of the tale Surya and Chandra were husband and wife. But they fought regularly over their children (stars). Chandra, the wife accused her husband Surya of not taking good care of their many children. They were unruly; didn’t listen to their mother as the father didn’t perform his duties towards the children. He didn’t take any responsibility which irritates the wife. To this he replied that although he hadn’t denied his responsibility, according to him it was the first and foremost duty of the mother to take care of the children. Inside the house, it was the mother who needed to take care of the children and was held responsible. The father, Surya, showing other commitments went out. That’s why Rabhas believed that the stars are always seen with the mother Chandra. Barbara Risman observes that little cultural change has occurred around fathering. In every culture the responsibility of upbringing of the children rests with the mother. Most men are not morally responsible for the quality of family life as we have seen in the conversation between the husband (Surya) and the wife (Chandra). Women have yet to discover how to avoid being held accountable, as it happened with Chandra, who though upset with her husband still stands by her children, a duty she cannot possibly avoid. Father takes the overall responsibility while day to day catering of the needs of children rests with the mother. Father is less concerned at sharing responsibilities of parenting.

**Version three:**

Surya and Chandra were two sisters. They were married but issueless. Their husbands were very simple. They were always compelled to do whatever their wives asked. Both the sisters were sad for not having children. After discussion among themselves both the sisters approached Brahma and implored him for a boon so that they could have children. They prayed, “A long period of time has elapsed since our marriage was solemnized. We have no children so far. We pray for your blessings so that we may become mothers.”
Brahma replied, “I am very sad to hear it. After marriage a couple should get children or else life’s aspirations remain unfulfilled”. Brahma asked how many children they wanted. They replied, “We want countless number of children –so that we may be proud as first-ranking mothers”. Brahma blessed them as they wished. In due course of time both the sisters started giving birth to innumerable sons and daughters. At one point, the living space for these children became inadequate in the sky. Chandra, an intelligent woman suggested to Surya that in accordance with the benediction from Brahma, they are getting children and more would be born in the days to come and they have to provide them with accommodation. She proposed to Surya that they should send some of their children to the open field lying unutilized in the Netherland. As proposed both of them went their to see the suitability of the place. Surya was enthralled, she liked the field very much but side by side an unscrupulous longing crept into her mind. To keep the land totally under her children’s occupation Surya sent all her children to the Netherland keeping Chandra in the dark. Chandra was very sad at the act of betrayal by her own sister. Chandra suffered mental torment in the backdrop of Surya’s evil designs. Losing patience and getting emotional, she went to creator Brahma in order to divulge before him the tales of her woes. Brahma calmed her, “everybody has to face the consequences of the works he or she does. Your children would remain twinkling in this blue sky for ages. People of the Earth will be enthralled by their sight and like you they too will be adored by human beings. But Netherland is dark. The children of Surya will have to remain always in darkness. They will not be seen and adored by people of the earth. Therefore my child, go now, give up your melancholy”. Chandra having heard these infallible words of Brahma came back home fully satisfied.

In this version of the tale Surya and Chandra (Sun and Moon) we get to see typical sibling rivalry and jealousy for each other to get the best for their own children. Dominating women like Surya and Chandra who are incidentally sisters make their husband look like timid characters. Elder sister Surya schemed against younger sister Chandra and did not share things with her. This so pained Chandra that she narrated her story to God Brahma who consoled by saying that her children would shine bright as star and people on Earth would worship her children in contrast to Surya’s Children who are destined to languish in darkness. This story also asserted the fact that children bring fulfillment to a woman. As a
mother a woman’s priority is always to safeguard her children’s interest, no matter whom and what comes her way. This aspect is still relevant today because a woman is regarded incomplete without a child. In the tales the dominant symbolic pattern of woman is one who gives love and affection. But this pattern is not consistent in tales. There are a number of step-mother tales which in a negative way emphasize the longing for motherly affection. But Ramanujan (1994: XXVI) says that mothers are split into good mothers and wicked step-mothers to express ambivalence. Tales depict rivalries among women and portray them as jealous and wicked even in the kinship context. In the tales instances of gender conflicts are rare but there are instances of alternative view points. There are instances of rivalries among co wives and sisters as exemplified in the rivalry between Surya and Chandra and mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Thus construction of gender is closely linked with kinship.

As a theme women's jealousy is to be equated only by that of their falsehood and superficiality. This weakness of the female character is dreaded because it destroys the harmony of the household. When the wives of a polygamist are jealous of one another, the births of children only add to the problems. The mothers so kind and loving toward their own children, often become hostile toward the offspring of the other wives. Each wife is seeking the favor of the father through her progeny. In the case of a chief’s or king’s wives, jealousy can be mixed with political ambition that might go as far as murder. Consequently the character of the step mother symbolizes the jealousy of females of the most terrible and ugliest kind.

The husbands are meek and less than independent characters in this tale. They are playing a secondary role who are compelled to do whatever their wives asked them to do. There is an indirect hint that they are incapable as men. Childless for long after marriage the wives approached Brahma to solve and fulfill their dream of getting children. From the conversation of Brahma and the two sisters it was quite clear that childlessness is not an acceptable condition by women themselves. For a woman a child brings about a fulfillment in her married life. Brahma also told them that life’s aspirations are not fulfilled without children. Moreover giving birth to more children is a capacity appreciated in
Women through which women themselves want to be recognized as first ranking mothers.

We find a role reversal here. Generally women are accused of not bearing a child. She is often humiliated and targeted for lack of a child among a married couple. But in this tale there is a subtle hint at the incapabilities of the husbands of the two sisters at giving birth. They were shown as timid and being dominated by their wives. The wives were seen as approaching creator Brahma. They told their unhappiness over not being able to bear a child even though considerable time had elapsed since they got married. After listening to them Brahma also agreed that they were rightly sad and worried as without child aspiration of life never gets fulfilled.

Since within our traditional society a woman can not be shown as getting involved with other men outside marriage openly, however pressing the need might be, the father figure’s (creator Brahma’s) help is sought out as a middle course to bless the women to realize their dream. Otherwise it would amount to breaking the moral order. The boon by Brahma means that they did not do anything immoral. They are not transgressors. Brahma’s divine intervention sorted out the problem making everyone concerned happy.

Even if they are strong women they needed the help of a man (Brahma) to sort out their problem. They do not have an absolutely independent existence. In folktales women can sustain themselves only with outside help from men.

4.1.4 Son of a Widow (Bidhaba Maa aru Maura lorar Kahini)4

Once upon a time a widow along with her son used to live in a village. The young boy always asked his mother to get him a trap to catch birds. So one day the mother somehow managed a trap for him. One day a crane fell a catch to his trap. In reality the crane was Parvati, the wife of Mahadeva, in disguise. The mother was very happy to see the catch and wanted to kill and cook it for them. The son was not interested. Parvati requested him to let her go and in return promised to give her daughter Lakhsmi in marriage to him. Shiva was not at all happy at this development. But to keep his wife’s words he gave his

4. Karab Ch. Rabha, 75:Bardamal, Goalpara
consent to marry his daughter Lakhsmi to the boy. But within seven days of marriage, Lord Shiva took her away to his abode. While returning with her father Lakhsmi gave a ring to her human husband as a sign of her love for him. But Lord Shiva after reaching heaven, wanted to remarry her. On the other hand her husband was very upset over their separation and started crying under a tall tree. A vulture was feeding her children at that moment on the top of the tree. As she found the boy crying she came down and wanted to know the reason behind his sadness. When she came to know about the entire story, she took him to heaven by making him sit over her back. Assisted by Kalabou (Kalabou in Hindu Mythology refers to a banana tree given a human shape who is draped in white saree with red border; kala bou worshipping is a must in every Durga Puja, who stands in front of Durga idol, she is considered the wife of Lord Ganesha, the son of Goddess Durga) they reached the Vivah Mandap (marriage altar). Lakhsmi could recognize her husband by the ring she had given to her, and immediately decided to return with her husband. Shiva got extremely angry at this and cursed them that they would never be happy.

Lakhsmi and her husband started living happily. One day after cleaning the house she took out all the clothes and kept it outside for warming and left for fishing. She asked her husband not to touch any of the clothes kept for warming. But as destiny had it, the weather worsened and thunderstorm lashed the place. Compelled by the situation the husband had to collect the clothes to bring it inside. But as soon as he touched he was transformed into a peacock. When she returned home Lakhsmi did not find her husband. Immediately she understood what might have happened. She also transformed herself into a peahen. This way the curse of her father is fulfilled.

Mythological characters like Shiva and Parvati and their daughter Lakhsmi are adopted with a local flavour. Here lies the beauty of a folktale which travels and in the process gets localized with the culture and tradition, way of life of the community. We see different additions and variations from time to time, teller to teller, from society to society. Here in this tale Lakhsmi, the goddess of wealth and the daughter of Shiva and Parvati was transformed into a local Rabha girl who works at home, goes out for fishing like any other village girl does.
Mother's promise to the boy that she would give her daughter in marriage to him in return of her release from his trap is not accepted positively by the father. Father Shiva was not at all happy at mother's making a promise regarding the daughter's marriage as it undermines his authority and control over the family. Quite reluctantly he agreed to her promise and gave her in marriage to the boy but within seven days of marriage, he took her back to his heavenly abode. Thus the father became instrumental in effecting a break up between husband-wife. Thus we see that mother's promise was not valued. Parvati, like most women in our society was given a secondary status regarding decision making. Because of near universal subordination of women and girls to at least some men but more saliently—a structural system in which some men and male values based in race, class and sexuality as well as gender dominate all women and children politically, socially, domestically—most women speak from social, economic and cultural margins.

Shiva is here presented as a status conscious father, a representative of the male psyche. When his daughter disobeys his wish of marrying her off to a groom of his choice, his ego is hurt. When she returned with her husband to her earthly abode, she went against the dictates of her father, thus incurring his curse. She was fighting from the margin against the centre—the power centre, her father, as bell hooks sees it. Disobeying father (male figure) means inviting unhappiness and trouble to the extent of destroying her life. Shiva is here a representative of the patriarchal society.

This tale reflects society at large. Decision regarding a daughter's marriage is mostly taken by the father, the centre of the family. In this tale the mother becomes a transgressor, a fact not taken lightly by the father, because by doing so she went against the usual practice of the society. But even after the daughter's marriage, the father tries to dominate and interfere in her life. We have seen that the daughter does not have a say initially, she did not protest. Even when she went against the decision of her father it was not done independently by her. She needed the help of her husband who went to heaven to bring her back. Thus once again we see that women are most of the time passive and if and when they act, they need the outside help and support to achieve what they want.
4.1.5 Hataburi Puk Keneke Hal (how the Hataburi insect was born)\(^5\)

Once there was a big arrangement of a marriage party. It was a traditional Rabha marriage. On the day of the feast the ritual was such that the bride has to serve everyone invited to the feast by her own hand and in such a way that it includes everyone present in the feast. The bride has to serve rice to everyone with a *hata* (rounded wooden serving spoon). The girl was humiliated and insulted in public if she fails to entertain everyone present i.e. she needs to serve everyone equally. If she falters in her job it was taken as a sign of evil omen or inauspiciousness. So the girl was accompanied by an old mature woman who could guide her through the entire event. The girl started serving with a *denga* (wooden spoon). Suddenly the cloth around her waist fell down (*kambung*). As a result she had to keep the bowl of rice on ground. Out of shame she ran away from that place by hiding her face. She jumped into a pond. People gathered at the celebration ran after her. But she never came back out of water. Later that girl turned out to be *Lazuki puk*. Rabhas call it *chong denga* or *Hataburi puk*.

Women in our traditional societies are judged by their activities and capabilities in managing household affairs. That's why the Rabha girl was asked to serve everybody so that her skill in managing people and entertaining guest is ascertained. This particular girl failed to do so when her waist cloth dropped and she was ashamed publicly. This shows her inability in managing herself while taking care of other invited guest. A woman is expected to present herself in a proper manner fulfilling the expectation of the patriarchal society. To save herself from disgrace, shame and criticism she ran away and jumped into a pond. She was presented as weak, vulnerable, and one who can not stand in the face of criticism. For her only course is retreat, which she did. A girl is brought up in such a way that she fails to rationalize things and move forward. She was under constant pressure to prove herself, to perform within the four walls be it in managing household, pleasing family members, giving birth to children, upbringing them, along with many other things. Fear of failure and hope for approval dominates her life disallowing her any individuality, freedom of mind and action. She took the extreme step of ending her life because she is brought up

\(^5\) Hakacham, 2009:77
in such a way that she knew that she had to perform well inside the four walls to make others happy. The pressure of performance builds in her and she internalizes this expectation as natural. The women know from childhood that she exists primarily for the male and that her role is to be a wife and mother. She passes from the domination of the father to that of her husband and later on to her son.

