

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **The Sister and The Daughter**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

The sister and the daughter, traditionally relegated to the position of secondary wife or second mother within patriarchal stories, are strong women in their own right in much folk lore. The sister and the daughter represent both familial continuity and social transformation. This chapter explores how the sister and daughter figures are constructed within Chinese and Khasi folktales and the degree to which they reflect or resist the patriarchal norms inherent within their respective cultures.

In classic Chinese culture, daughters were in many ways transitional figures within the family—first belonging to their original home and later to their in-laws. Sisters were to be obedient, modest, and self-sacrificing. However, folk tales most commonly envision daughters and sisters as morally strong, free-spirited, and transformative figures. Figures such as Mulan depict the transgression of gendered roles, while others subtly subvert normative expectations in acts of braveness, cleverness, or divine power.

The daughter in Khasi society is not only a temporary member but also the owner of lineal inheritance and caretaker of family identity. Although this can be said to give her a sense of empowerment, it does impose certain societal expectations and limitations on her liberty. Sisters can become guardians of tradition, but they also become harbingers of justice or deciders of fate in most stories. These folk tales put into focus the ambivalence that encircles the sister-daughter relationship in a matrilineal society.

Comparing the plot trajectories of Chinese and Khasi folktales about sisters and daughters, this chapter reveals how these characters inform, subvert, or reinforce the cultural logic of each society. It also explores their role in brokering themes of duty, rebellion, identity, and kinship.

#### **3.1 Role and social status of Sisters and Daughters in traditional Chinese Society**

“It is more profitable to raise geese than daughters,” a traditional maxim from Chinese folklore, encapsulates the sufferings that girls in families have undergone for thousands of

years (Freedman, 1961, p. 325). This included being smothered at birth, social isolation, low status in the family, lack of education, and humiliation at home, as well as early and forced marriage. To have a comprehensive overview of the position and condition of sisters and daughters throughout Chinese history, it is pertinent to examine the traditional family setup, which operated as a microcosm of the state of China as a whole. This also provides scope to compare the emotions and practices that prevailed among elites and common folks.

A traditional ideal family in China comprised many members, with three to four generations staying under one roof (Lee, 1953, p. 274). The larger family included the kins, consisting of a considerable number of people. The core functioning of a family hinged on the relationships between father and son, husband and wife, and elder and younger brothers. The family was headed by the patriarch, a male, usually the father, grandfather, or great-grandfather. Other male members were at the helm and took care of the dependents in the family. Sons were the privileged ones and, in return, were bound to display filial piety, as a part of Confucian ethics (Han, 2012, p. 23). Females were expected to obey and oblige the males. While a family formed the basic unit of society, it also served as a model for the state, considered to be the greater family (大家 dàjiā). The interrelationship dynamics based on Confucian ideologies within the family played a crucial role in maintaining peace, harmony, and equilibrium in the state (Quah, 2009, p. 49).

Over the ages, the position of the girl child in the Chinese family had gradually deteriorated, and girls were regarded as subservient and inferior to men (男尊女卑 nánzūn, nǚbēi) (Bansak, Jiang, & Yang, 2020, p. 159). Confucian doctrines and dogmas contributed the most to this perspective. Confucianism played a pivotal role in shaping traditional Chinese culture and had a supreme influence on traditional Chinese society. Patriarchy was the essence of the society, and ancestral worship and strict observance of rituals, as asserted in the teachings of Confucius, were strictly abided by every household. While Confucian Analects upheld the morality of the male members of a family, they have been majorly silent about sisters and daughters (Littlejohn, 2017, p. 12). A girl was thought to bring short-lasting happiness, as they were married off to another family. Hence, fathers were reluctant to invest in a daughter.

Confucius advocated that only a male heir could sustain, retain, and maintain the family's future, and male heirs were regarded as true successors (Freedman, 1961, p. 327).

It was beneficial to have more male heirs, and the birth of a girl child was often considered a misfortune. Girls were often choked to death in many families right after their birth (Chang, 2020, p. 118). If spared to survive, they were the last ones to be fed during calamities or hardships. Male members or sons were given preference in a family as they were physically strong and were regarded as bearers of the family lineage. Men were supposed to go out of the house to earn a livelihood and feed family members. They would provide shelter to the mother, sisters, and daughters and protect them. Daughters and sisters were kept out of the power dynamics in a family (Wang et al., 2019, p. 134).

Besides, Confucianism laid the utmost emphasis on morality codes. Sons and daughters were expected to display filial piety towards their parents. A girl, in particular, was preached to dedicate her life to serving her grandparents, parents, brothers, sisters-in-law, and their children in her natal family, and later her husband's family members. They were not allowed to read and write, as this was thought to inspire them to be progressive. A girl receiving education posed a threat to a man by becoming superior to him. Such a trend was considered a menace for the family and society (Lee, 1953, p. 274). It was a matter of great concern that too much education would corrupt the morality of the daughter and upset their ancestors. A girl, despite being meek and docile, tacitly posed a threat to male authority through her natural and biological endowments like lust, desire, and the ability to bear children (Ho, 1995, p. 195).

Confucian Analects only deal with the conduct of men, particularly how a son should treat his parents or how brothers ought to behave with each other. They do not speak about how sisters need to be treated in the family (Littlejohn, 2017, p. 9). Confucius and his followers regarded women as harmful, selfish, and manipulative. Sisters and daughters in a family were supposed to be educated only in household work and jobs that were limited to cooking, knitting, sericulture, house cleaning, etc. Their fundamental duty was to serve the males in their natal family before marriage and the in-laws, including brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law after marriage. Marriage was a girl's only goal in life, and she was brought up in accordance with similar aspirations (Guarde-Paz, 2016, p. 10).

In a traditional setup of a large Chinese family, young girls were expected to primarily serve the older members, as a daughter serves her father or as a sister serves her brother at home, and as a wife serves her husband after marriage. They were considered to be a liability to the family and were made to depend socially and financially on their

fathers or brothers before marriage, on their husbands after marriage, and on their sons when widowed. They were not allowed to meddle in the economic affairs of the family, since the eldest male member was in charge of managing resources shared by other earning male members (Yuan, 2006, p. 112). Neither were they allowed to step out of the house and look for a job (Wang et al., 2019, p. 442). Thus, it is evident that the parents were reluctant to make their daughters literate and preferred to educate them on household chores. A daughter had no right to choose her husband. When she was around ten, the parents would fix her engagement to a suitable family of their choice, usually through a local matchmaker. The would-be husband would preferably be an official or a prospective candidate of the official civil examination, well versed in the Confucian texts (Freedman, 1961, p. 325). The members of the in-laws' family expected the would-be bride to be apt in house-cleaning, cooking, sewing, child bearing, nursing, and similar domestic duties. Although this was the general trend among the masses, daughters, sisters, and wives belonging to the upper class were in a much better position than their rural counterparts and were allowed to read the classics and received education from a private tutor. However, they too were not permitted to attend public schools with their brothers or other boys (Lee, 2006, p. 354).

Since the family property was transferred to the male descendants, sisters or daughters were allocated only a small fraction that was spent as dowry or bridal wealth while marrying them off. Although the early dynasties made no concessions on this aspect, later dynasties like the Song (960 - 1279) and the Qing (1644 - 1911) ensured that a daughter was entitled to half of the ancestral property (Freedman, 1961, p. 324). Since society was ruled by men, this entitlement was entirely governed by the wishes of the patriarch. However, only fairly well-off families and the upper class could afford to arrange for the dowry which was largely utilized by the groom's family during the ceremony. It was even more tragic for families without a son and only a daughter. A higher number of female children was believed to bring in miseries with them. Poor families unable to provide dowry had to sell their daughters as concubines and prostitutes (Bansak et al., 2020, p. 23). Consequently, for her survival, a daughter had to depend on her father, her husband, and her son; she had to remain faithful and obedient to them in her entire lifetime (三从 Sān cóng, or the Three Obediences) (Chang, 2020, p. 7). Besides, women were also taught about right speech, right conduct, right attitude, and eagerness for work (四德 Sì dé, the Four Virtues). These were codified precepts from the Book of Rites (礼

记 Lǐ jì), considered to be one of the Five Classics attributed to Confucius, compiled during the Warring States period (475 – 221 BC) (Lee, 2006, p. 350).

Families in traditional China seldom discriminated children on the basis of their gender until the first six years and would equally train them in basic manners and etiquettes (Ho, 1995, p. 195). After that, they were groomed separately as girls and boys and were debarred from mingling with the opposite sex. After a girl attained the age of ten, she would be disallowed from taking part in activities outside home. Her life was confined within the four walls, engaged only in domestic activities like cleaning, washing, sewing, and the like (Wang et al., 2019, p. 902). She was also trained on values of being polite, compliant, and subservient. She would be reminded that her only goal in life was marriage, to lead her life in servitude at her parents' and in-law's places and her responsibilities towards both the families prior to and after her marriage. At around fifteen, she was forced to enter into marriage with a man whom she had no right to choose and to move to live with people who were strangers to her (Quah, 2009, p. 126).

Although not directly under the influence of Confucianism, the agonizing practice of foot binding became prevalent during the Song dynasty (960-1279). To enhance her daughter's physical beauty and charm, the mother would tie the toes of her feet tightly to break and twist them into tiny footwear. This led to permanent deformation of her feet, thus restricting her movement outside the house. In the beginning, the practice of foot binding was more common among the daughters of elite families as they could afford domestic help and were practically unable to move around or work swiftly. Later, this became prevalent among the ordinary masses too. However, by the advent of the Song dynasty, young daughters, sisters, and sisters-in-law started receiving education and were engaged in various vocational jobs. Although they managed finances, they were decisively controlled by the males of the family (Lee, 1953, p. 273).

