

**THE DARLONG FOLK LITERATURE: PORTRAYAL OF THE FEMALE FOLK IN THE  
ORAL TRADITIONS OF THE DARLONG RESULTING IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF  
PHALOCENTRIC PERSPECTIVE IN THE TRIBE'S CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY**

**BENJAMINA DARLONG\***

\*Research Scholar, Dept. of English, Tripura University, Tripura, India

**ABSTRACT**

The feminist literary criticism of today is the direct product of the 'Women's Movement' of the 1960s. The movement formulated the realisation on the significance to combat and question the images of women promulgated by literature. Noting it, the Darlongs, one among the many 'Kuki-Chin' communities, in their oral narratives portrays female character in certain paradigm that eventually act as a format for conceptualisation of the female folk in the Tribe. The monograph attempts to study the medium of concept formulation in the Darlong society that culminates in the construction of psychosis of certain figures. In other words, the article tends to investigate the oral narratives inputs in conceptualising the female figure among the community men as well as women. For instance, almost every tales portrays a widow character in the climax who either acts as a lucky charm or bad omen for the protagonist bringing about a turnaround in the tales. On the other hand, some tales depicts characters as an elements upon whom vengeance act or descend stepping aside their sublime characteristics.

**KEYWORDS:** Female, Darlong, Oral, Narratives, Typicalisation

**I. INTRODUCTION OF THE DARLONG COMMUNITY:**

The Darlong is claimed to be quoted under the 'Zo-Hnathla' nomenclature and are found to be residing mainly in the North district and the present Unakuti District of present state of Tripura, India. Tripura, being one among the eight North-Eastern states, is a small state enveloped by varied ethnicity of tribals residing within. Anthropologically, they belong to one among the many communities of the Kuki-Chin community having no written literature that leave their very ethnicity in ambiguity to certain extent. Every material with which the Darlong defines his identity, existence and world where he lives in are transmitted from one generation to another through oral tradition. As such, the community documented their practices, rites and rituals, customs and habits, culture and myth, history, legend and their past politics verbally. They believed that the genesis of human was born in the story of 'Sinlung Myth' which says that man came out of a cave called 'Sinlung' until the gods had

eventually closed the doorway. Nevertheless, there are several interpretations of the myth both rational as well as verbal.

The Darlong folktales and folksongs can be consider borrowing its accounts from an individual's or group's cultures functioning as a mediator to political decisions, validates conduct, release emotions and evaluate their social administration. The general themes of the tales are adventures, love, beauty hunting, hero tales, legendary tales, revenge and vengeance which according to the narrators are the characteristics of the Darlong community. Often we come across animal anecdote which highlights the bonding shared by animals and the community in those times attributing to a unique ecological balance. At same time, I do not deny the existence of similar tales and traditions in other 'Kuki-Chin' communities.