Kirin Narayan in "Mondays on the Dark Night of the Moon-Himalayan Foothill Folktales" observed that the ideology of modesty associated with honour pervaded women's lives in Kangra and was explicitly linked to the practice of veiling. _Sharm_ involved hiding one's sexuality, showing deference to males and elders, and in all upholding the honor of one's family. _Sharm_ invoked as the reason that unmarried girls should behave circumspectly and not adorn themselves, the reason for married women to veil in the presence of their older male-in-laws. As a powerful prescribed norm modesty (_Sharm_) seemed to connect social ideals with emotions lodged in mind and bodies. In this tale the newly wedded bride was ashamed of her situation the moment her waists clothe was dropped in front of the public gathering. She stood defenseless overwhelmed by _Sharm_ (modesty) and ran away from the people and gave up her life by jumping into water.

Again serving in the feast related to marriage is special, because at the time of the feast, everyone is together. The whole village and all the relatives are present. This allows them to recognize the bride and her qualities and potential at the same time. If she comes out good here, she proves herself and creates a good impression about herself as capable and her skills would be acknowledged which is a very important matter for a woman.

4.1.6 *Hati Kenekai Hal* 6 (how the Elephant was born)

Once upon a time there lived a grand big family from grand parents to grand children. It's a big joint family. They used to cook for all in a single kitchen, but while eating they used to bring it to their respective rooms. While distributing food all were called by beating drums. The eldest daughter-in-law used to do every work inside the

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6. Hakacham, 2009:75-76
household including cooking food for everyone. With this excessive workload she got disturbed and irritated sometimes. She was even more frustrated by different comments and criticisms from family members which hurt her a lot. One day on listening to such uncharitable comments, she was so upset that she did not eat anything. Next morning she left her home with the intention of never returning. But while leaving she did not forget to touch the feet of her husband. She took with her two pairs of ural (mortar) one pair of kula (winnowing fan), one Ural mari (pestle) and one kachi (scythe) while leaving. Every one in the family rose from bed and got busy with their work and life. Nobody noticed the fact that she was not present at home. Nobody was bothered about her. But the thought about her came to everyone's mind as it was time for lunch. Her absence made everyone serious for sometime and they started looking for her in different directions. She on her part turned herself into an elephant out of disgust and pain with the help of the things she brought with her.

But being a woman the thought of her home kept coming to her mind. So one day at night she reached her home in her changed form. Everyone could see her in their dreams who asked them to stay happy and united as a family.

Womanhood is associated with responsibilities inside the household. Thus when the woman transformed herself to an elephant one day out of bitterness and frustration, even then she could not restrict herself from visiting her family one more time in the transformed form and also wished them happiness. In her day to day life she had remained unnoticed and nobody gave her any importance till it was time for lunch. A woman is associated with need, need of one kind or other. Otherwise as an individual having an identity of her own she does not stand a chance. The woman in the house is made to live in seclusion. This kind of exclusion is another kind of purdah (veil). To quote Jasbir Jain "...even if purdah is not manifest in the matter of clothing it is perceptible in the unequal relationship which exists between different groups, no matter what the basis of the group formation is...money, political power, colour or gender".

Sonia Lee's observation on African folktales is also relevant here. Lee observed that it is much more entertaining to speak about women's faults than their qualities. From the point of view of male, if the woman has so many faults it
explains her inferiority. Man is seen as the master because he is thought to be morally superior and women must submit to his will. Although she has many faults for which she is criticized all the time as in the case of the Daughter-in-law, she is considered useful, indispensable to man. This fact is highlighted when she is missed by the entire family during lunch.

Kirin Narayan while analyzing the tale “Daughter My Little Bread” (page 49), observed that wives were considered replaceable, yet they were valued too. Men’s need for women’s labour – and also perhaps their reproductive powers as “vessel” was highlighted in Urmilaji’s (storyteller) explanation for why the king had been attracted by the sparkling brass pot his attendants brought him after the girl polished it. Urmilaji said “he saw the pot, and he saw that this was a woman who worked well. Then later he saw that she was beautiful too”. In this tale the daughter-in-law did every single thing inside the household but still unable to satisfy anyone. But when she left and the family members did not get their lunch ready they felt the need to search her. Till then no one was bothered about her. Her service was missed and at that moment they somewhat realized her value if not as an individual but definitely as a labour force. Once again a woman is missed in the time of need.

In male dominated societies man is central and woman is the ‘other’, repressed, ignored and pushed to the margins and her ardent wish is to be recognized as a human being with an independent existence.

4.1.7 Bidyabati aru Bari Sali (son of a widow)7

There was a kingdom called Ratnagiri. The king had a daughter named Bidyabati. She was beautiful as well as highly accomplished girl. When she came of age, the father started thinking about her marriage like every father does. Accordingly the king asked his cabinet to arrange for her “swayamber” where she will choose her husband. The person, who will successfully defeat her by posing three questions which she would fail to answer, would be accepted as her groom. In this verbal duel of intelligence whoever fails to become better than her would eventually end up in prison.

In due course of time all the big and the mighty from all over the world gathered at the king's palace responding to his announcement. Bidyabati appeared escorted by her friends in front of everyone. She easily answered everyone's questions put forward to her. One after another, everyone failed to match up to her intelligence and ended up in prison. Now nobody dared to pose a threat to challenge her intelligence or tried to match up to her.

Suddenly the son of a widow dared to come forward and stood to ask her three questions. The beautiful princess failed to answer his questions to the utter surprise of all present. To the query as to how he managed to defeat her in the game of intelligence, he said that all his questions are actually riddles which are related to his experience in his day to day life. The king was highly impressed by his intelligence and he now successfully won the princess and after their marriage he was made the king. He brought his mother along with him to the kingdom and together they lived happily ever after.

It is observed that in folktale the hero hits upon the right course of action unerringly. So in this particular tale we see the hero successfully defeating the heroine to make the narrative end in the expected line of male supremacy. Unless and until the hero wins, the story cannot reach to its expected culmination point. Moreover, the hero gets better of her as in our traditional society a wife cannot be accepted as superior to her husband. The heroine needs to get married fulfilling her father's dream in the usual social order. The hero, the anti-hero, subordinate characters, and props all precisely accomplish the specific narrative task that is assigned to them. But in the beginning heroine was mentioned to be exceptionally brilliant and intelligent whereas nothing of such is even uttered about the son of the widow. But at the end, when everyone fails, he comes from nowhere to hand down defeat to his much fancied rival in the battle of wits. It so happens as the requirement of the plot. Even then we get to see a woman who is also seen and appreciated for her wit and brilliance apart from her beauty. She also has a say in deciding about her groom, which is not very common in our tradition bound society. Freedom of choice of choosing her husband was given to her. But we have to remember one thing that she is a princess, a girl better placed in society, thus probably getting a chance to exercise freedom of choice.
Folktales break down the rich complexity of human beings. One cannot even speak of the characters of folktales as being intelligent. The tasks of cleverness that occur in the folktale are not truly tests of intelligence, as Charlotte Buhler 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.”

Barbara Gobrecht, in her studies on Russian folktales (Röhrich, 2008), has detected that women play much more active and independent role. In contrast to many of the Grimm’s fairy stories, many daughters of Czars and heroines in Russian folktales determine their own lives and choose their husbands themselves. This aspect of folktales is reflected in the Rabha folktale *Bidyabati and Bari Sali* (Son of a Widow). Bidyabati, the princess of Ratnagiri is very beautiful as well as brilliant. It was decided that among the prospective grooms whoever is successful in asking her three questions which she would fail to answer would be eligible to marry her and the unsuccessful ones would be thrown into prison. Thus the heroine had a role to play in the choice of her husband. She married the son of the widow who could make her silent with his questions.

4.1.8 *Mora Chorai Kenekai Hal* (How Peacock was born)\(^8\)

In those days’ people in this earth used to be quite close to gods and goddesses as in those days people were quite pure and honest. So relation ship established between gods and human beings. Daughter of a god (*Risi Kanya*) came down from heaven and started living with a widow and her son. They were very happy as with her, luck had returned to them. There was drastic improvement in their condition. Like an ordinary girl she used to do all the household works and helped her mother in law. Both the *Risi Kanya* and the widow bonded well with each other.

But the wind god became restless and wanted the divine daughter back. One day the mother-in-law went out for community fishing and asked her not to touch her clothe which was kept outside,

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Sarma, 2010:67-72
under any circumstances. But suddenly there was thunderstorm, and it took her away the moment she touched the clothe. She was transformed into a peahen. But she shared such a great bonding with both the mother-in-law and the son that at least once she comes in a year to visit them. (Two other versions of the tale are also there, where both the man and the woman turned into peacock and peahen).

In this tale we see positive bonding (quite uncommon) between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law. This happened because the daughter-in-law belongs to the upper strata (from heaven). Thus there is no overt competition. To begin with the widowed mother in law accepted her superiority and both of them were clear that they do not threaten each other's space and position. Relationship between two women can be positive and healthy only if they are not threatened by each other's presence. The daughter-in-law on her part came down to earth and started living like an ordinary girl adjusting herself with their condition. Thus she showed respect and concern for her mother-in-law who in turn reciprocated her gesture. Moreover she brought with her good fortune to the poor family and there occurred visible improvement in their condition.

The mother in-law yearns for a daughter-in-law. She wants the daughter-in-law by her side to help out in the unrelenting housework. In a joint family a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are together responsible for accomplishing household work; the mother-in-law can delegate or share task according to her inclinations.

Rivalry between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law starts when mother-in-law tries to dominate. In her desire to dominate she appears like a symbol of patriarchy. In this tale another reason why the relationship between the two women is balanced might have something to do with the fact that her presence brought good luck and fortune to the poor family and she contributed in the drastic improvement of their life, a fact that can not be ignored by the mother-in-law. Moreover the daughter-in-law's heavenly connection might have put her in an advantageous position.

4.2 WOMEN AS PASSIVE VICTIM

A regular feature in both the folk tales and fairy tales is the innocent and simple woman who is slandered, punished and persecuted for no fault of her own.
The suffering and affliction of the women in the face of male violence is beautifully demonstrated in the tales in which the innocent wife is thrown out of the house and property but she somehow amazingly survives the act of cruelty and after many a painful experience gets back her former position. Her job is just to bear everything silently.

4.2.1 *Mokara aru Bon Mokara Kenekai Hal* (how spiders were born)

In this folktale, we have a poor family in the village with two grown up daughters who happen to be extremely beautiful. The village headman could see the amount of hardship the family is facing to run their family. So he gave shelter to the youngest daughter as the maid in the house. They were highly impressed by the poor girl’s sincerity and expertise. So the village headman finally chooses her as the bride for his middle son. Two years had passed but unfortunately that girl could not give birth to a child. She was expert in all the other household works except weaving, which was considered an important skill among the Rabha tribe. Everything taken together she was no longer loved by her in laws. They could not tolerate her anymore because of her inability to give birth to a child. The in-laws are also facing a dilemma as she was chosen by them only. So the mother-in-law started instigating her son against his wife. But the son used to love his wife very much. As a result he could not decide as to whose side he should take. He can neither offend his mother nor can he leave his beloved wife. Finding no solution to his problem, at one point of time he even thought of committing suicide. But finally he was compelled to leave his wife. One day he took her out to a distant forest and asked her to sit by a stream and promising her that he would return soon and also asked her not to move till he does not come. He did not return making her spend the whole night all alone in the forest.

She was very upset and could not understand why she had to suffer the plight. Soon she realized that there is none to help her out. So she had to accept her destiny. Out of hunger, she became thinner and thinner and one day turned into a wild spider.

Her elder sister’s plight was similar to her. She was not at all skilled in house hold chores and as a result rejected by her husband. She

was confined inside the house and rebuked and ill-treated by her mother for her destiny. Extremely sad and dejected she also turned into a spider. Rabhas believed that as both the sisters lacked the skill of weaving for which they were deserted by their husbands and ultimately became spiders and keep on hanging like thread used in weaving in the spider web.

Small children still sing the song whenever they see a spider-

_Sing-sing sigrang sing jajibrang-
_Nok khalu khasulong sing nok drang]"

(We are two sisters living unitedly
Staying in a home and making thread) and also sing

_Sing sing sing grang
_Ganji nuwa chang?
(Sing sing sing grang
Tatat bohe Kun?)

