Chapter IX

ORAL LITERATURE: TALES, BALLADS, RHYMES, RIDDLES, ETC.

I Tales

As in other parts of India, a big number of tales are current in different parts of the district of Goalpara and the reciting of tales is a pleasant pastime, especially for old persons and children. The tales are of various usual types—wonder tales, humorous tales, tales of cleverness or cheating, didactic tales, etiological tales and myths. A few of the tales associated with religious ceremonies seem to be of a romantic nature. A sampling of different types of tales has been given below. An attempt has also been made to identify some of the tales in terms of the Aarne-Thompson Type-Index.

(a) Wonder tales, full of romantic or magical incidents.

(i) Seolāi Bāli

Seolai Bali is a merchant’s daughter and she is married to another merchant. Once Seolai’s husband goes on a trading voyage leaving her alone at home. The lonely Seolai writes a letter to her sister and engages a crow as its bearer. While flying on her errand, the crow sees the silk-cotton flowers. She thinks that the trees that have such beautiful flowers must bear wonderful fruits. She decides to wait till the silk-cotton fruits ripen. But when mature, the fruits burst open and the cotton flies all around.

Tales are called upkāthā (Skt. upakathā) in some areas and kechchā (Urdu gissā) in others.
Meanwhile, the merchant returns home and on finding out that Seolāi had sent a letter, grows suspicions. A scratch on Seolāi's breast, which she had received while plucking flowers, deepens his suspicion and Seolāi is driven away from home. The desolate Seolai is met on the way by a god and a goddess who take pity on her. Through their blessings the husband and wife are reunited.

(ii) The Story of the Wicked Co-wife (Type 511)

A wood-cutter has two wives. The older wife has a daughter and the younger one has a son and a daughter. The two co-wives hate each other but the younger one is particularly jealous and wicked. One day while the two are bathing at the river, the younger one pushes the older woman into the water. The latter prays to the water god and is turned into a tortoise. The wicked wife tells the wood-cutter that her co-wife has gone to her mother's place. On inquiry the wood-cutter finds that the older wife is not with her mother but the other wife carefully conceals the truth from him.

Meanwhile the daughter of the older wife is maltreated by the step-mother. She is given very little to eat. And yet she gets plumper and healthier. But her own children get thinner and sicklier. Actually the older wife who is living in the river in the form of a tortoise has been feeding her daughter while she goes to the river for her bath. The step-mother sends her two children to spy upon the step-daughter. They see everything and report to their mother who beats and scolds the step-daughter.
After a few days, she feigns illness and takes to bed. She tells her husband that she has aches and pains all over her body and that she will be cured only if she can eat tortoise meat. She also tells him where to find the tortoise. The wood-cutter engages fishermen to catch the tortoise. The tortoise tells them her story and entreats them not to kill her. The startled fishermen report the matter to the wood-cutter who in turn tells everything to the wicked wife; but she is adamant and demands that the tortoise be killed and its meat served to her. The wood-cutter brings the tortoise. This time the tortoise tells the whole story directly to the wood-cutter who sees everything and punishes the younger wife. At the advice of the older wife the wood-cutter worships the water-god and the wife gets back her human form. The water-god advises the wood-cutter to beware of the wicked younger wife.

The above tale is sometimes used in a religious context but the following two are exclusively connected with the ritualistic story-telling that forms a part of Subachani Puja proceedings.

(iii) The Story of the Wonderful Powers of Goddess Subachani

A milk-maid has been performing Subachani Puja for seven years. The day she goes to the market to sell curds entrusting the daughter-in-law with the duty of performing the Puja. But the latter forgets. The pots in which the milk-maid is carrying the curds break on the way. She understands that it is due to the non-performance of the puja. She brings home the broken pieces and next morning as soon as she performs the puja, the broken pieces get
joined together and the pots come back to shape. A chained con-

dict who is being taken to the river for his bath sees the power 
of the puja. He touches the flowers and basil leaves thrown into 
the river after the puja and his chains automatically get loosened. 
The matter is reported to the King, who is piqued at the power 
acquired by the milk-maid through her puja. He sends for her and 
asks her to bring back to life an elephant that died years ago. The 
milk-maid goes home and prays to the goddess with great earnestness. 
The goddess appears to her in a dream and tells her that all will 
be well. She goes back to the King and asks him to make preparations 
for the puja. It is done and the bones of the dead elephant are 
piled up. After the priests finish the scriptural rites, the milk-
maid starts her prayers. She sends for a old woman who knows how 
to recite the ritualistic tales but the latter refuses. Then the 
goddess herself comes in the guise of an old woman and as the rites 
are duly gone through, the dead elephant comes back to life. The 
King is greatly impressed and he also offers puja. Meanwhile, the 
old woman who had refused to participate comes and requests for the 
continuation of the puja in atonement. She had lost her husband 
and seven sons because of her refusal. At the end of the puja there 
is contentment all around.

But the King again chains the convict who prays to the 
goddess for help. The goddess is offended and appearing in a dream 
threatens the King with dire consequences if the convict is not re-
leased forthwith. The convict not only gets his freedom but his 
marrige is also performed. The newly-married couple is sent in a 
litter to the widowed mother of the convict. The overjoyed mother 
asks how all this became possible and is told about the goddess.
She goes to the milk-maid, learns all about the puja and together with the daughter-in-law starts worshipping Subachani regularly. They live happily ever after.

(iv) The Story of Labra-Labri

A fisher-woman and a milk-maid are great friends. Once it rains for seven days at a stretch. The fish and the curds get bad. The two friends decide to perform Subachani Puja if the weather clears up. Soon the sky is clear and the friends go to the market with their stale wares. The King's father's shraddha is being performed and his men buy up all their things. The two are greatly impressed. They buy provisions from the market and perform Subachani Puja on the riverside. They partake of the prasad and go home.

An evil-minded sycophant sees this. He reports to the King that the milk-maid has eaten from the same container as the fisher-woman (who is unclean). The milk-maid is sent for and asked to explain her conduct. She replies that the fisher-woman and herself had performed the puja at the bidding of the King himself and that they had only taken prasad. The truth of her version is soon verified and the man who had given the false report is publicly disgraced and banished from the kingdom.