Marrying daughters was also a means of establishing relationships with rich families and aristocrats that provided a scope for upward mobility of the natal family in society. A small amount of dowry received by the bride's family in the form of money and gifts would help the father arrange for expenses in his daughter's wedding ceremony. On the other hand, the bridegroom's family perceived their daughter-in-law as an additional working hand who would serve the elderly parents and other members of the bridegroom's family, apart from bearing and rearing her own children. It was conventional that she

would evolve into an ideal wife, mother, and mother-in-law through her unfaltering obedience (Quah, 2009, p. 58).

One of the fundamental concepts of Chinese philosophy is the Yin-Yang Theory, which distinctly demarcated gender differences in traditional society in China years after Confucianism. According to Chinese philosophy, the Yin-Yang Theory explains the forces of nature and the combination of elements that define different phenomena of life. While Yang symbolizes natural elements that are masculine, strong, bright, or active, Yin represents the feminine, weak, dark, or passive elements. In accordance with this branch of philosophy, girls were separated from boys and were sermonized to be submissive and weak. The Yin factor was not assumed to dominate the Yang one, otherwise it would disrupt the harmony. Likewise, daughters were not allowed to surpass sons (Fang, 2014, p. 27).

Although Confucius himself was much less vocal regarding discourses on women, there were other Confucian scholars who undertook the responsibilities of codifying systems and techniques of educating young daughters and sisters on ethics and moralities. Moral and ethical codes for women were compiled in four significant works (the Four Books for Women or 女四书 Nǚ sìshū) from different eras during the feudal period in China that reinforced the concepts of the Three Obediences (三从 Sān cóng) and the Four Virtues (四德 Sì dé) (Freedman, 1961, p. 325).

Ban Zhao, a scholar-historian from the Eastern Han dynasty (202 BC–220 AD), in her compilation on Lessons for Women (女界 Nǚjiè), instructed daughters, wives, and mothers on how to attain ideal womanhood. She recorded in her accounts that after three days of a daughter's birth, it was customary to place her under the bed, indicating her lowly status in the family, since sons were kept on the bed after birth. While a son was given jade, a daughter was given an earthen pot to play with as she was expected to devote her entire life to manual labor and be diligent in household work. Thirdly, her birth in the family was declared in order to reach out to the ancestors. This was to signify that the primary duty of the daughter was to worship the ancestors and conduct rituals (Quah, 2009, p. 88).

In accordance with the Yin-Yang Theory and as opposed to the strength of men, girls were supposed to be soft and docile. A daughter was taught to remain humble by not

revealing her talents. Being intelligent for a daughter was abhorred. Rather, she ought to display modesty and respect for other members and think the least of herself. She should practice endurance by not winning acclaim for her good deeds and by not concealing her failures. She should never react when insulted. She should go to bed late but wake up early and should neither be scared of hard work nor should she shirk her domestic responsibilities. The daughter who dared to work outside her domestic realm, together with her brothers or other men, was believed to bring disgrace to her ancestors and her family (Fang, 2014, p. 102). It was also forbidden for a daughter to engage herself in gossiping, laughing loudly, debating of any sort, and participating in any government affairs (Han, 2012, p. 45).

This apart, a girl ought to carry in her mind the four virtues of right speech, right conduct, right attitude, and eagerness for work (四德 Sì dé the Four Virtues), that have already been mentioned earlier. It is said that she should choose her words carefully, never indulge in profanity nor be outrageous to others. She should have expertise in sewing and weaving. She ought to be chaste, pure in body and mind. She should keep herself, her clothes, and the house clean. She should prepare well food and wine and serve them properly and should treat the guests well (Ho, 1995, p. 195).

The Analects for Women (女论语 Nǚ lúnyǔ) was compiled in the Tang dynasty (618 - 906) by the female scholars Song Ruohua and her sister Song Ruozhao. The objective of the compilation was to cultivate the former's daughter to become an 'ideal' woman. The latter stayed a spinster and preached her elder sister's admonitions on women. She was appointed as the royal instructor by the Tang emperor to educate the princesses. This book is regarded as one of the best works on female education during the feudal era in China. The pattern of instructions, however, was based on the earlier classics and the book of Ban Zhao. The Analects for Women expounds in detail on daily discourses for daughters. Major emphasis was on chastity and purity to maintain dignity, decency, and honor, which had been the primary themes in Ban Zhao's book Lessons for Women (Woo, 2009, p. 340). The Analects for Women forbade girls from turning their head while walking, opening their mouth widely while talking, moving knees while sitting, swaying or swishing skirts while standing, laughing loudly while happy, or fuming when angry. Daughters were also advised to conceal themselves in the interiors of the residence and learn domestic works. They were not permitted to be pampered, to express their own views,

raise their voices, sing songs, or venture out. The book warns girls to stay inside the walls of their houses, stay away from men, and not to venture outside the walls. In case they are bound to step out, they should not reveal their face and avoid conversations with strangers or ignoble women. Any deviation from this meant failure on the part of the girl to become a genuine human being (Ho, 1995, p. 196).

Besides, the *Analects for Women* also provides instructions in detail on how to operate the looms or the procedures of weaving fibres from ramie and hemp; segregating fine fibres, shuttling of looms; rearing cocoons; making footwear, stockings, clothes, stitching, mending, sewing, and embroidery. Commenting on the necessity of being economical and hardworking, the book also dissuades girls from being lazy and detests all lazy women who, by evading women's work, bring shame to their families and are ridiculed by society. The book also reiterates that a woman is incomplete without the knowledge of conducting rituals and proper manners strictly adhering to family etiquette. For instance, female guests should be welcomed with a warm and soft tone, prior to which she (the host) should dress well, make the tea cups and pots clean and ready, talk to the guest in a humble and poised manner, serve tea slowly and properly, enquire about the guest's well-being, and see her off cordially. When invited, one should be composed, helpful, and conduct herself appropriately (Lee, 1953, p. 275).

*Domestic Lessons* (内训 Nèixùn) by Empress Xu, the wife of the Yongle Emperor of the Ming dynasty (1368 - 1644), and the daughter of General Xu Da, was one of the treatises guiding women's behaviour, particularly the royal daughters. Her work consisted of twenty chapters or sections in reference to nature, cultivation, conduct, diligence, sincerity, social and moral restrictions, servitude, reverence of rituals and traditions, etc., chiefly drawn from earlier works with some editions (Freedman, 1961, p. 324). The book elaborately described modesty, dignity, faithfulness, warmth, and humility with regard to the virtuous nature of girls (Ho, 1995, p. 199). The book extols achieving a virtuous life taking the great sages as models and practicing astuteness following examples of the past. It tried to establish the relation between self-cultivation and virtue, the two of which were considered to be primary criteria for a daughter's marriage (Guarde-Paz, 2016, p. 12). It indicates that only through self-cultivation can a girl become virtuous, which can yield gainful influence on the in-law's family (Han, 2012, p. 45). A virtuous daughter brings in happiness and prosperity or else ill fate befalls on the family as well as the state. Young



daughters have been advised to despise envy, lust, and laziness and to cultivate the zeal for hard work (Lee, 1953, p. 278).

The Sketch of a Model for Women (女范捷录 *Nǚ fànjiélù*) by Madame Liu is the last book in the series of canons of conduct for women. The lady Madame Liu, who compiled this book, was not from the aristocratic class. She was the mother of a Confucian official and belonged to the Ming era (Chang, 2020, p. 4). She attained widowhood at a young age but did not remarry and remained chaste for the last sixty years of her life. Since she struggled a lot to parent her son single-handedly but never indulged in remarriage, people projected her as an exemplary mother and called her Chaste Widow Wang (Teng, 1996, p. 120). In her book, she propagated the Confucian theory of Three Fundamental Bonds and Five Constant Virtues (三纲五常 *Sāngāng-Wǔcháng*), the three most vital bonds in Chinese society on which all other relationships were based. These were relations between the father and the son, the master and the servant, and the husband and the wife (Littlejohn, 2017, p. 10). The five virtues were benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness. This book by Madame Liu acknowledges these Three Fundamental Bonds and Five Constant Virtues to be at the core of a family for retaining harmony and moral integrity (Zhang, 2006, p. 115). The book contained eleven chapters that touch upon various aspects of ethics, ideal motherhood, filial piety, chastity, principles, affection and love, customs and rites, education and prudence, hard work and thrift, and skill and generosity (Freedman, 1961, p. 334).

Confucian precepts that have guided and aspired daughters and sisters in families throughout Chinese history to act in accordance with the ideals of traditional womanhood and also formed the basis of education in China were by and large a privilege of the upper class (Quah, 2009, p. 78). The texts containing the sayings of Confucius were later compiled by his disciples in classical Chinese (文言 *wényán*) that were restricted to only the elite class who did not belong to the majority of the Chinese population (Yuan, 2006, p. 45). Common folks from the lower classes were left out of the purview of these doctrines. The function of folktales is immensely significant in this regard in transmitting and disseminating Confucian teachings from the four books among the masses since these canons were means of instructions for the daughters of elite families only (Bansak, 2020, p. 18). Folktales not only inculcated the traditional values among the vast Chinese population but also acted as a bridge of communication between the upper elites and the

common masses who were neither literate nor had the right to access these instructions (Lee, Wong, 2006, p. 360).

