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Lokaratna is the e-journal of Folklore Foundation, Bhubaneswar. It is a peer-reviewed International online open access journal with ISSN: 2347-6427. The purpose of the journal is to explore the rich cultural traditions of India for a wider readership. Any scholar across the globe interested to contribute to any aspect of folklore is welcome. This volume contains articles on culture, folklore, education, and language pedagogy.

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From the Desk of the Editor-in-Chief

Nature provides us with a perception of matters that connect with the mind, and we experience nature from our cognition. Cognition is connected to the five senses with nature; therefore, the objects as signified are represented in words as signifiers. Our world is divided into a world of the past and a world of the future with no connections. People imagine their utopian past as a golden era, and people who live in the future are also utopian and want a better life. People in the past and present are incomplete regarding a mismatch between the dichotomous ideology. What humans are missing is their connectivity, how a past can be connected to the present, and how the present can perpetuate the human experience and knowledge of the past, which are essential for future progeny.

The gap between ecology and technology has become so vast that none of the sections of people understand and integrate human knowledge for social reproduction when a modern man is well equipped with technology and enjoys the materialistic world, assuming that a human is a machine wishing that human should do more work than a machine, sometimes from 70 to 90 hours a week! In a time of human leisure, it was important to think, imagine, and create science and art freely. Thinkers had taken centuries together to establish a theory of knowledge. Specific knowledge is created after a long experience of success and failure; once it is tested, it is universalized. Knowledge is integrated into a society where nature, mind, and culture are attached to specific values and ideals. The symbiotic relationship of nature, humans and spirit is now limited to indigenous people and traditional societies. Modern society believes in a materialistic way of life where the universe is a substance and can be exploited for human use. This model, which emerged over four hundred years ago, shifted the classical view of nature- human- spirit trilogy and now discarded nature and spirit and only worshipping the human being as

supreme to all beings. The idea of humans as supreme has challenged the authenticity of traditional knowledge, safeguarding the classical values of human societies and denigrating nature through using atomic power and promoting intolerance around the globe.

Folklore Foundation questions the world's future and the knowledge required to sustain the earth. The articles included in the current volume are evidence of the fact that the world still maintains its natural order. The violation of this natural order has reached its peak for the atomic explosion, which is direct violence not against human society but against the whole ecology of the planet. What role can a poet or writer play in safeguarding the planet rather than creating an awareness of human conditions in diverse situations? Human society is seriously affected by the divide between peace and violence. An awareness is the first step to understanding the space and power of our land and language and culture of a greater humanity to eliminate dehumanization and foster human life through culture, language and literature. The articles included in this volume represent the multiple cultural landscapes and memories that claim their authority in the local world and wish for peace in the global world. I congratulate Prof Mahanand and his team on completing the work.

Mahendra Kumar Mishra

Executive Editor



Webs of Dialogue

Forms of folklore not only constitute a reservoir of rituals and cultural practices but serve as a storehouse of knowledge on arts and craft of different communities. They also embody a host of narratives on the issues of gender, caste and ethnicity. Considering these complex juxtapositions of the social categories, this volume of *Lokaratna* has been tuned into a tapestry embodying all these aspects of folklore that enhances webs of dialogue or cultural conversation. Folk narratives also give us idea about the coexistence of different ethnic groups and their social, cultural and economic transactions. Some of the articles deal with these aspects of cultural practices. For instance, Tamanna Joshi's article "The Artistic Knowledge of Hand-Block Printing: Challenges and Sustainability of Artisans of Sanganer and Bagru" is about the unique art form of Rajasthan. The article demonstrates that along with the traditional folk narratives one can discover the folk traditional knowledge of arts and crafts. The article also demonstrates how the folk forms have been facing challenges of modernization that make them difficult to sustain. The article titled "Unveiling the Invisible Chains of the Silenced Voices: A Critical Analysis of Gender Disparity in Rajbanshi Folk Rituals and Customs" by Bidoosha Roy deals with gender disparity that is evident in certain rituals of the Rajbanshis. Certain women are not allowed to participate in certain rituals. The scholar explores these rituals in detail. Generally unmarried women and widows are excluded from participating in rituals like Megh puja. While the previous article shows gender relationship, the next article "Inter-ethnic Relationship in Medieval Bengal: Textual and Historical Analysis of *Purbabanga Gitika*" by Sonika Islam is on the relationship between the mainstream and the so called lower caste Hindus as depicted in *Purbaanga Gitika*. Inter-caste relationship and inequality can generate conflict at times. Aravind Adiga's depiction of class conflict in the novel *White Tiger* lays bare this relationship. Here the novelist depicts how the ordinary people are exploited by the privileged ones and how the suppressed common people respond to such exploitation.

Dr Shyam Babu's article titled "A Feminist Critique of Masculinity and (Male) Body in Bhism Sahnî's *Madhavi*" studies the complex relationship between body, sexuality and ideology of violence in the context of a female protagonist Madhavi. Dr Pradip Kumar Panda's article "A Unity in Cross-cultural Scenario in E M Forster's *A Passage to India*" showcases the theme of intercommunity relationship among the people of India by studying E M Forster's novel *A Passage to India*. Dr Soumya Sangita Sahoo's article "The Journey of Indian Womanhood in the works of Fakir Mohan Senapati and

Premchand” outlines the pioneering efforts of these writers in highlighting the predicament of women in the contemporary society. Shabir Ahmed Mir in his article “Kahwa and Conversations: Food as a Medium of Cultural Dialogue in Kashmir” explores the role of food namely kahwa, or Vagrant tea laced with saffron in cultural communication. They play a significant role in the process of crosses cultural communication and help in establishing bond among the people in Kashmir. Tejaswini Behera’s article “*Kumari Kandan: The Last Continent of Tamil Folklore*” unearths the lost tradition of an old legend that has its origin in Sangam literature. Dr Irom Ranbindro Singh’s article “Meeteilon Short Story and Novel in the Post-Independence Manipur” deals with the post-Independence Meeteilon fiction by tracing its emergence and development. It is also an analysis of its current relevance. Dr Mayanglambam Sadananda Singh’s article “*Pena Phamshak: A Perspective on The Performance of Manipuri Oral Epic Khamba Thoibi* highlights the performative aspect Manipuri Oral Epic *Khamba Thoibi*. Ashish Chetri in his article “Whispers of Ancestors: Folklore and Identity in Trans-Malayalam Narratives” explores the aspects of identity in the folk forms of the Himalayan region. Kaynat Khan and Prof Sujay Kumar Mandal in their article “Beyond Minority: A Study of The Parsis of Kolkata and their Cultural Legacy” explores the life, culture and traditions of the Parsis in Kolkata.

The Language Pedagogy Section has a few interesting articles exploring socio-cultural issues along with pedagogical aspects. Tharsni Manivannn’s article “Gender Bias in Tamilnadu Primary Grade English Textbooks: An Analysis” surveys the primary textbooks prescribed in Tamilnadu Board and discusses the gender bias in it. Dr Venu Madhavi in her article titled “AI in English Classroom: South East Asian Teachers’ Perceptions towards improving oral proficiency in primary and upper primary learners” makes a survey on the effectiveness of using AI to develop speaking skills of the teachers at the primary and upper primary level schools. Dr S. Shravan Kumar in his article “Engaging in Events Betides Learning and Convergence of Languages, Technology, Literature, Culture and Art Forms” makes a study as to how participation of students in different cultural activities can enhance their language proficiency. Nikita Goel’s article “Sliding down the ‘slippery slope’: A call for critical pedagogy for voice demystification and construction in ESL student writing” explores the role of authorial voice as found in academic writing.

The last section contains three book reviews. Dr Kanu Priya’s “A Reading Journey from the Unreachable to the Reachable” reviews the book titled *The unreachable Word of Gopinath Mohanty* edited by Anand Mahanand and Pramod K. Das. Dr Mahendra K Mishra’s reviews Prakash Mishra , IPS’s book *Comedy in Khakhi*. Gondi Surender Dhanunjay reviews Panthakala Srinivas’s book *Traditional Folk Media in india: Jatharas a mode of Communication for Development and Social Change.*”

We must mention here that this volume got delayed due to certain unavoidable reasons. We apologize for the delay but we are happy that it could see the light of the day. We thank the contributors and reviewers for their help and support. We hope that the webs of dialogue would continue!

Anand Mahanand, Executive Editor

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FOLKLORE AND LITERATURE

The Artistic Knowledge of Hand-Block Printing: Challenges and Sustainability of Artisans of Sanganer and Bagru

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Abstract

This Paper aims to look at artistic knowledge of Hand-Block Printing of Sanganer and Bagru and the complex interconnectedness of the issues that are posing challenges in the survival of the craft which is carried forward by several generations of the artisans¹. The attempt is to highlight in what ways this art made its way through multi-faceted changes that occurred overtime and simultaneously highlight the major factors contributing in the near death of the craft practice. The paper aims to identify the gap in the literature on understanding all these challenges and the crisis in comprehensive and wholistic manner and not each in its isolation. This should contribute in reflecting upon multiple ways for its sustainable revitalisation and employing entirely nuanced lens to view such knowledge systems as future alternatives amidst the contemporary challenges of environmental sustainability.

Keywords: Hand-block printing, community, sustainability, artistic knowledge, Sanganer and Bagru

Introduction:

Hands covered with the dye of color – red, yellow and green, continuously thumping engraved block on the cloth, is how one sees artisans working in the household units, small factories with limited number of workers and ‘karkhanas’² in Bagru and Sanganer region, near Jaipur, Rajasthan, India. History of this art, traces itself back to approximately around 400 years and the settlement of the artisans in these two regions-Sanganer and Bagru, took place when the king- Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh invited the artisans from neighboring regions to settle here and therefore gave patronage to the craft. Since the origin stories of the craft and settlement stories of the artisans varies, therefore this has been largely agreed upon narrative. It is greatly influenced by ‘Malwa and Gujrati printing traditions’ (Greru and Kalkreuter 2017) and geometric designs are reflections of Persian culture under Mughals (Jain 2017) (Greru and Kalkreuter 2017). Chippas (printers), Rangrez (dyer), Bunker (weaver), Dhobi (washermen/women), Kharawaadi (woodblock maker)- this constellation of communities worked collectively along with their respective families on an artistic/craft produce and therefore share and practice the artistic knowledge of Hand-block printing. Crafts-people acquire knowledge through oral transmission by the ancestors and is a “hereditary profession” (Liebl and Roy 2004). With change in time, preferences of the designs and motifs (by the customers), physical conditions under which artisans worked and change in production and distribution patterns, etc, the artisans and their art adapted as well as innovated accordingly. For the artisans, their art is not only what they ‘make’ or ‘create’ but is deeply associated with their identity and recognition for which, is justifiably demanded.

During colonial rule, the overall craft or handloom sector went through serious survival crisis and not only the raw materials such as cotton, silk etc were transported from India to England (Shah 2021) but also the ‘portable museum’ that were designed by John Forbes Watson displayed the botanical specimen from India. Annapurna Garimella, an accomplished art historian in her lecture as part of short courses offered by MAP Academy on history of craft and textiles from 1850s to present talks about how Watson also published ‘Textiles Volumes’ that were kind of “manuals of instruction for British manufacturers” (Garimella 2024) elaborating on the preferences of Indians in terms of textile fabrics, so as to- one, capture the Indian market with clothes manufactured in Britain and two, to “facilitate copying”. Tirthankar Roy very aptly argues that Industrial Revolution and 19th century definitely affected Indian manufacturing and “Asian manufacturing tradition was destroyed” but then there were certain traditions that still survived (Roy and Giorgio 2009). So, it is to be explored how and what changes Hand-Block printing in Sanganer and Bagru went through from colonial times to post-colonial era and how did it impact the survival of the craft along with other vital changes as already stated above. The intention of the paper therefore is to highlight upon the multiple crisis, challenging the survival of art and the way forward for its sustainable revitalisation.

Materials and Methods

This paper is primarily based on the secondary sources ranging from books, research papers, youtube channels of the government owned channel such as doordarshan, short articles, stories, on field experience of research scholars, learning acquired through online courses which involves lectures by social sector workers, art historians etc. The usage of primary source involves talking to artisan in ‘haats’ or local markets organised by NGOs working in the field of textile, small traders owning handicraft stores in some parts of Rajasthan. The experience of working, reading, re-writing and listening on this particular art practice under consideration spans across more than a year now and hopefully continue until some concrete path is constructed on the revitalisation of the art practice.

Penning a short preliminary sketch:

“Sanganer ko sango babo, Jaipur ko hanuman
Amer ki salla devi, lyao raja maan”
{Sanganer’s Sanga baba (temple), Jaipur’s Lord Hanuman
Amer’s Salla devi, established or welcomed by the King}

This is an excerpt from one of the regional songs or popularly known as “lok geets” of Rajasthan that traces not only the history of the establishment of this small town Sanganer by the royal king but also unfolds the religious beliefs and faith associated with the regional deity. The craft of Hand block printing is also associated with “different versions of folklore” (Tokas, S, Agarwal S n.d.) and these tales also reflect how religious devotion and practice of art are enmeshed together- the stories associated with Namdev (or Namdev) and the ‘chippa’ community -the printers.

