

*Representation of Women in
Medieval Bengali Literature :*

*A Study of the Chandimangala and
the Manasamangala*

*Dissertation submitted to the
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the award of the*

DEGREE OF MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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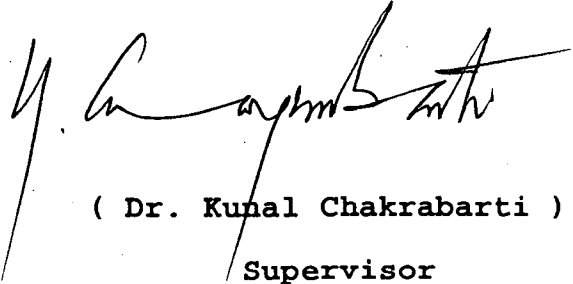
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D e c l a r a t i o n

Certified that the dissertation entitled " Representation of Women in Medieval Bengal : A Study of the Chandimangala and the Manasamangala" submitted by Nayana Dasgupta is in partial fulfillment of requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of this University. This dissertation has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other University and is her own work.

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


(Prof. Muzaffar Alam)
Chairperson


(Dr. Kunal Chakrabarti)
Supervisor

*Dedicated to my
Parents*

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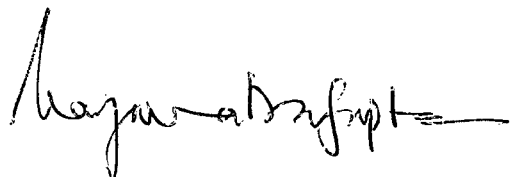
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Introduction

The subject of this dissertation is an enquiry into ideas about women in the medieval Hindu society of Bengal, based on a study of the *Mangalakavya* literature.

The *Mangalakavyas* are stories about cults, of the *laukika* or popular deities of Bengal. Most of these *kavyas* were composed during the 15th to the 17th centuries, although these are based on stories that have been in circulation in their oral form for a long time before their codification. A *kavya* was meant to be sung or recited during the period of worship of the deity in whose honour the narrative was composed. Each *kavya* was divided into sections meant to be sung over a period of 12 days or a month.

So far, the existing works on the *Mangalakavyas* have treated this genre of literature largely as a source for studying the process of cultural interaction between the Great Tradition of brahmanism and the various Little Traditions of medieval Bengal. The *Mangalakavyas* have been seen as marking a distinct stage in the process of cultural integration in Bengal. Brahmanical religion was well-established in Bengal by the post-Gupta period. It received patronage from the Palas in the 10th - 11th centuries and came to be recognised as virtually the state religion under the Senas. In the process of its expansion in Bengal, brahmanical religion encountered and assimilated many

local elements, mostly goddesses. At the same time, the various local religious traditions in this region were considerably transformed as they came under the influence of brahmanism. Shashibhushan Dasgupta in his *Bharater Shakti Sadhana O Shakta Sahitya* has described the manner in which different mother-goddess cults of local origin fed into the brahmanical principle of *Shakti* and came to be represented as her manifestations. The brahmanical version of this interaction is contained in the various *Upapuranas* of Bengal. The vernacular *Mangalakavyas* being much closer to the local traditions of Bengal, reflect this process from the point of view of the local cults, although these as well as the texts themselves were eventually overlaid with brahmanical elements.

In his seminal work on *Mangalakavya* literature, *Bangla Mangalkavya Itihas* Ashutosh Bhattacharya has investigated in detail the origins of some of the prominent *Mangala* deities and found tribal and lower-caste socio-religious practices associated with each of these.¹ Dinesh Chandra Sen, in his *Brihat Banga*, points out that the codification of the *Mangalakavyas* took place in two broad phases. In the earlier phase it was the popular or *laukika* traditions that dominated the stories, and in the later phase the brahmanical social norms began to be introduced by their upper-caste authors. As the *Mangalakavyas* acquired more and more brahmanical features, their distinctive characteristics began to wear off and by the end of the 18th century died out as

a literary genre. Edward Dimock considers it significant that the *Mangala* poems simultaneously belong to written and oral traditions. They have structural affinity with oral literature and since they are recited as part of worship, illiterate people are familiar with them. He believes that although these can not be strictly considered as folk literature, they are quite different from the highly stylised court poetry. In fact, the concern of the *Mangala* poets was not so much with poetic imagery or beauty of the language as with the narrative content. The prime aim of their authors was glorification of divinities and the entertainment of common people.² W.L. Smith, on the other hand, observed in the *Mangalakavyas* the process of sanskritisation at work, particularly in the emulation of Puranic style in the literary composition, in the incorporation of brahmanical beliefs, standards of social behaviour and ethical norms, and in the attempt to connect the local deities to the gods and goddesses of the Puranic pantheon.³ Indeed, the *deva-khanda* or the section about the gods which precedes the *nara-khanda* or the section on the mortals in all the *Mangalakavya* texts, is a selection of episodes from the *Puranas*.

The other important social phenomenon that the *Mangalakavyas* reflect is the process of social mobility within the caste or *jati* structure of medieval Bengal. Hiteshranjan Sanyal has used evidence from the *Mangalakavyas* to illustrate

his discussion on caste mobility in medieval Bengal.⁴ Sanyal argues that although it is practically impossible to ascertain the origin of these stories, there is a substratum of historical facts in them. For instance, he has demonstrated how the evidence of the *Mangala* poems can be utilised for a study of the processes of local state formation in medieval Bengal, such as the kingdom of Mallabhum, the ritual legitimisation of the founder rulers of these kingdoms through the cults of the presiding deities, and the organization of local administration in these kingdoms.⁵ T.W Clark suggests that the cult conflicts depicted in the *Mangalakavyas* may be seen as symbolic representations of struggles between different tribes, each having its own patron deity. According to him, the principal motif of the *Mangala* poems is the seduction of the worshippers of an agricultural deity by the goddesses of hunters, fishermen and herdsmen and the overthrow of male power by female power.⁶ Such questions remain, at best speculative ones, since it is difficult to say that details about material life found in the *Mangalakavyas*, correspond to the real situation. Eric Auerbach in his *Mimesis* has shown us how to use representation in literary texts for a study of reality. He uses the term *figural* to identify the conception of reality in late Antiquity and the Christian Middle Ages. In this conception, an occurrence on earth signifies not only itself but at the same time another, which it predicts or confirms without prejudice to the power of it

concrete reality here and how.⁷

However, these studies on the *Mangalakavyas*, are extremely valuable because they enable us to locate the *Mangalakavya* texts in the socio-cultural milieu in which they originated and thus offer the necessary background for a historical enquiry.

On the subject of women in the *Mangalakavya* literature, very little has been written. The possibility of such an enquiry has been indicated in the works of Ashutosh Bhattacharya, Dinesh Chandra Sen, W L Smith and Edward Dimock. A few essays also directly address this question. Satyabati Giri, for instance, has discussed the depiction of women in different literary traditions of medieval Bengal, viz., the Vaishnav Padavali Sahitya of the pre and post-Chaitanya period, the *Mangalakavyas*, and so on. She sees Radha of Baru Chandidas as a figure of resistance. The protest of the Gopinis in the *Harivamsa* of Bhavananda is also interpreted by her as an eloquent articulation of resistance by the women of medieval Bengal. In the *Chandimangala* story of Mukundaram, however, Lahana and Khullana are seen as victims of the practice of polygamy in contemporary society. But she points out that even in these stories the female characters voice their resentment against the state in which women in medieval Bengali society found themselves. Thus she observes that women did resist patriarchal oppression, but their spirited protest could not bring about an

effective change in their objective condition.⁸ In an essay on Mukundaram's *Chandimangala* Sanatkumar Naskar also draws our attention to the problem of co-wives and women's dissatisfaction with this practice, expressed in the *baramasyas* (descriptions of women's woes during the twelve months of the year) and the *patininda* sections or women's complaints about their husbands. He views these as an articulation of protest against their exploitation, as recognised by the poet Mukundaram.⁹ Thus, even though very significant works on aspects of women's history in medieval Bengal are yet to appear, interest in the subject exists.

However, the above mentioned works deal with the problem in relatively simplistic terms such as oppression and resistance. But a closer examination of the texts reveals a far more complex pattern of relations between men and women in medieval Bengali society. For instance, the anthropologist Lina Fruzzetti explored the space occupied by Bengali women in the exclusive set of marriage rituals in which only women participate. Fruzzetti, observes a complex set of relationships. Marked by seperable domains of actions and meanings for men and women within a clearly defined hierarchy.¹⁰ The vast corpus of works on aspects of women's lives in the context of European societies, familiarises one with the methods of reconstructing women's history as well as with the relevant questions and problems involved in such studies. However, it is necessary to consider

the extent to which insights derived from European historiography can be applied to the specificities in the Indian context. Even though there is an element of universality in the relations of domination and subordination in the relationships between men and women, male ideas about women's sexuality and power and female responses to their own perception of subordination are to a large extent influenced by cultural presupposition. To cite an example, it has been argued that the mother-son relationship is far more central to the development of the male child in India than in the West. I have found the works of such scholars as A. K. Ramanujan, Wendy Doniger, Velcheru Narayana Rao and Sudhir Kakar useful in developing a critical understanding of women's sexuality and male attitudes towards it in the context of Indian society. Ramanujan has drawn attention to the importance of women's tales in Indian folklore and suggested that women's stories constitute a separate genre in Indian oral literature. Velcheru Narayana Rao has also demonstrated through his studies on Telugu literature how women's stories can be clearly demarcated from their male counterparts in their concerns and world-view, and how the processes of acculturation and social mobility work upon and ultimately transform such narratives. Both Doniger and Kakar have contributed significantly to our understanding of male fantasies about female sexuality in India.

Doniger's conclusions are based on an intensive study of

Hindu mythology, and Kakar bases his hypotheses on a psycho-analytic study of myths, literature, films and his clinical experience. Both emphasise the figure of the mother as a powerful element that dominates the subconscious and shapes male sexuality as well as male attitudes and fantasies about women's sexuality in India. Doniger points to the innumerable references in Hindu mythology to the figure of the dangerous and powerful older woman and the hazards of desiring any kind of sexual alliance with such a woman. Indeed, Hindu mythology seems to be fraught with references to male fears about the sexual powers of women in general. However, one needs to exercise restraint and caution in applying Doniger's and Kakar's conclusions in historical analysis, for these may appear too general and not causally related to a specific context.

The subject of enquiry in this dissertation is the representation of women and sexuality in a selection of *Mangalakavya* texts for a better understanding of the popular culture of medieval Bengal. I take the notion of popular culture from Aron Gurevich who, in his study of medieval Europe, does not focus on concrete cultural products usually studied by historians, but digs into the intellectual, ideational, affective and socio-psychological soil in which culture was embedded and by which it was sustained. The task, in his words, is to elucidate those mental constructs and customary orientations of consciousness, the psychological equipment and 'spiritual

rigging' of medieval people which were not clearly formulated, explicitly expressed or completely recognised.¹¹

Does the *Mangalakavya* literature lend itself to such a reading? In order to address this question, it is necessary to briefly discuss the nature of these texts. It is indeed difficult to characterise the *Mangalakavya* in terms of any of the clearly defined literary genres. Are these folktales, myths, epics, or *vratakatha* stories? Do these belong to the written or the oral tradition? The first step towards understanding the *Mangalakavya* as a genre is perhaps to recognise that it possesses some elements of all of these. A *Mangala* story is at once a folktale and a myth and simultaneously belongs to both the written and the oral traditions. In fact, it would be pointless and misleading to draw clear boundaries between the above categories. Ramanujan has emphasised the continuity between classical and folk traditions in India. He also draws attention to the fluidity of the categories ---- written and oral, and argues that the transmission of a single story in both folk and classical versions parallels each other in time and that any one version may draw from either or both.¹² An interdependence of written and oral cultures has also been observed in the context of medieval Europe by Aron Gurevich. We have treated the *Mangalakavya* stories as myths, which have their origin in folk tradition, later codified into written texts while still

retaining their popular character. Borrowing from B. Lincoln's definition that myth is that small class of stories that possess both credibility and authority, Nigel Crook has observed that myths are a form of consciousness which realises itself through the content of a text and the popular perception of this content.¹³ This play between the content and their perception is crucial for our purpose. It is this dialogic relationship between the two that renders a myth useful for the purpose of studying social norms, values and attitudes. According to Gurevich, this is more so in the case of folklore, since folklore is subject to a kind of 'preliminary censorship' by its collective listeners as the community chooses acceptable productions and rejects others. Thus, only that survives which is approved and accepted by the audience and suits its taste. Susan Wadley, while taking into account the performative aspect of a *vratakatha*, also states that the shared knowledge and interpersonal relationship of the performer and the audience are critical to any meaning that the discourse might have, and that in both written records and oral culture the meaning lies in the context.¹⁴ It must be remembered that the *Mangalakavyas* were meant to be sung before an audience. Thus Gurevich's preliminary censorship applies in this case. In fact, he says that in folklore this censorship is unconditional. Unlike the written texts, in folklore the products of individual creativity which the collective refuses to incorporate socially are doomed

to perish. Because of its dual nature, even the written text of a *Mangalakavya* is not the product of an individual's imagination and fantasy. It is a product of the shared world of the real and the imaginary of the collectivity that includes both the author and the community.

And this is not all. The *Mangalakavya* stories were not only retold but also copied and recopied several times. Gurevich refers to a 'boundary zone' between individual and collective creation, between literature and folklore. This concept was introduced by Jacobson and Bogatyrev keeping in mind such 'creations' as that of copyists of literary works who unintentionally made changes to the texts. Medieval literature contains numerous works in which the same subject is developed in different forms. Interest in the topic emerged again and again and triggered a re-working of subjects which lived on in oral tradition and enjoyed wide popularity. This is true of the *Mangalakavyas* as well. Tarapada Bhattacharya, in his discussion on the *Mangalakavyas*, says that the several retellings were a result of audience demand, and that it was this very audience demand that prompted the *Mangala* poets to retain the familiar and popular formats of the individual stories.¹⁵

Crook observes that the telling of myth presupposes the hearing of myth; there may be a purpose in the telling but there must also be a purpose in the hearing. In his opinion, people

seek assurance. They want themselves to be shown as having been a part of a grand design. Further, a myth helps to reassure in matters beyond and before the political ----- it helps to create order in what is otherwise chaotic.¹⁶ Explaining the immense popularity of a work like the *Ramayana*, R.P Goldman has also observed that reading the text, hearing it, seeing it being performed and represented through various forms of art, has enabled its audience through their identification with the central characters to cope in their own lives with the problems that the epic poets have addressed. Besides, the *Ramayana*, like any piece of fantasy, permits the audience to partially externalise and master their innermost anxieties and conflicts.¹⁷ It is apparent from the discussion so far that the myth functions at several levels. At the conscious level, myth has a didactic content. It is told in order to establish a social position with authority, and is a way to control deviance.¹⁸ It thus sets the standards of desired social behaviour through a representation of the normative as well as through negative moral lessons. The folkloric aspect of the myth ensures that the depiction of every day life ----- with its tensions and contradictions ----- corresponds to reality, so that the narrative gains credibility among the audience. Tarapada Bhattacharya says that, while propagation of the cult of a particular deity was the professed reason for composing a *Mangalakavya*, entertainment of the people was the guiding principle. This may explain why detailed

descriptions of everyday life, customs and habits, ceremonies and rituals, food and dress, etc., are found in almost all the *Mangalakavyas*.

Beyond this surface level lies the realm of fantasy. Myths express, primarily through symbols and metaphors, the innermost doubts, fears and fantasies of the mental world of the community. That which is socially unacceptable and cannot even be allowed to enter the realm of the conscious, and therefore remains suppressed but dormant, is given symbolic expression at this second level of the myth. Such fantasies are usually projected onto the figures of the gods and goddesses rather than the human characters, because such projections do not directly threaten the stability of the social world.

At a third level, myth performs the role of wish-fulfillment. Narayana Rao observes, that the *Ramayana* in India is not just a story with a variety of retellings; it is a language with which a number of statements can be made. Women in Andhra Pradesh have long used this language to voice what they wish to say as women.¹⁹ Appropriation of the accepted 'language' of the dominant group, through the retellings of an epic such as the *Ramayana* or a myth or a folktale, by a subordinate group in society such as lower castes or women, is the first step towards wish-fulfillment. While stating that women-centred tales constitute a separate genre. Ramanujan adds that some of these

tales are creations of women's fantasy. Defying the restrictions of reality in imagination by means of these stories, women become partly reconciled to the reality of their lives. Ranajit Guha, in his analysis of the transformation of the Sanskrit myth of Rahu by some lower caste groups, argues that such retellings are acts of subversion that display awareness of their subordinate status. Unable to find redressal of their deprivations in real life, they seek compensation in the construction of wish fulfilling myths which are predicated on a critique of the objective social conditions.²⁰

The above schematisation of the different functions of myth has helped me to arrange my material thematically. However, before I enumerate this arrangement, it is necessary to provide a brief outline of the stories in the *Chandimangala* and the *Manasamangala*.

The *Chandimangala* is made up of two separate stories. The first story narrates the exploits of the goddess Chandi and the propagation of her cult through the hunter Kalketu. The goddess appears before Kalketu and his wife Phullara and bestows wealth upon them, with which he is to clear forest land and found a new settlement. Kalketu accomplishes this task and becomes the king of this settlement called Gujrat. He builds a shrine for Chandi and propagates her cult. Subsequently, the ruler of the kingdom of Kalinga, in which Kalketu's new settlement was located,

attacks Kalketu twice. On the first occasion he is able to defend himself, but on the second he is taken captive. In prison, he prays to Chandi who rescues him.

