

**Women in Ballads: A Comparative Study of
the Chittagong and Mymensingh Gitikas**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Department of English and Humanities

of

BRAC University

by

Najifa Nawar

Student ID: 03103013

**In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of**

Bachelor of Arts in English

May 2007

AYESHA ABED LIBRARY
BRAC UNIVERSITY

This thesis is dedicated to my parents.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express gratitude to my advisor Dr. Firdous Azim for the advice and instructions given to me during the writing of this paper. I would also like to thank writer Shaheen Akter who gave me the opportunity to take part in the research as a novice researcher.

Najifa Nawar

Contents

Abstract	v
Chapter 1 – Introduction	01
Chapter 2 – Chittagong Gitikas	18
Chapter 3 – Mymensingh Gitikas	40
Conclusion	70
Bibliography	73

Abstract

Folklore is one of the most prominent elements in Bangladeshi culture. The tradition of folklore is an ancient but one of the richest creations in Bangladeshi culture. Folk literature plays a vital role in defining folklore, as it includes oral practice of marriage songs, songs regarding women's life, fairy tales, songs of justice, ballads etc. Since the middle ages women have played a significant role in observing social customs and rituals. Not only that, women used to compose songs on the basis of their daily affairs, physical attributes, suppressed feelings, blessings for new brides and family functions. They represent their own happinesses, sorrows, pains, sacrifices and agony through their songs.

The research that I took part in aims to explore the projection of women characters in the some assigned ballads from Chittagong and Mymensingh districts. In this paper, I have made an attempt to glean the portrayal of women characters in terms of their biological differences, personal lives, sexual lives, family lives, standards of living, the struggle of upholding family and social values, the restrictions of observing women's rights within a patriarchal framework etc. The part of the research that I dealt with contained writings composed by men and it was interesting to see the portrayal of women from male writers' perspectives. In addition, I have applied feminist theories to analyze the themes of the Gitikas and point out the connection between feminism and the features of folklore.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Folklore is the customary artistic element of any community or folk society and it is associated with the beliefs, morality, conceptions, feelings and traditions of the common people. Basically folklore includes proverbs, riddles, songs, jokes and anecdotes, rituals at births deaths, marriages, and yearly celebrations and traditional dance and plays performed during communal gatherings. The spheres of folklore are mainly verbal compositions and social rituals, which are practiced by oral tradition rather than written down in a text. According to famous Bangladeshi folklore promoter Dr. Ashraf Siddiqui

Whenever a lullaby is sung to a child; whenever a tongue twister or a riddle or a counting out time is used in nursery or school; whenever sayings or proverbs are told; whenever a mother shows her daughter how to sew, spin, weave, embroider, bake an old-fashioned pie; whenever a farmer on the ancestral plot trains his son in the ways long familiar; whenever a village craftsman - carpenter, carver, shoemaker, blacksmith - trains his apprentice in the use of tools; ...and the practices of the past are handed down by examples or spoken word, by the elder to the new generation, without reference to books or print, then that is called folklore.¹

The main feature of folklore is that it is vivid, diverse and it gets conveyed through a strong oral tradition and natural modification. According to the prominent Bangladeshi folklore researcher

¹ Siddiqui, Ashraf, "Folkloric Bangladesh". *Bangladoot*. _5th Jan 2007.

<<http://www.bangladoot.org/Folkloric%20bd.doc>

Shamsuzzaman Khan

Folklore is the valuable cultural element of ancient, traditional and rural agricultural customary society but due to social changes, modernization of transportation and the advancement in science and technology these elements are rapidly getting extinct.²

As a discipline, folklore is regional but its practice remains international. According to scholars it is not easy to figure out when and where folklore first emerged in Bangladesh. In ancient days the festivals or rituals of villagers were related to village gods or goddesses. In fact, religious festivals or social rituals used to go hand in hand. In his book *Adhunik Folklore Chinta* Shamsuzzaman Khan defines a term called *Mangal Gitika*, which was practiced by women in the middle ages as a part of festival or enjoyment in the wedding ceremony. Blessings were associated with those songs, which were also sung by women whom were called Mangal Gayeeka, and they were professional singers. Gradually, our folk culture or the culture of common people emerged as a part of these religious and social rituals or festivals. Different dynasties such as the Mouryas, the Guptas, the Palas, the Senas and the Muslims, who were part of our social and ethnic context, influenced folklore in Bangladesh. Each played a vital part in enriching our branches of folklore through their ethnic norms and values. Folklore covers a wide range of branches such as *Marriage Songs, Ballads, Baromaasis, Fairytale, Pala Gaan, Khonar Bochan, Folk literature, Folk dance, and Folksongs etc.*

²Khan, Shamsuz Zaman; *Adhunik Folklore Chinta*, Dhaka: Anupam Prokashani, 2001
p- 7(my translation)

I have had the opportunity to work with a prominent and well-established Bengali writer called Shaheen Akter. She intends to produce an anthology, entitled *Women in Bangla Literature*, which is expected to depict the projection of women as well as the overall position of women in Bangla literature. I worked in that project as a novice researcher with the main researcher. Basically the main research focused on Bangla writings such as prose, poetry, songs, folklore and oral literature to produce an anthology. The part of the project that I was associated with is folk literature, that is, folklore and oral literature in which we find projections of everyday life of women in Bangladesh. Bangla literature has a past of about one thousand years and gender issues have always been present in Bangla literature. Specifically gendered roles and the relationships between men and women have been significant in the depiction of women in Bangla literature. The research intends to focus on the portrayal of women characters in terms of their attitudes, aspirations and responsibilities.

As we know the range of folk literature is vast, so the primary researcher has done a kind of selection for her convenience. The selected items were *Biyer Geet*, *Gitika*, *Baromaasi*, *Khonar Bochan*, *Brotokotha*, *Proverbs*, *Rhymes*, and *Folksongs* etc. There are two forms of folk literature written and oral, which are prominent in our rural Bangladeshi culture. I focused on the secondary elements of folk literature, which are available in book form. Due to time constraint, I did not go to the field to collect the folk literature myself. Basically my job was to do a kind of primary selection from published works for the main researcher. I had read *Gitikas* from Chittagong and Mymensingh districts and I made synopses regarding various stories, which are written in the form of *Gitikas* and in addition to this I analyzed the main features of those stories.

In this paper, I will discuss my experiences and contributions of taking part in the process of producing the described research. Basically I will concentrate on the portrayal of women characters in the assigned ballads from Chittagong and Mymensingh districts. Moreover, the relationship of the female characters with other characters, their lifestyles, attitudes, aspirations and above all women's issues will be presented from the perspective of feminism. The related themes of the stories need to be pointed out, but the relationship between men and women and its impact on the women in society will be my priority. The connection between feminist perspectives and the parts of folk literature needs to be pointed out thoroughly. The analysis of the research elements such as Gitikas from Chittagong and Mymensingh districts will define how the analysis of folk literature will satisfy the objectives of the main research. As the branches of folk literature that, I dealt with was composed by men, the portrayal of women characters by male writers will be highlighted in this paper.

As I mentioned earlier, feminist analysis is the most important part of my work. I want to begin this by discussing the emergence of feminism and feminist literary criticism. Toril Moi who works on feminist theory and women's writing defines feminism as "... Political labels indicating support for the aims of the new women's movement which emerged in the late 1960s.... is a specific kind of political discourse: a critical and theoretical practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism."³ In her book *The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism* author Barbara Berg defines feminism

³ Moi, Toril "Feminist, Female, Feminine" *Feminisms*. Ed. Kemp, Sandra and Judith Squires, Oxford University Press, 1997. p-246

It is the freedom to decide her own destiny; freedom from sex-determined roles: freedom from society's oppressive restrictions; freedom to express her thoughts fully and to convert them freely into action. Feminism demands the acceptance of a woman's right to individual conscience and judgment. It postulates that a woman's essential worth stems from her common humanity and does not depend on the other relationships of her life.⁴

The position of women of England in the 19th century was utterly different from the position of women in today's world. Either her father or husband controlled the life of a woman. There was no scope for women to get higher education and better jobs. They could not vote, they could not own property and they were treated with little respect. Marriage was the top most priority of a woman's life. Women were expected to stay at home and take care of their husbands and children. In this regard Memunah Sillah, comments on American writer Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*

What, however, is clear is Fuller's argument for the spirituality of woman, the "immortal being" that is being deprived of its "nature to grow, as an intellect to discern, as a soul to live freely and unimpeded, to unfold such powers as were given to her" by the creator. It is the importance of this immortal soul, or rather, the inability of man to acknowledge its importance, that Fuller sees as the cause of much of

⁴ Barbara Berg qtd in Hooks, Bell "Feminist, Femalee, Feminine" *Feminisms*. Ed. Kemp, Sandra and Judith Squires, Oxford University Press, 1997.p-24

woman's suffering. Marriage, considered compulsory for a woman, "if it be only to find a protector, and a home of her own", is all too often arranged for "convenience and utility" rather than as a "meeting of the souls".⁵

In United States the movement of feminism occurred in two waves- first wave feminism (1830-1920) and second wave feminism (1960 to the present). The first wave of feminism occurred in the 1920's when women fought for the right to vote and the extension of civil rights for women. The second wave of feminism emerged in the 1960's with the widespread growth in educational opportunities for women. This wave of feminism is sometimes referred to as Women's Liberation. This time the movement involved issues of reproductive rights such as birth control and abortion as well as equality in the workplace and female representation in the government.

According to the Glossary of Literary Theory *Litgloss*

Feminist criticism is an approach to literature that seeks to correct or supplement what may be regarded as a predominantly male-dominated critical perspective with a feminist consciousness. Feminist criticism places literature in a social context and uses a broad range of disciplines, including history, sociology, psychology, and linguistics, to provide a perspective sensitive to feminist issues. Feminist theories also attempt to

⁵ Sillah, Memunah "On Woman in the Nineteenth Century". *Transcendentalism*. 7th Jan 2007. <<http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/authors/fuller/sillahonfuller.html>>

understand representation from a woman's point of view and to explain women's writing strategies as specific to their social conditions.⁶

Toril Moi says that feminist criticism is not likely to be associated with the idea of being female.

According to her

If feminist criticism is characterized by its political commitment to the struggle against all forms of patriarchy and sexism, it follows that the very fact of being female does not necessarily guarantee a feminist approach.... It is a truism, but it still needs to be said that not all books written by women on women writers exemplify anti-patriarchal commitment. This is particularly true for many early works on women writers, which often indulge in precisely the kind of patriarchal stereotyping feminists, want to combat. A female tradition in literature or criticism is not necessarily a feminist tone.⁷

The author Cheri Register in this regard says that

... feminist writing should express female experience authentically, but also that authors should not feel obligated to offer an exact representation of their own lives... the text should express a representative female experience which we, the readers, can accept as an authentic reflection of our lives. And each individual woman should be

⁶ "Litgloss". *Bedfordstmartins*. 3rd Jan 2007. <<http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/litgloss/>>

⁷ qtd in Moi 246

struggling to find her own true identity, for which task strong, independent female characters may provide inspiring role models.⁸

British writer Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) is regarded as the first feminist text of women's effort for equal rights, and therefore it is the first step in awareness for the equality of the sexes. Wollstonecraft was influenced by the principles of the French revolution regarding the equal rights of individuals. In this text Wollstonecraft pitches her writing to middle class women. She states that a false system of education exists in society, which teaches women to make themselves alluring. According to her women are inferior to men physically not in terms of intellect or talent. The writer condemns women for being sentimental and not being able to curb their emotions.