Women in this tale are passive victims and sufferers and appear powerless against male aggression. Here the women in the forms of the mother in law and the mother help in sustaining and perpetuating patriarchal domination. Mother also rejected her own daughter as she was left helpless and abandoned by her husband. Sylvia Walby, in her work, "Theorizing Patriarchy" describes patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women. The ideology of patriarchy is so deep rooted in our society that all kinds of violence and women subjugation appear obvious. And this has also become possible because of women's internalization and acceptance of this patriarchal domination to a great extent. In her introduction to "Women in Patriarchy- Cross Cultural Readings" Jasbir Jain maintained that folktales throw up examples of how women have been abandoned or left unprotected either because of male rejection, persecution or authority. Rowe argued that to sustain a schema for femininity based on passivity, dependency, and self-sacrifice suggests "that culture's very survival depends upon a woman's acceptance of roles which relegate her to motherhood and domesticity" (Rowe 1991, 348).
Bearing a child is an obligation in Indian society because of social pressures. Woman is regarded primarily as a bearer of children and if she does not live up to expectation she is ridiculed and mocked by society and family as useless. The strong belief in children particularly a male child who carries forward the family tree emanates perhaps from the Hindu belief that if a man dies without a child he may never enter heaven. This kind of social belief acts against women. But tales are strangely silent about the inability of man to produce a child. The woman is generally blamed for not bearing the child but the man is never questioned. A woman is punished and she has to go through all sorts of humiliation although sometimes she is not to be blamed. Our patriarchal social set up refuses to acknowledge any problem related to the men. This view is amply reflected in this particular tale. The daughter in law was chosen by her in laws, was very hardworking, beautiful and capable in every household chore except weaving. But she was thrown out of her house on the ground that she could not bear a child and lacked one particular skill. All her positive qualities did not help her cause and was deserted by her husband.

4.2.2 Champavati

There was a peasant who married for the second time after the death of his first wife. He had a daughter from his first wife, named Champavati. She was an attractive and accomplished girl but her step-mother could not tolerate her. She had to work harder than her step-sister. One day her father sent Champavati to the field to drive away the birds which used to eat the maturing paddy. The girl sat in the tall watch-house made for this special purpose and tried to drive away the birds. She tried to disperse the birds but got a different answer from a nearby wood who said that he will continue to the paddy till he marries Champavati. The girl looked around to find the speaker, but did not see anybody. The same thing happened the next day also. Terrified, the girl informed about it to her father. The father came to the field and searched in vain for the person. Finally facing towards the wood he proclaimed “whoever you are do come out. I give my word that I’ll offer you Champavati in marriage”. On hearing his proclamation a serpent glided out of the wood. The peasant was in a fix. After all how could he give

away his daughter to a serpent? But at the same time he was bound by his words. The step-mother also persuaded him to yield. So he brought the serpent home and offered Champavati to it. After the marriage rites were over both the husband and the wife were given a room to stay. The step mother was very happy to imagine that soon Champavati would be eaten up by the serpent husband and she would get rid of her. At night Champavati found that her serpent husband was in reality a beautiful God in disguise who during daytime changes into a serpent. Her husband lavished her with gifts and ornaments. At dawn she came out happy and smiling and her whole body covered with bright ornaments. Looking at her the step mother grew extremely jealous. Immediately she persuaded her husband to get a serpent for her daughter too.

Accordingly the peasant procured another serpent for his other daughter. When the marriage was over newly wedded couple was put in a room and the mother sat outside anticipating great happiness for her daughter. Unlike Champavati the fate of this girl was different. The serpent began to swallow the bride's leg onwards and she cried out saying she was feeling titillation in her body parts. But the eager mother, waiting outside thought that her son-in-law is giving her daughter various ornaments for which she might have felt titillation in various parts of her body. The daughter cried out the last time and became silent after this. Next morning the girl was not to be seen; only the serpent was lying with its belly full.

Prafulladatta Goswami in his Introduction to *Tales of Assam* observed that “few tales except perhaps mythological and etiological ones-are the exclusive property of any particular community or language group. When people live together in the same geographical area and have had close contacts for centuries tales from one group tend to pass on to another group”. A close parallel to this story is also found among the Assamese people with a little variation. Moreover Bodos, Rabhas, Karbis, Tiwas, Missings, lalungs, Deuris are bilingual tribes within Assam. Thus some tales which are found among Rabhas are also equally popular among Assamese speakers.

Sudhir Kakar, the well known Indian psychoanalyst has examined the Indian stories in a psychoanalytic perspective, in his book *Intimate Relations* (Sudhir Kakar, 1989:56-57). Kakar elaborates on the symbolism of snake by
citing the well-known concept of the snake lover in Indian tales. The snake lover in Indian tales, says Kakar, is different from the animal lovers found in Western folktales. In the western tales, the lover is first the animal which transforms into a handsome youth who marries the heroine. This interpretation has been associated with the message that a woman should shed her aversion towards sex as animal-like. In the Indian situation, Kakar states the snake lover is an idealized phallus which helps the girl to overcome her fear of it. In this tale Champavati, the girl named Champavati was married to a cobra but her serpent husband turns out to be a beautiful god in disguise. He revealed himself in the first night and lavished Champavati with gifts and ornaments and made her happy. The next day when she comes out of her room, she was found to be very happy and smiling much to the astonishment of her step-mother. Immediately she also desired a serpent groom for her own daughter as by now she is convinced that a serpent would be the best husband for her daughter as well.

Again in cases where the husbands have gone astray, the wife gets consolation with the fantasy of the idealized phallus, which is expressed in the form of a snake lover. At this point we can refer to the play Nagitmandala by Girish Karnad, which tells the tale of a beautiful maiden whose husband has a mistress. Accidentally she meets with a cobra in the disguise of her husband and she bears him a child. An almost similar kind of tale is found in Kannada named Serpent Lover mentioned by Ramanujan in his article “Towards a Counter System: Women’s Tales” (Dharwadker, 1999). These are also additional proof that the snake is considered to be the ideal lover. Here Ramanujan mentioned that the snake is a benign figure. He is often a transformed brother, a husband, a grateful helper, a father figure, or the best of lovers who gives the woman every possible happiness.

Although in the case of the step mother’s daughter things did not turn out to be as happy and fulfilling as was expected. Finding Champavati happy and contended the jealous step mother found a serpent for her daughter too but only to be killed by it. This of course shows the triumph of good over evil. As the step mother was jealous and her intention was never good, she was punished.
The step-mother has maternal feelings for her own children despite her wickedness. She treats her own children well. The meanness she displays toward the orphan is often caused by jealousy she feels toward her co-wife. A wicked step-mother is always a bad wife by being a jealous wife. In most cases these young orphan girls have lost their mothers and are persecuted by wicked step-mother, as it happened with Champavati. Interestingly a step mother is a type, wicked and cruel to the core as perceived by the society. She is not treated as an independent individual. The character of the mother is not well represented but she is nearly always positive influence which fits the teaching of the tradition since maternity is a highly respected and desirable state. Wicked step mothers are abundant and can be explained by the fact that through them one can show in the same story many aspects of woman and consequently draw multiple lessons. The main purpose of their presence is to present the plight of persecuted innocence. This never fails to awaken the interest of the entire community. She is usually ordered (like Champavati) to accomplish an impossible task which will involve her in multiple adventures. The child is obedient, polite and respectful toward her elders and also respects the religious taboos without even questioning them. These qualities very much appreciated in girls, win her the protection of the gods and the spirits of the bush. In this story, Champavati who was married to a serpent actually turned into a beautiful god at night and showering her with gifts and love and making her happy and contended. These virtues in the orphan girl are also the proof that her real mother has been successful in her education. The mother raises and educates the daughter and the community appreciates such an upbringing. Her virtues win her the supreme reward- happy marriage. By winning a beautiful husband she will become the envy of the stepmother and the stepsisters.

Like other beast-groom stories (Aarne-Thompson tale type 425C), where the groom is toad, or cobra or python probably originated as a story about obedience, but in so far as it pivots on the ownership and disposal of women it has specific application to arranged marriages and hence affirms the “rightness” of patriarchy. A girl entering such an arrangement may well feel frightened, but she is reassured that if carefully obeyed the beast could turn out to
be an angel as it happened with Champavati. Her python husband turned out to be a handsome God full of love and affection for her. The voice of the father is the authority. His words are final and needs to be kept at all cost. This also reaffirms the society’s belief that unquestionably oblitering and submissive woman becomes happy in the long run.

4.2.3 Sita’s test by fire

Ravana, the king of Lanka, abducted Sita during their exile. Rama after killing rakshasa (demon) King Ravana rescued Sita and brought her back to Ayodhya. But many subjects were skeptical of Sita's purity.

Sita Devi was matchless in her beauty and virtues. Moreover she was a good painter. One day she was talking with her sister-in-laws and companions about Lanka and Ravana. They asked her to draw a portrait of Ravana so that they can also know how wicked Ravana physically looked like. Sita said that although she did not see the sinner, but happened to see his reflection on ocean water while he was carrying her after abduction. On their repeated requests she drew the portrait and the picture held all of them spellbound. The story of the picture spread among the women folk and from women it reached men, and finally to Rama. Many subjects, who were already in doubt, now got their doubts confirmed. Rama cherished the ambition to be a popular king of Ayodhya. This development shocked him and mistrust, impatience and unhappiness gripped his otherwise calm mind. So he asked Sita to prove her chastity. Sita became utterly shocked and speechless. Rama asked Sita to be exonerated from the blemish through evidence by an authentic witness. He was very eager to be known as a liberal and popular king. Unable to find a suitable witness to the satisfaction of everybody who could vouch for every second of Sita’s stay in Lanka, Rama finally ordered the removal of Sita’s blemish in a test through fire. Everybody gathered at the pyre constructed for Sita’s test. She stood unmoved in the burning fire with folded hand for salvation. She came out of the flames unscathed, standing motionless amid black embers. All people gathered there described Sita as a chaste woman. An emotion of peace and happiness rippled through Rama’s mind.

Sarma, 2010:34-38
Here we find the agony of Sita, the beloved wife of Lord Rama, the king of Ayodhya. It so happened that beautiful Sita, was kidnapped by Ravana, the king of Lanka who kept her in Asoka forest with evil intention. But he did not succeed in seducing Sita who was as pure as ever. After returning to Ajodhya subjects started talking about Sita's chastity. Sita, the Queen appeared as a passive figure. As a king Rama wanted to be loved by his subjects. So to please his subjects and to keep his image intact he asked Sita to prove her chastity and innocence. This proves the fact that every woman has to undergo this kind of humiliation and mental trauma irrespective of whether she is a queen or a beggar. In spite of the fact that Rama knew only too well that his beloved Sita is pure and chaste, he became insensitive towards her in order to protect his image as a king. Similarly in a Kangra folk tale "Daughter, My little Bread" the king had no regard for his wife's life. The king did not care if his queen died, for, as he said there were always other queens to be had. In making explicit the devaluing of women's lives and easy replaceability of wives, these upper caste women's tales also seemed to set a cultural double standard in ironic relief. For among the upper castes men were allowed co-wives [particularly if one had not produced a son and heir]. Further, if a wife died, the man invariably remarried, needing someone to serve him and his children. Yet upper caste widows were required to live a celibate life, hemmed in by ritual restrictions.

The male centered view of human life goes on to privilege one gender over another. 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( as in the case of Sita), or because of male rejection, persecution or authority. 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. Religion which forms a greater aspect of one's culture carries its gender related bias in its texts. For example, Hindu religion is an embodiment of patriarchal dominance. Practically most part of the Hindu mythology focus on the sacrificing nature and unquestionable loyalty of women. As for instance we can show the
uncomplaining image of Sita, who worshipped her husband and could tolerate all atrocities of the society and her husband. She could jump into fire and even went on an exile to the forest all alone to prove her chastity and loyalty. This act of Sita fits in well with the Indian expectation of women as obedient, passive, uncomplaining, and ever ready to adjust and compromise, self-effacing, powerless, submissive, vulnerable etc. and thereby Sita qualifies as the ideal heroine of mythology.

Although Sita’s story is pan Indian, and cannot be considered a Rabha folktale as such, yet we can see this story as the influence of Hinduism and Hindu Mythology in their traditional way of life. The story is found among Pati Rabhas who have a greater assimilation with Assamese culture and society. A great majority of Rabhas follow Hinduism and as such Sita who is highly revered by Hindus for her sacrifices, found her way in Rabha tales as well. We also know that every tale travels from its point of origin, adding local and regional variation to it.

4.2.4 Bisanmati

Once a merchant had a very beautiful daughter named Bisanmati. Her mother died when she was very young. The merchant married again to relieve the pain of his daughter in the absence of her mother. But things did not turn out as he expected. The step mother instead of treating her well started torturing her in the slightest pretext. From morning to night she worked inside the household. Still the stepmother was not satisfied. She used to make her life hell. But the poor girl used to bear every torture without uttering a word. She could not even complain to her father fearing further trouble. Once the father ventured out for business purpose. Before leaving he gave the responsibility of Bisanmati to her stepmother and asked her to take good care of her. But with the departure of the father, her fate also deserted her and eventually the cruel step mother killed her. After that she was transformed into a bottle guard plant. She used to narrate her plight if someone came to pluck a guard from that tree. Hearing this the step mother uprooted the tree and burnt it. Out of the fire a beautiful bird (Kapau) came out. When her father returned she wept and told her story.

