

## Gender Issues in Folklore: A Study with Special Reference to Some Assamese Proverbs

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**ABSTRACT:** The relation between gender and folklore is very close. Many of folklore components are related to men or women society. This folklore may be called gender specific folklore. The contextual meaning of a folklore text or text of folk literature indicates some truth of a society and social life. For example: state of women, nature of society, position of gender, gender psyche, political issue etc. Assamese folk literature is rich from the side of proverbs. There are many issues related to gender, gender construction, gender discrimination, domestic violence etc. are in Assamese Proverbs. The main objective of this research paper is to analyze some Assamese proverbs related to women by application of gender studies lens.

**KEYWORDS:** Assamese Proverb, Gender Studies, Masculine Stereotypes, Patriarchal Society.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Proverb is one of the genres of folk literature. There are six main components of folk literature. These are: (a) folk prose narrative, (b) Narrative folk poetry, (c) folk epic, (d) proverbs, sayings, maxims, etc., (e) Riddles, (f) folk speech. (Sarma 2011: 67) So, proverb is an important part of folklore. There are many ethnic terms of proverbs have been accepted in the Assamese language, Assamese society e.g., prabaad, prabacan, phakaraa, johanaa, dristaanta, patantar and bacan. It is clearly say that, Assamese proverbs can reflect the social life of Assamese people.

There are many issues related to gender are find in Assamese proverbs. In this research article we try to analyze some Assamese proverbs by application of gender studies base.

#### Objective Of The Study

The main objectives of our study are:

- To analyze the state of women in the Assamese society by application of Gender perspective as an analytical lens to some of the Assamese proverbs.
- To bring out the nature of gender discrimination and patriarchal society.
- To investigate the traditional masculine stereotypes.

### II. METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on analytical method. The analysis primarily concentrates on the gender perspective. Traditional masculine stereotype is investigated based on a coding scheme proposed by Macionis. (See Table 1) The primary data have been collect from written text and the secondary data from library work and internet. The scope of the present study is limited. Because, in this paper we try to analyze only some Assamese proverbs related to women.

The theoretical base of our study is gender studies and also feminism.

**Table 1: Gender Themes Based on a Traditional Gender Stereotypes**  
(Taylor 2003: 304)

Feminine Traits	Masculine Traits
Submissive	Dominant
Dependent	Independent
Unintelligent	Intelligent
Emotional	Rational
Receptive	Assertive
Intuitive	Analytical
Weak	Strong
Timid	Brave
Content	Ambitious
Passive	Active
Cooperative	Competitive
Sensitive	Insensible

Sex object	Sexually aggressive
Attractive due to physical appearance	Attractive due to achievement