The conduct and manners of women, in fact, evidently prove that their minds are not in a healthy state; for like the flowers which are planted in too rich a soil, strength and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty; ...one cause of this barren blooming I attribute to a false system of education, gathered from the books written on this subject by men who, considering female rather as women than human creatures, have been more anxious to make them alluring mistresses than affectionate wives and rational mothers;⁹

⁸ Eagleton, Mary; *Feminist Literary Theory A Reader*, 2nd edition. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.p-151

⁹Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Boston, 1792.p-101

Later on *A Room of One's Own* (1929) by British writer Virginia Woolf is an important piece of feminist literary criticism. Here, Virginia Woolf argues that the male dominated patriarchal society prevents women from realizing and exposing their talents and potential in literary fields. Women should have financial independence to afford a room and a fixed income to pursue their talents. She believes that if women were given the financial sources and freedom available to men, they would be as productive.

In the first place, to have a room of her own, let alone a quiet room or a sound-proof room, was out of the question, unless her parents were exceptionally rich or very noble, even up to the beginning of the nineteenth century.... Such material difficulties were formidable; but much worse were the immaterial. The indifference of the world which Keats and Flaubert and other men of genius have found so hard to bear was in her case not indifference but hostility.¹⁰

In the essay *Professions for Women* Virginia Woolf states that she had to kill "the Angel in the House" in order to write her novels and critical works. She argues that the very fact of being a woman has always been an obstacle for women to exercise their literary talent. She describes the difficulties of being a female writer in those days. To be a writer one has to destroy the conventional image of a housewife and mother. In other words, women writers have to pursue their dreams of being a writer wholeheartedly and exercise their talent to reach to their success.

¹⁰ Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*, Cambridge University Press, 1988. p-59

And while I was writing this review, I discovered that if I were going to review books I should need to do battle with a certain phantom. And the phantom was a woman, and when I came to know her better I called her after the heroine of a famous poem, The Angel in the House. It was she who used to come between me and my paper when I was writing reviews. It was she who bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her.¹¹

Again she adds to her lecture

Had I not killed her she would have killed me. She would have plucked the heart out of my writing. For, as I found, directly I put pen to paper, you cannot review even a novel without having a mind of your own, without expressing what you think to be the truth about human relations, morality, sex. And all these questions, according to the Angel of the House, cannot be dealt with freely and openly by women... Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer.¹²

Since this paper is based on Bengali folk literature, I want to mention the contribution of prominent writer and feminist Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain to the path of establishing equal gender rights in the society. She strongly criticizes the traditional approaches of society to women through her writings and the way Bengali Muslim society inhibits women from acquiring

¹¹ Woolf, Virginia. *The Death of the Moth: And other Essays*, New York, 1980

¹² *ibid*

education. According to her, instead of covering about half of the population, women lag behind for not having the equal social acceptance and rights in the society. She strongly believes that education is the only device for women to remove all the discrimination and women are themselves responsible for putting an end to the enforced slavery of their life. She introduces Bengali women to the world outside the bundles of saris and ornaments and encourages them to come out of the boundaries of patriarchal social frameworks. She says, "We constitute half of the population. How will society move forward if we remain backward? How far can a man limp if one of his legs is tied? Our interest is not different from men's—it is the same. We have the same goals in life."¹³ Again she says, "we cannot attain anything by merely wishing for it; one has to work hard for it. Nobody is going to come to our doorsteps with pitchers full of knowledge just because we thirst for it. The fountain does not come to the thirsty; it is the thirsty that must proceed towards the fountain."¹⁴

Feminist literary critics have established the novel, as the special field for women's writings. Most of the novels written in the 19th century by women used the home as the central image, because, like their heroines, female writers were almost utterly confined to the home. As they were isolated especially from social, political and economic activities, the experiences of female writers were not as broad as their male counterparts.

In this regard the author Terry Lovell says,

¹³ Moudud, Baby "Pabitra Rokeya Path" *The Daily Star* December 8, 2006

¹⁴ *ibid*

In terms of masculine\ feminine poles of ideology, novel-writing is deeply ambivalent, like all categories of so called creative writing. It is paid work, work for breadwinners; and despite recurrent male complaints of female competition, it is dominated by men.¹⁵

Mary Eagleton says,

Because the novel's genesis lay partly in forms of writing familiar to women- the diary, the journal, letters- the form could seem more accessible and approachable... the novel was often considered and still is an appropriate form for women.¹⁶

Now I will discuss the connection between feminist literary criticism and the practice of folklore by women. At first I will start with the definitions of Gitika. *Gitika* is known as ballad in English. It is said that Dr. Dinesh Chandra Sen first introduced this term to describe *Pala Gaan*. Gitika is also known as *Gatha*. Basically *Gatha* means narrative poems. We can also consider Gathas to be narrative folk tales.

Dr. Ashraf Siddiqui asserts in the introduction of *Mymensingh-Gitika*

If we consider ancient Sanskrit poetry as the aristocracy of literature then Jatra and Pala Gaan should be the feudalism of literature and Gathas are absolute democracy of literature because Gatha Gaan are created by the

¹⁵ Lovell, Terry. "Writing Like a Woman: A Question of Politics" *Feminist Literary Theory A Reader*, Ed. Mary Eagleton, 2nd edition. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996:83

¹⁶ qtd in Eagleton, 88

people, for the people and of the people, these are creation of the masses rather than the classes.¹⁷

There was social motivation behind creating these Gitikas. In this regard, Dr. Ashraf Siddiqui says “if Gittika is only used as an equipment to propagate religion, if it lacks the appeal of love of if it never get extended in folk tradition then we are not able to include these to our folk literature.”¹⁸ Gitikas are composed in the language of the local people, which has a strong oral tradition. Most probably Bangla Gitikas were composed in the 16th century. But most of the Gitikas have been collected in this century and many changes and expansions have occurred in this long period of time.

Md. Shahidur Rahman who is a professor of Bangla literature has given a list of some traits of Gathas and Gitikas.

1. These are folk songs, which are introduced by common people.
2. Singers used to sing and dance with these songs.
3. These are based on one single story.
4. These songs have simple and lucid language.
5. Repetition is a common trait of these songs.
6. Both of these are narrative.

¹⁷Sen, Sridineshchandra, and Rai Bahadur, *Mymensingh Gitika*, Banglabazar: Sikdar Abul Bashar, 1995. p-4 (my translation)

¹⁸ *ibid*, 7 (my translation)

7. Sometimes the traits of the play remain in these songs.¹⁹

If we analyze the features of Gitikas, we find some similarities between a novel and Gitikas. It appears that the essence of narrative stories remain in both the novels and Gitikas. As we know through a novel the writer can express the thoughts, expressions and feelings more profoundly, the writer can prolong the novel accordingly. On the other hand poetry requires more creativity and sophistication, as the poet has to follow the rhyme, rhythm, and stress while composing a poem. But Gitikas are narrative folk tales, which are composed in the form of poems. We can define Gitikas as something in between poetry and novel, as it has both the qualities of a poem and a novel. Gitikas are always based on one single story. According to feminist literary critics, novel has been the special field for women's writing where women writers highlight the private lives of women characters. Mary Eagleton says "...novels could be viewed dismissively as the best that women were capable of: men study classics; women amuse themselves with novels."²⁰ Generally composing poetry requires full concentration, which was not easy for women to provide, as they were busy performing household activities. Similarly in the Gitikas women characters are centered on family life and household. Therefore the qualities of a novel are present in Gitika but we get more variations in Gitika. They are associated with singing and dancing as a part of entertainment.

The relationship between feminism and the features of folklore is very relative and intimate. If we consider the history of folklore, we find the presence and contribution of women is very

¹⁹ Rahman, Shahidur; *Mymensingh Gittikai Nari Choritrer Shorup*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy press, 1998 (my translation)

²⁰ qtd in Eagleton, 88

much present in terms of pursuing traditional rituals such as *Biyer Geet*, *Mangal Gitika*, *Baromashi*, *Brotokotha* etc. Women used to compose songs for observing the rituals or customary occasions from the middle ages. Not only that, women used to compose songs on the basis of their daily affairs, physical attributes, suppressed feelings, blessings for new brides or family functions. They represent their own happinesses, sorrows, pains, sacrifices and agony through their songs. We know that feminist writing is based on female experiences or characterizations, not necessarily written or composed by women writers. Male writers with extensive elaboration of female characters and their experiences basically composed Gitikas and Rupkothas. As we know, most of the Gitikas are based on one single story, and it requires the emergence of female characters. The existence of female characters makes the Gitikas self-sufficient and credible.

There are Gitikas where the main plots are centered on the female characters. In this regard, I want to focus on Mymensingh Gitikas where female characters such as Mohua, Molua, Chandraboti, Kajolrekha etc play the vital role in the Gitikas. Not only that these, Gitikas are also named after those central female characters. In Mymensingh Gitikas female characters stand for fidelity, virtuosity, honesty and sacrifice for love. According to American writer Margaret Fuller marriage was the prior commitment of a woman's life in the nineteenth century. We get the similar kind of reflection in the life of heroines of the Gitikas like *Molua*, *Chandraboti* and *Kajolrekha* etc.

We know that feminist literary critics discovered that the female characters of nineteenth century novels are basically centered in the home. Similarly, the female characters of these Gitikas are

also busy maintaining the family life. These characters completely devote themselves to pursuing the love for their beloved male counterparts. They are confined to the four walls of their home. They are not involved in any kind of productive works, which require intellect or talent. If I consider the perception of one of the pioneers of feminism Mary Wollstonecraft, I can easily relate them to my research observations. Male writers are concerned in making the female characters 'woman' and the biological differences of being a woman have been highlighted in these Gitikas. The female characters are getting the 'false education' to make themselves alluring and capable of attracting perfect bridegrooms. The most important part in the portrayal of these female characters is based on the common notion of people that women are fragile, weak and insignificant creatures, who need to be protected by their strong male counterparts.

In this regard I want to mention the observations of Italian thinker Gramsci on culture and literature. Literature can be manipulated to establish a set of values and beliefs to control people and society. Gradually people start believing and accepting these concepts without question. Gramsci uses a term called *hegemony* that views and evaluates things and people from the perspective of a dominant group or class. Basically it serves the interests of the powerful group by getting social consent. Edward Said says in his book *Orientalism*

Culture, of course, is to be found operating within civil society, where the influence of ideas, of institutions, and of other persons works not through domination but by what Gramsci calls consent. In any society not totalitarian, then certain cultural forms predominate over others, just as certain ideas are more influential than others; the form of this cultural

leadership is what Gramsci identified as hegemony, an indispensable concept for any understanding of cultural life in the industrial West.²¹

I find that female characters of the Gitikas I have researched on are socially constructed and are part of a patriarchal hierarchy. Through the characterizations of women characters, the authors of these Gitikas satisfy the patriarchal framework and stereotypical mindset. In our society generally the identity of a woman is determined by her relationship with a male such as somebody's daughter, wife or sister. Not only that, in these Gitikas women's physical attributes are mostly highlighted than their individuality. The identity of a woman is mostly associated with her superficial portion called 'Sundori'. We are habituated to see woman as someone fragile, submissive, and utterly dependent on her male counterpart. So we can say that the characterization of female characters mainly reflects the core conceptions about women in our society. The authors try to project the scenario that we can easily identify with our life.

²¹ Said, Edward; *Orientalism*, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd 1978. p-134

Chapter 2– Chittagong Gitikas

The anthology, entitled *Women in Bengali Literature*, not only focuses on writings by women writers but also writings by male writers about women. In this way, it is going to be a unique piece of work. The research that I took part was basically writings produced by male writers and mainly the depiction of women characters is made from the perspectives of male writers. As I mentioned earlier, Gitikas from Chittagong and Mymensingh districts were my concentration in that research. In this chapter, I will focus on Chittagong Gitikas and take an attempt to glean the portrayal of women characters in terms of their biological differences, standard of living, the struggle of upholding family and social values, the restrictions of observing women's rights within a patriarchal framework etc. In this regard, I will focus on the projection of women characters' personal lives, sexual lives, family lives and so on.