## **3.2 Selected Chinese Folktales**

### **3.2.1 Faithful Even in Death**

#### **Narration:**

Two well-off families, Liang and Zhu, lived in two different villages and were close to each other. A son and a daughter took birth at the same time respectively in the Liang and the Zhu family. Shanbo, the son, was smart enough, so the Liang family sent him to study in town. The daughter Yingtai of the Zhu family was not only pretty but also quick-witted. Despite being a girl, when she grew up, she convinced her family to study away from her family with Shanbo in the guise of a boy. Although they studied and lived together, Shanbo was too busy with his studies to recognize Yingtai as a girl. Yingtai was humble, honest, serious, and had a soothing impression on all their friends. Even when the two slept together, she would place a bowl of water in between. Shanbo was truthful and never touched the bowl. Upon his father's death, Yingtai's sister-in-law began to dissuade her from staying outside home and studying. However, Yingtai was resolute and managed to continue with her studies. As they grew up, Yingtai fell in love with Shanbo, but the latter and others didn't even have an inkling about this. The sister-in-law, running short of money and apprehending that Yingtai might secretly marry Shanbo, stopped financing her studies and compelled her to get back home. She had already arranged Yingtai's marriage with one Dr. Ma from a rich family. Meanwhile, when they parted, Yingtai sang a song for Shanbo, hinting that she was a girl in love with him. But Shanbo failed to discern Yingtai's love for him. When he could not bear her absence, he inquired about her at her home only to realize that she had been forced to marry Dr. Ma. Shanbo was shattered and eventually died of grief. On the day when Yingtai was married off to her in-laws' house, she stopped by the side of Shanbo's grave. She prayed to Shanbo that if there had been any true love between them, let the grave open. It did happen, and Yingtai threw herself into the grave in the presence of her attendants. Two torn pieces of her dress turned into two butterflies and flew away. When Dr. Ma asked the attendants to open the grave, they found only two white stones lying inside. The stones were thrown away to a place that gave rise to bamboo with two shoots. When one was cut, the other emerged. So, the grave diggers cut them together, and they went up into the sky to become rainbows. They remain

behind the clouds, unseen and unperturbed, until the clouds disappear and the rainbow becomes visible. The red colour represents Li Shanbo and the blue colour symbolizes Zhu Yingtai.

### **Interpretation:**

The character of Zhu Yingtai dominates throughout this tale. Although she came from a traditional conservative family, Yingtai proved herself to be smart enough to study away from her native village. She disguised herself as a boy to continue living alongside Liang Shanbo. This trans-dressing is symbolic of the appearance changes in Yingtai, as individuals are often judged by their looks (Ho, 1995). However, the innate qualities of Yingtai fortified her position among her classmates. Her hard work ensured that her friends did not discover her true identity as a girl. Even though she and Shanbo shared a bed, the bowl of water she placed between them exemplifies her honesty, purity, and control over her desires.

Social constraints, however, prevented her from openly expressing her intense love for Shanbo, which she diligently nurtured within her heart. She was determined to marry only him and no one else. The separation from Shanbo was deeply painful for Yingtai. Despite her vehement opposition to her sister-in-law's plans to marry her off to Dr. Ma due to her greed, Yingtai felt powerless following her father's death, and Shanbo's failure to recognize her love for him compounded her helplessness. On the other hand, Shanbo was entirely oblivious to Yingtai's feelings and died in despair. In the end, it was Yingtai's indomitable spirit to be united with Shanbo that drove her to fling herself into his grave, transforming both into immortals. The rainbow representing their union—a manifestation of red and blue—symbolizes the tragic love that was lost in the mortal realm.

### **3.2.2 The Amazing Adventure of a Scholar**

#### **Narration:**

A poor scholar used to live with his wife in a valley. They were so poor that they could not even afford to celebrate the New Year. Since they had no money to buy firewood, the wife used to send the scholar to collect it from the woods. Once he went to the woods and roamed around for quite a while looking for firewood, but could not find any. On his way back, he came across tribal monkeys playing with precious gems. Hoping to take some of

the gems, he tried to shoo away the monkeys by throwing a large stone at them. However, he was caught by the apes and brought before their leader inside a palatial cave. The scholar spent several days in honour and happiness there. One evening, the monkey leader turned into a handsome human and took the scholar along with him to the emperor's palace by magic. In no time, they found themselves inside a majestic theatre. After a while, the scholar felt tired and wanted to have a nap. The monkey leader directed him to a bedroom where the scholar lay down and fell asleep. This was actually the bedroom of the chancellor's daughter. When the lady returned to her room, she was shocked to find a stranger lying on her bed. However, she recognized that he was no ordinary man from his beautiful eyes. She instructed her maids to leave the room, woke the scholar, and informed him that she was the daughter of the chancellor of that palace, rebuking him for his intrusion. The scholar explained the truth, and she fell in love with him. For several days, she concealed him in her wardrobe. Nevertheless, her curious maids peered through a crack, and her secret was gradually revealed to her mother. The mother immediately accused her daughter of misconduct. However, she was pacified upon discovering that the scholar was a decent and dignified person. She advised her daughter not to share the secret with her father, the chancellor. Instead, one evening when the chancellor was intoxicated, the mother presented the incident without mentioning her daughter or the scholar's name and sought his judgment. The chancellor suggested that the couple get married, which would resolve the issue. The chancellor's wife had this statement written on paper and obtained his signature. When the chancellor learned about the affair between his daughter and the scholar, he was furious. However, he could not punish the couple as his wife produced the signed statement. A wedding ceremony for the couple was held with great pomp and grandeur in the chancellor's palace.

### **Interpretation:**

The chancellor's daughter plays a brief yet significant role in this tale revolving around the scholar's surprising journey. The scholar lived with his wife in a place where no one appreciated his qualities, resulting in his poverty. His wife burdened him with the task of collecting firewood, a job unbecoming of a scholar. In traditional China, scholars held the highest societal positions and were viewed as carriers of rich traditions and culture. The scholar seemed weary of his miserable life, yearning for an ascent in social stature.

He clearly had potential, for neither the monkeys avenged him for attempting to deceive them nor did their leader punish him for it. Instead, they treated him with respect and made him their honoured guest, even transporting him to the chancellor's palace. Upon discovering him in her bedroom, the chancellor's daughter could have ejected him or imprisoned him. However, she had the integrity to accept his inadvertent transgression and the bravery to fall in love with him, placing her trust entirely in a stranger, who was, incidentally, already married. Moreover, she courageously hid him in her private chamber, providing him with food and drink. She disregarded the prying eyes of her maids, reflecting societal interference at play. It was her determination and strength that elevated the scholar from a state of poverty to become the emperor's son-in-law. This transformation signifies that only the pure love and support of a woman can uplift a man's life from despair to fulfilment.

### **3.2.3 The Witch's Daughter**

#### **Narration:**

An old man lived with his three sons in a small straw hut in the middle of high mountains and dense woods. As he had to go out of his house daily to look for fuel, once he happened to meet an old widow in the forest in a white dress playing chess. The old man found this amusing and agreed to play with her. The old woman laid the condition that if he wins, he would have her three daughters as brides for his three sons, but if he loses, he would have to send all his sons as her sons-in-law. The old man lost all the games and helplessly agreed to send his sons to her house in the dark valley.

The sons were sent one by one in three days' intervals. When the third and the youngest son was on his way, he chanced to meet a hermit, who, upon hearing where he was going, warned him, saying that the old lady was a witch who had only a daughter. She had earlier duped many young men and killed them. There was a lion and a tiger at the gate of her house that had actually devoured both his elder brothers. The hermit then gave him a pearl and an iron rod to protect himself from the lion and the tiger respectively, and a cherry stick to enter through the main gate of the old woman's house.

The witch was surprised to see the third son and felt strange about how he appeared before her alive. But she smilingly welcomed him and asked him to do weird tasks that were impossible to accomplish, in attempts to delay their wedding. However, every time

the witch assigned him some bizarre job, the daughter of the witch came to help the young man. This continued for a long period of time during which the man also succeeded in fetching a bed of white jade from the dragon king's palace, a big drum from the mountain of the monkey king, and made a beautiful mosquito frame. While undertaking these absurd missions, he almost killed himself, but could survive on account of his good fortune and the witch's daughter's help.

When he had finished all his assignments, the witch by magic fed him poisonous snakes as noodles and tried to kill him again. The daughter saved him again. Finally, the wedding took place. But at night when the young man and the witch's daughter went to bed, the witch started playing her tricks again. This time she had planned to harm both of them. The couple decided to run away from the witch's house. However, the witch sent a flying knife to kill them. The daughter told the man that the knife would not go back without killing a human. The man immediately offered to be killed, but the daughter said she would rather be killed because she had the ability to return to life. She asked the man to keep her body after death in a large lotus pail, after which she would come back to life seven times in seven days, or forty-nine days.

After the knife killed her, the man wept bitterly and kept her body in a lotus pail as instructed. Upon returning home, the third son told his father how both his elder brothers were killed by the witch and how the witch's daughter saved his life and gave up her own. He kept watching the pail and after forty-eight days heard the sound of groaning from inside the pail. Although his wife asked him to take her body after forty-nine days, the man did not wait for another day lest she would die of pain, he thought. But his blunder led to the death of the maiden.

