

#### 4. Masculinity in Galo Folk Narratives

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##### **Abstract**

*Folklore is perceived as a medium in the construction of gender identity and gender roles in a traditional folk society as it serves as a source of representation and medium of transmission of culture, belief and practices. As the notion of gender is usually seen as a social construct, which varies across culture to culture, in tribal society folklore tends to serve as an agent in construction of gender identity and behaviors through socialization. As also in the discourse of gender there is always a common consent that the idea of gender is a social construct by the patriarchal biases of civilization. Galo folk narratives in many cases are men-centric. Men are represented as heroes with courage, physical and mental strength and competitiveness. These narratives try to justify the superiority of men as a gendered being.*

**Keywords:** *Masculinity, Folk Narrative, Galo*

##### **Introduction**

Gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men, girls and boys. These binaries are socially constructed through socialization and representation. It is a behavior that is created and produced and varies across cultures. Gender as a behavior is usually produced by people to create identities and reproduce to form the structure and constraints in the society. Men and women are socialized to think and perform differently in a society. Men are socialized to embrace the values and ideals of masculinity and women as being feminine. Femininity may be defined as a set of attributes ascribed to biologically sexed females. Usually qualities like passive, acquiescent, timid, emotional and conventional are ascribed to be feminine. On the other hand masculinity deals more about the traits such as active, dominating, adventurous, rational, creative etc. Thus masculinity is defined in contrast of femininity.

The English term 'masculinity' is derived from the French term '*masculinité*', a word that could be found in French dictionaries from at least the mid-eighteenth century. Historically, however the masculine most often referred to language. The French were more likely to speak of traits like *virile* or *virileté*, which from the seventh century they understood in opposition to the effeminate (Husain 2018:24).

### **Man and Masculinity in Galo Folk Narratives**

The specific roles for men and women is orally transmitted from generation to generation and practiced traditionally in every culture. The social construction of gender begins as soon as child is born. Specific rituals, names, dress codes, ornaments, play activities for boys and girls all serve as a medium of constructing gender (John 2015:188). Galo is one of the indigenous tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. They are mostly inhabited in five districts- West Siang, Lepa Rada, Lower Siang, East Siang and Upper Subansiri of Arunachal Pradesh.

The Galo society is a patriarchal society. Man plays a dominant role in socio-cultural activities. The tribe has rich oral traditions in the forms of legends, tales, myths, songs and dances, proverbs, rituals, and beliefs which have been passed from generations to generations. Folk narratives play important part in preservation and continuation of traditions, customs and beliefs of the Galo people since there is absence of written form to preserve them. Man seems to hold a special position in community as well as in family. He is the custodian of all the immovable properties.

All the major decisions are mostly taken by men. They are considered as the custodians, the protectors and the torchbearers of the community. In such a patriarchal society, the socio-cultural and political institutions are also traditionally inspired by the belief of supremacy of men over any other being. Men's role in imparting, validating and justifying crucial decision in society are very much intensified through narrating their history via folklore as it is the only source for articulating their wisdom and knowledge. These practices had been followed from generations. Narrating stories has been a significant part of the traditions and cultures of Galo society. Narratives are generally taken as truth and thus these are told and retold time and again.

Narratives such as myths, legends, folktales etc. are the basic forms of Galo folk narratives that help



in constructing history and identity of the oral society. It further imparts traditions and imbibes culture and maintains conformity and continuity of practices.

Some of the Galo folk narratives are men centric. They reflect certain types of images and characteristic of traditional ideal men. These narratives are reflection of their dominant andro-centric ideology of the patriarchal society. There are varieties of male figures, human as well as deities, in the folk narratives that are projected in the images of conventional ideal men perceived by the society. Some of the origin myths, legends based on clan history and folk tales, that are associated with certain rite and practices, project man as a being whose experiences are preserved and passed on to the people from generation to generation. In such narratives men and their masculinities are also represented. These narratives have certain archetypal male figures or characters that dominate the story. Through these narratives it is used to convey the ideologies to construct social structures where men take the dominant place and to guide others through that dominant position the belief and aspects of the culture. In Galo society and their worldview the identity and role of man and woman are defined by the practices and behaviors they are assigned according to their sex. These roles are conveyed through the medium of folk narratives which also have recurrent features of man and masculinity associated with the socio-cultural beliefs within the society.