Chittagong Gitika is a collection of folk ballads from the Chittagong region. A collection of these Gitikas has been published by the Bangla Academy. The most common themes of these Gitikas are the practice of polygamy and its effects on women, the practice of infidelity, love at first sight between young hearts, the friendship between co-wives, the utter submissiveness of women characters towards the husband, a mother's spontaneous love for children etc. The Chittagong Gitikas that I will focus on in this paper are *Pachtola Konna*, *Dukhraj and Sukhraj*, *Surjomoni Konna*, *Chanmoni Surjomoni*, and *Manik Soudagor*.

I have gone through eight Gitikas from Chittagong district from which I have selected five Gitikas for the analysis in this paper. The following table will show the procedure of my selection of Chittagong Gitikas. The reason I exclude *Khulana Konna*, *Delobor Kumerer Pala* and *Hiralal Poddmoni* is basically repetition of themes such as utter dependence on male character, idealized physical beauty of female characters, the lament for not getting married on time, the sense of faithfulness and plight of woman character to establish chastity etc.

The name of total number of assigned Gitikas	The selected Gitikas	Common themes in these Gitikas
Pachtola Konna	Pachtola Konna	The painful experiences of childless couples, the practice of polygamy and its effects on women, the continuous lament for a son, the sense of faithfulness and chastity, the lament of female character for not getting married on time, internal conflict between co-wives etc.
Dukhraj and Sukhraj	Dukhraj and Sukhraj	Traditional approach of stepmother towards stepchildren, infidelity, the sense of faithfulness and chastity, friendship between

		co-wives, a mother's spontaneous love for children etc.
Surjomoni Konna	Surjomoni Konna	The violation of the bondage between siblings, the utter submissiveness towards the husband etc.
Chanmoni Surjomoni	Chanmoni Surjomoni	The separation pain between a mother and children, spontaneous mother's love for children, negligence for baby daughter etc.
Manik Soudagor	Manik Soudagor	The sense of faithfulness and chastity, the plight of a woman character to establish chastity etc.
Khulana Konna		
Delobor Kumerer Pala		
Hiralal Poddmoni		

Pachtola Konna

The story of *Pachtola Konna* starts with the marriage between the king Arab Singh and Afima Sundori. One of the most common features of these Gitikas is labeling women's name with the term *Sundori*.

হাউস গড়ি অউখা কন্যা তিনি কইল্য বিয়া

শুণ অনুপাম-

আফিমা সুন্দরী বুলি সেই কন্যার নাম।²²

(পাঁচতোলা কন্যা, চট্টগ্রাম গীতিকা-২, পৃ-৪)

The king remains childless even after three years so he chooses to get married again. But unfortunately the king remains childless even after marrying another woman. The desire for a son leads Arab Singh to marry four times. The lament of the king for a child really expresses the desire for a son and the universal appeal of a son.

একে একে তিনটি নারী আই কইল্যাম বিয়া

শুন সদাই

আমার ঔরসে বুলি পুত্র-কন্যা নাই।

বলি বার বার

একপুত্র বিনে মোর দুনিয়াত আঁধার।

(পাঁচতোলা কন্যা, পৃ-৪)

²² Chowdhury, Momen, Bangla Academy Folklore Sonkolon: 55 *Chittagong Gitika-2*, Dhaka, Bangla Academy, 1993

In our social context, specifically in a rural community childless couples are not accepted easily and this lack of acceptance adds to their mental agony. In *Pachtola Konna*, the king is not treated well by the sweeper because of his inability to become a father.

বেয়ানে উঠিয়া দেখি আটকুইর্গা বাদশার মুখ

কাজিয়া কাজিয়ায় দিন যায় মনের নাই সুখ ।

এই দেশত থাইলে আঁধার নাই ভালাই

এই দেশ ছাড়ি চল অন্য দেশত যাই ।

(পাঁচতোলা কন্যা, পৃ-৭)

The practice of polygamy is obvious here and it leads to internal family conflict between co-wives. Generally women are the victims of this practice. We know that biologically men are responsible for determining the gender of a child. But in this Gitika female characters are projected as commodity which is expected to be able to produce child specifically son. We can say that the practice of polygamy carries out by the male characters to satisfy their hunger to a son. The king Arab Singh gets more attracted towards his youngest wife Jamina as she reveals her utter faithfulness and devotion towards her husband. The expressions of faithfulness ultimately make Jamina a fragile and submissive character. The way she pleads to her husband virtually represents her sense of slavery to her husband.

স্বামী স্বর্গ স্বামী মর্ত্য স্বামী সে পাতাল

স্বামী জল স্বামী স্থল স্বামী কালাকাল

দিবানিশি থাকি সঙ্গে সেবিব চরণ

তুমি বিনে অভাগিনীর বিফল জীবন ।

(পাঁচতোলা কন্যা, পৃ-৯)

Jamina claims that if she is a virtuous woman she will definitely be able to produce a son.

বাদশার চরণ ছুঁই বলিতে লাগিল
আর কিছুদিন ছবুর কর ভাবি নিরঞ্জন
আমি যদি সতী হই পাইবা পুত্রধন
সতী নারীর পতি যেন পর্বতের চূড়া
অসতীর পতি যেন ভাঙ্গা নৌকার গুড়া

(পাঁচতোলা কন্যা, পৃ-৯)

Jamina expresses her helplessness and anxiety at being left alone at the news of her husband's departure. Not only that, she is also worried about the restlessness she feels because of her youth. Her way of expression ultimately shows her sexual desires. I think her bold expression makes her different from her other co-wives.

বিয়া করি আইনলা মোরে শুন খবর
আজই অবধি নত পুরাইল বিয়ার বছর
.....
.....
কি হালে রাইখ্যম আমার নবীন যৌবনী ।
মায়ে বাপে বিয়া দিল বাদশাহ জামাই চাই
রসের যৌবন অনাথিনী কারে দিমু বিলাই ।

(পাঁচতোলা কন্যা, পৃ-৮)

Arab Singh brings miraculous banana for his wives, which is supposed to be eaten by the co-wives equally in order to have a son. But the first two wives of the king get involved in a conspiracy against Jamina as she gets more attention from the king. They do not let Jamina have the banana and make the king believe that Jamina is unfaithful. They bring a false charge against Jamina of bearing an illegitimate son and exile her to a deep forest.

জাউর্গা পোয়া পেডত লই আঁর লয় গড়ছ ছল

বরর কলা খাতি কইলাম তুই কা খালি বাকল।

জল্পাদ আসিয়া তবে না কইল্য গ্লান।

.....
আন্দরতুন ছোট বিবিরে টানি লইয়া গঁই।

পাপে বুঝি পাপিনীয়ে কইর্গেয়ে নিধন।

(পাঁচতোলা কন্যা, পৃ-২০)

One of the most common incidents in these Gitikas is loss of female chastity. The women are not allowed to explain their situation and the male partners put the blame on them and they accept the judgments without question. In *Pachtola Konna*, we get a picture of the lack of faith and commitment from a husband towards his wife and Arab Singh is portrayed as an absolutely gullible person. Jamina is sent to a deep forest and eventually finds shelter in a carpenter's house and gives birth to a baby son called Chittro Singh. Chittro Singh meets his soul mate Pachtola Konna in course of time. The narrator idealizes the physical beauty of Pachtola Konna. The description is utterly associated with sexual desire.

হাসিতে বিজলীর রেখা মুখে ঝরে লাল
থাকুক যুবকের কথা পাগল হয় ছাবাল ।
আশি বছইর্গা বুইর্গা পাগল হইয়া যায়
বচন শুনিতে কন্যার কোকিলার রায় ।
কমল কলিকা পুষ্প বক্ষের উপর
মানে কয় ডালে বসি করিতে চুম্বন
চুমুকিয়া সেই মধু করিতে ভইক্ষন ।

(পাঁচতোলা কন্যা, পৃ-৫৮)

They fall in love with each other at first sight and start thinking about each other constantly. This attraction ultimately leads to physical relationship and Pachtola Konna becomes pregnant. Supernatural elements are added to this folk story. For example when Arab Singh goes for a business trip, he does not take Jamina's permission. Consequently, he has a dream where he is asked to take permission from Jamina otherwise his boat would be stuck in the middle of the river.

যামিনা কন্যার মাড়া যদি আন তবে হইবে ভাল
নতুবা চৈদ্ৰ ডিঙ্গা লই তোমার ঠেকির জঞ্জাল
এই কথা কাই আমি শুন হয় রে হয়
যামিনার সাড়া না আইনলে ডিঙ্গা ছুইটত নয় ।

(পাঁচতোলা কন্যা, পৃ-৩২)

Through this incident Jamina is given a kind of voice or importance by the narrator. Not only that, when Jamina suggests to her father to sell the wood in the market for their betterment, we find her exercising her intellect. Basically the narrator makes the female characters feel that their lives are centered on getting married, make a family and keep on trying to save their chastity throughout the life. However, there are certain points in the *Gitika* when female characters express their own individuality.

Dukhraj and Sukhraj

In the *Gitika Dukhraj and Sukhraj*, king Sultan is aware of the bitter experience of having more than one wife.

দুইজন বউ ঘরত্ রাখি কাডাইয়াম কাল

চুলাচুলি হইতে পারে বাজিব জঞ্জাল

.....

দুই বিয়া গইল্যে শান্তি মোটে পাইতাম নয় ।

.....

দুই নারী রিয়া গইল্যে দুখে যাইবে কাল²³

(দুঃখরাজ ও সুখরাজ, চট্টগ্রাম গীতিকা-২, পৃ-১০৩)

But he cannot resist the fact that he needs an owner of his property and only his son can make him proud.

²³ Chowdhury, Momen, Bangla Academy Folklore Sonkolon: 55 *Chittagong Gitika-2*, Dhaka, Bangla Academy, 1993

পুত্র কন্যা বিনে তোমার কন আ উপাই নাই ।

বাপর ঘরে আছ তুমি কর বাদশাগিরি

চিরকালত না থাকিবা একদিন যাইবা মরি ।

.....

যদি একটি ছেলে হয় কি কাজ হইব

স্বদেশে বিদেশে তোমার নাম প্রচার হইব ।

(দুঃখরাজ ও সুখরাজ, চট্টগ্রাম গীতিকা-২, পৃ-১০৫)

In this Gitika, we get the description of friendship between two co wives Akima and Mukima for bearing a child and making their husband happy. The friendship between co-wives is unusual in our social context but these two women make a compromise between themselves.

পুত্র কন্যা বিনে তারার দুনিয়া আঁধার

পুত্রের অভাব কন্যা চিত্ত ক্ষেমা দিয়া

হলাহল বিষ খাইল সতীন ঘরে লইয়া ।

দুই বিবি এক ঘরে গুন দিয়া মন

সদাই চলে তারা এক ভইনের মতন

কেয়ার উয়র কেয়ার হিংসা পিন নাই

দুই নারী ভাবনা করে এক পুত্র লাই ।

(দুঃখরাজ ও সুখরাজ, চট্টগ্রাম গীতিকা-২, পৃ-১০৮)

In *Dukhraj and Sukhraj*, we get a portrayal of the destructive nature of women's character. The character called Diborni is called a 'witch' and she appears to be a cannibal.

মনুষ্য দেখিয়া রাইক্ষসিনী বুঝ করে অন্তরে
মনুষ্য গোস্ত খাইয়ম আজিয়া পেড়ে যেন ধরে ।
আজিয়া মনুষ্য খাইয়ম উদর ভরিয়া
সাতদিন নিদ্রা যাইয়ম পরান শান্তাইয়া ।
(দুঃখরাজ ও সুখরাজ, চট্টগ্রাম গীতিকা-২, পৃ-১১৩)

She captivates the king through her irresistible charms and this attraction leads to a physical relationship between them.