The deep association of craft communities with their environment and craft simultaneously gets reflected in one-the designs and motifs used were inspired from the natural flora and fauna, inanimate objects, local architecture and religious symbols such as trishool, symbolic of gender, marital status and also caste indicative motifs (Garg and Singh 2020). Second- they performed Hindu ritual of immersing the hand block in the water body after they went out of use or worn out as they immerse the dead bodies of the community members (Jain 2017). Judy Frater in her article ‘Gender, Value, creativity and marketplace’ (2024) talks about how weavers and dyers in Kutch region of Gujrat used to exchange the dyed and weaved clothes for milk, grains etc. Similarly in case of Hand Block printing, the artisans were making the art primarily on cloth to exchange among communities especially in Bagru region (Jain 2018) apart from patronage received by “the Jaipur Royals” (Ranjan and Ranjan 2007).

The craft went through several transitions from time to time- changes in usage of different kind of motifs, the ones those were indicative of social positioning of an individual to that of non-signification such as cars, taxis , from usage of natural dyes to the pigment one, changes in consumer and market demand patterns and numerous others. With change, came several existential

challenges and therefore the instinct of the artisans to mend their ways to not only make path for their own survival but their craft too. In the subsequent sections, the paper will uncover all such changes and challenges that are now becoming detrimental to this art's survival.

In Focus: The Epistemology of the Art

The knowledge of block making, dye preparation, preparation of clay for 'dabu' print, washing and treatment of cloth before printing- are employed to make one piece of printed cloth. Since there are no textual references for this artistic knowledge (like most other craft knowledge systems in India) and disseminated orally or through years of practice, thus the sharing and preservation of the art has been with and for the community members. This internal collaboration, coordination, interdependency (Pandey 2019) has been the soul of the art itself as without even one, the process doesn't progress. The world view of the artisans takes into account members of each community and their natural physical realities too, for instance locally available resources, seasonal peculiarities etc. In an interview with local artisan, Greru and Kalkreuter, document their opinion of him on the aspect of sharing the work in the process, who says that-

'Earlier everybody had a defined work and every community within the region used to work as per the expertise and therefore craft work was done with immense ease' (Master Prabhati Lal, in Greru and Kalkreuter 2017).

This is indicative of how craft was deeply embedded in the lives of these communities and was a way of maintaining interpersonal relationships as well.

When one reflects on epistemology of this knowledge system and their artisans, it might appear that this cannot be considered as 'knowledge' or an 'art' for that matter. In case of former, indigenous knowledge systems are generally considered as 'non-science', 'non-knowledge' since they are not based on experiment, written texts etc. Instead, memory is the reliable source of information and 'justification of knowledge' (Sarukkai 2012) as well. In the similar line of thought, while elaborating on Haudenosaunee epistemic sovereignty, Eli Nelson points out how western epistemic sovereignty functions by creating hierarchy between "agents and objects of knowledge" and how Haudenosaunee and other indigenous epistemic sovereignty situates "human agents of knowledge within a lateral network of nonhuman and environmental relations" while situating itself outside the dichotomy of human and nature (Nelson 2016).

The hand block printing of Sanganer and Bagru, is considered as a 'craft' or part of 'handloom' sector and not as 'art'. So, it is to be questioned as to what 'qualifies' to be an art work and how one demarcates the boundaries, the strict borders, of being art, craft, handloom and community art as separate fields of expression. With coming up of schools of art, for instance Mayo School of art and Jamsetjee Jeejebhoy School of Art in 1865, the curriculum design and curriculum of design was imported from Britain. The students in these schools constituted both- the crafts men (there were no women) and their children and others from "Naukri peshu class" (Lockwood Kipling, quoted in the lecture by MAP). Here, 'drawing' was compulsory no matter which field one possesses skills (in case of a hereditary craft practice of the artisans or crafts people) or has interest

in pursuing. This initial homogenised approach to the art and craft, in some way or the reflects how the divisions must have surfaced between the qualifications for something to be considered as art and craft as the ‘other’.

Another aspect is that craft ‘traditions’ are being considered as strictly protected by the community/communities associated with it- making them hereditary profession and categorisation of such practices including hand block printing of Sanganer and Bagru as ‘traditional’, ‘primitive’ and ‘rigid’ indicates how comparatively structured profession or fields such as design or art, dominate the narratives of what qualifies to be considered as ‘innovative’ and ‘progressive’. This understanding is not based on the intent of ‘villainising’ or reverse ‘othering’ different creative fields of expression but this is just to explain how politics of knowledge and politics of art- practice plays out in wider scheme of thought.

Sustainability and the question of ownership of the art:

Pavan range ri agni rangde
Oh rangde jad asman re
Are dharti ro kan kan rangde
Rangde mahro rajasthan
{Colour the air and the fire,
Oh colour the sky as well
Colour each and every bit of earth
Colour my beloved state of Rajasthan}

This is yet another folk song of Rajasthan, expressing how vital and embedded was, the craft of making dyes in Rajasthan specifically.

The aspect of sustainability needs to be seen in two intertwined ways- one is the physical environment that provides the resources for art work by the artisans, from collecting ingredients for the natural dye to final sun drying the finished piece and the other is related to the very survival of the artisans. The hand-block printing of Sanganer and Bagru has very important characteristic- that “they are locally developed on the basis of ecologies” (Banerjee 2021).

Jasleen Dhamija, the great art historian of India, in one of her interviews talked about how the tradition of dye making was very much intrinsic to the lives of people earlier. Dying, she says, has always been linked “with alchemy, with magic, with transformation and with the mastery of the unknown” (Dhamija 2013). Through her extensive travelling throughout the country, meeting artisans and learning about their knowledge systems and reading about them, she is of the opinion that the dyer was an alchemist who used to collect herbs, roots of the plants and trees, scales of the skin etc to transform the cloth entirely. One of the artisans in the interview with Ankita Thapliyal in episode 5 of the series- ‘Wow Zindagi season-2’, narrates a possible story of how the process of colouring cloth must have begun and how ‘neel’ (indigo) was one of the first natural source of colour that came to be known. Moreover, vegetable dyes such as indigo also had ayurvedic

medicinal use and so the artisans used to refer to the texts of Ayurveda as well, argues Dhamija. Debajyoti Ganguly and Ms Amrita in their paper talks about how different colours of the dye such as Black was achieved by mixing acidic solution of iron with jaggery and the process of fermentation of these mixtures was carried out. Colours are also achieved according to the seasons such as lighter shades can't be achieved in hot season; use of natural heat therefore was once very intrinsic to the hand block printing of Sanganer and Bagru. This resonates with what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari calls as "art-brut- folk-art-raw art" (Deleuze and Guattari 1980). It is very interesting to note that this dye making process resembles the recipes of food and delicacies of the region.

With changing consumer demand patterns and the emphasis on completing the process of making the final product faster, as opposed to the required time to complete each process of creating a piece, the artisans started using pigment dyes- these enabled them to use wider colour pallets in order to fulfill customer demands. This led to three major consequences- loss of recipes of making natural dyes that women of the artisanal families used to own, the excessive use of water and the loss of emotional and environmental embeddedness of the art as well as their artisans.

While the researcher was interviewing some of the residents of areas near Sanganer, the concern expressed by the people was that due to usage of pigment dyes, excessive use of water and seepage of untreated chemical water under the ground, in the process of making a 'final product' (art work is seen largely viewed as beautiful product and lesser as a time taking creative expression) has led to fall in the level of ground water up to 1500ft, in and around the region, resulting in "shutting down of various printing units in Sanganer area" (Gaatha.org).

The wood carvers and the production of wooden blocks is a very intricate practice of art, requiring years of expertise to carve the most delicate designs on a wooden block. This is to note here that the wood used for making such block for printing, is that of those easily available in the region such as 'seesham' rosewood- highlighting the inherent nature of being close to the environment and therefore sustainable. Mashkur Ahmad, a 5th generation wood block maker, in an interview trace how wood carvers came with their head of the community to Rajasthan from Multan (present day Pakistan) and established themselves in Rajasthan. He elaborates on the knowledge of block making and how they have acquired the art-skill through their years of experience (Ahmad 2024). The idea they have of time, a particular wood takes to dry out and then carved in a wood block for printing is indicative of the association they have with natural resources of the region, the utmost level of patience and love they have for their craft and the sensitivity towards natural physical environment, makes this community art practice unique and a great alternative for the future given the challenges of environmental sustainability.

Annapurna Mamidipudi and Dagmar Schafer in their introductory chapter 'Ownership of Knowledge' in the book 'Ownership of Knowledge: Beyond Intellectual Property' introduces a new terminology of "kn/own/ables" where they have tried to resolve the dichotomy associated with knowing and owning of a knowledge. They through the example of Ding-the cook and his lord- Wenhui from 3rd century Chinese philosophical text, talks about how one 'negotiates' the knowledge ownership through various ways and not just "naming" under one's authority to then

reap its social-economic ‘benefits’ (Schafer and Mamidipudi 2023). The master artisan such as Mashkur Ahmad says- “meine bohot kaam kiya, hamne kitne block bana diye aj tak pata hi nahi hai” (I have worked for years, I don’t even know how many blocks I have made until now in more than 75 years of making hand blocks) (Ahmad 2024) reflects exactly what is stated by Annapurna and Dagmar. It is not to be seen in a way that these artisans don’t ‘own’ their craft but not in the way modern world understands it. In consonance with this, it is to be emphasized that for many societies, the knowledge or ‘knowing’ (Schafer and Mamidipudi 2023 based on some sort of text or written proof which can be used later to “retrieve” (Schafer and Mamidipudi 2023), only those can be considered as reliable and legitimate ways of knowing or knowledge as such. Since South Asian knowledge rarely has a written proof of their existence and are owned and transmitted by “perishable bodies” (Schafer and Mamidipudi 2023), therefore considered as ‘non-knowledge’ and ‘not-owned’.

Conflict or co-existence: Design, Technology and Market

When it comes to both -owning and knowing, it is important to analyze the dynamics shared between crafts people and the trained designers. With coming up of ‘designer culture’ (Jain 2017), the artistic communities in hand block printing of Sangner and Bagru has to negotiate on very foundational aspects of their craft so as to find their way forward to put their ‘produce’ in the chain of market economy. Designers have become the mediators, the new ‘middlemen’ resulting in voice of the crafts person getting muted (DeNicola and Wilkinson-Weber 2016). The designers popped up as “creative elites and experts” and “knowledge producers” (Greru and Kalkreuter 2017). With coming up of high-end design stores, two realms have been created, one that of “innovation” and the other of “tradition”, the former is associated with the designers and the latter with the “printers” (DeNicola 2008). The consequence is – ignorance of the intricacies of the art by the designers and forcing the artisan to produce a ‘perfect’ piece of cloth. To illustrate with example- an artisan while getting instructed to print in a certain way by the designers or owners of merchandise stores, he is of the opinion that if the printing will be done by hand than mistakes are bound to happen and there will be “differences in the intensity of the print” (unknown artisan, interviewed by Greru and Kalkreuter 2017). One very serious concern for artists is that of ‘copying’ the designs and not even receiving credit for it by designers and intermediaries and even the artists outside the region for instance or outside the family as well.

Having stated the point of conflict, it is important to highlight how designers and training in design has helped artisans immensely to continue their art work while facing the challenges head-on. In this direction, pioneering work of Laila Tyabji needs to be hailed and inspired by. She began working 1980s with the artisans, travelling across several parts of the country, when crafts products were not in the urban markets and crafts people had to face discrimination in many ways. She with 5 other prominent women founded ‘Dastkar’- a platform where crafts people can be benefitted from their work while being recognized for their work. Many such designers- Archana Shah, Judy Frater’s ‘Somaiya Kala Vidya’, Latha Tummuru, along with SEWA’s work, Weaver’s collective

etc has relentlessly worked hand-in hands with artisans to address each challenge in unique and most suitable way. In an interview with CNES and Archana Thapliyal (doordarshan), young artisans (younger generation from artisan family) talks about how their learning and training in School of design helped in mending the designs to suit the current tastes without compromising the essence of the art, different from that of traditional ones and also understanding the market way better than before. It is to be also acknowledged that since an artisan don't see ownership in the way widely understood, so reverse-copying also sometimes happen when artisan might not acknowledge the contribution of a designer. So, the craftsman also needs sort of an awareness about such issues.

Contemporary capitalist market production and “systematic marginalisation of already existing ones” (Banerjee 2021) is one the major factor that is pushing the unique market systems- such as ‘haats’, of such art practices, into oblivion. This has also resulted in making craft products as “aspirational” (Banerjee 2021). Latha Tummuru, Annapurna M, B Syamsundari, Seemanthi Niranjana in their paper underlines the importance of different kinds of “everyday marketing practices and processes” (Tummuru, Annapurna, et.al 2006) that might not be part of ‘visible’ capitalist market practices. They point to a very significant point that how market negotiations in case of handloom production-distribution system might even alter the “very nature of the market, in a sense pushing the market back to its place within a societal framework as a whole.

The encounter of the artisans of hand block printing art of Sanganer and Bagru with printing screens and other technological changes has posed a serious challenge of survival for the art. The artisan in a talk with the researcher explicitly and with an expression of worry, pointed out-

“Screen printing aane ki wajah se hand block printing mushkil me aa gaya hai. Screen print jaldi hota hai kyunki ek hi bar me kafi bada kapda print ho skta hai.” (Because of introduction of screen for printing, the art of hand block printing is facing serious survival crisis. Since the screen can print a bigger piece of cloth in just one go, therefore have been very faster a way of producing a piece).

