

## Emotional Economy and Influence Dynamics in 'Woman and Doll': A Social Exchange Perspective"

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### Abstract

*This paper explores the application of George C. Homans' Social Exchange Theory to the Manipuri folktale "Woman and Doll." The study aims to demonstrate how Homans' propositions regarding behavioral psychology, economic exchange, influence dynamics, and small group structure elucidate the underlying social behaviors. The folktale centers on a rich widow's daughter who bonds intensely with a doll, impacting her social interactions and marriage. The study explores her behavior, reflecting Homans' concept of seeking rewards and avoiding costs. It also views her attachment to the doll and subsequent social isolation as an economic exchange. Further, there is an analysis of the influence dynamics when the daughter gains a unique ability, altering the balance of social exchanges in her favor. The small group structure shifts as she integrates into her husband's home, achieving equilibrium through her newfound influence.*

**Keywords:** Behavioral Psychology, Economic Exchange, Influence Dynamics, Manipuri Folktale, Social Exchange Theory.

### INTRODUCTION

Folklore is that part of a people's culture which is preserved, consciously or unconsciously, in beliefs and practices, customs and observances of general currency; in myths, legends, and tales of common acceptance; and in arts and crafts which express the temper and genius of a group rather than of an individual. Because it is a repository of popular traditions and an integral element of the popular "climate," folklore serves as a constant source and frame of reference for more formal literature and art; but it is distinct therefrom in that it is essentially of the people, by the people, and for the people. (Gaster, 1972: 399).

Folktales connect different generations and offer insights into a community or nation's cultural values, societal norms, and traditions. These stories passed down orally, carry cultural wisdom, and moral teachings that have shaped societal standards and continue to influence contemporary life. They reflect a community's collective experiences and address universal themes such as good versus evil, the importance of wisdom and bravery, and the consequences of one's actions. Through their narratives, they entertain, educate, and instill values, allowing individuals to understand their place in the world and learn from the past. The origin of folktales remains a mystery, but their existence is as old as human communication. They likely began when humans started sharing stories to teach moral lessons and entertain. Despite the advancements in technology and changes in societal structures, the essence of folktales remains relevant, highlighting their timeless contributions and importance in preserving cultural identity and continuity.

This study will analyze the Manipuri folktale "Woman and Doll" using Homans' social exchange theory. Manipur is a northeastern state in India that has a rich cultural heritage. Manipur's geography is unique, with the valley region surrounded by hills stretching over much of the state. The central part of the state is where the capital city, Imphal, is located. This valley is a flat region that houses a significant portion of the state's population. The state is known for its diverse flora and fauna, including rare and endemic species, within its forests, which cover much of the hill regions. Loktak Lake, the largest freshwater lake in northeastern India, is a significant geographical feature of the state. Dance, music, and art are integral to Manipuri culture, with classical Manipuri dance being renowned worldwide for its grace and beauty. Manipur's history dates to ancient times, with early records mentioning the region as a princely state. Manipuri folktales are enriched with themes

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of love, courage, justice, and the supernatural. The diverse themes range from love, beauty, family, and evil to sacrifice marriage, death, and many more. From the heroic protagonist to the foolish jester, folktales have various characters that continue to captivate and inspire the audiences. It's not uncommon for the protagonist of a story to experience a great deal of hardship and turmoil throughout their journey. Sometimes, these difficulties can lead to the character's downfall or victory.

"Woman and Doll" is about a rich widow's daughter who forms a close bond with a doll her mother sews for her. This becomes central to the girl's life, significantly influencing her social interactions. As she grows older, her attachment to the doll deepens, leading to isolation from her peers and affecting her social quality. Eventually, this attachment plays a crucial role in marriage, where her unique relationship with the doll and the subsequent ability to understand animal languages influence her interactions with her husband and later, the king. The narrative's focus on attachment, influence, and social dynamics makes it a compelling subject for analysis through George C. Homans' Social Exchange Theory. It focuses on social behavior through rewards, costs, and exchanges. This theory encompasses several key propositions such as behavioral psychology, economic exchange, influence dynamics, and small group structure.