12. Rabha, 2004:42-54
to him. The father brought a diamond necklace for her whom he now gave to the bird and the step mother was punished.

In this tale the conduct and nature of the step-mother is highlighted. Thus creating sympathy for the nubile girl who was presented as helpless, obedient, hard-working and yet totally unhappy. She had already lost her mother; the father was also away on a business trip who could have been her protector. This uncomplainingly submissive nature is what is expected of a woman and she receives sympathy because of that. The stepmother and her cruel nature are put in contrast with the innocence and the helplessness of the girl who does not have anyone to turn to for help. The meanness she showed towards the orphan is often caused by jealousy she feels for her co-wife, who might be living or dead. Again her behaviour must have something to do with her feeling of insecurity (psychological rather than real). As the second wife she might have wanted to secure her place and position in the new household, in the life of her husband. Thus in order to get a place of prominence in her husband’s life, she tries to distance the step-daughter from the father. She refuses to share the space with the other women in her husband’s life—i.e. either the co-wife or the step-daughter. To get a secured future for her own daughter she tries to negate everything that the step daughter deserves—comfort and happiness. As a wife she seeks the favour of the father through her progeny.

This act of jealousy is a negative trait and is punished as it happened in the end of the tale where the step-mother is punished by the father and the passive daughter who suffered all torture and humiliation is rewarded with a diamond necklace. She is obedient, polite and respectful towards her elder ones and thus qualifies as an ideal girl.

Quite expectedly, jealousy is always punished. According to the tradition, it not only destroys conjugal life but also shows distinct lack of respect for the male and contradicts the wisdom of the proverb “the woman must tremble before the man”. It can also be considered a revolt against the popular tradition because from ancient times polygamous men are accepted unconditionally by society without raising an eyebrow. Women had always submitted on the ground that it
was for the common good, and women had to adjust and compromise her position for the man and his family.

The “habits” (as described by Urmilaji to Kirin Narayan while narrating stories to her in Mondays on the Dark Nights of the Moon) of the step mother had to do with systematically mistreating children of a different marriage while favouring their own children.

4.2.5 Bhutuni Budhi aru bari Sali (the witch and the son of a widow)13

In Chandan Nagar an old lady used to live. She knew wild magic and had a bird which she protected and kept inside the house with extreme precaution. The old woman who is actually a witch moves out at night and kills and eats whatever she gets outside- from animals to human beings. But while returning home in the morning she changes into the guise of a human being. She is also very clever and does not do anything to irritate her neighbours or arouse their doubt.

She also moves as beggar from one place to another and takes shelter in people’s houses and takes advantage of their virtue. Once she reached the home of a widow named Hima who had a five years old son called Ratan. Her husband died before the birth of her son. So the villagers accused her of being unfaithful, and was put in exile. Nobody kept any relation with her. She was living all alone by herself with her son. So happily she gave refuge to the old lady. The witch on her part liked the fact that Hima was alone. At night after dinner every one went to bed. Then the witch in the guise of an old lady came to her original self and eaten Hima. But the witch felt pity for her son and spared Ratan. She wanted to keep Ratan as her company. Ratan could see how his mother was eaten in front of his eyes. As he was very young he could not do anything but he promised himself that he would take revenge on the old lady one day. In the course of time the young boy attained manhood and now was keen to take revenge. He came to know about the secret of her life that it is in the bird that her life is preserved. So one day he killed the bird (Kapau) and thus the life of the witch came to an end. Everyone praised the orphan for his courage, intelligence and determination.

13. Rabha, 2004:61-68
Along with the stepmother another negative female stereotype in the folktales is the witch. In folktales witches are situated right on the borderline between the realm of the human and the realm of the demonic. Being a demonic individual the witch can change her appearance. She makes herself unrecognizable by taking on the looks of another woman, transforming herself into an animal, or into an object. The home of a witch is a long way away from human habitation. The surrounding of the witches home belong to the realm of devil and signify a danger zone. Eating human flesh and the power of metamorphosis are two attributes of demons. In addition an extremely thick skin and a lack of human sensitivity are further attributes. And demons can take on all kinds of forms (Narayan, 1997:187).

Here we have two women—one is active, evil, powerful and doing things in her own way. She is a witch. The other is a passive woman, a victim, a woman austricized by the society for no fault of her own. She was accused of infidelity as she gave birth to her son after the death of her husband. Thus here we see patriarchal world view where women are at the receiving end. Women’s voice is muted. This shows the cultural double standard of our patriarchal society where women need to prove her innocence all the time. She was not given a sympathetic understanding. She was killed by a witch, an event witnessed by her son. The son here is the representative of patriarchal world order as the revenger whose duty was to give justice to his mother. As a grown up man he is the symbol of the male dominated society. The image of male as the protector of woman percolates down to the child from his early days. Thus the son is an active agent. The woman was so passive that she did not protest the injustice meted against her. Ultimately help from a male (her son) is needed to get justice even if after death.

The witch in the tale possesses magical power which allows her to change her appearance to suit her purpose. She is shrewd and thus does not go for confrontation with people to avoid suspicion around her. This was her survival strategy. She took advantage of the loneliness and austricized state of the passive, helpless woman. As a widow she was helpless, a condition over which she does not have any control. She lost her husband, a man who was supposed to protect her. Struggle started for her and eventually was eaten and got killed by a witch.
Finally she received justice through a man (her son). Thus change from a victim to getting justice came only through the man in her life. She became a victim as she lacked a man (husband) in her life and got justice although after death, by a man (son). A woman's life is viewed only in relation to the man in her life. She does not have an independent existence. Her happiness, suffering, hope, exploitation, sadness all are related to the presence of men in her life—be it father, brother, husband, son, lover etc. Widowhood is a curse in our society and a widow has to undergo a lot of suffering and torture from the society.

4.3 ACTIVE AND INTELLIGENT WOMEN

In a few folktales women figure as active and intelligent agents who save or rescue her husband or village from a critical situation through their courage, presence of mind. But it is worth mentioning here that the act of intelligence is of fairly simple nature.

4.3.1 Trish Marka Paluwan (a wrestler who killed 30 mosquitoes in one slap)\textsuperscript{14}

There was a farmer's family in a certain village. They had only three members in their family—parents and their only son. The son was extremely lazy and idle; he simply does not do anything. In short he was good for nothing type. His parents were very angry at their son's conduct because he was a strongly built handsome and healthy young man. He used to eat and sleep only. So they brought a bride for him hoping that things might change for better. They expected that better sense would prevail upon him as he is now a married man. But unfortunately he did not change. In an attempt to change him, the parents asked them to live separately. They thought that this time he would have to work to sustain himself and his wife. Nothing had changed. This time his wife was compelled to go outside and beg for a living. The wife was utterly frustrated at this because she could not bear the fact that a strong and stout person like him is spending his time idly, not doing anything for the family. As a result she used to rebuke him. But the idle and worthless person he was, he used to listen to her outburst silently. Finally one day he came out of the house and asked for a bamboo from a neighbor. The owner thought in his mind, "What will

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this idle person do with a bamboo? Let me give him and see what he
does with this”. He brought the bamboo and throughout the day he made
tangal (made from bamboo to tie a knot, flexible). Their house was
situated near the forest. So while he was working mosquitoes surrounded
him. The wife came out to see what he was doing and found that
mosquitoes are all over his legs. She tried to make him see sense, “what
has happened to you? Don’t you see that mosquitoes were sucking your
blood?” He realized about this only after hearing his wife’s voice. He
just put a big slap over his leg and instantly his hand is filled with blood.
He told his wife, “See, thirty mosquitoes got killed in one slap. I am a
trish marka paluwan (a wrestler who could kill 30 mosquitoes at a go) ”.
Now the wife, getting something to feel proud about her husband and his
achievement, went on telling about this while fetching water, working in
the field etc. Now talk spread like fire and one day it reached the king.

On the other hand everyday one cow was missing from the
king’s cowshed. A tiger takes away one cow everyday. But nobody
could kill the tiger. All the hunters employed failed and king felt
helpless as to how to sort out the problem. Then as he heard about trish
marka paluwan, he asked his men to bring the person to his court. This
person got scared. He thought that he must have done something
drastically wrong otherwise why there would be a call from the king.
The king asked him to kill the tiger which was creating nuisance. In his
mind he thought that I have only killed mosquitoes, but neither I nor my
forefathers had ever killed a tiger. He left king’s court without uttering a
word. When he reached home, looking at him his wife thought
“something is wrong. Otherwise why he is looking so down and out?”
when she asked him what has happened, he said, “You have put me in
trouble, you told everybody that I am a trish marka paluwan and the
king thought me as a real paluwan (wrestler) and asked me to kill the
tiger. Now his wife also got worried. She never thought that her
proclamation would lead her husband into real trouble. After discussion
they decided to leave that village. As they did not have money he
decided to steal a cow from the king’s cowshed. The king wont even
know as he would think that tiger has eaten one more cow. In the mean
time by selling the cow they will be able to live for some day.

It was too dark at night. Taking advantage of darkness he
stepped into the king’s cowshed. By that time the tiger has already
entered the cowshed and trying to find out a cow of his choice. Trish
*marka paluwan* unknowingly has put his hand on the tiger instead of the cow. In his mind he thought this cow will be the best (actually the tiger) as its body is very smooth and strong. Immediately he captured the tiger tightly with the rope he took along with him. Now the tiger thought, "I am in danger". The tiger had already heard about the reputation of the *paluwan* as a very strong person. The *paluwan* meanwhile pulled the rope and reached home. At home he tied the tiger along with a bamboo solidly. He called his wife to see his success. The wife came out with a lamp and was astonished to find a big tiger. She was speechless. The man realized what he did only after watching his wife's reaction. He brought the much wanted tiger, thinking of it as a cow. Both of them went inside and locked the door tightly. In the morning out of fear both of them did not come out of their house. The king to his utter surprise found that on the last night the tiger did not take his cow and thought that this must have happened because of *paluwan*. To see the tiger by his own eyes he came to *paluwan*'s house along with his minister. He found the tiger at his place closely roped in the courtyard. Listening to peoples voice the wife came out. When asked about her husband the intelligent wife said, "King, he was extremely tired and now he is deep in sleep as throughout the night he fought with the tiger before finally winning over it". When the king asked her to make him awake she did it. With sleep in his eyes he came out. The king was very pleased at his feet and honoured him with cash. After that they lived happily with that money.

In our society marriage or bringing a wife for an idle, ineffective, worthless son is thought to be a corrective measure, a way to bring in change in the man. This probably hints at two things- on the one hand a woman can be given to a worthless man in marriage. His chief quality is that he is a man and he does not require any other qualification for marriage. He does not need to prove himself as an eligible person. On the other hand it also says indirectly about woman’s capacity to change a person. That way society in some form acknowledges woman’s inner strength, her strong mental makeup.

It is believed that responsibility which comes with marriage might bring in a kind of positive change in the idle one. In the patriarchal society, the duty of running the family rests with the male member, the husband after marriage. It was the primary duty of the husband to secure food and a living for the family. Woman is supposed to work within the four walls of the family. Thus his parents
thought that after they have asked him to live independently with his wife and sustain both of them, he would be compelled to work this time as now his wife is solely dependent on him.

Here we get an indirect hint on women’s nature. Women can not keep things within themselves. They share things which might prove to be dangerous sometimes. Here the wife also kept on boasting to everyone calling her husband *trish marka paluwan*. But we can not blame the woman for it completely. If we try to understand her psychology we would find that since her husband was sitting idle, doing nothing so far, one act of his i.e. killing of 30 mosquitoes in one single slap gave her reason enough to speak positively about her husband. She took it as a matter of pride to be shared among her circle even if she added a little color to the story. But her intention was totally harmless. As a wife, like every woman in our society, she wished to see her husband as a capable person. As a wife she felt ashamed of her husband till the incident occurred. Her sharing is her way of showing to the world that her husband is not worthless; rather he is a powerful and strong person.

The wife of *Trish marka paluwan* was active and intelligent. When her husband remained inactive, sat idle at home she used to work and go out in order to manage a living. Although at one point in the tale her tongue had thrown her husband into trouble but later on in front of the King she managed the situation quite intelligently. She gave the impression that her husband was tired after capturing the tiger and was sleeping. Reality was something different. She applied her intelligence and turned the situation to their advantage. As a result her husband was honoured and paid handsomely by the king. Finally their hardship came to an end. Intelligence in the woman brought positive change in her husband’s fortune.