The following tales, although containing magical and romantic incidents, have a didactic touch.
There is a righteous King named Subal. One day he ponders over the fate of man: why is it that he as a King is living in comfort and luxury and many others are living lives of hardship and misery. He asks his minister to explain the reason for this. The minister suggests that the King must have performed some good deeds in his earlier life. The King wants to know what exactly those good deeds are. The minister replies that only some sage or seer could tell that. So the King announces that anyone who could tell him about the good deeds of his previous life would be given half of his kingdom. On hearing this a very poor old Brahman decides to try his luck. He sets out with some provisions and starts a penance under a tree. God appears before him and gives him clue following which the King could recollect the happenings of his previous life. The Brahman goes to the King and after extracting from the King a deed of gift of the promised half of the kingdom, divulges the clue. A blind calf belonging to a certain person could tell him the story of his previous life. Accordingly the King goes to the blind calf who leads him to an evil spirit. The spirit in its turn leads him to the minister's daughter. Finally the minister's daughter answers his query: The King in his previous life was a poor man and supported his family by begging. One day when the family was about to take the mid-day meal, two guests arrived and asked for meals. The daughter-in-law took two plates inside and the man's wife and son ate up the two plates without waiting for any body. The guests took only one plate between them and the remaining plate was shared by the man and the daughter-in-law. The merit of this good deed of offering one's own meal to guests had
made the poor man into the King. The selfish wife and son had become the evil spirit and the blind calf respectively.

The King remembers everything. He also recognizes the minister's daughter to be the daughter-in-law of the previous life. Immediately he goes to the minister and arranges the marriage of his son with the girl.¹

(vi) Tulārāj Kanya

Tulārāj Kanya is the daughter-in-law of a merchant. The merchant is a very good man, but his wife is most wicked and treats their daughter-in-law very cruelly. The merchant dies and the family faces acute financial troubles. The mother advises the son to take up his father's business. The son sets out on a trading voyage and before leaving, requests his mother to take good care of his wife. But as soon as the son is away, the wicked mother turns most oppressive. In desperation Tulā thinks of committing suicide; but the thought of her loving husband restrains her. One night she flees from the room in which she was kept confined. She comes to a forest and loses her way. As she is waiting, frightened and bewildered, two merchants come that way and after learning about her sad plight take her to a rich man's house where the travelling merchants usually take shelter. The rich man advises her to stay at his place as her husband was likely to come to his house for shelter on his way back home. Tulārāj agrees, and as the kind-hearted rich man has no children, she is treated by him as a daughter. One day Tulārāj's husband comes to that house for rest and shelter and Tulārāj recognizes him. When the young man prepares to leave, the rich man suggests that the young man should stay with him as his son. The

¹ This story has an Assamese parallel. — See T-Devi: Sandhiyar Sadhu, pp. 60-77
young man would have none of it because, as he says, his mother and wife are waiting for him. When they are thus arguing, Tulā appears before them to the great astonishment of her husband. However, when the whole story of Tulā's plight is related to him, he becomes so indignant that he decides not to go back to his mother. And at the insistence of the eager of rich man, Tulā and her husband stay on with him as his son and daughter-in-law.

(b) Tales of Cleverness or Cheating

(i) The Old Woman and the Animals (Type 122F)

The old woman goes to her married daughter's place and is met on the way by a tiger, a bear and a fox in turn, each of whom wants to eat her. The woman avoids each of them by saying that ill-fed and emaciated as she is, she will make a poor meal. To each of them she makes the promise that she will offer herself on her return from her daughter's place, well-fed and cared for, making a better meal. At the end of her stay with her daughter, the old woman remembers the animals and the promises she had made. Mother and daughter hit upon a trick with which to fool the waiting animals. The old woman is put inside a hollow gourd shell. The daughter gives it a mighty kick and the gourd rolls its way towards the old woman's house. Both the tiger and the bear fail to discover the old woman when the gourd approaches them and in disgust each kicks the gourd, thus helping the homebound old woman. But the fox sees through the game and breaks the gourd-shell. Out comes the old woman to face the demand for the fulfilment of the promise. The sharp-witted old woman, who knows that she is not far from home, fools the fox into allowing her to sing a song as the fulfilment of her last wish. The
song is nothing but a call to her ferocious pet dogs who immediately rush forward and chase the fox who runs for all he is worth. This story is widely popular both in Bengal and Assam.

(ii) Jalā and Tentan: The Fool and the Trickster (Cp. Type 1030)

(Jalā means a fool or numskull and Tentan means the clever fellow or trickster. There are many Jalā-Tentan tales which have the same motif as the Ajalā-Teton tales found in other parts of Assam.\(^1\))

Jalā and Tentan are friends. One day they come to a rice-field. At the suggestion of Tentan, they decide to steal the ripe paddy. Accordingly they cut and take away the rice-stalks. While sharing the booty, Tentan so arranges things that he gets the top portions of the stalks (with the paddy seeds) and Jalā gets the bottom portions (i.e., the straws). Jalā goes home with his share. But his wife sees how he has been deceived and asks him to bring the top portions in future.

Next time the two friends steal sugar canes from a field. This time Jalā demands the top portions and Tentan readily agrees. When Jalā goes home with the useless front portions, he is told that he has again been deceived. Next they steal a cow. Tentan fools Jalā into accepting the front portion of the cow while keeping the hind portion for himself. Jalā has to feed the cow and Tentan enjoys the milk.

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1. See P. Goswami: Ballads and Tales of Assam, pp.110
(c) Tales of Humour

Some of the Jalā-Tentan tales are recited and enjoyed for the element of humour contained in them. A specimen of this type is given below. Of the other tales told mostly for the humorous material particular mention may be made of the tales about the Brahman and his attendant, in which the lowly but clever attendant scores over his high-born master as also of that about Pharing the All knowing who rises to the status of and maintains his reputation as the all-knowing through a series of extra-ordinary chances.¹

(i) The Queer Ways of Jalā

Jalā gets curious about when one dies. He is told that when black and red substances come out from one's behind, one should be taken as dead. Jalā was sitting near the loom of a woman who was weaving with red and black yarns. Some yarns stick to his behind and Jalā decides that he is dead. He asks people to bury him. He is buried with the head sticking out. Thieves come that way. One of them wipes away something offensive from his foot on the head. Jalā speaks out. The startled thieves talk to him and find out that he is a fool. They dig him out and take him in their stealing expedition. He is made to go inside a house and asked to bring out heavy things. He brings such things as a big earthen pot and the stone for grinding spices. They take him to the King's palace where he behaves equally queerly. At last he beats upon a drum of the palace. Everybody wakes up, the thieves run away and Jalā is caught.

¹. These tales are practically the same as those popular in other parts of Assam. - See Ibid, pp.103-106.
Here are two more tales of humour.

