



The Roles, Importance and position of Female Gender in Assamese Society: analysis through the Assamese Proverbs

Boby kalita

Assistant Professor, Darrang college

Abstract:

ABSTRACT : The tradition which is transmitted orally is known as Folk Literature or Oral Literature. This tradition is transmitted orally basing on the collective memory of their elders. In the ancient Assam Oral Literature has been playing an important role in traditional Assamese society. The folk literature reflects the day to day life, the joys and sorrows of the common people. Assamese oral literature is very resourceful both in quantity and variety. The wealth of the oral literature of Assam is most impressive. Oral literature is mainly produce by the folk society. In fact, oral literature flourished and transmitted from one generation to other by word of mouth. It contains songs, tales, ballads, proverbs, sayings, riddles, folk speech etc. In this research paper an analysis is attempted about the oral literature of Assam and its various sub categories. In the present research paper we try to observe the characteristics of oral literature.

Keywords:

Oral literature, folk songs, ballads, tales, proverbs, riddles etc.

INTRODUCTION:

Assam is very rich in Oral literature. Oral literature is the primary sector for study to folklorematerials. Oral literature is also called „folk literature“ or „Verbal art“. W.R Bascom introduced the term „Verbal art“ first time and the term clearly point out the distinction of relations existing among myth, legend, folksongs, tales and folk speech etc. Sometimes a term “Expressive Literature is also used. Besides these terms there are other various designation which precisely help in understanding this particular type of folklore material. The term oral literature became popular only after R.M. Dorson used. The oral literature is transmitted orally basing on the collective memory from one generation to another generation. Assamese folk literature is very resourceful. Assam is in true sense, a meeting point of many communities, faiths and cultures. This state has always been the hub of cultural diversity owing to multiple ethnic and non-ethnic communities living herein. Therefore, the oral literature of Assam is very rich.

Aim of Study :

This research paper aims to analysis the status of women in society by application of gender perspective as an analytical lens to the Assamese proverbs. In present time for the feminism revolutions some proverbs which are related to women domestic violence are not used. And today’s society is much more different from folk society. The research paper also

a step to preserve the proverbs which related with women society.

Methodology :

This research paper is based on analytical method. The analysis basically concentrates on the definition of Assamese oral literature and its classifications. To prepare this research paper we take help from the topic related books, research paper thesis and internet.

Results and theoretical discussion

The Assamese proverbs are filled with different images of female gender. Proverbs are an important genre of folklore; proverbs are describe or says about which is generally true. Proverbs are the wisdom of many and wit of someone. The pictures of female gender can able to take a special position in Assamese proverbs field.

Women are supposed to be categorised as the 'other', having a secondary position in society. Any gendered culture teaches people how to behave in the society depending upon the concept of masculinity and femininity. They teach every man and women how to behave in a society. Folk society used to express their ideology, knowledge by using proverbs. Although proverbs are composed by unknown composer, they draw different pictures of environmental problems agricultural management, social conduct, patriotism, superstitions, women's positions, hospitality, medical remedies, customs, beliefs and family relations etc.

Proverbs being an important genre of folklore, can be mentioned a representational medium of society. In the Assamese proverbs, women are represented as loving,

sacrificing, caring, emotional, weak or cruel, jealous and selfish. Proverbs are represented the society at a large. The composer makes the proverbs from those experiences which they got from the society as a member. Proverbs are some kinds of moral and educational knowledge of society. Through the proverbs various pictures of a society are reflected. Assam has a patriarchal society. Proverbs are some kind of medium through which women and men are represented and it gives us some idea about the patriarchal frame of a society. The patriarchal society has always the ideology that women should be positioned next to that of men and people in such society unknowing acquire a kind of patriarchal ideology when women are supposed to be dominated by the hegemonic power group. Society creates a crucial role in constructing the gender role depending upon its idea of masculinity or femininity. In a patriarchal society, the male ideology has always placed women under men. The society makes different rules and regulations for men and women as a member of the society and created binaries as man and woman. The women related proverbs are reflected the voice of love, pain, care, beauty, pride, courage, sacrifice, jealous, emotions and every inner feeling of a woman.