### **Interpretation:**

Although the depiction of the widow as a witch deceiving young men and killing them is in a very poor light, that of her daughter contrasts sharply with all the evil deeds that the mother was up to. The third son would not have survived if the daughter had not saved him every time he was in trouble. Conspicuously, no communication between the witch mother and her daughter is observed throughout the tale. Since the third son was honest and diligent, the daughter fell in love with him and constantly stood by his side, rescuing him, even going against the wishes of her mother. The truthfulness and courage of the

daughter were evident several times when she exposed her mother's game plan and never allowed her to succeed. She was straightforward in admitting her mother's wickedness and warned the man that she might kill them. In the end, the daughter offered her own life but saved the man she loved.

### **3.2.4 The Empress of Heaven**

#### **Narration:**

This is a tale about a seven-year-old half-immortal girl with magical powers. Her father and two brothers were merchants who often travelled by sea. Every time they were in danger while traveling, the little daughter, without revealing her identity, would save them. Once, when the father and the brothers were at sea, they encountered a massive storm and were in grave peril. The daughter, who was at home with her mother, sensed danger and her soul immediately left her body in search of her father and brothers. When she reached near their ship, she could see it being tossed by huge gigantic waves. Predicting their death was not far away, all three men had given up hope. The daughter lifted her two brothers in her arms and her father in her mouth. The colossal waves could not overpower her. The three men could only guess that it was an angel who had rescued them. They could hardly imagine that the little girl was from their own home.

But unfortunately, when her soul left her body to rescue her father and brothers, her mother was at home with her. Her mother was scared when all of a sudden, her mortal body became stiff and cold. Presuming that her daughter was dead, the mother wept, calling her name repeatedly while stroking her. The little daughter suddenly opened her mouth to reply and dropped her father from her mouth. The father was lost in the waves and could not be found again. The mother could not but blame herself for her husband's death. The brothers returned home and narrated how they were saved and how their father drowned. Although she condemned her mother for their father's loss, the daughter vowed not to marry. She took care of her mother throughout her life. After her death, she became a goddess whom the merchants worshipped as the saviour who protected them when they travelled in rivers, seas, and oceans.

**Interpretation:**

The little girl being an immortal in the family of ordinary people shows her exceptional capability and character. She had taken the form of an immortal to perform the inconceivable task of saving her father and brothers. At the same time, not revealing her identity indicates her humbleness. Otherwise, she stays at home with her mother, implying that in ordinary mortal form, she is an ideal daughter helping her mother with household chores. She also looks after her mother after her father's death to the end of her life.

Although her father died accidentally due to her mother's ignorance, nonetheless, she empathized with her mother by pledging never to marry. Marriage for a girl, in that society, often meant separation from her family. She was aware that her father was no longer there to take care of her mother. Her brothers were merchants and were away most of the time. Hence, despite being an immortal, she did not abandon her concerns for her family. Moreover, she did not limit her benevolence of saving lives at sea to her family only but extended it to all merchants, attaining the status of a goddess. It was precisely her kindness and greatness that attracted people towards her to venerate her as a guardian angel.

**3.2.5 Mulan Fights in The Guise of a Male Soldier****Narration:**

Around the fourth century, the notorious Huns laid an attack on the kingdom of Northern Wei. The emperor of Northern Wei, Xiaowen, cut the state's expenditure on warfare and encouraged farming to better the people's lives. Those working as military reserves were sent back to work in the fields. Since the Huns had threatened to have a war and it was a time of crisis, the emperor asked his commander called He to call back the reserves from the villages. A certain cavalier captain Hua Hu was among those who were called to join the war. Hua Hu was old and suffered from a prolonged illness. The emperor's order was ultimate, and Hu could not be replaced by his son who was only six, and his two grown-up daughters could not substitute him since girls were not allowed to be recruited. So, Hu had no option but to go for the war. Hu, who had been an erstwhile active soldier, was not afraid of fighting as he was for his poor health. He felt sad that he would not be able to serve his country properly. His youngest daughter Mulan was pretty, intelligent, and enthusiastic. She was completely opposite in character to her elder sister who was docile and whose only aim was to be married off to a good husband. After their mother died



young, the elder sister cared for Mulan and her little brother as her own children. Mulan was tomboyish and had learned all the skills of martial arts as she wanted to be a hero like her father. As the whole family was in a dilemma, one night Mulan sneaked into the room where her sister was repairing her father's armour. Mulan put on the armour and helmet of her father, looked at the mirror, and decided to join the war in the guise of a male soldier. When her father and elder sister heard about Mulan's decision, they initially did not agree to send a daughter to the battlefield. However, Mulan was confident and finally was able to convince them. After buying a horse and accessories, she bade goodbye to her family. Mulan was recruited without being recognized, and within a short time, she was promoted to the rank of general for her outstanding bravery. It was not an easy job for a young girl to stay with other men for ten long years. But she was intelligent enough to overcome all kinds of challenges. The soldiers were also happy to serve such a courageous and capable general. In a major campaign launched against the Huns, the commander took Mulan into confidence and ordered her to arrange for the supplies. Mulan assigned the most able lieutenant to undertake the task and warned her of the ferocious Hun leader Tu-Li Khan. Unfortunately, the Hun leader was cunning enough, and the convoy was ambushed in which many soldiers under the lieutenant were killed. After the failure, Mulan took charge herself to bring back the supplies and capture Tu-Li Khan. She chalked out a brilliant plan. At first, she pretended to surrender before the Hun leader and promised him to bring all her supplies to him. After winning his trust, Mulan very cleverly, yet cautiously, isolated Tu-Li Khan and a small group of Hun soldiers from the rest and then arrested them without much effort. The commander was elated. He praised Mulan highly and apprised the emperor of the exceptional contribution of Mulan in the victory. The emperor summoned them as he wished to promote her and confer bountiful awards on her. However, Mulan politely declined and requested her awards to be distributed among all the soldiers, as they too contributed equally to win the war. She also pleaded that as the war was over, she be released from her duty and be allowed to return home to serve her family. The emperor was very impressed and discharged her of her duty. She was too happy to join her expanded family after so many years. Her elder sister was already married and had children. Her little brother had grown up into a man and her father had aged. Everyone gave a warm welcome to Mulan and was excited to hear her accounts of bravery. A few days later, some comrades who fought along with Mulan came to visit her house. They mistook her as Mulan's sister and said that they were looking for General Mulan. After learning the truth,

they were awestruck. They could hardly believe that the bold and energetic general with whom they had fought the ferocious Huns was a young girl.

### **Interpretation:**

The portrayal of Mulan is representative of the undaunted spirit of adventure that is silently nurtured in young daughters' and sisters' psyche. The trait that women are capable of outdoing men and daughters are no less than sons is strongly marked by the character of Mulan. The tale speaks about how a crisis in her family brought her to the forefront to play a decisive role to save her father in the absence of an able son. She not only went against social norms of behaving as a tomboy or being recruited as a male soldier, but also undertook a major risk of being penalized had any of her comrades recognized her and informed the commander or the emperor. There were also possibilities of her being injured or killed in the war against the ferocious barbarians. She accepted the challenge of competing with men in their company, which depicts her strength and determination. Her being promoted to the rank of a general is an acknowledgment of her bravery. She is not only portrayed as a strong woman physically but was also very intelligent in planning flawless plans to defeat the enemy. When the lieutenant's convoy was ambushed by the Huns and the supplies were seized, she did not blame him but took charge herself. The prominent aspect of responsibility in her character might be observed throughout the tale. She acted as a protective and reliable shield for her family as well as her state. She assumed the form of an ideal daughter of the family and the country and stood straight against all odds as an example to be followed.

### **3.2.6 The Twin Sisters and The Magic of Malan Flower**

#### **Narration:**

Long ago, there was a very high mountain called Mount Malan in which grew a new kind of flower called Malan flowers. They were magical flowers grown by an immortal called Ma Lang who lived in the mountain. The Malan flowers would bring happiness but only to those who were brave and hardworking. Since the mountain was very steep, no one dared to go up and look for the flowers. There lived an old couple below the mountain with their two identical daughters. The older one, named DaLan, was greedy and lazy. But the younger one, called Xiao Lan, was hardworking. Once when Da Lan was busy eating at home, Xiao Lan went to work with her father in the farm. She expressed her eagerness