(ii) The Frog that Marries the Princess

There is an old childless couple. One day the old man goes to plough his field where a frog calls out to him and begs to be taken home. The old man does so but when he expresses his desire to kill it for its meat, his wife dissuades him. The frog remains with them as their son and does chores for them. One day while the frog is ploughing the field with a pair of bullocks, the King's men pass through the field on elephants. The frog gives them a thundering from under a clod. The bewildered men report the matter to the King who comes to verify and gets the same treatment. He gets the old man arrested and taken him away. The frog comes home, takes quantities of fried grains and distributes them among the insects. Thus equipped with a big army of insects he challenges the King who is compelled not only to sue for peace but also to give away the princes in marriage to the frog along with half of his kingdom. It later turns out the frog is none other than a prince in disguise.

This tale has several variants popular in different parts of Assam.

(iii) The Two Sisters Chāti and Māti

Chāti and Māti are two orphaned sisters. One day they have a longing for cakes, but poor as they are, they have no provisions for making cake. With great difficulty they collect the materials, like rice, molasses etc. And when they go to collect fuel from the forest they are challenged by a tiger who extorts an invitation to share the cakes with them. The cakes are made and the two sisters
eat up the whole lot except a broken and burnt piece. When they remember the tiger and his proposed visit, they get terrified. They hurriedly put the burnt cake and a few others made of lime at the entrance of their house and hide inside a bin. The tiger arrives and pleased with the taste of the first cake goes on to eat the others. The lime burns his mouth and he gets furious. At that moment one of the sisters urinates, passes wind and eases herself with such noise that the tiger takes fright and flees in a hurry never to come back.

This tale is a great favourite with young children who consider the last portion very funny. It is popular all over lower Assam.

(a) Myths and Etiological Tales

It has been seen that some of the cult songs like Marāi Puja songs, Bās Puja songs, Sonārāy songs and Kati Puja songs are based on popular myths. The Bās Puja songs in particular contain various creation myths however rudimentary in nature.

A few of the other myths popular in the district, like the following two centring round the elephant, have an etiological element. They are connected with the popular belief that the elephant is a Brahman woman transformed into the animal.¹

1. See Chap. VIII, section II(c).
(i) The Myth of the Elephant

There was an extremely poor young Brahman couple. But the two loved each other very much and were happy in spite of their poverty. The husband earned a little by doing priestly duties. The wife prepared sacred threads and fed wild animals and birds with whatever she could spare.

Once the husband went to perform the shrāddha ceremony of a rich Brahman who had left a fortune for his widow and only daughter. The daughter was ugly and evil-minded. But the cunning widow lured the young Brahman with the riches and tricked him into marrying her ugly and wicked daughter. The poor man now became fabulously rich and at the instigation of the new wife started neglecting and maltreating the old wife. The old wife lived in the old hut while a big mansion was built for the Brahman and the new wife. The unfortunate old wife also had to do various chores for them. She used to go to the river to draw water for them and to cry in desolation. Her tears mingled with the river water. The King of the elephants who used to drink water from the same river down-stream found the water salty and unsavoury. On inquiry he found that it was due to the tears of the unhappy woman. He went to her and asked her to leave the cruel world of man and to join the elephants. The woman hesitated but suddenly a flood came and washed away not only her hut but also the big mansion with the Brahman and the wicked wife. The woman had nowhere to turn to. So the elephant-king lifted her on his back along with the copper-pitcher (tām kalashi) she was carrying on her head and the golden spouted water-jar (jñāri) in her hand. She was taken to the land of the elephants, where she was installed as their queen. Then the elephant King poured on her
water of seven streams of waterfalls from seven jars, and the human form of the Brahman woman changed into that of an elephant girl (hastir kanyā). The copper-pitcher on her head became a sign on her forehead and the spout of the golden jhāri became her trunk.¹

(ii) According to the other story, more purely etiological, the elephant was formerly a very poor unlucky woman. When life for her became unbearable, she prayed to God that she might somehow be rescued from her miserable human plight. She was then pounding rice with a wooden mortar and a pestle. Her prayer was granted and she was transformed into an elephant. The feet took the shape of the mortar, the trunk that of the pestle, the winnowing tray became the ears, the long stick for stirring the grains became the tail and the belly was shaped like the big bin for storing grain.

There are many such short etiological pieces, a few of which are given below:

(iii) How the Crane Became White

A young girl was ill-treated by her step-mother. She had to wash heaps of cloth. She made the cloths as white as she could but the step-mother was never satisfied. In desperation the girl prayed that her life be ended. In answer to her prayers she was transformed into the white crane, symbolizing the whiteness of the cloths washed by her.

(iv) Why a Particular Bird Cries So Desperately

The bird was originally a very poor widow. She had fourteen sons and she was maintaining them with great difficulty. But as

ill-luck would have it, all the fourteen sons died and the grief-stricken mother went mad. She was later transformed into the bird. She still cries heart-breakingly about her fate:

mor choiḍya put
mor kisher dukh ?

I have fourteen sons
What care have I?

There is also a story about the dove and its notes.

(v) Why the Cobra and the Krait are Ill-disposed to Each other

The krait and the cobra were once husband and wife. The cobra was cool-headed while the krait was extremely ill-tempered. One day the two were extremely thirsty. The cobra went in search of water and found a boy playing with a bowl of water. He drank from the bowl while the innocent boy gave him blows in his play. The understanding cobra did no harm to the boy. When the wife learned about where the husband had got water, she also went to drink. Knowing the nature of the crate the cobra warned her and made her promise that she would not lose her temper even if the playing boy hit her. But the krait forgot her promise and as the boy hit her while playing, she bit him and the boy died. The cobra was so disgusted that he not only abandoned the krait but started avoiding its company since then.

Some very interesting myths are current among the tribal people of the district. The following one is a beautiful specimen with a charming quality of fantasy.
(vi) The Myth of the Kārhā-nal, the Bamboo-pipe

(The Kārhā-nal is a peculiar bamboo pipe used by the Ra-bhas. Its music is very dear to them. They have the following mythical story about the divine origin of the pipe and the music produced on it.)

