

Gendered Spaces: A Study of the Narratives in the Lakshmi Puja

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfillment of
the requirement for the award of the degree of*

Master of Philosophy

ANINDITA CHATTERJEE



**CENTRE FOR LINGUISTICS
SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND
CULTURE STUDIES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI-110067
INDIA
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by

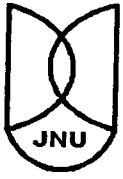
(ANINDITA CHATTERJEE)

A dissertation

presented to the Jawaharlal Nehru University

in partial fulfillment of the

thesis requirement for the degree of M.Phil.



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Date: 28.07.2006

CERTIFICATE

This dissertation titled "*Gendered Spaces: A Study of the Narratives in the Lakshmi Puja*", submitted by Anindita Chatterjee, Centre for Linguistics, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.

This may be placed before the examiners for evaluation for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy.

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This dissertation titled “*Gendered Spaces: A Study of the Narratives in the Lakshmi Puja*” submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or full, for any other degree or diploma of any university or institution.


(Anindita Chatterjee)

M.Phil student

CL/SLL&CS/JNU

To

My parents, who have inspired me throughout.

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Needless to say, however, that any errors in the dissertation are mine and mine alone.

(ANINDITA CHATTERJEE.)

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Patriarchal Rituals	4
2.1 Understanding patriarchy.....	4
2.1.1 The feminist conception of patriarchy	6
2.2 Understanding Ritual.....	9
2.2.1 Religious Rituals.....	10
2.2.2 Folk Gender Rituals.....	14
2.3 Folk/Gender Rituals in Bengal.....	17
2.3.1 Narratives in the Rituals	20
The Gender Significance of Rituals & Ritual Narratives	24
Chapter 3; Performing Patriarchy	29
3.1 The Ritual: An Overview	29
3.2 Pure and Impure Goddesses: the Olokkhi ritual	32
3.3 Narrating Patriarchy: The performance of the <i>Broto Kotha</i>	39
3.3.1 Gendered Text(s).....	39
3.3.2 The Narration	46
3.4 Gender Relations	53
Chapter 4: Conclusion	56
Appendix I: Interview Transcripts	58
Appendix II: The Lokkhi Pancali	74
REFERENCES	75

Chapter 1

Introduction

This dissertation is a study of the religious ritual of the annual Lokkhi Puja that takes place on the Omobassa (15th day of the dark fortnight) from a gender perspective. Broadly, this ritual consists of four main parts:

1. The decorations and preparations for the ritual done almost exclusively by women– e.g., the *alpana*, the making of the Olokkhi, the lighting of the lamps, the offerings to the goddess, etc.
2. The *puja* must be preceded by the worship of the *Olokkhi*, which literally means ‘person or event without luck/fortune’, but is used here to indicate a female force of ill fortune that must be disparaged and cast out before the *puja* begins. While a woman of the household constructs the doll representing Olokkhi, it is burnt and cast out by the Brahmin priest before beginning the *puja*.
3. The Brahmin priest performs the *puja*, which involves the chanting of Sanskrit *slokas*. Although both men and women may watch the puja take place, and make floral offerings, they are barred from chanting the *slokas*.
4. After the Brahmin priest leaves, women and children gather around for the narration of a *broto kotha* (ritual narrative). This narration is considered necessary to complete the ritual.

5. A further optional component of the ritual is the Lokkhi Pancali, a long poem that lists the virtues of the goddess Lokkhi, and asks her to bless the household. She is presented as an ideal for women to aspire to.

Although the narration is considered as an integral part of the ritual, its status is ambivalent, being performed after the invocation to the goddess Lakshmi has been made by the priest. Although the narrative is prescribed, it is narrated to an audience that never includes any of the men of the family nor the male priest; rather, the audience and the narrator are the women of the household and neighbourhood. At the same time, that the ritual space of the narrative does not have the same subversive content and character found to invest situations of same sex narrative spaces, as the interactive nature of such tale-telling is almost entirely eliminated. Rather than being told with feeling and empathy, the narrative is read from an established book in a style that lacks all spontaneity. We suggest that this is due to patriarchal nature of ritual spaces, which cannot function as an emancipatory space, as they reproduce and perpetuate the marginalisation and oppression of women.

The methodology employed to study the ritual involved fieldwork on a ritual performance in a middle-class home in Kolkata, through each of the four parts enumerated above. Interviews with the key participants of the ritual were also conducted. Both these sources form the basis for the analysis presented in the dissertation

The dissertation is been organised in four chapters, including an introduction, and a conclusion. The second chapter, '**Patriarchal Rituals**', provides the background necessary to embark on a study of any ritual of the sort we are studying here. It explores the intimate relationship between patriarchy and rituals, and women's motivations for the performance of rituals.

The third chapter, '**Performing Patriarchy**', studies the performance of Lokkhi Puja ritual, its structure, the narrative, and the views and attitudes of its participants, to make the claim that the patriarchal nature of ritual spaces prevents them from functioning as subversive and/or emancipatory spaces for women..

The final chapter, '**Conclusion**', sums up the arguments made in the dissertation, and suggests the avenues that we would like to explore in further research.

Chapter 2

Patriarchal Rituals

This chapter is intended to sketch the socio-economic and cultural background that a ritual performance is enacted in. In Section 2.1, we examine the concept of patriarchy, and in Section 2.2, provide a brief typology of ritual practises, with special emphasis on gender rituals. In Section 2.3, we examine the ritual narratives of Bengal, and discuss the ways in which patriarchy establishes a link between women's spirituality and what are quite obviously discriminatory ritual practices.

2.1 Understanding patriarchy

Patriarchy, as defined in the Britannica Encyclopaedia, is a 'social system based on the absolute authority of the father or an elderly male over the family group'. It is an institution of power and authority that interacts with other dimensions of social and cultural life, but is primarily distinguished as "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (Walby: 1990). This legitimisation of women's domination and deprivation is supposed to derive from their so-called 'selfless', 'frail', and 'dependent' natures, which defines them to be different from, and inferior to, men.

Women's supposed inherent mental and physical weakness has led to their

exclusion from the public sphere. Denied social, cultural and political rights, and confined within the four walls of the home, women have been easily oppressed, and subjugated by the patriarchal order. One of the main reasons underlying the patriarchal subjugation of women is the male control of women's labour, which is neither rewarded nor respected. One of the most ironic consequences of this patriarchal organisation of society is that women accept and uphold the norms and conventions of this 'man-made' system, and accede to their confinement to the domestic sphere, and accept their own 'weakness', 'lack of independence', and 'lack of rational thinking'.

Historically, the subordination of women was accelerated by capitalism, colonialism, and accumulation of wealth. Friedrich Engels (1872) attributed women's subjugation to the institution of private property, as human societies progressed into an industrial age in which surplus accumulation was possible and preferable.

As Barrett (1980) and Rowbotham (1981) have pointed out, the isolated nature of women's domestic work, and the separation of the public and private realms, were a product of the shift from agriculture to industrial economies. The impact of industrial revolution was such that the women were compelled to work day and night, often unpaid or underpaid, under the supervision of a male patriarch, and this continues to this day. Many women believe that they have been "given" the freedom to work outside the home, and ignore the fact that in actuality, the cost they pay is a

doubled exploitation – they must work both in the public as well as in the private sphere, in the latter, without any remuneration.

Violence against women is one of the reflections of patriarchy. Crimes against women have been committed since antiquity, as any social system that subjugates women has the potential for violence. Men try to control women by means of violent crimes resulting in verbal abuses, sexual assault, molestation, wife battering, and murder. Today, the growing success women's in the public realm is accompanied by an alarming realisation of this potential. Police records in India reveal that a woman is raped every 34 minutes, molested every 26 minutes, kidnapped every 43 minutes, and killed every 93 minutes. A woman is 9 times more likely to be assaulted at home than on the streets.

Despite this, there is shockingly little protest or any remonstrance in society, as patriarchy rules both public acknowledgement and protests a taboo. The patriarchal preference for male progeny is one such escalating violence, causing the death of millions of unborn female children. Another is the practice of dowry, and the denial of equal inheritance rights to women.

2.1.1 The feminist conception of patriarchy

The feminist concept of patriarchy as a wide spread social system of gender dominance evolved in the context of the emerging North Americans and European women's liberation movements and the intellectual and political

climate of the late 1960's to the 1970's, which emphasised large scale social systems and structures – capitalism, colonialism and racism. In the book, *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millet (1970) introduced the feminist use of the term patriarchy. In 1963, Betty Freidan published a book titled *The Feminine Mystique* where she reported the findings of her survey of 200 women who had graduated. The book revealed that white, heterosexual middle-class women were discontented and unhappy despite apparently living the ideal female life, but were unable to explain why “the problem has no name.” Freidan was able to provide a powerful case for the political nature of woman's experiences – that “the personal is political.”

“In small consciousness raising groups, they discovered that their bad political, sexual and family experiences were not simply personal misfortunes, but seemed both to be widely shared with other women and to build up into a general pattern of male use and abuse of power. This new understanding gave rise to the key slogan, “the personal is political.” According to Millet, the relationship between the sexes is based on men's power over women, it is therefore political.” (Bryson 1999)

This view of patriarchy as a unidirectional relation of the domination of women by men came to be questioned however, by both lesbian women and women of colour. The view that women's primary struggle was against male domination was critiqued as a heterosexual Eurocentric concern that articulated only the experience of white women's oppression. Socialist feminists were criticised by black women for the fact that their theorising

and struggles on women's situation in the family and the work place, on their rights to welfare, on men, motherhood, and sexuality, ignored black women, contributing only to "an improvement in the material situation of white middle class, women often at the expense of their black working class sisters." (Amos & Parmar 1984)

The argument made by black feminists at the time was that race was an important factor in understanding the workings of patriarchy, and the early white American feminists, whose race gave them a superior position in society, had ignored that this. While white women have to fight only against gender discrimination, other groups of women have to struggle for equality in many spheres; they have fight against a multi-layered system of discrimination. In this type of power relation, it could often be found that an Afro-American woman would identify with a man of her race, whose status would be equal to hers as far as racist discrimination is concerned.

This historical period of dissent and conflict within the women's movement has shaped current appreciation of patriarchy as interacting with other power relations in society – class, race, religion, and ethnicity. To say that patriarchy is simply male dominance is now an oversimplification, as it actually permeates all relations between the sexes in society – an upper class Brahmin woman is as likely to participate in/perpetuate in the patriarchal oppression of a Dalit woman as is an upper class Brahmin man.

This understanding has in turn led to quite a different path of struggle for feminist movements. Besides fighting against systems that entrench male dominance, women's movements now aim also to strive for new relationships with women of other classes, religions and ethnicities, so as build a shared community and culture that unites and gives voice to the varied experiences of women.

2.2 Understanding Ritual

A ritual is an established tradition that has been acquired and transmitted socio-culturally. Rituals are sacred acts of piety, considered by their performers to confer upon himself/herself great virtue and value for the individual, and in many cases the welfare of the family, and often the whole clan. In general, rituals tend to be events that involve the whole community, and foster a sense of belongingness and togetherness amongst all. Narratives form an important part of a ritual where the participant expresses his/her desires and yearnings to the deity(s).

Most rituals have their source in ancient traditions of prayers for the fertility of soil, good crops/rain, the destruction of evil forces, the ablution of sins, cure for diseases, and the like, they are also constantly reinterpreted to maintain their relevance. Although a ritual usually involves a period, however small, of abstinence from food, drink, and other indulgence, its performers see it as a festive relief from the monotony of daily life. This is particularly true for gender rituals, as this event affords

some freedom for women on the day, presenting them with an opportunity to go out and give expression to their talents in music and the arts.

A broad classification of rituals distinguishes, firstly, between religious and gender rituals. Although most rituals have a gendered component, given that distinctions are made between male and female participant roles, the folk ritual may often place sex/gender differences at the heart of the celebration. In religious rituals, there is some amount of pomp and show, whereas folk rituals are performed privately mainly, who express their desires and yearnings by means of a narrative. The spectator group is also small, and this audience participates in telling the narrative. Religious narrative on the other hand are generally alike, since they follow a guiding principle and a code, but folk rituals differ according to place, time and person following it. Some examples of religious rituals folk gender rituals are discussed below.

2.2.1 Religious Rituals

The Sacred Bath Ceremony at Gangasagar

Gangasagar, which stands at the confluence of the Ganges and the sea, is a centre of an annual meeting of people of diverse identities, who arrive there to perform ablutions in the holy water and its associated rituals on the day of Makar Sankranti.

“Bathing at the confluence of the Ganges is considered to be an act of sacredness by every devout Hindu. Sagar island is

the last land at the mouth of the old bed of the sacred river of Bhagirathi, actually the island is washed by the holy, water derived from sea-river contact” The ritual associated with it is mainly a religious ritual and related to mythology (Niyogi 1998).

The Myth: Sagar, the king of Ayodhya, was the warrior incarnation of Vishnu. He had performed the Aswamedha *yajna*, or holy sacrifice. As he performed the sacrifice, Indra, the king of heaven, became jealous of being displaced by the new rival, stole his horse, and concealed it in a subterranean cell, whilst the sage Kapilmuni was absorbed in heavenly meditation. The sons of Sagar thought Kapilmuni to be the thief of the horse and assaulted him.

The Holy man, thus roused, threw imprecations on the sons and they were burned to ashes and were sentenced to hell. A grandson of Sagar came to the resort of his father and uncles. He begged Kapilmuni to redeem the lives of the dead. The holy man replied that this could only be possible if the river Ganga could be brought to the spot to touch the ashes. The grandson was unsuccessful and died. His son Bhagirath prayed to Brahma and pleased Ganga, who visited earth. In order to reach the spot she divided herself into hundred mouths forming a delta. One of these mouths reached the spot and by washing the ashes, completed the atonement. The sea took its name Gangasagar from this legend and this point of river remains a celebrated seat of Hindu.

The pilgrims perform the ritual in honour of Kapilmuni and the associated

deities. The supervision of the temple is under the control of a *sadhu* cult.

“There are six deities in the temple, out of which four are connected with the mythology. Ganga and Indra are heavenly figures, whereas Kapilmuni, Sagar and Bhagirath are all mortal beings who became deified in due cause. There are two other gods, Hanumanji and Bishalakkhi. These two deities are interesting since they had no mention in the mythological text. Religious or ritual behaviour is a part of man’s culture – man moves with his religious traits as far as practicable.” (Niyogi 1998)

Bishalakkhi does not have any relevance to the mythology. The reason behind her being a member of the temple is ecological. She is the goddess of forests and woods. Every year a good number of pilgrims fall under tiger’s paw. She is ritually worshipped by the people who live in the vicinity of the forest for their own safety and security.

Prescriptions for ritual’s performance are not very rigid, as the men may place the deities according to their whims and wishes. This is also the case with the symbolic ritual bath, which may be taken by a married woman only if her husband accompanies her. If a woman happens to visit it alone, however, the rule is relaxed by requiring her to carry an article or artefact belonging to her husband, so that she can be considered to have performed the pilgrimage “together” with her husband.

Gotar Ceremony among the Gadabas of Orissa

The Gadabas are a tribe of Orissa, whose life and culture may be divided

broadly into a production cycle and lifecycle. “There is a strong belief among the tribe that unless the Gotar ceremony is solemnised the spirit of the dead (Duma) wanders about restlessly and may cause trouble. This may be reflected in the death of relatives, kin, poor harvest, etc.

The Myth: The Gotar ceremony is a secondary mortuary ritual among the Gadabas of Orissa, in which a large number of buffaloes are sacrificed in honour of the dead for admission into the unseen world.

“Death ceremonies are considered as the most important for the deceased who must be ceremonially removed from the world of living to the symbolic world of the dead. These ceremonies occur over a substantial period after a death and ends with a Great Feast, which is known as a secondary mortuary ritual. The magico-religious practices are carried on in order to control the supernatural power. It also attempts to explain the fact that gaining the prestige is the main object in their life. However, it helps to integrate the community for smooth running of the society (Pradhan 1998).”

