

Two Theoretical Frameworks of Folklore Studies and Two Selected Tales from the Collection of the Assamese Folktales Entitled *Burhi Aair Sadhu*: A Discursive Analysis

Sikha Devi Nath

Department of Assamese, Dibrugarh University, 785674 Assam, India

ABSTRACT

Within the broad spectrum of critical theories in Folklore studies, the critical tenets of Historical materialism and Psychoanalysis are of great significance. With the appropriation of Historical materialism propounded by Engels and Marx and the Freudian psychoanalytical perspectives, there emerged two novel trends in Folklore studies. Marxist folklorists argue that the folk- the creator of the folklore mostly constitutes the working class. Therefore, the body of folk literature is the symbolic representation of the class struggle itself. On the other hand, the adherents of Freudian Psychoanalysis explicate the folktales as the symbolic expression(s) of the id's repressed forbidden wishes and desires. The present paper intends to analyze two selected tales, namely *Tejimola* and *Panesoi*, from the collection of Assamese Folktales entitled *Burhi Aair Sadhu*, in the light of Historical materialism and Freudian psychoanalysis, respectively. The paper examines the theme and characters of two selected tales. Further, a close reading of both tales' symbols and metaphors would inform the conceptual underpinnings of Historical materialism and Freudian psychoanalysis. This study also analyzes the element of fantasy in the selected tales.

Keywords: Class-struggle, ego, folktale, historical materialism, id, psychoanalytical

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 09 August 2021

Accepted: 07 September 2022

Published: 17 February 2023

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47836/pjssh.31.1.02>

E-mail address:

sikhanath121@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Folklore studies entail various schools of thought and interpretative techniques. Amongst the several available methodical lenses, the application of Historical Materialism and Psycho-analysis is quite noteworthy in folklore studies. Following the advent of the sociological thought

of Historical Materialism promulgated through the writings of Engels and Marx, the subsequent folklorists made serious scholarly engagement with the critical tenets of Historical Materialism resulting in the inception of a new direction in the discipline of folklore studies. On the other hand, Sigmund Freud's theory of the human psyche and his interpretation of dreams also influenced the study of folklore. It inspired a new approach to apply psychoanalytical theory to the existing research methodology, thereby expanding the realm of the discipline. Moreover, the components of folklore studies can be examined through different approaches. Various narratives and forms constitute the cultural repository of folklore. Such repositories give unalloyed expression to the lived experiences of the folk, their traditional belief systems, customs and rituals, events otherwise considered mundane, individual struggles, and personal and collective psychological through all ages. Folklore and folk culture of any given corner of the world would encompass imprints of the historical evolution of human societies, and its knowledge of the preceding revolutions for social transformations is universally acknowledged.

In this regard, the existing folklores of Assam are no exception. Often a repository, folk literature qualifies as oral narratives of historical propensity amongst the people of a particular community or nation. Thus, to acquire a better understanding of the nature of the historical evolution of societies through various epochs, the praxis of

Historical Materialism could be beneficial to a given sociological hypothesis. To adequately comprehend the characteristic presence of class hierarchy and the mechanics of socio-political contentions within the narratives of Assamese folktales and legends, the dialectical tool of Historical Materialism becomes a plausible choice. This research paper shall attempt a discursive study of one of the most popular folktales of Assam *Tejimola* through the lens of Historical materialism. For a given community, the existing folktales or legends could be the historical template of a people's collective psyche or a given community. The state of consciousness and unconsciousness of a particular community finds verbal recourse only through the metaphorical tool of language. The unfulfilled desires and repressions of a community/people find expression in the existing items of legends, myths, and folktales. Thus, the psychoanalytic readings of these folktales reckon the complex psychic operations of both individual and collective minds of a community or a people, thereby providing valuable insights concerning social problems, repressions, and anxieties. Though an ample number of Assamese folktales characteristically invite such a reading, the demarcated scope of this paper focuses on the tale entitled *Panesoi* will be brought within the ambit of the present discussion. Here *Panesoi* will entail a psychoanalytic reading of the tale to locate the motifs of the human psyche within the nodes of the narrative to understand the complex functioning of the id, the ego, and the superego.

Literature Review

A body of research is available concerning different folktales popular in other regional languages of India. There is also available literature on the structural pattern of Assamese folktales, their motifs, and the cinematic adaptation of these folktales. Nevertheless, the existing body of works leaves scope for reading two of the popular Assamese folktales from the collection, *Burhi Aair Sadhu*, namely: *Tejimola* and *Panesoi*, through the critical perspectives of historical materialism and psychoanalysis. On the other hand, a few scholarly articles based on applying historical materialist and psychoanalytical perspectives to analyze certain Bengali folktales are to be noted. A brief literature review concerning the present study is mentioned below.