In the second story, the merchant Dhanapati, who belongs to the *Gandhavanik* caste, marries a second time which leads to conflict and enmity between the two wives. As soon as the merchant goes on a long voyage, the older wife, Lahana, begins to harass Khullana, the younger one. Meanwhile, Khullana is initiated into the cult of goddess Chandi by a group of women. When her suffering becomes unbearable, Khullana turns to Chandi for protection. When her husband returns, Khullana's sorrows come to an end through the intervention of the goddess. However, Dhanapati is not convinced of the powers of Chandi and desecrates her sacred pot. When the merchant embarks on another voyage, the goddess punishes him by causing him to be imprisoned in the kingdom of Singhala where he goes for trade. On growing up Khullana's son Sripati sets out in search of his father. After many trials and tribulations father and son are united and they return home together. Dhanapati then accepts the cult of Chandi, by whose grace he was rescued.

In the *Manasamangala* story, the goddess Manasa is informed by her father Shiva that in order to establish her cult on earth, it is necessary for her to secure the worship of a certain Chand Sadagar or Chando who is a merchant belonging to the *Gandhavanik*

caste. However, Chando not only refuses to worship Manasa, but also heaps insult on her. Enraged, Manasa makes a determined attempt to put the merchant through immense hardships. After killing his six sons and drowning his seven ships along with the crew and the merchandise, she proceeds to kill his seventh son on his wedding night. The wife Behula, who is thus widowed on her wedding night, takes her husband's dead body and travels down the river in order to bring him back to life, crossing several hurdles on her journey. Finally she reaches the abode of the gods where she pleases them with her skill as a dancer and gets Manasa to restore her husband to life, on the promise that she would secure Chando's worship for her. Chando remains reluctant, but eventually relents after being persuaded by Behula.

Each of these stories has been rendered into *Mangalakavya* by several poets. Thus several versions of the same story exist. For the purpose of the present work, I have selected the three most popular versions of each of these. Of the *Chandimangala* texts, I will look at Mukundaram Chakrabarty's *Chandimangala*, Dvija Madhab's *Mangal Chandir Git* and Dvija Ramdeb's *Abhayamangala*. Of the *Manasamangala* texts I have chosen Bijay Gupta's *Padma Puran*, Jagajjiban Ghoshal's *Manasamangala* and Ketakadas Kshemanada's *Manasamangala*. In all these versions, the core story, as told above, remains the same.

In the first chapter of the dissertation I discuss those

aspects of the stories that correspond to the first or the conscious level of the myth as discussed above. It is about the representation of women in the familial space as well as in the larger society. As mentioned above, the credibility of folkloric material for its intended audience lies in its realistic depiction of everyday life. Only after such credibility is acquired, can deeper and more complex issues and world-views be introduced. The primary requirement for the success of a story of this kind is that its readers, listeners or viewers must be able to identify themselves and their familiar society with the characters and society described in the story. It is precisely on this point that Tarapada Bhattacharya contrasts the genre of the *Mangalakavya* with that of the Vaishnav Padavali literature. The latter deals with abstruse philosophical and sublime emotional themes and at the time of composition had in mind only a select audience. The *Mangalakavyas*, on the other hand are more prosaic and earthy and were meant for a target audience composed largely of unlettered village folk. Hence the poets have presented a very detailed picture of the everyday lives of the common people of medieval Bengal. Particularly the trials and tribulations of women and their dissatisfaction with their lot have received a good deal of attention. The didactic message is conveyed through the edifying sermons on Brahmanical values, and also through negative moral lessons exemplified by the acts of the divine figures.

Thus conjugal relations, relationships of power between different female members of the household, the interface between the enclosed world of the *antahpura* (the inner apartments of a household) and the world outside, and networks of women providing them with some social support form subjects of enquiry in this chapter. It is important to mention that even though both the *Mangalakavyas* have common features in terms of their narrative strategies, they differ in the emphasis they place on the representation of everyday reality. According to Tarapada Bhattacharya, the *Manasamangala* texts contain a much greater element of fantasy and make more frequent use of symbolism than the *Chandimangala* texts. He suggests that the journey of Behula with the body of her dead husband is actually a journey towards the land of fantasy and dreams while the *Chandimangala* stories are more mundane.²¹ Hence, the first chapter deals largely with the *Chandimangala* stories.

The materials discussed in the second chapter correspond to the subliminal level or the level of fantasy in myth. In this chapter male attitudes to women's sexuality, which in the context of medieval Bengal constitutes the single most important source of women's power, have been studied. These attitudes could be the result of inchoate fears of men of women's greater sexual prowess, a kind of male fantasy regarding women's dangerous sexuality. Such fantasies are manifest in the depiction of the

relationship between the goddesses and the worshippers in both the *Mangalakavyas*. In all the texts, this relationship has strong erotic overtones, bringing to mind the observation of Wendy Doniger about the figure of the dominant older woman in Hindu mythology. According to Doniger, sexual relation with an older woman is believed to result in loss of vital sexual fluids; with her a man can only be a son. Similarly, the worshipper does not dare seek erotic contact with the goddess for fear of emasculation and incest. M. Carstairs observed a similar relationship between the worshipper and the goddess. One is expected to relate to the horrific figure of the goddess decapitating men and drinking their blood in an attitude of complete submission in order to evoke the maternal instinct in her and to gain her compassion. If however, this sexually dangerous goddess is rejected, the horrific image may become a reality.²² The relationship of the goddess Chandi with Kalketu and Dhanapati and that of goddess Manasa with Chando has been located within this framework.

The third chapter deals with myth as wish-fulfillment. The story of Behula's journey into the other world, her ordeals and her ultimate triumph are some of the typical characteristics of a woman-centred tale. Ranajit Guha points out that brahmanism engages in collating and constructing myths so that these can be presented as unified cycles of stories reflecting a harmonious and well-integrated social set-up. However, once the syncretic

wrapping is taken off, the content of many a myth can be identified as what it really is ----- a representation of some ancient and unresolved antagonism.²³ This generalisation is perhaps an overstatement, but when separated from the rest of the narrative, the story of Behula in the *Manasamangala* probably reveals some such deep ambiguity. It is indeed remarkable that Behula breaks several codes of respectable behaviour for women in village society, and more importantly, in a complete reversal of roles assumes the initiative of rescuing her husband. It is possible to interpret such reversals as wish-fulfillment. The psychological function of such wish-fulfillment stories is perhaps that of helping the subject group to cope with the reality of its subordination in everyday life. As Narayana Rao remarks, women participating in the telling and listening of these stories are no feminists. In his opinion, the meaning is received only subliminally. There is no conscious protest as these women do not seek to overthrow the patriarchal family structure. Instead, they work within it and attempt to create a little more space for themselves. However, it is also important to remember the observation of Natalie Davis that sexual inversions in rites and ceremonies are not merely safety valves for conflicts within the system. She argues that such inversions have the potential to transform even everyday existence through its structured connection with the privileged time of the ritual and the festive.²⁴

It is difficult to arrive at definitive conclusions about contemporary realities on the basis of literary representations of this kind. One can only attempt to partially recover some of the principles of the ordering of social relations from these symbolic constructs.

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NOTES

1. Theoretical models for studying cultural assimilation of this kind have been developed by scholars working on other regions such as Orissa, notably in the work by Eschmann, Kulke and Tripathi, *he Cult of Jagannatha and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*. The general principles for studying the process have been formulated by B.D.Chattopadhyay for the early medieval period showing common trajectories of this process, cutting across regional boundaries in his work. He says it should be possible to identify at least three major processes which were operative throughout all the phases of Indian history (and early Indian history in particular). These were "the expansion of state society through the process of local state formation and cult appropriation and integration", B.D. Chattopadhyay, *The Making of Early Medieval India*, O.U.P., New Delhi, 1994 p.16

2. Edward Dimock Jr., "The Goddess of Snakes in Medieval Bengali Literature", Part-I *History of Religions* Vol.1, no.-2 Chicago, Winter 1961 p.308

In the second part of this essay, Dimock examines in diagrammatic form, the characteristics and names of the chief character of the *Manasamagla* story and proposes a history of cult conflict through the overlaps in characteristics, symbols, etc. . According to him, this suggests a good deal about the way in which Manasa, and perhaps by extension any local god or goddess began to make her

presence felt and extend her power by epitomising in her own character the characteristics and realms of lesser or previous deities. Edward Dimock Jr. and A.K.Ramanujan, "The Goddess of Snakes in Medieval Bengali Literature", Part-II, *History of Religions*, Vol.3, no.2 Chicago, Winter 1964 pp.319-321

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10. Lina Fruzzetti, *The Gift of A Virgin*, O.U.P, India, 1990 and Susan Hanchett, *Coloured Rice: Symbolic Structures in Hindu Family Festivals*, Hindustan Publishing Corpn. Delhi, 1988

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12. He says, "Such a presence of reflexive worlds; such a dialogic response of one tradition to author; the co-presence of several of these in one space, parodying, inverting, facing and defacing each other, sharing and taking over characters, themes, motifs, and other signifiers but making these signify new and even opposite things---This is characteristic of Indian creativity". A.K. Ramanujan, "Towards a Counter-System: Women's tales" in Arjuna Appadorai et.al; eds; *Gender, Genre and power in South Asian Expressive Traditions*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Pennsylvania, 1991

13. Nigel Crook, "The Control and Expansion of Knowledge: An

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15. Tarapada Bhattacharya, *Bangasahityer Itihas*, S.Gupta Bros. (Pvt.) Lmted. Calcutta, 1962 pp.162-166
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Chapter - 1
Representation of Reality : Women in Everyday Life

This chapter is a study of representation of women in their everyday lives, in the *Chandimangala*. The depiction of society in its everyday aspects, entails two dimensions ----- the actual and the ideal. The first dimension corresponds to the author's own perception of the society to which he belongs. The second corresponds to the author's role as a disseminator of social norms. Dissemination is of course, implicit in the very act of narativising, especially when such an enterprise involves retelling of a tale that has been told several times. However, the author also self-consciously accepts this role. This is demonstrated in the inclusion of a section called *Svapnadesh* (deity's command communicated through a dream), where the need to retell such a popular story is justified and legitimised in the name of the deity herself. In his role as a preacher, the author lays down and reinforces the values, ethics and codes of social behaviour. In this chapter I shall attempt to locate women in their familial and social context, as depicted by the authors of *Chandimangala*, and subsequently analyse the significance of this depiction at various level indicated above.

The family described in the first story of the *Chandimangala* comprises the hunter Kalketu and his wife Phullara. Kalketu hunts game in the forest and Phullara sells the meat and other animal products in the market. Hiteshranjan Sanyal, in his discussion on the process of acculturation and social mobility, has drawn attention to the significant presence of forest and hill tribes

who came in contact with the 'Indo-Aryan' culture in early medieval Bengal. He presumes that the tribes established contact with the immigrants for selling their wares like baskets, rope and food-stuff, collected from the forest. This interaction resulted in a gradual transformation of the methods of production and distribution of these tribes and their partial absorption into Hindu society as low-ranking *jatis*.¹ The evidence from the *Chandimangala* texts seems to indicate that Kalketu and Phullara belonged to this stratum of society. Phullara's activities in the market, as detailed by Mukundaram come very close to Sanyal's conceptualisation of the pattern of economic exchange between the tribes and the immigrants who were the bearers of Brahmanical tradition to Bengal. The buyers of her wares included Brahmins. It is also mentioned that Phullara had set up shop in the outskirts of the town (*nagara*), which probably suggests that these people lived in the periphery of settled agricultural society. For instance :

Everyday the hunter kills animals with great vigour just as Brihannala killed the Kaurava soldiers. Seizing the trunk of a mad elephant, he throws it on the ground and tears out its tusks. Phullara then sells these animal products in the market as a farmer sells raddish.²

References to their low-caste status can also be found in the statement of Kalketu in Mukundaram's work, where Kalketu pleads with Chandi, who is disguised as a beautiful Brahmin woman, to leave his residence. He is afraid that she may be polluted through contact with such low-caste people.

I am a hunter, a low-caste person. You are a high caste lady. Kalketu wants to know your identity. Unparalleled in the three worlds, O brahmin woman, what can I give you ? For what purpose have you come to a hunter's hut ? Hunters are a ferocious tribe. Animal bones are lying everywhere; like a burial ground is this house. If you touch anything, you have to take a bath.³

Thus it is fairly clear that Kalketu and Phullara belonged to a caste which was located towards the bottom of the *jati* structure in medieval Bengal. In their depiction of the hunter's family, the three authors of the *Chandimangala* texts have presented a pattern of social interaction in which a clear separation between public and private domains was not rigidly maintained. This seems to have been rendered inevitable by the economic structure of the household. To be able to meet subsistence requirements it was necessary for Phullara to step out into the public arena, i.e. the market place and interact with a wide cross-section of

the male society. She also hawked her wares:

I carry meat from house to house and only get some broken rice and left-overs in return, which which leaves me hungry⁴.

Such transactions did not automatically lead to a questioning of her chastity by the patriarchal society. On the other hand, men were occasionally involved in running the household. For example, when Kalketu's mother Nidaya was pregnant, his father Dharmaketu not only arranged for her *sadh* (a feast for the women-folk in the community in honour of a pregnant woman), but also cooked the food that she desired to eat. Nidaya says :

In the ninth month the hunter arranged for Nidaya's *sadh*. Nidaya says to her husband, with a heavy heart, the state of my pregnancy scares me. No hunger or thirst have I felt for ten days. Only if I get food to suit my taste, can I eat a few morsels. To prepare for Nidaya's *sadh*, Dharmaketu goes to procure the ingredients. Cooking himself, he then gave Nidaya's *sadh*.⁵

There is also a passage in which Nidaya laments that she does not have her mother near her, nor aunts or sisters. Who would take charge of the household during her pregnancy ?

By this she possibly implies that her husband Dharmaketu would have to assume this unaccustomed responsibility.

My mother is not nearby. With whom shall I share my anxiety? Neither aunts nor sisters, neither relatives nor friends, are there to bear the burden of the household, for the almighty has made me unlucky.⁶

However, even though such overlaps between gender roles were not infrequent, the basic idea that the husband was the bread earner and the wife was responsible for running the household was recognised. This is demonstrated in the following verse, where Kalketu, returning empty-handed (except for the /godhika/ or lizard that was Chandi in disguise) from the forest, was filled with anxiety at the thought of meeting his wife:

His heart filled with anxiety, the hunter thought, what shall I offer to Phullara? How can I go near her without any game?⁷

On the other hand, Phullara was worried because the evening meal had not yet been prepared :

At sunset, my husband will return home starved. I will be beaten if food is not served immediately.⁸

In all the three versions, the authors have drawn an idyllic

picture of blissful conjugal life of the hunters . Nidaya and Dharmaketu, as well as Phullara and Kalketu, are shown to be happy with each other, despite living in abject poverty. When Kalketu is worried that he cannot feed her properly, Phullara assures him thus:

You and I are but one being. So do not worry needlessly about me.⁹

She heats up some stale rice in water and serves it to Kalketu. He, on his part, does not make a fuss but consumes it eagerly:

Knees touching the ground he drank the stale rice water, without questioning what he ate.¹⁰

Phullara is free from the presence of a co-wife or a mother-in-law who could disturb this picture of perfect conjugality. That their presence could have been a possible source of trouble for the young wife is also recognised by her husband. When Phullara goes with tears in her eyes to meet Kalketu at the market place, he says to her:

You do not have a mother-in law, a sister-in-law, or a co-wife. Then with whom have you quarreled and made your eyes red?¹¹

In fact, Phullara is perturbed at the prospect of having Chandi disguised as a beautiful woman, as a co-wife. She rushes off to find her husband and complains about his misconduct.

While in Mukundaram's version she only expresses her grief at his bringing home another woman, in the versions of both Dvija Madhab and Dvija Ramdeb, she not only chides her husband, but also taunts him about his poverty:

You can procure no rice at sunset. Yet so refined is your taste that you have brought another's wife.¹²

Phullara tries to scare the disguised Chandi who, she fears, would become her co-wife, with a detailed description of her hardships during each of the twelve months of the year.

The second story in the *Chandimangala* is about the merchant Dhanapati and his two wives Lahana and Khullana. Dhanapati belonged to the *Gandhavanik* caste, who were supposed to deal in herbs, drugs and groceries. By the time of the composition of these texts, the *Gandhavaniks* had attained the rank of Nabasakhs in the *jati* hierarchy that placed them in the upper reaches of the category of 'clean Shudras'. Thus they could be counted among the upper castes in Bengal, next in ritual status only to the Brahmins, the Baidyas and the Kayasthas.¹³

Unlike the case in Kalketu's family, the structure of this upper-caste family has been depicted as one that clearly recognised the division between the private and the public, or more precisely between the domestic and the public.¹⁴ This

division coincides neatly with the division of work between the sexes. The husband is a merchant who goes on long voyages to trade in distant lands. He is solely responsible to provide for his family and his sphere of activity is the outside world. The wives are confined within the four walls of the house. Any transgression of this domestic sphere inevitably leads to loss of their reputation.

