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## **Burhi Aair Sadhu: A Critical Study of the Women Characters and the Society**

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**DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20681433>**

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Lakshminath Bezbaroa(1864-1938), is undoubtedly, the brightest star in the firmament of Assamese literature. It is none other than this iconic literary figure who tapered the rich repertoire of folk tales from Assam. His earnest endeavor gave us the most well-known children collection, *Burhi Aair Sadhu* (1912). In his introduction to this book, Bezbaroa mentions ---

Like each community and nation having its distinct language, it has distinct folklore. The way language issues out of the life of community, folklore has also been a form of revelation and characterization of national life since the ancient past. Like the indelible footprints left on a language by common and erudite people alike, in the folktales too the imprints of the customs, mores, ideas and values of all classes of people are left intact. (preface to *Burhi Aair Sadhu*, 1911)

Folklore, as inherent in the life of the folk themselves may be an obstacle to the progress but in the hands of the trained and critical observer, it is the key to understanding the folk around us, on which so much of our social progress depends. Thus, A.R Wright defined folklore as “the science which studies the expression, in popular beliefs, institutions, practices, and literature and arts and pastimes of the mental and spiritual life of folk, the people in general, in every stage of barbarism and culture.” (A.R Wright, English Folklore, 1928, p7)

On the other hand, the folktale is one of the constituent genre of folklore. Mostly folktales are orally transferred stories from generation to generation, undergoing some narrative variations. Due to its



imaginative characters, their supernatural elements focus on action, simple sense of justice, and happy endings and the inherent essence of wisdom, these stories are characteristically popular among children.

Meanwhile, Prafulladutta Goswami, in his seminal work, *Ballads And Tales of Assam, 1960*, remarks, “The Assamese for oral tale is *Sadhukatha* usually from the Sanskrit *Sadhu, a merchant and katha – a tale, meaning thereby that the sadhukatha is a tale told by a wandering Merchant.* (*Ballads And Tales of Assam, Chap 3, p 80*). Though these tales are constructed and later on collected in print primarily for children; to be narrated by their grandparents, these are

not to be misjudged as childish and trifling subjects. Bezbaroa, in his aforementioned preface says, “until recent times, people misinterpreting the tales and being ignorant about the intrinsic values of these tales, considered them to be childish and trifling.” (*preface to Burhi Aair Sadhu*). But the German scholars were the pioneers in determining the true values of folk- tales. With the publication of German scholar Herder’s *Collection of Popular Songs* in 1778-79, the scientific study of folk-tales was commenced. Later on, as Bezbaroa acknowledges, this attempt bore mature fruit in the effort of the famous scholar Grimm during the period starting from **1811 to 1835**. Though folk-tales had gained currency among the people through oral transmission from one generation to another, but the scholars collected them for record from the old women in Germany who worked as paid weavers. Undoubtedly, Bezbaroa says “It was due to the efforts of the German scholars that modern civilized world has been made aware of the fact that, the basis of the folk-tale of a nation and the origin of word in a language are more valuable than the history of a great war.”

## 1.2 Burhi Aair Sadhu

Like other communities of known and unknown corners of the world, the Assamese community too, has a rich oral tradition of folk-tales. This perennial river of folk tales has flown on, occasionally changing its course, traversing into new territories for ages. Thus carrying varied sediments of myth, legends and folklore. Lakshminath Bezbaroa captures these flowing legacy of folk-tales from the mouth of a few custodians of these tales. He collects them, re-structures them, then writes them in a form weaved by the fabric of Assamese language. An ageless gift to his progeny – *Burhi Aair Sadhu*. Some of the tales such as- *Mekuri Jiyekor Sadhu* (*The Cat’s Daughter*), *Chiloni Jiyekor Sadhu* (*The Tale of the Kite’s Daughter*), *Champwati*, *Tejimola*, *Tula-Teja*, *Latkan*-not only appeal to our imagination but also make us shiver with unspeakable brutality of step-mothers. Such varied and covert motif gives us the objective this paper.



### 1.3 Objective of the Paper-

This paper is a humble attempt to conduct a critical inspection from a gender and social perspective on some of the selected tales of *Burhi Aair Sadhu*. This attempt gives us a scope to analyze Bezbaroa's subtle observance on the contemporary socio-economic conditions and its

reflections on the lives of folk. The present study also aims at establishing a relationship among the allegorical as well as supernatural elements with human characters in these stories. These elements are fundamental in finding a convincing argument as well as a deliberate conclusion. The focal observance of this paper would be the spectrum of woman characters and the society in these folk-tales.