Tagore (2018) observed that folktales reflect the resistance of common people against the forces of social oppression, economic exploitation, and unjust sufferings experienced in Indian society. His essay *Bongo Bhasa aru Sahitya* sheds light on the symbolic representation of people's dissent against injustice in the Bengali folktales.

Mitra (2007), in his book, *Methodology of Folklore*, attempts a reading of select Bengali folktales through the perspectives of historical materialism and psychoanalysis. The work includes reading two beast tales to give insights into the nature of a feudalistic society, its forms of oppression, and subsequent class struggle. The concerned book also includes certain Bengali legends

that reflect the socioeconomic evolution of a given society. Some legends also offer insights into the workings of the human psyche.

The tale of *Tejimola* has invited various readings in recent times. Satola and Das (2020), in their study entitled *Tejimola as a Character of Marginalized: A Comparative Study*, situate *Tejimola* at the margins of society to draw a comparative reading with the tales of Cinderella. This comparative reading analyses the socio-economic factors behind the marginalization of such characters in a given society

In the study entitled *Aesthetics of the grotesque body: The Dismemberment Metaphor in the Assamese Folktale 'Tejimola,'* Jharna Chaudhury (2021) critically engages with the ontology of death and femininity concerning the 'botanical reincarnate of the flesh, the grotesque trope and the metaphor of the dismembered body.'

Talukdar and Gogoi (2021), in their study entitled *Retelling of Assamese Folktales from a Feminist Perspective: A Reading of 'Tejimola' and the tales of 'Kite Mother's Daughter'* elaborates on the experiences of women and womanhood, the status of women in a patriarchal feudalistic society. This study also attempts to reconstruct both the tales, *Tejimola* and *Kite Mother's Daughter* that traditionally focalize the masculine worldview in a new light-foregrounding the feminist perspective to represent the emergence of strong women subverting the established dominant notions of patriarchy.

The above literature review suggests that various Indian folktales and Assamese

folktales, notably the tale of *Tejimola*, have been subjected to a diverse range of critical scrutiny. Critical analysis of *Tejimola* is mostly centered around aesthetics, typology, and feminist and postcolonial parlance. Thus, there is scope for evaluating the tale through the critical lens of historical materialism. It is one of the major critical premises in the concerned paper. On the other, no existing literature could be documented concerning the psychoanalytical reading of the folktale *Panesoi*.

METHODS

This paper is limited to the foundational understanding of the sociological thought of Historical materialism and Freudian psychoanalysis. The paper shall undertake discursive and analytical studies of the tales based on these two theoretical tenets. The primary folktales to be analyzed in this paper shall be concerned exclusively with the only two selected, *Tejimola* and *Panesoi*, from the Assamese Folktales entitled *Burhi Aair Sadhu* collection.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Folklore Studies and the Historical Materialist Approach

The amalgamation of folklore studies with the theory of historical materialism is a unique approach in the scholastic arena of folklore studies. It must be reiterated that the historical materialist approach to examining folklore is not primary to the larger theoretical realm of folklore studies per se. The principles of Historical Materialist could be appropriated to the

understanding of different forms and components of folklore. In 1848 with the publication of *The Communist Manifesto*, co-authored by Fredric Engels and Karl Marx, a Hegelian approach appeared to undergo appropriation to understand and interpret reality. According to this philosophical tenet, a schematic blend of Dialectics and Materialism, commonly referred to as Dialectical Materialism—thoughts were not passive and independent reflections of the material world. It has its origin in the products of economical labor. The offshoot of Marx's tenet of Dialectical Materialism is the sociological theory of Historical Materialism. In the subsequent epochs, historians, artists, and literary critics, too, borrowed some of Marx's principles of historical materialism to introduce a fresh approach to the field of history, art, and literature. Even the succeeding folklorists could not ignore the groundbreaking principles of Marxist dialectics – thus utilizing some of the fundamental tenets in studying folklore. In his historical materialist study of human history and society, Marx-Engels opines that:

History of all social systems seen so far is the history of class struggle. Independent people and slaves, patricians and plebeians, feudal class and working class; in a word, the two classes of oppressed have always been rivals. Fought endlessly, never in secret or in public. Every time this struggle has ended in the revolutionary

reconstruction of society or the destruction of all the conflicting classes. Almost everywhere in pre-historic eras we see complex classes of society, various stages of social hierarchy (Marx & Engels, 1976, p. 102).