এই কামিনী ছাইল্যে আমার জীবন বাঁচত নয়
.....
তোর লাগি যাইয়ম আমি নিজের রাজ্যত ফিরি ।
দুই বিবি যাকগই আমার পায়ের বালাই লই
দিক নিশি থাক্যম আমি তুই সুন্দরীরে লই ।
(দুঃখরাজ ও সুখরাজ, চট্টগ্রাম গীতিকা-২, পৃ-১১৭)

Consequently, we get the presence of Diborni in the palace and she takes over the charge of the palace. King Sultan spends most of the time with his new wife and expresses his complete tenderness to Diborni. She snatches Sukhraj away, who is a son of Akima and out of jealousy she sets him a drift in the river.

সতীনের পুত্র হইলে শুন সমাচার
রাইক্ষসিসীর অন্তর হইল বিষে জড়জড় ।

সতীনের পুত্র হইয়ে জানিতে পারিয়া

আউলামতি হইয়ে রাইক্ষসিনী ক্রোধমতি হইয়া,

.....

.....

বুকের ছাবাল কাড়ি আনি পাতিলা ভরিয়া

অকূল সাইগরের মধ্যে দিল ভাসাইয়া

(দুঃখরাজ ও সুখরাজ, চট্টগ্রাম গীতিকা-২, পৃ-১২২)

She sends Akima to the forest after imposing a false blame on her and Akima's husband king Sultan also behaves like an insensible person. Diborni switches the baby Sukhraj with the wooden witch doll.

আকিমার ঘরে যাই নিরক্ষিয়া চায়

রাইক্ষসর মুরতি বইলছে হায়রে হায়

.....

.....

তোর বাপে ফন্দি করি মনেতে ভাবিয়া

তুই রাইক্ষসিনীরে মোরে দিল বিয়া

আমি যদি রাজ্যের বাদশা এই নাম রাখিব

আঘোর জঙ্গলে তোরে আজিয়া পাঠাইব।

(দুঃখরাজ ও সুখরাজ, চট্টগ্রাম গীতিকা-২, পৃ-১৩১)

The female characters of the Gitika shower their spontaneous and selfless love on their children even if they are not their own children. In *Dukhraj and Sukhraj*, we get a character called

Lalmoti who nourishes Sukhraj without any earthly desires. She even accepts the blame of infidelity of being a virgin mother of Sukhraj out of love for the child.

কোলে উঠাই সেই যাদুৱে বলে হয় রে হয়

এই যাদু কার গৰ্ভে ধৰিল নিশ্চয়

.....

যে হক সে হক আমার নছিবর পরে

এই যাদুৱে রাইখ্যম আমি আদর করে।

(দুঃখরাজ ও সুখরাজ, চট্টগ্রাম গীতিকা-২, পৃ-১২৭)

In these Gitikas we get female characters expressing their sexual desires with spontaneity and full spirit. Therefore we can say that the female characters are allowed to exercise their freewill in this regard. They are not asked to suppress their sexual desire or expression of emotions. In this Gitika, Jorina is a stunning looking girl who is only twelve years old. She conveys the restlessness and loneliness she feels in the absence of her beloved and she cannot resist the appeal of her youth. She blames her parents for being unable to arrange her marriage on time. She is longing for the happiness and enjoyment of being united with her future beloved.

জরিনা কন্যা বুলি হাউসে রাইখ্যেল নাম।

বার বছইর্গা কন্যা আছে বাপর ঘরে

দিবানিশি যৌবন জ্বালা আছে অন্তরে

স্বামী বিনে বিরহিনী থাকে একেলা

ক্ষেনে ক্ষেনে উঠে কন্যার বিরহের জ্বালা

মনে কইত ঝাঁপ দিত যমুনার জলে

বৈয়া কল্যা মা-বাপত্তে লজ্জা সরম নাই

রিয়া নদি রাইথে মোরে ধন-সম্পদের লাই।

(দুঃখরাজ ও সুখরাজ, চট্টগ্রাম গীতিকা-২, পৃ-১৮১)

Surjomoni Konna

In *Surjomoni Konna*, Komolbosku and Komoljan are siblings and both of them come to the community of king Hamard in disguise. Komoljan who is a female character changes her feminine outfit to that of a soldier. In this way, she appears to be a male character to the community and somehow she gains the authority that male characters possess in these Gitikas.

ভাই ভাইন দুইজনে কইত্ব চায় দেখা

.....

পোশাক বদলী লইল সিপাহীর ভেশ

ভাই ভাইন এ কই সাথে চলিত লাগিল

কন নারী কন পুরুষ কেহাই টের ন পাইল²⁴

(সূর্যমণী কইন্যা, চট্টগ্রাম গীতিকা-১, পৃ-৩৩)

She continues her role of a soldier but Hamrad king recognizes her identity and he reveals his notions of love, which is based on physical attraction, which leads them to establish physical relationship with each other.

²⁴ Chowdhury, Momen, Bangla Academy Folklore Sonkolon: 54 *Chittagong Gitika-1*, Dhaka, Bangla Academy, 1993

বার বৎসর হইয়ে কন্যার যৌবন হইয়ে পুরা
কান্তমনি ঘরে নাইরে রসের ভোমরা ।
কমল কলিকা পুষ্প রইয়াছে ফুটিয়া
ভোমর বিনে সেই মধু কে খাইবে বসিয়া ।
বার বৎসর হইয়ে কন্যার যৌবন হইয়ে অতি
চমকি উমকি পড়ের যৌবনের আকৃতি ।
(সূর্যমণী কইন্যা, চট্টগ্রাম গীতিকা-১, পৃ-৩৮)

Gradually, king Hamrad exposes himself as a deplorable character who uses Komoljan as a device to satisfy his wishes. Komoljan gets involved in a conspiracy against his brother in the process of hiding her relationship with king Hamrad. She and her husband send Komolbosku to perform daunting tasks. She violates the bondage between siblings by turning her brother Komolbosku to a lizard.

ভাই ভাই করিয়া কমলজানে ধরিল বেড়াই
কানর গোড়াত দাবাই আন দিলরে গুঁজাই ।
কানর গোড়াতে যখন দিলরে দাবাই
টুকটুকী হইয়া তখন সেইয়েগই পোলাই ।
(সূর্যমণী কইন্যা, চট্টগ্রাম গীতিকা-১, পৃ-৬১)

The character called Surjomoni Konna reveals her utter dependence and submissiveness to her husband Komolbosku. Not only that, she is under a false impression that by proving her chastity

she will be able to make her husband return to her. She expresses her desperation over the situation when she is left alone without shelter.

সূর্যমণী দেখি তবে হইয়া আনমন
সোয়ামীর লাগিয়া তবে জুইগেরে কান্দন ।
কার লাগি আসিলাম আমি বাপের রাজ্য ছাড়ি
কার লাগি হইলামরে আল্লাহ নগরের ভিখারী ।
কার হাতে সপি দিলামরে আল্লাহ অভাগিনীর যৌবন
কেমনে রাখিব এইবার নারীর জীবন ।
(সূর্যমণী কইন্যা, চট্টগ্রাম গীতিকা-১, পৃ-৬১)

Chanmoni Surjomoni

In *Chanmoni Surjomoni*, we come across a character called Champaboti who plays the role of a stepmother. The narrator depicts the traditional insincere approach of a stepmother through this character. Though initially the narrator portrays her as a caring mother, gradually she becomes an unreliable character. She becomes unfaithful in her husband's absence. She ignores her responsibility towards the children because she spends time with the king's assistant. In the previous Gitikas we find that the people around women impose baseless charges against them. But in this Gitika the charges are based on truth and Champaboti carries the blame throughout the Gitika.

অহরে প্রাণের উজির শুন নিবেদন
তোমার লাগিয়া আমার নিষ্ঠি জ্বলে মন ।
মহারানীর কথা শুনি তার মন হইল খুশী

.....
বামনে পাইলে যেন আকাশের শশী²⁵

(চানমনি ও সূর্যমণী, চট্টগ্রাম গীতিকা-১, পৃ-৮৬)

There is another female character Roti who is the caregiver of Chanmoni and Surjomoni in this Gitika. She saves the siblings from the trap of their stepmother and sends them to another country far away from the evil shadow of Champaboti.

দুই যাদুরে ধীরে ধীরে কহিতে লাগিল

অহরে যাদুমনি গুন তাড়াতাড়ি

দুই যাদু ধাই যাগই বাপের রাজ্য ছাড়ি।

এই দেশত থাইলে তৌরার নত হইবে ভাল

পইশাতে আরার হুঙ্কা ঘাটব জঞ্জাল।

(চানমনি ও সূর্যমণী, চট্টগ্রাম গীতিকা-১, পৃ-৯২)

I think the most beautiful depiction of this Gitika is the celebration of motherhood by the narrator. Chanmoni and Surjomoni's actual mother dies at the beginning of this Gitika. The narrator depicts the overwhelming feelings of the mother, which is based on upcoming separation from her children and anxiety about their upbringing.

²⁵ Chowdhury, Momen, Bangla Academy Folklore Sonkolon: 54 *Chittagong Gitika-1*, Dhaka, Bangla Academy, 1993

দুই যাদু ডাকি রানী বুকের উপর লইয়া

স্বামীরে কয় কথা কাঁদিয়া কাঁদিয়া

.....

কইলজাত ছিঁড়ি যারগই বাচনর আশা কই?

দুধ খাবাই যাদুরে করিলাম ডাঙ্গর

যাদু এড়ি যাইরগই করিয়া ছেমর ।

(চানমনি ও সূর্যমণী, চট্টগ্রাম গীতিকা-১, পৃ-৭৯)

Chanmoni and Surjomoni also long for the mother's love and their way of expression reflects the eternal nature of a mother and child relationship. The universal appeal of being attached with the mother has been depicted beautifully.

কোথায় গেল মা জননী আমরারে ছাড়িয়া

এই ভাবে বিলাপ করে যাদু দুইজন কাঁদিয়া কাঁদিয়া

এই সময়ে জননী থাকিত যদি না হইত মরণ

জননী বিহনে আঁরার কুফল্যা জীবন ।

কাঁদি কাঁদি দুই ভাই ঘরর বাহির হইয়া

প্রভুর নাম লই যারগই জঙ্গলে চলিয়া ।

(চানমনি ও সূর্যমণী, চট্টগ্রাম গীতিকা-১, পৃ-৯৩)

Manik Soudagor

In the Gitika *Manik Soudagor* we find that the character Manik Soudagor goes for a business trip leaving his wife Sonai in charge of his mother. Both Manik Soudagor and Sonai feel the urge to meet each other secretly and get consequently united. After meeting his wife Manik Soudagor forgets to close the door of his wife's room. And this mistake brings the charge of being unfaithful on Sonai. Manik Soudagor is aware of his mistake, but he does not come back to clarify the situation. He knows that his wife Sonai would have to pay the cost of losing her chastity. In this case we find that a woman is being blamed and ultimately punished for the mistake of her male counterpart.

মানিক সাধু উঠি বলে শুন কই থিয়া

আমিত চলি আইলাম দরজা না বান্ধিয়া

ফজরে উঠিয়া যদি মায়ে টের পাইব

বিনা দোষে সোনাই কন্যারে বধির

.....

রাত্রিকালে দরজা খোলা মায় দেখে মুদি

অসতী বুলি কইব মায় কন্যার কন গতি।²⁶

(মানিক সওদাগর, চট্টগ্রাম গীতিকা-১, পৃ-১৭৭)

²⁶ Chowdhury, Momen, Bangla Academy Folklore Sonkolon: 54 *Chittagong Gitika-1*, Dhaka, Bangla Academy, 1993

In this Gitika we find that Sonai tries to clarify her situation and raises her voice against the blame being put on her. This is the first time we find any female character raising her voice against injustice.