### **Men as Heroes (Heroic Masculinity)**

Man is presented as hero in many forms in the folk narratives of the Galos. A hero is a classic protagonist of a story. Most of the situations are associated or centered on him. In Galo folk narratives several men are the central figures of their stories. They may be categorized into different types according to their role and attributes they portrayed in the narratives. The depiction of men as heroes in the narratives tends to display the ideal of heroic masculinity that the society seems to promote.

The heroic masculinity here refers to the ideologies or set of ideas that a given society or culture form to constitute an image of man as hero or heroic man. These include qualities and actions that are performed and accepted by the norms prevalent in the society. According to this the basic types of heroes that seem to emerge in the Galo folk narratives are- culture hero, legendry hero and everyman hero.

## Culture Hero

A culture hero is a mythical being specific to some cultural, ethnic or religious traditions of some archaic societies. A culture hero usually helps the Supreme Being in creation of the world or by assisting in bringing the changes in the world by discovery and invention. The most important role of the culture hero is to make the world a habitable place for human being. He establishes institutions for humans by discovering such as agriculture, religion, laws, marriage, death, etc. He is able to perform unimaginable tasks. He is powerful; a savior of humankind from dangerous monster; introduces culture to human beings. In some cases, a culture hero appears as a trickster who performs some misdeeds out of his selfishness or even foolishness from which he learns a lesson or bears punishment from divine being as a curse or punishment and that further ends up being a shared knowledge to all human beings.

In Galo folk narratives *Abo Tani* evolves as the culture hero of the Galos. He is considered as the great ancestor. In fact other *Tani* tribes such as Adi, Apatani, Nyishi and Tagin of Arunachal Pradesh also consider him as their great mythical ancestor. *Abo Tani*'s greatness as a culture hero is presented through the heroic myths. In the origin myth of the Galos, *Jimi Ane* is considered as the Supreme Being. She is the mother creator who created all the living and non-living creatures on the earth. *Abo Tani* is also one of the creations by her. The birth of *Tani* is taken as the point of the origin of first human being. Many myths associated with rites and practices are centered on him. He is considered as the progenitor of human race. Interestingly, if we look into the naming system of the Galos also we find that they count their genealogy right from *Abo Tani* or *Reni*. In this patrilineal method of naming the children the last syllable of the father's name is used as the first syllable of the child's name. Through this method the people identify their generations from *Abo Tani* and at times beyond that. It helps to remember their male ancestors only. It also helps in unifying clans who trace their similar genealogical origin. This naming system is patriarchal in nature because here only the lineage of male members is counted. Women are not included in it. It is evident that from this point of emergence of *Abo Tani* the Galos trace their history and all the practices are legitimized by it since these were practiced by their first man. *Abo Tani* as a culture hero is also reflected by the belief that many practices and institutions such as marriage, death, religion, festival etc. are formed by him. Many narratives that deal with *Abo Tani* as a central figure clearly indicate that the socio-cultural and

economic practices that are practiced by the people today are all because of *Abo Tani*'s experiences. It tries to validate that because of this culture hero today the Galo civilization has evolved and come to this far.

### Legendary Hero

No doubt *Abo Tani* is the culture hero of the Galos as he is considered to be the progenitor of human race and human civilization. But there are many other such male figures, in the myths and legends of the Galos, that give due emphasis to men as legendary heroes. These figures are generally associated with different clans which highlight the attributes of men as legendary heroes. A legendary hero is basically a man immortalized in the legends, myths and folktales. He is well known for his courage and bravery. His noble acts are remembered and praised by his descendants and believers in everyday social context. Through such legends the people construct their history of migration and settlement. These legends are living traditions and people refer them as true stories that happened in the past. These legends often exemplify social heroes or men with their popular beliefs according to their shared history.