The tribes have a belief that after the Gotar their will be good crops and all round happiness. The Gotar festival also creates a favourable atmosphere for integrated and coordinated community life as a whole.

The Ritual: The ritual is performed by the tribal community, the month of Magh (January), at night, and accompanied by music and dance. The ceremony takes place in Gotaria, where the performer, Disari performs the Duma *Puja* at the cremation ground by slaughtering a pig and two he-goats

in the name of the Gogoi (master of the spirit). The performer tries to bring life within the spirit by enchanting *mantras* and pushes Duma (the spirit of the deceased) inside the buffaloes, by feeding them good food. In the morning, before sunrise, the performer bathes the buffalo with turmeric paste and warm water, and worships the Rau Debta (Sun God), by sacrificing a she-buffalo. The buffalo containing the spirits of the deceased are carried away from the village, this journey signifying that the spirits of the deceased have been removed from the village boundary.

2.2.2 Folk Gender Rituals

Across the world, a number of rituals are practiced to mark gender and sex differences. For example, many African traditions and rituals are gender divided to give each gender their due respect. The male is usually revered most because of the authority he carries in the African home. For the peoples of Angola, the most important ritual of all is the *Mukanda* ritual. The *Mukanda* is an initiation ritual for young boys between ages 8-12. The young boys are taken away from their homes without warning and taken to a bush camp. The young boy's separation is from outside world, but mostly from their mothers to mark their symbolic death as children. The *Mukanda* involves the circumcision of the initiates, a ritual bath called *Kuliachisa* that also involves the teaching the fundamentals of manhood, and a concluding masquerade dance honouring the initiates.

The Chokwe people take a lot of pride in the male rituals, just as their

neighbours the Lunda people take pride in their female initiation. The difference between the males and the female's rituals is that, nowadays the female ritual is shorter, lasting about three days instead of a year like the male rituals. The female ritual takes place during a young girl's menstruation period. The initiate is taken from their home and assigned a teacher responsible for scarification, department, and stretching of the outer labia. In the female ritual, the woman is taught to be available for her man; she is taught to be sexual and submissive to her husband while the man is taught to dominate.

The ritual pertaining to menstruation among young girls is also performed in North Eastern India, in Assam. During the outset of this periodic cycle, the father of the daughter invites members of the kin, to announce his daughter's metamorphosis from girl to womanhood. It is an indication, for the relatives and neighbours to know that the girl is ready for marriage and can thus conceive. Men and women perform *Shibratri* together; they fast together and perform some rites equally. The day is believed as the union of the couple *Shib-Parbati*, and as all married men and women look up to them as the ideal couple, they perform this rite to maintain balance and stability in their relationship.

In many folk gender rituals, a narration is an important part of the ritual. The narrative is usually a folktale, i.e. a story that is disseminated through the oral tradition, and are passed on from one generation to another. Folktales are of the following broad types, where each class may also

function as a mere component of a larger tale:

Fairy tale: The stories are comprehensive and large, are marked by the supernatural and the magical, and their characters are usually drawn from the nobility or the gentry. The improbable unreal characters most often found in fairy tales have been considered to express the latent desires and yearnings of common men.

Animal tales: an imaginative unreal story with animal characters, it always has a moral at the end. The stories are generally small and the animals are personified as humans. Sometimes it also takes the form of satire, where sarcasm and ridicule are instrumental to show the vice and folly in a society.

Angel tales: It deals with angels and their kingdom. In some stories, angels are characterised as one who help humans and have good souls. They are mostly read by children or read to their mothers during sleep time.

Lyric Tales: Lyric tales are sung by men. They usually record the stories of the great deeds and adventures of male conquerors and the kingdoms of great emperors.

Legend: A legend is a combination of history and folktales. In areas/periods with no recorded history, legend takes its shape in the form of stories, so that people of the next generation would remember the past. In these stories, too improbable characters and events are its major ingredients, but the touch of history in them usually lends them a flavour

of credibility.

Mythology: Through pre-history and history, men and women have tried to make sense of forces beyond human control, and told tales of the supernatural, magical stories as a means to make sense of these phenomena. These stories have come down to us as mythology. The stories usually take place in three places – heaven, earth, and hell. Here too, the stories consist of improbable, chimerical, and fantastic thoughts.

A ritual narrative usually mixes many of these genres, particularly folk stories, and its narration is commonly believed to yield an ablution of sin. Through its medium, women/men seek to fulfil desires that are almost impossible to achieve in the real world.

2.3 Folk/Gender Rituals in Bengal

As Banerji (2001) has observed, by the late nineteenth century in Bengal, the domains of public and private spheres collapsed due to the pressures of capitalist colonialism and urbanisation. Women became increasingly constricted within their inner quarters,¹ known as *andarmahal* or *antahpur*, it isolated woman from the public domain of men, the *bahir*,

¹ Dissent at this confinement can be found in the Bengali literature of the period. As Bannerji points out, *Amar Jiban* is replete with grouses against women's incarceration, and "the twin brutalisation by housework and the deprivation of the exercise of reason." In *Subarnalata* too the longing and the desire for the

and women lived under an “enlightened” patriarchy. With the proliferation of an educated middle-class, women had to conform to a new role and image – that of *bhadramahila*, the female counterpart of *bhadralok*. A *bhadramahila* is “envisioned to embody the virtues of both the ideal Hindu woman and the Victorian image of the perfect lady who could contribute to the furtherance of their husbands’ career and educate their children in enlightened ways” (Dube 2001).

The life of upper class women rested in the domestic circle – as housewives, they were expected to combine a number of activities, and negotiate complex relationships. Their autonomy within the *andarmahal* was frequently to be exercised in the service of patriarchy – elder woman controlled the younger ones; the mothers-in-laws subdued the daughters in-law. At the same time, women also found a community with other women within the *andarmahal*. For the women of those times, *griha* was her chief concern, her private social space, where she could spend her time, in all her household chores, being together with other women community.

This included the lower class women who worked as domestic helpers in big *andarmahals*, frequently called the *chotolok*. These women had access to both the public as well as private spheres, and constituted the source of information about the outside world for the educated *bhadramahilas*. Furthermore, as they were their confidantes and shared the housework, a

outside world has been highlighted.

symbiotic relationship developed between *bhadramahilas* and the *chotolok* across classes.

The twin brutalisation of menial hard labour as well as the deprivation of the exercise of reason, equally affected both the classes. However, it has been noticed that, “the *bhadramahila* was constrained by their obligation to be refined, to cultivate those tastes which their husbands liked, to speak in a language which did not come spontaneously but had to be learned painstakingly”(Banerjee,swapna;2004). The women of the “marketplace and streets also lived in a male dominated society, but their economic self-reliance, their independent life style and non-conformity to the morals of *bhadralok* society allowed them some freedom” (Banerjee 2006).

The women within the inner quarters were denied any expression that would ‘displease’ the male patriarch. This was internalised to be ‘contrary to women’s nature’, and any threats to women’s natural characteristics, such as education, were viewed with suspicion – as Kailasbasini Debi (1876, cited in Bannerji 2001) observed:

“God by nature adorned girls with the gentle qualities of shyness, fear and devotion, but once they enter an educational institution, all those qualities will be destroyed.”

For these women incarcerated in the *andarmahal*, an enthusiasm for spiritual and religious practices serves both as solace to her inner desires and dissent:

“The need for spirituality among women derives directly and negatively from their oppressed lives. It is not surprising that they want to transcend their every day world and be in communication with a divine being who sees a soul beyond gender, and thereby escapes the claustrophobia of domesticity and intellectual and imaginative starvation. The idea of god as a wise and compassionate presence is an inner higher court of appeal for a morality based on justice” (Banerji 2001: 200).

“The women’s rituals are magical attempts to realise in their lives and fates what patriarchy requires. They also entreat self-protection and centre around such issues as securing a good husband and mother –in-law, male progeny, children’s health, averting polygamy and the pain of a Co.-wife, avoiding widowhood, and finally the husband’s prosperity” (Banerji 2001: 199).

In such gender rituals, narratives are an important feature, and their narration by women serves to complete the ritual.

2.3.1 Narratives in the Rituals

The Bengali *broto kotha* narratives share a plot construction marked by supernatural/superhuman powers in its characters, and the themes of the endurance and sacrifice of ‘good women’ and a reiteration of the power and importance of mothers. Most *kothas* end with a rhyming invocation, where women’s desires for a happy prosperous life are invoked.

The rituals themselves foreground the marginality of women. The rituals

are preceded by a period of abstinence from food and drink for women, and although the women of the household do all the arrangements required for the ritual, they have no significant role in the ritual itself. The women's role is secondary to that of men, who play the role of representing humans in front of the deity.

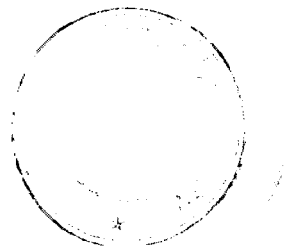
During the performance of the women's narratives, neither Brahmin priests nor adult males are present. The narrator of the *Broto Kotha* is always a woman, and her audience comprises solely of women and girls – no men, barring young male children, are allowed.

The *kothas* that can be performed by a woman are determined by her marital status, *Kumari broto kotha* are performed by unmarried women, *Sahib broto* by married ones, and *bidhoba broto* by widows. Although the narratives all refer to the betterment of society in general, they deal with, in the main, the socially determined desires/role specific to women at these stages in their lives

Kumari broto

A *Kumari broto* is done in the hope of marrying a good man from a happy well-to-do family, where there would be no poverty and need. It is also done for the welfare of the society, eradication of epidemic as well as malign diseases.

Shib Broto: Since the time the girls are five years of age they start practicing *Shib Broto*, which starts from the day of *caitra sankranti* till



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baisakh sankranti. Unmarried women perform this ritual throughout this period, continuously for four years. On the day of *caitra sankranti*, the little girls make a *Shib murti* (idol), of their own and place it on a copper plate. The materials required for this *puja* are *gangamati* (soil of Ganges), *aakunda* fruit, *dhutro* flower, *belpata*, *durbo candan*, banana, etc. The girls invoke Lord Shib by bestowing him with the wild fruits and flowers mentioned, and at the end of the act, they recite the *Shib Broto*. After the performance, a Brahmin priest is given some *dakkhina* (remuneration).

Capacandan: This *broto* is performed during the month of May-June (Jadish), by the unmarried girls and women. This is practiced to pray for a life without widowhood.

Basudhara: This narrative is recited when women yearn for rain, fertility of soil and cultivation of crops. It is performed during Baisakh and Jadish. In this ritual, an *alpna* has to be drawn with eight stars on it. A *ghot* filled with water (piercing a hole at the bottom) has to be hung on a branch of a *tulsi* (mint) plant. As the water drops from the *ghot*, the women chant a *mantra* expecting rain to arrive soon.

Sadhaba broto

Aranya Sasti: This ritual is performed in order to look after the welfare of children in the family. The women worship *Aranya Sasti Debi*, who is the guardian of young children and protects them from any kind of evil force. On every twelfth month, *sukla Sasti tithi*, this ritual takes place.

Nil Sasti: This ritual is performed just before the day of caitra sankranti. It has its similarity with *Aranya Sasti*, as it is also practiced for the welfare of the children. The only difference is that there is no Aranya Debi; instead, Lord Shib is worshipped here.

Sabitri broto: *Sabitri broto* is practiced by married women. This ritual starts from Jaistha's Krishno Pokkha until Omobassa Tithi. Some perform this ritual continuously for fourteen years. While performing, the day before the ritual, they are on a vegetarian diet, and on the day of the ritual, they abstain from any kind of food or drink. In order to practice this ritual, the materials required are: a leaf of a banyan tree, thread, 108 *dubba*, 108 *joom dhaner cal*, 108 canes, flowers, *candan*, vermillion, *ghot* etc. This ritual is practiced for the well being and good health of performer's husband. During the days of this traditional act, the performer takes meal only once in a daytime. After the ritual, the performer washes her consort's feet with water and dries it up with her sari.

Olokkhi broto: *Olokkhi broto* is practiced on the month of Kartik, at the auspicious time of Omobassa fortnight, on the day of Deepawali. During this ritual, *Olokkhi* supposedly a disparaged woman is driven out of the house and an ideal woman who is appreciated is welcomed inside the house. The Brahmin priest performs the *puja* of the belittled woman with his left hand and then takes her away from the premises of the house.

Bidhoba broto

Ombubaci broto: The *bidhoba* (widow) women store their food prepared before three days of the ritual. The ritual usually takes place on the seventh of Ashar. In these days they are not allowed to light fire for three days, so during this time of the ritual they usually take raw milk, tapioca and fruits, abstaining from any kind of cooked food. During this time of the ritual, land is also prohibited from cultivation.

The Gender Significance of Rituals & Ritual Narratives

As the preparations for the entire ritual are done almost exclusively by women, there can be no doubt that the ritual space enable women to develop what Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) have termed as a 'community of practice'. In this community, women develop activities together, and ways of engaging themselves in those activities, work out a common knowledge and beliefs, as well as ways of relating and talking to each other.

However, the ritual itself serves to produce and reproduce women as gendered subjects:

"The structuring of women as gendered subjects through Hindu rituals and practices is fundamentally implicated in the constitution and reproduction of a social system characterised by gender asymmetry and the overall subordination of women" (Sugirtharajah 1994).

The performance of rituals and narratives, cooking, and the serving or distribution of food, are important constituents of playing prestigious role of a Hindu woman. The ideal of Goddess Annapurna has an image of the unfailing supplier of food, has an aesthetic appeal which sets out privation and sacrifice as the defining characteristic of the feminine moral character, it proclaims an idea that a woman has to think about others before herself.

At a very early age, a girl becomes conscious of the constraints under which she will have to live, that she must not violate 'man-made' rules that force self-denial and abstinence – hunger and malnutrition – upon her. The ritual practices of fasting and abstinence are a preparation for such a life, which for many women may include a period of a brutal ritual austerity as a widow.² The girls learn to bear pain and deprivation, eat anything that is given to them, and acquire the quality of self-denial – in effect, a kind of training for a reality that are more than likely to live out. As Bannerji points out, the glorification of feminine 'tolerance', 'sacrifice' and 'self-restraint' is rooted in a consciously cultivated feminine role, which is embedded in, and legitimised by, culture and cultural ideology.

Rituals also provide one of the important means through which girls come

² As Bannerji (2001) points out, the ritual practice of self-denial for Bengali widows “ does not serve as a source of solace or transcendence but of discipline or mania... Their lives serve as a condemnation of a society that has thrown women into a pit of brutality.” (Bannerji: 2001)

to realise the inevitability of their transfer from the natal home to that of the husband. Mazumdar (1984), talking about the socialisation of the Hindu middle class Bengali women, says,

“Durga *puja* does carry one important message for girls. This *puja* is supposedly in celebration of the goddess’ return to her natal home. The fact that it lasts for five days in the whole year forcefully suggests to the girl that, once married, she too cannot expect to visit her family very often”
(Mazumdar 1981:70)

In fact, in the process of socialisation of girls, there is a considerable emphasis on the possible need to bow before the wishes of the husband and his family and on submissiveness and obedience as feminine ideals in general.

In Bengal, as in many other parts of India, lullabies and nursery rhymes ensure from the outset that girls are familiarised with the complex wedding rituals that dramatise the transfer of the bride from one family to the other.

Dol dol duluni, ranga mathaiy ciruni,
Bor ashbe ekhuni, niye jabe tokhuni.
Rock-a-bye-baby, combs in your pretty hair,
The bridegroom will come soon and take you away.

This preoccupation with marriage is expressed through a number of ritual practices. *Broto kothas* are narrated for getting a husband like Shiva or Vishnu. The purpose of two popular festivals, specially meant for little

girls, are characterised by collective worship, singing, and playing, is to obtain a good husband.