It is a general understanding that since the knowledge is owned and practiced by community of the artisans who don't have any formal education beyond primary level and therefore might not be innovative or technically well-versed. In this context Mushkar Ahmad in the interview with Archana Thapliyal says with great enthusiasm and pride that the tools they make are developed by them and they are the ones who innovate too when the need be. To quote Ahmad-

“ye (tools) sab hamne khud banae hai, bazaar me nahi milega ye” (Ahmad 2024)

It changed the ‘entire process and production cycle’ (Tokas, Agarwal et. al n.d) and range of steps involved in making of the final product got eliminated due to screen printing (one of the artisans says in the interview by CNES).

If one closely observes each step in the process of making a piece of art by the artisans, one can see how they tackle the issues or problems they face such as that of avoiding exfoliation of the colour, for which they create holes within the blocks so that excessive colour gets seep into them,

the entire process of making dye, washing the cloth and final drying of it, involves knowledge of nature, ingredients, environment.

Archana Shah, founder of a clothing company- 'Bandhej', in an interview emphasizes upon not shunning the technology outrightly (Shah 2023) and very importantly- not considering the indigenous art practices as 'least innovative'. Technology should be employed in a way that it aids the artisans in coping up with contemporary challenges of say- making the piece of art a bit faster and eliminating the difficulties in the process of for instance- washing a cloth.

Changing interpersonal relations and the question of gender and caste

Sheila Jasanoff's formulation of the 'socio-technical imaginaries' (Jasanoff 2017) highlights that technology or technical advancements or initiatives are embedded very much in social institutions, requirements, discourses etc. These socio-technical imaginaries also transform socio-technical relations of the communities (Mamidipudi, A, Syamadundari, B et. al. 2012) and overall social fabric. The process which was once very much embedded within communities, with emergence of socio-technical changes-ranging from screen printing, chemical dyes, etc led to the transformation of interpersonal relations among the artisanal communities.

The art of hand-block printing involves various steps ranging from weaving the cloth to that of final printed piece. Suman Pandey (2019) shed light on "social-economic status of women" artisans in Bagru and her research points towards how women within the artisanal communities are involved but only in limited steps within the larger process of making of the art. Therefore, the details of their involvement are not clear but women are visible in the process of washing and drying of clothes and are also repositories of knowledge of dye making. Judy Frater (2024) indicates towards very similar issue in case of weaving community of 'Meghval' and dyer community of dyers in Kutch region of Gujrat, India. Women of these communities are primarily involved in "pre-loom and post-loom works" writes Frater (Frater 2024).

Chippas (printers) traces their origin from Kshatriya (warrior) community and have several stories associated to that aspect, Rangrez (the dyers) often belongs to muslim communities, similarly 'dhobi' is a caste of washermen etc (Jain, E 2019). But again, with change in time, technique, economic exchange systems demands and choices of people, the boundaries blurred within different caste communities (Pandey 2019).

Understanding of all such sociological underpinnings of the craft communities involved in the block printing, yet seems very limited and needs extensive research. This is vital for understanding complex interconnected issues that are transforming not only the art-practice but also very survival of the communities of the artisans and preparing grounds for collective action in future.

Future Possibilities: Explorations and Expectations

Imagining possibilities of sustainable, economic and ecologically- embedded survival with ‘community’ as the centre of multitudinous, non-dichotomous (human and nature, living and non-living etc) existence, needs exploration of practices that can provide great alternatives to the consumerist and individualistic consumption patterns emerging throughout the world.

Latha Tummuru, designer, in one of the news articles dated 27th August 2018 talks about the importance of ‘sensory experiences’ which could be vital for the people to know and understand the context in which different communities collaborate to offer something so unique as opposed to industrial products, especially clothes in this case (“Exhibition tells” 2018). Erin Manning, a Canadian artist-philosopher explores something similar, that is the interaction between art-practice and matrix of sensing body in movement (erinmanning.com n.d.) The sense of touch, smell, dye’s colour-smell, and role of seasons in usage of certain colours, for example, might be helpful in actually sensitising those who are indifferent or unaware or even insensitive towards existence and blooming of this knowledge-system. This could be point of further exploration in consonance with what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari emphasises upon- the aspect of art outside gallery and importance of open exhibitions in this context.

The artisan while interacting with the researcher says-

“hame is kala ko zinda rakhna aur aage badhana zaruri hai. Meine apne bete aur beti dono se kaha h ki isko seekho chodo mat, chahe fir wo sathme apni padhai kare jo unhe karni hai magar kala ka gyaan zaruri hai” (I have instructed my both the children- my daughter and son, to continue this art practice while pursuing their own degree of interest, its essential to have this artistic knowledge).

This is indicative of the fact that with changing times artisans are very much willing to not only transmit the art to their younger generation while being considerate of their individual interests but also blurring the boundaries of gender of their inheritors. Annapurna Garimella in her lecture, through the example of Sangwan wood suppliers explains how a craft is not always hereditary but can be made to be a familial inherited practice (Garimella 2024). This shuns the conservative outlook of art-practices of particular communities as something that the artisanal communities are not willing to transmit it to someone outside of their familial structures. The point therefore again, is to understand such complex issues directly from the artisans.

Another possibility of contributing in revitalisation of the hand block printing of Sanganer and Bagru could be to learn from the artisans themselves the ways or methods to document their knowledge, if its at all possible. Not just about documentation but asking them how do they want the art to continue, what future do they see of themselves while being associated with the art, how and what ways can be adopted to address all the crisis and challenges, without considering

them as mere ‘subjects’ of some kind of objectivised research or having a saviour complex and not even limiting oneself as just ‘activists’ trying to ‘change’ the world in their own messianic ways.

Conclusion

The hand-block printing of Sanganer and Bagru is fraught with multiple challenges that are collectively putting the artisans and their art in serious survival crisis. The intent of this paper therefore is to not just list out the crisis and challenges but also re-creating dialogue about sustainability, community, collective action and most importantly re-imagining the possibilities of sort of a revolution against consumerist-isolationist tendencies which is entirely based on individual needs, concept of linearity of time-space and ‘unified’ or ‘singular’ way of existence. The joy, resilience and hope that these artisanal communities of Sanganer and Bagru has shown with changes in time, while being on the cusp of ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’ is inspiring and definitely pose their art practice as great alternative for the future generations.

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2.Unveiling the Invisible Chains of the Silenced Voices: A Critical Analysis of Gender Disparity in Rajbanshi Folk Rituals and Customs

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Abstract

The term "folk" refers to a group of indigenous people who share their thoughts, customs, beliefs, and rituals in their own way. As the title suggests, this paper attempts to deal with the folk rituals of the Rajbanshi community, prevalent in North Bengal, Assam, Bihar, Dinajpur, Nepal, and Bangladesh (Das, 2018). Folk rituals are deeply intertwined with a community's beliefs, in which practices sometimes blend with patriarchal notions and place women within the domain of domination and their bodies serve as manifestations of these rites. People are unaware of the underlying convention saturated with the ideology of gender discrimination, thus, such gender discrimination does not appear as unnatural. The Rajbanshi community reveres almost every God and Goddesses without any exception. Although gender discrimination has not explicitly emerged, they have always existed within the mechanism of practising these rituals throughout history. Therefore, by analyzing these rituals, this paper aims to uncover the hidden aspects beneath the convention.

Keyword : Folk, Gender Discrimination, Hudum Deo, Kati Puja, Chor Chunni, Bash Puja, Madankam Worship, Gaze, Beauty Myths

Introduction:

Rituals play crucial roles in solidifying a community's beliefs and social cohesion. They help communities distinguish their identity through repetitive practices. To maintain continuity and cultural coherence of ritualistic traditions, people pass them down to subsequent generations through socialization and cultural reproduction. This paper focuses on the Rajbanshi community, known as people of royal lineage (Barman, 2020), which originated from the 'Bodo Family' in the 10th century B.C. They are dispersed from Assam to North Bengal (Das, 2018) and scattered everywhere. Rajbanshi rituals reflect their tradition but also exhibit gender discriminatory attitudes towards women that are naturalized in people's minds, as they have already accepted these ideologies. Observations indicate that certain rituals exhibit inherent gender biases and women's bodies are subjected to certain practices where gender inequality is evident, both mentally and physically. Thus, the main focus of this paper is to present such concepts and practices where a woman becomes a subject of male domination and subjugation. Additionally, it will examine how ritual related songs represent women and marginalize their roles during performances. Data collection was mainly based on semi-structured interviews, telephonic conversations and other sources like e-books, journals, thesis, articles etcetera.

Throughout history, the Rajbanshis were connected to the earth and soil through agronomy, reflected in their worship of cultivation deities (Gupta & Das, 2016). They offer prayers to gods and goddesses at specific times, although some practices are now obsolete. It should be taken into consideration that, as these folk rituals are orally transmitted, they lack proper documentation. Although the practice varies from place to place, the basic concept or faith behind these remains the same. Therefore, this paper will examine two aspects to analyze the data regarding gender disparity:

1. Representation of women and their bodies in rituals and ritual-related songs.
2. Exclusion of women from rituals by their own community members.

The paper will look into four rituals to illustrate these two aspects: Hudum Deo and Kati Puja (for analyzing the first perspective) and Chor Chunni and Madan kam Puja (for analyzing the second) due to the limited scope of this paper.

1. Representation of Women and Their Bodies in Rituals and Ritual-Related Songs

At the outset, it should be clear that this study focuses on rituals connected to women, excluding those applicable to both genders. Throughout history, women have always been treated as sex objects or procreating machines, whereas men's experiences have consistently taken priority over women's desires (Nayar, 2017, p.83).

Hudum Deo or Megh Puja

Satisfying a man is believed to be a woman's role, and similarly, in this ritual, women seek to please the God of rain during droughts. Some believe the word 'Hudum' came from 'udom' means 'naked'. For others, 'Hudum' is derived from the 'Hudu Poki' (a rare bird) of Koch Rajbongshi society (Roy, 2021). In barren lands, harvesting was impossible due to water scarcity which led to drought. Therefore, how a woman's body can be involved in worshipping is quite evident in this ritual. A group of women secretly visited a nearby field on a new moon night to

appease God, hiding their nakedness from view. No men were allowed while they sang and danced. They did not use any idol; instead, they symbolically planted a banana tree in the field and danced around it. In an interview, Karandev Roy stated, “Every woman must be married; no widows were allowed. Sometimes, they used a frog to extract blood using an Urun Gain (a wooden pressing machine) or, in some places, they practised frog marriage ritual, which did not require a Brahmin. They believed that after this ritual, the God of rain would be pleased, and thus the drought would end” (personal communication, May 26, 2021). The songs sung during Hudum Deo occasionally featured direct explicit erotic references:

Song:

“Hilhilaichhe komor ta mor, Shir shiraichhe gaao/ Konte kena geile aela mui hudum er nagal paaoo?/ Patani khan porese khosiya, aaishek re Hudum Deo/ Tor baad e mui achhong bosiya, dingshal komor ta/ Tate nai mor bhatar ta/ koro ki mui kay ba koy/ konthe gele dekha hoy,/ dekha hole dyahata juray”

[My waist is quivering, my whole body is thrilled/ Where can I find my Lord Hudum/ My apparel is disheveling, please come my Lord Hudum/ I am eagerly awaiting you/ My waist is of no worth as my partner is absent/ Nobody is showing me the right path/ Where can I have a glimpse of Lord Hudum/ Only after seeing Him, the thirst of my body will be quenched]

The power of procreation and cultivation is intimately connected (Gupta & Das, 2016). This ritual relies on women's reproductive capabilities and utilizes their naked bodies as symbols of barren lands, reinforcing the prayer. It is the gender roles that dictate women are supposed to play the role of a perfect woman who should manage household chores, maintain family unity, produce children, take care of them and also give attention to their partner's needs. The erotic manner in which they sing, using their bodies to appease God, reflects the patriarchal society's notion of women as sexual objects.

Kati Puja

Kati Puja is a ritual where God is worshipped as a fertility deity. On the last day of the Bengali Kartik month, women worship Lord Kati, excluding men due to the explicit song lyrics. Since God Kati is associated with fertilization, women perform the all-night ritual on an empty stomach, believing that a pleased God will bless them with a son (Roy 77). Society has always given importance only to a son when it comes to the matter of legacy. Therefore, it is misleading to believe that gender discrimination occurs only after birth. In reality, societal expectations often show preferences even before birth, particularly in rural areas where the sex of the unborn child can determine their fate.

Song:

“Kathi thakurer bore putro paichhong kole/ Kathi thakurer bore soshya asichhe ghore,/ Takna korma seba puja”.

[By the grace of God Kati, we are blessed with a son/ By the grace of Lord Kati, our family has become fulfilled/ We must worship Him]

Through their songs, they also address societal issues like the “male gaze”, a concept introduced by Laura Mulvey in her 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."

Song:

“Gachher kola gachhe roilu badul geil tar dyashete/ Gachher aare thakiyare badul komorer saree dyakhe/ gachher aare thakiyare badul kaner shona dyakhe/ gachher aare thakiya re badul sither sindur dyakhe.”