Proverbs are one of the important verbal forms that act as an expression to communicate and to spread moralities and traditions. Proverbs are treated as the carriers of conventional wisdom; it presents values that are spontaneously and unconsciously acquired by people. Proverbs can lead to the generation of ideas that later become habitual knowledge in concern society. It plays an important role in confirming the traditional ideas. Proverbs can be an important source to study and understand the gender construction of a society. There are many characterise lies of a woman in society. They play the role of a daughter, sister, bride, daughter-in-law, mother, co-wives, step mother and mother-in-law. In the Assamese folk-society the

women are do the all work as a homemaker. The all responsibility of the house is upon the woman. They have to look after the children, help her husband in economical side and also take care of their in-laws. These all character of women is reflected in the Assamese proverbs. Everyday's necessary household work of a woman in mentioned in Assamese proverbs. Therefore, famous Assamese

Folklorist Birinchi Kumar Barua considered that Assamese proverbs are made by the Assamese women. A huge number of Assamese proverbs are related to women and they analysis the varieties character and daily life of an Assamese woman. The abovementioned

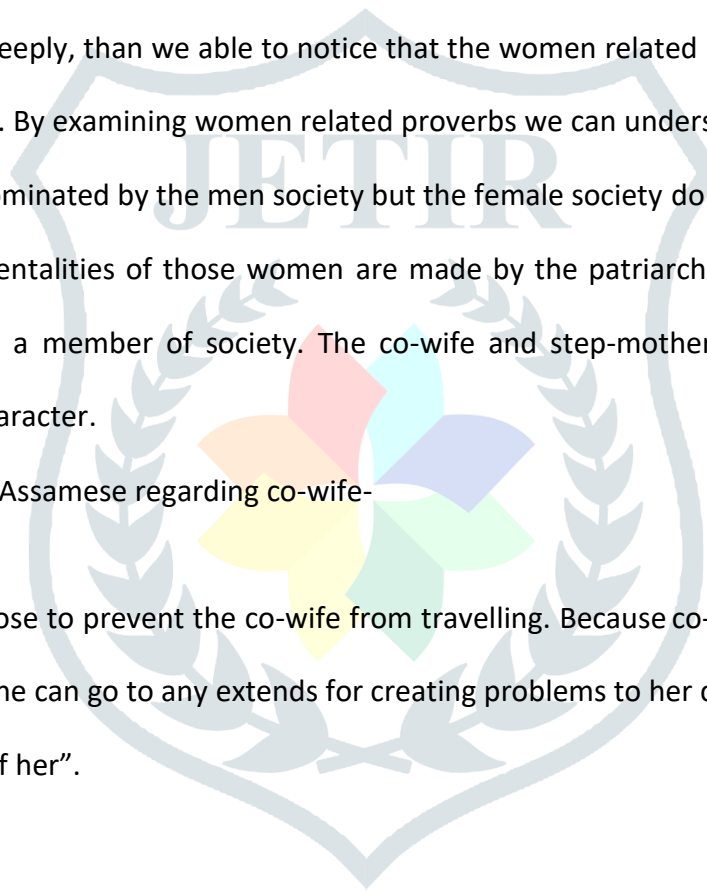
Folklorist clearly expresses his opinion in his book, "Asamar Lok-Sanskriti". Women's character, capability, beauty, fortunate, motherhood, step mothers, wives jealousy, sorrow of old-women all are reflected in proverbs. If we observed deeply, than we able to notice that the women related proverbs are mainly used by the women for themselves. By examining women related proverbs we can understand as a patriarchal society the women are not only dominated by the men society but the female society dominated by the women also. It happens because the mentalities of those women are made by the patriarchal society. They are learned how to treat a woman as a member of society. The co-wife and step-mother in Assamese proverbs are reflected as a very cruel character.

There are some proverbs in Assamese regarding co-wife-

" Nijar Nak kati

Satinir jatra bhanga kara."

It means- "Cut one's own nose to prevent the co-wife from travelling. Because co-wife is the matter of hatred for the other co-wife and she can go to any extends for creating problems to her co-wife. A woman having co-wife, is verymuch jealous of her".



Another common motif is that of the step mother. The image of a step mother of one who favours her own children and very cruel towards her step children. This kind of motif can also be found not only in Assamese society but also in the other parts of the country and all over the world. Assamese proverbs have made use of this motif. For example- “Ataitkai tita Neem gasar pat

Tatokoi tita mahi-air mat”.

It means- The Neem leaves taste are the most bitter than any other things.

But words of a step mother’s are bitterer than that.

Being a patriarchal society men are considered as the owner of property and permanent member of house.

They can take the major decisions at home as well as in society. But the women are considered as the secondary part or subordinate to men. The role of a woman should remain confined household chores only.