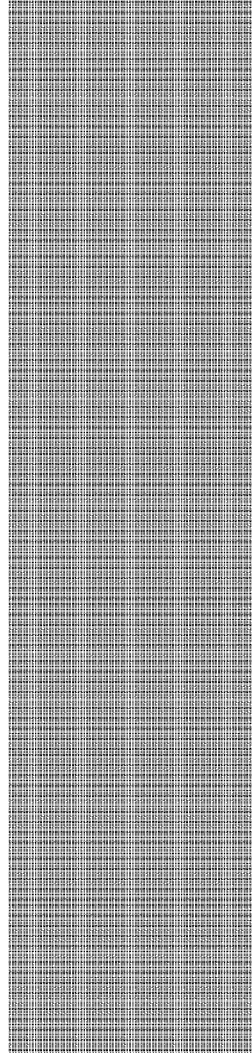
At the same time, these very forms have also been used to express women's despair and dissent. Forms such as doggerels, poems, proverbs, songs, dramatic compositions like the kirtans, *panchalis*, *kavi* songs, *tarjas*, *jhumur* songs, *kothakata* recitals, and wedding songs, which are peculiar to women's rituals are the oral preservation of anonymous composers which speak of the deprivations and insecurities of women. As Bannerji (2006) points out:

“The *vijaya* songs express the mother's sorrow at the departure of her daughter: the immersion of the goddess Durga becomes an excuse to give vent to the pangs of separation” (p.133) that every Bengali mother suffers when she is alienated from her daughter. The Radha-Krishna story also brings to light Radha's grouses about a philandering Krishna, which can be related to the “bitter admonitions of a Bengali wife hurled at her profligate husband” (p.136).

As the end and aim of a woman's life “is to cultivate the domestic affections, to minister to the comforts and happiness of her husband, to look after and tend her children and exercise her little supervision over domestic economies” (Sangari and Vaid 2006), the *broto kotha* is a justification and reassurance about her position and worth as a woman, as one whose only resource is home.

In this dissertation, we examine whether the *broto kotha* always exhibits

this radical potential in performance of a ritual. In the next two chapters, we present the results of a field study of the performance of the Lokkhi Puja ritual and the narration of the *broto kotha* to argue that ritual spaces may not always have this radical potential.



Chapter 3

Performing Patriarchy

Lokkhi *puja* is a traditional *puja* of Bengal, which is practiced five times a year. The Lokkhi *puja* studied here is a special one that takes place on the auspicious Omobassa day, usually in the month of November. The particular performance described here was held in a traditional area of Kolkata, Sobhabazaar, an area that was once inhabited primarily by the gentry.

The fieldwork consisted of an observation of the ritual interspersed with interviews with the participants of the *puja*, the full transcripts of which can be found in the Appendix. The preparations for, and the actual enactment of the interviews and the respondents were videotaped (see the enclosed CD-Rom).

Section 1 describes the structure of the ritual and discusses the gendered nature of participant roles. Section 2 examines specific aspects of the ritual to understand the patriarchal nature of the ritual space, and Section 3 concludes the chapter by examining gender relations in the ritual space.

3.1 The Ritual: An Overview

The women of the household decorate the area in which the *puja* is

supposed to take place. They do the arrangements with care and pleasure, ensuring that all the materials for the completion of each part of the ritual are in place, and their feelings of self-worth are evident.

The *alpana* (a decoration in white rice paste) is drawn at the entrance of the *thakur ghar* (the place where the idols of the god(s) are worshipped). This is a part of the ritual that gives space to women's creativity. The artist also transcribes the footsteps of Lokkhi in the *alpana*, and a *ghot* (a pot full of holy water) is placed on top of the *alpana*. The significance of the footsteps is to welcome the goddess to step into the house, and the *ghot* represents the god's spiritual presence.³

☞ The house is lit with *dhoop* (incense sticks), *dhuno* (an incense burner), and fourteen lamps in order to welcome goddess Lokkhi, and is lit. The idol of Lokkhi is created of a *kunke* (a rice measure) on top of which a *sindoor kouto* (vermilion pot) is placed. The *kunke* is filled with grain symbolising the goddess' wealth and glory. The idol is adorned with a rich ornamental (usually *Benarasi*) sari, a *cheli* (a silk loincloth worn in religious festivals), and a crown. Then she is placed on a throne surrounded by several *gach kouto* () and a *pancha* (an owl on which is

³ Some participants of the *pūja* reported that they had heard the some women even maintain an overnight vigil, with the doors of their homes ajar, in case Lokkhi should she visit their house. If this is indeed true, then the vigil represents an opportunity for women to escape the prescribed daily routine for a housewife, in which she can never sleep late, as she must be the earliest to rise.

Lokkhi's mount). The holy offerings to the goddess are seasonal fruits, known as *naibedda*. Women share the chore of cutting and arranging the offerings in wooden or metal plates on a *tepayya* (a stand made of three legs in the name of four gods, Lokkhi, Narayan (Lokkhi's consort), Kuber (god of wealth and glory),⁴ and an owl.

An important task that has to be performed is the making of the Olokkhi, Olokkhi literally means 'that person or event without Lokkhi' (luck/fortune), but is used here to indicate a female force of ill fortune that must be disparaged and cast out before the *puja* begins. A woman of the house makes the Olokkhi, which a coarse doll made out of cow dung – it is called a *putul* 'doll', rather than an idol. This doll is kept in one corner of the house, until the Brahmin priest arrives.

Before beginning the Lokkhi Puja, the Brahmin priest must first perform the *puja* of the Olokkhi. He then takes the Olokkhi out of the house, to burn her with a *paekati* (a kind of a stick generally used to burn dead bodies). In all this, the Brahmin priest uses his left hand, to denote the impurity of the Olokkhi and his disdain for it. As the Olokkhi burns in ashes, the young male children of the house play and dances with *koolo* (a flat and light vessel made of bamboo slips for winnowing grains) and *paekati*, as the destruction of the Olokkhi is to be celebrated.

⁴ Kuber has no idol – he exists only in thought.

The Lokkhi *puja* can now begin, as the destruction of the Olokkhi marks the spiritual rebirth of an ideal woman. The male head of the household performs the *puja* on the instructions of the Brahmin priest, who chants Sanskrit slokas to invoke the goddess. The man's role is confined to following instructions about placing reverential floral offering (*puspanjali*), and the like. Once this is complete, the *broto kotha* is read to complete the ritual. As stated, only women, girls, and young children participate to listen to the *kotha* session, which is usually narrated by a senior member of the household.

After the *broto kotha*, the Lokkhi Pancali may be read by the same narrator to an identical audience. The Pancali is a long poem that enumerates the attributes of Lokkhi and enjoins women to follow here example. In the performance of the ritual studied and described here, the *pancali* was not performed. The (Bangla) text of the poem is reproduced in Appendix 2, although we will not discuss the *pancali* further.

The ritual concludes with the distribution of *prosad* (the sacred food offered to the deity).

3.2 Pure and Impure Goddesses: the Olokkhi ritual

To properly appreciate the significance of the Lokkhi/Olokkhi ritual, it is necessary to contextualise it in terms of the social construct in which a girl/woman lives, as the concept of woman as a potentially source of misfortune and as an object to be controlled has its origins in social

attitudes towards women.

The production of women as gendered subjects begins from childhood itself, when she is repeatedly cautioned and cajoled into striving towards a feminine ideal. A preoccupation with the ways she sits, stands, carries herself, and talks and interacts with others marks every girl's childhood and adolescence. She is admonished to walk with a light tread == it should be so soft that her footsteps are barely audible to others. She should not sit cross-legged or with her legs wide apart. *Don't stand like a man*, is a common rebuke made to a girl to make her satisfy the demands of femininity. She is also often chastised for jumping; running and rushing about, as such activities are signs of masculinity. As she is taught that women are weak and frail in character, so she is warned against an overt display of ambition, strength, and steadfastness, which are considered masculine traits. She is required to speak softly and avoid abrasive 'male' language; in fact, even mild expressions of disgust or anger are frowned upon.

The moral code defining a woman's identity and conduct is also conditioned by her social status – caste, class, ethnicity, and religion, and vice versa. The one great fear is that an upper class woman may conduct herself as 'a woman of the street' or 'a domestic labourer.' Thus for pre-pubescent girls, whistling is tomboyish, but after puberty, it is a marker of promiscuity. This is also true of jangling bangles, laughing without purpose, glancing furtively, as shyness and modesty are considered natural

feminine qualities:

“Chewing betel leaves makes lips red, loose unplaited hair speaks of abandon, deserted woman. In many parts of India, girls were forbidden to look at a mirror or comb their hair after sunset, since these acts were associated with a prostitute getting ready for her customers. A girl standing in the doorway of the house during dusk is also particularly rebuked” (Dube 2001:107)

To become a perfect woman, such a girl must demonstrate an unusual self-restraint that will fortify her to bear pain and deprivation without question. Such a girl must be made to realise that her happiness and well being lies in her husband’s success, and later her children. While in worship, devotion is directed to god, in marriage it must be directed to one’s husband. Furthermore, a good woman is one who will pass all the norms and conventions she has been taught onto her female children through the process of socialisation, rituals, and ceremonies, the use of language and practices within and in relation to the family.

Women have been preached these norms and stereotypes, which in Indian history have the status of indisputable convention. The laws in the *Dharmasatras*, the legal texts, composed some time during the first two centuries of the Christian era by Brahmin men, accord women an inferior status, and prescribe their domination. For example, in the *Manava Dharmasatras* of Manu, women are classified in the lowest strata, irrespective of their social class or origin, and are stripped of their ritual

and social status. They are considered ritually impure and therefore not entitled to study, or recite the sacred mantras (Manu-9: 18).⁵

It is important to understand that these laws not only reflect the social conditions of the times, but also the ideal society that is aspired to as a goal. Consequently, much of the discrimination proposed in these texts is practiced until this day. As can be seen from the description of the Olokkhi ritual, the characterisation of woman as impurity/defilement, and the denial of women the rights to spiritual/religious practice, continues to this day.

The *puja* of the Olokkhi, that must precede that of Lokkhi, requires that the Brahmin priest first do a small *puja* of the Olokkhi with floral offerings, and then take it out of the house, to burn her with a *paekati* (a kind of a stick generally used to burn dead bodies). In these actions, the Brahmin priest uses his left hand in order to denote the impurity of the Olokkhi, as well as contempt for the negative principles the Olokkhi embodies.

The creator of the Olokkhi is a part of the custom to make the doll out of cow-dung. The priest in the outset would offer *pujato* this Olokkhi by taking it out of the house, and then would burn the doll. This indicates that as the Olokkhi is driven out of the house, the Lokkhi is welcomed inside.

⁵ The ritual impurity of women is such that they are proscribed from even touching the idol of Narayan, Lokkhi's consort.

The priest Olokkhi is made of cow-dung; it is given the shape of a doll, decorating it with false hair and other decorative items.

The old woman: The priest is always fixed; women do the arrangements. The priest takes the Olokkhi out of the house along with playing the broken *koolo* (a flat vessel for winnowing grains) and then starts the Lokkhi Puja.

As the Olokkhi burns in ashes, the young male children of the house celebrate, play, and dance. The Lokkhi *puja* then begins with the spiritual rebirth of Lokkhi – the ideal (woman/) goddess – from Olokkhi – the negative (female) force.

The ritual has significance at many levels. Notice that while a woman creates the Olokkhi, her expulsion, and immolation is by the male priest, an act that is rejoiced at by the young male members of the family. Olokkhi is not only symbolic of the exile of negativity and ill fortune, she is also a woman as the priest points out, and she is adorned like a woman, with false hair and jewellery. Her expulsion is accompanied by the playing of a broken *koolo*, a symbol for the lack of prosperity she brings to the household. Olokkhi offends patriarchal morality and conduct; she must be despised and driven out of the domestic sphere.

The ritual serves as a warning to the women observers – a similar fate awaits any woman who contravenes patriarchal morality. This practice thus is important for the maintenance of the patriarchal dictate that women must remain confined within the domestic sphere.

The sanction from social custom prevents any of the participants from questioning of the ritual. As can be seen below, neither the old woman nor the creator of the Olokkhi question the ritual or attempt to change its performance. Asked whether they felt that the fact women created the Olokkhi, but men were the ones to destroy it, the old woman, and the creator of the Olokkhi both stated that they did not think of these matters:

The creator of the Olokkhi do not know about this, in our house this norm is followed but in some households, women not only make the Olokkhi, they also drive it out of the house.

The old woman No, we never thought about such things. The Brahmin priest will carry out the *puja* We worshipped our god from within and said that whatever we knew we did at our best, you have accepted and approved of it {to god}. We wish to pray you again and again, this is what.

Neither these two women nor the priest is also able to make any explicit connection between the Olokkhi *puja*, expulsion, and the worship of Lokkhi. While the priest simply states that this is what has been prescribed by tradition, the two women try unsuccessfully to link it up with the *broto kothas* – the creator of the Olokkhi unsuccessfully tries to connect it with *kotha* narrated during the current Lokkhi *puja* ritual itself, the old woman invokes another *broto kotha*.

The priest we have been hearing since our grandparents time that at the outset of the *puja* Olokkhi is expelled out of the house, and only then we may start the Lokkhi *puja*.

The creator of the Olokhi The casting out of the Olokhi] has some connection with the story in the *broto kotha*. In the story, when the princess said that everyone gets food from their own fortune, the king did not believe her. As the princess was very stubborn, she wanted to prove what she had said. In the whole kingdom, like Olokhi, there was no light, and only her house was filled with light. This part OF the story, we can say, has some relation with the enactment. This is the reason why Olokhi *Puja* takes place before the Lokhi Puja.

The old woman in one *broto kotha* in the book, which I have learnt from others [once] a trader had managed to sell everything except one item at a market. Then the king bought it [from his subject] and kept it in his home. When he was in bed that night, he saw a lady walking away from his palace. He asked her who she was, and she replied that since he had bought Olokhi so she decided to abandon his palace. The king begged her to return, explaining that he had only bought the item because the trader would have returned home without the item being sold. Since that day, onwards it has been a social practice to drive Olokhi out of the house before the Lokhi Puja starts.

Neither these two women nor the priest is also able to make any explicit connection between the Olokhi *puja*, expulsion, and the worship of Lokhi. While the priest simply states that this is what has been prescribed by tradition, the two women try to link it up with the *broto kothas* – the creator of the Olokhi tries to connect it with the *kotha* narrated during the current Lokhi *puja* ritual itself, the old woman invokes another *broto kotha*. Although neither of these connections is well-argued, but the attempt to link up the expulsion of the Olokhi to the *broto kotha* is indicative of both the femaleness of Olokhi and Lokhi, and her

contribution to the ill-fortune of the household. In the creator of the Olokkhi, a connection between the stubbornness of the princess and the darkness in the kingdom is implied, whereas in the old woman's story, it is Lokkhi who is a woman, who cannot dwell in the house with another.

What is more striking about both responses is that they are primarily marked by a desire not to confront the gender discrimination and inequality that constitutes the message of the ritual. There is no attempt on any of the women's parts to understand the intent behind this ritual, and there seems to be a passive acceptance of its patriarchal message.

3.3 Narrating Patriarchy: The performance of the *Broto Kotha*

The *broto kotha* of this Lokkhi Puja is a *sahib kotha*, which is to be read by a married woman. After the *puja* is over, a senior married woman of the household narrator invites all women of the household, including the domestic help, and young children, irrespective of gender, to listen to the story that is supposed to serve as the moral/reason underlying the *puja*. In this section, we will subject the text of Lokkhi Puja *broto kotha* and its performance to critical scrutiny, in order to understand the ways in which the limited spaces for same sex interaction possible in patriarchy may be controlled. We will argue that both the *broto kotha* and the manner of its performance closes of the possibility of same-sex interaction.