In contrast to the hunter's story, the conjugal life of this family is beset by the problem of polygamy. Indeed, the entire narrative of the *Banik-Khanda* revolves around this social phenomenon. The co-wives compete with each other for undivided attention of the husband. When the husband is away for a long period of time, the wives attempt to harass each other, and when the husband returns, his love for one makes the other envious. Envy drives them to indulge in petty misdemeanors and constant quarrels. Thus, when Dhanapati is inside the bedchamber with Khullana, Lahana listens at the door and tries to disrupt their conversation:

Falling at his feet, Khullana says, O Lord, with her ear to the door Lahana is listening... Lahana says, how many more lies will you tell? But you can not remove Lahana from her husband's heart.¹⁵

The politics of the household thus expresses itself more

sharply in this story. A.K. Ramanujan puts into a separate category the stories which portray the power games of a joint family where women from different status and families are married to brothers, or as co-wives to the same man, and have to live together in one patrilocal household.¹⁶ In the story of Dhanapati, the *antahpura* consist of the two co-wives Lahana and Khullana, and the maid-servant Dubala. In Mukundaram's version, it is in connivance with Dubala that Lahana ill treats Khullana, while in the other two versions, Dubala acts as an ally of Khullana and tries to protect her from Lahana's vengeance. Some others like Lahana's Brahmani Sakhi (Brahmin friend), who do not belong to this household, also play an important part in the politics of the *antahpura*, by virtue of their closeness to one of the women residing in it. In the versions of both Dvija Ramdeb and Dvija Madhab, it is the Brahmani Sakhi who assists Lahana in her evil schemes.

The husband does not directly participate in such power games. However, he retains his importance, at least in notional terms, even in the domestic sphere as the ultimate legitimising authority. Lahana forges a letter in Dhanapati's name in order to expel Khullana from the house and out into the woods. Even though not fully convinced, Khullana can not defy the order since it is apparently issued by her husband. When Khullana pleads with Lahana not to turn her out, Lahana says :

Girl, don't ask me for favours. I do not have the courage to keep you in the house when our husband desires otherwise.¹⁷

Also, when Khullana's brother Kamdeb attempts to intervene on her behalf, Lahana hands him the forged letter. Upon reading it, Kamdeb is effectively silenced, for he has no authority to challenge the writ of his sister's husband.

Kamdeb reads the letter over and over again Shamefacedly he apologises to Lahana (for saying harsh words to her)¹⁸.

Even when he returns home, Dhanapati is more keen to woo Khullana in the bedchamber than to listening to her complaints about Lahana and her miseries in the long months of his absence. When he does condescend to give her an ear, he tries to rationalise her miseries by saying that she had to suffer because it was her destiny, just as it was Sita's destiny to suffer at the hands of Ravana.

Dhanapati says:

O dearest, if you give it serious thought, say, who upon this earth has not met with sorrow? When has a chaste woman, who was fated to suffer, ever forsaken her husband because of that? Srirama's wife Sita, O dear one, was kidnapped by Dasanan (Ravana). How she

suffered in the Ashoka grove? Blessed was she, the daughter of the earth, who bore her fortitude without complaint and did not forsake Rama on this account.¹⁹

All relations between the husband and the wife seem to have centered around their sexual relationship. Even when Lahana is sore about Dhanapati's intention of marrying Khullana, the merchant does not hesitate to expect Lahana to respond to his sexual advances.

She remained annoyed. Towards the end of the night the merchant was overcome with longing. But Lahana still refused to relent. Finding an opportune moment, the merchant enclosed her in his arms.²⁰

Of course, from the moment he marries Khullana, he no longer has any use for Lahana. Khullana being young and attractive, manages to monopolise his attention. Even with Khullana, whom he has left behind almost immediately after wedding her, the merchant is in great haste to consummate his marriage as soon as he returns from his voyage.

Thus it was youth, beauty and sexual appeal of a wife that ensured her favoured status with her husband. Consequently women also used their sexuality as a bait to bargain with men. When

Dhanapati seeks the company of Khullana in his bedchamber upon his return from the voyage, the latter hesitates, because her grievances have not been redressed. The maidservant Dubala prods her to go in and make use of this opportunity. She advises Khullana to first ensnare the merchant by her charms, and when he is completely overcome with longing, refuse to let him consummate his love till he has listened to her tale of woes. According to Dviya Madhab:

Duba says, hear O Khulana, when you become the sole recipient of your husband's favours, will you value my words. Wrap a garment over your body; enter his room with slow soft steps and put down the betel leaf. Stand to his left and let a lazy smile play on your lips. When the *sadhu* (noble person) is filled with desire, he will want you next to him. Look the other way and sit down on the bed beside him. Pretending to adjust your *anchal* (end of *sari*) offer him a generous glimpse of your breasts. If you feel embarrassed, cover his hand with yours when the *sadhu* reaches out to touch your breast. Raise your face to his and put out the miseries of both of you If he feels thirsty, give him a glass of wine. And then begin with your tale of woes.²¹

According to Dviija Ramdeb:

Dubala spoke thus : Listen O Khulana, while I tell you about *Kamkala* (the art of seduction). As it is you are beautiful. If you also learn *Kamkala*, you are sure to have him in your power. Entering the bedchamber, wake him up by jingling your bangles. Pretending to tie up your tresses, let the *sari* slip and reveal a part of your breasts. On seeing this he will certainly be stricken with desire and will long to touch your beautiful body. Your husband will beseech you. Speak softly to him and tell about your misfortune.²²

Such then is the structure of familial relationships in medieval Bengal, as portrayed by the authors of the *Chandimangala*.

Can these depictions of conjugal life be taken as representations of reality? It is significant that while conjugal relations within the rich and respectable family in the merchant's story have been depicted in great detail, with emphasis on the politics of the *antahpur*, the depiction of relationships within the lower-caste family in the hunter's story is bare of such details and somewhat idealised in its

construction. It is probable that with their upper-caste (all three authors of the *Chandimangala* texts were Brahmins) and possibly upper-class background, the authors had less direct contact with the lower-caste groups compared to the upper strata of society. Their portrayal of the former was probably inspired more by their imagination and prevalent beliefs about lower-castes among the elites of the society than by direct observation. Such idealised upper-caste notions about the lower strata of the society are contained in a garbled manner in the story itself. Kalketu, we are told, was in fact a reincarnation of Nilambar, the son of Indra, who was sent to earth on account of a curse of Shiva. Nilambar was asked to collect flowers for Shiva's worship. While picking flowers, he saw a hunter chasing game. The sight of the hunter so fascinated him that he got delayed in his mission. Also, being unmindful, Nilambar forgot to remove the thorns from the *bilva* leaves, which pricked Shiva's thumb. When Shiva ascertained the reason behind Nilambar's delay, he cursed him to be reborn on earth as the son of a hunter. Mukundaram's description of Nilambar's emotions upon sighting the hunter in the forest is probably an expression of romantic fascination of the upper castes with the 'simple' lives of the lower castes.

Seated under a tree with tears in his eyes and with a heavy heart, Nilambar thought that it was better to be born a hunter. Why did I have

to be Indra's son? How happy in this hunter! He drinks water when he is thirsty and he eats his meals when he is hungry. I cannot eat till the worship of Shiva is done. Look at this graceful hunter! He is just like Rama in exile and the deer is just like Maricha. ... And look at me! I am worthless and any divine existence is useless. I have neither gained knowledge, nor learnt archery. How shall I defend myself in a war between the gods and the demons?²³

Just as the lower castes had their own fantasies about the lives of the rich and the privileged, similarly the upper castes seemed to have entertained idealised notions about the poor and the socially deprived. The absence of blissful conjugal life among the more brahmanised sections of society was probably felt quite acutely. The popular literary mode called *patininda* (criticism of one's husband) in medieval Bengali literature directly addresses the issue of incompatibility in marriage. When handsome and well-bred Dhanapati went to marry Khullana, all the women assembled in her paternal home began to lament about their own fate that bound them to less attractive husbands.

All said, Khullana has got a good husband whose appearance is like Madanmohan (Krishna).

He lights up the room. One woman laments, ill is my fate, my husband is blind in both eyes..... Another says my husband has lost his teeth. To him everyday, a watery broth I have to serve. ... Yet another says, my husband has swollen feet (elephantiasis). One woman says I shall go to the mountains. Another says I shall drown in the sea. Another says I shall not return home. Yet another says my heart is restless.²⁴

Such then seems to have been the state of conjugal relations among the upper castes of medieval Bengal. Satyabati Giri holds the *Kulina* system which was prevalent among the upper castes in Bengal responsible for the mismatch in marriages²⁵. There was enormous social pressure on a girl's father to marry her to a *kulin* groom, failing which he would have to face ostracism. The twin problems of incompatibility in marriage relations as well as the presence of co-wives were by-products of this social practice²⁶. Dissatisfaction with conjugal life was therefore, common, and it found expression in medieval Bengali literature such as the *Mangalakavyas* and even in the Vaishnava *Padavalis*.²⁷

Thus it seems that not only the poets' ideas about the lower-castes and other marginal groups were conceived from an externalist perspective, but it is also possible that while

representing this society, the poets were actually engaged in constructing the 'other'. While the upper-caste construction of the lower-castes as its other resulted in the portrayal of the latter as uncivilised, barbaric and depraved, it also led to the projection of wishes and dreams that remained unfulfilled due to the limitations of their society in their own lives on them. The portrayal of the community of hunters as uncivilised is evident in Mukundaram's description of Kalketu's food habits. Kalketu is shown to consume unbelievably large quantities of food, and his manner of eating is unsightly:

Just as his slumber was uncivilised, so was
his eating barbaric.²⁸

On the other hand, in their depiction of conjugal life in the hunter's family, the poets probably projected the collective desire of the upper strata of society for such a life onto the relationships of Kalketu and Phullara. Velcheru Narayana Rao argues that the depiction of happy conjugal life of Rama and Sita in the women's *Ramayanas* contains an element of wish fulfillment. "All too often, women in this community find that there is little real love between them and the husband who has been chosen for them. An elaborate description of the mutual love and desire of Rama and Sita thus serves as a wish fulfillment."²⁹

The only aspect of lower-caste life that the poets seem to have developed in detail is that of poverty. The *baramasya*

(women's tales of woes for each of the twelve months of a year) had become a literary convention and it has been resorted to by almost all the *Mangalakavya* poets to describe the wretched conditions of the poor people. However, for the same reason, it is difficult to decide whether the somewhat stylised description of poverty in such cases is a realistic one and in genuine sympathy with the poor or these have been put in merely in deference to a literary mode.

The depiction of family life in upper-caste society was perhaps closer to reality. It addresses actual social problems such as polygamy, rivalry between co-wives, and consequently petty intrigues. Rivalry between co-wives is indeed a common theme in classical Indian literature. In the *Ramayana* Kaikeyi's desire to see her own son enthroned stems from the same sentiment. The reason for the enduring popularity of this theme is perhaps that presupposes the pervasive practice of polygamy and audiences through ages have been able to establish identification of their own situation with the fictive one. The manipulative power games of the *antahpur* as depicted in the story of *Lahana* and *Khullana*, are features of joint families that continued till the institution of joint family existed. Bharati Ray, discussing the condition of women in joint families in early twentieth century Bengal, observes that they too bid for power, though in very restrictive situations. "The joint family in its day to day functions, represented a complex set of power

relationships.....Their (women's) mutual rivalry was inevitable within the given structure of the domestic system, since women's activities and goals were confined to the familial sphere." She adds that it appeared to them as if familial rivalry and oppression were caused by women alone. "The majority could not see that the norms of the joint family were originally male-prescribed and that the male-dictated women's confinement to the private domain alone necessarily made the household the site for female rivalry while the male power-struggles extended to various public arenas".³⁰ This analysis of the early twentieth century holds good for the relationship between Lahana and Khullana. Lahana to an extent realised that it was the nature of patriarchal society that was her true oppressor. Hearing the news that Dhanapati was going to marry again, she said:

Men are difficult creatures, just like diamond blades. While being still, with one, they will be attracted to another. Women are wretched. They are blamed at every step and once attached to a man there is no question of entertaining another.³¹

In the politics of the *antahpura*, the *dasi* had an important role. Dubala in Mukundaram's text is very similar to Manthara in the *Ramayana*. When Lahana and Khullana began to live together in peace, Dubala saw this as a threat to her position in the

household:

Seeing the two wives entwined in mutual affection, Dubala with poison in her heart and cotton-wool in her mouth, thought, if Lahana and Khullana live in harmony I shall die doing all the housework myself and shall have to listen to abuses from both.³²

On the other hand, it was Dubala who, in the versions of both Dviija Madhab and Dviija Ramdeb, acted as an ally of Khullana and taught her *kamkala* to help her gain control (*bashikaran*) over her husband. This range of roles attributed to Dubala reflects the importance of the figure of the *dasi* in an affluent and upper-caste household in medieval Bengal.

So far, we have seen the authors as 'observers' and attempted to evaluate the extent to which 'reality' has been represented in the *Chandimangala*. The other aspect of the authors' role in the narrative is the construction of the normative. Throughout the texts, the authors betray a brahmanical agenda. The most obvious of these is the emphasis on the devoted and chaste wife. The depiction of Phullara as a devoted wife who shares her husband's poverty without complaint, is probably an expression of this devotion. Dharmaketu and Kalketu are worried about how to arrange for their next meal, Nidaya and Phullara stand firmly by their side and assure them of

their unswerving loyalty³³.

Nidaya even expresses her desire to commit Sati when her husband Dharmaketu dies. According to Dvija Madhab : (Nidaya thought) What will I do? Where will I go? My mind is unsteady. I will burn myself along with my husband.³⁴

However, it should be remembered that if idealisation of conjugal relationships in the hunters' family is due to the authors' imperfect familiarity with the lower-caste and marginal groups, the projection of brahmanical values on their womenfolk may be a part of the same idealisation and operationally less significant in the case of Lahana and Khullana.

The figure of the chaste wife has great significance in a pan-Indian context. Narayana Rao says that the *pativrata*, i.e., the faithful wife, is strong because of her total devotion to her husband. Whether he is sick or healthy, stupid or intelligent, evil or saintly, she lives for him in thought, word and deed. According to him, one aphorism states that a wife should act like a slave when she serves her husband, like a minister when she is consulted for advice, like a mother when she feeds him and like a courtesan when he takes her to bed. Citing the biographies of such well-known *pativratas* as Sita, Savitri, Damayanti and Anusuya, he points out that each underwent ordeals to prove her fidelity and that they display special powers only when their

chastity and not their life is threatened. Otherwise, they are as helpless as ordinary women, with nothing to do but suffer and wait for direction from their men. For example Damayanti, who successfully protected herself when her chastity was about to be violated by the hunter in the forest, could do little to save herself from the other unjustified sufferings that came her way.³⁵

The story of Khullana follows a very similar pattern. Even though she cannot protect herself from Lahana's cruelty, she appears to be endowed with extraordinary powers when put through several tests to ascertain her chastity by her caste group, including the ordeal by fire. The authors of the *Chandimangala* thus seem to have borrowed from the Sanskrit tradition to establish for their audience the role model of the virtuous wife. Even though Khullana has been portrayed as a tragic heroine and her characterisation by the poets necessarily directs the sympathy of the audience towards her, the story still delivers an important brahmanical message. That an upper-caste woman must never step out of the confines of the house unescorted, and if she does so, will be censured by the community, has been very effectively communicated. The story also helps to establish the boundary between the domestic and the public and the consequences of transgressing this boundary. The issue of private and public morality has also been dealt with by Dvija Madhab and Dvija Ramdeb. According to Dvija Madhab, when the *Kotwal* comes to know

that such a test is about to be held at Dhanapati's residence, he threatens Dhanapati and his caste members with dire consequence and reports the matter to the king. Dhanapati, instead of seizing this opportunity to request the king to intervene, goes to the latter's court along with his kinsmen and duly asks for permission to get on with the test :

Putting the lady to the test without the king's knowledge! You have gathered all your kinsmen to conspire. You are acting on sheer brute force (i.e. without the authority of the king's approval). Just wait till I report the matter to the king.³⁶

According to Dvija Madhab, when asked for permission by the caste group, the king says that since this was an internal matter of the caste, he would not like to interfere with it and asked them to go ahead with their plans:

The king said, hear O merchants, do the needful. Over matters of caste, I have no writ. Put the lady through the test. The *sadhu* went home along with the merchants.³⁷

Thus it seems that moral issues such as chastity of a woman belonged primarily to the jurisdiction of the caste group rather than the state.

An edifying sermon on the importance of virtue in a woman's life has been delivered through the mouth of Phullara when she is in conversation with Chandi, disguised as a beautiful woman. Chandi speaks of her miseries at home. She is plagued by the presence of her co-wife Ganga and the negligence of her old indigent husband, and wishes to seek pleasure on her own, now that she has abandoned her husband. Upon hearing this, Phullara states:

I ask you to return to your husband's home, or else you will subject yourself to great suffering. Listen to me, O foolish woman. If you leave your husband, how will you face other people? Husband is a woman's lord. Husband is a woman's last resort. Husband is God to his wife. Husband is the greatest treasure. None other than he can help her achieve salvation.³⁸

Again, Phullara lectures Kalketu on the immorality of lusting for another's wife:

Bali the lord of monkeys, took away his brother's wife. Everyone knows this. He had performed some good deeds in his previous life. Thus he was at least fated to be killed

by Sri Rama's arrow. The lord of the demons kidnapped the virtuous Sita, overcome with desire. Raghupati made preparations and along with the help of the monkeys rescued her after killing Ravana.³⁹

The logic behind the taboo on seeking sexual pleasures with another's wife was clearly a patriarchal one, since this would create problems in identifying one's heir.⁴⁰ However, the old brahmanical technique of making women repeat these homilies served the purpose of demonstrating the extent to which women internalised the value of chastity. Phullara of course is unlikely to know the *Ramayana*. Therefore putting these words into her mouth seems to be entirely rhetorical.