The King of heaven, in consultation with his councillors, decides to teach music to the human beings. Rishi, the seniormost of the divine ministers, is entrusted with the job. Accordingly, Rishi finds out four heavenly princes who are fit for the job and after giving them prolonged advice as to how to conduct themselves with restraint and dignity and warning them against rashness, sends them to earth with the assignment. The four princes come to earth and while enjoying the beauty of nature they come to the bank of a river near a village. It so happens that a group of young women come to fetch water in that river for a marriage that is being solemnised in the village. The princes are completely charmed by the beauty of the maidens but as they try to touch the latter, they are turned into nal bamboo (noluā), bijuli bamboo (choluā), kākoā bamboo (holunlungā) and water (jolunlungā) respectively. These four objects start playing such a divine music that the young maidens start dancing to it as if enchanted. The unusual delay of the maidens attracts the attention of the people at the marriage ceremony but those who come to inquire also join in the frenzied dance.

Then an old wise man comes to the scene and prays to Rishi. His prayer is answered and he grasps the whole situation. He cuts the three bamboos and also takes some of the water. The music stops and so does the dancing. The party goes back to the village with
the things collected by the old man. The old man makes sacrifices to Rishi and receives an oracle indicating how the divine music could be produced from the objects. Accordingly, a long piece of the nal bamboo is taken and holes are made into its joints with the bijulīt bamboo (thus producing a long cylindrical pipe). A ring made of the kākoā bamboo is fitted to the pipe and the pipe is then cleaned with water. And after the old man explains the whole thing to the assemblage, air is blown into the pipe: out comes the most enchanting music from it. The people are intoxicated with it and start dancing in ecstasy. Since then the music of the kārhā-nal has been the endless source of joy to the Rabha people and it always makes them forget their sorrow.¹

II Ballads

(a) Cult-songs with a story element

Since most of the Marai Puja songs, Bas Puja songs, Kati Puja songs and Sonaray songs are songs that tell stories or narratives that are sung to simple melodies, it can be said that they all have a ballad-like character; but in most of them, the ritualistic and cult character is much more dominating than the narrative.

Some pure ballads, sung by wandering minstrels and other singers, are, however, to be heard occasionally in the district. One of the most important of these, popular particularly in the western parts of the district, is the song of Maynamati, connected with the

Nath cult. The Nath cult, as has been indicated earlier, must have been fairly influential in Goalpara in the past. But apart from the song of Maynamati not much literary material connected with the Nath cult is to be found in these parts.\(^1\) The version of the ballad is similar to those collected by Dr Grierson and others from Rangpur and other parts of North Bengal.

(i) The Story of Maynamati and Gopichand

Maynamati is married to King Manikchandra who later weds a number of younger maids and turns out Mayna. Mayna, who is an expert in the yoga lore, comes to her husband when he is on his deathbed. She tries to save him from death but fails. The King dies and Mayna, who is pregnant, mounts on the funeral pyre of her husband. She is, however, not burnt. In time a son called Gopichand is born to her. When Gopichand grows up, he is married to two young maidens, Aduna and Paduna, with whom the young prince leads a life of pleasure and enjoyment. Mayna has a prescience that such a life

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1. Bengali literature has quite a lot of material associated with the Nath cult, including several versions of the story of Gopichand and Maynamati. The bulk of this material has been current in North and East Bengal. — See S. Dasgupta: *Obscure Religious Cults*, pp.367-361.

It has sometimes been suggested that the three famous Assamese ballads *Janaagabharur Git*, *Phulkowarar Git* and *Manikowar Git* could have some connection with the ballad of Gopichand and Maynamati. But apart from the similarity of the names of some characters and the superficial similarity of some situations, there is very little in common between the stories of the Assamese ballads and the legend of Gopichand and Maynamati. — See P. Goswami: *Ballads and Tales of Assam*, pp.33-50.
of pleasure would mean Gopichānd's death at the age of eighteen.
In order to avert such a fate, she advises her son to renounce the
world and to become a sannyasin under Hāri Siddhā. Not only does
the young prince vehemently oppose the suggestion but counselled
by the young wives, even starts suspecting the mother's character.
Maynā is made to undergo several ordeals, all of which she passes
successfully. At last the young Gopichānd is convinced of the
genuineness of the good intentions of his mother and agrees to take
up asceticism. He is entrusted to the care of Hāri Siddhā who
sells him to a prostitute called Hirā. Hirā inflicts indignities
on him for refusing to submit to her amorous desires. After long
twelve years the prince is rescued by Hāri Siddhā. When he returns
home, he is at first not recognised by the queens. However, finally
his identity is established and all is well again.

(b) Romantic tales told in song and drama

There is a fairly big number of romantic tales which are
not related in prose but are always sung. Sometimes they are also
dramatically presented in the local folk-play form known as pālā
gān, kechchā-bandī gān or simply dotra-gān. Even though characters,
dialogues and other extraneous material are freely introduced in
this form, the main narratives remain the same. As they are stories
told in song, they can also be classed as ballads.

Many of these ballads are the common heritage of North
Bengal and Goalpara. A few of which seem to have crossed over in
comparatively recent times contain unmistakable East Bengal elements.

1. See Chap. XI, Sec. I(b).
(i) **Maruchmati Kanya**

Twelve fairies from Indra's court come down to earth for a bath in a river. A young man sees them and is bewitched by their charm. He steals the clothes of one of them, who cannot go back to heaven. She is born as a female child in a poor wood-cutter's home. When she grows up she is married to a son of a very rich man. Maruchmati, for that is her name, remembers her heavenly home and wants to go back. Her sisters also contemplate her return to them. But the husband is too fond of her to let her go. The wives of the six brothers of the husband are jealous of her and they make her blind. At the end of twelve years Maruchmati tries to leave for heaven but her husband prevents her by clutching at her clothes. Thrice the sisters-in-law reduce him to ashes and thrice he is brought back to life by a holy man. When at last Maruchmati rides a chariot in her bid to go back to heaven, the husband hangs on to one of the wheels of the chariot and is carried to heaven where he is happily united with his wife.

(ii) **Aran Badshah**

Aran Badshah is the son of a merchant. His wife is Pankhamati. After his father's death, Aran wants to go out as a trader but his wife would not let him go. Finally she allows him to leave only after receiving a solemn promise from him that he would not fall a prey to the charms of some other woman. In course of his trading voyage Aran comes to the kingdom of Grishing Rā, whose daughter Phulmati sees him in the river ghāt and falls in love with him. Smearing herself with mud, she complains to her father that Aran has thrown mud at her. The King gets him arrested and brought to the
court. But when he pronounces the death sentence, Phulmati begs for the life of the accused. The King sportingly asks Phulmati to conduct the trial, which she does. Not only is the accused freed but he is also made to marry Phulmati. When Aran goes back home with his new wife, she is cursed by the former wife Pānkhāmati. Phulmati is turned into a stone. Now, Phulmati was actually a heavenly maiden and it was only through a curse that she had been born as a princess on earth. The fairies learn about her fate. They revive her to her former self and take her away to heaven.