3.3.1 Gendered Text(s)

Almost all the *pujas* performed in Bengal have such narratives associated

with them, and in the majority of these, the narrator is a woman. These narrations are never of the epics, which, extolling as they do, the glory heroic deeds of men, have very little to share with women. “Ramayana has been exploited by the patriarchal Brahminical system to construct an ideal Hindu female to help serve the system.” (Dev Sen)

The *broto kotha* narratives usually originate from the experiences that women can share in, usually reaffirming their status as those whose only resource is the patriarchal home and family.

“The end and aim of her life is to cultivate the domestic affections, to minister to the comforts and happiness of her husband, to look after her children and exercise her little supervision over domestic economies.” (Sangari and Vaid 2006:11)

The *broto kothas* are generally written in an informal style, and usually in *calit* (colloquial) Bangla, a fact that is expected under the patriarchal assumptions of women’s linguistic capabilities, as women are disallowed to read the classical language. While the basic narrative is identical across all texts, there is some textual variation are inevitable. We reproduce below one of the most the most popular versions in Bangla with its translation, and discuss the other in the text that follows.

The Lokkhi Puja Broto Kotha

Ek desher rajar panchti meye chilo. Ekdin raja shob meyeder deke jiggasha korlen je, tara shokale kar bhggye khay. Ei kothar uttore rajar choto meye chara shokolei bollo je, tara raja moshaiyer bhagge khay.

Kintu choto meye bollo je, je jar nijer bhaggye khay, aar maa Lokkhi tar baebostha kore daen. Choto meyer *kotha* shune rajar khub raag holo. Tini thik korlen je, shokale uthe tini jar mukh dekhben tari songe choto meyer biye deben. Porer din shokale uthte raja baire berutei dekhlen je, opor ek rajjer ek brahmon aar tar chele rajbariri samne diye kothao jacche. Raja brahmon ke deke tar songe *kotha* bole tar cheler songe chotomeyetir biye diye dilen.

Rajar meye tar cheler choto bou holo dekhe becara gorib brahmon khubi aaschorja holo aar besh cintay porlo. Rajkonyar mone kintu kono koshto holo na, se besh aanonde shami aar soshurke niye ghor korte laglo. Ei bhabe besh kichu din kete gelo. Eri modhye rajkonya Ekdin shami aar soshurke bollo, “barir samne ja dekhte paben tai niye aashben.” Ekdin tar shami barir samne ekta mora keute shap ke pore thakte dekhlo. Se tar strir *kotha* moto shaptake tule ene tar strike diye dilo. Rajkonyao sei mora shapta ke ek jaigay tule rakhlo.

Sei somoy sei desher rajar cheler khub oshukh hoyechilo. Onek kobiraj-boiddo dekhlen kintu keu tar rogh sharate parlen naa. Sheshe ek buro kobiraj bollen je, ekta mora keute shaper matha jodi kono rokome jogar korte para jay-tahole tar cheleke bacano jabe. Raja ei *kotha* shunu caridike dhaera pitiye dilen je, mora keute shaper matha je ene dite parbe, se ja caibe raja bina didhay take tai deben. Ei dhaera pitonor *kotha* rajkonyao shunte pelo. Se tokhuni tar soshurke diye mora keute shapta rajar kache pathiye dilo. Songe songe se soshurke e *kothao* bole dilo je, raja kichu dite caile ta jeno naa neowa hoy, shudhu rajake eituku bolte hobe je, tar rajje, kartik masher omabossar rathtire kono gramer kono ghare keu jeno naa aalo jalay. Rajkonyar soshur rajake ei *kotha* janiye shudu hatei phire elen, aar rajao aabar caridike dhaera pitiye shokolke janiye dilen je, kartik masher omabossar rathtire tar rajje keu jeno aalo naa jalay.

Tarpor kartik masher omabossar rath ashte rajkonya nije khub jak-jomoker songe Lokkhi puja korlo ebong barikhanar caridike aalo diye

khub sajiye rakhlo. Maa Lokkhi dekhlen, ekmathro sei gorib brahmoner bari chara aar karur barite aalo jolche naa. Maa tokhon sei gorib brahmoner gorei dukhlen. Rajkonyao khub bhakti nishthar songe maa Lokkhir puja korlen. Maa Lokkhio rajkonyar puja te khub shontushto hoye bollen, “tor ghare aami aamar payer nupur rekhe jacche, ekhon theke aar toder kono koshto thakbe naa.” Jabar somoy maa Lokkhi rajkonyake *ekothao* bole gelen je, tara jeno bhadra mash, kartik mash, poush mash aar caitra masheo emni bhabei Lokkhi puja kore.

Maa Lokkhir doyay gorib brahmoner aar kono koshtoi roilo naa, aar rajar moto oishorjo holo. Obosta bhalo hobar por rajkonya tar soshurke ekta pukur pratishtha korte bollo. Rajkonyar *kotha* moto pukur katano holo. Pratishthar din bohu lok khaowanor babostha holo. Dole dole lok khaowa -daowar janno ashte laghte laghlo, aar rajkonya shob dekhte laghlo barir janlay boshe. Emon somoy rajkonya dekhlo je, sei shob lok joner modhye tar babao royechen. Se tokhuni tar soshurke diye tar babake dakiye aanalo, tar nijer poricoy dilo tar kache.

Rajkonyar babao tokhon meyeke janalen je, maa Lokkhi tar opor oshuntushto howay tar rajje, dhon sompotthi shobi noshto hoye geche. Rajkonya shob shune tar baba ke Lokkhi puja korte bollo. Erpor raja deshe phire gelen ebong bhakti bhore Lokkhi puja korlen. Erphole olpo diner modhei dhon sompotthi shobi phire pelen. Raja besh kichudin tar rajjer o songsharer sokolke niye besh shanty te bash korlen, sheshe tar chele-meyeder Lokkhi puja korar jonno upodesh diye shorge cole gelen. Ei bhabei kartik masher omabossa maa Lokkhi pujar procar holo morte.

In a country, a king had five daughters. One day he asked them as to whom they considered the source of their good fortune. All the daughters answered that their sustenance was his wealth, except the youngest daughter who replied that her survival was because of her own deeds and fortune, with the blessings of goddess Lokkhi.

The king flew into a rage, and pledged that first thing in the morning he would get his younger daughter married. The next, when he arose, he

saw a Brahmin boy of another country along with his father passing by. Remembering his vow, he calls the Brahmin boy, and gets his daughter married to him.

The poor old Brahmin was very astonished to see his son coming back with a princess as a wife, and gets very worried about her well being. Nevertheless, the princess learned to adjust to her changed circumstances, to endure pain and suffering. In due course, she came to be happy in her domestic life along with her husband and father-in-law.

Time passed, and one day, out of nowhere, the princess asks his father-in-law and her husband, "Whatever you see near the house, you bring that thing home." One day, as her husband saw a dead snake, he brought it home and the princess concealed it in a private place.

At that time, the prince (of the other land the princess was now living in) was suffering from a terrible disease, which the doctors had failed to cure. An old doctor was called, and he opined to the king that only a head of a dead snake could only cure him. The king immediately proclaimed that whoever comes to his help would be given substantial amount of wealth. When the princess heard about the critical condition of the king's son, she asked his father-in-law to visit the palace with the dead snake. She instructed him not to accept any wealth from the king, but to instead to request the king to order his subjects not to light their houses in the month of Kartik on an Omobassa night.

Her father-in-law did what the princess had asked, and that day, the princess performed the Lokkhi *puja* with great pomp and show and decorated the house with lamps. As goddess Lokkhi stepped down on the earth, she saw the princess' house to be the only house lit with lamps and glittering in light. She entered the poor Brahmin's house. The princess did the *puja* with great devotion and piety and that made the goddess Lokkhi happy as well as satisfied. She said, "I am keeping my

anklets in this house, and you will never have to bear any kind of pain or poverty." While leaving, she reminded them that they should continue with the *puja*, on the month of Bhadra, Kartik, Poush, and Caitra.

The benediction helped the poor family; they led a happy life without suffering and poverty. After they became very rich, the princess wanted to build a pond and after getting her father-in-law's permission, the pond was dug. A grand feast arranged was arranged and many people were invited. On the day, as the many guests were streaming in, the princess, watching from a window from inside the inner quarters, saw her father was also in the line of guests entering. She asked her father-in-law to summon her father, and as he came in, she revealed her identity to him. The king repented at his treatment of the princess, saying that he had lost everything because he displeased goddess Lokkhi. The princess advised her father to start the *puja* in a devout manner. On following his daughter's advice, he became rich again within few days and lived happily until the end of his days.

The king counselled his subjects to perform the Lokkhi Puja, and this is why to this day, this *puja* is celebrated.

The narrative is thus about a woman character who challenges patriarchy, by challenging the accepted patriarchal norms that a woman's sustenance has its source in the generosity of the male patriarch (king). When asked, she boldly asserts that one survives on one's own deeds. The king's rage on hearing this, and his decision to exile her from her home and the kingdom, marks out the power and the wrath of a male patriarch whose power is challenged in the family. For him, the status of a king is more important than the relation of a father.

The princess' plight is well reflected in the *kotha* – though she is born a

princess, she is made to undergo trial and tribulation at the whim of a man's ego. At the same time, the story also suggests a scheming, vengeful side to her character – she seems to know that she will need the cobra's head in advance of her brother's illness; she uses her father-in-law to ensure that goddess Lokkhi cannot visit any other house in the kingdom. The devotion and enthusiasm with which she does the *puja* is then suspect – as the tacit motive is revenge. Her scheming works, and the trick is played well, and the goddess Lokkhi approves of her efforts, and emancipates her from the anguish of servility, poverty, and misfortune.

At the same time, there is also admiration for the princess' role as the sole saviour of her marital family, without transgressing the boundaries of the domestic. She instructs her husband and father-in-law to do her bidding by asking their 'permission'; and at the great feast to celebrate the fruition of her desire for a pond, she watches from, and stays within the *andarmahal*.

The *broto kotha* narrated in the Lokkhi Puja studied here approximates to this version. However, other versions exist as well, and they differ from this one in tenor and mood. In one such version of the same *broto kotha* (), though the basic structure and the story is apparently the same there are some significant changes.

There is an addition of a queen, who tries to protect her daughter from the king's rage – she orders the subjects of the realm not to come out of their houses after the king pledges that whoever he sees the next morning will

become his son-in law (*Rani ei kotha shune nogorer lokeder shokale rastay berute o dokan-pat khulte barun kore dilen*). Nevertheless, the queen is a timid, yielding and docile character, and being totally w subservient, fails in protecting her daughter. She thus contrasts with the princess – having no self, she lives in her husband’s identity, but the princess has her own will, so she protests the fetters of male authority, and suffers exile and exclusion.

In this version, the Brahmin boy and his father is depicted as quite crafty. When they come to know about the king’s vow, they decide to sit and wait near the king’s door to remind him of his promise. On the other hand, the princess is not as ambivalent a character in this version – for example, the princess’ mysterious request to her husband (and father-in-law) to bring back whatever they find. It is made explicit that the request has to do with the fact that since the family was very poor, the princess asked them to at least bring something when they return home. This version also details the poverty she lives in – they are so poor that the princess had to eat out of her husband’s plate, as she none of her own. Unable to bear the pain of this property, she utilises the situation to gain wealth. At the end of the story, too, the princess is shown to be victorious in her belief and her strong will.is applauded.

3.3.2 The Narration

A narrative tradition of women narrators is not uncommon in Bengal, even

for the mythic narratives, normally told by men. Women's retelling of epic mythic narratives is often quite different from men. In the epic mythic narratives, the patriarchal system cannot be refuted nor contravened, and its re-telling emphasises the overpowering and overbearing nature of patriarchy. In women's retellings however, there are sharp judgements and harsh criticism of this system. For example, in retelling the Ramayana, at the point when Rama questions Sita's purity, women throw imprecations at him, calling him a '*pashanda*' or '*papistha*' (sinner), attack him by saying, "Rama, you have lost your mind" ("*Ram, tomar buddhi hoilo nash*"). In the male version of the story, Rama is a brave, victorious hero and Sita is a Devi, who virtuously accepts the pain and suffering; but, in the women's re-telling, she is a yielding, suffering wife who speaks of her sufferings, injustice, loneliness and sorrow.

The existence of these alternative interpretations of the mythic epic narratives suggests that women may use the limited space for same-sex interaction allowed within patriarchy to quite radical ends. However, this does not happen in the Lokkhi Puja studied here. Although women across classes sit together, in a continuance of the historical solidarity of the women of the *andarmahal*, to listen to the narration, there is no interaction between them. In fact, their very presence at the narrative seems to be forced by the twin pressures of the sacred and social.

The *broto kotha* itself must be read from the book at high speed, without narrative or inflection of spontaneity or empathy. This reading mimics the

way that Sanskrit *slokas* are chanted a story-telling, with the result that the narration of the *broto kotha* loses its narrativity entirely, and becomes opaque and irrelevant for the women in the same way a patriarchal religious *puja* does. As can be seen from the enclosed video, the interest it arouses in the audience is minimal.

The narrator's own response to the story is interesting. When asked whether she believes in the story, she answers candidly that she does not, as it seems specious to her, and that is no link between the story and the actual ritual. However, she also feels that it is impossible to repudiate custom and the system behind it. She is ready to accept changes and innovations by others, but she will not initiate things herself. When asked about the characterisation of the princess in the *kotha*, she agrees that she has presented as scheming. She believes that although the *kotha* is an established text, it is unrelated to the Lokkhi Puja itself, and seems unbelievable and irrelevant.

The narrator: No I do not believe in the broto kotha. There is no connection with the ritual. Probably I could not have change things in the kotha, because it is a custom.... Some kind of fear of God works within us, should I change? No let it be, but if somebody recasts it then I would accept it. ... I do not think much about it. since these days' women are doing lot of work on their own. In a broto kotha what happens it hardly matters. I follow the ritual as I feel like.

It is important to note that the loss of narrativity is not inherent. The same narrator, when she informally narrates the story to the researcher while

she is making arrangements for the *puja*, as there she inflects the story with drama, relevance, and sympathy, as can be seen by the transcript below:

Krishno pokkher ratrite ghor omabosshay kono ghare aalo jolbe naa, rajamoshai meyeder porikkha korchen je tomra kar bhagge khao? Tomra kar khao? Onno dui meye bollo baba aamra tomar bhagge khai, kintu choto meye bollo naa baba aami nijer bhagge khai, rajamoshaiyer khub raag holo, bollo thik ache kal shokale aami prothome jar mukh dekhbo tar songei tomar biye debo, dekhbo kemon nijer bhagge khao, gorib brahmoner sathei rajkonnar biye diye dilo ebong take niye cole gelo, ebong raja bollo je ebar dekhi tumi ki kore nijer bhagge khao.

Eibar rajkonna to shoshurbari cole gelo, tar onek din kete gelo, ebong erokom jai hok kore to din katche, ebong erokom krishno pokkher ratri te, rajkonna tar shami aar shoshur ke bollo je aapnara bhikka korte beroon to konodin khali haate phirben naa, ja hoy ekta kichu niye ashben, to ekdin ora ekta mora keute shap peyechilo to setakei niye eshechilo, to rajkonna setake niyei rekhechilo, ekdin rajamoshaiyer khub kothin oshukh hoy, to rajboiddo bollo je keu jodiekta mora keute shap dite pare tahole rajamoshaiyer oshukh thik hoye jabe, to tarpor rajjomoy dhera petalo je karur kache jodi mora keute shap thake tahole niye ashukh, aami onek dhon doulot debo, to rajkonna tar shami shoshurke bollo je apnara ei shaptake niye rajdorbare jan, okhane rajake deben, ora taka poysha cai ni, keu jeno omabosshar ratrite deep naa jalay, ebar omabosshar rate koyhao kono aalo jolche naa, rajkonna erokom lokkhi thakur ke sajiye deep jaliye boshe ache, eibar maalokkhi shao ondhokar dekhe, kothao kono aalo jolche naa shudhu ekta barite jolche, tokhon oi baritei eshe rajkonna maane maa lokkhi eshe boshlen.