The positions of an Assamese women is cleared in proverbs-

“Poti Nijor, Jiiti lokar”,

(Sons are the property of own house but the daughters are the property of her in-laws)

As like as there is an another proverbs which meaning is same like the mention above that is- “Lora dhan, Sowali potan.”

The meaning of this proverb is that sons are like the paddy and girls are the blighted corn. In Assamese society, unmarried daughters are unbearable burden for family and relatives. They want to marry her in as soon as they can. They think “Jame nileo niya, jowaye nileo niya” means that after the daughter’s marriage, the parents have no responsibility towards their daughter. She has to live in her husband’s family and it is not important whether or not she is happy in that house.

Most of the time, the proverbs have observed some hidden meaning, sometimes the literal meaning of a proverb seems to have relation with women, but in real it’s not. Thus, the hidden meaning of proverbs may completely different from the literal meaning. On the other hand sometimes a proverb may literally seem to refer to some other meaning but by analyzing the inner meaning we can understand that its hidden meaning contain reference to women and their nature. As example-

“Lao jimanei dangor hauSadai pator talat.”

The literal meaning of the proverbs is that the size of a gourd or pumpkin is bigger than leaves, but it will always be under the leaves. But the inner meaning of this proverb is that women can never be equal with men. A woman may be highly educated or she might have achieved a lot of success. But, she will always stay

after men in a patriarchal society. The proverb consists of metaphorical words like gourd or pumpkin and leaves which symbolize the womenfolk and men folk respectively. Most commonly the user of this kind of proverbs, towards the female is the male member of the Assamese society. But women are also used this proverb for themselves. At present day when society is changing. Women are taking part equally in society with the man in the various fields getting the higher education, the using of such proverbs to degrade the position of women's are still available in society. Many other proverbs show conformity to the idea that women by nature are mysterious and advise that they should be guarded and rigidly controlled. These types of proverb are also popular among the common people of Assamese folk- society. Some of them mentioned below-

“Tiri, Miri, Bhatou, Kowa
Ei charir asau nopowa.”

Meaning- Women, Miri (now called mishing), Parrot and crow, nobody knows about these four. This proverb maintains that women are generally irresponsible, trail and unreliable by nature. They can be compared with in this regard, the Miris a tribe of Assam, Parrots and crows all of which are equally unreliable and unpredictable. Women are always given a secondary status in Assamese society. In this patriarchal society women are considered to be the other. They are supposed to have inferior and un-matured brain. There are some proverbs that depict women's lack of intelligence. For example-

“Tirotar agot koba Guruye karise mana.” “Jei purushe koi Duyu chaku kana.”

Meaning- The scholar advised to people not to say real words in front of women. But who share words with woman he is totally a blind man. The man doesn't know the words which he speaks in front of the woman, may be spread in society.

Domestic violence against women is common and natural picture for Assamese society. The patriarchal society wants to show off their strength and power by using violence on women. The male gender wants to control woman and their rights by using violence. In Assamese proverbs also shown a clear picture how to dominate and control a woman by beating and torturing her. As examples-

“Katari dharaba sile Tirota Balaba kile.”

Meaning- A knife can be sharpened with a stone and the husband can control his wife by beating and torturing her.

“Maheke pasheke diba taoTehe dekhiba tirir bhao.”

Meaning- To control a woman and to balancing a home the husband should to

beat his wife fortnightly and monthly. “Machar naniba saru kutaTirotar naniba bajar luta.”

Meaning- Don't buy small fishes, nobody can eat and don't marry a woman who goes to visit the market. The proverb maintains that a woman, who visits the market regularly or frequently, can't have a high moral character. Such a woman comes into contact of many men and is most likely to be reduced. So, the unknown composer wants to say that one should not buy small fishes because it has small thorns and not to good for eat. One should also not to marry a woman who likes to visit the market.

These above proverbs, basically goes with the same theme. These proverbs reflect the dependence behaviour of the female. The popularity of these kinds of proverbs proves about the violence and dominance and mentality on female gender of a male in contemporary society. In this society husband can beat time to time to control his wife. It is a normal incident for folk-society. But, if the man unable control his wife or don't show his strength on wife, then the society will not accept the situation and it shameful for the male society. These types of proverbs not only show the clear pictures on women, but also clear the pictures, how men forcefully want to make a masculinity society.