### 1.4 Methodology-

The paper aims at *Burhi Aair Sadhu – a critical study on women characters and the society in the folk tales of Bezbaroa*. In order to interpret the observations, *Burhi Aair Sadhu* (1912)

, a collection of folk-tales by Lakshminath Bezbarua is taken as the primary source. From which, selected stories have been referred to in this paper. The present study is mainly based on library resources. The women characters as well as the society have been analyzed, critiqued keeping in view of the traditional belief, conservatism, customs, superstitions and socio-economic milieu of the time. Further, the interpretations of these tales have been done with the scrutiny of the internal structure, content and symbolism in the texts.

### 1.5 Significance of the study-

Like Bezbaroa says, "folk-tales are not to be misjudged as childish and trifling subject." This study help us understand how Bezbaroa, along with his preferred genre of satire, short story and plays took the incentive to bring these scattered folk-tales into one reservoir. His effort was not only limited to collection, whereas, he re-framed these tales with the very fabric of Assamese language. In addition to the language, most of the tales give the readers a glimpse into the everyday aspects of the people--- food, costume, customs, norms, livelihood, agriculture, economy, handicraft, supernatural beliefs, social and class structure of the society.

### 1.6 Limitations-

While writing a term paper, a student always confronts some challenges while collecting relevant resources. The present paper claims no exception of it. The limitations of the study are-



- i) Due to some unavoidable constraints, the study is confined to the tales collected by Bezbaroa only. No field work was undertaken.
- ii) Only a few secondary research writings, articles and publications are to be found on this collection of folk-tales.
- iii) The interpretation is limited to the primary text only.

### 1.7 Grandmother as the Raconteur-

According to German scholar, Rorich, “The folk-tale use a language of images; images of threat and rescue, of evil and good, of scarcity and abundance, of happiness and sorrow, of beauty and ugliness...Anything else is not folktale.”(*Folktales* , 141)

The Folk-tales of *Burhi Aair Sadhu*, are characteristically wrapped around by the colourful covers of supernatural elements. These elements though abstracts the reality but make the tales attractive. As Rorich points out, in *Burhi Aair Sadhu* ,too, if there is fortune and happiness for Teja, then there is misfortune and death for Tula. If there is the love and protection of the Kite-mother and the Cat-mother, then there is also the cruelty of the step-mother(s) ( *Tejimola, Tula -Teja*). There are tales of both orphaned children (*Tikhor and Sutibai*) as well as aged-childless couple (*Bhekulir Sadhu*). There are characters like Tejimola’s father who is a rich merchant, and then an impoverished figure like Lotkon. Thus, folktale and reality at times, offers the readers the scope to understand many current transformations with reference to human reality.

When we study the images and supernatural elements in relation with the motif(s) of these tales, they help the reader decipher the implied references. Such references might be directed at characteristic individuals as well as society. They might also be directed at social belief customs of religion and ill-practices under the guise of superstitions. Occasionally, they may also indicate to the readers, the individual identity, gender prejudice and social institutions, such as-marriage. To understand this proposition better, let’s refer to the tales of Burhi Aair sadhu.

The very title of the collection *Burhi Aair Sadhu*(1912), implies a seemingly established notion that when it comes to the transmission and sustenance of folktales, women have a key role to play.

“It seems that women are the keepers of these stories that more or less regulate the home life just as they preserve the belief and customs of religion.”( Goswami.P, *Ballads and Tales of Assam*)



Concurrent with the aforementioned statement, the raconteur of these tales is an *aaitya* (a grandmother). There is little to explain that any grandmother in any corner of the world would not only be deepened by age; but also by vast experience. Grandmothers, however incongruous, their lives may be from each other; privileged or under-privileged, illiterate or literate would be wise and introspective minds in any society. They are taught by the school of life itself. A grandmother, at times, can be a living testimony, a breathing document that delineates the happenings and events either good or worse, during her lifetime.

“An oral tale depends on the ability of the raconteur. The raconteur can maintain a vital form in a tale”(Goswami.P, *Ballads and Tales of Assam*)

By projecting a grandmother as the raconteur of the folk-tales, Bezbaroa, might have intended to encapsulate in the form of these tales, the conscience of the contemporary society. These tales evidently project a design where a grandmother is narrating the tales to her grandchildren. Such an act of transmission is an indicative of the ménages of a traditional Assamese household. Traditionally, an extended family was a prevalent feature of most of the Assamese household. It is only after the advent of Assamese *bourgeois* in past few decades, the western concept of ‘nuclear’ family came into practice. In present day context, the title of the collection could help the readers board the flight of reminiscence, if s/he has ever lived in an extended family. Thus the title itself is suggestive of the traditional household structure of Assamese community in that contemporary milieu.

