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The Clever Old Woman

Once upon a time, there lived an old widow in a village. She lived alone. She worked hard. She used to weave on the loom during daytime and spin at night. In addition to her hard work, she was wise and witty.



One dark night, a thief entered her house silently. The old widow was spinning by the fireside. There was a *thaomei* burning nearby. The thief hid himself in a dark corner. He was waiting for the old woman to fall asleep. A little later the woman realized that there was someone hiding in the corner behind the *thaomei*. She was scared but she did not shout. Instead, she pretended as if she were not aware of the presence of the thief. She went on spinning. But she thought of a plan to catch the thief. Suddenly she called out, “*Ita-thaomei! Ita-thaomei!*”. Since there was no reply from

the *thaomei*, she went on, "It is strange that you have not replied today. Every day we talk to each other. What has happened today? Are you not responding because you are feeling sleepy? Or is there a stranger in the house tonight?" The thief was surprised. The woman talked loudly, "*Ita-thaomei*, if you don't reply, it means that there is a stranger in the house.

The thief thought deeply, "A wonderful thing! A *thaomei* responding to a human call. Perhaps it is not responding tonight because of my presence. I cannot let the woman know of my presence. I will answer her call this time. She will think that every thing is all right."

Soon, the old woman called again, "*Ita-thaomei*, can you hear me?" The thief replied, "Yes, *Ita* I can hear you." The widow felt quite certain now. She knew that she could catch the thief easily. She asked, "Were you asleep a little while ago?" "Yes, I felt so sleepy; I slept for some time," replied the thief. The widow continued, "As usual, let me tell you a story. Listen to it carefully." "I am listening, please go on," replied the thief.

The old widow began her story:

"Once upon a time, there lived an old woman in a village. She lived alone. One night, while spinning, she fell asleep. In her dream, she saw a thief breaking into her house. Actually a thief had already broken into her house and was trying to steal the utensils in the house. The old woman woke up and saw it. Immediately, she began to shout, "Thief, thief.

There is a thief in my house.” The old widow actually kept shouting at the top of her voice. Finally, her neighbours woke up and rushed to her house. The old widow told them of the thief hiding in the corner. The thief who was listening to the story of the old woman was caught by the villagers. Thus, her wit and wisdom saved her. The villagers thanked the clever widow. She helped them catch the thief so easily.

- A Manipuri folk tale retold

GLOSSARY

thaomei	:	Manipuri word for a lamp; here, a wick lamp
scared	:	frightened
Ita	:	term used by Manipuri women while addressing their female friends
responding	:	answering
stranger	:	unknown person
rushed	:	ran

COMPREHENSION

I. Answer the following questions:

1. What did the old woman do during daytime?
2. What did the old woman pretend when she realized that there was a thief behind the *thaomei*?
3. Why did the thief decide to answer the old widow's call?
4. How did the widow feel certain that there was a thief behind the *thaomei*?
5. Why did the woman shout, "Thief, thief" at the top of her voice?
6. What did the neighbours do?
7. Write how and why the old widow is called a clever woman.

II. Answer the following questions:

A. *Read the following passage :*

In 1667, Aurangzeb sent a huge army to conquer Assam. The Ahom army under Lachit, the Barphukan of Gauhati, had to fight this huge army to defend Assam. Aurangzeb's general Raja Ram Singh of Amber came with an army of ten thousand soldiers to conquer Assam. Lachit made preparations to defend his motherland. He gave the charge of repairing a broken fort near Amingaon to his uncle. He said, "Dear uncle, please finish repairing this fort tonight. Otherwise, our position will be lost tomorrow."

(a) Now, answer the following questions in one sentence each :

(i) In which year did Aurangzeb send a huge army to conquer Assam ?

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(ii) Who was there to fight Aurangzeb's army ?

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(iii) What is the name of Aurangzeb's general ?

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(iv) Which place did Raja Ram Singh belong to ?

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(v) Of which place was Lanchit, the Barphukan ?

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(vi) Who came to conquer Assam, and with how many soldiers ?

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B. Answer the following questions in about 20-25 words each :

(i) What plan did Aurangzeb make to conquer Assam in the year 1667 ?

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(ii) How did Lanchit prepare to defend his motherland ?

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