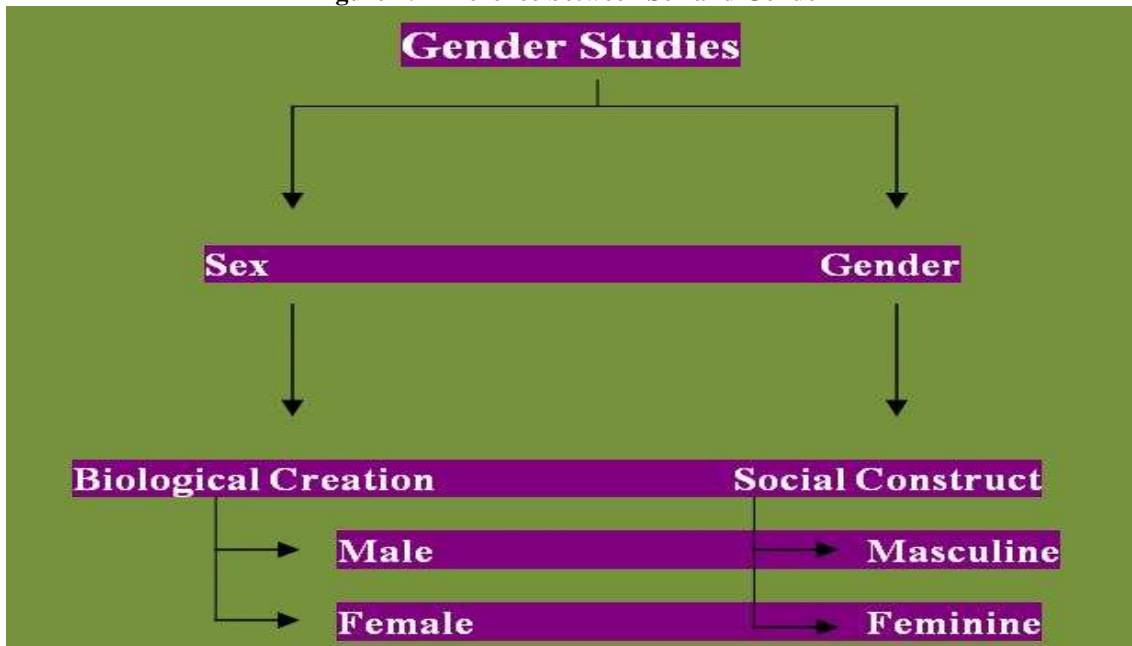
### III. GENDER STUDIES AND GENDER STUDIES OF FOLKLORE

#### 3.1 SEX AND GENDER

The usual widespread misconception about the interchangeability of Sex and Gender needs no introduction. Sex is a creation of birth while Gender is created by the society we live in. The society forms Gender Identity. Sex is a biological component of womanhood and manhood and Gender is psychological, social, and cultural thinking related to women and men. (Hossain, and Masuduzzaman 2012: 572)

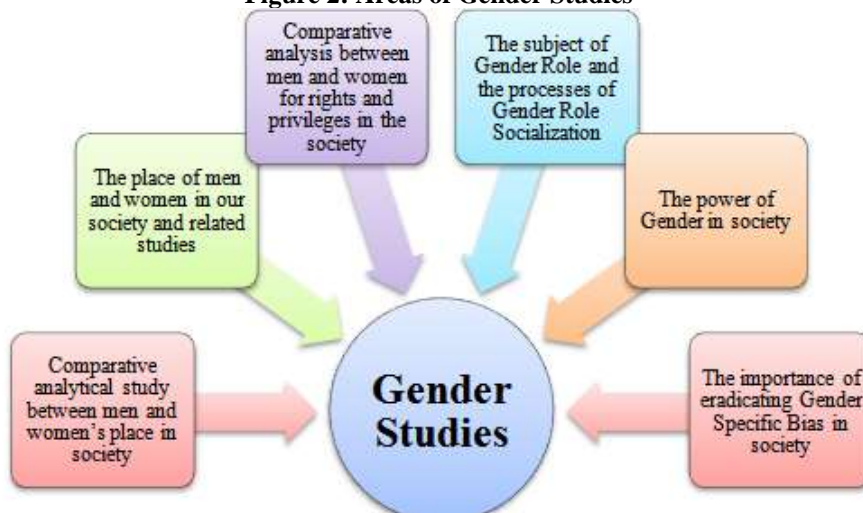
The difference between Sex and Gender can be stated as below:

**Figure 1: Difference between Sex and Gender**



Gender Studies is a broad concept. The major subjects discussed under Gender Studies can be stated as below:

**Figure 2: Areas of Gender Studies**



Feminism is another sphere that is entangled with gender studies. Evidently, the fight put up by feminism against Gender bias is existent from inception of the former term. This provides for a coordinated insight into folklore from feminism and gender perspective. Feminism is seen to gain popularity with the rising development of underdeveloped and developing nations across the globe. And yet the civilization has not surpassed the barriers of Gender specific issues till date. Such barriers are frequently observed in the various

aspects of folklore. Evidences of these issues are reflected in the folklore of various cultures and are termed as Gender Dimensions of Folklore (Islam 2011: 299).

### 3.2 GENDER CONSTRUCTION

In the discussion of Gender, a significant area is Gender formation in society or construction of social gender. This context has been elaborately discussed in the book *The Second Sex* (1949) by French author Simone De Beauvoir. The subject of Gender studies as a whole is immensely influenced by the de Beauvoir's quotation that:

One is not born, but rather becomes, woman. No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine. (Beauvoir 2011: 330)

It may be noted here that de Beauvoir did not place her faith in the sexual nature of women. Instead, she placed her importance on nature of human being. Simone de Beauvoir has earnestly attempted to assert in his writings that Gender formation and Gender Identity is a result of society and not a result of birth. As used by the French writer Simone de Beauvoir, the concept of 'the Other' describes women's status in patriarchal, androcentric cultures. While men are 'the One' (in other words, beings in and of themselves), women are 'the Other', beings defined only in relation to men. (Pilcher, and Whelehan 2004: 90)