Thus competing voices negotiate with each other and through such negotiations the normative is finally laid down. Dissatisfaction with social practices like polygamy and deviant behaviour like that of Chandi, seeking pleasures with a man outside her marriage, are all given recognition in the texts. But they ultimately serve to illustrate the consequences of transgressing the rules of normative behaviour.

Thus, the texts, help organize the world-view for the community, while setting out its limits.⁴¹

NOTES

1. He says that whereas in other, reasons, the absorption of the indigenous people into the caste-structure took the form of 'Kshatriyaisation' also, in Bengal such absorption seems to have taken place largely through their assimilation as Sudras or the lower-caste, such as distillers, fishermen, basket-weavers, leather-workers and hunters. Hiteshranjan Sanyal, *Social Mobility in Bengal*, Papyrus, Calcutta, 1981 pp. 14-15

2. অনুদিন পশু বর্ধে বীর মহাবল
কুব্জবান্দ মেলা জেন বর্ধে বৃহন্নল।
শূন্যে ধরি মাওক্স গজ আত্মচিরা মাগে
দন্ত উদ্ভাটিকা বীর আনে বোমাডারে।
ভুবনী মুলাইয়া শাটে বেচেয়ে সুন্দর
কুশান জেন শাটে দেই মুলায় পঞ্জায়া।

Sukumar Sen (ed.), *Kabikankan Mukunda-Birachita Chandimangala*,
Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1975, p.45

3. আমি ব্যেধনিচ জাতি / তুমি রায়া কুলবতী / পরিচয় মাগে কালকে;
ত্রিভুবনে এক ধন্যা / কিবা দিব দিউ বখ্যা / ব্যেধির কুটিরে কিবা
ব্যেধ হিংসক রাড / চৌদিকে পশুর হাড / এই ঘরে সমান সমান
কোই আমি হিও বানী / এই ঘরে গুরুবানী / দুকিডনে উচিত হয় শুন।

ibid., p.62

4.
 মাঁপ্ৰয় প্ৰপ্ৰয়া লৈয়া এমি ঘৰে ঘৰে
 কিছু-খুদে বুকুত মিলে উদৰ না পূৰে।

ibid., p.61

5.
 নয় মাসে নিদ্যায় মাধ দেই (ব্যস্ত/নিদ্যায় স্মৃতিবে ক'হ ডায়িয়া বিষাদ।/
 গৰ্ভেয় হৃদয়িয়া ওয়/মান বহুলাগ ওয়/খুধা ত্ৰিণা নাহি দিনা দৃশ/
 আদনাৰ মত পাৰে/তবে গ্ৰাম কত খাই/---
 নিদ্যায় মাধহেতু/ঘৰে জায় ধৰ্মহেতু/চাহিয়া আনিল আয়োজন/
 আদনি বান্ধিয়া ব্যস্তি/নিদ্যায় দিল মাধ/---

ibid., p.40

6.
 নিৰ্গৰ্ভে নাহি মাগ/কাৰে কয়ু দুঃখ কথা/দ্বিতি মাগি বহিনী-মাতুলী/
 গ্ৰাতি বকু নাহি আৰ/যে প'হে ঘৰেৰ ওয়/যিধি মোহে কবিল প্ৰতিবুলী।

ibid., p.40

7.
 বগন্ধিৰা উঠিল বীৰ চিন্তিয়া অনুর/কি ল'ৰয়া সমুখ ৱৰমু খুলৰাব (গাঢ় ॥

Ashutosh Das (ed.), Dvija Ramdeber Abhayamangala, Calcutta University, Calcutta, 1957, p.60

8.
 দিনান্তে আসিবে পাতি বুকুখাৰ্ড ৱৰয়া/শীঘ্ৰ না পাৰিল ওহে মাৰিবে ধৰিয়া
 ibid., p.63

9. বামা (বালে বীৰবৰ/ভূমি আৰু-প্রকাশ্য/না জাৰিয় গল্প অকাৰত ।

ibid., p.57

10. ভূমিও জানু দিয়া বীৰ সিং-বাসি জানে।/ওদলুনা কৰে অহা খাৰ-মহাবীৰে।

ibid., p.57

11. স্নায়ুডী মনদী নাস্তি (অৰ প্ৰতা/কো প্ৰান কন্দল কৰি চকু-কোলে বাত ।

Chandimangala, p.62

12. সোম্বাৰ দিনালু না মিলে ওত/ওতনাগবালি চাঠ/পৰন্যৰি আনিয়াহু ঘৰে॥

Abayamangala, p.69

13. Sanyal, op.cit., pp.36-42

14. A.K. Ramanujan emphasises that the division in Indian village society is not between private and public or between personal and impersonal, but between the domestic and the public, between the inner circle or the immediate kin within the four-walls of a house and the larger extended family, the sub-caste, the caste and the society at large;

also, A.K. Ramanujan, "Two Realms of Kannada Folklore", in Stuart H. Blackburn and A.K. Ramanujan (eds), *Another Harmony: New Essays on the Folklore of India*, University of California Press,

Berkeley, 1986

15. ਖੂਨਨਾੜ (ਬਾਲੇ ਪੁੱਛੁ ਖੜਿਆ ਠਰੋਨਾ/ ਕਠਾ(ਟੇ)ੜ ਕਠਾ ਦਿਸ਼ਾ ਨਰਨਾੜ ਸੁਲੇ ॥)---
ਆਰ ਕਠਾ ਸਿਖਰਾ ਕਠਾ ਕੜ ਆੜ ਆੜ/ ਨਰਨਾੜੇ ਆਰੀ(ੜ)ੜ ਨਾ ਆਰੀ(ੜ) ਆਰੀ ਠਿਠਾ

Abhayamangala, p.219

16. From the introduction in A.K. Ramanujan (ed.), *Folktales from India: A selection of oral tales from twenty-two languages*, New Delhi, Viking, 1993

17. ਨਰਨਾੜ (ਬਾਲੇ ਬੋਠਿ ਨਾ ਬਲਿਠਾ ਬੋਰੇ) / ਆਠਾਰ ਨਿ ਆਰਠ ਆਰੀ ਗਾਠਿਠਾ(ੜ)ੜ

Abhayamangala, p.153

18. ਕਠਾ(ੜ)ੜ (ੜੇਰੰ ਆਰ ਆਰੀ ਠਰੇ ਠਰੇ / ਆਰੀ(ੜ)ੜ ੜੇਰੰ ਆਰੀ ਕੜ ਖੂਨਨਾੜ ॥

ibid., p.170

19. ਠਰੇ ਆਰੀ (ਬਾਲੇ ਸਿਖਰਾ/ ਆਰੀ(ੜ)ੜ ਆਰੀ ਦਿਸ਼ਾ/ (ਕਠਾ)ੜ ਆਰੀ ਆਰੀ ਸਿਖਰਾ ॥
ਕਠਾ ਆਰੀ ਆਰੀ ੜੇਰੰ/ ਠਰੇ(ੜ)ੜ ਆਰੀ(ੜ)ੜ ਆਰੀ(ੜ)ੜ/ (ਕਠਾ)ੜ ਆਰੀ(ੜ)ੜ ਆਰੀ(ੜ)ੜ ਆਰੀ(ੜ)ੜ ॥
(ੜੇਰੰ) ਸਿਖਰਾ ਆਰੀ(ੜ)ੜ ਆਰੀ(ੜ)ੜ/ ਆਰੀ(ੜ)ੜ ਆਰੀ(ੜ)ੜ ਆਰੀ(ੜ)ੜ/ ਆਰੀ(ੜ)ੜ ਆਰੀ(ੜ)ੜ ਆਰੀ(ੜ)ੜ ॥
ਠਰੇ (ੜੇਰੰ) ਆਰੀ(ੜ)ੜ/ --- ਨਾ ਆਰੀ(ੜ)ੜ ਆਰੀ(ੜ)ੜ ॥

ibid., pp.217-218

20. ବାସୀ ଆଡିମାନୀ/ଲୋକେ ବିନୀଶିନୀ/କମଳାମନେ- ସାଧୁ ଅକ୍ତ /
 ଲରନା ନିନ୍ଦୟ / ମାରଣ୍ୟା ସମୟ / ସାଧୁ କରେ ବାସବକ୍ତ ।

Chandimangala, p.120

21. ଦୁବା ବୋଲେ ଜୁନରେ ଧୁଲନୀ// ଲରନା ଜିନିଆ ଯବେ / ଯୋଶାସେ ଆମଲୀ ହବେ /
 ଯାହେ ବାସିୟ ଯୋବ ବାନୀ // ଅସୁବେ ଜାକିରା ମା / ଲହ ଲହ ଦିଆ ମା /
 ପ୍ରଥମେ ପ୍ରବେଶ ହେବ ଯବେ / ଅସୁଲ ଧୁରନ୍ତା ଆମେ / ଦୁର୍ଗହରନ୍ତ ବାସ ଡାଗେ /
 ଶୁଭୁ ଶୁଭୁ ହାସିୟ ଅଧିବେ // ସାଧୁ ସାହୁର୍ଗ ଆମେ / ଲହ ବାହର ଡାହାରେ ମାମେ /
 ବିଷୁଧ ମସୁବି ବେତ ମୀମା / ବାସିଆ ଧାଡେବ ଡାଲ / ଆକଲ ଡାଲିକାବ ଦୁଲ /
 ଧୂକେ ଦେ ଧାରନ୍ତ କୁଟ ମୀମା // ଅଡା ଲଜ୍ଜା ବାସି ଘୁଟ / ସାଧୁ କର ଦିତେ କୁଟ /
 ତସି ଆଧୁମନ୍ଦିୟ ଡୁଗ ଦୁକେ / ଦୁକିତେ ଲରିଆ ଧୁଆ / ଦୁଲିୟ କମଟେ ଦୁଆ /
 ଦୁହାସ ବିହର ଦୁ: ଧ ଅନୁ // ---
 ଓଷ୍ଠା ମାର୍ତ୍ତଲେ ବୁକି / ସମେବ ମୟାବ ମାଜି / ଲରିୟ ସେ ଆମନା ବୁଢାନ୍ତୁ //

Sudhibhushan Bhattacharya (ed.), Dvija Madhab rachita
 Mangalchandir Git, Calcutta University, Calcutta, 1965 p.183

22. ଦୁହାସ ବୋଲେ ଧୁଲି/ଜୁନ ଧୁଲନା ସିଲି/ କାମକଳା ମରକାଣା // ---
 ଏକେ ଦୁର୍ କମମାଳା / ଆବ ଲିକ୍ଷା କାମକଳା / ଲୀଳାମ ମାସିବି ଯୋହିବାସ //
 ଦୁଲିକା ବାସାହେତ ଖିଆ / କଳ୍ପନ ସଫଳା ଦିଆ / ପ୍ରଥମେ ଜାଗାହର- ଧୁଲଣାବ //
 ଦୁଲିକା କରଣୀ ବାନ୍ଧିତେ ଡାରି/ ଆସ ଡାହାଣ କୁଟାସିବି/ ଦେହାକତି ଚିକ୍ଷିବ ପ୍ରକାଶ //
 ଓ ଓନୁ ମରଣା ଆମେ / ମତିବିନାତି ଡାସେ / ଶବନ ଶଲିତ ଆସି ଆସି // ---
 ଅନଳ ସିଦ୍ଧାସ ଧାରନ୍ତା / ମତି ତାସ ଜର୍ଜୁର ହେବିଆ / ଡାବେ ତାସ ଲହର ନାବନ //
 ହରିସ ବିଷାଦ ସମେ / ସଫୁଟ ସଫୁଟ ଡାସେ / ଦୁ: ଧେବ ଲରିୟ ନିବେଦନ //

P.T.O

23. বাসিন্দা তবুও গলে / ভাসিন্দা লোচন গলে / বিষাদ ওাবে নীলাম্বর /
সদয়ে বহিল শাল / ব্যাধিজনম ওলে / কেন হেঁলাও ইন্দ্রের কুণ্ডল /
এই ব্যাধি ওলে জিহ্বা / শিখা-মাণি শিখা / যথামলে কব-ভোজন /
বিশ্বনাথের সূত্র / জাহ্নবা করে রাজা / ওতকন উদ্‌বদন /
এই ব্যাধি কপবান / বনবাসি যেন রাম / মৃগী লক্ষী মারীচ মমান /...
না কাবিল কোন কর্ম / বিষল দেওতা কর্ম / বিদ্যার না হেঁলা অশ্রুতন /
না করিলু ধনু শিখা / শক কামনে বসনা / যদি হয় দেবাপুত্র বন-।

24.

এবে বলে খুলনাও যে মিল্য। (হু ওলে / মদনমোহন কুলে যব কব্যাও আলা /
এক জুহুও বলে আর মোক কর্ম মনে / অধাশিয়া পতি মোক দুই চকু অক্ষা /..
আর জুহুও বলে পতিব বর্জিত দশন / মাক মুগ মনে বিলে না করে ভোজন /
আর জুহুও বলে আর মোক মোক পতি /... এক বসনি বলে আমি মনোর জাব,
আর বসনি বলে জনমা মাসরে মারিও / এক বসনী বলে আমি নাহি
জাব মোক / আর জুহুও বলে মোক প্রাণ কেন করে।

25. Satyabati Giri, "Madhyayuger Bangla Sahitya: Abarodhe Natajanu Bidrohini" *Bangla Bibhagiya Patrika*, Jadavpur University, p.20

26. Sanatkumar Naskar, "Sapatni Samasya, Baramasya O Nariganer Patininda: Kabyaprathaye Nari Manastatyer Byabahar", in Ashish Kumar De and Bishvanath Ray (eds), *Kabikankan Mukunder Chandimangala: alochana O parjalochana*, Pustak Bipani, Calcutta, 1996, p.209

27. Giri, op.cit., pp.15-22

28. শরৎ সূত্রিত্ত বীৰৰ ভোজন বিটকোম
Chandimangala, p.46

29. Velcheru Narayana Rao, "A Ramayana of their own: Women's Oral tradition in Telugu", Paula Richman (ed.), *Many Ramayanas: The diversity of a narrative tradition in South Asia* O U P, Delhi, 1996 p.121

30. Bharati Ray, "The three Generations: Female Rivalries and the Joint Family in Bengal, 1900-1947", in Rajat Ray (ed.), *Mind, Body and Society: Life and Mentality in Colonial Bengal*, O U P, Calcutta, 1995 pp.367-385

31.

দুইজন জাতি হীৰাৰ কাটাৰি।/ একেতে মজিলে এন অন্য যায় ফিৰি।/
অবলা অধম জাতি পাদে পাদে অসমৰাধ।/ একেতে শরৎ-লক্ষ্মী অন্যতে ফিৰি।

Abayamangala, p.125

32.

ପ୍ରମଦକୁ ଦୁ ମାତିନେ ଦେଖିଯା ଦୁବଳା / ଚାନ୍ଦେ କାଳକୃଟ ବିଷ ଖୁଧେ ଜନ ରୁଣା /
ଲରନା ଧୁଳ୍ଲନା ଜାଦି ଥାକି ଏକ ଘୋଳି / କାଟି କାସି ଯାସିବ ଦୁଜାନ ଦିବ ଖାଲୀ ॥

Chandimangala, p.131

33.

ନିନ୍ଦା ଆବିୟା କାହ୍ନେ / ଝିଆରିଲ ଯାମ ମାଳେ / କର ବୀର କରୁଣା ଚଳେ /
ଦୁ:ଖିତ କାରିଲ ହରି / ତିନ ଜନ ଧୁଷିତେ ନାରି / କେମାତେ ଧୁଷିତେ ଚାରି ଜମ ॥ / ...
ପ୍ରହର ଚଳେ ଖୁବି / ନିନ୍ଦା କାରିଲ ଧୁନି / ଯାମେ ତିନୁ ନା ଡାରିବ ଆସି ।

Mangalchandir Git, p.45

34.

କି କାସିତ କେଆ ଯାସିବ ସ୍ତ୍ରୀବ ନାରେ ମତି / ଆସିବ ଦୁହିୟା ଯାସିବ ପ୍ରହର ମହାତି ॥

ibid., p.46

35. Velcheru Narayana Rao, "Epic and Ideologies: Six Telugu Folk Epics", in A.K. Ramanujan and Stuart H. Blackburn (eds), op.cit. pp.131-163

36.

କୃଷିକା କରଣ ବାମା ଧୁମ୍ପତି ନା ଜାଣେ ॥ ଛାତି ମତେ ଜାକିଆ ଆଲେ ବନ୍ଧୁନାଟ ଦୁଲେ ॥
କୃଷିକା କରଣ ବାମା ନିଜେ ଶରଣାଲ ॥ ଅରଣ୍ୟ ଜନିତେଲୁଣ ମିଆ ବୃକ୍ଷ କରଣକୁଲେ ॥

Abhayamangala, pp.238-239

37.

ଦଳଧରେ ସାଲେ ଶୁଭ ବନିତ ସମାଜା/କରଣେ ନରୀକା କନ୍ୟା ସେମାତେ ସଂ କାଜ ॥
ଜାତିର ଓମ୍ବର ଆଦି ନାରି ଆଦିକାରୀ/ନରୀକା ଦିଆ ଶୁଭ କରଣେ ସୁନ୍ଦରୀ ॥
ବନିତ ଲକ୍ଷ୍ମୀ ସାଧୁ କାରିଲ ସମନ ।/ ଆନନ୍ଦେ କ୍ଷୁଦ୍ରେ ଦିଆ ଦିଲ ନୃପନ ॥

Mangalchandir Git, p.204

38.