One of the founding philosophical premises of the historical materialist conception of the history of human evolution and societal progress argues that it is a constant mechanism of class divisions, class exploitations, and class conflicts between *the haves* and *the have-nots*. With the emergence of social classes, society becomes a breeding ground of social contestation among various strata of class. The Marxist philosophy agrees that the root of all class division and class conflict lies in the foundations of the material reality and the economic relations to the forces of production. The economic history of human societies reflects that the basis of economic relations has either been feudalistic or capitalistic. The unequal distribution of the forces of production within the ancient class-based societies set off class conflicts. Moreover, the social classes had disproportionate access to land holdings. The powerful landlords had unlimited access to the fertile lands. In contrast, the poor had to bear the hardships of cultivating something in the barren lands for their sustenance without dividends. As a result, the poor had to sell their labor in the cultivable lands of the rich landlords; thus, the opportunist exploitative class of the rich Zamindars and the poor landless, indentured

labor class. This hapless, exploited class of indentured laborers gradually denounced the existing economic mode of production. There came a period when these accumulated resentments had a volcanic outburst in the form of class conflict. These conflicts kept gaining momentum and exhibited greater intensity. In the succeeding ages, these forms of class opposition and resistance have continued between the capitalist and the working class. Such class struggles through different epochs of time is the driving force of class-based societies.

Folk culture is the shared body of cultural products of the ‘folk’ or ‘ordinary people.’ The term ‘folk’ does not only signify the so-called *illiterate/rural/peasantry*. Here, the signifier ‘folk’ addresses the term ‘folk,’ which can refer to any group of people who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is—it could be a common occupation, language, or religion, but what is important is that a group formed for whatever reason will have some tradition that it calls its own. In theory, a group must consist of many individuals. A group member may not know all other members, but he will probably know the common core of tradition belonging to the group, which helps the group to have a sense of group identity (Dundes, 1980).

Before Alan Dundes’ studied “Who are The Folk?”, the most commonly accepted notion was that the folk consisted of those primitive, peasant societies who lived on the margins of modern civilization. The Marxist folklorists too agreed with Alan Dundes’ (1980) interpretation of folk and

observed that the primary constituent of any folk culture – the ‘folk’ does not necessarily consist of only rural peasant society but all sections of the working class. The working class represents new content and demands new means of expression (Fischer, 1963). As societies change, so does the nature of the folk culture. Therefore, analyzing the workings of any folk culture within the paradigm of the history of class conflicts in society becomes pertinent. The historical Materialist approach was applied to the folk story in the last decade of the 19th century following the Russian Revolution. According to this method, folklore cannot be identified as a medium of joy and light only. The dissatisfaction accumulated in many special categories was published through the Folk literature (Thompson, 1955).

The folklorists from the erstwhile Soviet Union took great interest in studying the existing folktales within the ideological spectrum of classical Marxism. In the aftermath of the Russian revolution, there emerged a new breed of folklorists instituting the Historical school in Folklore studies, extending their critical engagement in the symbolic representation of the working class in the existing oral literature, especially in the folklore and legends. Sokolov (1952) offers a similar reading in his book *Russian Folklore* where he observes:

1. Folklore is an echo of the past, but at the same time, it is also the vigorous voice of the present.
2. Folklore has been and continues to be a reflection and a weapon of class conflict (Dorson, 1963).

While commenting on the historical materialist aspect of folklore, one of Soviet Russia’s well-known authors Maxim Gorky (2001), opines that there is an intimate connection of the folklore to the working conditions and the material reality of the people. Moreover, folklore holds a mirror to the struggles of the working class. In his essay, *Disintegration of Personality*, Gorky attempts an ideological reading of three Greek epics appropriating the tenets of Marxism to reflect upon the asymmetrical growth of the culture. According to Gorky (2001), “Oral poetry depended on the powerful generalizing image upon laboring activity. Examples are seen in such heroic laborers as Hercules, Prometheus, Mikula, Selyaninovich, and Svyatogor” (p. 89). This particular essay of Gorky was a pioneering effort concerning the historical materialist approach in Folklore studies in the Soviet Union. The Marxist sociological school of folklorists essentially argued that the items of folklore, such as myths, legends, and folktales, carry the utterances of denouncement and resistance against the existing class exploitation in a language deemed to be metaphoric. The existing class hierarchies were closely tied to the mechanics of the forces of production and labor transactions. Since the exploited class could not openly rebel against the exploitative apparatuses of such a mode of production, fearing death, these working-class people often appropriated such metaphorical, allegorical tales, songs, and myths to communicate their rebellious sentiments. Such allegorical narratives

are often warped in the motifs of class struggles and acts of resistance which could be expressed quite explicitly. In this regard, the tropes of speaking animals have been widely employed within the fabric of the tales. One of the most familiar leitmotifs of these allegorical tales is that an episode often occurs when a relatively bigger and more powerful animal causes sufferings to their docile counterparts. In the end, such a cruel animal is defeated by the coming together of the victimized animals through their ingenious tactics. According to the proponents of historical materialism, such distinctive groups of aggressive and docile animals are nothing but a set of allegorical icons substituting for society's oppressive and oppressed classes. The conflicts in these tales within two opposing groups of animals represent the larger class conflicts at the societal level. Often such a compendium of tales concludes with the dawn of a peaceful co-habitat for all the animals. Even the central philosophical strand of Marxism, of which historical materialism is an offshoot, aspires to establish a classless, egalitarian society that would be ideally free from all forms of exploitation.