As mentioned above, the narrator of the tales is an *aaitya*. By this association between folk-tales and a grandmother, Bezbaroa, might have invented in these tales a convenient yet, covert mouthpiece to critique the social evils, gender prejudice and violence of the contemporary period without appearing polemical.

“For though folklore is primarily traditional culture, it gets modified along the progress of society and takes on the color of times”(Goswami.P, *Ballads and Tales of Assam*) In these tales, the grandmother is not only the narrator but also the receptacle of the events, what Goswami, refers to as ‘colors of times. Moreover, “The character of a tale at a particular point of time depends no less upon the quality of the ‘narrator’ and the social changes brought about by the extraneous factors than upon its traditional form. As has been observed by Franz Boas, “ We find cultural, formal background of the art of narrative of primitive people almost entirely determined by their present cultural state.”(Boas, Franz, Race, Language and Culture, cited by Goswami.P, *Ballads and Tales of Assam*)

**II****Folk Characteristics in the Tales of *Burhi Aair Sadhu***

Reading the tales collected in *Burhi Aair Sadhu*(1912), a reader may discover subtle threads in the fabric of the text(s) which indicate at a particular society in a particular milieu and time. Tales as such, echo the insight of a particular folk culture and folk life. Some of the folk characteristics intrinsic in these tales are-

- i. These tales are not explicitly moralistic in tenor.
- ii. None of the tales upholds the concept of divine presence and grace.
- iii. The practice of polygamy is limited to the male characters only.
- iv. Some tales do carry the minimal portrayal of ghosts and demons.
- v. No characters representing bandits. Though there are a few characters of petty thieves.
- vi. Some tales have tricksters.
- vii. Some characters are merchants and traders.
- viii. The world of animals is at close association with the human society. In most cases, these animal characters are allegorical.
- ix. A few women characters are consumed with jealousy.
- x. There is little depiction of any kind of revolt or war.
- xi. None of the tales promotes superstitious beliefs. No portrayal of ethereal world.
- xii. Some of the tales critique the essence of love and relationship, while indirectly rejecting enforced and discriminatory relationships of lust and child-marriage.
- xiii. There is a marginal line separating native and distant customs.
- xiv. There is little explicit devotion to God. No representation of spiritual head.
- xv. No tale on the theme of animosity between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law.
- xvi. Handloom and weaving has been represented as an indispensable component of folk culture



(Phookan.Dilip, *Loko-Jiwonor Monudhwoni*).

### III

## THEORITICAL DISCUSSION

### 3.1 SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR AND THE CONCEPT OF GENDER-

In her seminal work, *The Second Sex* (1964), Simone De Beauvoir argued that men are conveniently able to mystify women. According to her, this mystification and stereotype was instrumental in creating patriarchy. She argued that women in turn, accepted their stereotype, and were always the negative of the men, where man was the ideal, the norm and the woman the deviant or the other, who sought perfection by trying to be as much like the man as possible. Women, with a preconception are measured by the standard of men and found 'inferior'.

One of the De Beauvoir's major insight was that there is no 'essence' of a woman, a woman is constructed as such by her men and society. In *Second Sex*, she puts it: 'One is not born a woman but becomes one' (1984;267). Her fundamental thesis is that biological sex and social gender are not accidental. She emphasizes that patriarchy makes use of sexual difference so as to maintain an inequality between men and women. De Beauvoir further argues that while sexual difference is real and unalterable, it cannot be the grounds for injustice and inequality (Nayar.K.Promod,2017;88)

### 3.2 THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER-

Sex, which is biological also includes anatomy and physiology. Even though the reproductive systems of men and women are biological, but they are invested with particular meanings through a salient social process. That women are biologically capable of bearing children, is no way a disputable statement. But, if we consider the values associated with the biological act of child-bearing then---

- Motherhood becomes a symbol of the true 'female.'
- It becomes the central role for women to perform (no woman is complete unless she bears children)
- Nurturing a child is the woman's 'natural' job. (Nayar.k.Pramod,2017;89)

### 3.3 GENDER STUDIES AND FOLKLORE

(Gender Studies) as a discipline is central to the discussion on societal-cultural Gender alone. But it would be a mistaken premise to build any discussion upon ignoring the subject of 'Biological Sex.' The



formation of Gender by socialization and social processes are after all, based on the revelations from 'Biological Sex.'