to see the Malan flowers. However, she did not want her father to venture up the steep mountain and risk his life. But her father was determined and went up Mount Malan to look for the flowers. With a lot of effort, he could reach the top and was mesmerized by the sight of the beautiful Malan flowers. At this moment, he slipped off from the rock and tumbled down when he was saved by the immortal Ma Lang. The father was astonished as Ma Lang had already known Xiao Lan as a beautiful, courageous, and hardworking maiden. He was also aware that the father had come to the mountain in search of the Malan flowers for his daughter. While praising her daughter, Ma Lang blushed and gave some Malan flowers to him. While coming down the mountain, the old man halted for a while to take rest and leaned against a pine tree. The pine tree suddenly spoke up and told the old man that he was lucky that Ma Lang had blushed while talking about his daughter Xiao Lan and would soon be his son-in-law. The old man's happiness knew no bounds as he hurried back home with the good news. Da Lan was not interested in a "workaholic gardener" like Ma Lang and found it too tedious to go up the mountain. But a wolf hid behind a rock and overheard the words that the pine tree exchanged with the old man. It stealthily went to the old man's house, ate their cat, and turned itself into a cat. All this was because the wolf wanted to have Malan flowers when Xiao Lan was back from the mountain. Meanwhile, Xiao Lan got married to the immortal Ma Lang and visited her father's house after a week. Da Lan was disappointed to see Xiao Lan visit home empty-handed. When everybody gathered at the table, Xiao Lan took out the magic flowers, uttered a verbal charm, and suddenly the flowers bloomed, and plenty of sumptuous food and a variety of drinks appeared before them. At this, Da Lan started envying her younger sister and presumed that she must be enjoying a comfortable and luxurious life with the magical powers of the Malan flowers. The wolf took advantage of the change in mind in Da Lan and asked her to see her sister off the next day when she leaves. Da Lan reluctantly went to see off Xiao Lan along with the wolf in the guise of a cat. Just before she would leave, Da Lan cried and asked Xiao Lan to exchange her dress and accessories as mementos. Da Lan in her younger sister's dress looked like Xiao Lan. Suddenly, to Da Lan's shock, the wolf snatched the Malan flowers from Xiao Lan and pushed her into a fountain. But as both of them could not recall the magical charm, the flowers did not bloom. The wolf advised Da Lan to pretend as Ma Lang's wife and learn the charm from him. However, when she met Ma Lang, Da Lan told everything to him. The wolf overheard their talk and fled. But all the people, animals, birds, and trees united to look for the wicked wolf. It was found hiding on a cliff and seeing everybody after it, it got scared and fell off

into a deep valley and died. Ma Lang salvaged Xiao Lan from inside the fountain water and brought her back to life with the help of the magical Malan flowers. Da Lan repented a lot and apologized to her sister, promising that she would follow her example from then on. Xiao Lan was very happy that her sister had changed for the better. She praised Da Lan a lot, saying that she was really the most courageous to confess her wrongdoings. Their family invited the entire village to a grand feast where Ma Lang chanted the magical charm with Malan flowers, and there was plenty of food for all.

### **Interpretation:**

Courage and diligence are the highpoints in this tale that keep recurring throughout. The depiction of Xiao Lan in contrast with her identical elder sister Da Lan shows that outer appearance may be deceiving (Freedman, 1961). It is the inner qualities of Xiao Lan that made her so popular that even the immortal Ma Lang wished to marry her. While Da Lan used to lead life greedily and aimlessly, Xiao Lan would always work hard to help her father. While everyone else would not even think of them, her longing for the magical Malan flowers is indicative of her aspiration and courage. However, she was honest enough not to let her father climb the steep mountain to collect those flowers. Her goodness and courage appealed to the immortal Ma Lang, who not only saved her father but also married Xiao Lan. The wolf is symbolic of wickedness and evil that cropped up in the mind of Da Lan. This is why she turned envious of her sister's attainment of magical powers. But when the wolf harmed Xiao Lan, she realized how low one can stoop with an immoral frame of mind. The traits of uprightness and endurance guided Xiao Lan in her journey and brought her back to life even after death. This is symbolic of the immortalization of these virtues that are manifested through the portrayal of Xiao Lan.

### **3.3 Role and Social Status of Sisters and Daughters in Traditional Khasi Society**

It is said that the sister embodies a Khasi family. The youngest sister is considered to be the successor of her mother (or clan) and is the sole custodian of the ancestral property (Gupta, Choudhury & Das, 2013, p. 32). It is relevant here to mention that she is not the owner of the property, nor can she sell it (Nongbri, 2000, p. 365). In case a man acquires land or sets up business at his wife's place, his entire property is handed over to the sister or Khadduh (in the absence of his mother) upon his death (Nongbri, 2000, p. 370). She is also the provider of shelter to her divorced brothers and sisters (Leonetti et al., 2007, p.

27). By rule, a Khasi man cannot marry two sisters, but is allowed to marry the younger one after the demise of the elder one. Such a case is also considered to be a taboo for which the man has to pay the fee (jingsang) against this taboo to the wife's family. The only male who acts as guardian to his sister and her children is the maternal uncle (Banerjee, 2015, p. 920). It is believed that the maternal uncle and his sisters along with their children maintain the bloodline of the clan or ling. Within the family where brothers and sisters stay under the same roof, the brother is forbidden to consider his sister as an object of sexual desire (Gneezy, Leonard & List, 2009, p. 1642). Sisters hold such a significant position in the Khasi family system that even the mother's elder sister (Meisan) acts as an adviser and the younger sister (Meiduh) acts as the younger mother for the children. During any emergent situation these two sisters take care of the kids instead of putting them in homes (Bhattacharjee et al., 2022, p. 3).

The concept of a powerful and commanding daughter in the Khasi society arose from the need to protect or retain the ancestral land property within the family that is essentially matrilineal (Hujon, 2018, p. 21). However, it is important to note that the youngest daughter is handed over the property as a custodian and not the only heiress (Nongbri, 2013, p. 415). The daughter has major responsibilities to accumulate resources for conducting family rituals (Devarani, 2019, p. 34). Religion or Niam for the Khasis is of supreme consequence. A family cannot afford to disregard its religious rituals (Kharmawphlang, 1996, p. 142). The daughter is also expected to make necessary arrangements to accommodate and look after all male and female members, including aged persons, widows, orphans, destitute, etc., in the clan or family (Kharmawphlang, 2005, p. 125). This role of the youngest sister or daughter in a Khasi matrilineal set up, which otherwise is played by sons in most other patrilineal societies, is a unique sociocultural trait (Beidelman, 1969, p. 190). The proactive participation of Khasi women in various fields of work, even as part-timers, is an obligation that they inherit by birth (Pakyntein, 2000, p. 29). A Khasi sister or daughter, whether she likes it or not, has to perform as a caretaker, a homemaker, and a bread-earner for her clan (Gurdon, 1907, p. 61). She is assigned with the custodianship of the family property handed down from her grandmother or great grandmothers so that no male members can seize this property entirely or in portions (De & Ghosh, 2007, p. 144).

### **3.4 Selected Khasi Folktales**

#### **3.4.1 The Tiger and the Monkeys**

##### **Narration:**

The animals in the beginning were not at peace in their kingdom. Their lives were full of disputes as they took undue advantage of their liberty to move around freely and create chaos. One day they held a meeting to elect a leader out of them who would be their king. Everybody unanimously chose the tiger for his might to rule the jungle. The tiger, being elected as the king, would always boast of his strength. One hot afternoon, while roaming around in the jungle, the tiger dozed off under the shade of a tree. He woke up to the tune of a beautiful song of a tiny insect. Unable to see the insect, the tiger looked around for the singer. There were some monkeys playing on the tree, one of whom smartly replied that it was their sister who was singing. Sensing trouble, the monkeys panicked. But to their surprise, the tiger immediately proposed to marry the monkey's sister. The monkeys were still scared and tried to postpone the marriage of their sister, saying that she was young and was yet not ready to marry the tiger. But the tiger was too obsessed to be convinced. After too many prayers, the tiger finally agreed to allow the monkeys a week's time after which he would arrive on the full moon night to marry their sister. The monkeys had a long discussion to fool the tiger and save their sister. They decided to make a clay figure, present it as their sister, and arrange a grand feast. On the said night, the tiger dressed himself elegantly and arrived with a net of betel nuts. He was very impressed to see his beautiful bride. He presented the betel leaf and nut to the bride and threw the net around her neck. When the bride showed no response, the tiger pulled the net a bit, at which the clay head broke and rolled down. On the pretext that the tiger tried to marry their sister only to kill her, all the monkeys attacked the tiger and almost killed him in a fierce fight. From that day onwards, the tiger never challenged the monkeys, nor did he marry an unknown animal from another fraternity.

##### **Interpretation:**

Interestingly, the sister of the monkeys, for whom the monkeys dared to challenge the tiger who was declared the king of the jungle, is conspicuously absent in this tale. But her absence, on the contrary, makes her presence more apparent. The entire plot of monkeys fooling the tiger due to his ignorance of other cohabitants of the jungle revolves around

her. The brutal battle that took place at the end of this folktale symbolizes the unity of weak people against a powerful opponent. This is one perspective. A sister in the Khasi society is considered to be precious, so is a piece of land for those engaged in farming. The tiger possibly personifies the landlord community who use strength and power to subdue the common people—here represented by the monkeys. Monkeys in most folktales are portrayed as witty animals. Their reluctance in marrying off their sister to the tiger was because of the tiger's lack of wisdom and understanding towards his subjects. The monkeys were convinced that the tiger would not have made a good match for their sister. Hence, they were not intimidated by the formidable tiger. Without bothering about the consequences of fighting such a ferocious animal, the monkeys, on behalf of their sister, defeated the tiger. The sister passively acted as a secret force that helped the monkeys gather courage to accomplish an unthinkable task.