স্বামীধন আইস্যেল টঙ্গীত আজ নিশির পরে

পরভাত হইবার আগে তোমাকে বুঝাই

স্বামী মোর গেলগই চলি মোরে না জাগাই।

স্বামীধন চলি গেল মানতে ভাবিয়া

কলঙ্কিনী কইল্য মোরে দরজা ন বান্ধিয়া।

(মানিক সওদাগর, চট্টগ্রাম গীতিকা-১, পৃ-১৭৯)

In this Gitika we come to know another character called Maleka Bibi who gives birth to six daughters and becomes pregnant again. Maleka's husband threatens her that if she gives birth to a baby daughter this time, he will exile her to a forest. But she again gives birth to a baby daughter and this time she plots to steal Sonai's son Muktheadhor to make her husband happy. This is one of the pathetic scenarios of a male dominated society where women are considered as trivial creatures. We can easily identify with the situation in our social context where women are considered to be responsible for producing a baby son.

মালেকা বিবি বুলি সেই বিবির নাম।

নাছিবর ফেঁরে

এক পুত্র ন জন্মিল সেই বিবির উদরে

কইয়ম কারে কি

সেই বিবির গর্ভত হইয়েল মোটে ছুঁয়া বি

বিবিরে রাজায় কয় ক্রোধ দিয়া মন

এইবার যদি মাইয়া হয় তোর গর্ভত

জন্মাইদা দি পাঠাইয়ম আমি তোরে গভীর জঙ্গলত।

(মানিক সওদাগর, চট্টগ্রাম গীতিকা-১, পৃ-১৯২)

After analyzing the Chittagong Gitikas, I can say that the roles of female characters are shown in a traditional approach. They are identified as somebody's daughter or dependent wife and their name is distorted by labeling the term 'Sundori' by the narrator. That means women's physical attributes or sexuality are highlighted more than their intelligence or originality. In this regard Mary Wollstonecraft says

Novels, music, poetry and gallantry, all tend to make women the creatures of sensation, and their character is thus formed in the mould of folly during the time they are acquiring accomplishments; the only improvement they are excited, by their station in society, to acquire. This overstretched sensibility naturally relaxes the other powers of the mind, and prevents intellect from attaining that sovereignty which it ought to attain to render a rational creature useful to others, and content with its own station: for the exercise of the understanding, as life advances, is the only method pointed out by nature to calm the passions.²⁷

²⁷ Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Boston, 1792. p-121

Women characters undergo trial of chastity constantly to prove their faithfulness to their husbands. The dual role of women has been projected in these Gitikas. However, we come to know the aspirations, desires or dreams of the women's characters through their speech. In this way, the narrators convey the celebration of womanhood or motherhood. On the other hand, through the practice of polygamy, the continuous lament for a son, the internal conflict between co-wives or the suspicion of husbands on their wives, we come to know the depiction of exploitation, oppression and objectification of women's characters. The most striking part of the female characterization is that the narrators basically produce absolute positive or negative approach of the characters. The narrators depict some female characters with the qualities of supreme sacrifice, submissiveness, modesty and tolerance. On the other hand, negative characters are shown with ultimate cruelty, jealousy, infidelity and conspiracy. There is a little scope for female characters to exercise their cognitive and rational skills.

Chapter 3– Mymensingh Gitikas

Mymensingh Gitikas were another concentration of my research for the anthology entitled *Women in Bengali Literature*. Through the research I came across the diversity and versatility of Mymensingh Gitikas in terms of characters and allegorical representations. Mymensingh Gitikas are based on the lives of the inhabitants of the Mymensingh region. These Gitikas are mainly based on love stories but there are differences in plots and characterizations. Like Chittagong Gitikas, male writers have mainly composed Mymensingh Gitikas and the depiction of women characters is made from the perspectives of male writers. We get the depiction of the lives of people from both Muslim and Hindu religions. The most common themes are the glorified physical beauty of women, the practice of child marriage, objectification of women, the fight to protest chastity and self-esteem and so on.

In this chapter, I will focus on the projection of women characters in Mymensingh Gitikas such as *Mohua*, *Mohua*, *Chandraboti*, *Komola*, *Kajol Rekha*, and *Firoj Kha Dewan*. Through the title of the Gitikas we see that most of the Gitikas are named after women. The reason I have selected these six Gitikas among others is basically the dimensions in themes and traits of women characters that have helped me to explore the main objective of this research that is to glean the various roles of women play in these Gitikas. Specifically I have selected *Komola* and *Firoj Kha Dewan* to show they are playing two contradicting themes that is women characters' exceeding traditional outlook and their ability to exercise their freedom.

<u>The selected Gitikas</u>	<u>Common themes in these Gitikas</u>
<i>Mohua</i>	The objectification of women, the glorified physical beauty etc.
<i>Mohua</i>	The fight to protest chastity
<i>Chandraboti</i>	The influence of woman over men
<i>Komola</i>	Raising voice against the evil character
<i>Kajol Rekha</i>	The sense of faith in predestination
<i>Firoj Kha Dewan</i>	Breaking the convention, women character is the role of a soldier etc.

Mohua

Mohua is a daughter of a snake charmer called Humra but he is not her real father. Humra snatches her away from her real parents. She is a natural beauty from the very early stage of her life and this fact can be one of the main reasons why she is kidnapped.

ছয় মাসের শিশু কইন্যা পরমা সুন্দরী
রাত্রি নিশাকালে হুমরা তারে করল চুরী
চুরী না কইর্যা হুমরা ছারা গেল দেশ²⁸
(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, মহুয়া, পৃ-৫)

²⁸ Sen, Sridineshchandra, and Rai Bahadur, *Mymensingh Gitika*, Banglabazar: Sikdar Abul Bashar, 1995

Mohua's present father Humra named her daughter 'Mohua Sunundori'. There is a practice of labeling female character's name as 'Sundori'. I think it is done intentionally to make the women characters more alluring to the readers.

সাপের মাথায় যেমন থাইক্যা জলে মনি

যে দেখে পাগল হয় বাইদ্যার নন্দিনী

আগল ডাগল আখিরে আসমানের তারা

তিলেক মাত্র দেখলে কইন্যা না যায় পাশুরা

বাইদ্যার কইন্যার রূপে ভাইরে মুনীর টলে মন।

এই কইন্যা লইয়া বাইদ্যা ভরমে তির ভুবন

পাইয়া সুন্দরী কইন্যা হুঁমরা বাইদ্যার নারী

ভাব্যা চিন্ত্যা নাম রাখল “মহুয়া সুন্দরী”

(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, মহুয়া, পৃ-৫)

Through this description we come to know that Mohua is a stunning looking young girl. But somehow we get the idea that the narrator is idealizing the beauty of a woman and physical attributes are highlighted unnecessarily. Mohua has become one of the major members of the snake charmers' group. Her appealing approach makes her distinct in their group. She has been shown as an object that is supposed to grab people's attention and attract them through her appearance.

কাইন্দ না কাইন্দ না কইন্যা না কান্দিয়ে আর

সেই বাইঈন বেচ্যা দিয়াম তোমার গলায় হার

নয়া বাড়ী লইয়াই বাইদ্যা লাগাইলো উরি
তুমি কইন্যা না থাকলে আবার গলায় ছুরি।
(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, মহুয়া, পৃ-৯)

Not only that she is depicted as a device of gaining success for their team. Her father is utterly dependent on her to make profit.

নতুন একদল বাইদ্যা আইসে তামসা দেখাইবারে
পরম এক সুন্দরী কইন্যা সঙ্গেতে তাহার
জন্মিয়া ভন্নিয়া এমুন দেখি নাইকো আর

বাইদ্যার তামসা করাইতে একশ টেকা লাগে।
(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, মহুয়া, পৃ-৭)

Mohua meets her soul mate in course of time. Love and physical beauty have worked equally to bring about the relationship between two young hearts. Mohua's approach towards her first love is associated with sexual desire.

শুন শুন ভিন দেশী কুমার বলি তোমার ঠাই

নবীন যইবন কইন্যা ভুলা তোমার মন
এক রাতিরে এই কথাটা হইলে বিস্মরন
তুমি তা ভিন দেশী পুরুষ আমি ভিনু নারী
তোমার সঙ্গে কইতে কথা আমি লজজায় মরি।
(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, মহুয়া, পৃ-১০)

Mohua has to go through a trial to establish her notions of love and deep attraction towards her beloved. Initially she remains hesitant to accept her feelings for him. But eventually she accepts her first love and wants to get associated with her beloved Noddar Thakur.

আমি নারী পাগলিনী বন্ধুরে তুমি গলায় মালা
তিলেক মাত্র না দেখিলে হইরে পাগলিনী
পিঞ্জরায় বাঁধিয়া রাখছে পাগলা পঙ্খিনী
ফুল যদি হইতারে বন্ধু ফুল হইতে তুমি
কেশেতে ছাপাই রাখতাম ঝাইড়িয়া বানতাম বেনী
(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, মহুয়া, পৃ-১৪)

Mohua reveals her feelings for Noddar Thakur with spontaneity and gallantry. She is predicting the sheer pain of loneliness and separation from her beloved. Though Mohua feels a deep attraction for Noddar Thakur she curbs her emotion for the time being to keep pace with her family. But through the portrayal she comes across as helpless and dependent. Though Mohua is an active member of their team, she never realizes her importance. She is always taught to be dependent on her male counterparts who think of her only in terms of physical attributes.

আমি যে অবলা নারী আছে কুল মান
বাপের সঙ্গে নাহি গেলে নাহি থাকব মান
পড়্যা রইল বাড়ী জমি পড়্যা রইলা তুমি
কেমন কইর্যা পাগল মনে বান্ধিয়া রাখাম আমি

(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, মহুয়া, পৃ-১৫)

Mohua shows her love for her beloved after they get separated from each other. She stops doing her daily affairs and gets immersed into thinking of her beloved, Noddar Thakur.

নিদ্যা নাই সে যায় কন্যা না ছুঁয়ে ভাত পানি
মাথায় বিষেতে কন্যা হইল পাগলিনী
সর্ব্বাপেক্ষে বাতের বেদনা আইঞ্চল পাতিয়া
ছয় মাস যায় কন্যার কান্দিয়া কান্দিয়া
ভাত নাই সে রাঞ্জে কন্যা খেলায় নাই সে মন
এই রূপ হইয়াছিল কন্যা সংশয় জীবন
(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, মহুয়া, পৃ-২১)

She gets back her life seeing Noddar Thakur after six months. But this time her father wants her to kill him.

উঠ উঠ নদ্যাঠাকুর কত নিদ্রা যাও
অভাগী মহুয়া ডাকে আঁখি মেইল্যা চাও

পাষান বাপে দিল ছুরি তোমায় মারিতে
কিরূপে বধিব তোমায় নাহি লয় চিতে
পাষান আমার মাও বাপ পাষান আমার হিয়া
কেমনে ঘরে যাইবাম ফিইরা তোমারে মারিয়া
(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, মহুয়া, পৃ-২৪)

Mohua is unable to make her father happy, as she can never think of taking his life by herself. Finally she decides to elope with Noddar Thakur regardless of the consequences. Through this attempt she reveals her straightforward attitude and tries to break the conventional social norms.

পইড়া থাকুক বাপ মাও পইড়া থাকুক ঘর
তোমারে লইয়া বন্ধু যাইবাম দেশান্তর
দুই আঁখি যে দিগে যায় যাইবাম সেই খানে
আমার সঙ্গে চল বন্ধু যাইবাম গহীন বনে।
(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, মহুয়া, পৃ-২৫)

Accidentally, Noddar Thakur drowns in the river and Mohua is left alone and taken away by a man called Dusman Saudagor. He tries to tempt Mohua with his sweet words and flattery. He also claims he is the only shelter left for Mohua in this world and nobody will accept her in future. There is a tendency to make a woman character fragile and vulnerable.