Adopting Biological Sex as a referent source, the social processes provide standards of (male-female behavior) and teaches (male –female characteristics) to the subjects in society.

Meanwhile, there are a few important parameters that help an analyst conduct analytical discussions on folklore. Individual as well as social constituents such as-region, language, religion, context, age and gender are key loci of discussion. The study of folklore from gender perspective can encompass numerous areas. Among which the principal ones are highlighted below----

- To study about the evolution of Folk-culture and Gender Perspective.
- The nature and importance of Gender Specific Folklore.
- The study of the expression of Gender Voice in various areas of Folklore.
- The study the issues, challenges, deprivations, social formations etc. faced by women in popular Folklore.
- The study of the development of Female uprising against the social barriers in Folklore.
- The study of the perception of women towards the established customs and traditions in society, as recalled in Folklore.
- Investigations into the views of subjects towards the differences between men and women in Folklore.
- The study on effects rippling from Folklore or the Gender Role and Gender Role Socialization processes. Study of the various contributors of women to the various areas in folklore. (*IOSR-JHSS*, Volume 23, Issue 1, Ver. 8, Jan 2018, Moran.M and Handique. L)

#### IV

### **THE STATE OF WOMEN AND THE SOCIETY IN THE FOLKTALES OF *BURHI AAIR SADHU***

Lakshminath Bezbaroa's popular collection *BURHI AAIR SADHU* contains 31 folktales. Most of them are specifically centered around women. These characters across the tales reflect multiple dispositions



and psyche. Moreover in the fabric of the tales, closely knitted is the state of society in which the women live in.

The rest of the paper presents an analytical evaluation of the state of women and society as evident and indicated in the selected tales of this collection.

#### 4.1 THE BECOMING OF A WOMAN-

‘One is not born a woman but becomes one,’ says Simone De Beauvoir. *Ow Konwari, Mekuri Jiyekor Sadhu, Tula and Teja, Tejimola and Panesoi-* each of them is a document of this meticulous statement. The milieu of these folktales verifies the argument that locate gender as a social category rather than a biological one. These tales provide precedents to the theoretical arguments that woman are socially conditioned, trained and prescribed so as to accept the role of ‘women.’ The women characters could stereotypically be clubbed either as ‘mother’ and wife’. The narrator of these tales, who herself is a grandmother depicts the age-old, fossilized symbols of womanhood. That she herself has been victimized by the discriminatory constructions is a hardly debatable. These conceived symbols that supposedly bring completeness to any woman are – giving birth, upbringing children and successful management of the households. In these folktales, young female characters after reaching puberty are getting married either because of persuasive male or insidious scheme by stepmothers. Many of them have been confined in the life of either an obliging daughter or a subjugated woman.

#### 4.2 MARRIAGE AS THE SINGULAR PURPOSE FOR THE WOMEN-

In the tales of *Burhi Aair Sadhu*, it is quite evident that women had no better option for acquiring social acceptance than getting married. As if they were preordained to spend their life in a cycle of girlhood and motherhood. They had little scope to develop the sense of individuality. Their womanhood was closely scrutinized on the ability to bear child. These tales

present ample instances of how these paths for social acceptance were grossly discriminatory for women. A girl-child in most instances is married off, once she reaches her puberty. Neither for the parents nor for the girl, marriage is an affair of personal affection, but either forced by social or economic insecurity. Occasionally, a girl is taken away by some persuasive and rich merchants, or forcibly married off due to the scheming of the stepmothers. In no such decision, the consent of the girl is asked for. A girl child is tutored to be voiceless and unquestioning entity in a parochial society. Thus the concept of ‘individual conscience’ itself becomes a gendered privilege.



In the opening tale of the collection, *Ow Konwari*, we find how a prince manages to marry his enchanted lady without her consent. In the *Tale of Mekuri Jiyekor Sadhu*, a younger sister is extremely remorse at the abduction of her elder sister. She laments by the riverbank. Then comes a trader and finding such a beautiful girl all alone; readily takes her to his home. Though he was already married twice, yet he takes a little known, helpless girl as his wife. Without her consent. His proclamation of the cat's daughter as his wife is solely motivated by desire. The lines in original read as '*...Rupohi Suwalijoni Noir Parot Bohi Thoka Dekhi Taik Nawotloi Gusi Gol.*' (getting enchanted by a lonely beautiful girl who was sitting by the riverbank, the merchant took her home)