"An incidental advantage of an exchange theory is that it might bring sociology closer to economics-that science of man most advanced, most capable of application, and, intellectually, most isolated." (Homans, 1958: 598). Homans suggests that individuals maximize rewards and minimize punishments in their social interactions. The daughter's attitude towards the doll can be interpreted through behavioral psychology. The doll provides emotional rewards such as comfort and companionship. This system, like operant conditioning, explains why the girl continues to invest time and care into the doll despite social isolation. Social interactions are viewed as transactions where individuals exchange resources of value. Her relationship with the doll can be seen as an economic exchange. The girl invests emotional energy, time, and care into the doll, expecting emotional satisfaction and companionship. This reciprocal relationship highlights the transactional nature of social exchanges, where both parties provide and receive valuable resources, albeit in a non-material form.

According to Homans, individuals influence each other's behavior through exchanges that alter the balance of rewards and costs. The daughter's interactions with the doll influences her social status. It leads to social isolation and affects her relationships with her peers and later, her husband. When she gets the ability to understand animal and bird languages, it alters the dynamics of influence. Consequently, her value and prestige within her social group, particularly with the king and her husband, is heightened. "But perhaps the first person has found their sentiment and activity rewarding, and, if he is to keep on getting them, he must make his own behavior more valuable to the others." (Homans, 1958: 599). The exchanges between individuals shaped the structure and dynamics of small groups. The folktale illustrates the changes in the small group dynamics when the girl marries and joins her husband's household. Initially, she is misunderstood, creating tension within the group. However, her ability to predict future events through the languages of the birds brings her into equilibrium with her new social environment. Her unique skills and the effect helped stabilize the group dynamics. This shows exchanges and the balance of rewards and costs shape the structure of small groups.

### **Behavioral Psychology: The Daughter's Bond with the Doll Through Homans' Theory**

The daughter's connection with her doll can be comprehensively understood through George C. Homans' proposition that individuals seek rewards and avoid punishments. He posits that behaviors are influenced by their consequences, specifically, those that result in positive outcomes are rewards and these are likely to be repeated. On the other hand, those that result in negative outcomes are likely to be punishments that are to be avoided. In the folktale, the woman's bonding with the doll becomes a central aspect of her life. It provides her with significant emotional rewards. The doll offers comfort and companionship which are the essential emotional needs for the girl, especially given her apparent isolation from other social interactions. The consistent companionship of the doll provides the daughter with feelings of security and happiness. This emotional satisfaction is a powerful reward, strengthening her nurturing and interaction with the doll. From a behavioral psychology perspective, this situation can be explained using the principles of operant conditioning. Operant conditioning, a concept developed by B.F. Skinner, suggests that behavior is shaped by its consequences. In this context, the daughter's care towards the doll is positively supported by the emotional

comfort and companionship she receives. Each time the daughter interacts with the doll and experiences these positive emotions, it is more likely that she will continue to engage in similar interactions. Operant conditioning involves three main components. These are reinforcement, punishment, and extinction. The doll's companionship rewards the girl with a positive emotional response. Every interaction that brings comfort and happiness strengthens her attachment and prompts her to continue caring for the doll. On the other hand, the folktale does not explicitly describe punishments. The negative social consequences such as mockery from peers who call her "keeper of the doll" can be viewed as a form of social punishment. However, these are not strong enough to outweigh the rewards she receives from the doll. Extinction would occur if the rewards from interacting with the doll diminished over time, leading the daughter to cease her potential. However, in the folktale, the emotional rewards remain constant or even increase as she grows older. The mother hiding the doll to break her attachment introduces a temporary form of extinction. This action further leads to the daughter's distress and refusal to eat or drink. This response highlights the depth of the conditioned behavior and the strong reinforcement that the doll's presence provides. The girl expresses relief and happiness when her mother returns it. As she matures, her attachment to the doll becomes a defining aspect of her identity, affecting her social interactions and relationships. It drives her to prioritize the doll rather than develop relationships with peers and complicates her marital relationship. The emotional rewards provided by the doll outweigh the potential social rewards from human interactions.