(c) Bāramāsī

The bāramāsi songs, a number of which are extant in the district, are also songs that generally contain some story elements and may thus be classed as ballads. Technically, however, they are all concerned with the moods of the twelve months. The bāramāsī are songs of sorrow and lamentation, mostly dealing with the predicaments of a young wife from mouth to mouth throughout the year.¹

1. Similar songs depicting the sentiments of love-lorn women, and occasionally of men, through twelve, six, eight or four months form parts of the literary traditions in different languages in India, particularly in Hindi and Bengali in which many individual poets have based their compositions on that tradition. — See S. P. Bhattacharya: Bharatiya Sāhitye Bāramāsyā. The book contains a fairly big collection of such songs in different languages. (pp.111ff)

It may be pointed out that songs closely akin to the Goal-para bāramāsī in theme, content and structure are found both in North Bengal and in Kamrup district of Goalpara. In some cases even the languages are similar. Also, a number of compositions found in Kamrup, Goalpara and North Bengal have in their bodies the same name mentioned as the author - Jaidhar (or Jaidhan) Bānia. All this shows the prevalence of a common bāramāsi/bāramāsīh tradition in this whole region. (For specimens of Kamrupi bāramāhis see P. Kalita: Bāramāhi Aru Bilāp Git and for those of North Bengal bāramāsī see M. Mansuruddin: Harāmani).
In some of the shorter compositions there is only the suggestion of a story. In these the descriptions, generally starting from the month of Jeth or Jaistha, are confined to the various seasonal fruits and other phenomena. But in most of the longer compositions, in which the narratives usually start from the month of Aghan, the story element is stronger and the descriptions abound in allusions and suggestions. But in the majority of these the central theme is the same—the test of the wife's chastity. The burden of the story is this: The husband is a merchant who has gone out trading, leaving his young wife at home. He comes back after a long time and in order to test the chastity of his wife goes on paying court to her from month to month as a foreign merchant. The months are the setting for the one-sided courtship. Finally, satisfied with the sense of virtue of his wife he discloses his identity and is reunited with his wife.¹

Different variations on the same theme are to be found in compositions known variously in different parts of the district as Sādhu Bāramāśi, Piya Bāramāśi, Tiya Bāramāśi, Nāri Bāramāśi, Sānti Bāramāśi and so on.²

There are, however, a few Bāramāśis in which the themes are different. For example, one popular composition deals with the growing up of a child-bride from year to year and the gradual awakening of her youth till she is capable of cooperating in the consummation

1. Dr Goswami has brought out the similarity of this theme with that of Damini charitra found in West Bengal.— See P. Goswami: Ballads and Tales of Assam, pp.60-62.

2. A curious thing about the Bāramāśis of Goalpara is that though a fairly big number of them are known to be current, majority of them are found to be either incomplete or contain obvious corruptions.
One particular song which the singer insisted on calling a bāramāsi, although it did not have the usual character of a bāramāsi, has a most unusual theme—a brother's incestuous infatuation with his sister. The song could be recorded only in parts, but as the parts did not give a coherent narrative, the singer himself supplied the background.

The brother has amorous inclinations towards the sister, which of course he has no opportunity of making known. The sister is married off but the brother's unnatural infatuation does not end. He goes to his sister's place and after taking away the brother-in-law on some pretext, kills him in the jungle. Then he comes back to his sister with the intention of making the unholy proposal. The unsuspecting sister asks the brother about the whereabouts of her husband.

The singer then sang the following portion:

'O my brother, you are back but where is my brother?'
'O my sister, your husband has gone for a dear hunt.'

facts that become clear when the texts are compared with those of similar songs of Kamrup or North Bengal. One reason for this state of things may be that in Goalpara there is a widespread popular belief that anybody who sings bāramāsi songs must hear a complete bāramāsi song in his death-bed; otherwise his soul will not be 'released'. Some people even say that a pregnant woman who has heard a bāramāsi incompletely must listen to the whole of it, failing which she cannot deliver the foetus. There are other vague beliefs that peculiarly associate bāramāsis with sorrow and misfortune. This naturally is sufficient to act as a deterrent to the singing and practising of bāramāsis, which may account for the incompleteness and corruptions referred to above.

1. This song has a Kamrupi version called Tārā Pateswari Kanyā Bāramāhi.— See P. Kalita: Bāramāhi Aru Bilāp Git, pp.22-26.
'O my brother, why are those kites and crows hovering about?'
'O my sister, the fishermen have their camp there.'

[The suggestion is that the crows and kites are hovering over the
death body of the murdered husband and the brother is misleading the
death body of the murdered husband and the brother is misleading the
sister].

'O my brother, how I still cherish my vermilion mark.'
'O my sister, your husband is a stickler for money.'
'O my brother, how I still cherish my conch-shell bangles.'
'O my sister, your sister has gone on a trading voyage to far
away Lanka.'

The singer could not give the remaining part of the song
but told me that in that part the brother makes an unholy suggestion
and the shocked and outraged sister most vehemently and scornfully
turns it down.

Another interesting song with a story at the background is
the song of the Brahman (Bamuner gan). It describes the plight of a
Brahman youth who is carried away by the charms of a Dumuni (a female
of the Dom community which is considered to be unclean and is tradition­
itionally associated with pig-rearing) and marries her. He is of
course disowned by his family. He loses his caste and status in the
society and has to take up the avocations of the Dom. The song ri­
dicules the Brahman youth's humiliation and describes how he tends
pigs, gathers fire-wood and ties the bundles with his sacred thread,
and so on.
III Rhymes

(a) Nursery Rhymes

Of the several kinds of rhymes current, nursery rhymes and rhymes connected with children’s games constitute the most important group both from the point of number and variety. As is universal with nursery rhymes, the Goalpara rhymes also move in a world of fantasy where logic and coherence are conveniently dispensed with. Such flights of imagination, however, give them a charming kaleidoscopic quality and the usually the language also assumes an intense delicacy in keeping with that quality.

It may be pointed out that many of the rhymes have several different versions, one particular version being popular in a particular area.

Some of these rhymes are pure lullabies (nindāli) and others are meant for amusing or humouring the child (chāwā bhurkā). Here is a lullaby in which sleep is addressed as sleep-maiden (nind-bāli):

Come, O sleep-maiden,  
Sit close by,  
Our baby is on the bed.  
Sleep from the river phāt  
Sleep from the street  
Cry on the bed.  
The eyes of our baby  
Grow heavy with sleep.