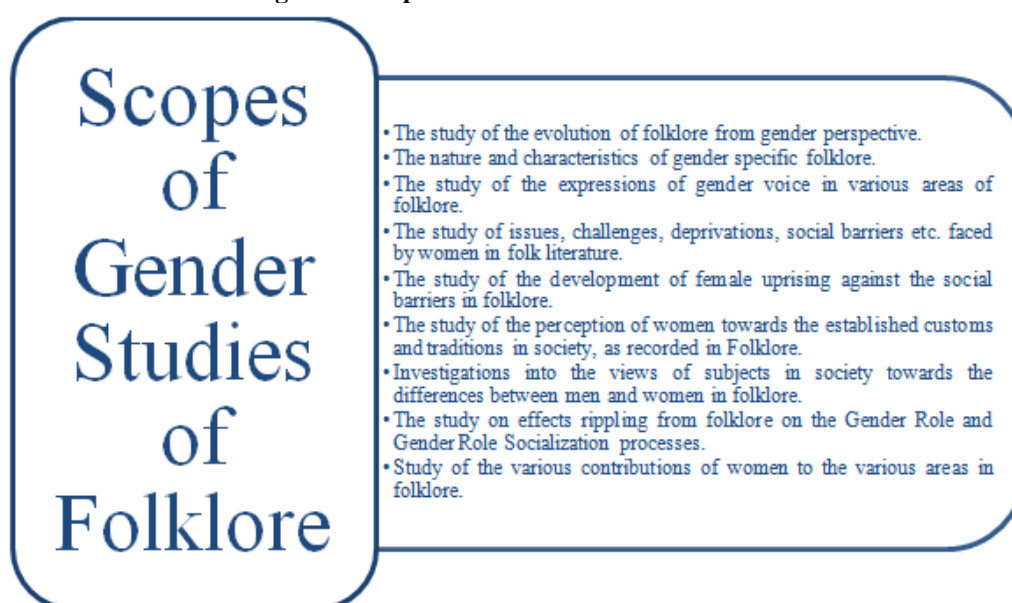
Gender studies places focused discussion on societal-cultural Gender alone. This does not mean that the subject of 'Biological Sex' can be completely ignored since the formation of Gender by socialization and social processes are based on the revelations from 'Biological Sex'.

Taking Biological Sex as a reference, the social processes provides standards of male-female behavior and teaches male-female characteristics to the subjects in society. Femininity and masculinity are also a social-cultural construction of patriarchal society. There are many forms of femininity and masculinity. Masculinity is the set of social practice and cultural representations associated with being a man. (Pilcher, and Whelehan 2004: 82)

### 4.3 GENDER ISSUES IN FOLKLORE

The close relationship between Gender and Folklore is made evident by numerous milestones that mark the shaping of Folklore taking women as a locus of creation. However, some works also suggest men as a primary and dominant character in society. Thus, Gender Studies cannot be ignored as longer than it is, in the study of Folklore and. These folklores are hence termed as Gender Specific Folklore (Islam 2011: 300). Evidently enough, Gender Perspective is a significant academic domain in the study of society and folklore. There are a few important parameters that uphold analytical discussions on Folklore. Religion, region, language, context, age, etc. are some worth a mention. Among these parameters, Gender also finds a significant place. The study of folklore from Gender Perspective can encompass numerous areas among which the principal ones are mentioned below: (Islam 2011: 302-303)

**Figure 3: Scopes of Gender Studies of Folklore**



#### IV. GENDER STUDIES OF ASSAMESE PROVERBS

In the Assamese proverbs, women are represented as weak, emotional, sacrificing, loving, caring or as cruel, jealous and selfish. To establish these characteristics, women are shown in relation to men, to other women and to the society at large.

a) Laao jimaanei daangar hauk

Sadai paatar talei.

(লাও যিমানৈ ডাঙৰ হওক

সদায় পাতৰ তলেই)

(The size of a gourd is immaterial; it will always be under the leaves.)

Here the gourd represents the Assamese women, who are dominated by the manmade society. In this society, the position of women is low. The contextual meaning of this proverb is women of every stratum have to be dominated by men. The patriarchal society does not accept the socio-intellectual development of women. The viewpoint of the patriarchal society: socio-intellectual development of women is meaningless.

b) Tirir mel kalar bhel.

(তিৰিৰ মেল কলৰ ভেল)

(The gossip of the women is meaningless. This is as baseless as raft made of banana tree.)

The contextual meaning of this proverb is the mel (conversation) of women is fruitlessness or meaningless. The think of the patriarchal society is that intellectually women's mind and brain are poor.

c) Katari dharaba shile, tirota baba kile.

( কটাৰী ধৰাৰা শিলে, তিৰোতা বাবা কিলে।)

(What your knife on the grindstone.