### **3.4.2 The Goddess Ka Ngot and Ka Iam**

#### **Narration:**

Long, long ago there were two twin daughters of the god of Shillong called Ka Ngot and Ka Iam. They were happy and joyful and reluctant to part with each other. Ka Ngot was docile while Ka Iam was assertive by nature. One day when they were enjoying the view of Shillong from above the hills, they caught sight of the plains of Sylhet. They readily decided to compete with each other to win a bet by first reaching the plains. Ka Ngot was meek and slow. She chose longer but safer paths. Upon reaching the plains she was unable to find Ka Iam. As she turned to look for her sister, she turned herself into a stream shining in the sunlight as a silver necklace or Rupatylli in Khasi. Meanwhile, Ka Iam took all shortcuts to flow down without caring for smoother ways. She kept on hitting large rocks and pebbles, consumed a lot of time, and was nearly exhausted when she reached the plains. She was too confident to win the race and was shocked to find that Ka Ngot had already arrived before her. Being humbled, Ka Iam hid herself into five streams to meet her sister. Thus, there were two rivers: Ka Um Ngot and Ka Um Iam. When the Khasis came to know about Ka Um Ngot, the winner of the great race, they began worshipping her by offering her sacrifice and acknowledging Khublei or gratitude.

**Interpretation:**

The two twin sisters in this folktale, although deities, manifest humane qualities. They have been portrayed as twin sisters with contrasting natures. The stark differences between them display the good and bad consequences in the tale, with subtle indications of ideal features that a responsible sister or daughter in a clan should possess. While the younger sister Ka Iam was hasty, reckless, and overconfident, the elder sister Ka Ngot was prudent, patient, and diligent. The younger sister, without assessing the path from the hills to the plains, was certain about her win. Considering her elder sister to be a meek person, she underestimated Ka Ngot's capabilities. It was unwise of her to take detours to save time. She ventured against nature, which consumed most of her time and energy. In the end, she had to accept defeat for all her misguided and inappropriate decisions. Ka Ngot, on the other hand, quietly won the great race by thinking out simple, natural, yet effective judgments. She was way ahead of her younger sister not only in the race but also in her responsible approach. After she reached the destination, she looked for her younger sister, as an elder should do. She was not absorbed in winning the race like Ka Iam, but Ka Ngot restarted her journey by turning and changing her directions in search of her. As an ideal sister, Ka Ngot embraced her little sister as she hid and divided herself into small streams. Although this tale is about the twin sisters, it highlights the role of Ka Ngot as a responsible sister.

**3.4.3 What Caused the Shadows on the Moon****Narration:**

Once upon a time there was a goddess mother and her four children—three daughters Ka Um (Water), Ka Ding (Fire), and Ka Sngi (the Sun), and a son U Bnai (the Moon). All four children were beautiful, particularly the youngest siblings Ka Sngi and U Bnai. Both of them, i.e., the Sun and the Moon, at that time were equally bright and elegant. The children respected their mother and admired each other. However, as time passed by, the brother grew up to be a rebel in the family. He would act recklessly without the consent of his mother and sister. In one such instance, U Bnai went to the nether world and spent some time in darkness with the goblins and other evil creatures. When he returned home, he was welcomed by Ka Sngi with all brightness and charms. Being in the gloomy dark world for several years, U Bnai disregarded his family's dignity and honour, and asked his



mother to get him married to Ka Sngi. He insisted that he was the only match for her in the universe. The goddess mother was grief-stricken upon hearing such an unethical proposal. The sister Ka Sngi, out of rage, threw ashes on U Bnai's face. Thus, the moon became pale and would never show his face during daytime in the presence of Ka Sngi the Sun.

### **Interpretation:**

A Khasi family centers around the mother. Her children are expected to hold her in high esteem, and all decisions in the family or clan are taken with her consent. The goddess, her three daughters, and a son representing the elements fire, water, and the Sun and the Moon symbolize a typical Khasi family. While the daughters abide by their mother's will, the only brother U Bnai suddenly started following a wrong path. This probably paints a general picture of boys in a Khasi family, where the parents are believed to be biased towards the daughters and are loved more than the sons. Preference of daughters over sons is primarily due to the prevailing custom of bestowing the daughter with the family land or property. Daughters stay back even after marriage in the matrilineal family, and they tend to be more attached to the clan and are liable and responsible to it than the sons. This lack of belongingness to the family and its dignity is shown in U Bnai's leaving the family without his mother's or sisters' consent. He breached the sacred system of relationships within the family with an undue and unethical proposal of marrying Ka Sngi, his own sister. The incident of throwing ashes by Ka Sngi and turning U Bnai pale indicates that he was stamped as the outcast and disgraced and demoted to an object that will shine or appear to be beautiful only when the Sun casts its light on it. This dependency of males on females is also visible in other Khasi matrilineal family structure.

### **3.4.4 U Ksuid Tynjang**

#### **Narration:**

In the ancient times, there lived a crippled demon called U Ksuid Tynjang in the forests of Shillong. The demon, on account of his wrongdoings, was cursed with an extremely unpleasant and incurable itching which was relieved only by human touch. Because of this, the evil monster would draw people towards him by mimicking humans and shouting "Kaw-Hoit, Kaw-Hoit" – a rescue call of those who have lost their companion in the forest. Since it is considered to be a crime not to respond to this call, people would rush to him

only to be intimidated, captured, and compelled by the evil monster to rub his body to ease his itching. The pitiable ones who did not listen to his orders were tickled to death by the demon.

Once, while attending for the first time a traditional fair held at the foothills, two sisters, Ka Thei and Ka Duh, along with their little brother, lost their way and unknowingly walked away from the neighbours who accompanied them. It was getting late and they were scared. The eldest sister Ka Thei, in her desperate bid to lead her younger brother and sister back home, tried to catch up with others, but their companions were far ahead. They tried hard to look for their friends, but by the time they reached the hills into the Shillong Forest, it was dark. Finding it hard to trace their way back, and moreover, since they were tired with sore feet, they sat down and shouted for help. But there was no response. Suddenly they heard someone yelling, “Kaw-Hoit, Kaw-Hoit.” They mistook it to be a friend’s call, forgot about the warning, and immediately shouted back in response. But they were terrified to see the ugly crippled demon walking towards them. They were forced by the demon to rub his body. They had heard about the atrocious demon and dared not disobey his orders. Ka Thei, the eldest sister, was very intelligent and smart. She knew that the demon had not noticed the younger brother and at once hid him under a leaf-umbrella. As the younger sister rubbed U Ksuid Tynjang’s body, he fell asleep. Early next morning, Ka Thei instructed her brother to quickly return home, inform their parents about the peril they were in, and ask them to offer sacrifices to the god U’Lei Shillong whose land they were in, to save them. Both the sisters took turns to carry on with the hateful task of rubbing the demon’s body to keep him asleep. At night when the younger sister Ka Duh was collecting twigs and straws to light up a little fire, she found a dao or spear-sword nearby. Ka Thei immediately concealed it, and later on, when the demon was dozing off, she heated the blade of the sword red hot and lost no time to thrust it inside the demon’s body to kill him. But as nature has it, demons when killed do not die instantly but take some other forms. U Ksuid Tynjang turned himself into a jirmi creeper that guzzles life from other trees and entwines the feet of hunters. This creeper since then came to be known by the Tynjang creeper.

### **Interpretation:**

The fact that daughters appear to be stronger than sons has again been underscored in this folktale of the Khasis. The elder sister Ka Thei is courageous, responsible, and quick-

witted. She did not let her younger sister and brother lose hope when they failed to trace the route to their village in the darkness of night. They were in the forest and had no one to come to their help. She cleverly hid her brother before the demon U Ksuid discovered him. Despite being in distress, she retained in her mind the rituals of her clan and conveyed her parents to offer sacrifices to the god of Shillong and seek his blessings for protecting them from the demon. Like a traditional Khasi daughter, she was religious and reposed her faith in God U'Lei Shillong and believed that the sword that was found by chance was in a way the god was helping them. Broadly speaking, she succeeded in saving herself, her brother, and sister from the clutches of the demon. She also salvaged the villagers from the vices of the demon by getting rid of him. The younger sister Ka Duh also acted in tandem with her elder sister in the daring adventure of slaying the demon U Ksuid Tynjang. While her elder sister was preparing to inform their parents and killing the demon, she followed instructions from Ka Thei and carried on with the despicable job of rubbing the demon to keep it dozing. She did not flee away and stood firmly with her elder sister abiding by her words until the end and helped her to kill the demon. The unity of the sisters in an ideal Khasi family and their capability to fulfil undaunted tasks are the underlying messages that gradually unfold in this folktale.

### **3.5 Comparative Analysis**

As mentioned earlier, our study is primarily based on a comparative frame of reference to mark the representation of women in Chinese and Khasi cultures. In this chapter, we deal with the comparative depiction of women as sisters and daughters in Chinese and Khasi folktales. In the present section we try to analyze the major traits that may be observed in the significant roles played by the women as sisters or daughters in the selected Chinese and Khasi folktales mentioned in this chapter. We also try to understand the course of development of the characters that appear in the tales. Traits that define these sisters and daughters are discussed first from the Chinese folktales followed by those from the Khasi tales in the following paragraphs.

#### ***Faithful Even in Death (Chinese Folktale)***

**Rebel woman:** Zhu Yingtai was a revolutionary to be able to convince her family to let her stay alone away from home. She not only disguised herself as a boy, but she proved herself to be distinct from other meek girls who would dare not cohabit with boys. It is

astounding to observe how she managed to share a bed with Liang Shanbo her lover and impressed other boys where they stayed and studied together without anyone being able to discover her real identity. She did not compromise with social challenges when it came to confessing her true love, even on the day of marriage.

**Emulous woman:** Although women in traditional China were taught to act inferior to men, Zhu Yingtai stands alone who excelled in studies and conduct along with her male classmates.

**Independent woman:** While she was from a traditional well-off family, Zhu Yingtai stayed away from the comfort of her home, among only boys and still worked hard and took care of herself and her studies.