Historical Materialism and the Tale of *Tejimola*

A folktale is an imaginative narrative (preferably oral) rooted in the shared values, customs, and lived experiences of a given community transported through the annals of time. Traditional tales were exchanged from one generation to another, largely through the oral medium. These tales have

been made available in book format in recent years, yet they originated primarily in the oral tradition. However, it would be naïve to disqualify these folktales as merely fantastical; these tales are like 'living documents' of a given community. In his preface to *Burhi Air Sadhu*, Lakshminath Bezbaruah (2013) writes, "In order to get acquainted with the uncharted domain of the national history of a people, the understanding of folklore, just as philology and mythology, is equally indispensable" (p. 1). The scientific analysis of folktales originated in Germany. The publication of Herder's *Collection of Popular Songs* in 1778–79 remains one of the earliest commencements of such an endeavor. A systematic study of folktales made progress under the scholarship of the Grimm brothers (Bezbaruah, 2013). The popular folktales—transcending the barriers of geography and nationality, share some fundamental commonalities within the plot. Certain aspects of this civilization include migration, cultural expansion, societies' steady evolution, and the nature of class struggles. These are nearly similar in the pattern of their occurrence across the globe, as a result of which commonalities of schemes in the folktale are also located. According to the historical materialist approach, the foundations of human societies are based on the ideological structures of class division, its relational praxis with the economic mode of production, and the form of human labor. It provides a major impetus for such historical and dialectical materialist readings of the folktale.

Like all the available folktales of the world, the Assamese folktale merits a historical materialist interpretation. The first collection of Assamese folktales is *Burhi Aair Sadhu*. Lakshminath Bezbaruah captures the stream of folktales from the mouth of a few custodians of these tales. The collection was first published in the year 1911. It is noteworthy that the 'preface' to this collection of tales sets exemplary precedence to the systematic analysis of the folk tradition of Assam.

From the collection of the tales, this paper will specifically discuss the tale of *Tejimola* through the lens of a historical materialist approach. The story *Tejimola* centered on the plight of an eponymous rich merchant's daughter *Tejimola* in the hands of her cruel stepmother during the long absence of her father, her tragic death and subsequent fantastical metamorphosis across life forms, and ultimate regeneration into her former self. The innocent and docile *Tejimola* becomes a victim of devious conspiracies framed by her vindictive stepmother. In the supernatural scheme of the narrative, the stepmother pounds her to death. The events or characters of folktales allude to understanding the past through the historical materialist outlook. The structure of *Tejimola* presents shreds of evidence of fantastical elements that drive the plot ahead. The instance of *Tejimola*'s multiple re-birth in varied categories of no human forms is one such primary structural element. Following her burial, she supersedes the grid of human life form and takes re-birth as a bottle-gourd plant.

Knowing about this rather phantasmagorical development, the stepmother uproots the plant. After that, *Tejimola* takes the form of a citrus fruit plant. Then she becomes a lotus. On his way home, the merchant's father spots the lotus. He wishes to pluck it for his daughter *Tejimola*. To his utter surprise, the lotus achingly narrates the past events and discloses her to be none other than *Tejimola*. Startled by such a testimony, the merchant asks the lotus to identify herself as a sparrow. Then, *Tejimola* transforms into a sparrow and finally returns to her former human self. Once he gets home, the merchant gets acquainted with the stepmother's cruelty and disowns the stepmother. The tragic story of *Tejimola* should resonate with many such cruel events in society. *Tejimola*'s metamorphoses add an element of fantasy into the story that is characteristic of folktale.

Tejimola's unjust suffering is a microcosmic representation of the larger world, and her episodes of allegorical rebirth provide scope for historical materialist study of the tales. The leading characters in the tale—the Merchant, the Stepmother, and *Tejimola* can be inferred as personifications of a larger social constitution. Over the years, the character of *Tejimola* has compelled many succeeding writers across time and genre to re-conceptualize the saga of *Tejimola* in poems, short stories, and novels. An interpretative reading of the popular Assamese folk narrative of *Tejimola* through the historical materialist perspective alludes to the age-old experience of the impoverished, exploited people of a

given society. In the story, the stepmother cunningly places live ember and mice inside the folds of the *Chador –Mekhela*. On the pretext of destroying the treasured garment, the stepmother tortures Tejimola and eventually kills her. The whole instance calls for a symbolic inference. The silk represents the traditional textile industry of Assam driven by manual expertise. The placing of live embers inside the silk *Mekhela* symbolically alludes to the inimical impact on the traditional textile industry of Assam following the onset of the capitalist enterprises. This particular folktale roughly gives an impression of 19th-century Assam. In that period, the incoming mechanical mode of cloth production brought a consequential change to the existing mode of production in the region. The local textile laborer suffered as they had to compete against the machine products which began to occupy the 19th-century market in Assam. The stepmother could be argued as a member of the oppressive mercantile class. The cruelty against Tejimola and her subsequent killing could be read as the forms of exploitation and punishment inflicted upon the oppressed class by the oppressors under the guile of various pretexts.