### **Economic Exchange: Impact of Unique Abilities and Emotional Investment**

Social interactions are conceptualized as transactions in which individuals exchange valuable resources. These can be material, such as money and goods, or non-material, such as time, affection, and social approval. The girl's relationship with the doll can also be interpreted as a form of economic exchange. She invests significant emotional energy, time, and care into her relationship with the doll. From a young age, she treats it as a perfect companion, sharing her daily experiences and meals. This is not merely a sign of affection but also a transaction in which she expects to receive something in return which can be emotional satisfaction and companionship. These intangible rewards are crucial for her well-being and sense of security, especially given her isolation from other social relationships. Her emotional investment in the doll is substantial because she treats it as a confidant and friend, sharing her joys and sorrows. This energy is a valuable resource that she continuously expands, nurturing the doll as she would a living being. These include dressing the doll, speaking to it, and ensuring it is always by her side. It reflects the high value she places on her doll. Time is another critical resource the girl invests in her relationship with it. From childhood through her teenage years and into her marriage, she dedicates considerable time to caring for and interacting with the doll. This long-term commitment indicates that she perceives the emotional rewards she receives as worth the significant time investment. The reciprocal nature of this exchange is evident that the more time and emotional energy she invests, the greater the emotional satisfaction and sense of companionship she receives.

The relationship between the girl and the doll exemplifies a reciprocal exchange fulfilling Social Exchange Theory. In this relationship, both parties provide and receive valuable resources non-materialistically. The doll's role is to offer unwavering companionship and emotional support. This is important for the girl's stability and happiness, particularly as she faces the challenges of growing up and navigating social dynamics. Although it is inanimate and does not have agency, the girl perceives it as giving back emotional comfort and companionship. This is essential for her continued investment in the relationship. Her act of reserving food for the doll and speaking to it is met with the doll's constant presence, which she interprets as emotional support. The consistent emotional satisfaction she derives from the doll compensates for the lack of social interaction with her peers.

When she marries, the dynamics of her economic exchanges shift. Her husband and new household members become part of her social exchange network. Initially, her continued attachment to the doll creates tension, as her first husband misinterprets her manners. However, when the king acknowledges her ability to understand the language of animals and birds, it alters the balance of exchanges within her marriage and household. Her unique ability becomes a valuable resource, increasing her influence and prestige. This shift highlights how new resources can change the dynamics of social exchanges and relationships.

## **Elevated Social Status and Influence through Unique Contribution**

The girl's behavior, driven by the emotional rewards she receives from the doll, leads her to forego potential social interactions and the rewards they might bring. The mockery from her peers acts as a social punishment, but the emotional comfort and companionship provided by the doll outweigh this cost. A decisive moment in the folktale is when the doll gifted her with the ability to understand the language of the birds and animals. This new skill significantly alters the influence dynamics within her social group. However, this ability begins to influence her marital prospects. She is married to a wealthy man's son, but he misunderstands her actions. The husband, unable to comprehend her actions, suspects her of being unnatural or even a demon which leads to further social costs. This highlights the complexities of influence dynamics, as the daughter's actions, shaped by her attachment to the doll, impact her husband's perceptions and end their relationship.

Fortunately, her value and prestige increased with the appearance of the king. Her skill proves useful in several critical situations, such as when she discovers a hidden treasure or warns of impending danger through animal messages. These actions demonstrate her unique value to the king who later marries her, shifting the balance of rewards and costs in her favor. When she interprets the crow's warning about the poisonous rainwater, many people in the kingdom are saved. This act showcases her unique ability and significantly increases her social capital. The king, recognizing the importance of her skill, values her presence and contributions thus elevating her social status and influence.

## **Long-term Stability and Broader Recognition in Social Structures**

The girl's ability to influence others through her unique skill reshapes the group's structure, establishing her as a key figure in the tale. This shift in influence dynamics also affects how others interact with her. The king, valuing her contributions, treats her with respect and honor. These changes demonstrate how influence dynamics can transform social relationships and structures within a group.