4.3.2 *Kachmont*¹⁵

A widow had two sons. The elders name was Ganju and the younger one was Hanju. Ganju was intelligent and Hanju was a fool. After Ganju’s marriage disputes arouse between the two brothers and

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¹⁵ Rabha, 1977:6-14
Sarma, 2010:44-50
one day it reached its peak and as a result properties were divided between them. But the division was an unequal one, where the intelligent brother took all the benefits of the division, giving practically nothing to the foolish one. But the foolish one later on realized that he had been deprived by his elder brother. Out of anger and frustration he began to chop off the jackfruit trees of his share. His elder brother saw the mess he had made and thrashed him severely. He was so badly treated that one night Hanju left home for good.

During his journey he came across a man whom he addressed as “father-in-law”. The man said I am still unmarried. How can I be your father in law?” “After your marriage if a girl is born and I marry her, then will you not be my father-in-law?” thinking him to be a lunatic, the man said smilingly, “yes, yes, but when my marriage will be solemnized?” I am in need of money. Hanju promised that he would arrange both money and bride for him. Accordingly he arranged for the man’s marriage. He did all the hard work. After a year, a girl was born, Hanju baptized her as Kachmoni. Soon after her birth, her father Ginal died.

With the attainment of marriageable age, according to the previous agreement, her mother prepared for her marriage. One day Kachmoni went to the river. At that time a merchant’s boat was passing through. Seeing the beautiful girl, he forcefully dragged her to his boat and then let the boat sail off.

Hearing the news of Kachmoni’s kidnap her mother began to weep aloud. Hanju consoled her and set off in search of Kachmoni. He promised to find her out. He reached the merchant’s village, after searching for Kachmoni here and there. He told the story of Kachmoni to one family. They also agreed that it is a great sin to lie and a false step to kidnap a lonely and hapless girl. They offered all help to rescue her. The Ojha (who treats diseases and examines the omens) of this merchant also promised to help. Accordingly he managed a fisherman who would take her to a different village. As planned, the girl went to the bank of the river, but ill luck had it that at that very moment the dreaded dacoit of the land, Bagha with his assistant turned up on the bank. Seeing such a beautiful girl at dawn, Bagha forcibly dragged her to boat. She cried aloud. He promised to marry her but Kachmoni said “I am betrothed. You will be committing a sin”. He refused to term it as sin.
While the dacoits were moving with Kachmoni, they saw some passers by who were passing through the forest with booties on their heads. They anchored the boat and marched to attack the passers by. Meanwhile Kachmoni remained alone in the boat. The prince, the son of the minister and the army general of a different land arrived at that place for hunting. Having found the girl alone in the boat, every one of them wished to have her as his wife. Argument and counter argument started as to who had the right over the girl. Kachmoni was an intelligent girl. She said “please don’t quarrel amongst you. I shall accept him (as my husband) who after running to the forest can bring a bouquet of wild flowers. They agreed to her proposal and taking off their swords and clothes, they ran into the forest to fetch bouquets of flowers. It was in the flash of a moment that the girl wore male attire and took the sword of one of them; then mounting a horse she fled away swiftly, taking the remaining clothes with her. Kachmoni wore the male disguise as it might be necessary for her. She reached Rangdan Kingdom. The king there had no son. With the dress of a male Kachmoni disclosed her identity before the king as the orphaned son of a hero clan. She sought refuse with the king. The king was attracted by “his” behaviour, style of work and intelligence and proposed that “he” marry his only daughter Kachmati. The male dressed Kachmoni replied “oh king I abide by your proposal. But before I marry her, she will first have to marry my sword. Only after that I shall give my consent to this marriage”. The king accepting this proposal, arranged for Kachmati’s marriage to the sword, as per social custom.

The king began to run his kingdom with the counsel of Kachmoni who was in disguise. One day she counseled the king “your majesty should arrange to dig a big tank and announce throughout the kingdom that whoever be able to pickup Kachmoni bead thrown into the tank by diving would be well rewarded”. Accordingly the king made the public announcement throughout the kingdom. Everybody responded to the announcement perhaps with the hope that if he could win the King’s test he would be able to claim Kachmati, the only daughter of the king.

Kachmoni advised the King that as soon as the aspirants would arrive, they should be imprisoned. Abiding by her counsel the King imprisoned all of them.

Hanju who roamed at random like a maniac also heard the King’s proclamation and as he was aware of the kachmoni seed, he too
turned up at the royal courtyard. After sometime, Hanju and Kachmoni got familiar with each other. Thereafter Kachmoni brought him to the King and narrated all the tragedies of their past life. She told the King “he is your son-in-law and I am your daughter”. As all the secrets were revealed, the King was happy and he got the marriage accomplished gorgeously. On that occasion all the prisoners were released. Everyone realized their mistake and blessed the couple. Kachmoni brought her mother Batachoik, her rescuer Chengman Ojha and his wife Chengmani to the royal court. Peace, prosperity and happiness were restored to the kingdom.

If we analyze the tale we see that Kachmoni’s marriage was fixed even before her birth, in a conversation between her father who was at that point of time not even married, and her would be husband. From birth to death the relationship between a man and a woman is that of owning and belonging. Man owns woman as he owns other material objects and she belongs to him, be it father, brother, husband or son. She is denied an identity of her own. Thus regarding marriage, taking consent of the girl in question was not taken as an important criterion. This reflects a lot on women’s right in deciding on her life. When she was kidnapped, she needed the help of a male Ojha to rescue her. Till then her principal function was thematic, as she occupies the important position of victim. Torbong Lundell in her article “Folktale heroines and the Type and Motif Indexes” pointed that both heroes and heroines in the folktales need and receive help to complete their tasks and overcome obstacles. They meet helpers in the form of animals, old women and men, magic objects and supernatural creatures who carry the protagonist from one place to another or give good advice. Helpers are supportive and their power is limited. Lundell has further pointed out that careful investigation of the folklore material shows that the model for female conduct reflected in folktale 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 when she managed to flee successfully from the clutches of different men, using her intelligence, then also she needed the guise of a man. In our
societies, particularly in the patriarchal set up, the courage and intelligence of females are not acknowledged; it becomes "help" for the male hero. In this particular tale and in many other tales, a female protagonist has to disguise as a male to achieve her goal of rescuing her husband or beloved or male kin from the adversaries or villains. But their bravery or intelligence or presence of mind or capacity of acting under pressure do not make them heroes but helpers, because sphere of their action is different from what the male-dominated society has assigned to them.

She could act only in the guise of a man and accomplished her mission of finding Hanju her husband in the role of the man. Just being woman she could not possibly have achieved her goal. Folklorist Margaret Mill observed that women most often act like men to gain mobility in the outside world, both to avoid sexual contact and to rescue family members (mostly males) who are confined or incapacitated. (In Jordan and Kalcik, 1985:195) but Kachmoni surely qualifies as an active heroine though partially, as she became instrumental in reviving the fortune of her husband. Moreover she also brought back happiness to the lives of her mother and the ajha who helped in her mission. The characteristics pattern of woman centered tales, according to Ramanujan as observed in his article, "Towards a Counter System: Women's Tales" (Dharwadker, 1999), begins with a first union often a marriage, followed by a separation, and ending in reunion and a firmer bonding between the woman and her spouse. In this tale also Hanju and Kachmoni got separated after they were engaged, followed by a lot of trial and tribulation for both the man and the woman and finally they were united at the end by the act of intelligence of the heroine. She became instrumental in bringing back the happiness in their life and also to the lives of people who were supportive of her in her worst times. To quote Ramanujan again here is relevant:

In the woman centered tales, as in their classical analogues of Sakuntala or Savitri, it does not seem enough for a woman to be married. She has to earn her husband, her married state, through a rite de passage, a period of unmerited suffering.
4.3.3 *A Tiger and an Old Man*\(^{16}\)

A very ferocious tiger started creating problems for the entire village demanding different eatables every now and then. He also ate different domestic animals of the villagers. The villagers did not have any idea about how to tackle this problem. One day the tiger demanded *pitha* (home made bread) from an old man in lieu of allowing him to safely collect firewood from the forest. The wife of the old man listened to the demand but she did not become terrified instead decided to teach the tiger a lesson so that the menace could be stopped once and for all. The old man in the beginning tried to dissuade her fearing the consequence if something goes wrong. But the old lady was quite confident of herself and made her plan. Accordingly the woman prepared *pitha* with lime stone powder and offered it to him. The tiger could not sense the danger and ate it happily and left for the forest. But on his way uneasy gripped him and he could not tolerate the itching caused by the lime stone and fell dead. Villagers were very pleased at her act of intelligence and courage, and lavishly gifted her many things as a reward for her achievements.

This tale presents us with a formidable old woman who by using her intelligence and presence of mind rescued the village from the fury of the powerful tiger who was creating havoc on the poor and helpless villagers. Although we get passive victim and sufferers, dependent women in many folktales, but the ever-patient, uncomplainingly submissive woman is not the unique type of woman we find in the folktales. There are many examples of female cleverness and independence as we have seen in this particular folktale. The adventurous and leadership qualities of a folktale heroine, in this case the old woman, are ignored. Aarne and Thompson in their type and motif indexes of folktales seem to downplay female activity and capability. There seems to be different standards for evaluating behavior of women and men. And in some labeling male is given the credit instead of the female in the title. This happened in this particular tale also where the man was passive and it is the woman’s able leadership quality, fearlessness and capable handling of the situation which saved

\(^{16}\) Rabha, 1977:80-85
Sarma, 2010:86-90
everyone from impending danger. It is important here to mention that parallel to this tale is also found among the Bodos and also among the Assamese.

4.4 WOMEN AS TRANSGRESSOR

When women go beyond the limit set by patriarchal society, their act is termed as subversion. Ramanujan maintains that subversion/inversion of a normal order or relation is found in folktales. According to him in folktales women have the courage to come out of subjugation of male domination. Unlike real life, in tales women tried to come out and assert themselves. But women who cross the boundary of their traditional role are termed transgressors by the dominant male order.

4.4.1 Bangkhong aru Natrong Keneke Hal (how the insects were formed)\(^7\)

There lived two sisters named Bangkhong and Natrong. They used to sing and dance beautifully. Because of their singing and dancing talent, people used to praise them. But there were also people who were jealous of them and used to spread rumour surrounding them. Listening to these rumours their maternal uncle and their brother got very angry and started rebuking them. The sisters were very unhappy but still they could not stop singing and dancing as this was their passion. So whenever they got a chance, they would sing.

Once again they were threatened to give up their singing. Even fear of punishment could not prevent them from pursuing their passion. Out of sheer frustration and anger, the maternal uncle lost his patience and cursed them (his niece) to die. The curse became a reality and both the sisters died. Their bodies were not cremated, instead were kept in two holes dug to keep their body. From those two holes eventually two insects were born. Their name was Bangkhong (bigger oichiringa, an insect) and Natrong (smaller oichiringa, another insect) respectively. Even then, they used to sing like this-

Neither we are ashamed of our brother
Nor we are afraid of our uncle (maternal)
Not afraid, not afraid, we will sing and dance all the time.

17. Hakacham, 2009:81
We can find in the tale that singing and dancing were the passions of both the sisters for which they got praise and criticism along with curse from family members. But even then they were not afraid to pursue their passion and resisted the unjustified dictates and control of their male elders in their own way. They say “not afraid, not afraid, we will sing and dance all the time....” These two girls are not treated as equals as per men who can have a mind of their own and are allowed to exercise freedom of choice.

If we analyze the tale from a particular feminist perspective we see that in male dominated societies man is central and woman is the “other”, repressed, ignored, and pushed to the margins and her ardent wish is to be recognized as a human being. In this context Simone de Beauvoir pointed out that women were constrained by the societal roles and as such could not exercise their essential freedom. She asked “when women were to be defined in relation to men how could they exist as individuals and claim their essential freedom?” Thus the two sisters were prohibited from pursuing their passion- singing and dancing as it is not considered right and proper by their male elders. Man has demarcated space—the public sphere as his own domain and private sphere as woman’s space. Thus their maternal uncle and brothers were opposed to their singing and dancing as it requires them to venture out into the public domain of man as hailed by patriarchal social order. Women’s domestic role as daughters, wives or mothers are stressed, denying them their subject position.