Historical materialism states that the existing movements of class struggles in a given society over the years play a determinant role in social evolution. In the initial stage of social evolution, the dominant system of feudalism favored the feudal lord, Jamindars, to command an institutionalized form of exploitation of the rustic labor force.

Gradually, such an exploitative nature of social hierarchy incited rebellious zeal amongst that perennially victimized class. Thus, the contemporary folktales in a given society provided the scope to articulate their grievances and acrimony in an allegorical form. For example, in the tale of *Tejimola*, the stepmother, under the slightest pretext(s), repeatedly inflicts unbearable punishments upon Tejimola. Her unjust cruelty finally culminates only with the death of Tejimola. Such inhumane episodes registered in the tale mentioned above can be inferred as an allusion to the unaccountable sufferings and pain historically meted out to the subjugated class in a feudal society. In her final desperate attempt, the stepmother surreptitiously allows her ‘Mekhela-chadar’ to be shredded by some mice, and she further places some live embers between the folds of her ‘Mekhela-Chadar.’ After inventing such a pretext, the stepmother inflicts several fatal blows to Tejimola with the husking paddle, to which the little girl finally succumbs. The stepmother in the tale may be construed as the archetypal figure of the affluent exploitative class. Likewise, it becomes almost apparent how under the camouflage of various manufactured pretexts in a given society, the working class is often victimized by the privileged class. Once the Merchant-father of Tejimola sets out for his mercantile obligations in some distant lands, the stepmother withdraws any semblance of affection she pretended to have towards her stepdaughter. With several insidious tactics at her disposal, the stepmother acts outright with a sadist

design toward Tejimola. Subscribing to the exploitative nature of master-slave relations, the stepmother within the domestic space exacts backbreaking household labor from Tejimola without considering her age. Here, the stepmother exhibits class opportunism at the expense of the labor class, which is typical of the feudal class. The Merchant-father of Tejimola is a representative of the middle class, which Marx, in his political writings, referred to as the petty bourgeoisie.

The so-called middle class often finds themselves caught in the oscillation between the feudal and the oppressed class. The middle class tends to cushion itself from decisive participation in the class struggle. Therefore, this petty bourgeoisie has hardly any influential role in such an ongoing struggle. Characteristically the middle class tends to situate itself at such a stratum, often deemed to be secured from the intrusion of both the feudal and the exploited class. The middle class is ever present throughout social evolution. Nevertheless, the middle class has often come across as an indifferent, secluded class. As a class, it is quite reluctant to commit itself to the cause of larger social movements. Often, it appears to be contented with the status quo. The Merchant-father initially does not learn about the torturous treatment meted out to Tejimola. Rather, he is seemingly preoccupied mostly with his mercantile obligations.

The utter hardships endured by Tejimola and her subsequent death in the tale in the absence of her merchant father can be inferred as the lack of willful participation

on the part of the middle class in most class-induced uprisings. In the later events that gradually unfold after Tejimola is buried, it seems that Tejimola re-emerges, taking a life form of a bottle gourd plant. Her resurrection to life in a metamorphosed state can be identified with the indomitable spirit of the rebellious class fighting against the agents of exploitation in a given society. It must be noted that when the historically institutionalized form of oppression hits the saturation point in a given society, the so-called subjugated people tend to organize themselves and call for revolts to overthrow such oppressive institutions. The stepmother's inhumane act of pounding Tejimola to death is nothing but the extreme victimization of the oppressed. Moreover, the stepmother's destruction of the bottle gourd plant, once she realizes it to be none other than metamorphosed Tejimola, is a typical reaction of the feudal class to arrest any form of organized resistance in a given society.

According to historical materialism, the class struggle would inevitably be persisted unless a more egalitarian society is attained. Tejimola's subsequent attempt to resurrect herself through various inter-species life forms, such as a citrus tree, and lotus flower, is quite suggestive of the persistent nature of any organized class resistance. It may be conceived that the emasculated, oppressed class appropriated the oral tradition of folktales to encapsulate their enduring saga of suffering, despondency, and resistance. The characteristic fantastical elements of these folktales supposedly provided the

victimized class some kind of escape from the harsh reality of oppression, exploitation, and discrimination. The genesis of the fantastical tropes of these tales may be the product of the institutionalized state of dehumanization and the subsequent accumulation of collective resentment and mutinous disposition towards the oppressive agency. The tale of *Tejimola* culminates with her resurrection to human form. According to Sokolov, “What a vastly important artistic force this is in the propagandizing of the resplendent socialist culture” (Catherine, 1950, p. 39). Taking a cue from Sokolov’s observation, the latent structure of the *Tejimola* epitomizes the history of the struggle of man to assert one’s identity and encompasses a poetic representation of many shades of social uprisings against the inimical forces of a given society.