The contribution of women in the economy of the family is not considered directly. The patriarchal society only thinks that women can only give birth of children and take care of them. The traditional society thinks that women are primarily responsible for the home, child rearing and maintenance of good relationship. In Assamese society, women's primary roles to revolve around the motherhood and managing the households only. The male members are the main earner of a family. Women manage the all household and men are work outside. Women should always stay inside the boundary of house and serve the domestic works. She is the house wife and these rules are made by the patriarchal society. If a woman stay in the house, do the everyday's household works and take the care of the members of house then she is recognized as the idle woman for the society. The evidence of patriarchal society is very much clear through the proverbs like this-

“Giri jai porot

Tiri thake ghorat.”

Meaning- the man or husband works in outside and woman or wife stay at home and manage the every household works.

Sometimes, some Assamese proverbs, describe another pictures about the position of women in Assamese society. Besides women in Assamese society have always been accorded status hardly by women in other places in India and the Assamese women have always been making significant contribution towards to the economic, the family, social and cultural life of Assamese society. Many proverbs provide the clear pictures-

“ Gharar ghoini, chalir maakTok nusudhi, sudhim kak.”

Meaning- In this proverb, the composer analysis the position of a woman in her house. Woman is a wife of a man and mother of his children. So, her opinion is very important to him in every work and to progress his family. The woman is the main source of happiness and prosperity of a family.

“ Tiriye giri

Tiri nohole jai hatachiri.”

This proverb means that, in a family, the woman is the main key to everything. She manages and controls every relations and household of a family. If a woman want than she make a house into heaven. As well as, she also can destroys everything and turn the house into a hell. If, there is not any woman in a family, it is very unfortunate. And the family never make progress and happiness. In this proverb, shows the role of a woman in making a house to home. In Assamese society if a woman humble, meek, wise, soft and weak than she is an ideal woman for society. Motherhood is an important role of women. It is seem that, mother enjoy a more prestigious and respectful position in society than any other roles of women they played. Mothers are considered as the maker of society through his children.

Mothers give moral knowledge, primary education and basic knowledge of life to her children. Mothers are creator of new generation. It is believed that the period of attending motherhood is the best period of every woman's life. Every woman is expected to perform such a life. Almost all the time she is held in a high esteem by the members of the family. In the field of the

Assamese proverbs, beautiful and respectful pictures of mothers are drawn.

“ Aair saman haba kon?Nair saman baba kon?”

In this proverb, mothers are compared with the river. It is universal truth that river is eternal, its flow never stops. Likewise, a mother's love and affection never dry. This proverb obviously glorifies the mother.

The very same concept is also reflected in the proverbial expression- “ Makar bharir talat swarga”. It means- there is heaven at mother's feet. In this proverb mother is compared with the goddess. Worship of mother's is equal to worshipping God. By this proverb mothers are placed in the highest position in world. It is not that

women are always neglected and depicted in Assamese. It is important to mention here that there is a proverb in Assamese society that “Dasa putra sama kanya” which means a daughter is equal to the ten sons. Through the above proverbs, a quite, high and respectable position has been seen of the women in Assamese society. But, it must be mentioned that women, in general, did not enjoy their social position which they deserved. Women are considered as the main source of the happiness, peace and prosperity of the family, but they are not recognised as the main part of family.

Conclusion

By the analysis and discussion, we got a result that, the gender roles in Assamese proverbs are basically generated by patriarchal world. Through the Assamese proverbs led to a revelation of the social differences between men and women. These proverbs are indicated some social challenges, issues, social divisions faced by the female gender in Assamese society. As a matter of fact, proverbs continue to be in use in the society but in doing this, vast number speakers are unconscious of its use in real life situations. It is true that the old people use proverbs more frequently than the young. Moreover, there are some proverbs which have become obsolete in contemporary times because of their irrelevance in the modern context. To understand the actual meaning of the proverbial text, we have to take the help of the particular context related to the particular proverb. The proverbial text without context has no meaning. Because proverbs are always full of metaphors and such rhetorical elements can be understood only in the presence of context. By the analysis on Assamese proverbs it is proved that there was no voice of women community in against the gender difference at the time. But, in present time, some proverbs which are mentioned above are not used by the Assamese society. At now days, the status and position are not same as the former society. In Assamese society now women are developing themselves from every side. Now Assamese women are highly educated and developed by work and knowledge. Women are progressed themselves in mental, economical, political, social and cultural way. So may of proverbs where women are clearly dominated by patriarchal society are rarely used in present days. Therefore, many proverbs are lost from the society. By this research paper, we try to analysis the status and position of women in folk-society. In the other hands, we also try to save the female related proverbs which are not used in the present days. Because, the women related proverbs are valuable property for the folk literature.