ତେଜ ଆଦି ବନି ଡାଳ/ସ୍ଵାମୀର ବଜାତି ଢଳ/ନରିକାମେ କାଳେ ଠକ ଦୁଃଖ/
ଶୁଭ (ସହ ସୁଧମାତି/ସାଧି କ୍ଷୁଦ୍ର ନିଜୁ ମାତି/କେଶାନ ଚାରିଅ (ଲୋକସୁଧା/)
ସ୍ଵାମୀ ବନିକାର ମାତି/ସ୍ଵାମୀ ବନିକାର ମାତି/ସ୍ଵାମୀ ବନିକାର ବିଧାଜ/)
ସ୍ଵାମୀ ମନେ ଧନ/ଦିନେ ସ୍ଵାମୀ ଅନ୍ୟ ଜନ/କେର ନାରେ ସୁଧ (କାଳକାଳା)

Chandimangala, p.60

39.

ବନି ମନେ ଆଦିକାରୀ/ଅବିଳ ଚାରି ନାରି/ସମ୍ପଦ ସହଜେ ମିଳିତ ସାଧୁମାନେ ।/
ସୁଧ-କୃତ ସୁନ୍ଦର ଦିଲ/ଗାରେ ମିଳିତ ସଫାର୍ଦ୍ଦେଲ/ସାଧୁମାନେ ସମୁଦାୟେ କାଳେ ॥/
ନିଜାକାର ଆଦିମାତି/ଅବିଳା ଜାମକୀ ଅଜୀ/ବିକଳ ସହଜା କାଳକାଳେ ।/
ମାତିଲକ ସୁଧମାତି/କଳିକୂଳ ସମ୍ପାତି/ଓମ୍ବୁମାନେ ସଫାର୍ଦ୍ଦେ କାଳେ ॥

Mangalchandir Git, p.62

40. Satyabati Giri, op.cit., p.10

41. V. Narayana Rao, op.cit., pp.131-163

Chapter - 2
Women's Sexuality in Men's Fantasy

We have seen in the previous chapter how the poets of the *Mangalakavyas*, painstakingly strove to construct the normative figure of the devoted and chaste wife. Was such a construct necessary only for the maintenance of stability in the structure of the family and society ? Or was it a reflection of a deeper and consciously unacknowledged conflict in the male psyche regarding the sexuality of women? Sudhir Kakar, on the basis of his clinical experience, has argued: "Underlying the conscious ideal of womanly purity, innocence and fidelity and interwoven with the unconscious belief in a safeguarding maternal beneficence is a secret conviction among many Hindu men that the feminine principle is really the opposite ----- treacherous, lustful and rampant with an insatiable, contaminating sexuality".¹ Thus beneath the veneer of a stable social life sustained by the idealised chaste woman, lie the figure of the vicious older woman and the malignant and punishing goddess, related to some of the deepest fears of men. This chapter is an attempt to delve into this subconscious level of the collective male psyche, as represented in the various symbolic codes and metaphors in both the *Chandimangala* and the *Manasamangala*. The two broad aspects around which the discussion has been framed are the male fear of the older and sexually more powerful woman and the omnipresent figure of the mother in the male psyche.

Male fear of women's greater sexual prowess is a common

theme in Indian literature, in both the classical and the folk traditions. Brenda Beck has attempted to demonstrate this through a quantitative analysis of dyad types in a large corpus of South Asian (mostly Indian) folktales. She believes that the frequency of occurrence of certain key themes can help clarify the basic assumptions of a particular culture. For instance she finds that more than half of the entire corpus of tales concerning spouse dyads focus on female characters and a large majority of these present women in a negative light. Only thirty one percent describe her favourably while the remaining sixty one percent are more or less neutral. When a male is the central character of such a story a much higher percentage of tales describe him in positive terms. This pattern is most clearly discernible in stories dealing with adultery. Nearly all of the seventy stories that Beck examined hold women responsible for transgressing the marital norm of fidelity.² Even though conclusions drawn from such quantitative analysis can remain at best tentative, the sheer volume of stories presenting women in negative terms cannot be altogether ignored. It is an indication of male perception of women as essentially lustful and therefore untrustworthy and dangerous.

Wendy Doniger has noticed that in brahmanical texts all sexual interaction is seen primarily as an exchange of fluids. In her detailed study of the nature of sexual fluids as represented in these texts, Doniger has observed a deep distrust

of female sexuality, exemplified in the negative representation of female sexual fluids. In the *Rig Veda*, the blood of defloration has been described as the "purple and red stain" that becomes a dangerous female spirit walking on feet, a witch who binds the husband and makes his body ugly and pale³. More significant is the recurring image of the devouring female who eats the man during intercourse. This image, according to Doniger, pervades not only the explicit instances of oral impregnation in the myths, but even descriptions of the normal sexual act. Women consume men through the devouring womb, the *vagina dentata*, that often has eyes as well as teeth. Women are also far more complex than men. She has two sites of sexual fluids to his one, and the one that she shares with the male ----- the genital site is doubly productive in her (of both seed and blood). Her milk, issuing from her secondary sexual site, is considered similarly ambivalent. However, the sexual fluid from the breasts of a woman is generally considered creative and nourishing, while those from her genitals, destructive and emaciating. According to the Vedic and Post-Vedic texts, the male anxiety of losing bodily fluids leads not only to retention of his own fluids but also attempts to steal the partner's fluids and engender the fear that the partner will try to do the same.⁴

A.K. Ramanujan has argued that the common motif of the lethal first night is a characteristic example of male fear of

women's greater sexual prowess. He refers to a tale in which anyone who marries a certain princess is found dead after the wedding night. When the princess sleeps, snakes come out of her nose and bite her husbands. According to Ramanujan, this is a typical instance of male anxiety about female sexuality.⁵

In the *Manasamangala* story, this motif first appears in the section on the desertion of the goddess Manasa by her husband Jaratkaru, the sage. In Bijay Gupta's version, Manasa kills her husband with her poison eye. Jaratkaru wakes up after the first night and asks Manasa to collect flowers for his daily worship. She refuses to comply. When he insists, she gets angry and says:

I shall not pick wild flowers and grass. You criticize me, O wretched brahmin! Open your eyes and see my power. Speaking thus, Bishahari (Manasa) looked at the sage and he fell down unconscious.⁶

When he is brought back to life by Manasa:

The sage swears by Rama and says, I have nothing to do with a woman like Padma (Manasa). So saying he goes away.⁷

In Jagajjiban's version, when Jaratkaru sees Manasa take her snakes out to the waterfront to feed on frogs, he feels repulsed by the sight and decides to leave her:

Happily Manasa goes near the water The snake grabs
the toads and frogs and eats them Seeing this the
sage thought that this woman would destroy my family
and lineage.⁸

The symbolism of the husband's death after the first night as well as the woman's association with snakes and consequently the husband's apparent disgust and desertion, probably points to the male anxiety about his incapacity to cope with the sexual demands of women. According to Ramanujan, the snakes in these stories are usually rivals of the man.⁹ In the *Manasamangala* story, the motif of the lethal first night is repeated in the episode on Behula and Lakhindar. This subconscious fear manifests itself in different forms. It has been argued in the previous chapter that the construction of the normative was a necessary requirement to ensure the maintenance of the patriarchal social order. However, behind this fragile stability lay one of the deepest fears of the male mind, the fear of impotence in the face of her overwhelming sexual prowess. A necessary component of any idealised figure is its very opposite. The good woman is young, beautiful, docile, fertile and childbearing who unquestioningly submits to patriarchal control. A symbol of all these 'virtues' is Khullana. The counterpoint of good woman Khullana is Lahana, who is older, not so beautiful any longer, childless, and often very sharply critical of patriarchal norms.

Lahana is thus the bad woman who makes Khullana suffer. It is indeed Khullana who triumphs in the end. According to Kathleen Erndl, although male characters also split into good and bad, the split in the case of women is far more pronounced and is always expressed in terms of sexuality. Erndl juxtaposes Sita and Surpanakha as alter-egos of each other. She argues that Sita and Surpanakha exemplify two types of women who appear almost universally in Indian folk love and mythology. Sita is good, pure, fair, auspicious and subordinate, while Surpanakha is evil, impure, dark, inauspicious and insubordinate.¹⁰

One reason for Lahana's 'badness' is perhaps the fact that unlike Khullana, who is a virgin till she is deflowered by Dhanapati after his return from the first voyage, Lahana is a sexually mature woman. Thus intercourse with Khullana was safer. Since, as Doniger says, in India it is the older woman who is the primary threat to the man's sexual fluids.¹¹ Kakar also observes that the fantasy world of Hindu men is replete with the figure of older women whose sexual appetite drain men of their vigour, whose erotic practices include, among others vaginal suction or 'milking the penis'. Thus the preference for younger, sexually immature women points to the concomitant fear of sexuality of mature women.¹² Khullana and Lahana represent fairly unambiguously the two images of women in the *Chandimangala*. It is evident from a conversation between Dhanapati's priest and

Khullana's father Lakkhapati that she is a very young girl. The priest says:

Listen, O foolish Lakkhapati.
A daughter of twelve years
resides in your house. How can
your mind be so free of trouble.¹³

That she must have been quite beautiful is attested in the following verses :

Khullana was going for a bath with her friends.
She walked slowly with the grace of a swan.
Seeing her, Dhanapati was instantly struck with
love.¹⁴

Lahana on the other hand has been described as the reverse of Khullana. When Dhanapati attempts to persuade her to accept gracefully his impending marriage with Khullana, he tells her that overwork in the kitchen makes her look old and worn-out. Hence he is getting her a co-wife who will slog over the hearth instead:

Beloved, staying in the kitchen (all day), you
have spoilt your appearance. Nowadays after a
bath, you don't comb your hair. Your hair
doesn't get any sun and remains
perpetually wet. This is what I think about

you all the time. In rain and in storm you
blow into the fire of the oven. Without
camphor or betel leaf your mouth has dried up.
Smoke goes into your eyes (and disfigures
them). Look into the mirror and see for
yourself.¹⁵

Thus Lahana is old and ugly. That she is also inauspicious is
conveyed by the fact that she dressed up as a widow¹⁶ after
hearing the news of Dhanapati's remarriage. Dhanapati says in
anguish:

O Lady, I cannot fathom the reason why you
have taken on the appearance of a widow when
I'm still alive.¹⁷

The dichotomy between the good and the bad woman has, however,
not been pushed to its furthest point. In the *Chandimangala*
story, Lahana is only older, childless, critical of patriarchal
norms and inauspicious on occasions. However, she is not
unchaste. In Kathleen Erndl's formulation of the contrasting
images of the good woman Sita and the bad woman Surpanakha, the
former is chaste and the latter is 'loose'. The good woman is
one who remains controlled, both mentally and physically, by her
husband (or in his absence by her father, brother or son), and
whose sexuality is channeled into childbearing and service to her

husband. The bad woman is not subject to these controls. In contrast to Sita, Surpanakha is unattached and wanders about freely.¹⁸ The reason why Lahana's characterization was not stretched to this limit was perhaps that granting such sexual freedom to an ordinary housewife would be inconceivable despite the narrative requirement as this would be potentially disruptive of the social order.

Yet, for all the dangers that it represented, the figure of the older and sexually more powerful woman was simultaneously highly tempting. Explaining why Rama and Lakshmana, instead of repulsing her advances immediately, spent some time with Surpanakha in teasing conversation with a touch of the erotic, Erndl says that the 'loose' woman, while perceived as dangerous, also holds a certain fascination for the male imagination. Unable to give expression to such fantasy in their characterization of mortal women, the poets of the *Chandimangala* and the *Manasamangala* seem to have projected it onto the figures of the goddesses.

Just as Surpanakha in the Valmiki *Ramayana*, describes herself as a strong woman who goes where she likes, the goddess Chandi also introduces herself in a similar fashion. She describes herself as a woman of means who, being unhappy with her marriage, has now decided to step out of it and seek her own pleasure, going wherever she pleases. Chandi says to Phullara:

With all my wealth I shall capture Kalketu's heart. From today you shall live in great comfort. Let me now introduce myself. I am an unlucky woman. I live in Varanasi. My husband is a beggar since birth. How shall I describe my ill-fortune? I have a co-wife called Ganga. My husband holds her in his head. He would rather drink poison than look my way. Hence I have left my home.¹⁹

This passage is full of double entendre, for even though Chandi is telling the truth about her life with Shiva, she gives the impression of being an ordinary brahmin housewife, with problems that are common to most households. What shocks Phullara is that even though she is miserable, Chandi has actually forsaken the protection of her husband. Immediately, Phullara breaks into a lengthy sermon about wifely virtues and advises Chandi to return to her husband. Rejecting Phullara's counsel, Chandi says:

I am the wife and daughter of an (exalted) lineage. I can decide for myself what is right and wrong for me. I require no advice from you. I alone am responsible for protecting my honour.²⁰

In all the three versions of the *Chandimangala*, Chandi carries on with her ruse as long as possible. Only when Kalketu threatens to strike her down with an arrow does she reveal her true identity. It appears as if the poets tried to prolong the verbal game as much as they could. This probably expresses the collective male fantasy about contact with the figure of an older, independent and powerful woman, whose threatening aspect only serves to enhance her charm.

The above episode indicates that the goddess was endowed with considerable sexual appeal. In claiming that it was Kalketu who brought her home with him, she was speaking the truth, for the reptile that the hunter brought back home was actually Chandi in disguise. However, with a fine play of words, she arouses jealousy in Phullara who is deluded into believing that Chandi is going to be her co-wife.²¹ The obvious, vicarious pleasure that the goddess derives from this delusion, leads one to suspect that she may be enjoying the idea of sharing a romantic relationship with her intended worshipper Kalketu. The details about her *kanculi nirman* (stitching the covering for her breasts) before she meets Kalketu, draws attention to her secondary sexual site ---- her breasts.²² Even in her relationship with the other devotee, the Raja of Kalinga, there is a hint of an erotic liaison. The goddess takes great pains to adorn herself with jewellery and look very attractive before appearing in his dream.²³ It seems as if the goddess must

entice the king in order to gain his devotion. The erotic content in her relationship with Kalketu is also evident in her envy of Phullara. Kalketu praises his wife and attributes his success in war with the king of Kalinga to the fact of his being supported by such a chaste and virtuous wife as Phullara. This annoys the goddess and she causes Kalketu to be defeated and imprisoned by the king in the next battle.

The brave one said, O dearest, this is a happy occasion. The husband of a virtuous woman can never be destroyed. Having won the battle, the hero praises his wife. This angers the mother of the universe and she decides to deceive him.²⁴

The element of eroticism is perhaps even more explicit in the merchant story of the *Chandimangala*. In this story, the goddess appears in her *Kamale Kamini* form before the merchant Dhanapati while he is travelling by the sea. In the *Kamale Kamini* form the goddess appeared as an extremely beautiful woman, seated on a lotus, successively swallowing and disgorging an elephant. She looked so inviting that Dhanapati was instantly smitten with desire for her.

The wife of Hara cast a spell on him. Seated on the lotus, she began to smile. With the bow of

flowers she sought her target and pierced the merchant's heart with five arrows.²⁵

In the *Manasamangala* story, the deliberate and explicit display of sexuality by the goddess Manasa has been described in the section entitled *Mahagyan haran* in which she steals the occult power of her intended worshipper Chando by means of sexual seduction.

She takes the guise of a dancer (*nati*) to steal his knowledge and goes to Chando's town. She sings and dances in the most pleasing manner, without missing a note in the *ragas* just like a *koel* in spring time. Savouring these, Chando's heart is filled with delight. He looks at the *nati* with unblinking eyes, and his heart burns as though struck by the arrows of love. Chando says to the *nati*, you listen to me; hold me in your embrace and save my life. The *nati* says, hear O noble Lord, I shall do just as you say.²⁶

Wendy Doniger says that the dominant woman represents danger in Hindu mythology and the dominant goddess expresses this danger in several different but closely related ways. Thus erotic contact with the goddess is not without its price. For instance, the worshipper does not seek erotic contact with the non-maternal

goddess for fear of losing his power, and with the dominant woman who appears as the mother goddess for fear of incest.²⁷ Doniger's classification is reminiscent of the figure of the 'bad mother' which according to Kakar, is a predominant fantasy of the Indian male child.

Explaining the concept of the bad mother in the Indian context, Sudhir Kakar observes that for various reasons, the balance of nurturing may be so affected that the mother unconsciously demands that the child serve as an object of her own unfulfilled desires. Faced with her unconscious intimations and demands, the child may feel confused, helpless and inadequate, frightened by his mother's overwhelming nearness and yet unable to get away from her. In his fantasy then, her presence acquires the ominous visage of the 'bad mother'. Social expectation of progressive renunciation of her sexuality may dispose a young mother to turn the full force of her eroticism towards an infant son. "The son's predicament is extreme: although he unconditionally needs the physical tending and emotional sustenance that at first only his mother provides, he is profoundly wary of the intensity of his feelings for her (and of hers for him) and unconsciously afraid of being overwhelmed and 'devoured' by her". In his opinion, the theme of 'bad mother' merits particular attention in the Indian context not just because it exists, but because it is characterized by a singular

intensity and pervasiveness. The acute conflict it causes in man has been sought to be resolved in the plane of myths. One typical mode of resolution is the renunciation of masculine potency and prowess, mythically depicted in Arjuna's temporary transformation into a transvestite, as a result of being cursed by Urvashi, whose sexual advances he repulsed by placing himself as her son.²⁸

In the *Chandimangala* and the *Manasamangala* too this conflict seems to have been resolved in a similar way. On the one hand, the texts toy with the idea of the goddess as a sexual partner. This according to Kakar, is the flip side of the coin, that is male fear. He argues that it represents the counter phobic attitude, the conscious seeking out of what is unconsciously feared.²⁹ But once this erotic fantasy gets too close for comfort, the devotee or the would-be devotee submits himself to the goddess, invoking her as the 'mother'. After having given full play to the erotic element in the relationship between Kalketu and the goddess Chandi, the poet Dvija Ramdeb attempts to restore the balance by making Kalketu submit to her as her son. It is only when Kalketu submits himself totally to the goddess that her maternal instinct is aroused and she takes pity on him. When Chandi, after being invoked by him visits Kalketu in the prison, she promises to redeem him from his pathetic state. After the maternal feeling is reawakened, the goddess herself expresses a sense of shame.