Thus, justice is served, and her father disowns the stepmother. Thus, the father’s involvement at the final juncture of the tale implies that at some point in history, when the nature of class exploitation hits bottom low, the middle class can no longer seclude itself from the ensuing class struggle. Nevertheless, the class-based movements inherently remain an organized struggle between *the haves* and *the have-nots*. The tale’s climax concurs with the central premise of dialectical materialism, which states that class struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed would entail the latter’s victory and subsequently engender an egalitarian society. To conclude, even though the tale of *Tejimola* is constituted

around some individuals, each individual can be analyzed as the representative figure of different class stratifications within a given feudal society.

Freudian Psychoanalysis and Folklore Studies

In a remarkable development, the twentieth century saw the emergence of the Psychoanalytical approach in the discipline of Arts, Literature, and Folklore. The publication of Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud’s much-acclaimed book, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1913), proved to be a watershed moment in the field of psychoanalysis concerning the functioning of the unconscious. In his classic theory of the unconscious mind, Freud states that in dreams, whatever is repressed, the unfulfilled desires tend to find symbolic expression. Thus, his interpretation of dreams became the underlying principle of Freudian psychoanalysis. Following the publication of Freud’s book, many contemporary folklorists made erudite attempts to appropriate Freudian principles of psychoanalysis in the study of folklore and folk culture. The folklorist would need knowledge and expertise such as that possessed by the psychologist to interpret the tales (Claus & Korom, 1991).

Freud (1913), in his well-known study of the human psyche, states that the human mind consists of two levels: Conscious and Subconscious. Freud further opines that the conscious mind does not deem certain sets of unfulfilled wishes, feelings, and desires—which, which are often sexually motivated

to be as desirable. According to the Freudian structure of the human psyche, it primarily consists of three components: Id, Ego, and Superego. 'Id' refers to the primary drive. According to Freud, the desire for oral pleasure is also dominant in childhood. A child tends to fulfill his urge for primary pleasure through the mother figure during the oral stage. As a result, the male child's dependence on his mother's figure increases, and the male child tends to desire his mother. As a result, the male child assumes the father figure to be his rival for his mother's affection. Nevertheless, as the male child grows, he becomes aware of forbidden desires and acquires social codes, cultural norms, and moral principles.

Therefore, such guilt-ridden, unfulfilled desires are shut away in the unconscious mind of an adult. The superego engenders the experience of guilt. The intermediate stage between the id and the superego is termed the ego. The unfulfilled desires often deemed forbidden in society are pushed deeper into the 'Id,' which results in ego repression. According to Freud (1913), human dreams function as the latent mechanism that gives symbolic expressions to the unfulfilled, forbidden desires of the id. Moreover, Freud, in his study, interprets dreams to be the symbolic expressions of the repressed sexual drive and unfulfilled desire of a subject. It is further understood due to the latent conflict induced through the mechanics of id, ego, and superego; human expressions take recourse to fantastical and surreal imagination. Later such imaginative constructions take the form of legends

and folklore. Therefore, the symbols become a fundamental component of any psychoanalytical study of folklore (Sen, 2013). In his extensive study of the Greek mythological figure Prometheus in his book *Dreams and Myths* (1913), Abraham (1913) identifies the myth of Prometheus as a symbolic representation of "the masculine power of procreation of all life" (p. 74). Abraham further states that all myths are but dreams replete with sexual symbolism.

On the other hand, Freud (1913) leaned heavily on myths and fairytales, taboos and jest, and superstitions to support his exposition of the subconscious mind. Taking a cue from Freud, Abraham thus pronounces, "The dream is myth of the individual" (p. 72). Following the intellectual precedence of Freud, many of his later disciples, too, approved of the role of the unconscious, i.e., the id, as indispensable in making various constituents of folk culture, such as folklore, customs, and rituals. The psychoanalytical study of folklore draws a parallel between the workings of the individual and the collective id. Like individual dreams that are symbolic expressions of repressed desire and unfulfilled wishes, the collective unconscious, i.e., the id of a community attempts to escape the conditioning of the superego; thus, creating a world of symbols to articulate its collective unfulfilled wishes and forbidden desires. It must be noted here that Erich Fromm – a German social psychologist and sociologist, had enumerated certain ubiquitous sexual symbols based on his study of folklore. In his inventory, Fromm (1951) identifies

certain objects: sticks, pencils, and trees as symbolic of the male genital, while caverns, flowers, and gardens symbolize allusions to the female genital.