[The banana remained in the plantain tree, the bat went to its own thought/ remained hidden in the tree, the bat looks at the waist draped in saree/ remained hidden in the tree, the bat stared at the gold earring/ Remained hidden in the tree, the bat glares at the vermilion]

By deconstructing the meaning of the song, it has been revealed that the ‘Badul’ (bat), as a symbol, is looking at the passerby, a woman, who is married as suggested by ‘sither sindur’ (vermilion) and her gold earrings as well as her saree draped waist. Whether in daily life or in the songs, the concept of objectifying a woman is not uncommon. While talking about ‘pleasure in looking’ in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, Laura Mulvey quoted Freud’s remark on the theory of scopophilia and said:

Although the instinct is modified by other factors...at the extreme it can become fixated into perversion...sexual satisfaction can come from watching, in an active controlling sense, an objectified other... scopophilic arises from pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight. (1975)

The bat, as a symbol of the male gaze, mirrors the idea of deriving pleasure from looking at women. Similarly, perched on the plantain tree, it gazes and replicates this mechanism. However, nobody reacts to such gaze because the power to determine what is unnatural is already neutralized in a patriarchal society. This particular song is a reflection of the same ideology.

2. Exclusion of Women from Rituals

Women face exclusion in various spheres, including workplaces, families, rituals, and performances. For instance, the absence of Rajbanshi women in rituals like Chor Chunni and Bash Puja raises crucial questions: why have Rajbanshi women been systematically excluded from these rituals, and what factors led to replacing them with males, even resorting to cross-dressing?

Chor Chunni

The main concept of Chor Chunni came from Puran. In a personal communication, Kalipada Roy said: "Chor" (thief) represents "Kaal" (time) and "Chunni," represents Mrityu Kanya (Daughter of Death). Chunni symbolizes the inevitability of mortality. All living beings revolve around Kaal, trapped in a cycle of birth, transformation, and death. This cycle encompasses various phases that reminds us of the reality of mortality where every earthly creature is mortal and subject to transformation. Only the soul remains immortal, beyond the destructive power of "Kaal" (time) (personal communication, July 06, 2021). Alternatively, as Sanatan Adhikary suggests, “Chor” represents "Jomraaj”, the harbinger of death. Chor completes the human cycle on earth by separating the soul from the human body (personal communication, May 24, 2021). Despite varying interpretations, the practice remains remarkably consistent.

To perform this ritual, a group collects rice and other vegetables by visiting the neighbours. After collecting those ingredients, they worship Maa Kali. This ritual began in the Bengali month

of Kartik when a group comprising a singer and some instrumentalists with khol (percussion), kortaal, bashi (flutes) and two more persons (Chor and Chunni) who performed alongside the songs visited from place to place. Chor and Chunni danced while others sang. However, Chunni's role must be played by a male, dressed as a woman.

This performance is now obsolete but dates back to an era when women of the Rajbanshi community did not have much freedom. Therefore, they were restricted from participating in many rituals and performances. This dominating attitude limited their opportunities in multiple fields. The song of this ritual makes it clear that women were not allowed to go outside, representing their dependency on their partners.

Song:

Chunni: “Je jon chora kore churi/ Tar maiyaa pindichhe saree/.../ Chora aschhe puja bazaar/ Nage ei son mor chandrahar/ Dine dine din jacchhe mor, korek tui bichar.”

Chor: “ Chunni ge na nage kandibar/ Dibar na parim mui chandrahar/... O mor hisabot na kulay taka/ Kemne goraim chandrahar?/ Tor baad e ki oge chunni jam mui moribar?”

[The wife of the thief: Whoever secure their livelihoods by stealing/ Their wives can wear sarees/... My dear husband, the great festive season has begun, thus I need a neckpiece/ I am getting old day by day, do justice with my age.

The thief: My dear wife, don't cry, I am unable to afford such an expensive gift/... I cannot manage such a huge amount, how can I give you that ornament?/ Do I have to die for fulfilling your wish?]

The song reveals a restricted wife urging her partner to steal, driven by desires for prosperity and beauty. She wants to be beautiful by wearing expensive ornaments thus reflecting the societal beauty myth. In this context, Naomi Wolf said:

The beauty myth tells a story: The quality called ‘beauty’ objectively and universally exists. Women must want to embody it and men must want to possess women who embody it. This embodiment is imperative for women and not for men, which situation is necessary and natural because it is biological, sexual, and evolutionary: Strong men battle for beautiful women, and beautiful women are more reproductively successful. Women's beauty must correlate to their fertility, and since this system is based on sexual selection, it is inevitable and changeless... Like any economy, it is determined by politics... In Assigning value to women in a vertical hierarchy according to a culturally imposed physical standard, it is an expression of power relations in which women must unnaturally compete for resources that men have appropriated for themselves. (2002, p.12)

In this society, beauty is a deeply entrenched concept that fueled her desire, blinding her to poverty and driving her husband to immoral deeds. Yet, this beauty standard is a male-driven construct that is rooted in politics, sexual repression, and emotional distancing and reduces beauty to mere physical attraction for women alone. The song from these rituals reflects the same societal notions. In this context, Simone de Beauvoir's words resonate profoundly: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (2015) and by this, she makes society understand that there is no strict rule or any ideal women have to follow. Thus, what she wants to convey is that resistance towards

the male stereotypes of beauty can make a huge difference and can mean greater equality (Warburton).

Bash Puja or Madankam Puja

Some believe Madan Kam and Bash Puja originated from the Puranas, while others argue that ancient societal needs drove its development. In ancient times, land was plentiful, but manpower was minimal. Thus, making family growth, particularly with sons, was a necessity. This necessitated sexual intimacy between couples, reflected in Madan Kam's name, where "kam" means "lust". In this ritual, an emblem of Madan Kam is placed between one pair of bamboo (Barman, 2013). The bamboos are decorated with colourful ribbons, and the edges are tied with 'shalu kapur' (red cloth) (Roy, 2009). This ritual had also been performed only by Rajbanshi men where the songs were quite erotic and indecent. Similarly, Bash puja songs, akin to Kati Puja, reveal the community's preference for sons over daughters.

Song:

"Kalkapurite Achhil aek jamidar/ Monete dukkho boro putro nai taar/... Duijone jor hoste Madan Kamok koro manachina,/ Putro sontan hoy na kobhu Madankam bina,/... Din jay, raat jay, aro jay maas,/ Putro sontan laagi boroy habilash,/... Madan Kam bole byata Mala Giribor,/ Ghore jodi putro chao Baasher Puja kor." (Roy, 2009)

[There was a landlord in Kalikapuri/ He was in grief as he had no son/... If you want to be blessed with a son/ Do worship Madan Kam God. Without worshipping him, no one can be blessed with a son/... Several days, nights and months passed/ But their grief remained the same... Madan Kam said to son Mala Giroir/ If you wish to grow your family with a son, do worship Bash (bamboo)]

The lyrics conspicuously reveal the existing societal gender disparity of that time. This illustrates a power dynamic that perpetuates gender discrimination, viewing daughters as burdens and sons as assets within families (Nayak).

Conclusion:

The study of Rajbanshi folk rituals through a gender lens reveals how society perceives women's roles, particularly in communities like Rajbanshi where women face double marginalization – as Rajbanshi and as women. The myths, rituals, and rites maintain patriarchal suppression, blurring the idea of women's freedom. This suppression is deeply ingrained and normalized to seem natural over time. Women's voices are silenced, and subdued by societal rules and regulations, specifically designed to constrain them. Judith Butler also questioned: "Is there a 'physical' body prior to the perceptually perceived body? An impossible question to decide. Not only is the gathering of attributes under the category of sex suspect, but so is the very discrimination of the "features" themselves (2006)". Rituals reflecting the ideology of gender discrimination do not only show the community's thought process but also their continuation of the power exercise upon women making them subordinate to males. Therefore, this is a self-sustaining cycle unless the underlying concept is dismantled.

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Inter-ethnic Relationship in Medieval Bengal: Textual and Historical Analysis of *Purbabanga Gitika*

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Abstract

Purbabanga Gitika (2009) is a four-volume anthology of folk ballads from Eastern Bengal of undivided India, edited and published by Dineshchandra Sen. These Bengali folk ballads are composed mostly by Muslims and lower-caste unlettered Hindus in medieval Bengal. Analyzing these folk ballads many national and international folklorists have unearthed the social history of the Bengalis of the then rural Bengal. However, this paper explores *Purbabanga Gitika* to unearth the history of inter-ethnic relationship between Bengalis and non-Bengali ethnic groups like Munda, Chakma, Garo, Khasi, Koch and many other ethnic groups living in hill and forests of medieval Bengal. This paper will do both textual and historical analysis of the ballads anthologised in *Purbabanga Gitika* by using new historicist theories that there is no single history and the school of folklore theories which believe that oral literature retain glimpses of past, forgotten life. This paper will show that the way the non-Bengali ethnic groups are portrayed in these ballads gives evidence of a pluralistic society of Bengal where Bengalis were dependent on other ethnic groups in social, political and economical life. To justify the historical importance of these ballads evidences from historical documents written and recorded by the British colonial administrators have been taken into account to show a rich social, political, and economical cultural contribution made by Garos, Chakma, Mundas, Koch people and other ethnic groups in Bengal. This paper, by revealing the long forgotten rich civilisation of different ethnic groups as embedded in *Purbabanga Gitika*, will inspire further ethnographic research on the contribution of non-Bengali ethnic groups in the civilization of Bengal.

Keywords: inter-ethnic, ballads, ethnic groups, Bengali, medieval Bengal

In our time, history is that which transforms documents into monuments.

Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge* 7

Ancient things remain in the ear.

Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* xi

Introduction

Purbabanga Gitika (2009) is a four-volume anthology of folk ballads crafted by rural Bengali poets with the first volume originally published in 1923 and the fourth volume in 1932. This anthology, edited by Dineshchandra Sen, is a well-loved literary artifact to trace the history of Bengali people of that era. Here in this paper, I have identified both Bengalis and non-Bengalis as ethnic groups according to Eriksen's point of that "ethnic group thus has to be affirmed socially [...] that it is culturally distinctive [...] related to social practices, such as religion, marriage" (Eriksen 277). Apart from Bengalis, Bengal had other ethnic groups like Kuki, Chakma, Munda, Santal, Garo, Koch, and Hajong and many more. I have positioned these other ethnic groups as non-Bengali ethnic groups in relation to Bengalis just to make the differences clear in the paper. My paper analyses the ballads in *Purbabanga Gitika* to explore the inter-ethnic relationship between Bengalis and other ethnic groups.

Many scholars, including Dineshchandra Sen and Dusan Zbavitel, have conducted intensive researches on the folk ballads anthologised in *Purbabanga Gitika*. Zbavitel in his book, *Bengali Folk-Ballads from Mymensingh and the Problem of their Authenticity* (1963) and Sen in several of his books on these ballads along with his editorial notes have studied the secular nature of the then Bengal by closely reading these folk ballads. While their researches show significant documentation of Hindu-Muslim relationships in pre-Colonial Bengal, Seraj Salekeen dedicates three chapters in his book, *Ethnic Groups in Poems: Looking from the Center* (2020) analysing the portrayal of ethnic groups in these ballads. While Salekeen shows the power-relation between Bengalis and other ethnic groups by illustrating how Bengalis were in the center of the power, my reading of *Purbabanga Gitika* is based on Sen's claim that these ballads were crafted in "pure Bengali," before Sanskritic influence (*Eastern* xxxiii) mostly by composers from peasant class (Sen *Purbabanga* 15). It is worth noting that Sen introduces these texts to English readers as "indigenous texts" from Bengal (*Eastern* xiii). He promoted these ballads to advocate Muslim's contribution in Bengali literature in his book, *Prachin Bangla Sahitye Musolmaner Obodan* (1940). Also while Sen was struggling to publish these ballads, he had to opine that had he got only twenty five thousand taka instead of the one lac taka that was spent for collecting Rajput ballads, he could have collected similar ballads from the whole Bengal (*Purbabanga* 41). Sen also informs that with the pride of English education many would often discourage him in working on these ballads since only lower-class people, esp. Muslims composed those songs while 'rustic farmers' would listen to them during breaks from farm work (Sen *Purbabanga* 15). Thus, Sen was falling behind other dominant ethnic groups of India like Rajputs to get the attention of British administrators for funding to preserve these Bengali ballads and thereby, neither the composers nor Sen was at the center of the power.

Method and Scientific Context

This paper does a historical analysis of the ballads in *Purbabanga Gitika* using folklore theories which show that oral folk literature reflects the past life. These ballads are not themselves historical documents but provide valuable hints about inter-ethnic relation in Bengal. Gomme emphasises in his book *Folklore as an Historical Science* (1908) on how folklores have "materials for elucidating

the early life of man” (48). Vladimir Propp, in his book *Theory and History of Folklore* mentions that V. I. Cicerov says that “By preserving the memory of past events, the historical legend lives in people’s memory as oral, unwritten history” (qtd in Propp, 51). Another folklorist, Jan Vansina, states that “Readers should be informed of the date, place, and author of the performance (Vansina 36). Therefore, to understand the historical facts presented in these ballads I will discuss briefly the timeline, place and the composers of these ballads. These ballads were composed from 13th century to late 18th century and were particularly found in Mymensingh, Sylhet and Chittagong altogether which was known as Eastern Bengal in colonial India. It is to be noted that till 16th century, Mymensingh had small independent kingdoms ruled by non-Bengali kings from different ethnic groups like Rajbangshis, Hajongs and Koches (Sen *Eastern* xxii, Majumder 23). Then, from 13th century to 16th century, Chittagong under Arakanese king had small kingdoms ruled by Non-Bengali ethnic groups (Debbarmma 38). Sylhet too was inhabited by many non-Bengali ethnic groups (Choudhury 104). Even after the Mughal rule, non-Bengali ethnic groups continued to live in Bengal. At the background of this pluralistic society with different ethnic groups, the ballads anthologised in *Purbabanga Gitika* were being composed by the unlettered peasants.