*Ato Paktu* is one of the legendary heroes in Galo folk narrative. He is a descendant of *Abo Tani* and a great forefather and prominent figure of the Paktu Clan. The legend of *Ato Paktu* is usually narrated through a *Ponu*, a medley of both song and dance performance, called *Ato Paktu Aa*. The narrative talks about the courage and bravery of *Ato Paktu* who along with *Ato Kojum* took revenge of the gruesome murder of his fraternal aunts, *Anyi Koi* and *Anyi Koyo*, from *Tane Kode* and *Jara Jarba*.

Men like *Ato Paktu* are the metaphor of strength and greatness of the community. In the earlier times or during some social conflicts the community integrates with the help of folklore they shared. There are some legends that talks about the complexity of inter-tribe unity and conflicts. The conflicts were generally resolved by heroism. These legends are now documented and printed by the clans. Till today the people remember and talks about the great valour and strength of *Ato Paktu*. Like *Ato Paktu* there are several other legends about such heroic figures in different clans among the Galos. The legends of *Ato Bogum*, *Ato Lobom*, *Ato Lodu*, *Ato Karko* and many other such deserve here a mention. These legends are usually transmitted in the form of folk narrative to preserve the deeds of the forefathers and also to trace the origin of each clan. The central figures in these legends transmit the

belief of the ideals of the people and their society. All the actions and belief that the people today hold are justified through the acts or deeds that were done by these legendary heroes. As already mentioned that the Galos are known for their system of genealogical nomenclature derived from the name of their father, as such, clans are also developed from the name of such legendary historical figures of the community. For instances from *Ato Paktu* clans like Memo (which includes Angu, Bagra, Doji, Kamsi, Kamnyi, Karcho, Naso/ Naho, Ngomdir and Rame are the sub clans); Tunyik (Ado, Am, Ango, Anya, Loya, Lomi, Lollen, Lotem and Loyi are the sub clans); and Tutem ( Bamey, Ete, Mayi, Nyodu, Nyok, Nyolin, Nyorak, Ori and Tasar are the sub-clans) clans are originated.

Many villages today erect statues or stones of these legendary ancestors to pay homage and also to show their pride being the descendants of such brave and great figures in the past. The legends like *Ato Paktu's* help in maintaining the traditional notion of men as warrior-like having immense courage, strength and honour. These legends are even today narrated to the young boys by the elders to inculcate masculine ideals such as pride, strength and honour that they must retain in the community as a man just like their legendary forefathers.

### **Everyman Hero**

Apart from highly glorified portrayal of men as heroes in the myths and legends of the Galos. The ordinary men are also represented as heroes in the folk narratives. These heroes can be labeled as everyman heroes. An everyman hero is an ordinary man without any special heroic traits or characteristics. He is a stock character with ordinary and humble nature and is often placed in an extraordinary situation that forces him to perform heroically. An everyman hero in stories usually cultivates in people a sense of identification with the character and at times through such stories of a common man some moral lessons are also inculcate. Any ordinary man can relate to this type of hero for they are from within the same walks of life and their selflessness is taken as virtue to live a better life.

In Galo folk-narratives three men emerge as everyman heroes. These are *Achi Kara Karba*, *Topo* and *Lubo Raye*. These three men are ordinary men just like any other men from the Galo society. Their narratives highlight them as ordinary men dealing with circumstances that had been offered by the society they live in.