According to Homans, the structure and dynamics of small groups are significantly shaped by the exchanges between individuals. These exchanges, which involve both material and non-material resources, influence the balance of rewards and costs, thereby determining the relationships and hierarchies within the group. In "Woman and Doll" the small group structure is vividly illustrated through the changes that occur when the protagonist marries and integrates into her husband's household. When she moves into her husband's household, the misunderstandings create tension within the small group. The husband's inability to comprehend his wife's peculiar behavior during their first meal leads him to question her nature and later suspect her of being a demon.

Feeling sorry when the two ants stop their tug of war on a draw, the girl cuts the grain of rice with her sharp nail into two halves. Each of the two ants bit one half of the rice grain and went away happily thinking in their respective minds that each had won the game. Seeing this the girl heartily laughs, On seeing the condition of his wife the husband feels suspicious, and without uttering a word he begins to think in his mind whether his wife is a human being or goddess or giantess. (Kumar, Chirom, 2014: 13-18).

This suspicion outlines a significant imbalance in the group in which the husband's perceptions about his wife are misunderstood. This results in a state of disequilibrium. Concerning social exchange theory, the husband perceives the costs of his wife's actions negatively. It creates a barrier to acceptance and integration within the household. The tension and confusion of her first husband outline a disruption in the expected exchanges of mutual understanding and support that typically characterize a stable small group structure. However, her unique skill, later, becomes a valuable resource exchangeable within the group, altering the balance of rewards and costs.

When she is an adult, the woman's contributions become fruitful and thus, the small group structure stabilizes. The group's dynamics evolve to accommodate and integrate her potential, establishing a new equilibrium where her role is recognized and valued. The changes in the small group structure are not just about acceptance but also the redistribution of influence within the group. This redistribution of influence exemplifies Homans' proposition that social structures are shaped by exchanges that balance rewards and costs. The long-term

stability of the small group is achieved through ongoing exchanges that maintain the balance of rewards and costs. Her integration into the small group is complete when her influence is recognized not just within the household but also by the king. Her predictive skills bring her to the king's attention, leading to her acceptance and respect at a higher social level. This broader recognition further stabilizes her position within the small group, as her value is acknowledged internally and externally.

When the King recognizes her extraordinary power, she enters the larger group. For instance, when she interprets the crow's warning about the poisonous rainwater, she provides important information that saves many lives.

One day, suddenly at midnight a crow was flying across the localities and the village and heralded the news: "Hey mankind! Don't drink the rainwater that will fall on the third day from today, that's poisonous water. If it is taken you will die of diarrhea." Hearing the herald of the crow the woman reported it to the king the next day. The king sent his men to spread the message all over the country. (Kumar, Chirom, 2014: 18).

This act increases her social capital and elevates her status within the group. The king sees her not as a source of confusion and threat, but as a unique woman with great potential. In social exchange terms, the rewards of knowing the languages of birds and animals which further provides protection outweigh the initial costs associated with her misunderstood behavior. The King's perception of her changes from suspicion to appreciation, acknowledging the practical benefits of her abilities.

## **DISCUSSION**

George C. Homans' Social Exchange Theory offers many angles for analyzing human behavior, relationships, and social group structures. This perspective shows how fictional narratives can illustrate and predict real-world social dynamics. An intriguing aspect is the daughter's bond with the doll challenges traditional views of social interaction. Behavioral psychology highlights the power of non-human entities in shaping human behavior. Attachments to objects, often seen as unhealthy, can provide significant emotional rewards, sometimes even more than human relationships. This raises questions about material culture's role in emotional and social development, a topic worth exploring in psychology and sociology. The folktale's narrative explores economic exchange principles in a non-economic context. The daughter's emotional investment in the doll acts as a currency, with the doll's companionship being the return on that investment. This exchange expands Homans' theory beyond material exchanges, suggesting emotional and psychological resources are crucial in human relationships. This perspective invites further study of how non-material exchanges shape social bonds, especially where material resources are scarce or secondary. The story's influence dynamics highlight another key aspect of Homans' theory. The daughter's ability to understand animal languages transforms her socially, showing how individual skills can shift power dynamics within a group. This part demonstrates that personal abilities can change social hierarchies and influence structures. Recognizing and valuing individual contributions can enhance group performance and harmony, especially in organizational settings. The analysis of small group structures in the folktale shows the fluidity and adaptability of social groups. The shifts in group dynamics as the daughter moves from her mother's household to her husband's, and then to the king's court, illustrate how social structures continually change through new exchanges and relationships. This view challenges rigid models of social organization, advocating for a more nuanced understanding of group evolution in response to internal and external changes. This insight is particularly relevant in today's rapidly changing social contexts.