Eibar rajamoshai to banijje bhoradubi holen, maare bhishon gorib hoye gelen, maane se ekebare bhikari hoye gelen, tarpor oi diketerajkonnar prasad toiri hocche, maane choto rajkonnar, eibar sekhne raja aar rani

maa mojur khathte esheche, dur theke rajkonna dekhe tar shami aar shoshur ke diye tader deke pathiyeche, dakar por rajkonna tader sundor kore sajiye khete dilo, aar rajamoshai ekbar kore khacche aar khub kandche. Tokhon bolche je aapni erokom kandchen keno? Tokhon rajamoshai bolchen je dekho maa tomar moton aamar o ekta meye chilo, take aami bhaggo porikkha korte giye ekta gorib brahmoner sathe biye diyechilam, jani naa ekhon se bece ache kina. To khon rajkonna bollo je amiy aapnar sei meye, maa lokkhi dekhale to je ke kar bhagge khay, ekhon ami amar bhagge khai. Dekho maa ami aamar bhul bujte perechi ebong je jar manush nijer bhagge khay, etai hocche mul katha.(said to the researcher)

On the night of the Krishno Pokkho Omobassa, houses must not be lit. The king was testing his daughters' loyalty. He asked them "on whose fortune do you think that you are prospering? Two daughters replied that it was his generosity, but the younger daughter replied that she prospered because of her own actions and deeds. The king became enraged and he vowed to teach her a lesson, he said " I will marry you off to the first person he saw the next morning, and then we'll see how you eat [prosper]!"

The princess was married to a poor Brahmin boy. The king taunted her "we'll see now how you eat [prosper]!" The princess left with her husband for her in-laws home. Days passed and the princess somehow learns to manage in her changed circumstances.

One night, on Krishno Pokkho, she tells her husband and father-in-law, that "when you go out to beg for alms, do not return empty-handed." When they returned, they brought a dead cobra back with them and the princess took it and kept it.

One day, the king of the other land falls seriously ill and the royal physician says that "if anyone could find a dead cobra, then the king could recover." Royal proclamations were made, with the promise of a

reward. The princess heard it, and told her husband and father-in-law, "You go to the place to give the dead cobra. However, do not take any money. Just ask that on the Omobassa, nobody should light lamps in the houses."

On Omobassa night, the houses were not, and the princess decorates the house (in a manner similar to what I have been doing), and waits for the goddess' arrival. When Goddess Lokkhi sees that all is dark except for the one house, she enters (and the princess gains wealth).

Now, by this time, the princess' father's business had collapsed – he had become very poor, a complete pauper. On the other hand, the princess was building a mansion. The king and the queen now come to work as labourers on the construction site. On seeing them approach, the princess asks her husband and father-in-law to bring them to her quarters.

After they come, the princess feeds her parents a royal meal with loving care. As he ate, the king alternately looks at the princess in astonishment, and weeps. The princess asks him "why are you crying like this?" the king replies, "I once had a daughter like you. Because I tested her [and she failed], I had her married off to a poor Brahmin. Who knows whether she is alive or not?" the princess then reveals her identity to him "I am that daughter." The princess says "now you see, ma Lokkhi has shown who eats on whose fortune. Now, I eat because of my fortune." The king says, "I now understand how I have wronged you."

The essential moral is that each one lives according to his fortune [will and deeds].

The *broto katha* is told in a spontaneous, conversational style with an awareness of the audience. Told in the imperfective aspect, which is characteristic of Bangla narratives, she repeatedly confirms that the

audience (the researcher) is following her, by the means of using interjections like-“*hae*,” “*ebong*”, “*tokhon*”, “*bujecho*” etc. The story she tells is one of real people, who speak in direct rather than quoted speech, and have feelings and emotions. For example, she emphasises the cruel and merciless character of the king by repeating his vengeful threat to his daughter, “we’ll see now how you eat [prosper]! (*dekhbo kemon tomar bhagge khao-raja bollo ebar dekhi tumi ki kore nijer bhagge khao*).” She also alludes to the princess’ experience of poverty and endurance with sympathy.

In general, the narrator expresses a greater identification with the princess -- when the king is impoverished, the narrator reiterates the fact, so as to bring home to the audience that he has got what he deserved. She changes the story to drive home the message that the king has wronged the princess. In referring to the great wealth the princess achieves, and by making her construct a mansion (rather than a pond) and reducing her parents to the status of labourers, the narrator wishes to communicate to the audience that if injustice is done, then it will bring misfortune who the perpetrators. The narrator thus makes a moral judgement in favour of the princess, a fact that is emphasised by her alteration of the story to make the king apologise to the princess for his wrongdoing. This event affirms the narrator’s judgement, as does the moral she herself pronounces (which echoes the princess’ words) at the conclusion of the tale.

In this retelling, the story becomes more coherent, with each event in it

being linked with the previous one. There is no mystery in the way the princess' gains the dead cobra. Even though the princess does gain her wealth by ensuring that the other houses in the kingdom are dark on the night of Krishno Pokkho, the narrator does not judge this to be a trick. Rather, the emphasis is on how she becomes successful by her own actions. The princess is also not characterised as malicious or spiteful – when she sees her parents at the construction site, she immediately invites them and treats them honourably, elicits an apology, and accepts it. At the same time, she does not leave the opportunity to make the point that she herself has made her own fortune, and that she had been wronged.

This conspicuous difference in the narrative style and the content of the tale, I suggest, is due to the fact that the narrative is being recited in a ritual space, which is emptied of its emancipatory potential. The absence of the narrative style we have witnessed above is the means as well as the ends to accomplish the objectives of patriarchy.

3.4 Gender Relations

An important aspect of this narrative is its positioning immediately between the *puja* and the distribution of prosad, as this means that the male of the household must wait for its completion. Only young male children are part of the audience in the women's gathering, and this is by virtue of the societally endorsed link between mother and male child. In Bengali society, a mother is supposed to be more revered than a father is

by young male children. In adolescence, however, he has to emulate his father, and young men are taught to consider the rituals associated with their mothers and women as despicable and feminine. This is shown by the responses of the male head of the household – although he admits that he had enjoyed the story as a child, he has only vague memories of the story, and does not listen to it now, despite the fact that it is being performed in his own house.

The man: When we were young, these narratives used to attract us since they had a story to tell... the story tells us about goddess Lokkhi's potential in bestowing wealth. I read it one or twice, when asked by my grandmother.

The *broto kothas* not really related with the *puja* but it consists of a story which is somewhat related, the story tells us about goddess Lokkhi's potential in bestowing wealth. The story was interesting so I used to read it sometimes. ... I do not listen now because the same thing is narrated repeatedly, so there is no novelty in it.

Both this man, as well as the Brahmin priest, are conscious of the fact that all the work for the *puja* must be done by women, but emphasise that role of men is central to the *puja*. This is reiterated by the old woman as well. We find that the priest and the old woman are both most committed to a strict division of gender roles.

In conclusion, we would like to consider how the Olokki ritual connects with the *broto katha*. The ritual starts with the burning of *Olokki* and ends with the narration of the *katha*. The Olokki ritual enacts the

expulsion from the home of the woman who brings bad luck, so that the good and virtuous woman can be welcomed. The *broto katha*, on the other hand, tells us the story of a woman who challenges patriarchal norms and nevertheless succeeds. The message of the *broto katha* thus stands as a contradiction to the message of the Olokkhi ritual. This tension is defused by the ritually prescribed mechanical way of narrating the *broto katha*, to the extent that its content may be virtually ignored. Thus, patriarchy re-establishes control over what could have become an emancipatory space.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

This dissertation has focused on the subtle nuances of the practice of patriarchal rituals, and the *broto kotha* narratives that are a part of them. We have argued that that patriarchy operates at every level in the performance of the ritual, from the preparations for the puja to the expulsion of the *Olokkhi*, to the ritual *broto kotha* narratives. The argument made here is that the ritual space is almost wholly patriarchal, and dictated by patriarchal norms.

Our particular focus has been the particular Lokkhi *broto kotha*, which we have shown to be exceptional in that the actions of its chief character, the princess challenge the patriarchal order, by questioning her father's (the king's) authority. The princess is portrayed as an equally wilful character, who through her actions is successful in challenging the existing system. Importantly, this characterisation of the female protagonist as a strong woman is unique among the *broto kothas*.

The performance of this *broto kotha* by women to an audience of however does not involve the spontaneity, passion, and enthusiasm that befit the tale. Rather, it is read verbatim in a mechanical and monotonous style, typical to the reading of religious texts. This observation suggests that,

although women are given a space of same-sex interaction by the patriarchal order, this space remains a patriarchal construct, which does not allow them to break free of the shackles of patriarchy. We contrast this with the instance when the narrator tells the tale outside the ritual space, she invests a lot of feeling and empathy in it.

As the study is based on the observation of a single ritual performance in isolation, further research is needed to evaluate the conclusions reached here, via a study of the performance of Lokkhi Puja rituals in other areas of Bengal, and across social classes.

It will be recalled that one of the most articulate respondents in this study exhibits an awareness of the injustice of the *kotha's* portrayal of the princess as wilful and crafty. She states that if somebody were to change this characterisation, she would readily adopt. An in-depth investigation is needed to understand whether other women feel the same way, as well as the extent to which women will actually accept changes and innovations in these *kothas*.

Appendix I

Interview Transcripts

THE WOMAN WHO MADE THE OLOKKHI

- Q: Eta ki toiree korecho?
What are you making?
- A: Goborer putool toiri hocche, niyomer moddhe pore. Eta thakur moshai aage poojo kore saudorer baire giye, paekati aar kulo bajiye putooltake jaliye debe. Tarmane, Olokkhi biday holo, er pore thakur moshai barir bhetoire giye Lokkhi Puja shuru korbe. The Olokkhi is prepared of cow-dung, and is ousted from the house. At the outset the priest will expel the Olokkhi, by first offering some prayers with little flowers and fruits, after that it will be driven out of the house. After she has been ostracised, we all welcome Lokkhi by asking her to step into the house. Then the priest washes his hands and feet to sit for the Lokkhi Puja.
- Q: Thakur moshai ki biday koren? Chelera ki biday kore
Is it only the priest who can drive the Olokkhi out of the house, or is it that the males can do it too?
- A: Barir mongoler janye.haa chelera biday kore, tarpor Lokkhi Puja shuru hoy.
It is for the welfare of the house. Yes, the men only drive the Olokkhi out of the house, and then the *puja* begins.
- Q: Meyera *Olokkhi* toiri kore aar cholera *Olokkhi* biday kore? tomar e sambondhe ki mone hoy?
The women make the Olokkhi and the men are allowed to drive it out? What do you think about it?
- A: Eta ami jani naa, eta amader barite acche, kintu onek barite abaar meyerai toiri kore aar meyerai biday kore. Ei barite chelera biday kore.
I do not know about this, in our house this norm is followed but in some households, women not only make the Olokkhi, they also

drive it out of the house.

Q: *Olokkhi* bolte tumi ki bojho?

What do you understand by *Olokkhi*?

A: Ei khane golpotar sathe meel acche.golpe jemon raajkumaree bolechilen je ami amaar nijer bhagge khai, sei jinishta raja bishsash koren ni, jeder boshe raajkumaree dekhate ceyechilen je shobai taar nijer bhaggei khay, shara rajye *Olokkhir* moto kono aalo nei.kintu onaar barite aalo acche.ekthane golpotar sathe ekta relation royeche.tai Lokkhi Pujar aage *Olokkhi* biday hoy.

[The casting out of the *Olokkhi*] has some connection with the story in the *broto kotha*. In the story, when the princess said that everyone gets food from their own fortune, the king did not believe her. As the princess was very stubborn, she wanted to prove what she had said. In the whole kingdom, like *Olokkhi*, there was no light, and only her house was filled with light. This part of the story, we can say, has some relation with the enactment. This is the reason why *Olokkhi Puja* takes place before the Lokkhi Puja.

Q: Biday ta cheleraï to kore na?

Is it the boys who only drive the *Olokkhi* away?

A: Biday chelera kore, paekati koolo bajay.chelera egoolo kore, Meyera korte pare naa,Meyera shudhu pootul tai korte pare.thakur moshai er jogaar korte pare, kintu thakur moshai otake paekati diye jalabe.aar barir choto choto chelera koolo bajate bajaate *Olokkhi* ke barir baire baar kore, Lokkhi ke aane.Lokkhir aagomon hoy.

A man does the expulsion, women are not allowed to do these acts, and they can only make the doll. They make the arrangements for the priest to perform the *puja* the priest burns the *Olokkhi* as the young male members of the house dance in jubilation playing a *koolo*. Through this enactment, they welcome Lokkhi.

THE NARRATOR

Q: Aapni broto kothatai bishsash koren?

Do you believe the *broto kotha*, the text?

A: Naa, kori naa.

No, I do not believe in the *broto kotha*

Q: Ki meel acche?

What relation does the *broto kotha* have with the ritual?

A: Kono meel nei.

There is no similarity with the ritual.

Q: Aapnake jodi boltam ota ektu palte dite, ta hole Aapni ki korten?

If you were asked to change certain things in the *kotha* what would you have done?

A: Seta hoyto korte partam naa, kaaron ekta sanskar to, ja hoye ashche. hoye ashukh.

Probably I could not have done that, because it is a custom, whatever is happening. Let it happen.

Q: Ki mone hoy je ki korle meyeta caritrata broto kotha te ektu bhalo hoto? ekhane jemon dekhiyeche je meyeta hothath kore mora keute shap ene aalmarie te lukiye raklo. jeno gota galpotar modhye ekta trick er baepar royeche.

What do you think, what we could do to improve the character of the women in the *broto kotha*? Here in the *kotha* it has been shown that suddenly the girl gets a dead snake and hides it in her cupboard. As if the whole story uses some trick.

A: Jaeno aage thekei jene geche je erokom ekta hobe. aar maa Lokkhi amar ghare ashbe, eta jaeno thik mene nite iccha korche naa, jodi bishsash joggo galpo hoto taholeo thik chilo. aabar eteo thik je ja aage theke hoye ashche. ekta thakurer baepar. moner modhe to ekta bhoy kaaj kore, aami palte debo?. naa thak keu jodi shahosh kore koren to korun, aami mene nebo.

[Yes], as if it was conspired in such a fashion that she knew from beforehand. and that goddess Lakshmi would enter my house, this story is not believable. It is also true to certain extent that the story has been passing on since generations. It is related to god and supernatural forces. Some kind of fear works within us, should I change? No let it be, if somebody recasts it then I would accept it

Q: Broto kotha te ki kono sadhu calit baebhar aache?

Is there any use of *sadhu* and *calit* bhasa in the *broto kotha*?⁶

A: Naa, *calit* tei to hoye asche, aami ja maa der somoy theke dekhechi.

No, it has been in its *calit* form as I have been seeing from the times of my mother.

Q: Ei je brotokotha ta lekha hoyeche, eta ekta cheler lekha. othocho narrate korbar somoy kintu ekta meye korche, aapnar e sambondhe ki dharona, je chelera likhche othocho porchi aamra meyera?

This *broto kotha* is compiled and written by a man, yet during the time of narration it is a female who narrates it, what do you think regarding this, that it is written by a man whereas read by a woman?

A: Tate aamar kichu mone hoy naa, karon aajkal meyera onek kaaj i to korche. ekta broto kothay ki holo tate bishesh kichu jai ashe naa. Aami aamar nijer moto kore puja kori.

I do not think much about it, since these days, women are doing lot of work on their own. In a *broto kotha* what happens it hardly matters. I follow the ritual as I feel like.

THE OLD WOMAN

Q: Aapni konodin panchali porechen ki?.ki mone hoyeche panchali pore.shekhane Lokkhi bolte ki bujhiyeche?

Did you ever read *panchali* What did you feel after reading it? How Lokkhi is depicted there?

A: Lokkhir aaradhona kori, sonsharer mongoler janye.raater belay puja hoy, deepabolir deen.