In a patriarchal society, young girls who are married off at a tender age; ends up becoming an instrument of sexual satisfaction. In *Mekuri Jiyekor Sadhu*, the merchant never bothers to inquire the cause of his wife's grief. That she was only his object of desire, becomes evident after he throws her away from home. The merchant ignorant of the insidious scheme by the co-wives believes that his third wife had had miscarriage. On the other hand, child-marriage, a kind of social evil was quite prevalent in earlier times. In *Tejimola*, there is an indication of this practice when *Tejimola* visits her friend's home who was getting married....*Etimodheye Tejimolar xokhiyekor biya aahil* (*Tejimola's friend is about to get married*). The tale of *Champawati* is a comment on the evil consequences of such marriages. In that tale, *Champawati* and her sister are married off to pythons. Here the two pythons are allegorical representation of masculine figures i.e the grooms. While *Champawati's* marriage could be interpreted as a marriage of affection rescuing her from the cruelty of the stepmother, her sister becomes a victim of lust and meets her death.

#### 4.3 PRACTICE OF POLYGAMY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ALIENATION ---

Reading the tales of *Burhi Aair Sadhu*, one may also locate verifiable traces of bigamy or polygamy in the text. What was arguably a discriminatory privilege against the women, the social acceptance of bigamy or polygamy, certainly not with the consent of the other partner(s), did infringe the laws of marriage. The practice of bigamy or polygamy could be relatable with the men's insufficient understanding about womanhood. In a traditional patriarchal society, a woman is seen as man's possession for sexual gratification and procreation. Failing to meet the whims of men in either of the expectation, a woman becomes vulnerable to domestic violence, negligence, isolation, and ultimately reduced to the status of an abandoned or ill-favored co-wife. Under a patriarchal construction 'motherhood' becomes a symbol of the true 'female', and 'nurturing of a child is the woman's 'natural' job.



In *Tejimola*, the stepmother who has no child of her own fails to elicit any admiration or love from her husband. She develops strong hatred, commits unjustifiable violence upon her step-daughter and her cruelty only culminates at the death of Tejimola. Thus the stepmother was everything but a 'true female.' In *Chilonir Jiyekor Sadhu*, when the husband of the kite's daughter is made to believe that she had a miscarriage, the husband without any inquiry curses her. Whereas insidious events were executed surrounding the child-birth. As she failed to give birth, therefore she is made to live in the backyard. The lines in the original text read as

*...Mudoie xorujoni ghoiniyekor eibilaak kotha xosa buli vabi taik kulokhoniya tiruta buli thik kori nijor ghoror pora khedi di chuwapatonit ghor eta xojai dile.*

The practice of bigamy introduced the concept of *Laagi* and *Elagi*. This allowed the rich men to treat one wife favourably (*laagi*) and another (*elagi*). Moreover, the possession of riches was a persuasive factor in obtaining multiple wives. In *Chiloni Jiyekor Sadhu*, the merchant having already seven wives, without the girl's opinion, is able to convince the mother-kite for giving her daughter to him, only because of his riches and status. He tells the mother-kite, ... *Moor anek dhon-bostu aase, moi chohoki manuh. Kintu moor etiya saatjoni ghoini aase* (I have accumulated much wealth, and I have seven wives). Meanwhile, in *Tula Teja*, a rich farmer has two wives. One is considered *laagi* while the other as *elaagi*. Whenever a husband has two or more wives, he becomes particularly fond of the younger one neglecting the others. This happens supposedly for his sexual cravings. In *Mekuri Jiyekor Sadhu*, a line reads as...*Kumol boyoxiya xoru ghoiniyekok mudoie aagor dujoni ghoiniyekotkoi besi morom koribo dhorile.*

(The merchant favorably loved his tender-aged wife while neglecting the two elder wives). Such discriminatory treatment often breeds jealousy and strife among the co-wives. They indulged themselves in instigation against the youngest or favored wife. These perpetration of evilness against the favored wife is carried out even to her children. The stepmother's shivering cruelty upon Tejimola, and Champawati's forceful marriage to a python are such two striking instances amongst the few others. Thus the practice of either bigamy or polygamy precipitates multiple sense of psychological alienation for women. This alienation is multidimensional.

- A girl child is conditioned to be docile, submissive and stoical, thereby alienated with her self.
- The wife remains subjugated by her husband because of the considerable age difference.
- She is psychologically alienated from her co-wives who are rivals for eliciting favour from the



husband.