To support what these folk ballads are saying about the inter-ethnic relationship in Bengal, I have used historical records, memoirs and travelogues to conduct a textual and historical analysis to prove that whatever is documented on non-Bengali ethnic groups are not imaginary facts, but based on reality.

However, the term “history” itself is very complex and cannot be of any singular version. Foucault, in his book *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1971), explains the difficulties of constructing “total history” as history is influenced by “many theoretical contexts in which it developed and matured” (Foucault 4). He further criticizes how literary analysis fails to take into consideration “the spirit or sensibility of a period, groups, schools, generations, movements, or even the personality of the author in the interplay of his life and his creation’ (Foucault 5). Taking Foucault’s warning, this paper acknowledges that the travelogues and the history books used here to find out the history of non-Bengali ethnic groups portray the voice of the colonisers or the majority ethnic group, Bengalis; and not the other ethnic groups. New historicist, Stephen Greenblatt, further expands on Foucault’s theory by stating that “The work of art is a product of negotiation between a creator or a class of creators and the institutions and practices of a society” (Greenblatt 13). These ballads were composed for the audience who were not only the farmers but also the Bengali gentry of medieval Bengal and probably this is the reason they tone down the conflicts between Muslims and Hindus. The composers of these ballads often mingled historical facts with fantasy to compose these ballads, Sen comments to show that these ballads cannot taken as absolute historical documents (*Purbabanga* 407). Another new historicist, Louis Montrose, further works on the concept of the influence of art and literature and states that “writing and reading are always historically and socially determinate events” (Montrose 35). So, while my paper attempts to identify the history of ethnic groups embedded in *Purbabanga Gitika*, this paper not only lacks the genuine voice of the ethnic people, but my reading too is determined by my scholarship and my political position as a Bengali living in my nation state.

Nevertheless, my point of departure from previous researchers is that *Purbabanga Gitika* represents a rich civilisation of non-Bengali ethnic groups which they shared with Bengalis in the pluralistic society of medieval Bengal.

Results

Inter-ethnic Marriage

A couple of ballads anthologized in *Purbabanga Gitika* which portray the complexities that arise in inter-ethnic marriage will be analysed now. It is important to notice that all the ballads show mutual love and desire between a man and a woman and values women's consent for marriage. The concept of women's consent regarding marriage or sexual intercourse is not a modern feminist discourse since both *The Quran* and *The Law of Manu* insists on marriage with consent and asks to show kindness to the wives (*The Quran* 4:19, 72; Bühler 81). As the composers of these ballads were unlettered, it is more likely that the general ambience of medieval Bengal respected women's consent over marriage and sexual union as well. However, only one ballad, "The Kafan Stealer," composed by one unknown Muslim composer (Sen *Prachin* 71) shows how a Bengali man abducts a young girl from a non-Bengali ethnic group and marries her forcefully without consent:

One day Ludha Gazi saw
A beautiful girl going to work in jhum field
How to describe her immense beauty
Clad in black Khami, she had two curved black eyes
.....
From his bamboo raft he approached the girl
Slowly he came closer without uttering a word
Then from behind he embraced her
Looking back seeing him Cheuya Pori's started crying
With a *gamcha* Ludha Gazi bound her mouth
What did the evil Ludha Gazi do then
He carried the girl on his shoulder
.....
Ludha Gazi tried to console by saying many words
Neither does she understand the language, nor his words
Rowing the raft for four days onwards
Ludha Gazi came to his own house in Gojali village
The girl could not bear her sorrows
And starved herself to death
After a few days she became pregnant
.....
At child birth, the girl breathed her last (Sen *Purbabanga* 844-846)

The above-mentioned excerpt subtly tells the readers that Pori, the daughter of a businessman from a non-Bengali ethnic group, becomes a victim of forced marriage and marital rape by Ludha Gazi,

a Bengali trader who abducted her. Someone who never ceased to cry after the abduction and kept starving herself could hardly be anyone who willingly had sexual intercourse with the husband who forcibly abducted her and married against her or her family's consent.

Then, in "Nasr Malum," collected from folk singer Nur Hosen, we find a description of the failed marriage between Nasr, the Bengali hero of the ballad and Ekhin, a daughter of the headman of a woman-centered ethnic group; though the marriage took place with mutual consent. The composer describes the ethnic group Ekhin belongs to:

Women wear expensive jewellery
And wear two and a half hand Thami.
.....
Seeing this land of women
Fire of desire agitates his heart
Mafo was the headman of this town "Angi"
Ekhin was his daughter of immense beauty
.....
Ekhin's beauty makes Nasr mad
.....
Seeing all these what did Mafo do?

He married them off according to his law. (Sen *Purbabanga* 1230-1232)
In the end, when we see Nasr goes far away for business and does not return, Ekhin's father marries her off again. Unlike Nasr's first wife, Amina, a Bengali woman, whom he left to marry Ekhin, we do not see Ekhin keeps waiting for Nasr forever; rather she starts her new life again after waiting just a year for her husband's return in vain.

The tension of inter-ethnic marriage is further shown in another ballad, "The Ballad of King Bharoia," collected from the singer Nazir Fakir, where a Bengali king humiliates the queen of a Koch King Bharoia Hazra, saying that the status of a Koch princess is below the royal standard to marry a Bengali Brahmin prince.

I won't marry off my son to any jungle girl
How can there be a relation with a Koch!

.....
Marry off your daughter to any plain land Hajong. (Sen *Purbabanga* 1350)
Here, Salekeen rightly points out the social oppression of the Koch people by the Bengali Brahmin King in this excerpt (Salekeen 79). However, this ballad also shows the internal conflict between non-Bengali ethnic groups-Koch and Hajong- since the Koch King wanted the affiliation of a Bengali King and not with any Hajong headman.

Similarly, in “The Ballad of Sheeladevi,” collected from Kalu Shekh and Nandalal Das (Sen *Purbabanga* 1580) we see how not just the king but his daughter, Princess Sheeladevi, too vehemently opposes the marriage proposal from a Munda youth. This leads to a war between the Bengali king’s forces and the Munda people. In the end of the ballad, the Munda youth kills the fiancé of the princess, and the princess Sheeladevi kills herself by the same poisonous arrow with which the Munda youth killed her fiancé.

On the other hand, resistance against the abduction is shown in the ballad, “Mohua,” composed by a Namasudra composer, Dwij Kanai (Sen *Purbabanga* 35). Mohua, by blood is sure a Brahmin daughter, but she is brought up as a Bede girl by her Bede foster parents. Though, Bedes have become familiar as an occupational group, they are actually a non-Bengali ethnic group with their distinct language, Thar (Rahman 49, 56). When a Bengali merchant kidnaps her, Mohua at first pretends to be happy with the merchant and after gaining his trust, she poisons the merchant and his crew. When they all became unconscious, she drowns the boat by making a hole in it so that none of the abductors have any chance to live nor there be any clue of the murder left behind (Sen 66). Interestingly, though “Mohua” is famous for the tragic ending with eponymous heroine’s suicide, there is hardly any discussion on Mohua’s strength to save herself by murdering a boat full of men. Both Ekhin, who remarries after her husband leaves her, and Mohua, who kills her abductors are strong women from non-Bengali ethnic groups with agency to stand up for themselves and these sort of strong female characters are common in *Purbabanga Gitika*. About this trend of portraying strong women, Bhattacharya, a folklore researcher, informs that since majority of the ballads in this anthology are composed in Mymensingh where the majority of the ethnic groups were “matriarchal” and the matriarchal norms were the root base on which these ballads were composed and thus these ballads express the strong women by portraying strength of “women’s personality [...] and women’s individuality” (357).

Thus, we can see that though, for centuries, inter-ethnic marriage between Bengalis and non-Bengali ethnic groups have taken place; it has never become a common practice and has always led to conflicts. However, in spite of the resistances and the unsuccessful inter-ethnic marital union, these ballads hint on how the racial assimilation trickled down for centuries to make Bengalis a hybrid race.

Inter-ethnic Fraternity

In the preface of *Munipuri Muslims*, Syed Manzoorul Islam added an anecdote from his childhood days, saying how he and his siblings were friends with their Manipuri neighbors and one of his brothers even could speak fluent Manipuri (Swapan 13) and this anecdote naturally raises a question in a researcher’s mind: why were these natural friendships never recorded in early Bengali literature? While closely reading *Purbabanga Gitika*, I have come across only one ballad where the friendship between Bengalis Koches is portrayed.

In “The Ballad of Maniktara,” composed by Jamayetullah, friendship between a Koch family and a Bengali family is portrayed. This ballad gives a beautiful description of how Basu’s mother, a Bengali woman, found refuge in a friendship with Kanu’s mother, a kind Koch woman.

Kanu becomes a dacoit as he grows up, and Basu follows him blindly. Basu's mother realizes that Basu is going astray and yet cannot say anything against his son's friendship with Kanu because of her dependence on Kanu's mother. Basu's mother reflects that "Kanu's mother is such a kind lady; Basu's mother is her heart./ Every day she would bring food for their hearth" (Sen *Purbabanga* 604). Later, when Basu's mother realizes that Basu has murdered a Brahmin, she cannot take the shock and dies out of mortification. And then it is Kanu's mother who starts taking care of Basu. Kanu's mother marries off her son as it is easier for her to find a girl of her race. But for Basu, she suggests a Bengali family who has a beautiful daughter. Thus, indirectly Kanu's mother takes the responsibility of settling Basu.

However, the story of friendship does not end here. The girl whom Kanu's mother chooses as Basu's wife is Maniktara, a girl from a Bengali family. She is androgynous, both a kind-hearted feminine beauty and a strong woman who is good at fighting and hunting. When Basu gets surprised at her abilities for hunting birds with arrows, she remembers respectfully her Koch masters and says, "Daru and Sumaru Koch lived in the King's palace/ Dead by their arrows hundreds of enemies would go to Jam's palace/ They became my masters, and I their disciple" (Sen *Purbabanga* 622).

Thus, this ballad not only shows how a Koch woman is sheltering a poor Bengali woman but also how Koch soldiers were training a rural Bengali woman to be self-dependent. What is more inspirational is that this friendship or kindness is mutual. We see Maniktara trying her best to repay the kindness of Kanu's mother towards Basu when Kanu is captured by another dacoit and the narrator reports to the audience, "Finding Kanu in danger, Tara keeps thinking/ How to bring back Kanu here/ Only by doing so, I can pay back the debt of Kanu's mother" (Sen *Purbabanga* 627).

In another variant collected by Khitish Chandra Moulick, there are two more verses to show Maniktara's concern about Kanu's mother. She was wondering "My husband has eaten salt of Kanu's Mother/how can I pay back the debt of that salt!" (Moulick 4:284). Later when Maniktara started looting money by being a dacoit, she continued to take care of Kanu's mother (Moulick 4: 290) and this is how Maniktara paid back Kanu's mother's kindness which she once showered upon Basu and his mother.

This closeness among different ethnic groups was quite common in pre-colonial Bengal both in plain land and valleys. In "The Ballad of Capturing Elephants" whose author is unknown, we see that the farmland of Bengalis and the jhum land of the Chakmas were near each other on the eastern hills. This description can be proven by the historical document written by Fisher where he says that people residing on hills and plain land both used to produce crops in hills (823). Dalton reported in his book *The Ethnology of Bengal* that the ethnic groups had a uniquely democratic process to solve any inter-ethnic disputes. He wrote that 'Disputing tribes are brought together by a "neutral party" for a feast together. In the meeting over the feast, if the dispute is solved, both parties promise to keep their words by biting the sword and feeding each other' (Dalton 62). So, here we see that the different ethnic groups were not only warring against each other as portrayed by many historians but also had their civilized way of solving a matter. Thus, when people, no

matter what ethnic groups they come from, live as neighbors; a certain fraternity is supposed to develop among them.

Inter-ethnic Trade Culture

Closely reading a number of ballads, three distinct characteristics of business by non-Bengali ethnic groups can be traced.

First of all, a few of the ballads describe how some nomadic ethnic groups used to holler products from going door to door in the villages of Bengal. In the ballad, “Mohua” we see that the Bede people do not only show circuses but also sell different products to village women. Similarly, in “The Ballad of Ayna Bibi,” crafted by an unknown Muslim composer, we find about another nomadic ethnic group, called Kurunjia. The women of this ethnic group also sell products from door to door.

Moreover, we find ethnic trade centers at the valley of hills in these ballads. In “Nasr Malum,” we see that Nasr went to Ekhin’s village to trade where Ekhin’s father, Mafo, was the headman of the village and he was also a businessman. He had a business of selling dried fish. This is how Nasr came to know him. Nasr, being a trader himself, would come to Mafo to buy dried fish and then sell it to others.

In addition to ethnic trade centers, in “The Kafan Stealer,” we find a more detailed description of trade culture between Bengalis of plain land and ethnic groups of hills and jungles.

On the east of Chatigah, there’s a great mountain

.....

There lives Rosainga, Pankhoya, Murong and Bonjugis
And Naked tribes of Jummas, Chammoys and Kukis

.....