The moon has always occupied an important place in lullabies in India. In Bengal and North India, the moon is the maternal uncle (Chānd Māmā, Chanda Māmā). In upper Assam, it is Elder Sister Moon
(Jon Bai). In East Goalpara (and also Kamrup), however, the children are taught to address it as Brother Moon (Jon Kaka), as evidenced by the following specimens:

Come, O. Brother Moon,
Come, come, come.
We'll give you milk and rice
We'll let you sleep under the bed-stead
Hoi-Hoi-Hoi.

O Brother Moon,
Come, come.
Four pun for you and four pun for me,
Let us string ghugura pieces.
The ghugura goes run-jhun.
As the bridegroom comes,
The bridegroom is asking for temi-katāri
And the bride is asking for a sāri.

[Pun or pon : a counting measure which means eighty;
Ghugura : an ornament for the feet, made of small junglii bells;
Temi : a small lime pot; Katāri : a knife. People addicted to areca-nut chewing used to carry temi-katāri as they came handy whenever the inclination for chewing was felt].

The following one is recited as the baby is put across the dangling feet of a grown-up and is gently swung:

Our baby swings
He swings and falls
The elephant gave a kick
Our baby fell yonder.

As the child grows, the rhymes recited to them also seem to become more complex:
O sparrow from far off,
   Go far away.
Don't eat mother's paddy,
   Eat sister's paddy.
When the paddy ripens,
   I'll give you flattened rice,
Sit on a branch and eat;
When the branches break,
   Go to the oil-presser's.
The oil-presser will give you tel-gamsa
The gardener will give you flowers;
The old man's daughter will get married,
The old woman will beat the drum.

[Tel-gamsa : Oil and napkin, needed for ceremonial bathing]

There are many rhymes which older children recite while playing particular games, and the fun of the game consists as much in following some procedures as in reciting the rhymes.

Here is one meant for a game in which the children sit in a circle, place their hands, palms down, one upon the others, the hand above clutching the one below with the fingers. All the hands are moved up and down together as the rhymes is recited by everyone. As soon as the recitation is complete, each one loosens his hands and strikes his or her puffed mouth with them, producing a peculiar sound. An attempt has been made to retain the metric structure of the original rhyme in the following translation:

Chiki miki salt and pepper,
Granny has gone to the market
Toys got broken on the way
A little girl plucks jujube fruits
I ask for some and she beats me.
The children place their hands, palms down, on the floor. As the rhyme proceeds, one of them stikes the hands one by one in a rhythmic motion, keeping time with the recitation. The hand on which the last stroke falls is removed and the process is repeated until all the hands are removed.

Another rhyme used in playing a popular game of a similar nature has several widely varying versions. It is extremely difficult to make out the exact meaning of any of them, and a faithful and accurate translation is almost an impossible task. However, several versions would indicate that it was originally about a king taking recourse to divination (mangal) with the help of sticks (kāthi).

We are citing one version and giving a very rough translation:

Original:  Ichan bichan dhāpri bichan
           Gouri rājī dise pati
           Tā-thoi-thoi mangal kāthi
           Mangal kāthita lare chare
           Āi gosānir pāwat pare
           Eler pāt beler pāt
           Siri āngthi tol hāt

Translation: Ichan bichan dhāpri bichan
              The Gauri king has set it.
              The divination stick moves tā-thoi-thoi
              And falls on the feet of the Mother Goddess.
              Leaves of el, leaves of bel,
              The siri ring;— now raise your hand.

In case of some rhymes, their recitation itself is a game of fun between two children. They consist of some stock questions
and answers. One child asks the questions, the other goes on answering.

Q What is that?
A Vermilion
Q Where did you get it?
A While cutting banana leaves for the king
Q Didn't I ask you to call me?
A I have cried myself hoarse calling you.

In the one that follows the dialogue is playfully extended to a considerable length:

What is that?
A child.
What does it want?
Rice and milk.
Had I not given some?
The cat has eaten it up.
And where is the cat?
It has hidden under the grass.
And where is the grass?
I've burnt it for ash.
And where is the ash?
The washerman has taken it.
What did the washerman do with it?
- Washed cloth.
What did he do with the cloth?
The king took it.
What did the king with it?
He tied it as a band round his head.
What did he do thus head-banded?
Went hunting on horse-back.
What happened to the horse?
It died after eating leaves of the *madam* tree.

Rhymes like the following one are sung as much for their rhythmic swing as for their picturesqueness:

Come on, O girls,
Let's go the eat pulses.
And while eating pulses
Let's go to Mama's place. [*Mama = maternal uncle*]
In the backyard of Mama's house
The mango trees are full of fruits.
When we pluck a few of them,
Mama recalls something.
Why are you crying, O Mama,
Covering your face with a napkin?
Next year we shall arrange your marriage
With a pretty, pretty bride.

(b) *Rhymes of Seasonal and Agricultural Rites and Ceremonies*

The next important group of rhymes are those that are connected with some seasonal and agricultural rituals and ceremonies.

It may be mentioned that this rhyme and some others have their parallels in the Kamrup region. See P. Goswami: *Folk-Literature of Assam*, pp.50-56; H. N. Sarma Doloi: *Sahitya Aru Samskriti*. pp. 30-31.
The most important of these rhymes are those recited at the Ori or Euri festival. Although popularly called songs, they are not so much of songs, and should more appropriately be treated as rhymes. Although a few of them express in unambiguous terms the purpose of the visit of the singing and dancing groups, the majority of them are made up of a series of expressions that are so loosely joined that they hardly make up an integrated whole and often make little sense. Thus they have the appearance of doggerel verse. As it is almost futile to attempt a translation, we are reproducing the originals of some of these verses:

Ori arane
Mahālakhi charane
Mahālakkhi dice bar
dhān topātā bāhir kar
dhān topātā unidumi
sonār bāndālu tuni
tunire rang suā
āmār ḍākhal khāy guā
khāy guā rāpāl chun
pāntā bhātāt dhāle nun
pāntā bhāt glilmilāy
āmār ḍākhal dāṅg khelāy
dāṅg khelāte lēgil jui
si jui juge began purā
began purā jaye ghorā
tin chāy āthārā ghorā
ghorāy ghorāy jula mare
bāt balti pīta mare
bāt bal pitaler chāti
olāī ēhe Madhaber betī
Madhab Judhab sātiya de
sonār nāngal bānaya de
sonār karam rupār phāl
biskaram jurse hāl
hāl bāy sirale moi de pāte
mahār māyēkā pār karlu
dhunā lāsā ghāte.