**Truthful woman:** Although Zhu Yingtai shared the same bed with Liang Shanbo, yet she was true to her chastity and purity. The bowl of water she kept in between her and Liang Shanbo shows her carefulness and particularity in maintaining an ethical distance from Liang Shanbo. Although Shanbo never recognized her as a girl. But Yingtai was aware of the fact that she was sleeping in the same bed with her lover before marriage.

**Resolute woman:** Zhu Yingtai faced resistance in different forms in her life. Initially she refrained from revealing her gender. Secondly, she restrained herself from revealing her love for Shanbo. Thirdly, there was a severe reluctance from her family to let her continue her studies. Fourthly, she was resisted to recognize her true love and marry an old person in lieu of money that the family wanted to receive from the bridegroom. Fourthly, Shanbo lost his life in her grief without expressing his love for her. Nature resisted them to meet as true lovers in this mortal world. At the face of all these challenges, Zhu Yingtai firmly convinced herself that she would not let her love to be lost forever. And she succeeded in meeting Zhu Yingtai in the form of rainbow where both the lovers stayed together forever.

### ***The Amazing Adventure of a Scholar (Chinese Folktale)***

**Rebel woman:** The Chancellor's daughter acted against all existing odds of the society, first by allowing a man to stay in her private room for days; and second, by deciding to marry an already married man.

**Truthful woman:** Since her father was in an administrative position, the Chancellor's

daughter could have easily handed over the scholar to her father and get rid off him. But when she came to know about the goodness of the scholar, she fell in true love with him and vowed to protect him from his father and the society.

**Courageous woman:** The daughter knew that her father the Chancellor was an angry man who would by no means accept her daughter to marry a person with an uncertain background. Moreover, the scholar was married. Because of her determination, she dared to have the audacity to first convince her mother and then request her mother to further convince her father. At the same time, she quashed away all kinds of intervention from the society.

**Resolute woman:** For the Chancellor's daughter, it was extremely unconventional to marry a poor married man. She was also aware that there would be severe social objections, detrimental to the reputation of her father or family. But she too was determined to marry him when she could see through the scholar's honest and gentle nature.

### ***The Witch's Daughter (Chinese Folktale)***

**Rebel woman:** The daughter of the witch was expected to resemble her mother in killing all trespassers. However, she precisely acts in contrast to her mother. In the course of saving the third son she went to the extreme to stand against her mother. In the end, the daughter gives up her life for her husband.

**Truthful woman:** The tale also reveals that the witch had failed to persuade her daughter to kill the third son. The daughter, when she came to know the son's exceptional attributes, readily fell in love with him and accepted him as her life partner. She helped him in all the occasions when the witch tried to kill him.

**Courageous woman:** It might not have been an easy task for the daughter to confront the witch for an ordinary human prey. Given the cruel nature of the witch, the daughter certainly detested her mother's ways of killing innocent humans. In protest, she proved all her mother's evil strategies futile and made the witch taste her own medicine by sacrificing her own life.

**Saviour woman:** The witch's daughter laid down her life in protecting the third son. She knew right from the beginning that her helping the third son would definitely bear strong

consequences. Every time the witch hatched some heinous plans for killing the son, the daughter would predict them and offer solutions to the son for saving his life. Without the daughter being there by his side, it was impossible for the third son to survive at the witch's place.

### ***The Empress of Heaven (Chinese Folktale)***

**Caring woman:** The daughter in this folktale was an immortal unlike her other family members. However, she was full of humane attributes. On the one hand she was anxious about her father and two brothers travelling on sea, and on the other she was taking care of her mother at home. She was so devoted to her family members that after her father's death, she vowed not to marry but stay home to take care of her mother.

**Emulous woman:** Although a little girl she was, the daughter exceeded her brothers in capability and responsibilities. She applied her skills to save and maintain her family better than her brothers. She did not rely on her brothers to look after her mother. Rather she took up the task herself. She did not confine her generosity to her own family, but extended to all traders who crossed the sea on their missions.

**Saviour woman:** As narrated in one incident in the tale, the daughter came to rescue her brothers and father with all the might she had. She tried to compensate the guilt of not being able to save her father by remaining a spinster lifelong to protect her mother. She also evolved from an immortal to a goddess through her virtue of benevolence as a saviour angel for all seafarers.

### ***Mulan Fights in the Guise of a Male Soldier (Chinese Folktale)***

**Rebel woman:** Mulan, the protagonist in this folktale is an epitome of rebellion. Seeing her family in crisis, she defied the norm and got recruited in the emperor's army changing herself into a tomboy. She also undertook the risk of being caught and penalized by the commander.

**Courageous woman:** Mulan displayed unparalleled valour in replacing her ailing father and train herself to work in the army and later successfully capturing the fierce enemy Tu-Li Khan. She put her life at stake and brought back all supplies from the enemy camp. Her outstanding bravery was acknowledged, and the emperor declared to promote her as an

army general. Her daring character has served as a symbol of courage for the Chinese people through ages.

**Emulous woman:** Mulan's spirit of adventure displays that women are equally or more capable of men. Amid the family's crisis, Mulan took the crucial role of substituting her father and proved that a daughter is no less than a son in serving the cause of her family or her country. She not only assumed a job that was supposed to be the forte of men only, but she excelled in it without boasting herself or drawing too much of attention of her commander or the emperor.

**Intelligent woman:** The tale of Mulan indicates that besides being physically strong, she is wise in her decisions too. Not only did she devise flawless gameplans but executed them to successfully defeat the notorious Huns. She was also quick-witted to win over potent enemies without bloodshed.

#### ***The Twin Sisters and the Magic of Malan Flower (Chinese Folktale)***

**Courageous woman:** Xiao Lan, the younger sister and the protagonist is both hardworking as well as courageous. She was never reluctant to help her father in the field. She was a simple village girl, yet after marriage she left home to stay with Ma Lang the immortal on the steep Malan mountains. Xiao Lan could see and have the magical Ma Lan flowers as she was fearless.

**Truthful woman:** Although Xiao Lan dreamt of seeing the Ma Lan flowers, but she was a loyal daughter and never asked her father to embark on the arduous journey to Ma Lang's abode for collecting the flowers. Her honesty and righteousness attracted Ma Lang towards her. These virtues also helped Xiao Lan come back to life even after death.

**Perseverant woman:** While an ordinary village lass would not aspire to think of Ma Lang the immortal, Xiao Lan did not lose hope of him and finally ended up marrying him. Her indomitable spirit of collecting the Ma Lan flowers and getting back to life are powerful traits that display her strong perseverance.

#### ***The Tiger and The Monkeys (Khasi Folktale)***

**Intelligent woman:** The monkey sister, although not referred to directly in the tale, plays the pivotal role and proves her to be a game changer. Possibly the idea of fooling the tiger

with a clay replica of her dressed as a bride was shared by her. She also probably instructed her brother monkeys to fight the tiger united on the face of any untoward situation.

**Self-respecting woman:** The monkey sister maintained her dignity by not coming to the forefront throughout all the happenings. Although marrying the tiger would have promoted her to the position of queen of the jungle, she refused to marry the tiger, as she preferred merit over might. Thus, she was able to retain her self-respect till the tiger was defeated by her brothers.

**Unfazed woman:** All the monkeys were scared at the proposal of the tiger to marry the monkey sister. However, the sister remained indifferent against all odds. From behind the curtain, she expressed her reluctance to marry the tiger, even though he was the king of the jungle, and instructed her brothers to think of teaching a lesson to the tiger and chalk out a plan accordingly.

**Optimistic woman:** Initially the tiger, as a powerful animal and the king of the jungle appeared to be dominating and demanding. But the monkey sister possibly did not lose hope of defeating the tiger. The task was almost impossible, but the brothers were convinced. This hope or optimism of the monkeys, not as strong or ferocious as the tiger boosted them up to engage in the brutal war to triumph over the tiger.

### ***The Goddess Ka Ngot and Ka Iam (Khasi Folktale)***

**Caring woman:** Ka Ngot was very affectionate towards her impulsive younger sister Ka Iam. In the absence of their parents, she acted as the guardian of Ka Iam. She was so concerned with her that she never thought of boasting about her win over her younger sister, but being unable to find her out Ka Ngot was much worried about her whereabouts. After Ka Iam had reached, she gleefully welcomed her without belittling her for her defeat in the great race.

**Confident woman:** Assessed in the folktale as a docile and meek woman, Ka Ngot was not expected to win the race. She was also initially reluctant and slow in running down to the plains. Yet she was confident enough to find out longer but smoother ways to allow herself flow at ease without stumbling against rocks. This poise and confidence ultimately helped her win the great race.



**Perseverant woman:** As she herself did not propose the great race, she as an elder sister, could have opposed or denied the proposal. But she probably had to show her younger sister the values of life that she needed to inculcate. Consequently, she participated in the race with a patient attempt and continued to flow until she reached the plains. Even after that she continued flowing, not for herself, but to look for her dear little sister.

#### ***What Causes the Shadows on the Moon (Khasi Folktale)***

**Truthful woman:** Ka Sngi was one of the members of the family of deities where there was a mutual respect for each other and veneration for the mother. She was fully aware of the religious aspect and honour of the family. She was pained when her brother U Bnai approached their mother with the absurd proposal of marrying her. She stood up against this breach of family ethics and religion and punished her brother to be ashamed of him and hide from her forever.