এমন যৌবন কন্যা যায় অকারন
আমারে ভজহ কন্যা রাখহ মোর মন
এমন সোনার পানসী তাতে মাঝি নাই
যৌবন চলিয়া গেলে কেউ না দিব ঠাই
ফুলে ভরা মধু কন্যা ফির একেশ্বরী
তোমারে পাইলে আমি বাহা পূর্ণ করি।
(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, মহুয়া, পৃ-২৮)

Finally, Mohua frees herself from this trap and regains her freedom. Mohua brings her beloved Noddar Thakur back to life through her determination and patience. But she does not see the light of dawn yet, as her father eventually finds them. The love story of Mohua does not meet a happy ending rather it turns into a tragedy as her father kills both the young people. The depiction of Mohua is done in a traditional way and the narrator describes her beauty as a tool to have control over others. Though she is confined in a patriarchal society, she effortlessly expresses her limitations of being a woman. The positive side of the plot is that Mohua makes an effort to prove her true feelings through the sacrifice of her own life.

Molua

The story of *Molua* depicts the life of haor inhabitants in Mymensingh region. At the beginning of the *Gitika* we find that Binod, the male protagonist's mother persuades him to go the field and cut the rice. She also reminds him of the period of starvation they go through almost every year. Through her speech we come to know their economic struggle to earn a livelihood and the struggle for survival in the rural context.

উঠ উঠ বিনোদ আরে ডাকে তোমার মাও
চান্দ মুখ পাখলিয়া মাঠের পানে যাও
আর কতকাল থাকবে যাদু ঘরের মাঝে শুইয়া
আইল আইশনারে পানি উভে করল তল
ক্ষেত কিশি ডুবাইয়া দিল না রইল সম্বল
দেশে আইল দুর্গাপূজা জগত জননী

.....

ঘরে নাই সে লক্ষ্মীর দানা লক্ষ্মীপূজার তরে।²⁹

(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, মল্লয়া, পৃ-৪৪)

Binod goes to another country for hunting and earning a livelihood. He meets the female protagonist Molua there. Molua is the twelve year old daughter of a fellow called Hiradhor and she has five brothers. Molua gets concerned about the stranger's situation and she expresses her kindness and wants to take him to her home.

ভিন দেশী পুরুষ বল যাইবে কেথায় আর

বাড়ী নাই ঘররে নাই নাই বাপ-মাই

রাত্রি পোষাইতে কেবা দিব একটুক ঠাই

মনে লয় পুরুষে আমি জাগাই ডাকিয়া

বাপের বাড়ীর পথ আমি তারে দেই দেখাইয়া

(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, মল্লয়া, পৃ-৫০)

After getting up Binod is enchanted at the tenderness of Molua's beauty. Like the previous Gitikas the narrator romanticizes the beauty of Molua.

দেখিল সুন্দর কন্যা জল লইয়া যায়

মেঘের বরন কন্যার গায়েতে লুটায়

এইত কেশ না কন্যার লাখ টাকার মূল

²⁹ Sen, Sridineshchandra, and Rai Bahadur, *Mymensingh Gitika*, Banglabazar: Sikdar Abul Bashar, 1995

শুকনা কাননে যেন মছয়ার ফুল
ডাগল দীঘল আঁখি যার পানে চায়
একবার দেখলে তারে পাগল হইয়া যায়
(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, মলুয়া, পৃ-৫১)

Molua also blushes to see the stranger and she feels attracted to the opposite sex for the first time in her life.

ভিনদেশী পুরুষ দেখি চান্দের মতন
লাজ রক্ত হইল কন্যার পরথম যৌবন।
(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, মলুয়া, পৃ-৫২)

Molua's family is concerned about her marriage, as she is already twelve years old. The practice of child marriage prevails in this Gitika. Neighbours are also busy gossiping on Molua's passing youth and the need of her getting married soon. But her family is searching for an affluent bridegroom who can assure financial security for her.

বার না বছরের কন্যা পরম সুন্দরী
না লইল বিয়া কন্যার চিন্তা মনে ভারী
বাপ-মায় চায় বর রাজার সমান
একমাত্র কন্যা মাও-বাপের পরাণ
কত ঘর আইল গেল পছন্দ না হয়
ভাল ঘরে বিয়া দেওয়া হইল সংশয়
(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, মলুয়া, পৃ-৫৫)

Eventually Binod and Molua get married through a formal marriage proposal through an intermediary. Binod works as a labourer and prepares for the marriage. Women sing traditional *Biyer Geet* along with bride's mother at the marriage ceremony and give their blessings and wish a happy married life for Molua.

গীত বাদ্য করে যত নারী চমৎকার
তবেত মলুয়ার মাও খুড়ীজেঠা লইয়া
সোহাগ মাগিতে মাও বিয়ার মঙ্গল চাইয়া
খুড়ীর সোহাগ জেঠার সোহাগ আর মাসীপিসী
সোহাগ মাগো কন্যার মাও মঙ্গল উদ্দেশি
শ্বশুর বাড়ী গিয়া কন্যা থাকুক সোহাগে।
(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, মলুয়া, পৃ-৬৬)

The conflict of the plot begins when Molua goes to her in law's home and a fellow called Kazi offers his evil hands to her. But Molua denies the proposal immediately and says she is extremely happy with her husband Binod.

কাজিরে কহিও কথা নাহি চাই আমি
রাজার দোসর সেই আমার সোয়ামী
আমার সোয়ামী সে যে পব্বতের চূড়া
আমার সোয়ামী যেমন রণ দৌড়ের ঘোড়া
আমার সোয়ামী যেমন আসমানের চান
(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, মলুয়া, পৃ-৭৬)

Molua's refusal makes the Kazi vindictive and he convicts Binod falsely of not paying debt on time. Binod leaves Molua and his mother alone in utter frustration, which is an immature act on his part. This incident makes Molua helpless but she does not lose her patience. Binod insists that Molua go to her father's home for financial security but Molua decides to accept her present situation.

বনে থাক ছনে থাক গাছের তলায়
তুমি বিনে মলুয়ার নাহিক উপায়
সাত দিনের উপাস যদি তোমার মুখ চাইয়া
বড় সুখ পাইবাম তোমার চন্মামিতি খাইয়া
রাজার হালে থাকে যদি আমার বাপের বাড়ি
মলুয়া নহেত সেই সুখের আশারী
(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, মলুয়া, পৃ-৭৮)

Molua faces a cruel situation as she constantly struggles to survive with her mother-in-law. She sacrifices all her ornaments in her battle against poverty. As Molua's parents are affluent and she has never dealt with this type of situation before, it is a sheer hardship for her. Molua shows her strength and resilience and sticks to her decision.

শ্বশুর বাড়ী থাকবাম আমি করিয়াছি মন
সেই ত আমার গয়া কাশী সেইত বৃন্দাবন
মা বাপের সেবা কর তোমরা পঞ্চ ভাই
শাশুড়ীর সেবা কইরা ধর্ম আমি চাই

ঘরেতে আছেয়ে বুড়া থইয়া কেমনে যাইবাম

(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, মলুয়া, পৃ-৮৩)

Molua's five brothers come to see their beloved sister and take her with them. They also say that Molua's mother was longing to see her daughter and they want to take her with them to Molua's father's home. But Molua decides to remain with her mother-in-law and accompanies her in the struggle for survival. The narrator depicts a beautiful bond between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law in this Gitika. They support and accompany each other in this crucial time and their relationship is such that they can share their feelings easily.

সূতা কাটে ধান ভানে শাওড়ীয়ে লইয়া

এই মতে দিন কাটে দুঃখু যে পাইয়া

মাঘ ফাল্গুন গেল মলুয়ার ভবিয়া চিন্তিয়া

চৈত্র বৈশাখ গেল আশায় রহিয়া

জ্যৈষ্ঠ মাস আম পাকে কাউয়ায় করে রাও

কোন বা দেশে আছে বন্ধু নাহি জানে তাও

(মলুয়া, পৃ-৮৩)

After returning home Binod is arrested for not paying the due debt and instigated by Kazi an influential man in the village called Dewan kidnaps Molua. Binod is punished for not paying the debt on time but Molua has to pay the debt at the cost of her chastity. Like the previous Gitika we see the objectification of woman here. Dewan wants Molua to live with him as his mistress. Eventually Molua frees herself by applying her intellect. But the society does not accept her

cordially rather puts a blame of being unchaste on her shoulders, as she stayed with Muslim Dewan for three months. The stereotypical notion of violating the norms of the family exists here and a Molua is the sufferer for the crime she has not committed.

কেহ বলে মলুয়া যে হইল অসতী
মুসলমানে অনু খাইয়া গেল তা জাতি
তিন মাস ছিল মলুয়া দেওয়ান সাবের ঘরে
কেমন রাখিল প্রাণ না জানি কি মতে

ভাইগনা বউয়ের হাতের ভাত খাইতে নাহি পারি
(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, মলুয়া, পৃ-৯১)

In this stage of the story Molua makes an incredible sacrifice of allowing Binod to go for a second marriage to keep peace in his family and putting an end to the constant accusations brought against her. She also wants to serve as a servant in her in-laws house and the practice of women becoming slaves intentionally or unintentionally occurs in the Gitika.

ভাল দেইখ্যা সোয়ামীরে আগে করাও বিয়া
বুড়ি শাশুড়ী মোর না দেখে না শুনে
কেমন কইর্যা কাটবে দিন এমন গুজরানে

বাইর কামুলী মলুয়ার মনে দুঃখ নাহি পায়
বাইর কামুলীর কাম করে মনের সন্তোষে
সতীনরে রাখে কন্যা মনের হরষে
(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, মলুয়া, পৃ-৯২)

The story ends in tragedy as Molua commits suicide to save her husband's reputation. After her death everybody seems to sympathize with her but she becomes the scapegoat because of the so-called observance of family values and tradition.

Chandraboti

Chandraboti is the daughter of a worshiper called Bansidas. She has a childhood friend called Joyanando and they meet each other while plucking flowers for the puja. They meet in a serene environment and they fall in love with each other.

প্রভাত কালে আইলাম আমি পুষ্প তুলিবারে

বাপেত করিব পূজা শিবের মন্দিরে

ডাল যে নোয়াইয়া ধরে জয়ানন্দ সাথী

তুলিল মালতী ফুল কন্যা চন্দ্রাবতী

একদিন তুলি ফুল কন্যা চন্দ্রাবতী

একদিন তুলি ফুল মালা গাঁথি তায়

সেইত না মালা দিয়া নাগরে সাজায়³⁰

(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, চন্দ্রাবতী, পৃ-১০৩)

In this Gitika we get the emergence of the practice of sending love letter and Chandraboti and Joyanando keep in touch with each other and convey their feelings through love letters.

পরথমে লিখিল পত্র চন্দ্রার গোচরে

³⁰ Sen, Sridineshchandra, and Rai Bahadur, *Mymensingh Gitika*, Banglabazar: Sikdar Abul Bashar, 1995

পুষ্পপাতে লেখে পত্র আড়াই অক্ষরে

যেদিন দেখাছি কন্যা তোমার চান্দবদন
সেদিন হইয়াছি আমি পাগল যেমন
তোমার মনের কথা আমি জানতে চাই
সর্ব্বশ্ব বিকাইবাম পায় তোমারে যদি পাই
(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, চন্দ্রাবতী, পৃ-১০৪)

Chandraboti is worried about her father while answering the letter and she reveals her helplessness in this regard.