We offer prayer to goddess Lokkhi, for the welfare of the family. The *puja* takes place at night, on the auspicious day of Deepaboli.

Q: Lokkhi Puja ki shobsomoy rater belatei hoy?

Does Lokkhi Puja always take place at night?

A: Naa, bhadra, poush mashe sokale hoy, ei puja tai shudhu sondhe

⁶ *Sadhu* is the formal and *calit* the informal variations of Bangla language.

belay hoy, deepabolir deen.

No, the *puja* which occurs in the month of Bhadra and Poush, takes place at the morning time, whereas this *pujais* always at evening time, on the day of Deepaboli.

Q: Ei puja ta ki omaaboshai hoy?

Does this *puja* take place at the time of Omobassa?

A: Haa, aamader *Olokkhi* bole. goborer *Olokkhi* kore, biday deoya hoy. prothome purohit eshe *Olokkhi* biday korbe, taake phol-mool diye puja kore shodorer baire bar kore aashbe.maane shodorer baire. Seikhane taake paar kore diye eshe bole, maa, gharer Lokkhi ghare esho, *Olokkhi* biday hou. Purohit taarpore haat-paa dhuye puja korte boshe.

Yes, we call it *Olokkhi*. The *Olokkhi* is prepared of cow-dung, and is ousted from the house. At the outset the priest will expel the *Olokkhi*, it will be offered some prayers with little flowers and fruits, after that it will be driven out of the house. After she has been ostracised, we all welcome *Lokkhi* by asking her to step into the house. Then the priest washes his hands and feet to sit for the *Lokkhi Puja*.

Q: *Olokkhi* biday chelera naa meyera kore?

Is the expulsion of *Olokkhi* done by the men or women?

A: Purohit jogar kora thake, jogar meyera kore. purohit haate kore niye. bhanga kulo baajiye taake gharer baire ber kore deoya hobe, eshe purohit *Lokkhi Puja* shuru korbe.

The priest is always fixed; women do the arrangements. The priest takes the *Olokkhi* out of the house along with playing the broken *koolo* and then starts the *Lokkhi Puja*.

Q: Aapnar ki mone hoy. *Olokkhi* gorche meyerai othocho biday korche chelera.e bishoye aapnar ki mone hoy?

What do you think? The women make the *Olokkhi* but it is oust by the men-folk. What do you think regarding this issue?

A: Broto kothar boite aache. poroshpor poroshpor shikichi. seta lekha achhe je bajare bikree korte esechilo shob bikree hoyechilo, oi jinishta bikree hoyni, tarpur raja kine ene barite rakhe, raatre ghumote dekhe ke ekjon beriye jacche, tokhon bolechen Aapni ke maa? Tokhon boleche tumi *Olokkhi* kinocho aami aar tomar bari thakbo naa. Tokhon raja bollen o phiri jaben bikri hoy ni tai raja

kinechilen. sei thekei aamader protha hoye geche, je Olokkhi biday hoy tobe Lokkhi Puja shuroo hoy.

In one *broto kothain* the book, which I have learnt from others [once] a trader had managed to sell everything except one item at a market. Then the king bought it [from his subject] and kept it in his home. When he was in bed that night, he saw a lady walking away from his palace. He asked her who she was, and she replied that since he had bought Olokkhi so she decided to abandon his palace. The king begged her to return, explaining that he had only bought the item because the trader would have returned home without the item being sold. Since that day, onwards it has been a social practice to drive Olokkhi out of the house before the Lokkhi Puja starts.

Q: Broto kotha kara pore? Chelera na meyera?

Who are the ones to read the *broto kotha*? Men or women?

A: Meyera pore.

Women read the *kotha*.

Q: Aar panchali meyera pore?

Do the women read *panchali* too?

A: Meyerai. puja hoye gele, meyera eksonge boshe broto kotha boi pore.

Only the women. After the *pujais* over, the women sit together and narrate the *broto kotha*.

Q: Aaccha. aami pujari mane thakur moshai er kach theke shunchilam, ooni bolchilen je narayon puja te je broto kotha ache seta naaki ekmatro. narayon puja teo naaki ekta panchali hoy, seta naaki chelera pore, brahmon purohit?

I heard from the priest. In the Narayan *Puja*, there is also a *broto kotha* which can be read only. Is there a *panchali* in the Narayan *Puja* that is read only by men, Brahmin priest?

A: Hae, narayon puja ta shunichi je meye manush cole naa. narayon poojo ta shunichi meyecheler dara hoy naa.

Yes, I have heard that women cannot perform Narayan *Puja*. A woman cannot practice it.

Q: Aapnar e sambondhe kichu dharona ache. je meyerai keno narayon korbe naa?

Do you have any idea? Why are women barred from practicing the Narayan *Puja*?

A: Naa, seta aamra poroshpore jene esechi, gurujon der mukhe shune esechi je shila puja meyera korte pare naa. shibo puja korte pare kintu narayon, mushidhor, onek rokom naam ache. jemon damodor, shridhor, shiju.oshob meyeder haate puja cole naa.

No, we have come to know mutually from one another, we have heard from our elders orally the women cannot perform that *shila puja* Shiv *puja* can be done but Narayon, Mushidhor, and many other such names like Damodor, Shridhor, and Shiju. All these rituals cannot be performed by women.

Q: Aapnake sesh ekta proshno korbo, je eije aamader je shob aayojon meyera kore, shob jogar-janti meyera kore, kintu shob seshe bhogobaner kache je phul nibedon kora, ba ja ja jabotiyu bhogobaner kaaj kora, ba songskrito sloka gulo bola, segulo ekjon brahmon purohit kore. tokhon to meyeder. maane. aamader mone to ekta hoye oocit je shob kaaj korbar pore sesher.maane sesh kaajtai. maane shobtheke prodhan kaajtai korte parlam na. I will ask you a last question. The arrangements for the *puja* are all done by the women in the household, right? However, at the end it is seen that the Brahmin priest carries out the prime job, acting as the representatives of god. Then the women think. I mean that we somewhere have a feeling that in the ritual the significant work is not done by us. That is the final job is prohibited for women.

A: Naa, seta aamader mone konodin ashe ni, purohit puja debe. nijera bhitor theke thakur ke bolechi je aamra ja jaani korechi, Aapni grohon korechen. aapnake jaeno aabar dakte pari, ei. No, we never thought about such things, Brahmin priest will carry out the *puja* We worshipped our god from within and said that whatever we knew we did at our best, you have accepted and approved of it {to god}. We wish to pray you again and again, this is what.

Q: Panchali tar sathe puja tar sathe aapni ki bhabe link koren? Panchali ta maane dhorun. How do you link up the *puja* with the *pancha*? What does the *Panchali* signify?

- A: Panchali ta aar broto kotha aamrai boli, ota aamader purohit bolen naa.
We only read the *panchalis* well as the *broto kotha* Our priest does not read these.
- Q: Chelera ota bole naa?
Don't the men narrate?
- A: Naa, cole gele purohit dorjata bhejiye diye boshe, shobai mile eksathe phul hathe kore boshe.
No when the priest goes away, we close the door and sit together with flowers in our hand.
- Q: Panchali aar broto kotha.
Panchali and the *broto kotha*.
- A: Hae.
Yes.
- Q: Broto kotha aar panchali jekhon poren tokhon kaara boshe?
Chelera naa meyera?
When you narrate the *broto kotha* or the *panchalis* then who are the ones to sit and listen to it? The men or women?
- A: Naa, meyera.
No, women.
- Q: Meyera boshe, taholeo ki ota meyeder kaaj?
The women sit, so it is basically their job, right?
- A: Hae, meyederi kaaj, cheleder bola hoy je aaj Lokkhi Puja, je jar snan-tan kore, pronaam kore jabe. Thakur ghare pronaam kore jabe.
Yes, it is a woman's job, boys are informed about the Lokkhi Puja, and are told to take a bath and pray to goddess Lokkhi. They are asked to enter the *thakur ghar* and pay respect to the god.
- Q: Kono kaaj kore naa?
Don't they do any work?
- A: Naa.
No.
- Q: Jabotiyo kaaj meyerai kore?
Do the women do all the work?

- A: Hae, meyerai kore.
Yes, the women only do.
- Q: Panchalir sathe, ei je dhorun pujata holo, tar sathe to kichu link kora jaey naa, kintu tobuo aamra panchali pora. Aar panchali porar o to ekta style ache, naa? Je mon aamra boli naa? “esho go maa Lokkhi debi, komolobashini.”
The *panchal* that is being read, the *pujais* not related with it, right? Still we continue reading the *panchali* The narration of the *panchali* follows a typical style, right? Like, “ *esho go maa Lokkhi debi, komolobashini.* ”
- A: Se to aamra baro mashi aarnik puja kori, maa ke aaradhona kori, tobe to se moner modhye ashbe.
We perform the *aarnik puja* for the all twelve months in a year, we pay service as a prayer to god, and then only, I believe, god will reside in your heart.
- Q: Panchali te to ekta chora ache, naa?
The *panchali* has a rhyme, right?
- A: Naa, aamra chora boli naa. Aamra broto kotha tai boli.
No, we do not recite any rhyme. We only narrate the *broto kotha*
- Q: Tar maane golpota to?
It means the story, right?
- A: Boi theke pora, broto kothar boite shob somoyer puja lekha ache, ek jaigay boshe pora, ogra hon mashe itu Lokkhi Puja hoy, ghot boshiye, ek ek bar, ek ek rokom, dhaner somoy ghot boshiye hoy.
We read from the written text, it has been all written, about all types of ritual and their associated *broto kothas*, we sit together and read, in the month of December *Itulokkhi Pujata* takes place. Each time different *puja* with different practices, during this *puja* the ghot used is filled with grains.
- Q: Ei puja tai to ekmatro puja, jeta omabosshay hoy? Aar baki puja gulo to bodh hoy purnimay hoy.
This is the only *puja* that takes place on the dark fortnight of Omobassa, right? The other Lokkhi Puja takes place on the full moon day.
- A: Naa, tithi dekhe.
No, it is according to the auspicious time.

- Q: Sukhlo pokkhe.
- A: Hae, brihoshpoti bar hobe, Sukhlo pokkho dekhe.
Yes, the *puja* will take place only on the day of Thursday, and the auspicious time of *Sukhlo Pokkho*.
- Q: Aar, ei tate ki hoy?
What happens to this *puja*?
- A: Ei te omabosshay tithi, deepabolir din hobe.
This *puja* will take place on the day of Deepaboli, in the auspicious hour of the dark fortnight.
- Q: Eikhane broto kotha te dekhlam, maane kartik masher broto kotha te dekhlam je ek rajar panch meye chilo, to ek meye ke jiggesh korechilo je tumi kar bhagge khao?
I saw in this *broto kotha* {while the narrator was narrating} that a king had five daughters, and to one of them he asked, that, on whose fortune is she surviving?
- A: To tokhon se boleche je se shaamir bhagge khay.
Then she replied that she is surviving on her husband's fortune.
- Q: Naa, naa, nijer bhagge khay.
No, no, on her own fortune.
- A: Hae, hae nijer bhagge khay. Tokhon je boleche je shokale jar mukh dekhbo, tar sathe tomar biye debo, oi broto kothar boitei ache, meye cole jabe. tarpor rajar durdosha hobe tarpor sei meyei eshe tar.
Yes, yes, on her own fortune. Then the king said that whoever he would first see in the morning, would marry his daughter, it is all written in the book, the girl would go. The king would fall into a big trouble and that daughter would come to his rescue.

THE PRIEST

- Q: Aapni e barir main pujari to?
Are you the main priest of this house?
- A: Aamar baba main pujari, aami babar post e mota-muti ashchi, aamra state er barir pujari, mota-muti 40-45 bochor dhore korchi. Aami tuk-tak guli caliyे dicchi.

My father is the main priest, I am now in my father's position, we are the priests of the state house, and my father has been practicing nearly for 40-45 years. I am now managing the small ones.

Q: Kotodin dhore korchen?

Since how many days are you practicing?

A: Baba bochor 45 esheche, aami goto 10 bochor dhore babar side e side e korchi.

My father had come since 45 years; I am practicing along with my father for the last 10 years.

Q: Aapnake kichu question chilo jiggesh korar. aapni je niyom-karon gulo korchen segulo ki kothayo lekha ache?

I have few questions to ask you. All the norms that you are following in the ritual, are they written down somewhere?

A: Hae, shob boitei lekha ache, boi dekhei korbo, ei je aajke kali puja ache shob boi dekhei korbo.

Yes, they are all written down in books. The Kali *Puja* will do today, I will do following the book.

Q: Naa, aapni Lokkhi tai bolun. Eta ki meyera naa chelera kore?

No, please talk about the Lokkhi Puja. Do men or women do this puja?

A: Barite onek jaygay meyera kore. maane baromashe jeta hoy sei Lokkhi ta meyera kore.

Many women do the ones that happen all the year themselves in their homes.

Q: Aajker deene?

What about today?

A: Aajker deene aamra kori.

Today, we perform the *puja*.

Q: Maane chelera kore to?

The men do it, right?

A: Hae.

Yes.

Q: Brahmon ra kore naa ki je kono chelera?

Is it the Brahmins or any man?

- A: Brahmon. hae aamra kori. brahmon.
Brahmins do it. We do it. Brahmin priests.
- Q: Aapni je montro ta poren seta ki kono necessary ache, je portei hobe?
The slokas that you read, are they necessary to chant?
- A: Hae, boltei hobe.
Yes, we have to chant.
- Q: Maane montro cchara puja hobe naa.
It means that without the slokas the *puja* would not take place.
- Q: Aapni ki panchali-tanchali poren?
Do you narrate *panchali*?
- A: Hae, pori.
Yes, we read *panchali*.
- Q: Maane. meyera pore?
I mean to ask. Do the women read?
- A: Meyera beshir bhag. Kintu, sotto narayoner panchali ta beshir bhag aamra pori, Lokkhi panchali meyera pore.
Mostly the women read. However, we mostly read the *panchal* of Narayan whereas women read Lokkhi *panchali*.
- Q: Ta narayoner panchali ta aapnara poren keno?
Why is the Narayan *panchali* is read by you?
- A: Sotto narayon ta. narayon ke kauke chuteo deowa hoy naa. boiteo paben, oi narayon jinishta kauke chute deowa hoy naa.
Narayan cannot be touched by anyone, it is also written down in the scripts. Narayon cannot be touched by anyone.
- Q: Narayon thakur ke shudhu chelera kore, aar Lokkhir panchali meyera kore, tai to?
Men do Narayan *Puja* and Lokkhi *panchalis* narrated by women, right?
- Q: Aar broto kotha?
and what about the *broto kotha*?
- A: Broto kotha karur barite aamra pore di, karur barite meyera pore. aamader समय থাকে না বলে, আমরা পড়ি না।
Sometimes we too read the *broto kotha* In some places, we do not

much time to read the *kothā* so, most of the time it is read by women.

Q: *Olokkihīr* baeparta jodi ektu bolen. maane Lokkhi, *Olokkihī*?
If you can say something about the Lokkhi/*Olokkihī* sequence?

A: Aamra jototuku jani maane aamra ja kore esechi. thakur dar aamol theke je *Olokkihī* aage biday kore Lokkhi Puja hoy.
What we know, I mean to say, what we have been hearing from our grandparents, that in the outset of the *puja*, *Olokkihī* is expelled out of the house, and then we start the Lokkhi Puja.

Q: *Olokkihī* bolte maane?
What do you mean by *Olokkihī*?

A: Goborer *Olokkihīr* murti toiri kore, tarpor ote mathay cul-tul diye toiri hoy. jake bole *Olokkihī* biday howa.
Olokkihī is cow-dung given the shape of a doll, decorated with false hair and other decorative items.

Q: Hae, dekhlam. je paekati diye je jaaliye deowa hoy. Ekhane ki Kuber.
Yes, I saw how *Olokkihī* was driven out with a bamboo stick and then burnt. Do you have Kuber here?