**Caring woman:** Ka Sngi was a caring daughter as she held her mother in high regard. She was furious when her brother insulted their mother. Although she drove her brother away to hide during daytime, she made him visible and shine by offering him her own light. This represents her sisterly affectionate love for her only brother.

**Self-respecting woman:** As may be observed from the tale, Ka Sngi never allowed her brother take advantage of her or her mother's affection, and harm her dignity. She retained her self-esteem of maintaining the family ethos and never let the wicked brother play mischief with her. Her expression of anger and flinging ashes to U Bnai is manifestation of protecting her self-respect.

#### ***U Ksuid Tynjang (Khasi Folktale)***

**Intelligent woman:** Ka Thei, the elder sister was smartest among the three siblings. Her successful actions of hiding her brother and later sending him as a messenger to the village, keeping the demon in slumber with the help of her younger sister and finally slaying the demon when it was asleep all show how quick-witted she was.

**Unfazed woman:** Given the horrible situation they were in, Ka Thei kept her calm and never acted in haste. Quietly but skillfully, she turned the worst situation to her advantage and without being panicked saved her brother, the younger sister and herself and all the

villagers from the cruel demon.

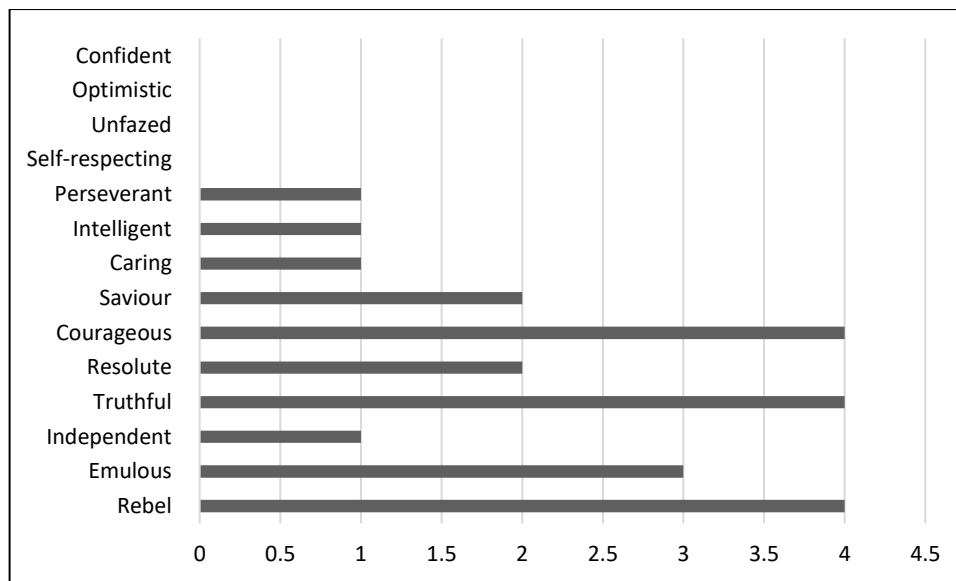
**Truthful woman:** Ka Thei was true to her clan religion and stuck to the belief in the god of Shillong. She had faith in the god and sought his blessings before killing the demon. For this she urged her parents to offer sacrifices to the god. She truly felt God was on their side when her sister Ka Duh found out the sword that was later used to kill the demon. This truthfulness in Ka Thei in believing that the demon can certainly be slaughtered through the blessings of the god might possibly helped her gather courage to accomplish the undaunted task.

### 3.6 Observations and Inferences

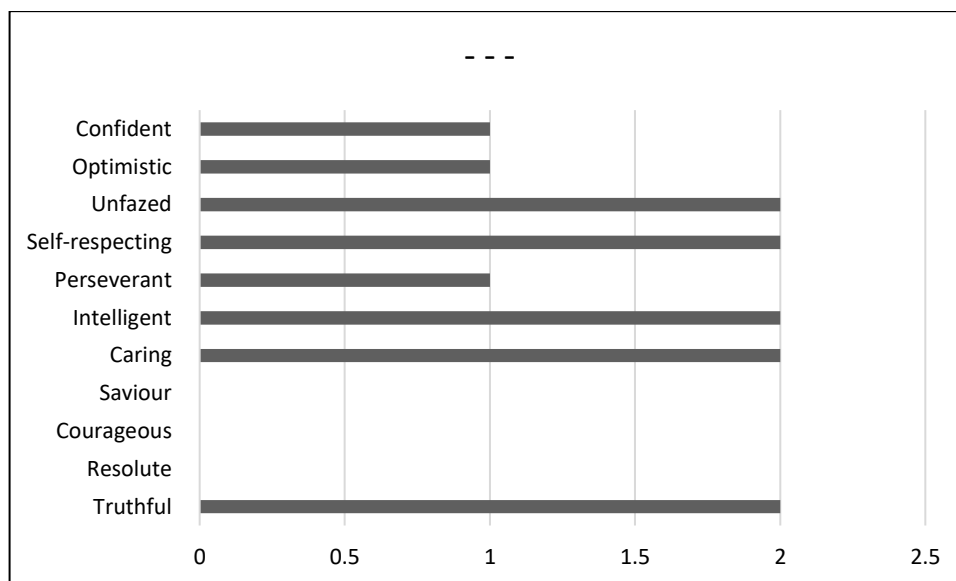
In the following section, we see the frequency of over a dozen traits that occur in the Chinese and Khasi folktales that have been chosen. The comparative table (Table 1) lays these out, although they do not appear evenly distributed within the stories. Data supports comparative study of the principal roles that women have as sisters and daughters and the extent to which these reflect cultural values as well as gendered expectations. As in the last chapter, the characteristics listed in Table 1 are assessed in terms of their social and symbolic meanings.

Traits Highlighted	Frequency of occurrence	
	Chinese Folktale	Khasi Folktale
Rebel	4	-
Emulous	3	-
Independent	1	-
Truthful	4	2
Resolute	2	-
Courageous	4	-
Saviour	2	-
Caring	1	2
Intelligent	1	2
Perseverant	1	1
Self-respecting	-	2
Unfazed	-	2
Optimistic	-	1
Confident	-	1

**Table 1: Chart of Traits and their Frequencies in Chinese and Khasi Folktales on Sisters and Daughters**



**Figure 1: Assessment of Traits in Chinese Folktales on Sisters and Daughters**



**Figure 2: Assessment of Traits in Khasi Folktales on Sisters and Daughters**

Table 1 indicates that virtues like courage, insubordination, and imitation pervade Chinese folktales, whereas self-esteem, intelligence, concern, and an unflappable attitude feature conspicuously in Khasi tales. Interestingly, honesty comes out as a pan-cultural virtue, highlighting how both cultures hold chastity, loyalty, and moral integrity in high esteem. This corresponds to what feminist folklore theorists recognize as the cultural construction of "ideal womanhood," in which the female body and reputation become the emblem for collective honour (Warner 236; Dundes 142). In both cultures, the daughter is

socialized to be pure and self-controlled, as any departure from chastity can lead to stigma, exclusion, or loss of marriage prospects (Ortner 77). Truthfulness, in this case, is not an individual virtue but a symbolic signal of the community's moral order.

In the Chinese stories, courage and rebellion are pushed to the foreground to highlight women's resistance to patriarchal constraints. Hua Mulan and Zhu Yingtai are examples of characters that represent archetypes of the "female rebel" who downplay gender roles by impersonating themselves and surpassing men (Jung 213). Their defiance is both personal and social: a covert balancing of filial obligation, personal agency, and cultural resistance. This is echoed in feminist interpretations of folklore, which see women's subversive identities as both cultural critique and aspirational empowerment (Haase 65). The characteristic of emulation—women reaching to "hold up half the sky"—provides further ideologizing pressure toward gender equality, an echo of modern socialist reinterpretations of traditional folklore (Honko 41).

In contrast, Khasi stories place women's roles within matrilineal and matrilineal society where the youngest daughter inherits inherited property and takes charge of the family. This is what matrilineal sociology understands as the structural responsibility of women in kinship structures (Gough 4; Nongbri 23). Intelligence and resourcefulness of the sister or daughter are key to maintaining the family's welfare, especially in poor households where economic survival is reliant on her flexibility. Further, those qualities of self-respect and caring are also required to counterbalance authority in the family since Khasi women have to negotiate between dependent relatives, maternal uncles, and household responsibilities. In this context, "being unfazed" serves as a survival tactic, a psychological mode of coping with communal obligations (Butler 178).

In contrast to Chinese heroines characterized by saviour roles modelled on myth and legend, Khasi women are not infrequently characterized as warriors or public guardians. Such absence indicates structural limitation: Khasi women are relegated to domestic control and barred from warfare or administrative responsibilities, so their symbolic capital is bound up in lineage continuity and not heroic rescue (Lévi-Strauss 214). The Khasi daughter is thus conceived more as a family guardian and less as a public heroine and thus represents the Great Mother archetype as understood through Jungian archetypal analysis—a nourisher, protector, and sustainer of life whose power remains contained within the kinship sphere (Jung 136).

Thus, comparative data expose divergent but culturally congruent models of female agency. In Chinese stories, women express individual defiance, taking on feminist archetypes of rebelliousness and bravery. In Khasi stories, women take on collective responsibility, acting as cultural centres of matrilineal kinship. Both systems end in agreement on truthfulness and chastity as non-negotiable virtues, reaffirming women's symbolic function as guardians of honour.