কেমনে লিখিব পত্র প্রানের কাহিনী
কিমনে লিখিব পত্র বাপ আছে ঘরে

ফুল তুলে জয়ানন্দ ভালবাসি তারে
ঘরে মোর আছে বাপ আমি কিবা জানি

আমি কেমনে দেই উত্তর অবলা কামিনী
(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, চন্দ্রাবতী, পৃ-১০৭)

Chandraboti reveals the fact that she is deeply in love with Joyanando and through her speech it seems that she is romanticizing her notion of love.

তোমারে দেখিব আমি নয়ন ভরিয়া
তোমারে লইব আমি হৃদয়ে তুলিয়া

তোমারে কবির পূজা প্রানে আশা করি
বাড়ীর আগে ফুট্যা রইছে মল্লিকা মাতলী
জন্মে জন্মে পাই যেন তোমার মত পতি
বাড়ীর আগে ফুট্যা রইছে কেতকী দুস্তর
কি জানি লেখ্যাছে বিধি কপালে আমার
(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, চন্দ্রাবতী, পৃ-১০৮)

Chandraboti's father, Bansidas is concerned about his daughter's marriage and he wants the bridegroom to be affluent and influential.

এত বড় হইল কন্যা না আসিল বর
কন্যার মঙ্গল কর অনাদি শংকর
বনফুলে মনফুলে পূজিব তোমায়
বর দিয়া পশুপতি ঘুচাও কন্যাদায়

আমার কন্যার স্বামী হউক দেব পুরন্দর
আর ফুল দিল বাপ কুলশীল পাইতে
বংশ বড় ভট্টাচার্য খ্যাতি রাখিতে
(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, চন্দ্রাবতী, পৃ-১০৬)

Chandraboti and Joyanando get married through an intermediary. We come to know about the occasion called *Biyeer Geet*, which is one of the prominent features of Bangla folk literature. The women sing songs as a part of entertainment or giving blessings to the new bride.

পানখিল দিয়া করে বিয়ার আয়োজন

পাড়ার যতেক নারী পান খিলায়

যতেক নারী মিলি তার গান গায়

সোহাগ মাগিল আর মায় বিধিমতে

আগে চলে কন্যার মায় ডালা মাথায় লইয়া

তার পাছে কন্যার ঘুড়ি লোটা হাতে লইয়া

তার পরে যত নারী গীতি জুকারে

(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, চন্দ্রাবতী, পৃ-১১১)

Joyanando appears unfaithful and falls in love with a Muslim girl. The narrator seems to put the blame on destiny rather than on the guilty Joyanando. There is a tendency to exceed the male character whereas a woman character is always made responsible for the same misdeed.

পাপেতে ডুবাইল নাগর চৈদ পুরুষের নাম

কি হইল কি হইল কথা নানান জনে কয়

কপালের দোষ, দোষ নহে বিধাতার

যে লেখা লেখ্যাছে বিধি কপালে আমার

কি দিব কন্যার বিয়া ঘটল বিষম দায়

(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, চন্দ্রাবতী, পৃ-১১২)

Chandraboti is shattered after getting the news of her husband's infidelity. She stops doing her daily tasks and becomes absolutely heart-broken.

না কান্দে না হাসে চন্দ্রা নাহি বলে বাণী
আছিল সুন্দরী কন্যা হইল পাষাণী
মনেতে ঢাকিয়া রাখে মনের আগুনে
জানিতে না দেয় কন্যা জল্যা মরে মনে
এক দিন দুই দিন তিন দিন যায়
পাতেতে রাখিয়া কন্যা কিছু নাহি খায়
(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, চন্দ্রাবতী, পৃ-১১৩)

Chandraboti shows her determination and resilience to get back to her real life. She decides to give all her concentration on *Shiv Puja* and composing *Ramayana* rather than getting married or making family again.

চন্দ্রাবতী বলে “পিতা, মম বাক্য ধর”
জন্মে না করিব বিয়া হইব আইবর
শিবপূজা করি আমি শিবপদে মতি

অবসর কালে কন্যা লেখে রামায়ন
যাহারে পড়িলে হয় পাপ বিমোচন
(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, চন্দ্রাবতী, পৃ-১১৪)

Her father helps her to ignore Joyanando and curb her emotion and keep the promise she has made with herself.

একমনে পূজ তুমি দেব বিশ্বেশ্বর
অন্য কথা স্থান কন্যা নাহি দিও মনে

জীবন মরণ হইল যাহার কারণে

তুমি যা লইছ মাগো সেই কাজ কর

অন্য চিন্তা মনে স্থান নাহি দিও আর

(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, চন্দ্রাবতী, পৃ-১১৬)

Eventually Joyanando commits suicide and somehow attains the redemption. The narrator gives more importance to Chandraboti and a male character sacrifices his life for a female character in this Gitika. In most of the Gitikas the sacrifices or compromises are shown on a woman's part.

দ্বার খোলা চন্দ্রাবতী তোমারে শুধাই

জীবনের শেষ তোমায় একবার দেখ্যা যাই

আর না দেখিব তোমায় নয়ন চাহিয়া

দোষ ক্ষমা কর কন্যা শেষ বিদায় দিয়া

ইহজন্মের মতন কন্যা দেও মোরে সাড়া

দেব পূজার ফুল তুমি তুমি গঙ্গার পানি।

(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, চন্দ্রাবতী, পৃ-১১৭)

Komola

Komola is the daughter of Manik Chaklader of Hulia village. Karkun, a servant proposes Komola through a love letter with glorified and fanciful words.

কিরপা কইরা কন্যা একবার চাও মোর পানে

পরানে বাচাও মোরে ভরা যৌবন দানে

আমার যা আছে তোমায় সব কৈনু দান
তোমার লাগিয়া পারি ত্যাজিতে পরাণ
তুমি আমার ধরম করম তুমি গলার মালা³¹
(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, কমলা, পৃ-১৩০)

But Komola strongly refuses the proposal, which shows her self-esteem and self-confidence.

কার কুনে কহিস তার মুখে মারি ঝাটা
বাড়ীর চাকর হইয়া এত বুকের পাটা
পায়ে গোলাম হইয়া শিরে উঠতে চায়
বেঙ্গে কবে শুনেছিস পদ্মের মধু খায়
ইচ্ছা যদি করি তারে দিতে পারি শূলে
কুকুরে কামড়ায় কেবা কুকুরে কামড় দিলে
(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, কমলা, পৃ-১৩৮)

Komola is aware about the fact that she is an extremely beautiful girl and she is proud of her virginity and beauty. She is waiting for her soul mate to come and make her dreams come true.

মানুষের সাধ্য নাই মোরে বিয়া করে
দেখহ আমার রূপ চান্দের কিরন
আমারে ভোগিতে নাই মানুষ এমন

³¹ Sen, Sridineshchandra, and Rai Bahadur, *Mymensingh Gitika*, Banglabazar: Sikdar Abul Bashar, 1995

সেই মনে চিন্তা করি বিরলে বসিয়া
ধরায় থাকিব কেমনে মদনে ছাড়িয়া
কত বিয়ার সম্বন্ধ মোর কয় বাপ মায়

বিশেষ মদন ঠাকুর কোনদিন আসে।
(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, কমলা, পৃ-১৩৪)

Komola exercises her freedom to express her thoughts wholeheartedly when Karkun says he wants to marry her. She expresses all her anger and contempt for Karkun in her speech. The narrator portrays her inner feelings, making the readers hear the voice of a woman. The most common aspect of these Gitikas is that women characters do not identify their potential and self-respect. But this Gitika seems to gain weight in this regard and somehow Komola rebels against the custom of accepting any suitor.

আমার বাপের লুন খাইয়া বাচিলা পরানে
তার গলায় দিত দড়ি না বাঝিল প্রাণে

বনে জঙ্গলায় থাকবাম নাহি ইতে ডর
তবু নাই সে করবাম এমন রাক্ষসার ঘর
মায়ে ঝিয়ে ভিক্ষা মাগ্যা খাইব নগরে
(মৈয়মনসিংহ গীতিকা, কমলা, পৃ-১৪৩)

Kajol Rekha

Kajol Rekha is a fairy tale and the narrator uses both prose and poetic forms to narrate the story. The story is based on faith in predestination as Kajol Rekha goes through trials to get the ultimate happiness in her life. Kajol Rekha is the daughter of a businessman called Dhoneshor. Dhoneshor expresses his frustration for not being able to arrange his daughter's marriage. A miraculous bird called Sukpakhi foretells the destiny of Kajol Rekha and according to her Kajol Rekha will marry a dead and she has to be sent to a forest. The life of Kajol Rekha is associated with a bird and through the symbolic representation the narrator shows the passivity of the woman character.

এগার বছরের কন্যা বারয় নাই সে পড়ে

বিয়ার কাল হইল কন্যার চিন্তে সদাগরে

ভাবিয়া চিন্তিয়া সাধু শুকের কাছে যায়

কহ কহ শুক পংখী এহার উপায়

এই কথা শুন্যা শুক পংখী কইল- সদাগর, তোমার সকল দুঃখ দূর হইছে। এই দুঃখের আরও দেবী। মরা সোয়ামীর কাছে এই কন্যার বিয়া হইব। এই কন্যারে তোমার পুরীর মধ্যে রাখ্যো না বনের মধ্যে নিবাস দিয়া আইস।³² (কাজল রেখা, পৃ- ৩২২)

Dhoneshor deceives his daughter and exiles her to a forest where she is locked in a room with a dead man. Her father says her that the dead man is her husband and she has to prove herself virtuous and make this dead man come alive.

³² Sen, Sridineshchandra, and Rai Bahadur, *Mymensingh Gitika*, Banglabazar: Sikdar Abul Bashar, 1995

সামনে আছে মরা কুমার সেই তোমার স্বামী
সাক্ষী হইয়ো চন্দ্রসুর্য বনের দেবতা
আজি হইতে ছাইড়া গেলাম পরাণের মমতা
সতী নারী হও যদি আমি যাই কইয়া
ঘরে আছে মরা স্বামী লইও জিয়াইয়া
জন্মের মত থইয়া যাই আর না হইব দেখা
সোয়ামীরে জিয়াইয়া তুমি রাখ্যো হাতের শাঁখা
(কাজল রেখা, পৃ-৩২৬)

Kajol Rekha expresses her sadness over her destiny and simultaneous fascination over her young good-looking husband. She is worried about her present situation but she accepts the dead man as her husband and is concerned about his condition.

জাগ জাগ সুন্দর কুমার রে কত নিন্দ্রা যাও
আমি অভাগিনী ডাকি আঁখি মেইলা চাও
জন্মিয়া না দেখেছে কভু তোমায় অভাগিনী
বাপেত কহিয়া গেছে তুমি মোর স্বামী
বাপেত নিষ্ঠুর হইয়া দিল বনবাসে ।

যে হও সে হও প্রভু তুমিত সোয়ামী
যতকাল দেহ তোমার ততকাল আমি
মুখ মেইল্যা কও কথা আঁখি মেইল্যা চাও
(কাজল রেখা, পৃ-৩২৭)

In this Gitika we get to know the hostility of a woman's heart and the insensitive practice of stealing another woman's husband. Kankon Dashi who is a servant deceives Kajol Rekha and takes her place in her husband's life. Kajol Rekha becomes the servant but she cannot reveal her identity out of compulsion.

আগু হইয়া পরিচয় কহে কান্ধন দাসী
কন্ধনে কিন্যাছি ধাই নাম কান্ধন দাসী
রাণী হইলে দাসী আর দাসী হইল রানী
কর্মদোষে কাজলরেখা জন্ম অভাগিনী ।

সন্মাসীর আদেশ মত কাজলরেখা স্বামীর নিকট আত্মপরিচয় দিতে পারিল না । স্বামীর সঙ্গে দাসী হইয়া স্বামীর রাজ্যে চলিয়া গেল । (কাজলরেখা, পৃ-৩৩৩)

Kajol Rekha shows her talent and artistic capability in every aspect such as cooking, painting etc. The narrator attributes all the positive aspects of Kajol Rekha in comparison with Kankon Dashi. Again there is a tendency to portray absolute positive or negative women characters in the Gitika.