Hearing her worshipper's words, the mother of the universe smiles and asks, son, why do you put me to shame?³⁰

Doniger, who explores the implications of the relationship between the devotee who plays the role of the consort as child and the sexually aggressive mother, says that at least one manifestation of this relationship may be seen in the Tantric iconic image of the goddess holding the severed head. She explains that the sexually assaulted child "sacrifices his masculinity" to the mother in order to escape the unbearable conflict engendered by his sexual excitation by her.³¹ Even though in our stories the head of the worshipper is not severed, it is placed at the feet of the goddess in complete submission. Thus, Dhanapati, after having passed through the phase of erotic excitation by the goddess (the *Kamale Kamini* episode), resolves this unbearable conflict by unconditionally submitting to her and invoking her as his 'mother'.

With a scarf around his neck, the noble Dhanapati prostrated himself before her and said, I am the offender, mother, lying at your feet. Forgive me and give me a place at your lotus feet.³²

Why does Dhanapati call himself an offender? Is it because he

has committed the primal sin of expressing incestuous desire for his mother? Is it because, as Doniger points out, female dominance in such myths is fraught with Freudian dangers? The observation of Carstairs is germane: "As the Goddess, she [the mother] is seen as a horrific figure, decapitating men and drinking their blood. In order to appease her fury she must be placated with offerings, but what is more important, she must be appealed to in an attitude of complete submission. She becomes kind and rewarding, a mother again and no longer a demon, only when one has surrendered one's manhood and become a helpless infant once again."³³ The submission of Kalketu and Dhanapati to the goddess Chandi follows exactly this pattern.

In the case of Chand Sadagar, the submission, initially, is not so complete. He only reluctantly agrees to offer her worship with his left hand and with his face turned away. But once Chandi, his favoured deity, announces to him that Manasa is a part of Chandi herself and directs him to worship Manasa, all Chando's reservations disappear. He is now more than willing to submit himself at the feet of the goddess. The renunciation of masculinity in his case is even more pronounced than that of Kalketu and Dhanapati. Chando not only invokes the goddess as mother, but also offers to place his moustache and beard as offering at the feet of the goddess.

Let my face be disfigured, O mother, and the

mouth with which I have abused you. Have mercy on me, O mother Bishahari I shall slash my moustache and beard and place these at your feet.³⁴

What could be a more unambiguous symbol of one's manhood and virility than a well-groomed moustache in Indian village society? Besides, before redemption was obtained from Manasa and Chandi, both Dhanapati and Chando were put through tremendous hardships by the incensed goddesses. Borrowing from Doniger, it is possible to argue that at the mythic level these instances are representations of "castrating fury" of the sexually aggressive mother. It needs to be remembered that Chando not only refused to worship Manasa, he also made disparaging remarks about her physical appearance (he called her *Chengmuri Kani* ----- a slimy one-eyed woman), thus spurning her sexual advances. This rejection turned on her fury and Manasa took away all that was precious to Chando, except his life.

In this chapter we have attempted to suggest, on the basis of our evidence, how tensions, fears and conflicts in the male psyche are expressed and get partially resolved at the level of the myth. These myths are *invariably* male-oriented, addressing the unconscious wishes and fears of men.³⁵ In our stories the fears and wishes are predominantly about female sexuality. The two figures that loom large are those of the dominant older woman.

and the sexually aggressive mother. They overlap to a large extent as the figure of the dominant woman evokes by association the figure of the mother.³⁶ What is of particular interest is the fact that the pan-Indian models constructed by Doniger, Kakar and others fit so neatly into the evidence drawn from regional vernacular sources. This perhaps suggests a continuity of instinctual attitudes and their symbolic manifestations from pan-Indian and classical to regional and folk, which at times go unnoticed.

NOTES

1. Sudhir Kakar, *The Inner World: A psychoanalytic Study of Childhood and Society in India*, Delhi, O U P, 1981, p.93
2. Brenda Beck, "Social Dyads in Indic folktales", in Stuart H. Blackburn and A.K. Ramanujan, (eds), *Another Harmony: New Essays on the Folklore of India*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1986, pp.94-95
3. Wendy Doniger O' Flaherty, *Sexual Metaphors and Animal Symbols in Indian Mythology*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1981, pp.19-20
4. *ibid.*, pp.52-56
5. A.K. Ramanujan, "Toward a Counter-System: Women's Tales" in Arjuna Appadorai et al; (eds), *Gender, Genre and Power in South Asian Expressive Traditions*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Pennsylvania, 1991, p.52

6. *এন পুষ্কর দুর্ভা আমি কজে নাহি স্তমি ॥
আমা নিন্দা কয় স্তমি দুঃখিত ব্রাহ্মণ।
চক্ষু মেলি দেখা স্তমি আমায় বিক্রম ॥
প্রত বালি বিষয়বি চাহে মুনিঃ ডিতে।
তলিয়ার পাঠিল মুনি গদ্যায় মাঝনাৎ ॥*

Jayantakumar Dasgupta (ed.), *Padmapuran of Bijay Gupta*, University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1962, p.86

7. তৈল্য পার্শ্বা মুনি (বাল্য রাম রাম)।
পদ্মা (২য় স্তীত আমাঃ নারি কিছু কাঃ)।
প্রত্য গলিয়া জব মুনি চলে যায়।
ibid., p.89

8. আনন্দিত মনমা কলর কাছ যায়।
ধাওয়া গাওয়া মর্মে চের চের যায়।।
দেখিয়া মুনির মনে হৈল মনুকার।
এই নারি কাহিন্যে কলর খাঁয়ায়।।

Dr. Ashutosh Das and Surendrachandra Bhattacharya (eds), *Kabi Jagajjiban birachita Manasamangala* Calcutta University, Calcutta 1984, p.103

9. Ramanujan, *op.cit.*, p.51

10. Kathleen M. Erndl, "The Multilation of Surpanakha" in Paula Richman (ed.), *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, O U P, Delhi, 1992 pp.67-88

11. Doniger *op.cit.*, pp.55-56

12. Sudhir Kakar, *op.cit.*, pp.99-100

13. শুন (২) অরু ধ লক্ষ্মীমতি/বার ৫৭মারে মুজ/প্রঃ ঘরে আশুগ /
কোমলে আদুর শুম্মতি।

Sukumar Sen (ed.), *Kabikankan Mukunda birachita Chandimangal*

Sahitya Akademi, N. Delhi, 1975, p.115

14. ସମ୍ପତ୍ତି ସମେତ ସୁଲଭା ଗଳାରେ ସ୍ନାନ (୨୩) ॥
ସୁନ୍ଦର ସୁନ୍ଦର ଗଳା ଶାଢ଼ୀ ଶାଢ଼ୀ ସମସ୍ତେ ।
ଦେଖି ଶାଢ଼ୀ ଆନନ୍ଦେ ଘୋରିତ ସମସ୍ତେ ॥
ଅନଳେ ଘୋରିତ ଶାଢ଼ୀ ଶାଢ଼ୀ ଅପସରା ।

Ashutosh Das (ed.), *Dvija Ramdeb birachita Abhayamangala* Calcutta University, Calcutta, 1957 pp.122-123

15. ବୁଦ୍ଧ ନାମେ କେଳେ ସ୍ତ୍ରୀୟେ ଏକାନ୍ତେ ଶାଳେ ---
ସ୍ନାନ କରନ୍ତା କିମି କିମି ଘା ଦେଇ ଚିରୁନି
କେନ୍ଦ୍ର ନାହିଁ କାୟ କେଳେ କିମି ଚିରୁନି ।
ଆସିବତ ପ୍ରଭୁ ଚିନ୍ତା ଅନ୍ୟ ନାହିଁ ଶାଳି
ଏକାନ୍ତେ ଶାଳେ ବୁଦ୍ଧ ନାମିଲେ ମାଧୁରୀ ।
ବସିଆ ବାହୁଲ ଆନାଲ ଦିତ ହୁ
କର୍ମୁର ଭାବୁଲ ବିନା ସୁଧାର୍ଣ୍ଣ ହୁ ।
ସୁଖକୁତ ଆନଲେ ସାହର୍ଣ୍ଣ ଗର୍ଭାଲେ
ଦର୍ପଣେ ଶନ ଦେଖ ଗର୍ଭା ବାତ ଘୋ ।

Chandimangala, p.119

16. Married woman are considered auspicious. Widows are inauspicious and they are subject to severe restrictions in dress, eating habits, participation in rituals and social life. Kalpana Viswanath, "Shame and Control: Sexuality and Power in Feminist discourse in India", in Meenakhshi Thapan, ed., *Embodiment: Essays on Gender and Identity*, O U P, N. Delhi, 1995 p.315

17. କମଳ ନରୀତେ ନାରି କହରେ ଯୁବତୀ ।

ସାତ୍ତ୍ଵିକ ସ୍ଵର ସେନ ଶ୍ରୀତେ ଆତ୍ମିକ କାଠି ॥

Abhayamangala, , p.126

18. Kathleen Erndl, p.67-88

19. ଦିଆ ଆମାର ସିଦ୍ଧ/ଭୂମିର ବୀରବ ମନ / ଭାଜି ୨୨୧୭ ବଡ଼ କାଠି ଯୁଦ୍ଧ ।
ପ୍ରତ୍ୟକ୍ଷନ ନାସିକ୍ଷ କାଠି / ଆମାର କଳ୍ପମ ଦୁଃଖି / ବସି ଯୁଦ୍ଧ କରାଣୀ
କାଠି କୋର ଜନମ ଡିଆରି / କି କର ହୁ:କେର କଥା / ଅନ୍ଧୀ ନାମେ କୋର ଯୁଦ୍ଧ
ସ୍ଵାମୀ ତାବେ ସାରିଲା ମୟାକା / ବସନ୍ତକାଳେ ହାତ / ଆମା କାଳେ ନାସିକ୍ଷ କାଠି
ଠକର ଦୁଃଖିଲ ପ୍ରତ୍ନ କାଠି ।

Chandimangala, op.cit., p.59

20. କୁଳେଟ ବେଠି ଆସି କୁଳେଟ ନାମିକୀ

ଆମନାର ଓଲଟାନ୍ଦ ଆମନୀ ମେ ଜାମି ।

କୋରେ ଡିକୋନେ କୋମାର କିବା କାଠି

ଆମନୀ ମେ ବକ୍ତା କାଠି ଆମନାର କାଠି ।

ibid., p.61

21. ibid., p.59

22. ibid., pp.56-58

23.

କାତା ଚାଲିଲ ନୂପାତିକ୍ଷୁରେ ସୁମୁ କାଠିବାର ତାବେ

କାଳୋବକ୍ତେ ଓବେଶ ବାବାର ।

କିରୀଟି କୁଳେଟିବାର ବକ୍ତାୟ ଅଲକ୍ଷ୍ମୀକା

ପ୍ରତି ଆନେ ଦୁଃଖନ ୬୨୨୨ ॥

অচম্বা বসন্ত কবে বাতুল কখন সবে
 ওকম তুলনা দিতে নাই।
 বিছব্বী লোকে আমি মিসর প্রমীলক আমি
 স্মৃষ্ণ কবে নৃপতিব চাই ॥

Abhayamangala, p.34

24. বীরমণি বলে মিসা এ বচি উল্লাস।
 মজীরা মা পাতি কভা না হই বিনাস ॥
 সমর জিনিয়া বীর প্রণয় প্রেমি।
 সেই ঘোষে বাক্য-~~অস্ব~~ তানে জগতজননী

Abhayamangala, p.100

25. আপনি কবিল মগ্না হবের বনিগ
 সাঁসিতে লাগিল মাভদলের উপর।
 শুভস্য ধনুতে মাগা মসিয়া একম
 মাধুর্য সহস্রে মাঝিলা প্রসঙ্গান।

Chandimangala, p.205

26. মহাভাবন করিতে কপাটে হইল নটী ॥
 নটী কবে মায়া সেনা চন্দ্র নন্দ।
 মুললিত নাচ গায় অতি মনোহর ॥
 গীত গাহে মহাশয়ী গায় নর চন্দ্র তিল।
 আলাপন গীত যেন বসন্ত কোকিল ॥
 গীত কুনিয়া চন্দ্র মজিলেক মন।
 নটীর দিগ চন্দ্র চাহে মন মন ॥
 একদিগে চন্দ্র নটীর দিগ চায়।
 গায় গানেও চাকুর প্রাণ সুখিয়া যায় ॥

ବ୍ରାହ୍ମଣ୍ୟୋନି ନୀତିଃ ପୁଣି ଜ୍ଞାନ ଯୋଗ କଥା ।
 ଆଲିଙ୍ଗନ ଦିକ୍ଷା ଯୋଗ ପ୍ରାଣ-ରକ୍ଷା କର ॥
 ନୀତି କର ଏବେ ଜ୍ଞାନ ସଂରକ୍ଷଣ ।
 ସେଇଠି କଥା ପ୍ରକଟ କରାଯିବ ବିଷୟ ॥

Abhayamangala, pp.157-160

27. Doniger, op.cit., p.77

28. Kakar, op.cit., pp.87-103

29. Kakar, ibid., p.102

30. (ସର୍ବୋପାଧି ଶୁଭିକା କଥା ସାମଗ୍ର ଜଗତ ଯାତ୍ରା
 କେବି ସୁତ ଲକ୍ଷ୍ମୀ ଦେବୀ ଯୋଗ ।

Abhyamangala,, p.109

31. Doniger, op.cit., p.86

32. ଶଲ୍ୟାୟ ଯମନ ବାନ୍ଧୁ ଶାନ୍ତି କ୍ଷମାପତି ।
 ନିନ୍ଦିତ ଭୟା କତ କାରିଣୀ ପୁନଃପିତା ॥ ---
 ସୁର ଅକ୍ଷୟାୟ ଯାତ୍ରା ପୁଣି ନିନ୍ଦିତା ।
 ଅକ୍ଷୟାୟ ଶାନ୍ତି ଦାୟା ବ୍ରାହ୍ମଣ୍ୟୋନି ॥

ibid., p.403

33. M. Carstairs, cited in Doniger, op.cit., p.110

34. ଯେଉଁ ସୁଖ ଓ ଶୁଭ ସାଧନ ଜ୍ଞାନଜ ଶୁଭିକା ।
 ସେ ସୁଖେ ଦିକ୍ଷାଦି ଆଲିଙ୍ଗନ ଯେଉଁ ଧୁନ କାଳି ॥
 ଆମାତ୍ୟ କର କଥା ବିଷୟକି ଯାହା ।
 ଶାନ୍ତି ଯାଚି କାଟିକା ନିମ୍ନ ତୋମା ମାୟା ॥

Padmapurana,, p.539

35. Kakar, *op.cit.*, p.57

36. Doniger, *op.cit.*, p.110

Chapter - 3
***Mangalakavya as women's stories : Empowerment
and subversion through wish-fulfillment***

In the previous chapter we have attempted to show how male-oriented myths express the doubts, fears and fantasies of the male-mind regarding sexuality of women. In this chapter we shall argue that traditional stories may well serve as a medium of expression of the wishes and fantasies of women. The marked feature of women's fantasy in such women-centered (though not necessarily women-oriented) stories in folktales, etc., is the reversal of their subordinate status in society vis-a-vis men. In patriarchal systems, both in reality as well as in literary representations, the heroes and principle actors are always men. It is they who slay demons, cross difficult hurdles and rescue the fair maiden whom they eventually marry. Hence, when women assume the role of a protector, saviour or rescuer of women and even of men, these should be taken as instances of indulging in their most favourite fantasy, an expression of wish-fulfillment through reversal of roles. In this chapter, we shall first explore the fragments of women-centred tales in the two *Mangalakavyas*, especially in the *Manasamangala*. Subsequently, an attempt will be made to analyse the story of Behula, her various ordeals and her ultimate triumph in the apparently impossible task of bringing her dead husband back to life, as an elaborate example of this wish-fulfilling fantasy. The core of the Manasa story, according to W.L.Smith, is a *vratākatha*.¹ A *vratākatha* is a story that describes the greatness of a deity,

usually a local goddess. These are recited during the performance of a *vrata* in honour of the deity. A *vrata* is a household rite performed in fulfillment of a vow. The *vratas* in Bengal can be broadly classified into two types ----- the *sastriya vratas* and the *asastriya* or *meyeli vratas*.² The *sastriya vratas* are sanctioned by brahmanical authority and entail an elaborate procedure involving the mediation of a brahmin priest.³ The *meyeli vratas* in contrast are quite simple in which there is no place for ritual specialists or sacred hymns. Unmarried girls and married women get together to perform a simple rite for the fulfillment of such mundane desires as a desirable marriage, male offsprings and domestic happiness.⁴ Poromesh Acharya relates the performance of *meyeli vratas* to a wider process of socialisation among women. The *vratas* offer an occasion when women can congregate and exchange views on matters of common concern. He says that reflection of a non-brahmanical cultural milieu can be detected in almost all the women's *vratas*, although certain elements of the *vrata* are obviously of later brahmanical origin.⁵ Kunal Chakrabarti also suggests that brahmanism, by creating a separate category called the Puranic *vratas*, did tamper with the pre-existing structure of *meyeli vratas* in Bengal in several ways. For instance, by introducing a brahmin priest, they wrecked the uniquely feminine character of the ritual. However, he argues that the Puranic *vratas* did not take over the indigenous *vratas* which continued to be performed by women in the seclusion of the

inner apartments of the households.⁶ It is therefore possible to speak of a ritual domain that was occupied exclusively by women. In spatial terms such a domain was denoted by the *antahpura*. Anthropologists such as Lina Fruzzetti attest the existence of such a domain that is identifiable in terms of a separate set of meanings expressed through symbols and categories in the exclusively women's rituals, rituals such as *Stri acars* (customs, habits and actions of women), which are restricted to and conducted by women alone.⁷ What these rituals express constitutes a subculture in Bengal giving meaning to the lives and actions of women in relation to Bengali culture as a whole.