A: Karur barite hoy, cal-tal diye soondor bhabe jara toiri korte pare, noyto emni bhabe kore dey.
Some places they worship Kuber, people decorate it with rice, etc otherwise they do it casually.

Q: Kuber maane to dhoner debota?
Is Kuber the god of wealth?

A: Hae.
Yes.

THE MAN

Q: Aapni panchali sambondhe kichu janen?
Do you know anything about the *panchali*?

A: Naa, sherokom bhabe aamar puthigoto kono jana nei, barite pora hoye ashche, seta. maane panchali pore poojor upolokkhe setai.
No, I do not know how it has been written in the scriptures. But, yes,

it has been a part of the *puja* in the house.

Q: Aapni kokhono thaken jokhon panchali pora hoy?
Did you ever stay when the *panchali* is read?

A: Naa, chelebelay thaktam.
No, but I used to be present during my childhood days.

Q: Maane baccha boyeshe to?
When you were young, right?

A: Hae, baccha boyeshe.
Yes, when I was young.

Q: To, broto kotha jokhon pora holo dekhlam, choto chelera chilo,
kintu boro hoye gele bodhhoy tara thake naa, naa?
I saw that when the *broto kotha* was being read, the young boys
were present, but when they grow up they are reluctant to hear the
narration, no?

A: Naa, thake naa, chotobelay je ekta aakorshon thake, maane
aamader chelebelata je bhabe keteche aar ki, tokhon ogulo
aakorshon chilo, ekhon jemon aajkaler moton eto diversification
chilo naa, tar phole, ei jatiyo onushthan, maane, aamra ekta
uthshob hishabe dekhtam.

No, elder members are present, when we were young these
narratives used to attract us since they had a story to tell, but things
have become different now, our childhood days were spent
differently, for us these type of functions were like big festivals, and
we really enjoyed it.

Q: Chotobelay aapni thakten?
Did you listen to the narration when you were young?

A: Hae.
Yes.

Q: Borobelay aar thaken naa to?
Now, do you listen?

A: Naa.
No.

Q: Keno aapnar ki mone hoto?
Why, what did you think?

- A: Karon ekta jinish to bar-bar pora hocche, ota modhye notunotter aar kichu nei.
The same thing is narrated repeatedly, so there is no novelty in it, and thus people lose interest.
- Q: Meyerai ki broto kotha pore?
Do the girls only read the *broto kotha*?
- A: Hae, tobe aami du ekbar porechi, aamar thakuma aamake porte diyechilen, tobe maa kei porte dekhtam.
Yes, when asked by my grandmother I read once or twice, but generally, my mother read.
- Q: Broto kotha tar sathe aapnar ki mone hoy, poojor sathe kono bhabe link aache, maane ki bhabe tied up? Puja ta to ekdom onno rokom bhabe kora hoy, maane songskrito slokas bole. pujari moshai.
What do you think, how is the *puja* tied up with the whole enactment of the *broto kotha*? The Brahmin priests perform the Lokkhi Puja very differently, by chanting Sanskrit *slokas*, etc.
- A: Broto kotha maane Lokkhi debi ke puja kora hocche, ebong oi je panchali ta pora hoto. ota related. aamar jotodur mone porche Lokkhi debi songkranto ekta golpo chilo.
Broto kotha is read to invoke goddess Lokkhi, and I think the *panchalis* related. As far as I remember, there was some story regarding the ritual practiced during the *puja*.
- Q: Ota ki poojor sathe kono bhabe related?
Is it somehow related with the *puja*?
- A: Naa, poojor sathe sherokom bhabe related noy, tobe ekta related golpo chilo, Lokkhi debi daan korte paren. golpota aamar porte bhalo laghto tai portam.
No, it is not really related with the *puja* but it consists of a story which is somewhat related, the story tells us about goddess Lokkhi's potential in bestowing wealth. The story was interesting so I used to read it sometimes.
- Q: Aapnar ei shokal theke je puja ta holo, tate aapnar participation kotota?
How did you participate in the *puja*?
- A: Naa, prottokkho bhabe nei, korar eto lokh ache je aar dorkar pore

naa.

No. I apparently did not participate, there are so many people to help, that my help, is not needed.

Q: Meyera kore?

Do the woman participate?

A: Hae.

Yes.

Q: Maane, meyerai shob jogar kore to?

So, it is the women who do all the arrangements, right?

A: Prottokkhe hoyto aamra kori naa, kintu porokkhe hoyto kori, jemon bajar kora.

The women work in the private domain whereas we work in the public domain, like shopping etc.

Q: Aapni ki kokhono dekhe eshechen je ekta typical style e broto kotha pore?

Did you ever hear, *broto kotha* being read in atypical style?

A: Hae.

Yes.

Appendix II

The Lokkhi Pancali

শ্রীশ্রীলক্ষ্মীদেবীর ব্রতকথা ও পাঁচালী

নারায়ণং নমস্কৃত্যং নরৈষ্কেব নরোত্তমম্ ।
দেবীং সরস্বতীষ্কেব ততো জয় মুদীরয়েৎ ॥
বন্দে বিষ্ণুপ্রিয়াং দেবীং দারিদ্র্য-দুঃখ-নাশিনীং ।
ক্ষরোদপুত্রীং কেশবকান্তাং বিশেষাৰ্বক্ষোবিলাসিনীং ॥

দোল-পূর্ণিমার নিশি নিখিল আকাশ । এতেক শুনিয়া লক্ষ্মী দুঃখিত অন্তরে ।
মৃদু-মন্দ বহিতেছে মলয় বাতাস ॥ কহিলেন অতঃপর ক্ষুণ্ণ মুনিবরে ॥
লক্ষ্মীদেবী বামে করি বসি নারায়ণ । মর্ত্যবাসী দুঃখ পায় শোকের বিষয় ।
করিছেন নানা কথা সুখে আলাপন ॥ দুকৃতির ফল উহা জানিবে নিশ্চয় ॥
হেনকালে বীণা-করে এলো মুনিবর । চঞ্চলা আমার বলে কিসের লাগিয়া ।
উপনীত হৈলা আসি বৈকুণ্ঠ-নগর ॥ ইহার কারণ তবে শুন মন দিয়া ॥
ধীরে ধীরে যুগলেরে করিয়া প্রণতি । শাস্ত্র নাহি মানে দেখে যত নারী নর ।
কহিলা নারদ মুনি লক্ষ্মীদেবী-প্রতি ॥ অশাস্ত্রকে শাস্ত্রজ্ঞান করে নিরন্তর ॥
কি কারণে আজি হেথা লক্ষ্মী জিজ্ঞাসিলা । অনাচারে ভরাইল সকল সংসার ।
পদে নতি পুনরায় ঋষি নিবেদিলা ॥ অপবিত্র স্থানে থাকা দুরূহ আমার ॥
কেন মাগো নর-প্রতি তব অবিচার । নিজধর্ম নিজশিক্ষা দিয়া বিসর্জন ।
চঞ্চলা চপলা প্রায় ফেরো দ্বারে দ্বার ॥ পরধর্ম পরশিক্ষা করিছে অর্জন ॥
ক্ষণকাল তরে তব নাহি কোথা স্থিতি । দিবা-নিদ্রা অনাচার ক্রোধ-অহঙ্কার ।
সেই হেতু নর-নারী ভোগয়ে দুর্গতি ॥ আলস্য কলহ মিথ্যা বিরিছে সংসার ॥
সতত কুক্রিয়া রত নর-নারীগণ । উচ্ছ্বাসি কটুকথা কহে নারীগণ ।
অসহ্য যাতনা পায় দেখি অনুক্ষণ ॥ সন্ধ্যাকালে নিদ্রা যায় হ'য়ে অচেতন ॥
অন্নাভাবে শীর্ণকায় বলহীন দেহ । রমণী-ভ্রমণ লজ্জা দিয়া বিসর্জন ।
সেই কষ্টে আত্মহত্যা করিতেছে কেহ ॥ ষথায় তথায় করে স্বেচ্ছায় গমন ॥
কেহ প্রিয় প্রাণাধিক পুত্র-কন্যাগণে । নাহি দেহ ধূপ-দীপ প্রতি সন্ধ্যাকালে ।
করিতেছে পরিত্যাগ অন্নের কারণে ॥ সতীর সিন্দুর শোভা, নাহি পরে ভালে ॥
বল দেবি, প্রকাশিয়া কি পাপের ফলে । প্রভাতে না দেয় কভু গোময়ের ছড়া ।
ভীষণ দুর্ভিক্ষে সদা মর্ত্যবাসী জ্বলে ॥ ঘৃণা নাহি করে তারা এড়া বস্ত্র পরা ॥

লক্ষ্মী-স্বরূপিণী নারী করিয়া সৃজন ।
 পাঠায়েছি মর্ত্যলোকে সুখের কারণ ॥
 ক্ষণেকের সুখে তারা ভুলিয়া আমায় ।
 অ-কার্য্যে কু-কার্য্যে এবে সংসার মজায় ॥
 স্বস্তুর-শাস্ত্রী প্রতি নহে ভক্তিমতী ।
 কটুবাক্য কহে সদা তাঁহাদেরি প্রতি ॥
 পতির আশ্রয়গণে না করে আদর ।
 থাকিতে চাহয়ে সদা হয়ে স্বতস্তুর ॥
 লজ্জা-আদি গুণ যত রমণী-ভূষণ ।
 একে একে সব তারা করিছে বর্জন ॥
 অতিথি দেখিলে তারা রুষ্ট হয় মনে ।
 পতির অগ্রেতে খায় যত নারীগণে ॥
 স্বামীকে করয়ে হেলা না শুনে বচন ।
 ছাড়িয়াছে গৃহধর্ম্ম ছেড়েছে রক্ষন ॥
 নারীসঙ্গে নরগণ সময় কাটায় ।
 মিথ্যা ছাড়া সত্যকথা কভু নাহি কয় ॥
 সতত উহারা মোরে করে জ্বালাতন ।
 চঞ্চলার প্রায় ফিরি তাই সে কারণ ॥
 ঈর্ষ্যা-দ্বेष হিংসাপূর্ণ তাদের হৃদয় ।
 পরশ্রীকাতর চিন্ত কুটীলতাময় ॥
 দেব-দ্বিজে ভক্তিহীন তুচ্ছ গুরুজন ।
 সদাই আপন সুখ করে অব্বেষণ ॥
 বসনা ভূপ্তির লাগি অখাদ্য ভোজন ।
 তারি ফলে দেখ ঋষি কুষ্ঠ-আক্রমণ ॥
 প্রতি গৃহে এইরূপ পাপের আগার ।
 অচলা হইয়া বল থাকি কি প্রকার ॥
 তেয়গি এসব দোষ হলে সদাচারী ।
 নিশ্চলা হইয়া থাকি আমি বিভাবরী ॥
 এত শুনি মূনিবর কহে ক্ষুণ্ণ মনে ।
 কেমনে প্রশন্না মাতা হবে নরগণে ॥

কেমনে পাইবে নারী তব পদছায়া ।
 ওগো দয়াময়ি! তুমি না করিলে দয়া ॥
 সৃষ্টি-স্থিতি-প্রলয়ের তুমি অধিকারী ।
 জগৎ প্রসূতি তুমি জগৎ-ঈশ্বরী ॥
 কহ মাতঃ কৃপা করি ইহার বিধান ।
 মানবের দুঃখ হেরি কাঁদে মোর প্রাণ ॥
 নারদের বাক্যে লক্ষ্মী দয়া উপজিল ।
 মধুর বচনে তাঁরে বিদায় করিল ॥
 নর-নারী দুঃখ হেরি কাঁদিছে অন্তর ।
 প্রতিকার আমি বাছা করিব সত্বর ॥
 অতঃপর লক্ষ্মীদেবী ভাবে মনে মনে ।
 মরতের দুঃখ নাশ করিব কেমনে ॥
 কেমনে তাদের দুঃখ করিব মোচন ।
 উপদেশ দেহ মোরে প্রভু নারায়ণ ॥
 শুনিয়া লক্ষ্মীর বাণী কহে লক্ষ্মীপতি ।
 উতলা কি হে প্রিয়ে! হির করো মতি ॥
 মন দিয়া শুন সতি আমার বচন ।
 লক্ষ্মীব্রত নরলোকে কর প্রচারণ ॥
 প্রতি গুরুবারে মিলি যত নারীগণে ।
 পূজিয়া শুনবে কথা ভক্তিসুন্দ মনে ॥
 বাড়িবে ঐশ্বর্য্য তাহে তোমার কৃপায় ।
 সর্ব দুঃখ দূরে যাবে জানিবে নিশ্চয় ॥
 নারায়ণ-বাক্যে লক্ষ্মী অতি হৃষ্টমনে ।
 গমন করিলা মর্ত্যে ব্রত-প্রচারণে ॥
 অবন্তী-নগরে গিয়া হৈলা উপনীত ।
 দেখিয়া হইল লক্ষ্মী বড়ই স্তম্ভিত ॥
 নগরের অধিপতি ধনেশ্বর রায় ।
 অপার ঐশ্বর্য্য তাঁর কুবেরের প্রায় ॥
 সোনার সংসার তাঁর শূন্য হিংসা-দ্বেষ ।
 পালিত সবাবে সদা পুত্র-নির্বিবেশ ॥

একে অশ্রু সাত পুত্র রাখি ধনেশ্বর ।
 সমস্মানে যথাকালে গেলা লোকান্তর ॥
 ভাষার কুহক-জালে সপ্ত সহোদর ।
 পৃথক হইলা সবে কিছু দিন পর ॥
 হিংসা-দেষ অলঙ্কার যত সহচর ।
 একে একে সবে আসি প্রবেশিল ঘর ॥
 এ সকল দোষ হেরি কুপিত অন্তরে ।
 লক্ষ্মীদেবী সেই গৃহ ত্যজিলা সত্বরে ॥
 বৃদ্ধ ধনেশ্বর পত্নী নিজ ভাগ্যদোষে ।
 না পারি তিষ্ঠিতে আর বধূদের রোষে ॥
 চলিলা বনেতে বৃদ্ধা ত্যজিতে জীবন ।
 অদৃষ্টের ফলে হয় এ হেন ঘটন ॥
 অনাভাবে শীর্ণকায় মলিন বসন ।
 চলিতে শক্তি নাহি করিছে রোদন ॥
 হেনকালে বৃদ্ধাবেশে দেবী নারায়ণী ।
 উপনীত পশ্চিমধ্যে হইলা আপনি ॥
 সদয় হৃদয়া লক্ষ্মী জিজ্ঞাসে বৃদ্ধারে ।
 কি জন্য এসেছ তুমি এ ঘোর কান্তারে ॥
 কাহার তনয়া তুমি, কাহার ঘরণী ।
 কি হেতু মলিন মুখ কহ গো বাছনী ॥
 বৃদ্ধা বলে, শোন মাতঃ ! আমার কাহিনী ।
 পতিহীনা আমি এক মন্দকপালিনী ॥
 পিতা পতি ছিল মোর অতি ধনবান্ ।
 সর্বদা আমার গৃহে লক্ষ্মী-অধিষ্ঠান ॥
 সোনার সংসার মোর ছিল ধনে জনে ।
 পুত্র, পুত্রবধূগণ সেবিত যতনে ॥
 পতির হইলে কাল সুখ-শান্তি যত ।
 গৃহ হ'তে ক্রমে ক্রমে হ'ল তিরোহিত ॥
 সাত-পুত্র সাত-হাঁড়ি হ'য়েছে এখন ।
 সতত বধূরা মোরে করে ছালাতন ॥