নকল রানী পাক করিল চাইলতার অম্বল, ডৌউয়ার ঝাল, আলবনে কচুশাক সে সব খাইয়া রাজা খুব লজ্জিত হইল ।
পরদিন দাসীর পালা ।

ভোরেত উঠিয়া কন্যা ভোরের সিনান করে
শুদ্ধ শান্তে যায় কন্যা রন্ধন শালার ঘরে

মানকচু লইল কন্যা কাটিয়া কুটিয়া
জোরা কইতর রাঙ্গে আর মাছ নানা জাতি

পায়েস পরামন্ন রাঞ্জে সুন্দর যুবতী

(কাজল রেখা, পৃ-৩৩৭)

Firoj Kha Dewan

In this Gitika we come to the woman character called Sokhina who appears to be a soldier who decides to go the battlefield to free her husband from the evil hands of his enemy and fights the war to give support to her husband. As Sokhina's husband Firoj Kha Dewan fights the war against Sokhina's father, Omar Kha, she is prepared to go against her father and thus she shows great mental strength. She refuses the traditional outlook and shows her bravery in the battlefield.

কি কর সখিনা বিবি পালঙ্কে বসিয়া
শিরসের সিন্দুর বিবি কানের সোনাদানা
পালঙ্ক ছাড়িয়া কর জমিনে বিছানা
পিঙ্কন শাড়ি খুল্যা ফালাও কাট্যা ফালাও কেশ
আইজ হইতে ধর কন্যা দিগম্বরী বেশ
বাহ হইতে খুল কন্যা বাজুবন্ধ তার
গলা হইতে খুল কন্যা হীরামনের হার

শোন শোন বিবি আরে কহি যে তোমারে
তোমার স্বামী হইল বন্দী কেল্লাতাজপুর সরে³³

³³ Sen, Sridineshchandra, and Rai Bahadur, Purbobongo: *Mymensingh Gitika*, Banglabazar: Sikdar Abul Bashar, 1995

(মৈমনসিংহ গীতিকা, ফিরোজ খাঁ দেওয়ান, পৃ-১৫২)

Sokhina is proud of her courage and she chooses to disguise herself and hide her true identity as women were not allowed to go to the battlefield in those days. Sokhina promises to her mother-in-law that she will win the battle and makes Firoj Kha Dewan free.

সাজাও দেখি রণের ঘোড়া গেল কতদূর

সিপাই তীরন্দাজে সীতাব কওত ডাকিয়া

রণেতে যাইবাম ঘোড়ায় সোয়ার হইয়া

আও রাত হইয়া আমি যাইবাম রণে

এই কথা দরিয়া তুমি রাখিও গোপনে

আমার স্বামী বন্দী করে কেমন বুকের পাটা

জগেতে বুঝিবাম তারে কেমন বাপের বেটা

দোওয়া কর মা জননী দোওয়া কর মোরে

রনে জিত্যা পুত্র তোমার আন্যা দিবাম ঘরে

(মৈমনসিংহ গীতিকা, ফিরোজ খাঁ দেওয়ান, পৃ-১৫৩)

But the most pathetic scene appears when Sokhina receives divorce letter from her husband in the battlefield. She is utterly shattered after getting this news that the person she is fighting for lets her down and abandons her. She is heart-broken and loses all her determination and strength and falls in the ground from the horse. It seems that Firoj Kha Dewan abandons her at the fear of

losing his life and doing so he becomes a treacherous person. Sokhina cannot bear this shocking news and thus dies out of shock.

যার লাগ্যা জ্বলে আগুন জঙ্গলবাড়ী সরে

তালাক দিয়াছে দেওয়ান সেই সখিনারে

এত বলি তালাকনামা তুল্যা দিল হাতে

তালাকনামা পড়ে বিবি ঘোড়ার উপরে

সাপেতে ডংশিল যেমন বিবির যে শিরে

ঘোড়ার পিষ্ট হইতে বিবি চলিয়া পড়িল

আউলাইয়া পড়িল বিবির মাথার দীঘল কেশ

পিঙ্কন হইতে খুলে কন্যার পুরুষের বেশ

(মৈমনসিংহ গীতিকা, ফিরোজ খাঁ দেওয়ান, পৃ-১৫৫)

At the end of this chapter we can say that the Mymensingh Gitika is a wonderful creation of Bengali folk literature. These Gitikas are unique in terms of exploring new dimensions in the plots and characters where women's voices are heard. In this regard women characters of Mymensingh Gitikas are more vibrant than Chittagong Gitikas. Women characters in Mymensingh Gitikas are more diverse in their attitudes, tastes and aptitudes. They are aware about their respective position in the Gitika. In some cases they try to break the conventions and establish their notions. Md. Shohidur Rahman who is a professor of Bangla literature says in his book *Mymensingh Gittikai Nari Choritrer Shorup*

We come to know versatile traits while exploring the aspects of women characters in Mymensingh Gitika. The traits include ties of love,

restraint, patience, innovative capability, determination, chastity, devoted to husband, sacrifice, self-awareness, personality and simplicity. With the attachment of these traits women characters specifically female protagonists becomes more vibrant and prominent than others.³⁴

In Mymensingh Gitika female characters try to get out of the traditional framework of patriarchal society where women are subjugated not necessarily physically but verbally. In my research I basically came across women occupying the role of daughter, wife or mother or women are portrayed as a symbol of beauty, chastity, maternity, sacrifice and so on. But in these Gitikas we come across women playing exceptional roles. In these Gitikas we see women playing unconventional roles such as that of defensive teenager, disobedient daughter, soldier in the battlefield, devoted to doing *Shiv Puja* rather than going for a second marriage etc.

³⁴ Rahman, Shohidur; *Mymensingh Gittikai Nari Choritrer Shorup*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy press, 1998, p-43(my translation)

Conclusion

In this concluding part I will apply the feminist theories and analyze the themes of the Gitikas both from Chittagong and Mymensingh districts. Firstly I will point out feminist perspectives from the western world. The pioneer of feminist literary criticism Mary Wollstonecraft blames the false education system, which is responsible to make women vulnerable and submissive to the society by labeling the superficial term 'beauty' with them.

Women are told from their infancy, and taught by the example of their mothers, that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, outward obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of property, will obtain for them the protection of man; and should they be beautiful, every thing else is needless, for, at least, twenty years of their lives.³⁵

I mentioned earlier that male writers mainly produce the Gitikas that I have gone through. Therefore we get the projection of women that is done from male perspectives. According to American literary critic and feminist Elaine Showalter

...one of the problems of the feminist critique that it is male-oriented. If we study stereotypes of women, the sexism of male critics, and the limited roles women play in the literary history, we are not learning what

³⁵ Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Boston, 1792. P-105

women have felt and experienced, but only what men have thought women should be.³⁶

Their male counterparts basically manipulate the notion of love that women possess in the Gitikas. Their concept of love is based on false thought that men are stronger than them and they need to be taken care of by their male-counterparts. And men, both writers of the Gitikas and male protagonists, are responsible for developing this notion in women.

Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain says in this regard

Men always tell us they have kept us deep in their hearts and threaten us saying that we will never receive as much affection from any other source in this world. That is why we melt and stream towards them! As a consequence it is there affection that must be seen as harming us. They are confining us within their hearts and depriving us from sunlight and fresh air, and we are being smothered by their love!³⁷

We can say this false education and perception ultimately constructs feminist ideology. According to writer John Storey “ ideology can refer to a systematic body of ideas articulated by a particular group of people.”³⁸ Again he states that ideology creates masking, distortion,

³⁶ Showalter, Elaine. ‘Towards a Feminist Poetics’, “Women Writing and Writing About Women” *Feminist Literary Theory A Reader*, Ed. Mary Eagleton, 2nd edition. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996 p-105.

³⁷ Moudud, Baby “ Pabitra Rokeya Path” *The Daily Star* December 8, 2006

³⁸ Storey, John. *An Introduction Guide to Cultural theory and Popular Culture*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1993.p-3

concealment and false consciousness. Women are under a false consciousness that being obedient and respectful to the decision of their male counterparts will prove their faithfulness towards their partners. But they are unaware about the fact that they are being scapegoats and subjugated by their partners. It makes them undergo any hardship without raising questions. Not only that they shower boundless love on their partners, which is distorted by relating utter submissiveness and sexual desires.

I think the anthology entitled *Women in Bengali Literature* will bring out both accepted pictures of women's life and women playing unfamiliar roles in context of folk literature. The inspiring part of the research is it does not come across incidents of violence against women such as women battering. It is interesting to see women come out of the accepted roles in the ballads and make their own way to create spaces for themselves. Readers can hear women's voice in both the contexts. As women are confined in the patriarchal framework where they are supposed to uphold family vales and conventions, there is little opportunity for them to speak out their desires and complaints. But still the way they express their desires and raise voice against injustice exceeding social constraints is commendable.

Bibliography:

Primary Sources:

Azim Firdous, Zaman Niaz. *Infinite Variety. Women In Society And Literature.* The University Press Limited 1998

Chowdhury, Momen, Bangla Academy Folklore Sonkolon: 55 *Chittagong Gitika-2*, Dhaka, Bangla Academy, 1993

Chowdhury, Momen, Bangla Academy Folklore Sonkolon: 54 *Chittagong Gitika-1*, Dhaka, Bangla Academy, 1993

Sen, Sridineshchandra, and Rai Bahadur, *Mymensingh Gitika*, Banglabazar: Sikdar Abul Bashar, 1995

Sen, Sridineshchandra, and Rai Bahadur, Purbobongo: *Mymensingh Gitika*, Banglabazar: Sikdar Abul Bashar, 1995

Secondary Sources

Eagleton, Mary; *Feminist Literary Theory A Reader*, 2nd edition. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.

Hooks, Bell "Feminist, Female, Feminine" *Feminisms*. Ed. Kemp, Sandra and Judith Squires, Oxford University Press, 1997

Lovell, Terry. "Writing Like a Woman: A Question of Politics" *Feminist Literary Theory A Reader*, Ed. Mary Eagleton, 2nd edition. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.

Khan, Shamsuz Zaman; *Adhunik Folklore Chinta*, Dhaka: Anupam Prokashani, 2001

“Litgloss”. *Bedfordstmartins*. 3rd Jan 2007. <<http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/litgloss/>>

Moi, Toril “Feminist, Female, Feminine” *Feminisms*. Ed. Kemp, Sandra and Judith Squires, Oxford University Press, 1997

Moudud, Baby “Pabitra Rokeya Path” *The Daily Star* December 8, 2006

Rahman, Shohidur; *Mymensingh Gittikai Nari Choritrer Shorup*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy press, 1998

Siddiqui, Ashraf, “Folkloric Bangladesh”. *Bangladoot*. _5th Jan 2007.

<<http://www.bangladoot.org/Folkloric%20bd.doc>>

Sillah, Memunah “On Woman in the Nineteenth Century”. *Transcendentalism*. 7th Jan 2007.

<<http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/authors/fuller/sillahonfuller.html>>

Said, Edward; *Orientalism*, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd 1978

Tharu, Susie. Lalita, K. *Women Writing in India 600 B.C to the Present Volume I: 600 B. C to the Early 20th century*. Oxford University Press 1993

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Boston, 1792.

Woolf, Virginia. *The Death of the Moth: And other Essays*, New York, 1980

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One’s Own*, Cambridge University Press, 1988