The collective observance of such rites by women also provided networks of social support for them. The ritual space of the *vratas* emerges as a site where these networks converge. The solidarity thus expressed between women help them to cope with the knowledge of their uncertain worth in their respective families. Such networks within the circumscribed world of women are represented in various ways in both the *Chandimangala* and the *Manasamangala*.

In the merchant's story of the *Chandimangala*, when Khullana is completely overcome with misery, she is spotted in the forest by Padma and her friends and is initiated into the *vrata* of Abhaya or Chandi. After the performance of the *vrata*, the goddess intervenes on Khullana's behalf:

When the five ladies heard her cry, they discontinued the performance of their vrata and asked her to explain. Say O beautiful woman, for what reason are you so distraught and roaming about in this forest?... Khulana says, o mother, say no more. What good will it do to ask an unfortunate woman a question such as this? I am Lakshapati's daughter, an unlucky woman. I have been appointed by my co-wife to graze goats. On the orders of the king, my husband has gone to Gaura Patan. In the empty house, the co-wife ill-treats me in every conceivable way. It will take me a day to narrate my tale of woes. At the moment, I have lost the goats and cannot find them anywhere. If the co-wife comes to know of this, she will strike me to death. Mother, I beseech you. Please tell me about the goats. Hearing Khulana's story, all were moved to tears. Distressed by her sorrow, Padma says, I know a way out. Worship Abhaya Bhavani (Chandi) in this pot. After that, you will have no cause to weep any more. You will find the goats that you have lost in the forest.

In the *Manasamangala* story, Chando's wife Sanaka learns

about the sudden prosperity of a family of fishermen. Upon enquiry, she is told that the performance of the Manasa vrata had reaped such rich rewards. Sanaka, who had lost six sons, wishes to have another. The fishermen's mother initiates her into the vrata of Manasa and her wish is granted.

The existence of separate and well-defined space is recognised in the *Mangalakavyas* at least for the goddess. In the *Manasamangala*, Parvati is said to possess a secret garden where she sports with her friends and even Shiva, her husband, has no knowledge of it. Narada informs Shiva:

There lies a beautiful spot along the southern bank of the river Sarayu. Chandi has grown flowers there. In the night she sports in this garden with Dakinis and Yoginis. It is very far from everywhere and hence none has seen this place. Your own Kashi cannot surpass its beauty. Hearing this, Shiva smiled and said, Chandi has a garden and I do not know of it!⁹

Even though this private garden is granted only to a goddess, it has implications for mortal women, particularly if the divine cosmos is seen as a mimetic reiteration of the empirical world.

Tales that originate from such a space, would then bear a

stamp of its distinct characteristics. A.K. Ramanujan, on the basis of thematic, contextual and performance features of the Indian literary genres, has suggested that most known genres can be positioned on a continuum from domestic or interior (*akam*) to public or exterior (*puram*). The *akam* genres, he explains, are performed by women in or around the house and describe generalised human, especially familial, relationships.¹⁰ At a different place, Ramanujan has discussed how women's stories constitute a separate genre in folk tales, myths, etc., such that the meanings of motifs and symbols alter significantly from male-oriented to women-centred tales. A woman's culturally constructed meaning-universe is different from a man's in such tales.¹¹

We have already noted that the story of the *Manasamangala* resembles the narrative content and the manner of enunciation of a *vratakatha* and that the *meyeli vratas* constitute a separate world of meanings for Bengali women. Thus the *vratakatha* and other such stories including parts of some *Mangalakavyas* should be considered as belonging to the genre of women-centred tales. Ramanujan observes that in male-oriented stories, especially in tales of quest, men are the protagonists, women are secondary; they are usually part of the prize. These stories end in marriage. In women-centred tales in contrast, the heroine is either already married or she is married early in the tale; only then do her troubles begin. Thus the structure of a woman-centred tale is

different in that it follows the pattern of marriage-separation-ordeal-reunion. This is exactly the pattern of the merchant's tale in the *Chandimangala* and the story of Behula in the *Manasamangala*. In the merchant's story, Khullana is married to Dhanapati at the beginning of the story. She soon gets separated from him and her troubles follow this separation. The story ends with reunion with her husband. Behula's separation from her husband Lakhinder begins on the day after her marriage, for he dies on the wedding night. Subsequently after a difficult journey with her husband's corpse on her lap, She reaches the abode of the gods, where as a reward of her penance and in appreciation of her skill as dancer, her husband is brought back to life and she is reunited with him.

In the women centred tales, symbols also take on different meanings. Ramanujan cites the example of the snake as a recurrent symbol. A snake in a male-centred tale, is usually something to be killed for it represents a rival phallus. In women-centred tales, snakes are lovers, husbands, uncles, donors and helpers. The example of the snake is a pertinent one. In the story of Behula, it is a snake that causes her husband's death and that too at the behest of Manasa, the goddess of snakes. However, Behula's relationship with snakes, and even the snake goddess, is not an unambiguous one. On the night of her wedding, as the snakes appear one after the other at the end of each *prahar* (unit of time comprising three hours), Behula greets the first three as her

relatives and offers them food. As a result, these snakes are unable to bite her husband:

Seeing a great snake at the corner of the door, Behula feels perturbed. With fear in her heart, she places a golden bowl full of milk in front of it and says in a sweet voice, O uncle (*Khura*, father's younger brother) where have you been? I cry everyday because I do not see you, nor does my black-guard father enquire about you. But please do not take offence and have this milk in the golden bowl. Hearing this, the snake feels ashamed and drinks the milk with its head bowed down.¹²

When the next snake comes, she speaks to it in a similar fashion, addressing it as her father's elder brother (*jetha*). The third snake is addressed simply as her elder brother (*dada*).

During her arduous journey down the river with her husband's corpse, Behula is often saved from praying animals and lustful men by the goddess Manasa herself. While in Chando's story the snake appears as an unmitigated rival, in Behula's story the snakes are also made to behave as close relatives and eventually as helpers.

The other criterion that distinguishes women-centred tales

is that these question and subvert many stereotypes, such as women as passive victims, the laws of *karma* and even the ideal of chastity. Of these, at least the first stereotype is stoutly countered by Behula. She refuses to accept her fate of premature widowhood and sets out to reorder her destiny. In Vijay Gupta's version, her in-laws, and in Ketakadas Kshemananda's version her kin group attempt to desist her from undertaking this mission. They argue that if she travels unescorted, it would bring disgrace to the family. However, Behula remains firm on her resolve. Women are hardly ever allowed to assume such initiative in a male-oriented story.

It should be remembered that apart from the fact that there exists a *meyeli vrata* of Manasa, the cult of Manasa has a special significance for women. In the Sunderban area, for the duration of a month during Sravan and Bhadra, her sacred pot, her idol or her *sij* plant is worshipped primarily by women. On this occasion, *Manasamangala punthi* is read aloud or Manasa's *bhajan gaan* is sung. Kapotakshsi Sur suggests a correlation between this *laukika* form of *Manasapuja* and the remnant of a fertility cult.¹³ In the *bhasaan gaan* of the Sunderban area, not only does Behula enjoy a highly personalised relationship with Manasa, but the other female characters like Sanaka also share a similar relationship. For instance, when Sanaka asks Manasa for a son, the latter grants her this wish, but with the condition that the son would die

right after his birth. When Sanaka refuses to except such a boon, Manasa relaxes the condition a bit. Sanaka again refuses and Manasa further relents. Sanaka continues to bargain in this manner till a compromise is reached:

"See mother Manasa, you have to give me a son".

"I grant you the boon of a son. You shall have Lakhinder. As soon as he is born, I shall take him back".

"Listen, O Hara's daughter, forget it, I do not want such a boon".

"I grant you the boon of a son. You shall have Lakhinder. On the day of his *annapraashan* I shall take him back".

"Listen, O Hara's daughter, forget it. I do not want such a boon".

"I grant you the boon of a son. You shall have Lakhinder. On his wedding night I shall take him back".¹⁴

Velcheru Narayana Rao, in an essay on women's oral retellings of the *Ramayana* story, attempts to ascertain whether these oral retellings, usually rendered in songs, were composed by men or women. He deduces female authorship from the feelings, perceptions, cultural information and the general attitudes revealed in these songs. Events of interest to women such as

pregnancy, morning sickness, childbirth, tender love of a husband, affection of parents-in-law, games played by brides and grooms as part of the wedding rituals are prominently portrayed and receive detailed attention. All the stories in both the *Mangalakavyas* fulfill this criteria. A month by month account of the pregnancy of Nidaya, Phullara and Khullana in the *Chandimangala* and of Sanaka in the *Manasamangala* has been provided. The wedding rituals, especially the exclusively women's rituals in the wedding ceremony have also been described in great detail.

However, in spite of the presence of a number of features that tend to identify these as women's tales, the extant texts ultimately betray a pronounced male, brahmanical concern. This scenario is not unique to the the *Mangalkavyas*. Women's stories do get transformed through brahmanical mediation and due to the attempt of some lower-caste groups to move upwards in the social hierarchy. Narayana Rao, in his essay on some Telugu folk epics, has identified a correlation between categories of caste, their attitude towards women (i.e., restrictive or permissive), and the ethos of the epics which these castes patronise. He cites the example of the trading castes, among whom women enjoy relatively greater freedom. They patronise the sacrificial epics with a heroine, a leader of her caste, who in the end becomes a goodess, a "deified virgin". He shows how, when these traders attempted to move up the social ladder, they had to make

themselves acceptable to the dominant agricultural castes and imbibe their martial, male-centred values. At the level of the epic, it led to what he calls "secondary epic formation". This process, according to Narayana Rao, was associated with four features, one of which was the transformation of the role of women in the epic. A specific case is that of the Komatis who were patrons of the Kanyaka epic. The Komatis aspired to Vaisya status, as a result of which the Kanyaka epic begin to undergo gradual transformation. One of the major changes occurred in the role of Kanyaka herself. In the folk version Kanyaka was the leader, an initiator of action. In the transformed "secondary" epic, Kanyaka was still the supreme power, *Adishakti*, but she was also identified with Parvati, the wife of Shiva. Consequently, her position as a caste-leader was diminished. Her initiative was now transferred onto the figure of the brahmin Bhaskaracharya who was credited with the authorship of the secondary epic.¹⁶ Ranajit Guha's analysis of the transformation of lower caste and tribal religious traditions under the influence of brahmanism may perhaps be used as a general principle for understanding all such transformative processes, including that of the pre/non-brahmanical exclusive traditions of women. As has already been discussed in the Introduction, Guha argues that the "pull of parallel traditions and the pressure of upper-caste, especially brahminical, culture tend to assimilate and thereby transform them to such an extent that they show up as little more than

archaic traces within an established Hindu idiom. For the main work of Brahminism has been to gather the myths together, to display them as unified cycles of stories and to set them in a better-developed social framework".¹⁷ This probably explains the discrepancies in the meanings of motifs and symbols in our stories. While the snake unambiguously symbolises malevolence in Chando's story, in Behula's story the snakes are a little more benign. Ramanujan says that a mix up of different genres within a system may lead to a substantial change in what is signified, even though most of the signifiers may remain the same.¹⁸ W.L. Smith points out how brahmanisation and the dynamics of mobility affected the *Manasamangala* story. In his opinion, the story was non-brahmanical in origin and thus the actions of the human protagonists as well as those of their gods had to be revised, at least superficially, in order to make them conform to the ethical values of orthodoxy. For instance, when Chando and Behula were presented as *Gandhavaniks*, some of their actions that would be commonplace among the lower-castes, came to be regarded as violations of upper-caste norms. Mentioning the specific case of Behula, Smith says that she violated caste norms in the process of rescuing her husband and ordinarily she would have been subjected to a chastity test. However a unique and ingenious solution was devised by Radhanath from Sylhet, whose unfinished *Padmapuran* is one of the late versions of the *Manasamangala*. He transferred the initiative of Behula on to Lakhinder. According

to Radhanath, when Lakhai was bitten by the serpent Kali and felt that his life was ebbing away, he pricked his finger and wrote a letter to his sleeping wife with his own blood:

Listen my beloved wife, I beseech you...
Because you were deep in sleep, you did not
respond to me. Daughter of Saha, you are
devoted to your husband, you will surely abide
by my words. Take me and go to the city of
the gods, dance before them and please the
hearts of the gods. Have them first make you a
promise, then ask a boon...

(translation by Smith)

"Thus when Behula sails off with her husband to the city of the gods, dances before Siva and is given the boon which results in his being brought back to life, she is not acting at her own initiative, but is merely following her husband's orders!"¹⁹

However, I would like to submit that in spite of such ethical revisions and obvious overwriting by the upper caste authors the core of the Behula story remains untampered and should be understood as an expression of women's collective fantasy. The very idea of a woman as the principal actor and the saviour of her husband, is an instance of wish fulfillment which can only be achieved in the imaginary world of the story. As

Smith says, if a *Gandhavanik* girl did in real life what Behula did, she would have been condemned and probably outcasted. As we have already seen in the merchant story of the *Chandimangala*, it was considered a serious offence for a married *Gandhavanik* woman to step out of the house and wander unescorted in the forest. For this offence Khullana was put through the severest of tests to ascertain her virtue.

Besides, Behula was also guilty of other transgressions like working as a washer-woman (even though the clothes she washed belonged to the gods) and dancing before an assembly of men (even though they were gods).²⁰ According to most versions, she did all this on her own initiative, and in some versions, such as of Bijay Gupta and Ketakadas Kshemananda, despite the objection of her in-laws and other kinsmen. Several other details in Behula's story also point to a reversal of roles. The manner in which Behula defended her chastity, whenever it was threatened in the course of her journey, is a significant example of such a reversal. The fact that after Lakhinder's death, the men she met on her journey did nothing to alleviate her misery, and instead made sexual advances towards her, and that Bhula firmly pursued her resolve while repulsing them²¹, is also an indirect admission of men's wickedness and infirmity and a recognition of women's steadfastness of purpose and power. This description reverses the patriarchal stereotype that women are by nature disloyal and lustful. More importantly, on the fateful wedding night,

Lakhinder behaved like a weakling resigned to his fate, as Behula struggled against her own. Even though he was aware of the prophecy about his death, Lakhinder continued to sleep peacefully, while Behula was busy obstructing the snakes. When he woke up after the third *prahar*, Behula showed him the three snakes she had captured with the golden tong. But Lakhinder showed little interest in the matter. Instead, he asked Behula to provide him with some food, and when Behula expressed her inability to do so as there was no arrangement for cooking in the iron chamber, he began to fret like an unreasonable child. Thus Behula not only looked after his security, but also managed to prepare rice and feed him as a mother would feed her son.²²

It is significant that the place of Behula in the cultural baggage of Bengal rests not so much on her being the dominant or subversive woman but as an exemplar of wifely devotion. Smith rightly observes, "like Savitri Behula has become a popular symbol of the devoted wife and like Savitri it is often overlooked just what means she did use to save her husband's life", for "Yama did not release the soul of Savitri's husband because he was impressed with her devotion; he did so because Savitri outwitted him."²³ The dominant discourse always attempts to imperceptibly iron out the subversive elements in a popular story and reabsorb the sanitised version within the framework of what it considers is socially acceptable. Still, even in its

textual form, it is impossible not to recognise Behula's story as essentially a woman-centred tale. According to Ramanujan, such "tales are creations of women's fantasy that deny in imagination the restrictions of reality, the constraints of family and customs, even within themselves". However, in the end, this escape into a world of make-believe only helps women get partly reconciled to the reality of their lives.²⁴ This suggests that women retreat into wish-fulfilling fantasy in order to cope with their state of subjectivity.