Beauvoir also commented that “to be feminine is to appear weak, futile and docile. The young girl is supposed not only to deck herself out, to make herself ready and to repress her spontaneity and replace it with the studied grace and charm taught to her by her elders. Any assertion will diminish her feminity and attractiveness” (Beauvoir 1972,359). These two sisters were also asked to curb their spontaneity in order to please the elders in the family. But they choose to resist and decided to continue with their passion for which they were cursed by...
their maternal uncle. This is how the male world reacts to any assertion by a
woman to restore her freedom and identity. They decided to “sing and dance all
the time…” It is not easy for women to cast aside the garb of the “secondary” and
acquire human status. The sisters resisted to the unjust demand of their male
elders and reaffirmed their desire to continue with their passion. They choose not
to be submissive and docile, but came out strong as individuals. Edward R. Lee
observes in Psyché as Hero that patriarchy creates role model for people which
are inhibiting and stereotypical but when a woman finds herself capable of
breaking chains of patriarchal cultures around her and acts in this direction she
becomes a woman hero, “within this context- patriarchal, hostile pre-occupied
with rank-the woman hero is an usage of anti-thesis. Different from male-her sex
her sign-she threatens his authority and that of the system she sustains”. Thus
“the male picture of the ideal woman ….usually omits the role of revolutionary
activist” and folklore offers “glimpses of women’s resentment of the repressive
role given to them” (Jordan in Jordan and Kalcik 1985:42-43).

4.4.2 Bachelor Kartik

In this tale Lord Shiva gave Parvati the responsibility of
arranging the marriage ceremony of their son Kartik to beautiful Usha.
But Parvati grew jealous of Usha and thus was reluctant to accept Usha
as the bride for her handsome son Kartik. Conflict had started brewing in
her mind.

To fulfill her aim of not letting her son marry Usha, she very
cunningly tried to blackmail Kartik emotionally. Parvati said that if
Kartik brings Usha to their home as his bride then she would torture his
mother to the extent of not giving her enough food to eat. Kartik was
very upset at this. Being a very devoted son he promised to his mother
that he would remain a bachelor throughout his life.

Parvati was passionately attracted to her son Kartik. One day she
asked her own son to satisfy her immoral desire. Kartik could not
believe his ears and told his mother that he could not commit such a sin.
She was so desperate fulfill her lust that she told Kartik that even if it is
a sin he is bound by promise to satisfy her. She even reasoned that it is

Sarma, 2010:30-33
not a sin to eat the thing one has created. Kartik was in a dilemma. He put a condition that he would fulfill her desire and act according to her wish only when there would be total silence in the place. There should not be any kind of sound in the place. But Kartik was rescued from committing the sin at the right time by a pair of peacock. Kartik was relieved and Parvati was ashamed of herself. Out of anger and frustration she cursed the pair of peacock that they would never get the satisfaction of conjugal life.

The great importance of sons to mothers in the politics of the Indian family (Kakar 1978, 57), is related to prolonged period of breast-feeding, the practice in many families of sons sleeping next to mothers almost until they are adolescent does make the mother-marries-son tale significant. It expresses a mother’s desire and real temptation to cling to her son.

A rare example of mother-son relations in mythology is the Bengali legend about goddess Durga, whose intercourse with her son is watched and noisily interrupted by a peacock. Durga gets angry with the peacock for being a peeping Tom and curses the bird with impotence and an ugly squeal for a voice. She relents later and allows peacocks to have offspring by means of their tears.

This tale reflects on the fact that mothers don’t want to part away with the sons and because of the close nature of their relationship, mothers feel threatened by the arrival of another woman (daughter-in-law) in her son’s life. The feeling of insecurity creeps in as she doesn’t want to lose her son to another woman. Sometimes this desire to cling to her son increases to dangerous proportion as in the case of Parvati, who was physically attracted to her son and thus wanted to establish a sexual relationship with her son. As a result she becomes a transgressor here, crossing the role assigned to a mother, who tried to be passionately involved with her own son.

4.4.3 Tasrairajur Kahini (the story of Tasrairaju)\textsuperscript{19}

Basundhar was born to sage Krimichung and his wife. But after some time the sage got bored of family life and left for doing serious

\textsuperscript{19} Rabha, 1977:15-22
Sarma, 2010:1-6
Patgiri, 2005:427-432
meditation and said that in case of any danger the family should remember him. Once Basundhar fell ill and his mother went in search of medicine in a dense forest. At the same time Tasrairaju also fell sick and her mother also searched for medicine in the same forest. In the process both the mothers met, talked and agreed for a marriage between their children. Suddenly Basundhar’s mother got killed by a tiger while she went for fishing.

Basundhar was then given shelter by Kancharaju Tikkaraju and she brought him up. Tikkaraju was considered an evil woman. She knew black magic and sorcery. Because of this nobody married her.

Everyone knew that Basundhar and Tasrairaju would get married soon as planned by their respective mothers. Kancharaju Tikkaraju could not tolerate this. She got passionately attracted to Basundhar, although he was much younger than her. The date of their marriage was fixed. But the evil woman had different plan. Through magical power she took the guise of Tasrairaju and married Basundhar, replacing his chosen bride. Next day everyone came to know about the fact. Both Basundhar and Tasrairaju were very upset over the development. He got separated from his beloved. Now Basundhar tried to get rid of characterless Tikkaraju. Once he pretended to be ill. Tikkaraju tried medicine to get him cured. But he continued to feign illness. He asked her to go to a sage and take his advice. Accordingly she went there where Basundhar was already sitting in the guise of the sage. The sage said to her, “He has been suffering because your head swarms with lice and Basundhar’s sword is rusted. Both of you will have to go to the same river and bathe there cleansing your head and Basundhar will sharpen his sword and said that Basundhar will recover only when the rust of his sword will be removed along with the lice’s of your head”. While following the sage’s advice, taking advantage of the situation Basundhar killed Kancharaju Tikkaraju. But as she knew witchcraft, with the slain head itself, she tried to attack Basundhar. This time Basundhar’s father came to his rescue and he finally got rid of her.

Now he went to Tasrairaju and wanted to marry her. But he had said that kancharaju Tikkaraju died out of illness, hiding the fact that he had killed her. They were happily married now. One day he told Tasrairaju the real story behind Kancharaju Tikkaraju’s death. She got suspicious but remained silent. One day she reported the matter to her mother. Her mother became worried that Basundhar might repeat the
same act with her daughter also. She then reported the incident to her brother Maranga. Maranga was a
angry person but he always followed truth and punished wrongdoers. He came to beat Basundhar but he
managed to flee away. Maranga also knew magic and with the help of that power he confused Basundhar’s way and finally got transformed him into a stork (bor Tukala). This happened because Basundhar ate Faring (cricket). Now both mother and daughter became very sad over the development and regretted what had happened.

Tasrairaju was young and beautiful. So, people got attracted towards her. In a moment of weakness she got united with Nalong, and became pregnant. Their union outside marriage was not accepted as their family backgrounds differ. Both of them became worried as society would consider it as a sin and they would not get society’s sanction. Finding no other alternative, they decided to die and went for self immolation. But as the fire increased they could not resist the heat and ran out of it. To get relief Nalong jumped into a river and became fish and she went to a forest and became a bird. Thus the story ended in a sad note.

The hero is presented as an orphan (practically) with the sage father’s rare presence as he left home after his son’s birth, for a life of solitude and meditation and his mother’s untimely death. It gave the other female character, Kancharaju Tikkaraju, a chance to take charge of the situation and mother the child. She nursed him and brought him up into manhood. As the boy attained maturity the woman who brought him up as a mother figure, felt attracted towards him. Passion of the woman became a key factor in the tale for which she wanted to marry the son figure much younger than her. Till then she remained a spinster as people avoided her because she practiced witchcraft. Her desire to marry much younger Basundhar is not sanctioned by society. The boy’s marriage was fixed by his mother before her death. In due course of time he decided to get married to the girl of his mother’s choice, whom he also loved dearly. But things did not turn out as he wanted. The evil woman resorted to magic and married him in the guise of his beloved. She substituted herself with the original bride of choice and got married to Basundhar by resorting to trick. Folklorists Stith Thompson and Warren Roberts have remarked on this tale type “stories dealing with the substituted bride theme are very common in India and show a great variety in
their treatment of the theme.” (Thompson and Roberts, Types of Indie Oral Tales, 1960, P.58).

Ramanujan in “Towards a Counter System: Women’s Tales” (Dharwadker, 1999) maintains that inversion or the reversal of a normal order or position or relation is found in folktales. According to him in folktales women have the courage to come out of subjugation of patriarchal social set up. In real life there is subjugation but in tales women have a better standing.

According to Propp (1958), the woman, (Kancharaju Tikkaraju) lacks something- she is unmarried, unwanted. There is partial lack liquidation through the child she brought up (Basundhar).

Here magic worked as an instrument of controlling situation in her favour. Magic played an important part, though negativity is attached to it but we also see that there is counter attack through magic later on in the story. Recurring motif is magic and establishment of social norms and punishment.

Again when Tasrairaju’s husband was turned into a stork, she remained neither a widow nor a married woman. But being young and beautiful, she naturally had the physical urge. But society would not permit that and there is social sanction on her. This reflects society’s idea on sexuality. This view is extended to the idea of proper relationship sanctioned by society. Society has a set rule as to how women should behave and express or repress her desire. She is not expected to give a free display of her sexual desires or urges. But in a weak moment, Tasrairaju and Nalang copulated clandestinely. In course of time she became pregnant. But Tasrairaju was the descendant of a sage and Nalang that of a hero. Their union, that too out of wedlock, was considered to be a sin in the eyes of society. They were seriously in trouble. On the one hand, they would have to bear the brunt of the society, and on the other, maintain the prestige of their respectable lineages. Unable to find a way to keep the balance, out of desperation, they decided to end their lives. There is considerable disagreement amongst psychoanalyst as to how this process of development of sexuality and sexual identity applies to girls. However the control of sexuality falls more heavily on females in most societies and their sexuality and reproductive nature
became a part of the family’s social strategies. Repression of their sexual desire is more complicated, sometimes entailing an earlier and subsequently more severe denial.

Thus the tale also commented on the propriety of women’s sexual relationship. While the evil woman took the upper hand in establishing relationship through marriage to fulfill her urge, and consequently got killed, the virtuous women decided to die on her own, fearing the consequence of her act of intimacy, which is not granted by society.

Ramanujan said that folklore is a counter system (Dharwadker, 1999). Folktales cannot always cross the prevailing discourse in the society, although we find inversion of the normal order time to time. Foster mother and son’s marriage is against the prevailing social discourse. Thus the scheming mother was expectedly punished, that too by the son whom she nurtured and later on married.

In tales evil women or witches are seen as powerful, but their capability is aligned to monstrosity. Folktales witches often take the villain’s role as was seen in this tale. Kancharaju Tikkaraju’s character is also seen as villain, who became instrumental in separating two loving people to fulfill her own desire. As old, ugly women she was put in contrast with the young, beautiful heroine.

Folklorist Natalie Kononenko’s study of witchcraft in Ukraine (Röhrich, 2008) shows that suspicion against witches sometimes led to verbal and physical attacks, and even to murder. This fact is also reflected in this particular tale where evil Kancharaju Tikkaraju was murdered by Basundhar who was initially brought up by her after he lost his biological mother. Thus negative conceptualization of female power nonetheless also abounds in folktales like this. Just as a woman can stand for the unity and productivity of the successful household so can she stand for the destructive tendencies inherent to the household. Women are associated with conflict, envy and witchcraft. 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. In
this tale society has a negative view of Kancharaju Tikkarraju as she was different from society's expectation of a woman. She practices magic, asserted herself, went on to marry the much younger man she desired, through her skill in magic. She does not fit into the feminity schema of passive and dependent woman. Thus she qualifies as evil, one who needs to be punished.

Both the women are transgressors here. By marrying the man she brought up in his parent's absence, and a man much younger to her, Kancharaju Tikkarraju transgressed the societal norm and thus was punished by the same man she once nurtured and brought him to manhood. She was a mother-figure and thus a transgressor. Again Tasrairaju also transgresses her role as a wife by establishing a relation with Nalong, which was considered a sin by society.

4.5 NEGATIVE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF WOMEN

Negative conceptualization of female power abounds in folktales. Women are associated with conflict, envy and witchcraft. Many women who stand partially outside the conventional expectations for their role, appearance, status or activities label themselves or receive their community's label as witches.

4.5.1 Shankha Ojhar Kahini (tale of Shankha Ojha)20

Once upon a time there lived an Ojha (exorcist, incantator). There was nothing that he could not cure. The moment he touches a person, he recovers from his ailment. Thus people respected Shankha Ojha a lot. His wife's name was Radaiyari. He married her who was a witch herself, through his power of incantation or occult power. Although she had some resentment she was not bad basically.

The witches of that area were not at all happy with him. One day they held a meeting to chalk out plan to deal with Shankha Ojha as due to him they are not getting anyone to torment. They feared that they won't get anyone to eat till Ojha lives. After a prolonged discussion they agreed that no outsider could harm him. Thus the responsibility of killing him was given to his two nieces. Raimari and Abulani-Bibulani. Listening these, both the sisters were very scared. Killing their own maternal uncle is a sin for which they would not be forgiven by anyone. But they did not have any other option. Unless they kill their maternal uncle, they will be killed by the witches.