Psychoanalytical Theory and the Folktale of *Panesoi*

Similar to the role of individual dreams in penetrating deeper into the unconscious, i.e., the id for the understanding of the complex functioning of the individual human psyche, the psychoanalytical approach of folktales enhances more holistic insights to gouge extremely intricate layers of the collective unconscious and the psychological operations of a given society or a community for example, the *Gate of Dream* published in 1952, went on to explain the myth and folktale of primitive tribes of Australia, where folktale and the subconscious mind have a connection with imagination (Sen, 2013). Likewise, some tales from *Burhi Aair Sadhu* invite such psychoanalytical understanding.

The tale underpins the latent tension between the id and the superego. According to the Freudian study, the superego, i.e., the conscious territory of the human mind, is embedded with social mores, cultural codes, and moral values. Thus, the conscience mind attempts to prevent any forbidden desires or unfulfilled wishes of the unconscious. In this regard, the tale of *Panesoi* included in the above collection can be read as an allegorical/symbolical representation of man's primal sexual drive and the unfulfilled wishes sheltered in the id. At the beginning of the tale, the only son of a single mother

brings her a goose egg for safekeeping. The tale gradually turns supernatural when a baby girl emerges, splitting the eggshell one day. The mother calls her *Panesoi* and brings her up just as her daughter. Growing up, the boy gets infatuated with *Panesoi* and betrays a strong urge to marry her. When *Panesoi* learns about the impulsive desire of her brother, she leaves her home and metamorphoses herself into a goose. In the end, the brother identified the goose as *Panesoi* and enticed her to marry him.

The tale of *Panesoi* alludes to the concept of the Oedipus complex. The girl *Panesoi*, born out of a goose egg, can be inferred as the extended self of the 'ideal' mother figure of the tale. Even before she emerges from the eggshell, the brother's strong infatuation towards *Panesoi* and his incestuous wish to marry her in later years correspond to the notion of a child's forbidden desire towards his mother figure and subsequent traces of such forbidden attraction in the adult unconscious. It is quite evident in the tale mentioned above as well. Society unequivocally proscribes any sexual inclination towards the mother figure. It is deemed to be incestuous. However, the phantasmagorical realm of the folktale can transcend any semblance of human-induced moral convictions. Therefore, in the tale, the episode of a brother marrying a girl born out of a goose egg is however fantastical in appeal, it rather circuitously alludes to the fulfillment of the desire of the id—what is deemed as 'forbidden' and 'incestuous' by the collective superego. In the tale, during his childhood, it is the mother figure with

whom the boy has invested his trust for the safekeeping of the egg. Later too, it is the mother who surreptitiously locates the baby girl coming out of the eggshell—such events from the tale concerned tacitly correspond to the Freudian notion of the Oedipus complex.

Other objectives in the tale of *Panesoi* can be examined through the tenets of psychoanalysis. During the primitive period, the primitive forefathers lived closer to the wilderness. The modern-day notion of society was still a fry cry. The primitives were blissfully ignorant about virtue and vice, legal and illegal, and moral and ethical codes of conduct. Friedrich Engels opines that as men began to expand their ambition and looked for the inheritance of private property; so, it became imperative for society to impose certain sets of moral values to limit- what the social conventions deemed promiscuous. In India, although the sexual relationship between siblings was prohibited even during the Vedic Age, one of the texts of *Dasaratha Jataka* refers to the lord Ram and Sita as brother and sister as men began to envision a more regulated civilized order of settlement; any sexual participation required due social approval. Otherwise, an act of sexual defiance ensures social sanctions.

Nevertheless, the traces of primitive drive remained in the unconscious. In a civilized society, the forbidden desire of the id is shut away in the collective unconscious. The tale of *Panesoi* is also apparently about incestuous love and marriage between two siblings. The dynamics of familial relations are very complex. Often the superego

prohibits any forbidden wishes and desires to trespass the sanctity of the kinship. In a particular Bengali folktale, while plucking flowers, accidentally, one of the fingers of the female character, who happens to be the sister of the male character, gets pricked. The story reads that the brother sucks the spilling blood from her finger and manages to stop it altogether. Nevertheless, the brother could not get over his sister's blood taste. One day he kills and devours her. Thus, the act of consuming the meat of his sister implies sexual innuendo rather symbolically.

There are several kinship tales with similar motifs. The tale of *Panesoi* alludes to the brother's strong urge to indulge in a forbidden incestuous relationship with his sister. Even though society is dead against any such sexual inclination, in the tale, the brother affects a conjugal relationship with his sister. It must be noted that the girl in the tale attempts to secure herself inside a goose eggshell which signifies procreation. It also alludes to the id's latent drive for forbidden pleasure. The brother, impulsively obsessed with sexual gratification with his sister, trespasses the societal codes dictated by the superego concerning sexual conduct. Therefore, the girl is projected as someone who is not born out of the same womb as the mother figure; rather, she is metamorphosed from a goose egg in a fantastical turn. The primitive drives of the id do not inherently subscribe to any moral principles. The prevalent societal norms and cultural codes are the product of the collective superego. Thus, the fantastical realm seemingly

accedes to the forbidden urge of the id. It may be argued that the tale of *Panesoi* opens up certain avenues to delve deeper into the complex role of the id, its forbidden wishes, and latent repression to persist the mundane conformity with the structures of kinship and social order.