The folktale's supernatural elements, like the daughter's ability to understand animal languages, provide a context for examining the intersection of belief systems and social behavior. These elements highlight how cultural narratives and mythologies shape social norms and expectations. By including supernatural abilities in the story, the folktale reflects broader cultural values and beliefs, suggesting social behaviors are influenced by deep cultural narratives as well as rational economic exchanges. This intersection enriches our understanding of how cultural contexts influence social interactions, offering a broader framework for analyzing social exchange. The folktale's depiction of marriage and familial relationships through Social Exchange Theory sheds light on the complexities of intimate relationships. The daughter's evolving relationship with the king and their initial misunderstandings highlight the importance of clear communication and mutual understanding in maintaining balanced exchanges. This aspect aligns with contemporary discussions on relationship dynamics,

showing the relevance of Homans' theory in improving intimate relationships. Applying his theory to "Woman and Doll" also explores the role of gender in social exchanges. A female protagonist facing social challenges through unique abilities offers a ground for examining how gender dynamics influence social interactions and group structures. This perspective is crucial for understanding the impact of gendered expectations and roles that balance rewards and costs in social exchanges. Gender-sensitive approaches to social exchange can provide a deeper understanding of the complications of human behavior and relationships. Therefore, discussing Homans' theory underscores its versatility and applicability across diverse contexts. The woman's relationship with the doll, the impact of her unique abilities, and the shifts in group dynamics provide the manifold nature of social exchanges. It shows that this theory offers valuable frameworks for understanding economic and material exchanges, and the complex emotional, psychological, and cultural dimensions of human relationships. This analysis invites further exploration of Social Exchange Theory across various cultural narratives and real-world scenarios, affirming its significance in understanding social behavior and interaction.

## CONCLUSION

This study successfully applies George C. Homans' Social Exchange Theory to the Manipuri folktale "Woman and Doll," revealing the theory's broad applicability to both real-life and fictional narratives. The folktale also expands the concept of economic exchanges to include emotional and psychological investments. The daughter's relationship with her doll showcases how these non-material exchanges play a vital role in human relationships, emphasizing that social bonds extend beyond material transactions. The influence dynamics within the story underscore the impact of individual skills and attributes on social standing. The daughter's unique ability to understand animal languages transforms her social position, demonstrating how personal contributions can alter social hierarchies and group dynamics. This aspect is particularly relevant for understanding the importance of recognizing and valuing individual differences in various social contexts. The shifting group structures depicted in the folktale maintain the adaptability of social groups. The daughter's integration into different households and eventual recognition by the king illustrate how social structures evolved through new exchanges and relationships. This view of social organization challenges rigid models and extends the fluid nature of social groups. The inclusion of supernatural elements in the folktale reflects the role of cultural narratives in shaping social behaviors and norms. These elements provide a broader context for understanding how belief systems influence social exchanges, enriching our understanding of the interplay between cultural narratives and social interactions. Finally, the folktale's focus on marriage and familial relationships offers insights into the balance of rewards and costs in intimate relationships. The initial misunderstandings and eventual mutual recognition between the daughter and her husband highlight the importance of clear communication and equitable exchanges in maintaining healthy partnerships. In conclusion, this analysis demonstrates the versatility of Homans' Social Exchange Theory in explaining various aspects of social behavior and relationships.

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