Days passed by. They had neither courage nor opportunity to accomplish the job vested on them. They sometimes came to visit the uncle's place. On one such visit, they were searching lice on the head of their maternal aunt. In villages searching lice is a favorite pastime with women. Their uncle could very well understand the reason behind their frequent visit to his house and their talk with aunt Radaiyari. One day the niece asked, “Dear aunt, our maternal uncle is such a famous Ojha. He won't die easily. Nobody can get better of him. Is their any chance that he would die of something particular?” the aunt replied “neither witch nor snake could do any harm to him”. They then replied “Oh, it means our uncle is immortal, do not mind, we just asked whether there is any means by which he would die. But now we are so happy to know that nobody can kill him”.

The maternal aunt was very simple. Gullible as she was, she could not understand the cunning niece’s real motive behind their inquiry. She said frankly that as far as his knowledge over incantation and herbal medicine was concerned he was simply unbeatable. But if a snake bites him on his neck then he would naturally die as incantation or his magical power fails in that case. These two girls were very happy to get the secret out of their aunt.

One day Shankha Ojha went out to jungle in search of rare herbal medicine. While searching for it, a snake from a hole of a tree had bitten him on the back of his neck. This snake was none other than his own niece. In sheer pain somehow he returned and asked his son to rush to the jungle to bring the medicine which could cure him. And to find it quickly and correctly he asked him to take a dead fish along with him so that he can test the medicine. He found the medicine but the niece who had bitten her uncle in the guise of a snake now transformed herself into an old lady and intercepted him on the way back. She said “throw away the medicine and rush to your house. It is of no use as your father has already died”. The simple son threw it and ran towards the house. Everyone is waiting for him eagerly to bring the medicine. But he disappointed everyone. Again he was sent back to the forest with a word of caution not to listen to anyone this time. Once again he got the medicine but he met with an unknown woman. She told him that “leave the medicine. It is of no use. Your father died and his cremation was also over. I have attended his cremation and now coming back to take a bath. Rush to your home. You have many things to do.”
This time also he failed in fulfilling the expectation of the people particularly his mother. The mother lost her patience and said “you have seen the condition of your father. Still you did not care to cure him. You are an unworthy son and you will be responsible for your father’s death.” Soon Sankha Ojha died.

Sankha Ojha died because his wife shared the secret of the manner of his death with others although unknowingly and because his son proved to be an absolute fool. Centre of the tale is Sankha Ojha who is powerful, revered and his presence is overwhelming in the story- a person capable of charms and incantation. By his occult power he posed threat to the witches as he is challenging their very survival.

The wife of Sankha Ojha was simple and gullible to the extent that she shared the life-secret of her husband with his niece. It is possible that she might not be aware of the fact that by revealing the secret of her husband she is risking his life. But we cannot overlook one important point mentioned in the story that is the Ojha had married his wife through charms and incantations. By revealing the secret of his life she might have contested the patriarchal male domination (i.e. by her husband), although she might not be aware of it herself. Again meaning is fluid and it is not always clear if the meaning of a particular text or performance is in fact subversive. Texts typically have inherent ambiguities, opening them to alternative interpretations and used by diverse audiences.

Witches in folktale often take the villain’s role. Witches are always situated in the margins in contrast to the Ojha who is at the centre. Mainstream (Ojha) has marginalized the margin (witches) in the tale who are struggling for their survival and future security. By hatching a plan to overcome Ojha they are trying to subvert the power centre (Ojha). Looked from this angle the wife is also at the margin who was married by the use of charms and incantations.

Within patriarchy there is no mid way for women. A woman can be either good or bad, either angel or monster as Gilbert and Guber mentioned in their book “The Madwoman in the Attic”. The angel they noted is an ideal representation of the feminine-with associated attributes like purity, submissiveness and self-denial. The monster conversely has traits typically
associated with masculine behaviours like aggressiveness (or assertiveness) selfishness (or independence) and the lust for fame and fortune (or ambition or work ethic). By challenging Ojha’s existence, and trying to find ways and means to kill Ojha, and eventually becoming successful at killing him, they have secured their existence along with fame and fortune for themselves and their next generation. Living Sankha Ojha is a threat to their very survival. By sharing the secret, the wife also allied with the witches, though unknowingly, thereby qualifying as a monster.

Bell Hooks in center/margin theory maintained that 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. Margin always tries to move to the center. The way to move towards the center is to use those with influence in the community. The witches who are at the margins tried to move towards the center by displacing the Ojha from the center. They established a connection with Ojha’s nieces and successfully influenced them to kill their maternal uncle. Through the nieces of Ojha they tried and got the better of Ojha and moved towards the center from margin. The nieces of Sankha Ojha are presented as evil as they betrayed their uncle and killed him. For their own survival they obeyed the witches who used them to achieve their goal. The process of killing the Ojha was not an easy one. The nieces, first transformed themselves into a snake and then to an old woman and finally to an unknown woman. But if we observe the pattern all the disguises they took are of female to accomplish the evil deed. In this tale we see the negative portrayal of women in the form of the wife, nieces and the witches.

In the dominant patriarchal set up male visualizes women as submissive disallowing her right to any revolutionary activity. Thus the resistance by the witches with the active help from the nieces to Sankha Ojha’s overwhelming presence and domination would not be accepted by the society. So the activities of the witches are always considered evil.

Witches by being assertive, active, aggressive, selfish can never qualify as ideal from the male point of view. In the folktales witches are situated right on
the borderline between the realm of the human and the realm of the demonic. Being a demonic individual the witch can change her appearance. She makes herself unrecognizable by taking on the looks of another woman, transforms herself into animal or into an object. By changing themselves into old and unknown women respectively, the nieces have proved to be powerful but this has also equated them with the witches because a demonic individual like witch can change form according to their need and wish.

4.5.2 Lubhuni Burhi (Greedy old woman)21

There was an old couple. They did not have any children. So they were unhappy. The old man was expert in work. Though he is old he still ploughs in the field. One day while working in the field, he saw a bird (kora sarai) chirping. The old man followed the bird silently and killed it. The old man was very happy at the prospect of having a good meal with the meat of the bird. He brought it home, asked his wife to cook it and left for a bath in the river. The old woman prepared the meat with pieces of pumpkin. But she was extremely greedy and could not even wait to finish cooking. Instead in the name of tasting the curry she started eating one piece of meat after another. This way she finished the entire meat. What was left for the old man was only curry and pieces of pumpkin. Disappointed at this he asked her-

*Haye burhi*

*Ek kora anilong mari*

*Anjat dekhu suda pani*

(old woman, what happened to the bird I brought along?)

The old woman replied-

*Ae Burha, korak nanibe jani*

*Lau rol dukhara dukhari*

*Kora hae gel pani.*

(The old woman said that the meat of the bird melted into water only the pumpkin remained in the curry)

*Hearing* her clever answer the anger of the old man dampened a bit. Another day during the first flood of the season in *kulsi* river people got busy in fishing. The old man succeeded in catching eight *kurhi* fishes and asked his wife to prepare fish *tenga with ou tenga* (a kind of citrous

21. Rabha, 2004:14-17
Bhubin Rabha, Loharghat
fruit used to prepare fish curry). Once again the same thing got repeated. She finished one fish after another while tasting the stuff. Getting nothing to eat, out of anger the old man asked-

Haye sakhini burhi
Ath kurhiya anilong mari
Anjat dekhu suda pani

(old woman, what happened to the eight fishes I caught?)

Clever woman replied-

Eh burha nakabide-
Burha-bule kinu hal?
Burhi- dui gel bil suwari
Burha- aru chay?
Burhi- basongte katongte duta gel khyay
Burha- aru sari?
Burhi- thakarar jhiyake nila duta karhi
Burha- aru dui?
Burhi- eta khala saru eta khala jui”

(out of the eight fishes two left for the lake itself, from remaining six two got lost/depleted while cleaning, two were snatched away by the village headman out of the four left, and out of the last two left, one is eaten by an innocent kid, and the other is burnt in fire)

The answer made him astonished but was really upset over the whole matter. He decided to teach his wife a lesson. One day he brought a big, ripe jackfruit to his home. From its smell itself the old woman’s mouth went watery. Realizing her greed the old man answered- “oi burhi, pasanti ghalanti tak nakhay tiranti” meaning women should not eat rotten fruit. And instead he ate the entire jackfruit in front of her. The greedy woman could only watch with eagerness in her eyes.

If you cheat someone, get ready to be cheated also. The old woman was shown as an extremely greedy person. She transgresses her role as a wife, a woman. Traditionally a woman is expected to wait for her husband to eat first, and then only she eats. But here she did not keep anything for her husband to eat. Rather her greed was such that she could not even wait for the cooking to finish. While tasting it she finished everything. Thus her behaviour was quite unlikely of a woman.
There was an old couple. They were issueless. The man never used to go out for fishing in the fields, ponds and lakes. Rather he used to work in his Bari (courtyard). The old woman used to go out for fishing generally. But once it so happened that by the grace of god she became gabhari (pregnant). At that time she could not go out for fishing. But she used to like fish very much. To fulfill his pregnant wife’s desire, the old man went for fishing. Although, he was an ediniya masuoi (first timer), he could successfully catch 8 nos. of Kurhi fish. Reaching home he asked his wife to clean and prepare fishes. He took bath and went out to roam around the village.

After she finished cooking she could not wait for her husband to return, rather she ate all the fishes herself. When the old man returned and sat for lunch, he did not get a single fish to eat. Astonished at this he asked his wife “what happened to the fishes I asked you to cook?”

The wife replied-

Mari anilong ath kurhiya
Duta gel bi suvariya
Teutu thakibo lagisil chay?
Kutungte basongte duta gel khyay
Teutu thakibo lagisil sari?
Gaor gauburha ahi duta loi gel karhi
Teutu thakibo lagisil dui?
Eta khale nabalok saliye,
Eta khale jui, kot puwa burha toi.

(out of the eight fishes two left for the lake itself, from remaining six two got lost/depleted while cleaning, two were snatched away by the village headman out of the four left, and out of the last two left, one is eaten by an innocent kid, and the other is burnt in fire)

This way answering cleverly she saved herself from the anger of her husband and also successfully managed to convince him.

The story teller Bhubin Rabha, Loharghat, analyzed it as saying if you know how to speak, how to use words in your favour, you can survive in difficult and extremely hard situation. Set in a Rabha household this tale shows women in
their day to day life. They cook, do all the household chores and also go out for fishing. When the old woman ate all the fishes there was an indirect hint at her greed but the narrator's sympathy lies with her as he mentioned about the fact that the woman got pregnant by god's grace. During pregnancy a woman craves for different food. The husband went to fish for the first time as she wanted to eat fish and could not go out herself for that. Traditionally a woman is given importance and care during pregnancy and this fact is reflected in this tale. Her husband and family try to keep her happy fulfilling her wishes to the extent possible.

Two versions of the tale reflect on an important point- woman was seen in sympathetic light in one version (may be due to her pregnancy at late age) and in another version her greed is highlighted.

4.5.4 Jilee kenekoi Hal (How Cicada was created)23

Once upon a time there lived a widow with her two daughters. They were very poor. One day the elder sister bagged some millet from someone else's field. While going for fishing, she asked her younger sister to prepare cake of rice (pitha) from the millet. The sister got busy in the act and prepared the cake of rice, though very few in numbers. The elder sister returned home to find a few cakes. This aroused her suspicion that the younger might have eaten some. She scolded her sister and asked her to say the truth. Finally out of suspicion, she cut her stomach in search of the rice cake, which was of course not to be found there. Thus the innocent younger sister died. The elder sister could realize her mistake. Out of pain and sorrow, she was turned into an insect and whenever there was sunshine, Jilee cries remembering her misdeed.

The story speaks of the suspicion of the elder sister towards her younger sister. Suspicion can prove to be fatal. As a negative quality it is associated with woman. Taking action in anger is dangerous. Some mistakes can't be corrected in life. Life once lost can't be brought back however much one repents. The story has thus a message to convey i.e. believing in your own family members is

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23. Hakacham, 2009:73
important in sustaining a relationship. In the kinship context one sister took the life of the other sister as she did not believe in whatever the younger sister said.

4.6 WOMEN AS PRIZE OR GIFT

There are many examples of fathers who regard daughters as their property, whom they can give away in marriage. The kings/fathers reveal a patriarchal system of affairs by offering their daughter's hands in marriage to the man who kills a dragon or some monster, as a reward for finding solutions to problems, for victory in tournament or game, supplying a precious thing or simply by winning the heart of the father by some act or deed. Sometimes the daughter is given to some animal (frog/snake) to fulfill some promise. The awesome patriarchal hierarchy of marriage and family, in other words the supreme authority of the father is not only clearly visible in both fairy tales and folktales but also in the teaching on the marriage in the didactic tales.