- If she is a stepmother then she is emotionally alienated from her step-children.
- If she is childless, then she is not a 'true female.' Thus she is alienated from the social acceptance and construction of her gender.

#### 4.4 INCEPIENCE OF ECONOMIC DISPARITY IN THE SOCIETY---

There are a few tales like *Tikhor-Sutibai*, *Digholthengia*, *Lotkan*, which are categorically amusing in their tenor. Be it wily Tikhor or crafty Lotkon, both of them are extremely impoverished. To make their ends meet, they possess all but trickery and deceptiveness. If we evaluate these characters in relation with the other stories; then we would locate the shift from traditional community based to a more individualistic manner of life. The characters of this collection includes rich merchants (*Mekuri Jiyekor Sadhu*, *Chiloni Jiyekor Sadhu*), wealthy potter (*Chiloni jiyekor Sadhu*), orphaned-children without any means (*Tikhor-sutibai*), impoverished brahmin (*Lotkon*), petty thieves (*Digholthengia*) and tricksters (*Dui Budhiyok*) and old begging women amongst the others. They are part of a society where the new economic order is making inroads. Unfortunately, a few of them are first to suffer. Wealth is getting accumulated in the few hands. They enjoy not only high economic status but also unjustifiable dominance over the marginal. A chosen few get to decide the order of resource distribution according to their advantage. Tikhor lives in society where people are accumulating properties

and generating incomes, but he is penny less. Thus, it is the economic disparity that forces Tikhor to take resort to trickery. It becomes a necessary tool for survival. Characters like Tikhor and petty thieves mock at the traditional values when it is a matter of survival. Values that were formulated by those who enjoyed a better social standing. On the other hand, Lotkon, who belongs to a class that traditionally enjoyed social reverence and offerings, find himself in utter destitute. Without any stable income, he is forced to leave home in search of 'new money and possessions.' He is not equipped to adopt with the new order. Left with no means to acquire wealth, he deceptively may be, tries to accumulate some wealth for survival. The tale indicates to the emergence of a new economy greatly driven by monetary transaction. The society has moved towards individual property and wealth accumulation. Material possession is gradually becoming a key factor that influences personal relationships. Lotkon and his wife had a bitter marital life until he returned rich. Moreover the presence of a few old begging women represents the poor plight of aged-women in a society where material possessions was to become a pre-condition for survival. Women, in this emerging society are marginalized not only socially but also economically.



## CONCLUSION

In *Burhi Aair Sadhu*, Lakshminath Bezbaroa invokes the societal norms of a period from an unreachable past and issues it to the children through an aged grandmother in the form of tradition. The stories are however not merely fables and are pregnant with insightful resources along with a kaleidoscopic view to the magical realms.

And if the child grows up to sustain the lessons he incorporated from his grandmother he is bound to discover that these stories would act as a time capsule for he is bound to discover the stories as ever evolving proceedings. The stories acquire new meanings and universal prospects when exposed to juxtaposition with contemporary events as well. The child who is now an adult will learn to unmask these stories and explore the world of magic in a more introspective ordeal.

The society from the folk tales can be looked upon as a borrowed structure of Bezbaroa's own time and culture. The turbulence, customs, strife and scandals are deeply layered with multiple issues that found its way into the tales which he managed to extend into superfluous and supernatural measures. However under these veiled accounts lies a multilayered documentation of the Assamese society and echoes from its past.

The paper focuses in a cohesive discourse of the state of women characters that Bezbaroa designed to incorporate in his works.

Reading these tales with a critical lens has helped us to trace the inherent social and the gender differences in our intrinsically patriarchal society. Critical insights of these tales have also led us to revelation of socio economic reparations of gender discrimination. It has revealed the contributing elements of social and collective consciousness in the construction of gender based identities. A few of the tales also mirror the incipience of economic disparity due to the inequality of resource distribution. Some of the salient observations of this paper are mentioned below-

- The tales can be interpreted as the critique of patriarchal society.
- Women are the victim of gender based constructions.
- Women become the object of sexual gratification.
- Patriarchal society accepts bigamy and polygamy undermining the gender discrimination.



- Women are socially as well as economically marginalized.
- Emergence of a new economy and the concept of material property and wealth.
- Material possession and changing relationships.
- Disparity of income and inequality of resource distribution.
- Incipience of a new social stratification based on material property and wealth.

To conclude, Lakshminath Bezbarao's *Burhi Aair Sadhu* is also a subtle critique with a universal resonance on the issues of discriminations, inequalities, evil-practices and prejudiced constructions concerning tradition, gender, economy and society.

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