The jhum fields grow gold such is the strength of their soil
Crops, threads, Marfa, Chinar and many products they toil
Jungle people sell their products going from one hut to other

The plain land people come to buy these products there. (Sen *Purbabanga* 843-844)

Robert Lindsay reported in his memoir that traders of ethnic group, “Cusseah” [modern spelling is Khasia] used to refine “chunam” or lime and used to trade it to “Armenians, Greeks and Low European” (Lindsay 176). It seems now that probably Sunamganj got his name from Chunam, a Khasia name for lime, for being its trade place. Lindsay also witnessed how the Khasia people used to come down from hills to sell products to plain land people. Lindsay reports that “A caravan arrive from the interior of the mountain, bringing, on their shoulders the produce of their hills, consisting of the coarsest silks from the confines of China, fruits of various kinds but the great staple was iron, of excellent quality. (Lindsay 179). Almost about 79 years late in 1845, Wylie gives a similar description of trading culture of Bengal at the foot of the hill. He reported that “there was a brisk trade between “the people of the plains and those of the hills” (Wylie 80).

Moreover, jungle-based economy is also portrayed in these ballads. In “The Ballad of Capturing Elephants” we see how people from many different ethnic groups helped the Bengali trader capture and tame elephants so that he could supply these elephants to the king. Bengalis, an

ethnic group from the plain land, could never capture elephants alone. They always needed the support of other ethnic groups. There is this beautiful description of how a Bengali trader took the help of a Chakma headman, Mongla, to capture elephants in “The Ballad of Capturing Elephants:”

Mongla was the headman of Chaummarkul village
He was very famous and a man of influence.
So many cows and buffaloes were in his stable
And outside he had miles of lands arable.
Years after years in haats he sells crops
Of Golok cane of thousand taka worth.

.....
Mongla told Golbodon, “Trust me, you’ all
I know where the elephants stay or stroll. (Sen *Purbabanga* 931)

This verse reveals two sides of the contribution of the Chakma people in trade. He sells Golok cane in markets, and he cooperates in capturing elephants that the Bengal used to gift to other kings or sell in other kingdoms.

However, “The Ballad of Santal Rebellion,” the only ballad from mid-19th century, documents how Santal revolted against both Bengalis and British administrators when the trade between Bengalis and Santals turned into an economical oppression against Santals (Sen *Purbabanga* 656). Interestingly, after this rebellion Church Missionary House of London published a booklet where they completely denied that Santals were revolting against the revenue system of East India Company (*A Plea* 15) and in the same booklet they revealed their worries about the “friendly mutual intercourse” between Hindus and the ethnic groups of hills (*A Plea* 39).

Thus, *Purbabanga Gitika* portrays the contribution of non-Bengali ethnic groups in the trade and economy of Bengal. Though, the historical documents by British colonisers and these folk ballads portray the participation of different ethnic groups from hills and forests in the trade of Bengal, surprisingly even the most appreciated book *Bangalir Itihas* (1949) by Ray or *Brihat Banga* (1935) by Sen on history of Bengal does not mention anything about the contribution of farmers and producers of different ethnic groups other than Bengalis.

Inter-ethnic Political Relations

Some ballads recorded in *Purbabanga Gitika* give glimpses of the Medieval Bengal when alongside Bengalis other ethnic communities too had significant political and military strength.

Loyal support was sure one of the most important political strength of non-Bengali ethnic groups that the Bengali royals sought for. In “The Ballad of Raja Raghu,” whose one version is crafted by Adhar Chand, a Hindu composer, we see how the Garo people are lamenting the kidnapping of King Raghunath by Isa Khan:

Emptying the throne, they had kidnapped the King

Can there be any beauty in a kingdom without a king? (Sen *Purbabanga* 1282)

Many of these ethnic groups were self-sufficient and provided political and military support to Bengali Kings and Queens. In the same ballad mentioned above, we see twenty thousand Garos fighting against the military of Isa Khan to save the Bengali Raja Raghunath Roy, the son of Queen Komola. There is a description in this ballad of how the Garo soldiers invaded the palace of Isa Khan to rescue the Bengali king-prince Raghu:

They took Kuch and they took Ballam and Ramdao.
Fiercely, they went to Jangalbari city.
Twenty-two units of Garo corps marched double past.
Under their strength, the land started to tremble fast-
Engulfing the world in wrath fierce. (Sen *Purbabanga* 1283)

Not only Bengali kings but also Mughal kings could rule in medieval India because of the loyal support from the ethnic groups whom they offered tax-free settlement in return of their military support against intruders either from foreign countries like China or by attacks from different ethnic groups from hills or forests (Lindsay 163).

Then, this anthology documents two ballads, “The Ballad of Isa Khan” and “The Ballad of Firoz Khan” both composed by Muslim composers, which reveal how the kingdoms of Koch kings was such invincible that Isa Khan had to adapt cowardly ways to overthrow Koch kings, Ram Hazra and Lakhshman Hazra.

Ram Lakshman two brothers
Ruled the Jangalbari city
Crossing the river Isa Khan
Reached there in the midnight
His armies seized the palace
Ram Lakshman two brothers did escape
While Isa Khan overthrows their powers. (Sen *Purbabanga* 782)

Here we see how Isa Khan’s army invaded the kingdoms of Koch kings inside the Jangalbari forest and took over the kingdom. Isa Khan’s army was quite astonished to see how his cats were killed by the rats inside the dense jungle of Jangalbari and thus decided to invade the Jangalbari forest. He was wondering “I’ve never seen that rats kill cats/residence here will sure bring many miracles” (Sen *Purbabanga* 687-688). This shows how Koch kings were evidently so powerful that Isa Khan had to win the war by attacking the Koch kings unwarned and asleep in midnight which was usually not a brave king’s way of fighting a war with other kings.

In another ballad called “The Ballad of Bharoia King” we see how the Koch king invaded a Bengali King’s kingdom by clearing a forest there:

O brothers! Listen to me what happened one day

The Koch King went to survey the land that day
 There was a dense forest at the bank of Sundasheti river
 His men requested him
 To summon for workers to clear the land
 Sure, what's the need of this dense jungle!
 The king summoned his workers without a second thought
 Twelve thousand Koch workers came there at once. (Sen *Purbabanga* 1336)
 And when the Bengali king fought to win back the kingdom, the Koch king easily defeated the
 Bengali Brahmin King and imprisoned him announcing:
 If needed cut the city and drown it in the sea.
 But do bring the head of Birsinghi and show it to me

 King Bharoia captured King Bir Singh
 Hands in handcuffs and legs in ropes
 Carried him on an elephant to the palace
 Where lived he, the Bharoia King. (Sen *Purbabanga* 1337-1338)

Interestingly, though these ballads depict inter-ethnic conflicts, Eaton informs that after the Mughal conquest, all Bengali Hindu and Muslim kings along with “tribal chieftains” joined together to oppose the Mughal under Isa Khan and that he was considered as a “de facto” ruler of Eastern Bengal as the Mymensingh ballads portray him. Thus, these ballads show how, once upon a time, the non-Bengali ethnic groups played an important role in the politics of medieval Bengal.

Inter-ethnic Shared Folklore

There are three ballads in this anthology which have variants in the oral literature of matrilineal ethnic groups, Garo and Khasia. Firstly in “The Ballad of Queen Komola” crafted by Adhar Chand, is shown how Queen Komola, who was contemporary to the Emperor Jahangir (Sen *Purbabanga* 376) once was ordered to dig a pond in her dream. And when there was no water, she again dreamed that she should pay tribute standing inside the pond so that the water can rise in the pond. While she was worshipping, the water started to rise until she got drowned under the water. Garos, who identify themselves as Mandi, also have a folk tale on Rani Komola where the myth is that once a Mandi youth fell in the water of Sagar Dighi accidentally. After drowning in the water, he reached a palace where he met one beautiful lady. The youth asked the name of the lady, and she replied that she is the queen who had to drown under the water of Sagardighi (Toru 74-76). So, the legend of Queen Komola exists not only in Bengali folk tale but also in Garo folk tale.

Then, the variant of another ballad, “Kajolrekha,” included in *Purbabanga Gitika* is found in Khasi folktales. In the ballad “Kajolrekha,” whose composer is not known, the girl is married to a dead prince, and in the variant of Khasi folk tale too the princess marries a dead

prince, and after the marriage, the prince comes back to life, informs Pamthet, a Khasi woman in a personal interview.

Moreover, “The Ballad of Blind Friend” which according to Sen was composed anytime between the end of the fourteenth century and the early fifteenth century (Sen *Purbabanga* 1593) and is collected from Buddhu Hajong, a Hajong singer and Manik Nath, a lower caste Hindu, has an exact version in Khasi folktales. Nongkynrih, a Khasia writer documents this oral tale called “U Manik Raitong” in his book, *Around the Hearth: Khasi Tales*. The only difference is that in the Bengali Ballad, the queen and her lover commit suicide by drowning in the river (Sen *Purbabanga* 1359-1370), whereas the Khasi tale shows how, after finding out about the extramarital relationship between the flutist and the queen, the king orders him to be burned alive on a pyre. However, while the flutist was on the blazing pyre, the queen runs and jumps into the fire. The Khasis believe that it is from that time that the Hindus started the Sutte tradition, thinking that if an immoral woman can die for her lover, then wives as pure as Sita can also burn themselves alive to follow their husbands (Nongkynrih 129-154).

Now the question is how two different ethnic groups with two different languages have different variants of a same folk tale. About the variants of a single tale, Kaarle Krohn says:

The common origin of peoples has little to do with connections of tales whereas geographical proximity and reciprocal relations have much more relevance in spite of the great differences in languages. Folktales have no connections with language, but with culture, that is to say, with civilization. (qtd in Dundes, 43)

Thus, following Krohn’s idea of connection with civilization as a reason behind variants of the same tale, we can deduce that since these ballads show how Bengali and non-Bengali ethnic groups shared a common yet pluralistic civilization once upon a time in trade, politics, marriage and social norms; that variants are found in two complete different languages.

Discussion

This paper was inspired by Foucault’s suggestion that history makes document into a magnanimous artifact (Foucault 7). *Purbabanga Gitika* is one such epoch-making document which shows that the marginalised peasant class of medieval Bengal had the liberal mindset not only to craft songs about them but also about other ethnic groups who were more marginalised than them. About medieval Bengali literature, Syed Manzoorul Islam says, “One renaissance took place in Bengali literature in the middle age ... liberal, advanced, human-centric approach were already present in many medieval Bengali literature” (manush juktir shontan noy, probrittir shontan, 13:19-15:02). Professor Islam seems to be echoing what Sen said about these ballads from eastern Bengal. Sen says that “Without any racial or sectarian propaganda” these ballads “have a universal appeal” (Sen *Eastern* xxxvii). However, looking at the timeline of these ballads and the then political situation of Bengal, these ballads become the evidence that this liberal trend of composing literature could not continue due to the Brahminic influence and later by the influence of western education among the educated intelligentsia of colonial Bengal. Dundes reminds us that according to Freud the replacement of id which evokes folklores by the “civilizing superego” is not beneficial to anyone (Dundes 114). How the “civilizing superego”

changes these same ballads can be seen in Mollick's works and Salekeen's reading of Sen and these ballads. Kshitish Chandra Mollick after two decades of the publication of *Purbabanga Gitika* collected the same ballads himself at a time when Bengali nationalist politics was at the peak along with Hindu-Muslim conflict in Eastern Bengal under Pakistan. So, in Mollick's version of the ballads we find that at places non-Bengali ethnic characters get replaced by either Hindu or Muslim character. And when Salekeen gives his reading fifty years after Bengalis have their own state, his readings of both Sen and the composers have changed to an accusing tone that these ballads have an undermining tone towards ethnic minorities. Choice of diction is never apolitical and they always bear the burden of the meanings of the era when they are being used. To us, "uncivilised" is sure a derogatory term as Salekeen accused Sen of using, however, probably to Sen "uncivilised" carried a different meaning and in quite a few places Sen gives a respectful description of non-Bengali ethnic people saying "even if they were uncivilised, they were peaceful and non-violent" (Sen *Purbabanga* 244) in the same way Sen often talked about the farmers who composed these ballads saying even though they were "unlettered they were the true masters of knowledge" (Sen *Prachin* 12). While Sen deconstructed the definition of "civilisation" by his readings of these texts, future researchers can reconstruct a true renaissance meaning of "civilisation" by going back to these medieval literature crafted mostly by Muslims and lower caste Hindus.

I have mentioned earlier that this paper lacks the true depiction of the condition of different ethnic groups in Bengal since neither the historical documents used here nor the ballads which have been analysed here are written by non-Bengali ethnic groups. However as Gomme quotes Campbell saying that folk tales do not tell the exact truth, yet "something may be learned of the forgotten ways of life" (Gomme 48), my historical analysis of *Purbabanga Gitika* too reveals glimpses of the lives of not only Bengalis but also other ethnic groups of medieval Bengal.

Since these ballads significantly portray the lost world of a dignified position of non-Bengali ethnic groups and that they had their own civilisation in trade, culture and politics in Bengal, I believe, the way Sen worked to revive the rich culture of Muslims and lower caste Hindus of medieval Bengal by analysing these ballads, now, we should do the same for non-Bengali ethnic groups through reading these ballads by reviving the liberal mindset of medieval renaissance of Bengal. I also believe, the findings of this paper will certainly draw the attention of historians and anthropologists so that they can conduct an ethnographic research on inter-ethnic relationship in Bengal, which I am sure will not only reveal the conflicts among different ethnic groups as the modern monographs mostly show but will also unearth a rich history of communal interdependence among the ethnic groups which made Bengal a pluralistic nation.