CONCLUSION

Both Historical materialism and Freudian psychoanalysis have been quite relevant when it comes to academic research in the discipline of Folklore studies. Folklore, especially folktales, is a collective repository of oral history concerning a given community's social and psychological expressions. Often, folktales provide a paradigm to understand the social evolution of a given society, including the complex development and functioning of the human psyche. It must be noted that in most of these folktales, the readers (the listeners) get familiar with a world replete with fantastical events. In such fantastical realms, the rhythm of rustic life and the inner workings of the conscious and the unconscious finds symbolic representation. Such folktales did not originate merely as a mode of amusement.

Whereas, through such folktales, the accounts of class struggle, the collective defiance against such agents of class exploitations, the repressed indignation of the oppressed, the hardships of the downtrodden class began to find symbolic articulation over time. The oppressed classes finding themselves equipped insufficiently

to wage any revolt against the oppressors, took recourse to a such fantastical realm(s) to give vent to their repressed drives by committing symbolic vengeance against them in such folktales. In the tale of *Tejimola* in its fantastical world, one may find symbolic gestures toward the structure of a given society and the persistent class struggle between the opposing forces in a given mode of production. On the other hand, the tale of *Panesoi* offers a great deal of insights into the complex human psyche. According to Freud, dreams, myths, or folktales are symbolic expressions of the actions and reactions of the id. In reality, the superego imposes various moral and ethical restrictions upon the wishes and desires deemed 'forbidden.' Therefore, as a substitute, the forbidden finds fulfillment in myth and fantasy.

The concerned analysis of both these tales offers a cogent view about the folktale(s) being a medium of symbolic representation of myriad human experience(s). In the repository of Assamese folktales, one may find many such folktales that merit such analysis based on the theoretical principles of Historical materialism and Freudian psychoanalysis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wants to thank the research supervisor, Prof. Nirajana Mahanta Bezborah, for her support and Lakshminath Bezbaruah Library, Dibrugarh University. Unfortunately, no Funding has been received for carrying out the research.

REFERENCES

- Abraham, K. (1913). *Dreams and myths, a study in race psychology*. Johnson Reprint.
- Bezbaruah, L. (2013). *Burhi Air Sadhu* (6th ed.). Kitap Samalaya.
- Catherine, R. S. (Trans.). (1950). *Russian folklore*. Macmillan.
- Chaudhury, J. (2021). Aesthetics of the Grotesque body: The dismemberment metaphor in the Assamese folktale 'Tejimola'. *Dibrugarh University Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 12(5), 125-134.
- Claus, P. J., & Korom, F. J. (1991). *Folklorist and Indian folklore*. Regional Resources Center.
- Dorson, R. M. (1963). Current folklore theories. *Current Anthropology*, 4(1), 93-112. <https://doi.org/10.1086/200339>
- Dundes, A. (1980). Who are The Folk? *Interpreting Folklore*, 26(1), 1-18.
- Fischer, E. (1963). *The necessity of art: A Marxist approach*. Penguin.
- Freud, S. (1913). *The interpretation of dreams*. General Press.
- Fromm, E. (1951). *The forgotten language, an introduction the understanding of dreams, fairy tales and myth*. Rinehart.
- Gorky, M. (2001). *On literature: Selected articles*. University Press of the Pacific.
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1976). *On literature and art*. Progress Publishers.
- Mitra, S. K. (Ed.). (2007). *Methodology of folklore* (1st ed.). Lokashanskriti Gobehana Porisod.
- Satola, D., & Das, S. (2020). Tejimola as a character of marginalized: A comparative study. *Proteus Journal*, 11(10), 568-574.
- Sen, S. (2013). *Folklore: Theory and practice* (2nd ed.). Anjali Publishers.
- Sokolov, Y. M. (1952). *Russian folklore*. Indiana University Press.
- Tagore, R. (2018.). *Bonga bhasa aur sahitya* [Bonga language and literature]. Createspace Independent Publishing.
- Talukdar, T. A., & Gogoi, A. (2021). Retelling of Assamese folktales from a feminist perspective: A reading of 'Tejimola' and kite Mother's Daughter. *Psychology and Educational Journal*, 58(1), 24. <https://doi.org/10.17762/pae.v58i1.2189>
- Thompson, S. (1955). Myths and folktales. *Journal of American Folklore*, 68(270), 482-488. <https://doi.org/10.2307/536773>