*Achi Kara Karba* is an elder brother of *Anyi Kari Karnya*. Just like any other ordinary obedient son and elder brother he was shouldered with familial responsibilities. He was good at all the works laid by the society for a man to do. He was good at handling swords and arrows. He was a great hunter, the very deemed occupation of Galo man during olden times. He never forced his sister to get married. He just wanted to perform his responsibility as a son and brother to find a match for his sister. However he had to compete with his sister, *Anyi Kari Karnya*, only on the account that she was adamant wished to compete. But at the end he eventually convinced her to get married with empathy and affection and not by force. *Achi Kara Karba* is an ideal form of a son and a brother that the Galo society expect a man to be.

The everyman heroes do not have any superhuman traits in them. They are just like any ordinary man. Their stories are also not as extraordinary or elevating. But a sense of identification with them is what it connects with the audience. In this same vein as *Achi Kara Karba*, *Topo* can also be labeled as everyman hero. The story of two brothers, *Topo and Karbo*, reflects the very nature of ordinary men dealing with societal roles laid down for the man. They had to conform to the rules set by the society and perform according to it for their existence as much as women do. In the story, *Topo* and *Karbo* were born and brought up in a land called *Topo-Karbo-Puyi-Punyo*. When they became adults and started their own family they had to face, just like any other ordinary man, the social and economic pressures caused by overpopulation.

This led the two men to compete with each other in a series of competition framed by the society in the form of the council, one of the highest authorities of the Galos for survival and existence in a modern sense of the term without harm. Ultimately *Topo* loses and had to accept what the council decides for the welfare of the all. *Topo's* very acceptance in defeat and migrating to the south conveys the very nature of change an ordinary man has to accept when circumstances offer. Even today in Galo society, generally in joint family, when sons grow up and get married, the father or any elders present divide the immovable properties amongst the sons and let them go to build their own house so that the domestic disputes could be avoided in the future.

The story of *Lubo Raye* is also crafted in a way that the ordinary people can identify or situate

themselves in his shoes. Thus identification with him as an everyman is more modern in sense. *Lubo Raye* fits in what the above lines claimed about the everyman hero. He is an orphaned adolescent who had to face odds in the society and at the same time tries to be as resourceful as possible for the greater good for himself and for others around him. His journey from an orphan little boy to a prosperous man conveys the people to face the challenges with sound mind and better reason. The story of *Lubo Raye* is frequently narrated by elders to children to teach moral lesson about the hardship that the one will surely face in their life. But if one is morally right and had the courage to face all the oddities like *Lubo* one will surely lead a respectful life with wealth as well as honour.

Through these narratives the various shades of men are represented in folk narratives. The reflection of men as heroes in various shapes and forms seems to promote the heroic notion of masculinity of man. These folk heroes are the ideal representation of man as heroes that the society deemed man to be. The Galos revered these men by narrating their adventurous stories time and again in various socio-cultural contexts such as festivals, ritual performance or even at some casual occasions. Children also encouraged and educated through such myths, legends and tales where men are heroes. The reverence paid to these male figures by the Galos thus promotes the very notion of heroic masculinity that is attached to men. These narratives glorify man's valour and strength.

### **Conclusion**

The folk narratives of the Galos vary according to the needs of the culture. Culture decides the content and forms the narratives. In the context of Galo culture the views held by the society towards men and women are reflected in their folk narratives. The notion of men as heroes and the propagators of civilization there by advocating the notion of heroic masculinity is one of such view the society seem to inculcate. Various forms of heroes are represented in their folk narratives. The idea behind the presentation of men in such shades exemplify their belief of men as an important being with various traditional characteristic assign to men and masculinity such as non-emotional, aggressive, independent, courageous, honorable, competitive, tough-skinned, active, strong, sexually aggressive, rebellious, experienced, adventurous etc. Men are also often portrayed in competition with other men, with spirits or supernatural beings or even sometimes with women. From the evolutionary point of view for survival and also for reproduction men are always thought to be I forefront. This is naturally imbibed in them. These traditional notions of men are integral part of the men centric Galo folk





narratives. Moreover the prospects that it offers in the form of power, authority, superiority, security and other privileges are the aspects these narratives seem to convey.

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