Note

All translations of the excerpts from *Purbabanga Gitika* and quotes from Bengali texts are the author's own.

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Aravind Adiga's Depiction of Class Conflict In *The White Tiger*

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Abstract

Aravind Adiga is the most significant Man Booker Prize-winning author of Indian literature in English. His writings address serious issues such as terrorism, poverty, corruption, political unrest, and caste and class discrimination. His writings depict the struggles that ordinary people face in their daily lives. Adiga's debut novel, *The White Tiger*, tells the story of a man's quest for independence. His books seek to examine people's avaricious desire for wealth. This paper examines the social issues of contemporary India as depicted in *The White Tiger*. His works offer a clear picture of contemporary India. It emphasizes the struggles and exploitation experienced by India's lower and common classes.

Keywords: corruption, greed, poverty, injustice, globalization

Introduction

Novels written before independence address topics such as social evils, rites and rituals, poverty, and illiteracy. Post-Independence novels address social issues such as poverty, terrorism, caste and class discrimination caused by industrialization, modernization, globalization, and world war.

The terms "class struggle," "class conflict," or "class discrimination" refer to the political unrest and economic hostility that arise between social classes as a result of power imbalances in the socioeconomic hierarchy, competing interests, and limited resources. Class conflict is simply the ongoing struggle between the wealthy and the poor. Class is determined by property rather than status or money. These are influenced by distribution and consumption, which reflect class relations of power and production. Thus, class is a formal and theoretical relationship between individuals. According to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, there has been conflict between these two classes for the majority of human history. "Class struggle" is the term used to describe this conflict. This idea gained popularity following the publication of *Das Kapital* and *The Communist Manifesto*. Two classes—the "bourgeoisie" and the "proletariat"—are central to understanding Marx's theory. People who sell their labor for a wage are known as the proletariat. A bourgeoisie is defined as someone who buys and profits from the labor of others. In other words, the bourgeoisie is the group of people who own the means of production used by labor. For instance, they own factories and have employees there. The profits go to the owner of the factory. Consequently, the bourgeoisie generates income and is able to support themselves, mostly through real estate investments.

India's current confidence in its path to a brighter future is depicted, along with a positive commitment and a hidden moral purpose. V.S. Naipaul, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Kamala Markandaya, and Arundhati Roy are among the prominent novelists who have depicted the disorder to reflect the current situation in India. They have shed light on their communities' hardships and provided us with a foundation for understanding the complex relationships between caste, class, and gender in Indian society.

Aravind Adiga is a shining example of Indian English literature. He was born in Madras, which is now Chennai, on October 23, 1974. An Indo-Australian writer, he also works as a journalist. *The White Tiger* was his first published book and the one for which he won the 2008 Man Booker Prize. The other three Booker Prize winners are Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, and Kiran Desai. Adiga has won numerous other awards, including the British Book Awards Author of the Year, the John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize, and the Commonwealth Writers Prize. His three most important works are *Between the Assassinations*, *The White Tiger*, and *Last Man in Tower*. His characters in these novels are real people at the bottom of the social and political ladder. His four collections of short stories are *The Elephant*, *Smack*, *Last Christmas*, and *The Sultan's Battery*.

The White Tiger is a brilliant and thought-provoking novel from India that is truly revolutionary. Balram, the protagonist of the novel *The White Tiger*, writes a series of seven-night epistolary letters to Chinese businessman Wen Jiabao, in which he tells him his story. Adiga discusses how certain aspects of Indian society are exploited and suppressed. Its primary concerns include Indian crime, corruption, and injustice. Adiga highlights the intricacy and fluidity of India's class system throughout the entire book. While education, material success, and access to political power are the most significant factors influencing class stratification in urban India, caste and economic status are the most significant factors in rural India. Indian cities, according to Balram, are teeming with people carrying their salaries on their backs, bustling city markets, and homeless families. Balram does not wish to follow in his father's footsteps, who worked himself to death because he was always in debt to the bourgeoisie, the Stork, and the Mongoose. Rather, Balram considers himself a white tiger, which is uncommon and special in the Indian jungle. The competition between the stork and mongoose in the jungle relates to the larger themes of capitalism and the culture's ingrained survival of the fittest mentality.

“The caste system as one [being] born in India with its most important standing, namely belonging to his/her social class, which is theoretically immutable. This tradition applies equally to rural environments, where virtually no one can conceal his origin and to make a living, one has to deal with occupations that have been determined by their classes” (p. 4, *The White Tiger*).

Balram is a metaphor for all of our country's impoverished people who yearn for better lives. A terrifying new India can be compared to Balram's story. Balram is a skilled businessman who knows how to defend himself. He works under the guise of injustice, corruption, and poverty. The gap between those who have and those who do not is always growing, and with it comes anger and bitterness. According to Adiga, the wealthy profit at the expense of others because of the widening economic gap between the rich and the poor. The poor toil for their owners and their wealth, as farmers toil for their landlords. From the IT center of Bangalore to the tranquil Bihar village of Laxmangarh, the book chronicles Balram's entire journey. Balram was a talented young man who had to abandon his studies due to challenging family circumstances. Being an intelligent Balram who, according to a school inspector, went by the nickname "white tiger."

“You, young man, are an intelligent, honest, vivacious fellow in this crowd of thugs and idiots. In any jungle, what is the rarest of animals—the creature that comes along only once in a generation?”
“The white tiger.”

“That’s what you are, in *this* jungle.”

Balram got a job as a driver for Ashok, a dishonest businessman from Delhi. Balram's master, Ashok, and his family subjected him to torture and constant humiliation. His master and family never allow him to feel ashamed of himself; instead, they treat him with fake kindness. Pinky, Ashok's wife, killed a child while driving after drinking. Following that, they began accusing

Balam of killing the child and forced him to sign a statement admitting his guilt. Balam developed cynicism and dishonesty as he became more exposed to corruption in Delhi. When he realized how much he had been duped by corruption, he began to resent the upper class and sought revenge. He was determined to keep himself free from both mindless obedience and servitude. Because of these pressures, Balam murdered his boss, stole his money (which he had secretly kept in order to bribe a politician), and fled. Balam desired self-sufficiency because he was equally dangerous as the "White Tiger."

Balam had no other way out of this situation. He fled to Bangalore and used the stolen money to start a taxi business. After a few years, he became a successful businessman. Adiga discusses how he created the character of Balam in an interview. He says that:

"Balam Halwai is a composite of various men I have met when traveling through India. I spend a lot of time loitering about train stations or bus stands, or kind of continuous murmur or growl beneath middle-class life in India. And this noise never gets recorded. Balam is what you would hear if one day the drain and faucets on your house started talking."(BookBrowse.com)

With Balam's arrival, the narrative shifts from the shadows to the light, from the village to the city, and Adiga emphasizes the ongoing hardships and mistreatment of servants. To highlight aspects of class differences, the text emphasizes the masters' colonizing attitude toward their servants. As Adiga puts it, "the light," or urban India, thrives on the splendor of capitalist material prosperity, while the oppressed class remains colonized by modern-day Indian elites. For generations, the oppressed have been kept in their positions by the village's landlords, while the English-speaking elites in the city have taken their place. The servants' resistance to the class divide is visible as they are colonized by globalized India's English-speaking elites. As stated by Bhaba in his "Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition," to Fanon's *Black Skin: White Masks*:

"It is true for there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler's place. it is always in relation to the place of the other that colonial desire is articulated; that is, in part, the fantasmatic space of possession that no one subject can singly occupy which permits the dream of the inversion of roles (Bhaba XXVIII)."

The White Tiger represents the social and economic divide that exists in modern India. It is a provocative piece of social commentary, with a keen awareness of the disparities that exist in India despite its recent prosperity. As a result, the novel contrasts India's rise to prominence as a major global economic power with the plight of the socially marginalized, who live in extreme rural and urban poverty. The text provides a compelling analysis of the growing wealth disparity that has engulfed India in the twenty-first century.

It is clear that contemporary society is threatened by a schism between the strong and the weak, or the privileged and the underprivileged. Nobody has the opportunity to misuse the wealth or use it for personal gain because of the wealthy and influential community. They clearly benefit from their wealth because they were raised in a wealthy family from birth. Their newly acquired or inherited wealth is primarily spent on materialistic comforts, personal accomplishments, and possessions. Despite their severe and circumspect outlook, the impoverished are forced to live stressful lives. In this case, the disadvantaged circumstances will remain unchanged, while the privileged will enjoy increasing prosperity. This writer's work has concentrated on the frequency of this disparity.

Conclusions:

Without questioning its relevance or legitimacy, the book *The White Tiger* reveals the ignorance of their Indian counterparts and their mindless acceptance of western culture. The book awakens the masses in India from their delusional perspective of western societies. The novel draws attention to the problems pertaining to the elements that have contributed to the decline of Indian culture in the face of Western influence. It also demonstrates how foreign cultures are dominant. The most concerning factors contributing to Indian society's cultural degradation are the influence of Western languages, widespread corruption, the breakdown of the caste system, the rise of materialism, technological advancement, modernization, social mobility, law and legislators, Western-style clothing and lifestyle, competition, and disloyalty. These days, people only care about making money and do not care about the memories and trails they leave behind. They just want to follow their financial path. Both rich and poor people want to be wealthy, even if it means taking a life.

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A feminist critique of masculinity and (male) body in BhismaSahni's *Madhavi*

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Abstract

The paper seeks to study body, sexuality, and ideology of violence meted onto a female character Madhavi, the chief protagonist of the eponymous play *Madhavi*, written by modern Hindi playwright BhismaSahani. The play consciously puts forth an inversion of biased Indian patriarchal ideology of "(im)purity of women body and offers a powerful critique of patriarchal masculinity imbedded in the most ambitious ancient Hindu epic the Mahabharata. It is thus a retelling of the Mahabharat's tale of a woman named Madhavi (she is the wife of Galav, a young brahmin sage under Visvamitra who promises his teacher to give price of his teaching by bartending her own wife) and her physical disfigurements. The act of coercion includes measurements, enforced liaison etc. This consumerist and sexist understanding of the female body purely as an object of sexual gratification against her own wish and her maternal feelings. She was conspicuously denied of having the privilege over her own body and sexuality. In the original story she is asked by her own father to company a young sage-Galav to get the latter's promises fulfilled. The play undermines the male masochism under the social system of 'purity'; a condition in which chastity becomes a matter of honor and authority than the women self-worth at the behest of supposedly a husband or a father. In the original mythology narrated in Mahabharata the character Madhavi under the influence of Galav is forced to regain her chastity against her own desires and aspiration. But in present play text the narrative is put upside down and seeks it to critique the institution of the purity created by male to fulfil the crude masculine desire. Sahni's *Madhavi* did not revoke her 'virginity' despite she having been graced with divine power to regain her virginity whenever, she wishes to. The paper first will discuss the theoretical concept of body and sexuality. In the second part it, will explore the male hegemonic practice of purity and the biased perception towards women against their wellbeing and rights through the interpretation of *Madhavi*.

Keywords: sex, body, virginity, selfhood, patriarchal/heterosexual norms, hegemo

Introduction

The paper tries to study the bodily and sexual violence on a woman named Madhavi in the mythical past through the play text *Madhavi*. It unfolds the fact that there has been gender biased violence against women under the pretext of 'purity' or chastity. It further establishes that there is a systematic oppression of the women subjects in the great Indian epic *Mahabharata* in the name duty and Dharma. Hence the paper tries to critique this male centered view of sexuality and subjection in tandem with the feminist agenda of liberation from such cultural constructs. Women as subject in Indian Theatre became visible in early 20th century with the emergence of Binodini as performer first in Bengali theatre as a self-conscious actor, displaying her will and power through the enactment. Their voice as asserting agency became visible particularly in post-independence Indian theatre scenario. During 70s and 80s several modern playwrights such as Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Utpal Dutt, Badal Sircar and Bhisma Sahnii among others start projecting woman as the chief protagonist in their play texts. The play such as *Silence! The court In Session* (Leela Benari), *Naga-Mandala* (Rani), and *Madhavi* (the eponymous character of the play), etc. are "androgynous texts" which seek to deconstruct the hegemony of patriarchy and the dominance of masculinist violence against women.

My concerns showcase how: 1) woman centric approach in theatre emerged in the late 70s and 80s in Indian dramatic parlance which was equally informed about the European feminist movement; 2) how women became popular subject matter both as subject and as the agent of their story. In Indian drama and theatre studies 90s phase is very crucial due feminist intervention in theatre and performative studies which sought to define women from the feminist point of view. Women start writing, producing, theorizing theater solely from women's perspective as the sole producer/writer, character/actor, audience/receptor and consumer of their desired representation. The paper thus, tries to offer a critical reading of *Madhavi* where the woman self as an independent agency starts interrogating the male hegemony and the masculine perception of sexuality, body and desire. The paper studies as to how gender justice of yonder or past is connected with the postcolonial present in Indian drama. And also discusses how and to what extent post-colonial drama reflects the sexual and gender-based violence on Indian women? How does a play text such as *Madhavi* perceive, delineate and circulate the idea of sexuality and masculinity from the perspective of women as a free agency? In the first part of the paper the theory of masculinity, body and women subjugation will be discussed, and in the second section the play will be discussed with reference to the feminist perspective of sexuality, power and subject.