Sway your wife with blows.)

This is one of Dak's proverbs. This is the Assamese recipe for managing a wife.

d) Tirik kile, Mirik mile.

( তিৰীক কিলে, মিৰিক মিলে।)

(A wife is to be managed by blows and Miris by good treatment.)

This is a social belief in the male dominated society. In this society women should be brought under control by beating.

This proverb can be compared with the old English sayings in the 16<sup>th</sup> century: "A woman, a dog, and a walnut tree, the more you beat them, the better they'll be."

e) Tik baladha olai mati,

mak bhale jiyek jati.

( টিক বলধা ওলাই মাটি

মাক ভালে জীয়েক জাতি।)

(That bullock is good which jumps up when its buttock is touched, that piece of land is good which is in front of a man's house; and if a mother is good the daughter is the same.)

f) Mati kiniba maj khal,

chowali aniba mak bhal.

( মাটি কিনিবা মাজ খাল

ছোৱালী আনিবা মাক ভাল।)

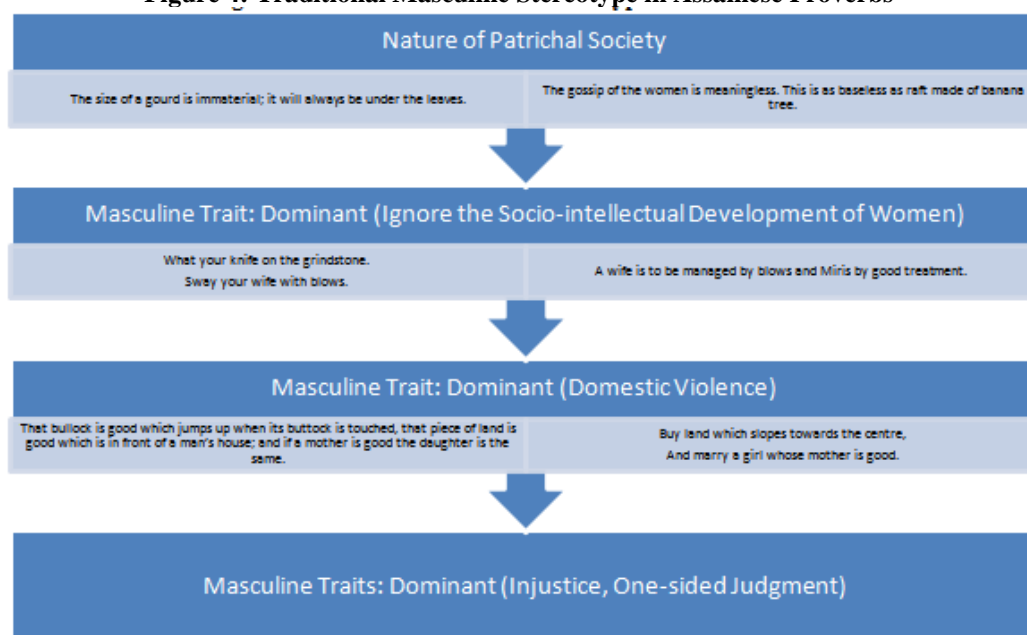
(Buy land which slopes towards the centre,

And marry a girl whose mother is good.)

This is a social dogma. While selecting a girl for marriage, people don't judge the character of her father. They don't judge the environment of her family, school or one word, the whole society. People always judge the character of the mother. If mother's nature and family background is good, it is believed that her daughter's character is also obviously good. This judgment may be called one-sided judgment. Because: one's character is not depended only on his mother's character, but also his family, and the whole society.

An analysis of some Assamese proverbs with Gender Perspective has led us to put forth the traditional masculine stereotypes. These are given below:

**Figure 4: Traditional Masculine Stereotype in Assamese Proverbs**



## V. CONCLUSION

The context is very much essential for every folklore item. A proverb consists of a few texts which has meaning only in the presence of its context. In one sentence, to understand a proverb or a proverb text, one has to find out its context. Otherwise it becomes meaningless. The Assamese proverbs related to women indicate some of the notable challenges, discrimination, issues, and social divisions faced by the women community in Assamese society. An analysis of some Assamese proverbs with Gender Perspective has led us to put forth the following conclusions:

- These proverbs portray the male dominant social picture of Assam.
- These proverbs clearly reflect the gender differences and gender discrimination.
- In such a society, women were looked at as 'the Other' instead of human beings or 'the One'.
- Through this, the gender psyche of a male dominant society is well displayed.

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