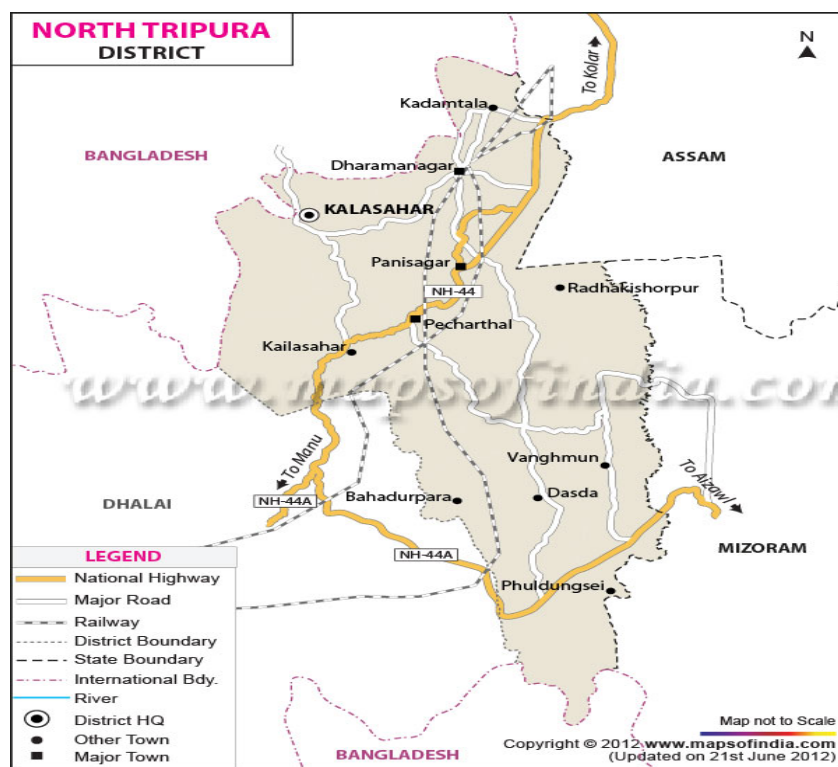


Fig.1. Map showing the present location of the Darlong in Tripura.

## II. PORTRAYAL OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN THE TALES:

In the early Darlong community, the female folk are dictated or puppeted by their male counterpart. Almost in every aspect of their activities, the male had the upper hand. There is a saying in the vernacular that defines the plight of female in the Darlong society which says "Nupang naipang" which means 'female and child'. The saying is nothing but categorising the female to that of a child i.e. their emotions, intellect, judgement, strength and endurance to that of a child's. Hence, they are not of any importance in social affairs in the early Darlong. In fact, the community till today do have this thought lying dormant which in many

practical instances, get awoken resulting in the elimination of the female folk from any participation partly or wholly. In the story of 'Ralruanga', the protagonist wandered for several years wanting to expert himself with black magic leaving his pregnant wife astray where she had to go through all pain taking from earning of subsistence, giving birth to a child and survival. But the narrator or the story, as a whole, do not leave any clue or evidence of the wife's sufferings nor pain where as one can find the husband attempt of physical relation with another girl while returning home. However, the recipient happens to be the protagonist's own daughter and when the daughter tries to inform her mother about the incident, 'Ralruanga' murdered his daughter in order to silent her with the help of his black magic. There was not a note of nostalgia from the part of the mother in the narratives which rationally was very possible. However, when 'Ralruanga' returned home after many years, his wife readily welcomed and accepted her husband not questioning a single time thereby exalting the character of 'Ralruanga' to the likes of historical figure such as Agamemnon<sup>i</sup>. It is a matter of discourse as to why the voices of women are less heard in the society during the contemporary time. In the eye of the feminist, the phenomenon is nothing but a "mechanism of patriarchy, the cultural 'mind-set' in men and women which perpetuated sexual inequality" (Barry. 117).

Secondly, we also find the character of Jocasta<sup>ii</sup> when the 'Sawwabawr Lal' or the 'King of Sawwabawr' sleeps with his own mother without knowing who she really is or was in the story bearing the same name. Further, in the story of 'Sûhlhutea', the protagonist mother was reduced to an object of lust in the absence of her son. The hero adventured out to avenge his father and uncles leaving his mother all alone by asking her to wait for him and open the door only when she hears the voice of her son. However, some mischievous men went to the house asking to open the door in similar voice as did her son and forcefully sleeps with her. Finally, when the son arrived after avenging his father's and uncles' murderer, the mother no longer open the door for him as she couldn't risk doing so since she had been cheated several times only to lose her son who left with heart broken. Before leaving his mother, 'Sulhlutea', the hero urged his mother to clarify her doubt by looking toward the east where she will see the lighting of his dragger thereby leaving the head of the slain villain hanging by the house. In case of fake son, the lightening wouldn't show was the deal but promise not to return. Waking up the next morning, the mother did as told and discovered that it was truly her son who knock at her the previous night. With heavy hearted, the mother touch the moustache of the villain head saying, 'what a pity, oh my son. This is what you

killed?" As a consequence, the mother's hand was wounded and the bleeding causes her ultimate death establishing the superiority of the boy's risk undertaken over the mother's endurance. The portrayal constructed a male version of world where heroism, adventures, revenge and negligence of the weak are some of its significant traits which the feminist of 1980s had sought to reconstruct.