This verse has several versions, each slightly different from the other in sounds. Many of these sounds either have no meaning or when a meaning can be made out, it is too outlandish to be relevant. But in most of them there is reference to ploughing, and also to mosquitoes being sent across a river.

In the next one references to ploughing and farming are elaborate, and apart from mosquitoes, tigers also come in.

Ori Ori
āhilang re āhilang re
āhilang giraser bāri
lāu jhāu jhāu kalār jhāri
lāur pāt jhilāu lāu
tāk khvā nā pālāo.
nin khini hāse re
chāku chipā nāse re
chāku chipā lōhār bāi
mēgiyā ānilang dhān bāi
dhān bāi pāyā
bhenniyā ānilang chayāte
Sei bhenniyā nobōy hāl
sonār nākāl rupār phāl
hāl boāy sirale
moi de pāte
mahār māoṃ pār karilāng
kerkeriyār ghāte
kerkeriyā hēkā bēkā
tāt pārīyā gel māserkā
māserkā rītiu tīu
We have attempted the translation of one particular rhyme which appears to have some coherence:

One fox prepares the meal,
   And two foxes share it,
Our uncle Majumdar
   Goes on horse back.
He goes on horse back
   And receives a silken cloth.
He receives the silken cloth
   And ties it as a head-band.
He ties it as a head band
   And eats the siriphal [siriphal = a species of wood-apple]
While eating the siriphal
   A thorn got stuck in the throat.
About the co-wife
   How much will your hear?
Seven boats of brass have been made,
Mother Durga has embarked on them.
Mother Durga is smiling
Her black hair is dancing
It's going jāmbār-jumbur.
Some rhymes are simple and direct and are meant either for begging alms from the householders or for ridiculing them when they are late with the alms:

Kān-khuchuri, o kān-khuchuri,
Find and bring the money from the box.
The money moves in the box
It promises but deceives.
We won't give up without being given.
We shall press them
As hard as oil is pressed.

[It is not certain whether the term Kān-khuchuri means the bird Indian starling or an ear-prick].

That most of the rhymes of this class have ritualistic significance is beyond doubt. But some of them also seem to possess some magical association over and above the ritualistic. The rhymes cited on the last day of Aswin as part of the rituals practised on that day may be referred to.¹

(c) Spells and Incantations

Charm: Essentially belonging to the field of magic but structurally coming under the category of rhymes are the spells and incantations (mantra) which are said to constitute one of the oldest

¹ A number of such rhymes have been given in Chap.V. Section I(b)(ii)
ingredients of folk-literature. The belief in magic and the super-
natural being particularly strong in Goalpara, a large body of such 
material is known to be current in the district. But since the 
practices in which they are used are largely esoteric and since 
there is the belief among the practitioners that the efficacy of 
the formulae is lost by random recital, it is most difficult to col-
lect them. However, we are reproducing below two of those we have 
come across. The language is artificial, at least by present stan-
dards and much of the matter seems to be meaningless. However, in 
such incantatory verses, the sound and the rhythm seem to be more 
important than the apparent meaning.

Shān shān sarba-shān
Shān shān sarba-shān
The evil spell of the spirit
I have cut into pieces.
The spell of Mother Kamakhya Chandi
I have cut into seventeen pieces.
I make obeisance at the feet of Siva and the guru
Save me, 0 goddess Kaorup Kamakhya Chandi Mother.

The golden plough and the share of silver,
I have yoked the black tom cat into the plough.
Earth came up while ploughing,
I remove the venom completely.
I tie the dharni with vennā
I tie the dharni with benpurā,
I tie the dharni with the tulsi leaves.
I also tie the feet of Gourab Mahādeb [?]
Go upwards instead of coming down.
Swearing by the name of Lord Mahādeba,
I pay obeisance at the feet of the guru
Save me, O Mother Kārūpa Kāmākhyā Chandi.

[Venna and benna are two species of grass. Dharnī seems to be derived from dhārani of Mahāyana Buddhism]

IV Riddles

Riddles in Goalpara are called by various names in different parts of the district. People in some parts call them chilka or sollok or sillok, obviously corruptions from the Sanskrit sloka. In some other parts they are called phakili.¹ And in the areas contiguous to Kamrup they are called distan, derived from the Sanskrit dristanta, as in Kamrup. Whatever the name given to them, riddles are extremely popular throughout the district. In some western parts, riddles almost constitute a pastime and children and old men often have what may be called riddle-sessions in which the posing and answering of riddles are gone through with great gusto.²

1. In fact, not only proverbs but also aphorisms and wise sayings of all kinds are called sollok or sillok by some people. The terms phakili and chilka are current in North Bengal also. - See C. C. Sanyal: The Rajbansis of North Bengal, p.174.

It may be pointed out that some enigmatic proverbs current among the Vaishnava initiates of Assam are known as phakara. They are so obscure for the uninitiated that they are as good as riddles. The similarity of the two terms, phakara and phakili, is worth noting. According to Dr P. Goswami phakara may be a borrowing from Maithili in which language it means a rhyme or jingle.

2. This seems to be the practice in North Bengal also. - See K. Pal and M. K. Raha: 'Riddles from North Bengal' in Bulletin of the Cultural Research Institute, West Bengal, Vol.VI, No.1 and 2, 1967.
Of the big number of riddles current throughout the district, we have chosen here only a few popular and interesting ones.

rājār beti dhubli peti
bin kodāle khure mati

The princess is big-bellied,
She digs the earth without a spade. - A pig

in kichi bin kichi
nāi chochā nai bichi

It has no skin, it has no seed. - Salt

ek gās jhāpār-jhupur
tāt basiya āse kālā kukur

There is a tree full of leaves
The black dog resides on it. - The louse

ek gāse ek phal
pākiyā āse tal mal

A single fruit on a tree
It is ripe and juicy. - The pineapple

gāo dhum dhum ekhnā hārā

It has a fat body
But just one bone. - A hay stack

dhum gharer ek poi

The big house has a single post. - do

ekhnā buri pithā bhāje
mui genu to duor dhāke

An old woman makes cake
If I go near, she closes the door. - A snail
panit janma tikhrât bās
pānit dile hay sarbanāşh

It is born in water but lives on land
If put in water, it is done for. - Salt

dhuppur kori poil
chepā lägi roil

It fell with a thud
Then it got stuck. - Cowdung

Some riddles popular in west Goalpara are also found to be current in North Bengal.¹