4.6.1 The King-Frog

There was an issueless old couple. Although old, the man still ploughed. In his own cultivated land he set big Khokas (bamboo-made fish trapping receptacle), and got sufficient fishes too. But for the last few days he failed to catch any fish. One day in his Khokas he found a bid “ganggang” frog. The old man was angry at seeing the frog. He brought home the frog and told his wife “look, this frog devours all the fishes that are entrapped in my khoka. Cook this frog. Today we shall eat its meat. After killing it, fry its flesh in oil. I shall take revenge on it this way”. Following her husband's direction the old lady came forward to kill the frog. The frog urged the woman “oh grandmother, I fervently beseech you not to kill me. I will earn my livelihood and sustain you like a son”. The old woman relented after listening to his repeated requests. She did not kill it, instead killed a chicken and fried it in high heat.

When the old man came home and sat for lunch, he proclaimed in pride, “oh, ganggang, by devouring you I have taken revenge on you. Oh! How much of our fish had you finished?” listening to this the frog began to giggle. Taken aback the old man asked “who is giggling there?

Sarma, 2010:11-17
The wife said "no, no one has giggled". The husband persisted saying that somebody has giggled. The wife stuck to her point and said "no, no, there is no one to laugh. It is perhaps your deed, you simpleton". The old man resumed having meal but the frog continued to giggle. The old man stood up and tried to find out who had ridiculed him. The wife now got scared. She held him by the hand and told him in detail the story about the frog. Still when the frog persistently began to beseech, "oh grandpa, please don't kill me. I swear by God. I will look after you like a son". When both the frog and the old woman requested him again and again the old man gave in. He asked the frog what work he will do for him, as he is not a human being. The frog replied "oh, grandpa, although I am not a man, I shall be able to do all kinds of work just like a man does".

As promised the frog went for ploughing. The old man on the other hand remained busy making ridges and uprooting weeds in the field. As soon as ploughing was finished, the frog returned with a pair of bull.

Once during rainy season came heavy flood. The surging water inundated the Bao (a kind of paddy grown on flooded land) paddy fields. The frog ploughed the field on the high lands. At that time the king along with his sentries was rowing through the paddy field. The frog perching on the handle of the plough began to banter with the king's band. He asked: 'who are these rascals that go rowing through the paddy crop? They have, as though taken to excrement". The king and his sentries looked all around but found none. They could only see a pair of oxen bound with a plough and a yoke. Having seen no one, the king loaded his boat with the pair of oxen and the yoke and rowed homewards. The frog felt extremely distressed. But he promised the old couple that he would bring back the pair of oxen and the yoke by hook or crook. He was determined to do so.

As he set out for his mission, he met the king of bees and snakes and narrated his story of distress. Hearing this they promised him all assistance. Accordingly they planned that snakes will keep hiding around the precincts of the palace and the bee brothers will keep hanging in the trees of the vicinity. The frog will have to go directly to the king and demand from him the return of the pair of bullocks and the yoke. If he does not agree the frog would proclaim war immediately. Then they will attack the King's sentries.
When the frog raised his demand the king dismissed him as insignificant frog. When he waged war, the king still did not give him much importance. Instead he laughed at him. But in the war the King was defeated. Helped by the bees and snakes the frog became irresistible. Being elated at the situation, the frog shot a volley of questions to the king, "oh king, where is your valour? Where is your strength? Tell me are you ready to make a truce; whether you will return me my bullocks, plough and yoke? Utterly perplexed and helpless the king agreed to make a truce. The frog then agreed to a ceasefire. But as a condition for the truce the frog wanted to marry the king's daughter. Before revealing his condition he made the king take an oath that he would abide by the condition.

The king swooned on hearing the frog's proposal but recovered after being nursed. There was no backing out. There was loud wailing. The princess too fainted. When she recovered her marriage was accomplished with pomp and ceremony and she was send to her in laws place with royal gifts and farewell.

The old couple unaware of what has happened was sitting worried for their grand son, the frog. They were astounded when the big procession entered their courtyard. As ordered by the frog the princess prostrated before the old couple to offer her regards.

On the night of consummation the frog was transformed into a young man. And he revealed that he was actually a widow's son and became a frog because a tantric mendicant sprinkled water from his water pot on him out of rage as he was a restless young boy at that time that irritated the mendicant. As a remedy he said "you will live the life of a frog. In flourishing youth, when you copulate with a young woman, you will be transformed into a man." Thus on that night he became a man. After that he searched for his mother and found her too. Every one including the parents of the princess, the old couple became happy at the turn of event. The king vested the new couple with the mantle of supreme power of the entire kingdom. He was coroneted and was called the Frog-king.

We see here an old childless couple. The old woman was so affectionate by heart that when the frog requested her not to kill (for cooking) him she just could not proceed. Her motherly instinct aroused and she tried to protect him from her husband who wanted to take revenge on him by killing her. Finally both
the old lady and the frog requested him to have mercy on him. The frog promised him that he would look after and sustain them as their son. Thus the frog won them around as a son, promising love and care for them. The old couple was childless and thus might have experienced the sorrows of childlessness and must have longing for the child. In India a childless couple is considered terribly unfortunate. So when the frog offered to be their son in lieu of sparing his life, they were happy that they have got support in their old age. It is every couple's dream that they have a child. Though late in their life they could realize their dream through the frog.

As the story developed, the king lost the war with the frog and agreed to give his daughter to the frog in marriage as a condition of the truce. The king gave his daughter in marriage to a frog to save his life and kingdom. The woman is here treated as a commodity to be bartered in exchange of his happiness and safety.

We can here refer to Luce Irigaray, a prominent author in contemporary French feminism and continental philosophy who in her work named “Cosi Fan Tutti” (in This Sex which is Not One), argues that phallus is not a symbolic category, but is ultimately an extension of a reinforcement of Freud’s description of the world according to a one sex-model (men exist and women are a variation of men). She also maintained that 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. The phallus is the privileged master signifier of the symbolic order. One must have a relationship to the phallus if one is to attain social existence.

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. The rest of the world which is defined as ‘other’ has meaning only in relation to the possessor of the phallus. Thus Irigaray believes that men are subjects and women are “the other” of these subjects (non-subjective, supporting matter).
Thus as a possessor of the phallus, a frog (a male) like a man can wish or desire a woman as his bride. With the phallus men can inscribe on women's body. She is treated as a commodity by her father, the king because as a king, his duty is to protect his kingdom from the enemy. As a condition in the truce with the frog, the princess was treated as a commodity, as an object rather than an individual.

Irigaray believes that all women have historically been associated with the role of "mother", whether or not a woman is a mother in reality; her identity is always defined according to that role. This is in contrast to men who are associated with culture and subjectivity. While excluded from subjectivity, women served as their unacknowledged support. In other words while women are not considered full subjects, society itself could not function without their contribution. She states that western culture itself is founded upon a primary sacrifice of the mother, and all women through her. In this tale the future of the king and his kingdom lied on the sacrifice made by the daughter. She was treated as a commodity in barter. But however unacknowledged her contribution remains, without her support the king (father) would have lost his kingdom.

There are certain symbolic and ritualistic ways in which the Ego deals with the demands of the Id. This sort of personal symbolism is the product of a process whereby an item becomes a substitute reality to satisfy the necessarily repressed demands and desires of the unconscious. One common form of this personal symbolic process is called symbolic object for the real object of the Id's desires. Another is symbolic transference: the substitution of another person for the real person the Id desires. Thus the girl was made happy as her wish is fulfilled at the end. Although she was silent at the decision of marriage to a frog and could only cry passively, there was latent desire in her. At the end her desire was fulfilled as the frog turns out to be a handsome hero. Thus the story is a kind of wish fulfillment for the girl, and projection of women's psychological longing for a better life.

Again if we follow the dominant patriarchal model that is prevalent in our society, we see that the princess was honoured for being obedient, submissive
and virtuous in the expected line. She was made happy as she followed her father's whims silently. Through this kind of tale male hegemony is perpetuated and sustained. From childhood a girl is made to believe that father's word is the last word and whatever he decides for her is final and she needs to accept these without any complain.

Folk tale generally imparts a moral lesson. Sometimes it is overt in the narration and sometimes it is done indirectly. This kind of tale also gives a certain kind of inspiration to its followers particularly young girls. There is a message that if you follow the dictates of the father (a male figure) you will be rewarded at the end.

Again the story also reflects tradition and custom of the society. After marriage the frog gets the status of the husband and as a traditional wife the princess prostrated before the old couple along with her husband frog as asked by him. Status of the husband is important irrespective of who he is. One way this shows the superior position of the husband and on the other hand it also reflects on the tradition bound society. Bowing down to the old couple to seek their blessing by the newly wedded couple is a custom in our society. This also shows the mark of honour given to elders and close family members in different auspicious moments of family life, like, birth, marriage etc. This is acceptance of their seniority as well as acceptance of the new bride/groom by the elders. By giving blessings the old order passes the responsibility and therefore the power to the new bride.
reserved youth and soon began to show complete indifference to the world and its ordinary conventions. His mind was inquisitive and analytical. He ardently reasoned out everything that came within his ken.

With age Mithdeibesa became even more reserved, solitary and contemplative. His parents were quite alarmed at his unusual behaviour. So when he reached the age of 27, they got him married to a beautiful and accomplished girl of the Marak sect. It was their secret hope that the stern realities of married life would change him into a practical man of the world. Mithdeibesa was never lacking in conjugal happiness; but his attention was constantly fixed on the mysteries of birth and death, pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow. Occasional reprimands from his wife had little effect in making him give up his pensive mood.

With the passing years thoughtful Mithdeibesa became more solitary and silent than ever. Often in the midst of his profound meditations he lost sight of himself, his wife and children. He loved his children dearly; but the humdrum of home life with all its ties galled him. There was no solace in worldly life which to him was stale and unprofitable. Homely engagement proved a great impediment to his lifelong desire of devoting himself to spiritual things. Therefore he decided to leave his wife and children. But before leaving he labored hard to accumulate enough food, cloth and other supplies to last for his wife and children for a long time to come.

Once in his ascetic life, in the purple dimness of the tropical night, he seemed to see a shadowy, ghost-like figure coming towards him. It was a colossal figure of a hairy, wild looking man. The colossal man was the materialized figure of a benign spirit known as Jinnee. The spirit was one of the immortals. It could make itself visible or invisible to human beings at will. It never willingly harmed any human being, but bore kindly thoughts towards mankind as a whole. Jinnee provided Mithdeibesa food and told him,

“\[I\] come to help thee. Not only can I bring the messages and things from the remotest places in no time but I can at once transport thee invisible wherever thou desire to go. I can make thee visible to thy fellow at thy sweet will.”

Mithdeibesa then desired to see his relations, family and friends once more but himself remaining invisible. Immediately the spirit bodily
transported him to his former home. He found his wife remarried to another man and muttered:

"It is her carnal desire that urged to seek that husband or the combined creative urge of man and woman that brought them together. It’s natural!". Next, he saw that his children were all well and happy, thus preferred to leave them undisturbed.

One day three men from Mithideibesa’s village happened to meet him in the forest. Although an anchorite Mithdeibesa was not a misanthropist (general dislike of people). With the help of Jinnee he arranged for their food and shelter.

Once while discussing on ultimate realities, Mithdeibesa felt a great change taking place within himself. He realized that his body was but a particle of dust in the self acting whole. He asked Jinnee: "are there any other people who have forsaken home, wife and children in search of Truth as I have done?" And when Mithdeibesa wanted to know where they dwell and what do they do? And expressed desire to go there, Jinnee immediately took him to the wonderful solitary caves in the great Chuma Mountains.

During my field visit in the Pilingkata area of Kamrup (Metro), Holdesh N. Sangma while talking on the story told that the Garos believe in spirit like Jinnee with special power. He also said that Mithdeibesa could accept his wife’s second marriage after he left her as natural because he did not have any interest in family life or material life. No doubt for a little while he thought over it and murmured within himself that it might have happened as the result of her carnal desire or liking between both man and woman. But he admitted it as natural. This fact did not bother him much as he was more interested in understanding the mysteries of the world. He himself preferred a secluded life. Since family life was creating an impediment to his Quest of truth and greater realities of life, he accepted her marriage liberally. In a way he was relieved to see her as well as her children happily settled. Sangma also said in this connection that Garo society is quite liberal in accepting second marriage and widow marriage in the absence of the husband/wife. Here women enjoy comparatively better freedom regarding her life. Mithdeibesa did not criticize his wife’s act of marrying as immoral. This is in one way a reflection on his broader mind and also can be understood as a
and virtuous in the expected line. She was made happy as she followed her father’s whims silently. Through this kind of tale male hegemony is perpetuated and sustained. From childhood a girl is made to believe that father’s word is the last word and whatever he decides for her is final and she needs to accept these without any complain.

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