সহিতে না পারি আর তাদের তাড়না ।
 ত্যজিতে জীবন আমি করেছি বাসনা ॥
 নারায়ণী বলে, শুন আমার বচন ।
 আত্মহত্যা মহাপাপ নরকে গমন ॥
 যাও সতী, গৃহে ফিরে করো লক্ষ্মীব্রত ।
 অচিরে হইবে সুখ তব পূর্বমত ॥
 গুরুবারে সন্ধ্যাকালে ল'য়ে বধূগণে ।
 করিবে লক্ষ্মীর ব্রত হ'য়ে একমনে ॥
 জলপূর্ণ ঘটে দিবে সিন্দুরের ফোঁটা ।
 আশ্বের পল্লব দিবে তাহে এক গোটা ॥
 আসন সাজায়ে তাহে দিবে গুয়া-পান ।
 সিন্দুর গুলিয়া দিবে ব্রতের বিধান ॥
 ধূপ-দীপ জ্বালাইয়া রাখিবে বামেতে ॥
 শুনিতে বসিবে কথা দুর্বা ল'য়ে হাতে ॥
 মনেতে লক্ষ্মীর মূর্তি করিয়া চিন্তন ।
 একমনে ব্রতকথা করিবে শ্রবণ ॥
 কথা-শেষে উলু দিয়া প্রণাম করিবে ।
 ভক্তিভরে এযোগণে সিন্দুর পরাবে ॥
 যে রমণী পূজা করে প্রতি গুরুবারে ।
 হইবে বিগুহমনা লক্ষ্মীদেবী-বরে ॥
 যেই গৃহে ব্রতকথা হয় বারোমাস ।
 সতত তাহার গৃহে করি যে নিবাস ॥
 তারি গৃহে বাধা রব হইয়া অচলা ।
 পূর্ণ করি ভক্তবাঞ্ছা আমি যে কমলা ॥
 গুরুবারে যদি হয় পূর্ণিমা উদিত ।
 যেবা নারী অনাহারে করে এই ব্রত ॥
 সকল বাসনা তার পূরণ হইবে ।
 পতি-পুত্র ল'য়ে সুখে বারোমাস রবে ॥
 লক্ষ্মীর ভাগুর যেবা স্থাপি নিজ ঘরে ।
 রাখিবে তগুল তাহে এক মুঠা করে ॥

সঞ্চয়ের পথ উহা জানিবে নিশ্চয় ।
 এর ফলে উপকার পাবে অসময় ॥
 ছাড়ি অলসতা সূতা কাটিবে যতনে ।
 অন্ন-বস্ত্র কষ্ট যাবে মহাদ্বন্দ্ব-বচনে ॥
 প্রসন্না থাকিব আমি কহিলাম সার ।
 যাও গৃহে, করো মাতা ব্রতের প্রচার ॥
 এতেক কহিয়া লক্ষ্মী নিজ মূর্তি ধরি ।
 বৃদ্ধারে দর্শন দিলা দেবী কৃপা করি ॥
 দেখিয়া হইলা বৃদ্ধা আনন্দে বিভোর ।
 প্রণাম করিলা সতী জুড়ি দুই কর ॥
 প্রসন্না হইয়া লক্ষ্মী দিলা তারে কোল ।
 সুধালেন আরো কত বলি মিষ্ট বোল ॥
 লক্ষ্মী কহে, ব্রত মোর সংসারে প্রচার ।
 অচিরে হইবে তব বৈভব অপার ॥
 পুত্র, বধুগণ বশে থাকিবে তোমার ।
 পূর্ব শান্তিময় তব হইবে সংসার ॥
 এত কহি লক্ষ্মীদেবী হৈলা অদর্শন ।
 হৃষ্টচিত্তে বৃদ্ধা গৃহে করিলা গমন ॥
 আসিয়া বধুগণে বৃদ্ধা করিলা বর্ণন ।
 যেরূপে ঘটিল বনে লক্ষ্মী-দর্শন ॥
 ব্রতের বিধান বৃদ্ধ বলিলা সবারে ।
 যে সকল কথা লক্ষ্মী কহিলা তাহারে ॥
 মিলি সব বধুগণ করে লক্ষ্মীব্রত ।
 হিংসা-দেষ স্বার্থভাব হৈল বিদূরিত ॥
 ব্রতের ফলেতে মিলে সপ্ত সহোদর ।
 দূরে গেল দুঃখ-কষ্ট ঐশ্বর্য্য বিস্তর ॥
 'মা লক্ষ্মী' করিলা তথা পুনরাগমন ।
 অচিরে হইল গৃহ শান্তি-নিকেতন ॥
 দৈবযোগে একদিন সাধুর আলয়ে ।
 উপনীত এক নারী ব্রতের সময়ে ॥

ব্রতকথা শুনি তার ভক্তি উপজিল ।
 মনে মনে লক্ষ্মীব্রত মানস করিল ॥
 পতি তার কৃষ্ণবস্ত্র অক্ষয় অর্জনে ॥
 ভিক্ষা করি যাহা পায় খায় দুইজনে ॥
 তাই নারী মনে মনে করিলা বাসনা ।
 পতিরে নিরোগ করো চরণে কামনা ॥
 গৃহে গিয়া সেই নারী করে লক্ষ্মীব্রত ।
 ভক্তিমনে এয়ো লৈয়া পূজে বিধি মম ॥
 দেবীর কৃপায় তার দুঃখ হৈল দূর ।
 পতি হৈল সুস্থ দেহ, ঐশ্বর্য্য প্রচুর ॥
 কালক্রমে শুভদিনে জন্মিল তনয় ।
 হইল সংসার তার সুখের আলায় ॥
 এইরূপে লক্ষ্মীব্রত প্রতি ঘরে ঘরে ।
 ক্রমে প্রচারিত হৈল অবস্তী-নগরে ॥
 অবশেষে শুন এক অপূর্ব ব্যাপার ।
 ব্রতের মহাদ্বন্দ্ব হৈল যে ভাবে প্রচার ॥
 একদিন গুরুবারে অবস্তী-নগরে ।
 নারীগণ মিলি যত লক্ষ্মীব্রত করে ॥
 শ্রীনগরবাসী এক বিণক তনয় ।
 দৈবযোগে সেই স্থানে উপনীত হয় ॥
 অনেক সম্পত্তি তার ভাই পঞ্চজন ।
 পরস্পর অনুগত রয় সর্বক্ষণ ॥
 ব্রতের নিয়ম দেখি সাধুর তনয় ।
 বলে, একি ব্রত, ইথে কিবা ফলোদয় ॥
 সদাগর-বাক্য শুনি বলে ব্রতীগণ ।
 করি লক্ষ্মীব্রত, যাতে মানস পূরণ ॥
 মন-প্রাণ দিয়া যেবা করিবে পূজন ।
 সকল মনের আশা হইবে পূরণ ॥
 ইহা শুনি সদাগর বলে অহঙ্কারে ।
 যে জন অভাবে থাকে, সে পূজে উহারে ॥

ধন-জন সুখ-ভোগ যা কিছু সম্ভবে ।
 সকল আমার আছে আর কিবা হবে ॥
 কপালে না থাকে যদি লক্ষ্মী দিবে ধন ।
 হেন বাক্য কভু আমি না শুনি কখন ॥
 গর্বিত বচন লক্ষ্মী সহিতে না পারে ।
 সেই দোষে লক্ষ্মীদেবী ছাড়িলা তাহারে ॥
 এতেক कहিয়া বাণী লক্ষ্মী করি হেলা ।
 নানা দ্রব্যে পূর্ণ তরী বাণিজ্যেতে গেলা ॥
 দেবযোগে লক্ষ্মীকোপে সেই সাধুজন ।
 তরীসহ জলমধ্যে হইলা মগন ॥
 ইষ্টক-আলয়-আদি যাহা ছিল তার ।
 বজ্রাঘাতে দগ্ধ হ'য়ে হৈল ছারখার ॥
 দূরে গেল ব্রাতৃভাব হৈল ভিন্ন ভিন্ন ।
 সোনার সংসার তার হইল বিপন্ন ॥
 ভিক্ষাজীবী হ'য়ে সবে ফিরে দ্বারে দ্বারে ।
 জঠর-জ্বালায় গেলা দেশ-দেশান্তরে ॥
 পড়িয়া বিপাকে এবে সাধু মহাশয় ।
 দু'নয়নে অশ্রু ঝরে করে হয় হয় ॥
 কিবা দোষ দেখি বিধি করিলে এমন ।
 অধম সন্তান আমি অতি অভাজন ॥
 সাধুর দুর্দশা হেরি দয়া উপজিল ।
 করুণ-হৃদয়া লক্ষ্মী সকলি ভুলিল ॥
 দুঃখ দূর ত'রে তারে করিয়া কৌশল ।
 পাঠায় অবস্তী-খামে করি ভিক্ষা ছল ॥
 নানাদেশ ঘুরাইয়া আনি তার পরে ।
 উপনীত করাইলা অবস্তী-নগরে ॥
 হেরে তথা লক্ষ্মীব্রত করে নারীগণ ।
 স্মরণ হইল তার পূর্ব বিবরণ ॥
 বুকিল এখন কেন পড়িলা বিপাকে ।
 অহঙ্কার দোষে লক্ষ্মী ত্যজিলেন মোকে ॥

জোড়করে ভক্তিভরে হ'য়ে একমন ।
 করিছে লক্ষ্মীর স্তুতি সাধুর নন্দন ॥
 ক্ষম মাতঃ ! এ-দাসের যত অপরাধ ।
 তোমা হেলি মোর ঘটে অতি পরমাদ ॥
 অজ্ঞান অধম আমি করো মোরে দয়া ।
 পড়িনু বিপাকে মাতঃ, দেহ পদছায়া ॥
 শ্রেষ্ঠ হ'তে শ্রেষ্ঠতরা পরমা প্রকৃতি ।
 কোপাদিবর্জিতা তুমি মূর্তিমতী ধৃতি ॥
 সতীসাক্ষী রমণীর তুমি মা উপমা ।
 ভক্তিভরে দেবগণ সদা পূজে তোমা ॥
 সুর-নর সকলের সম্পদ-রাপিণী ।
 জগৎ-ঈশ্বরী তুমি ঐশ্বর্য্য-দায়িনী ॥
 রাস-অধিষ্ঠাত্রী দেবি তুমি রাসেশ্বরী ।
 সকলেই তব অংশে যত আছে নারী ॥
 গোলোকে কমলা তুমি মাধব-মোহিনী ।
 ক্ষীরোদ-সাগরে তুমি ক্ষীরোদ-নন্দিনী ॥
 মহালক্ষ্মী তুমি মাগো, ত্রিদিব-মণ্ডলে ।
 গৃহলক্ষ্মীরূপে তুমি বিরাজ ভূতলে ॥
 তুমি গো তুলসী গঙ্গা পতিত-পাবনী ।
 সাবিত্রী বিরিকিপূরে বেদের জননী ॥
 কৃষ্ণ-প্রাণেশ্বরী তুমি কৃষ্ণ-প্রাণাধিকা ।
 তুমিই আপনি ছিলে ছাপরে রাধিকা ॥
 বৃন্দাবন মাঝে তুমি বৃন্দা গোপনারী ।
 নন্দালয়ে ছিলে তুমি হ'য়ে গোপেশ্বরী ॥
 বিরাজ চম্পক বনে চম্বক-ঈশ্বরী ।
 শতশৃঙ্গ-শৈলে তুমি শোভিতা সুন্দরী ॥
 বিকশিত পদ্মবনে তুমি পদ্মাবতী ।
 মালতী-কুসুম-কুঞ্জে তুমি মা মালতী ॥
 কুন্দদন্তী নাম ধরো তুমি কুন্দবনে ।
 তুমি গো সুশীলতা সতী কেতকী-কাননে ॥

তুমি মা কদম্ব-মালী কদম্ব-কাননে । এই ব্রত যে রমণী করে একমনে ।
 বন-অধিষ্ঠাত্রী দেবী তুমি বনে বনে ॥ লক্ষ্মীর কৃপায় তার বাড়ে ধনে-জনে ॥
 রাজলক্ষ্মী তুমি মাগো নরপতিপুরে । অপুত্রের পুত্র হয় নির্ধনের ধন ।
 সকলের গৃহলক্ষ্মী তুমি ঘরে ঘরে ॥ ইহলোকে সুখ, অন্তে বৈকুণ্ঠে গমন ॥
 দীনজনে রাজ্য পায় তব কৃপাবলে । লক্ষ্মীর ব্রতের কথা বড়ই মধুর ।
 দয়া করো এবে মোরে, ওগো 'মা' কমলে ॥ যাহার প্রভাবে সব দুঃখ হয় দূর ॥
 দয়াময়ী ক্ষেমঙ্করী অধম-তারিণী । যেবা পড়ে, যেবা শুনে, যেবা রাখে ঘরে ।
 অপরাধ ক্ষমা করো দারিদ্র্য-নাশিনী ॥ লক্ষ্মীর বরেতে তার মনোবাঞ্ছা পূরে ॥
 অন্নদা বরদা মাতঃ, বিপদ-নাশিনী । ব্রত করি স্তব পাঠ যেই জন করে ।
 দয়া করো এবে মোরে মাধব-ঘরণী ॥ অভাব রহে না তার লক্ষ্মীদেবী-বরে ॥
 এইরূপে স্তব করি ভক্তিয়ুক্ত মনে । লক্ষ্মীর ব্রতের কথা হৈল সমাপন ।
 একাগ্র হৈয়া সাধু প্রণমিলা সেস্থানে ॥ ভক্তিভরে বর যাচ যাহা লয় মন ॥
 ব্রত-অণ্ডে সাধুবর করিলা প্রণাম । সিঁথিতে সিন্দুর দাও সব এয়ো মিলে ।
 ব্রতের সঙ্কল্প করি আসে নিজ-ধাম ॥ উলুধ্বনি দাও সবে অন্য কথা ভুলে ॥
 বলে সাধু গৃহিণীরে লক্ষ্মীব্রত সার । লক্ষ্মীর ব্রতের কথা বড় মধুময় ।
 সবে মিলি করো ইহা প্রতি গুরুবার ॥ প্রণাম করিয়া যাও যে যার আলায় ॥
 সাধুর বাক্যেতে তুষ্টা হ'য়ে বধূগণ । জোড় করি দুই হাত ভক্তিয়ুক্ত মনে ।
 ভক্তিমনে করে তারা ব্রত আচরণ ॥ প্রণাম করহ এবে যে থাক সেখানে ॥
 ভক্তাধীনা নারায়ণী হইয়া সদয় । প্রণামি লক্ষ্মীদেবী বিষ্ণুর ঘরণী ।
 নাশিলা সাধুর ছিল যত বিঘ্নচয় ॥ ক্ষীরোদ-সম্ভবা দেবী জগৎ-পালিনী ॥
 দেবীর কৃপায় পুনঃ আর বধূগণ । অগতির গতি মাতঃ, তুমি নারায়ণী ।
 দারিদ্র্যতা দূরে গিয়া নিরাপদ হন ॥ দয়াময়ী জগন্মাতা বিপদ-নাশিনী ॥
 সপ্ত তরী উঠে ভাসি জলের উপর । ভকত-বৎসলা দেবী সত্যস্বরূপিণী ।
 আনন্দে পূর্ণিত হ'ল সাধুর অন্তর ॥ হরিপ্রিয়ে পদ্মাসনা ভূ-ভার-হারিণী ॥
 মিলিল ভাতারা পুনঃ আর বধূগণ । চঞ্চলা কমলা মাগো ত্রিলোক-তারিণী ।
 সাধুর সংসার হ'ল শান্তি-নিকেতন ॥ প্রণামি কৃপাময়ী মাধব-রঞ্জিনী ॥
 এইরূপে মর্ত্যলোকে ব্রতের প্রচার । ভবাবাধ্যা তুমি মাতঃ, দারিদ্র্য-নাশিনী ।
 মনে রেখো পৃথিবীতে লক্ষ্মীব্রত সার ॥ কৃপা করো নিবারণে ত্রিতাপ-হারিণী ॥

শ্রীশ্রীলক্ষ্মীদেবীর ব্রতকথা ও পাঁচালী সমাপ্ত ।

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