Riddles like the following, current in the eastern parts of Goalpara have their exact parallels among some of the more popular riddles of the Kamrup region:

ekdāl khere
gotāi ghartā bere

A single thatch
Covers the whole house. - A lamp

saragar pe pāril lätim
lätim bale moi kiya phātim

A top fell from heaven
It says, why should I burst? - The mustard seed

enu enu enu
dhorbār nāi thenu

Enu enu enu
There is no handle to catch it. - An egg

The dhum fell from above
It says, smell my behind. - A mango

Mother, mother, mother
There is the house, but it has no doors. - An egg

Mother is in grandmother's womb
I am already on my way to the market. - Banana

(Sometimes bunches of banana are taken to the market to be sold even when the banana spadix contains banana flowers that later form into fruits)

Some riddles have common patterns. For example many of them begin with, the expression, 'I went to my maternal uncle's place.'

I went to my maternal uncle's place
I wetted a blanket
But could not dry it. - The tongue

1. In North Bengal the common pattern is to start the riddle with the words 'hutti genu, hetti genu, genu marā ghāt' (I went here, I went there, I went to the burning ghāt). - C. C. Sanyal: op. cit. p. 174.
I went to my maternal uncle's place,
They gave me a rope to wind,
But I could not wind it.  — The road

Another such pattern not only begins with similar words but also has a rhyme formula. For example:

* bag bag bagila, thak thak thakila
  chair matha bara theng jwatha dekhila *

* bag bag the heron, thak thak you're cheated
Where did you see four heads and twelve feet?
- Two bullocks and two men standing on a harrow attached to the bullocks

Exactly similar riddles are extremely popular with children in many parts of Assam. For example:

* chit pakhiba
  tini mur dah theng
  kot dekhila *

The fleeting butterfly
Where did you see
Three heads and ten feet?  — Two bullocks a man ploughing with them

Some riddles contain the suggestion of a story, however, elementary. The following one is supposed to be told by the wife to the husband when announcing that meal is ready:
I've cooked him with him  
You place him on the floor and sit  
Come to have your meal  
After answering this riddle.  

The 'he' here is jute. Jute leaves have been cooked into curry for the meal. Dry jute sticks have been used as fuel. Now, the husband is being asked to sit on a seat of sacking. One or two also involve the solution of some problem of arithmetic.

Some riddles, obviously of recent origin, reveal the power of observation and of pointed expression of the village-men who compose them. Take the following example:

**tip tip tipali**  
**tipate lukāy**  
**sat khan pāhār bhāngeyā**  
**pāni khābā jāy**

The little *tipāli*  
Can be hidden in the finger-tips  
It goes across seven hills  
To have a drink of water.  

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**Proverbs and Aphorisms**

As it is well known about rural India, proverbs and aphorisms, traditionally handed down from generation to generation, not only enliven the speech of the ordinary villager but also set before him standards of value and codes of conduct. In the different
parts of Goalpara also there is a mass of sayings, frequently mouthed by the humble peasant and the unlettered old woman, that covers a wide range of things, from the light-hearted commentary to the satirical banter, from the charming witticism to the insipid homily. We shall take up here only a few representative specimens of different types.

Some proverbs extoll the virtue of simple and unostentatious living:

The one who eats left overs
Has a robust health
The choosy one is lean and thin.

Leave alone fine grain,
Coarse grain will sustain the body.

There are quite a few proverbs advising the acceptance of one's social and economic position, a note of fatalism being evident in some of them:

Why should the rich and the poor be in speaking terms?
Why should the strong and the weak be engaged in a fight?

The horse of the well-to-do dies
[A similar mishap takes place when]
The earthen pitcher of the poor breaks.

The monkey whom luck favours eats the ripe fruits
The monkey whose fate wills otherwise simply moves from branch to branch.

Such characters as the over-ambitious the luxury-minded, the spendthrift, the intemperate and the hypocrite come in for disapproval:
He has no bullocks to yoke for ploughing,
He has no dhoti to wear.
But he must indulge in the luxury
Of sleeping on a pillow,
Though it is nothing but a bundle of hay.

Kaka has nothing to eat,
But his wife has fineries.

Some people get drunk by drinking wine
Some people get drunk by smelling the wine-pot.

The expert singer sings
The expert player plays [on the instrument],
Why should he [the good-for-nothing busy-body]
Get himself busy in their midst.

The daughter is yet to be born,
But he fixes the date for her marriage.

He (or she) is very fastidious about rules,
And observes the ekādasi fast,
But the whole of the night he (or she) eats roasted fish,
Sitting on the broom.

[A fast, when observed meticulously, means abstaining from all food. Non-vegetarian diet is doubly taboo. Again, a broom is regarded particularly unclean by the fastidious]

A few also warn against laziness and shirking of duty.

The lazy cow frequently drinks water,
The lazy man frequently looks at the sun.

The man who ploughs after dusk
Will have nothing to eat after the month of Kāti.

[Kāti = October-November when the next harvest is at least one month away]
But the one pillorying the gluttonous, lazy, good-for-nothing and showy woman is particularly pinching:

Four $\text{gandās}$ of brinjals, $\text{ganda} = \text{four}$
Four $\text{gandās}$ of $\text{bhāṅgā}$ fish,
And rice cooked with four measures of $\text{chal}$; $\text{rice}$
My body feels heavy, [after eating a meal with them]
Who will wash the dishes?

The foppish woman is consumed by luxury,
And the husband dies of a consumptive cough.

Some involve moral judgment of some kind or other:

The thief has eaten the $\text{malbhog}$ banana,
[And now] it is the thief who shouts much.

The [pet] bird eats and drinks,
But it always looks to the forests.
[Suggesting the ungrateful nature of some people]

There are even a few with some kind of family planning advice:

The man with one wife is cramped,
The man with two is like a dog in the verandah;
The man with three wives does not get his meal,
The man with four buries his head in his hands.

When children are born in one's youth,
They are carried on the shoulders,
When children are born in one's old age,
One can do nothing but fondle them.

A fairly big number of course contain nothing more than banalities:

The cloud that thunders much does not send rain,
The husband that shouts much, does not beat [his wife],
The land looks nice when properly cleaned.
A girl looks nice when properly dressed up.

If the son of a lowly man
    Receives a big status,
He wears a turban fashionably,
    And looks on all sides.

Thieves are thick among themselves
One thief marries the sister-in-law of another.