Ranajit Guha, on the other hand, offers a more radical explanation of the function of wish-fulfillment in myth and literature. In his analysis of the lower-caste retellings of the myth of Rahu, in which the brahmanical version has been turned upside down, he observes an inversion occurring only within the world of religious thinking. Yet, he does not dismiss this inversion as insignificant. "For it is nothing other than a consciousness articulated as a recognition by the despised and the poor of their own debasement and the need to overcome it. Unable to find redress in real life they compensate for it in wishful thinking. This wish is still too feeble to actualize itself as a project powered by a radical will. Nevertheless, it is a wish predicated on a critique of the social and cultural conditions of subalternity."²⁵ Nigel Crook speaks of information and knowledge as creative competence and potentially revolutionary, particularly among the underprivileged, because of

the immediacy of their experience of contradictions between "ideological claims and actual practice. However, the existence of class or caste conflict does not in itself ensure the critical competence of the oppressed. Such competence can only be acquired through the development of a critical tradition among them, crafted and reproduced through formal or informal systems within their control. Crook argues that the rich and powerful attempt to monopolise the transmission of knowledge and hence suppress the development of such systems.²⁶ Thus the only option available to the underprivileged groups is subversion while remaining within the accepted boundaries established by the former. A possible method of subversion is the appropriation of a dominant style or genre, such as the myth, to tell their own story.

However, Narayana Rao does not accept retellings of myths as a conscious act of subversion. He agrees with Edwin Ardner's theory of muted groups who are silenced by the dominant structures of expression. Muted groups, however, are not silent groups; they do express themselves but under cover of the dominant ideology. According to Narayana Rao, India's lower castes and women fall in this category. But he argues that the singers or listeners of women's *Ramayanas* are not self-conscious about the message of these songs. They receive their meanings only subliminally and perhaps the value of these songs lies precisely in the absence of conscious protest. The women who

compose, sing and in the process often embellish these songs, do not seek to overthrow the 'patriarchal' family but work within it, their interest being creation of more social space for themselves within the existing structure.²⁷

This is probably what Behula's story attempts to do. Though the agenda might not have been a direct confrontation with the brahmanical patriarchal authority, the possibility that the story is an expression of a consciousness articulated by women of their own subordination, as suggested by Guha, cannot be completely ruled out. In fact when Narayana Rao accepts that the message of the retold *Ramayana* songs are received by women who sing or listen to them at least at a subliminal level, he is keeping the door open for more radical possibilities. Natalie Davies has observed that sexual inversions in cultural forms are ultimately sources of order and stability in a hierarchical society, for they act as safety valves in situations of tension and conflict within the system. However, she argues that rather than expending itself completely during the privileged time of the joke, the story, the comedy or the carnival, topsy-turvy play also spills over into everyday "serious" life. Thus comic and festive inversions can be more than mere safety valves and may acquire radical potential in certain circumstances.²⁸ The instances of sexual inversion in our story also contain this potential.

NOTES

1. W.L. Smith, *The One-Eyed Goddess : A Study of the Manasa-Mangal* Almqvist and Wiksell International, Stockholm-Sweden, 1980, p.134
2. Abanindranath Tagore, *Banglar Brata*, Vishvabharati, Calcutta, 1350 B.S, pp.5-6
3. Kunal Chakrabarti, "Textual Authority and Oral Exposition: The Vrata Ritual as a Channel of Communication in early Medieval Bengal". *Studies in History*, July - December, 1994, vol X, No.2, p.218
4. Smith, *op.cit.*, p.134
5. Poromesh Acharya, "Indigenous Education and Brahminical Hegemony in Bengal," in Nigel Crook (ed.), *The Transmission of Knowledge in South Asia*, O U P, Delhi, 1996, pp.111-114
6. Kunal Chakrabarti, *op.cit.*, pp.239-240
7. Lina M. Fruzzetti, *The Gift of a Virgin : Women, Marriage and Ritual in a Bengali Society*, O U P, Delhi, 1990
8.

সকল প্রার্থী শুনেন যদি যে প্রব কন্দন ।
এত প্রকল্পিয়া তাল জিহ্বায় কাবল ॥ ---
কহ কহ কাশ্মিনী কিলামিয়া সিমনিনী কামলত রহিয়াহু আবুল ।
খুলনাহু (গাল মাত না মলিয়া আর ।
অষ্টাশীতে জিহ্বায়াল কি ফল (গাঙ্কাব ॥

ଦୁଇଟି ଚରଣଗାର ଘୋର ନିମ୍ନାଞ୍ଜ ମାତିଣି ॥
 ଦୁମ୍ପତିର ଆମ୍ଭେମାନେ ପ୍ରଭୁ (କୋଟିକାର୍ତ୍ତବ୍ୟ) ।
 ଶୂନ୍ୟ ଘୋର କାହା ଘଟା ନିଷିଦ୍ଧ ଲାଞ୍ଜୁର ॥
 ଓ ଦୁଃଖ କାହିଁକି ଚରଣ ଶେଷି ଅମଳେଷ ।
 କରମେ ଶରଣାର୍ଥୀୟ (ଦୁଇଟି ନା ପାରଲୁଣ ଡାହାଣ ॥
 ମମତ୍ତୀଏ କ୍ରମେ ଯାହି (କ୍ରମେ କାରଣ ॥
 ନୀରବ ପ୍ରହରଣାତ ଲକ୍ଷ୍ୟା ଜୀବନ ॥
 ଘୋର ଦୁଃଖ ମାତ୍ର ଆଶିଷ କାରି ନିବେଦନ ।
 ଦୁଃଖିନି କାହିଁକି ଦିଶା ଦୁଃଖିତ-କାରଣ ॥
 ଧୂଳିକାର କାରଣେ ମହତ ଚରଣ ଅଭ୍ୟୁତ୍ଥାପି ।
 ଆତ୍ମନ ଚରଣେ ଗାମ କାହ ମନ୍ଦାବତୀ ॥
 ମନ୍ଦାବତୀ (କାଳେ ମାତା ଏକ ସୃଷ୍ଟି ଜାଣି ।
 ଏହି ଘଟେ ମୁକ୍ତ ଦୁଃଖି ଅଭ୍ୟାସ ଓଦାନୀ ॥
 କ୍ରମେ ନା କର ଆତ୍ମ ଆତ୍ମାତ ଯତନେ ।
 କରମେ ଶରଣାର୍ଥୀୟ (ଦୁଇଟି ଶରଣ ଅଭ୍ୟାସ ॥

Ashutosh Das (ed.), Dvija Ramdeb birachita Abhayamangala, Calcutta University, Calcutta, 1957, pp.177-179

9. ସରସୁତେର ଦୁଃଖିନେ କୁଳେ ଏକ ବନ୍ଧ୍ୟା ସୁମନ ।
 ଚନ୍ଦ୍ରୀ କାହିଁକି ତାହା ମୁଖ୍ୟର ଉଦ୍ଧାନ ॥
 ବାସ୍ତବୀ କାଳେ ଡାକିଣୀ ସୁଖିଣୀ ଲକ୍ଷ୍ୟା (ଧ୍ୟାନା) ।
 ଘେନି ମୁଖ୍ୟରାଜ ଚନ୍ଦ୍ରୀ ନିତ୍ୟ କରେ (ଧ୍ୟାନା) ॥
 ଆତ୍ମ କେତେ ନାହିଁ (ଦେଖ ଅତି ବହନମୁକ୍ତ) ।
 ତାହାର ଆଧିକ ନାହିଁ (ତାହାର କାଳୀମୁକ୍ତ) ॥
 ଏତେ କ୍ରମେ ଶାନ୍ତିଲେଖ ନିବର କୁଳମାନି ।
 ଚନ୍ଦ୍ରୀକାର ମୁଖ୍ୟରାଜ ଆସିତ ନା ଡାକିଣି ॥

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10. A.K. Ramanujan, "Two Realms of Kannada Folklore," in Stuart
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11. A.K. Ramanujan, "Toward a Counter - System : Women's Tales"
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Press, Pennsylvania, 1991;

A.K. Ramanujan, *A Flowering Tree and Other Oral Tales from India*,
(ed.) by Stuart H. Blackburn and Alan Dundes, Penguin, N. Delhi,
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12. *কপাটের আঁচ দেখি ডুখল ডুজল / চমকিত বহলাব বহিল ওরক //*
বাহিত ২২য়া গল মধুর বচনে। কপালনের বাট দিল তাঁচা দুখ পান
বহলা কহিল খুচা কোথা আছ তুমি। কোথা মধা না দেখিয়া বিজ্ঞানী
অবিরত মন কত গুনিব হতাশ। আমার কালিনী বাস না কহে ওপাশ।
মনে কিদু না কহিহ- মই অভিমান। কপাল বাট চ কহ তাঁচা দুখ পান
এতক শুনিয়া মপ গু লক্ষ্য পাইয়া। তাঁচা দুখ পান কহে (ইচ মন
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Akshaykumar Kayal and Chitra Deb, (eds), *Ketakadas
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B.S., pp.255-256

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ଦିଲାଇ ଦିଲାଇ ପୁସ୍ତକ
ହେ ତୋମାଟେ ନାଧୀନୁ
ଶୁଭାମାତ୍ର ଆନିବ ହରିଆ
ଶୁଭା ଶୁଭା ହେବେ କୀ
ଏ ଦୁର ବାବେ ହେବେ କି ।
ଦିଲାଇ ଦିଲାଇ ପୁସ୍ତକ
ହେ ତୋମାଟେ ନାଧୀନୁ
ଅନୁମାତ୍ର ଆନିବ ହରିଆ ।
ଶୁଭା ଶୁଭା ହେବେ କୀ
ଏ ଦୁର ବାବେ ହେବେ କି ।
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ହେ ତୋମାଟେ ନାଧୀନୁ
ବିଆବ ବାବେ ଆନିବ ହରିଆ ।

ibid., p.82

15. Velcheru Narayana Rao, "A Ramayana of their own : Women's Oral Tradition in Telugu", in Paula Richman ed., *Many Ramayanas : The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, O U P, Delhi, 1992, p.119

16. Velcheru Narayana Rao, "Epic and ideologies : Six Telugu folk epics" in A.K. Ramanujan and Stuart Blackburn, 'op.cit.

17. Ranajit Guha, "The Career of an Anti-God in Heaven and on Earth", in Ashoka Mitra, ed., *The Truth Unites : Essays in Tribute to Samar Sen*, Subarnarekha, Calcutta, 1985

18. A.K. Ramanujan, "Two Realms of Kannada folklore", op.cit.

19. W.L. Smith, op.cit., pp.151-152

20. *Padmapurana*, pp.478-490; *Jagajjiban-birachita Manasamangala*, pp.290-303, *Ketakadas Kshemananda - rachitra Manasamangala*, pp. 272-274

21. *Jagajjiban - birachita Manasamangala*, pp.269-283; *Ketakadas Kshemananda-rachita Manasamangala*, pp.266-269; *Padmanpurana*, pp.455-458

22. ತಿನ್ನಿ ವಾಸ್ಯ ವಂದಿ (ಇನ್ನೂ ಬಾಕಿ ತಿನ್ನಿ ಪ್ರಾ) | ಇನ್ನೂ ಕಾಲೇ ಜಾತಿಯ ಮೂರ್ಖತೆ-ನಾಶಿನಿ ||
 (ಇನ್ನೂ ಕಾಲೇ ಮುಖ್ಯ ವಾ ಜಾನಿ ಕಿ ಕಾಲೆ | ತಾಳೇ ಪ್ರಾಣ-ವಾಚ್ಯಾ ಆಗಿಲ್ಲ ಕಾಲೇ ||
 ಇನ್ನೂ ಮುಖ್ಯ ತಿನ್ನಿ ಪ್ರಾಣಿ ಕರ್ತವ್ಯ ಪ್ರವೃತ್ತಿ | ಕಾಲೇ ಆತ್ಮವಿಚಾರಿಣಿ ತಾಳೇ ಪ್ರಾಣಿ ||
 ಪ್ರಾಣಿನಿ ಮುಖ್ಯವಾ ಕಾಲೆ ನಿಧ್ರಾ ಇನ್ನೂ ಕಾಲೆ | ಮುಖ್ಯವಾ ಪ್ರಾಣಿ ದಿವ್ಯ ವಾಚ್ಯಾ ||
 ಪ್ರಾಣಿ ಮುಖ್ಯವಾ ಯದಿ ಕಾಲೇ ಕಾಲೆ | ಮುಖ್ಯವಾ ಆತ್ಮನ (ಇನ್ನೂ ಕಾಲೇ ನಾಶಿನಿ ||
 ನಾಶಿನಿ ಕಾಲೆ ಪ್ರಾಣಿ ಕಾಲೆ ಕಾಲೆ ವಾಚ್ಯಾ | ಮುಖ್ಯವಾ ಆತ್ಮನ ಮುಖ್ಯವಾ ಕಾಲೆ ||
 ಪ್ರಾಣಿ ಕಾಲೇ ಯದಿ ಕಾಲೇ ಕಾಲೆ | ತಾಲೆ ಪ್ರಾಣಿ ಕಾಲೇ ಪ್ರಾಣಿ ಕಾಲೇ ||
 ಕಾಲೇ ಕಾಲೇ ಕಾಲೆ ಕಾಲೆ ಕಾಲೆ ಪ್ರಾಣಿ ಕಾಲೆ | ಕಾಲೇ ಕಾಲೇ ಕಾಲೇ ಕಾಲೆ ಕಾಲೆ ||

Ketakadas Kshemananda rachita Manasamangal, op.cit, p.256

23. W.L. Smith, op.cit., p.125

24. A.K. Ramanujan, "Toward a Counter-System : Women's Tales", *op.cit.*, p.53
25. Ranajit Guha, *op.cit.*, p.19
26. Nigel Crook, "The Control and Expansion of Knowledge: An introduction", in Nigel Crook, ed., *The Transmission of Knowledge in South Asia*, O U P, Delhi, 1996, pp.22-23
27. Velcheru Narayana Rao, "A Ramayana of Their Own: Women's Oral Tradition in Telugu", *op.cit.*, p.133
28. Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, Duckworth, London, 1975

Conclusion

In this dissertation we have made a study of a particular kind of literature from medieval Bengal in order to examine the dominant notions and ideologies about women that prevailed in Bengali society of that time. In a patriarchal and brahmanised society like that of medieval Bengal, such ideologies would obviously be role generative. Hence male ideas about women constitute the bulk of our discussion. These ideas, as represented in the texts relate to women in the everyday aspects of their social life, such as conjugal relations, relations between women within the household and their relations with wider society, as well as to male notions of chastity, promiscuity, and of women's sexuality in general. Depending on the context, these ideas appear in the texts as representations of reality, as the ideal or normative, and as fantasy. However, the texts do not reflect only the male point of view. They seem to have retained a core of women - centred tales that reveal wish-fulfilling fantasies of women. This discussion has drawn largely on theories and models developed either in the general pan-Indian context or in specific regional contexts other than Bengal. Hence, our emphasis has been on the regional specificities in the manifestation of these common pan-Indian themes, However, only one category of literature can offer only a very restricted view of the regional cultural ethos and is therefore an insufficient source on which to base formulations about a specific regional

pattern.

The nature of the source material also limits the work in another way. Literary texts particularly of the kind examined here, enable us to speak with some degree of assurance only about the mental horizons of the community and not about people's lived experiences. Kalpana Viswanath has observed that there are two broad disciplines in which theories of the female body and sexuality in India have been formulated. These are anthropological and cultural studies and feminist studies. According to her, while anthropological studies on women in India have looked at the female body and sexuality within symbolic systems, they have not taken women's lived experiences as the base from which to conceptualise these systems that structure women's lives. These theories locate women's sexuality within a cultural universe which is abstracted from the realm of experience. On the other hand, the women's movements begin with women's experiences, their aim being to translate these experiences into social texts that would provide the basis for political action. But these experiences are not soundly anchored in cultural and symbolic systems.¹ The ideal solution then, would be to study simultaneously the representation and the real in order to relate the one with the other. However, in the medieval context, one can only study representations whereas in a study of contemporary society it is possible to combine evidence from creative literature, and autobiographical accounts of

individuals, records of social practices, legislation, etc., and personal field observations. The paucity of such varied sources on the one hand, and the absence of experiential context on the other, impose severe limitations on the history of women of pre-modern periods, and compel one to fall back on literary representations. However, the importance of the symbolic or the representational should not be undermined. As Simone de Beauvoir says, "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman"², i.e., the female body and experience of femininity are largely social constructions. Thus myths about women and their lived experiences feed into each other in a continuous and simultaneous process. Sudesh Vaid and Kumkum Sanghari have pointed out the difficulties in relating various symbolic constructs and hegemonic ideologies on women to existing divisions of labour and systems of production. However, they admit that "though there is no neat fit between symbolic constructs and the ordering of social relations or between consciousness and causality, yet ideas, invented traditions and symbolic constructs do intrude upon the labour process in a number of ways ranging from the causative to the legitimizing."³ In fact, not only does study of symbolic constructs of the past enhance our understanding of the society that produced them, they also throw light on ideas, norms and practices of the successive periods that follow. Eileen Power observes: "Medieval theory about women, bequeathed as a legacy to future generations and enshrined alike in law and in

literature, was destined to have profound social effects for centuries to follow, long after the forces behind it had ceased to be important and when the conditions which had accounted for it no longer existed"⁴. All contemporary constructs necessarily have a diachronic aspect. This dissertation is an attempt to understand some aspects of medieval representation that continue to condition the construction of women in the present.

NOTES

1. Kalpana Viswanath, "Shame and Control : Sexuality and Power in Feminist Discourse in India", in Meenakashi Thapan, ed., *Embodiment: Essays on Gender and Identity*. O U P, Delhi, 1995 pp. 313-320.
2. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 1988, p.295 cited in Kalpana Viswanath, *op.cit.* p. 318.
3. Kumkum Sanghari and Sudesh Vaid, "Introduction", in Kumkum Sanghari and Sudesh Vaid (eds), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, Kali for women, N. Delhi, 1989, pp. 3-4.
4. Eileen Power, *Medieval Women*, (edited by M.M. Postan), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975, p.9.

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