In the third place, women characters are subject of vengeance in the guise of a cruel step-mother, notorious wife and strangers at certain point of time. The story of 'Thangsua Puan' deployed a young boy who was chased out of home by the cruelty of his step-mother resulting in an orphan, to serve the purpose of revenge. The boy grew up to be a wealthy man by marrying the daughter of the wealthiest person in the adjacent village through his sheer intellect. As we go through the story, fate played a cruel role when famine fell throughout the entire territory letting the boy's parent to go in search of survival where they eventually end up finding in the hand of their cast-away child. Getting the opportunity, the boy even the score by killing his parents in the most torturous way possible tying his mother's waist and father's throat to a horse and making it run randomly. Again, the story of 'Naipathakboia'<sup>iii</sup> too has almost the similar kind of theme where father banished his two sons at the expense of his second wife. As a result, they had to wander through a dense forest and jungle to find their path where the elder brother transformed himself into a 'Vapual'<sup>iv</sup> as a reaction of eating the eggs. The younger brother later met a happy ending when his marriage took place with a daughter of a wealthy man ornamented by the visit of his elder brother in bird form when he threw his feathers upon his younger brother as a sign of his blessing. The father, on the other hand, asked for the same to his elder son who instead of feathers excreted upon him that eventually becomes the cause of his death in the end of the story. As a result of the insult, the father went back home in shame only to murder his wife.

In the fourth place, 'Tairamnu' is the general term used to denote the female villain which can be regarded as one most controversial term used to denote the character of the female in the narratives of the Darlong. The term narrowly or commonly refers to an old wretched woman that has characteristics of a witch. In other words, it may also be considered to the kind of witch we find in the English fairy tale of 'Hansel and Gretel'. Stories like 'Naipathakboia', 'Tlumtea', and other tales display the menace of the 'Tairamnu' character. However, the horrifying character usually dies at the hand of an ordinary man like in the stories mentioned above. In the story of 'Naipathakboia', when the two brothers lost their way, the elder brother transformed into 'Vapual' and the younger brother had to find his own

way after he lost the shadow of his elder brother. He then encountered the very character called 'Tairamnu' who tried to swallow him up the moment she saw him. Eventually, the little boy managed to cheat the witch and acquired the magic swan of the witch with which he could avenge his father and step-mother in the end. In the other story, 'Tairamnu' was desperately in love with the 'Tlumtea', the hero of the story. She waited years and years for an opportunity but was always denied. One day her hunt becomes successful when she abducted her lover 'Tlumtea' on his way back home from jhum. She then kept her lover in her castle in a distant place where nobody would come in between them. However, unfortunately, the lover 'Tlumtea' ran from the castle in her absence getting an opportunity. Nevertheless, the lover finally dies at the hand of 'Tairamnu' as she did not want her lover to be with someone else other than herself. The beloved's (Tairamnu) emotions and sentimental attachment to the hero was not acknowledge where as the hero's imprisonment in the castle and his detachment from his family was more taken into consideration from the part of the community men and women. This was, perhaps, because of the fact that the community in the contemporary time gives less importance to the feminine gender as a whole or attempt to create a phalocentric society consciously or unconsciously through their literature which primarily is in oral form. In other perspective, the female character may be considered as an outcast of the society because of her difference in appearances and other features or rather a semi human that have not completed the entire stages of human evolution. However, despite her frightful characteristics as told by the narratives none of the male characters who have encountered her in the tales are afraid which gives scholars scope to regard the character as human thereby reducing the term, which was believed to have a ghostly connotation, to an ordinary name of a person.

In the fourth place, the Darlong oral narratives depict an old lady character which is one of the most interesting characters in the narratives. Almost in every tale, the old lady appears either in the genesis or in the period which I called 'The Revelation part'. This character lived alone and has nobody to look after her or support her in time of distress. The old lady plays a significant role in establishing the climax of the tales and the narratives generally construct a fear factor for the listeners in the shape of her. In many instances, the character acts as a messenger of the villains. The character even exists in many of the present Darlong villages who are generally looked down upon and an object of ridicule for fun lovers. No doubt, they do not occupy the similar position as they do in the tales. To me, the character of an old day allegorically stands for the deprived class of the community who are

detached from all kinds of social affairs and thus had to survive in isolation. It is in this regard that the vernacular term 'Richon' may be applied. To be more precise, the term may be interpreted as 'portent' as because the character at certain point of time acts as lucky charm where as at other instances she acts as the claw of the villain. In the story of 'Liandoia hei Unai', 'Fapite'<sup>vi</sup> came to the 'Liandoi Brothers' in the guise of an old lady and elevates them from their poverty. Similarly, in the story of 'Naipathakboia', it was the old lady which filled the head of the younger brother with wisdom making him eligible for marrying the daughter of the wealthiest man in the village. On the other level, stories like 'Sulhlutea', 'Parual Sarika' and others depict the character as the so called 'right hand' of 'Bakvomtepu'<sup>vii</sup>, the villain of the stories.

Finally, female characters are the face of theatrical characters in the Darlong narratives. In the story of 'Lasiri nih Lasara', the two goddess sister are madly in love with 'Neithangzaia', a village ordinary man cross referring the poem, 'Tithonus' written by the famous poet, Alfred Tennyson. However, when the sisters went to the latter's home they were treated in a most shameful manner by their lover for which they showed their back at him for the rest of the story. In the end of the story, the two sisters had to transform themselves in to flowers for the sake of their lover but unfortunately, the lover could show up on the right time hence disappear forever. Similarly, in the story of 'Liandoi Brothers' the goddess was present in the guise of an ugly aged women who was denied by every men and men in the village from letting her entered their respective house giving rise to the feeling of existence of 'untouchable class' in the community of the contemporary period.

The narratives of the Darlong community echoed their socio-cultural picturesque scene of the contemporary time. The female are almost reduce into 'Mad Women in the Attic' where characters with both the monsters and angelic qualities are detained from use of their superiority or charm by the male. To me, this is nothing but poaching by the narrators which I called 'Art of Typicalisation'. In other words, the narrators of the tradition tales had a silent plan of marking his female characters from impressing the listeners thereby creating a phalocentric space which is then basic trait of the Darlong society. Thus, Virginia Woolf in her 'A Room of One's own' term such act of language as 'That is a man's sentence' that further echoed in Dale Spender's 'Man made Language' 1981 arguing 'language is not neutral medium but one which contains many features reflecting its role as the instrument through which patriarchy finds expressions'. Ultimately, marginalisation or subjugation in the formulation of the tribe's contemporary perspective on the degraded gender is corollary. In

many instance of the tales of the community, we find the female gender used as a form of socialisation<sup>viii</sup> and their 'Jouissance'<sup>ix</sup> merely reduced to desire of a child. Nevertheless, in the present Darlong, the subjugation have submerged in many extents with the advent Christianity in the year 1919 yet embedded in their subconscious that often get awaken projected through the men's actions and behaviour.

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1. The king of Sparta and brother of Menelaus, who brought a slave girl as a wife after his victory over Troy but murdered his real wife on hearing that she, was having an illicit relationship with one of his ministers.
  2. Mother of Oedipus and wife of Laius from the play having the same name i.e. Oedipus.
  3. The man who sent away his sons.
  4. Name of a bird.
  5. On the basis of my research carried on, I have break up the reading of Darlong tales into three parts viz. i) The Introduction Part ii) The Revelation Part iii) The Concluding Part.
  6. Goddess of Bounty.
  7. A Bat in human form.
  8. Cannon to establish oneself materialistically.
  9. Term that appeared in Lacan's work in the seminars of 1953-54 and 1954-55.