Theorizing Body/Masculinity

In the contemporary gender discourse masculinity occupies a significant position in the debates of hegemony, power and gender relations. Like gender and sexuality, masculinity is an identity marker which involves power-ideology. It is considered to be a male preserve and male dominance. Masculinity, needless to say is connected with material dimension of body and public perception of male gaze. Body is the site of power and medium to show corporeality of masculinity. Body has also been used in derogatory sense to denote as pure emotion, lack of logical thinking and

static and with female, whereas mind as often associated with the intelligence, logic and dynamic and hence male. This untenable dichotomy of mind-body or mind vs. body imperative has been exposed by the feminist critics and scholars specially from the Second Wave feminists who advocate that this discourse of cleavage has been created by 'phallogocentric' scholars. This preposterous division is not only detrimental to feminist discourse but also essentialist in nature and hegemonic in practice, very least to say. It seeks to deconstruct woman's identity on preconceived notion. The binary of this kind perpetuates the violence endlessly onto the women subject and their agency. Women identity is always subject to the masculinity/dominant sexual desire. An act of flaunting male body or displaying body publicly is a conscious strategy of imposing a masculine desire as normal and universal and hence, unquestionable.

It is imperative to note that 'masculinity' is not biological but cultural and well-constructed like gender. It's a well thought off negotiation between gender and sexual roles. The discourse of masculinity is not only limited to feminism and sexuality studies, it has a lot to do with the social relations and power-dynamics it is operated on. Masculinity thus is contingent upon the power/hegemony and discourse of control and desire and agency. In *Masculinities* (1995) Connell writes, "any one masculinity, as a configuration or practice, is simultaneously positioned in a number of structures of relationship, which may be following different historical trajectories"(Rajan 2004, 7). Connell for the first time espoused the theory of "hegemonic masculinity" where he rearticulates Antonio Gramsci's insightful notion of hegemony to signal power relations in society (7).

Masculinity and body are inextricably linked to each other. The power of masculinity is shown through the presence of physical body. Michel Foucault theorizes body in much better disciplinary fashion especially in his monumental books '*Discipline and Punish*, and two volume of '*History of Sexuality*'. He views institutions ranging from the prison, asylum, factory and army and such other forms of power-knowledge affect the shaping of the body(sexuality). He reinstates that, "power relations have an immediate hold upon the it (body), they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs..." (Counsel 2001,127).

Body/Sexuality in Sahni's *Madhavi*

The post-Independence Indian playwrights such as Dharmvir Bharati, Mohan Rakesh, Shanker Shesh in Hindi, PLDeshpande and Vijay Tendulkar in Marathi, Girish Karnad in Kannada, Badal Sircar in Bengali among others created a new postcolonial theatre idiom to create space for marginalized. They hugely depended upon the history, myths and folklore as new *modus operandi* to decolonize the Indian theatre and as well as to critically engage the myths and legends for their contemporary relevance. The era of 60s and 70s is the time of theatre upsurge, and Indian theatre saw many theatrical innovations. Playwrights turned towards the myths, folktales and oral narrative to write the play. This introspective movement was basically aimed at to decolonize the Indian stage by reverting towards the Indian-ness. Moreover, these modern playwrights and writers found myth a brilliant metaphor or idioms not only convey the most complex modern issues but also to critique those myths and make them stand on their feet.

All the myths or mythopoeic literature of post-independence scenarios used as the functionalist argument that is they had a symbolic and ontological association with the modern contexts. So, the use of myth became the emblem of modern sensibility. The impact of myths was so huge that it became the very reality of our literary discourse(Satchidanandan, xi).The myth therefore, is cogent medium to articulate the complexity of the human predicaments across -between the different time zones. Modern Indian writers have used it very conspicuously to give vent to the postcolonial doubts, dilemma and political chaos and uncertainty that the nascent India faced at sociopolitical fronts. Among the everlasting sources and archive of myths to Indian imagination till date remained the most ambitious and the largest written document the *Mahabharata*. Many prominent writers such as Dharmvir Bharti, UR Anthamuthy, Shivaji Savant, Girish Karnad, Sashi Tharoor, Banerjee Divakaruni, Pratibah Ray, Sarla Joseph to name only them, have extensively reworked Mahabharat with different perspectives.

Bhisham Sahni(1915-2023) was a prolific Modern Hindi writer and was associated to the Progressive Writer's Movement of Hindi literature which was founded in the heyday of Indian impendence movement by the great Hindi novelist, Premachand as early as 1936 in Allahabad.He was General Secretary of All India Progressive Writers Association (1975–85).Sahni, a versatile genius starts his literary journey in late 70s. He is widely well known for his partition novel *Tamas*. As he was born in east while Panjab now in Pakistan and has had a firsthand experience of partition which wrecked a havoc to both India and Pakistan due to religious extremism and sectarian violence. He received many accolades which include Sahitya Academy Award, Padma Bhushan among others. Sahni was associated with several alternative literary and cultural organizations and worked as Acting General Secretary of the Afro-Asian Writer' Association and was also a founder and chairman of 'SAHMAT'(Safadar Hashmi Memorial Trust), an organization promoting cross-cultural understanding, founded in memory of the murdered theatre artist and activist Safdar Hashmi (1954-1989).

The play *Madhvai* is reworking of a myth from the *Mahabharata*. The character Madhavi is a daughter of Yayati in the play.This play exposes the very notion of womanhood, sexuality and ideas of dharma/righteous action. Sahni due to his Marxist leniency and following Prem Chand, explicates the three serious questions to ponder over as sensitive readers: 1) was Madhavi disloyal to truth/dharma when she was *reluctant to* cohabit with Kings? 2)why was she sexually (ab) used as a bet when she didn't have interest? 3) what is the dharma of a woman, to protect her body or follow the order/religion made by male/husband? As the plot unfolds Madhavi is a young, beautiful daughter of great King-Yayati, one of the founders of the Kuru dynasty in Mahabharat story. This dynasty came to prominence in the two clan, Kauravas and Pandavas. Yayati was a supposedly a staunch religious and dutiful King. His services to the sages and brahmins were populous stand to ascertain his right as a great King. After the death Madhavi's mother, he chose to give her to Galav who had just attained the scholarship in Dharmashastra and spirituality under the tutelage of Viswamitra.(Vishvmistra was also the teacher of Ram and Lakhsmn from the epic *Ramayana*) Galav after the successful completion of his formal education with seer Viswamitra, desires to fulfil the price of his education, that is *guru Dakshina*. The seer, however, initially did

not want to take any *gurudakshina* from his but upon Galav's persistent request he asked for eight hundred white horses, which presumably teach a lesson. In those times, white horses rare breed. It is understood that there were only six hundred white horses possessed by three great emperors. As Madhavi as a daughter of Yayati was bestowed with boons of regaining her virginity even after marriages and sexual liaison. Yayati out of his duty and dharma decided to give her to young sage Galav. She, however, did not want to marry him but due to her father/king act of donating her as a gift to the young sage, she agrees to marry her. Galav to fulfil the demand of his guru decides to abet her to with several kings who were having the possession of white horses.

Ayaryavata, or Bharat which is perceived as modern-day India, could have only 600 hundred white horses possessed by Kings of Ayodhya, King of Banaras and of Ujjain respectively. To get all those six white horses she was forced to marry three Kings. As she was bestowed with ability to give birth to sovereign Kings (son) and also an ability to regain her virginity, she was put as bet to get those horses. All kings happily agreed to exchange their two hundred horses in lieu of temporary marriage and a sovereign prince with the most beautiful Madhvi. She married all three Kings and gave birth to three young prince to each king respectively. For the remaining two hundred horses she has to sleep with Vishwamitra himself to fulfil the demand of eight hundred white horses. Thus, she could fulfil the promises of her husband's. In the original mythology of Mahabharat, Madhavi under the influence of Galav, is forced upon to regain her chastity against her own desires and aspiration. But in present play text the narrative is put upside down and seeks it to critique the institution of the purity created by male to fulfil the crude masculine desire. Sahni's Madhavi did not revoke her 'virginity' despite she having been graced with divine power to regain her virginity whenever she wishes to.

It is a very poignant story of a woman/wife/lover who struggles to find her rights, selfhood and dignity. Madhavi's journey of giving birth to sovereign sons with the different kings is also the story of missing of motherhood. The boon of the eternal virginity of Madhavi turns to be a curse later when her body is continuously ravaged and politicized in terms of sexuality. However, Galav keeps on collecting the horses by bartending her fertile body/womb. After sleeping with three kings and managing six hundred horses, her body exhausts, shrinks and rebels. As strong critique to patriarchal masculinities, she reluctantly recollects her vigor and finally approaches Vishwamitra, the seer himself and boldly invites him to sleep with her to fulfill the demand of eight hundred. Vishwamitra (earlier a kshatriya king turned into sage), shamelessly accepts her proposal to sleep with her. As it has been aptly put in, "...the body of Madhavi involves in proactively appearing in front of Vishwamitra proposing him for lovemaking and vigorously disappearing from society discarding virgin eternity. Her body as a historicist tells the contemporary narratives of society and stands as a microcosm of social revolt (Lamichhane, 3).

Finally, Galav gets his promises fulfilled to his guru Vishwamitra. Her sacrifice of maternal desire and sexual exploitation is purely done under the dominance patriarchal masculinities where all men seduce her, enforce them on her and enjoy her beauty and body according to their (masculinity) desire. Interestingly, Sahni does not make her a victim of situation, rather made her the heroine of her destiny.

As a feminist text we get to know about her double victimization by not only her lover but also by her own father. She however, emerged resist the dominance of masculinist patriarchy whether it is her father or lover. Madhavi as a play dramatizes the dialectics between the patriarchal ideology operating at the level of the myth and the male gaze in everyday situation and chooses to address the problematic areas regarding the rights and privileges of the women in the epic world(see Basu, 3).Madhavi as a play text enamored a reader to refute the injustices meted out to an innocent girl, eponymous Madhavi. “Treated as no better than an object or at best as a chattel slave, Madhavi’s fate is to be negotiated or decided by no lesser arbitrators than the powerful agents of patriarchy. Selecting a marginalized tale of womanly woe, Sahni exposes the inhuman practices of reification of the female ...(Satchidanandan,2004, 25)

Hindu Varna system I contend, does not give freedom to women on their terms due to:1) male biasedness towards female sexuality, 2) patriarchal order of power and control. So, women are either subservient/dependent to male partner (no preference for sexuality) or they are venerated as goddess or givers in patriarchal expectation and design of power play. As the plot unfolds Madhavi did not have any choice of her own. Her different sexual encounter is the saga of dominance of masculinity/male hegemony in mythical time. I consider her sexual liaison to multiple Kings under ideology of dharma/duty as “hegemonic masculinity” espoused by Connell. Here a woman’s identity is contingent upon the male desire of her body. In other words, she become desiring body of sex, control and a source of immense power as she could borne many powerful offspring.

Coming to the matter of the fact, women in past did not have any agency or privilege to protest against this violence, and if they had, their representation was quite falsified and posed against the very human virtues such as forgiveness and compassion. Women who were aware about their political right and of their identity and freedom such as Draupadi, Shikhandi in mythical times, they were considered absolute or more than ordinary women. Such tendency of romanticizing the fight of women has been dominant mode of production/representation through the times.

V Padma (Mangai) a well-known feminist theatre practitioner states that female sexuality is always determined by the male/heterosexual/upper caste gaze. She categorically discusses the women sexuality and moral policing. About the female sexuality she observes, “Female sexuality has always been a troublesome area. What is the image of a woman outside the male gaze? Does she exist on her own? How does she construct her ’self’? How does one understand and counter the readymade images through which we make sense of the social bodies and which determine, at least in part, their value and status? (“Gender Studies”, 220).Similarly, Anita Singh observes, “Sahni gives Madhavi what the myth denies her, her essential humanity, her motherhood, her bonding with children, a dream of love and freedom. From being a commodity, he elevates her to the level of a human being and lowers the great heroes from the stage of heroism and makes us see their self-glorification” (21).

To conclude, *Madhavi* is an extremely unsettling feminist play and this text unfolds the different layers of power and subjection of a woman. Masculinity here comes in the forms of not

only male body but as dharma, duty and other obligations for Madhvi. Bhisam Sahni puts forth a very brilliant story of 'inversion' to put across the strong political message of emancipation where woman has emerged as triumphant over the traditional (biased) gender role and do not fulfill (rebel) the male demands and expectations to render justice to the women subjects.

Primary Text

Sahni, Bhisam. *Madhavi*. Seagull Books, 2008. Hindi edition.

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A Unity in Cross-cultural Scenario in E M Forster's A Passage to India

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Abstract

A synthesis of cultures among Hindus, Muslims and Christians is reflected by Edward Morgan Forster when he attempts to discriminate between mysteries and muddles in his novel, *A Passage to India*. The rational British with a scientific and modern outlook attempt to probe into the comprehensive and composite culture involving both Hindus and Muslims. The distance and condescending attitude of the English towards Indians, terming them undisciplined, unruly and chaotic in nature prohibit their minds to put themselves in others' shoes.

Keywords: mystery, muddle, culture, Englishman, Indian

Introduction

The European outlook cannot dance to the tune of Indians and the goody-good objects, places and appearances seem as muddles. When they remain patient and tolerant, they seem as mysteries of India, a bit pleasing and alluring to them. The disturbances and drastic occurrences pose them as muddles remaining beyond comprehension. The *Marabar Caves*' experience seem as muddles to Mrs. Moore, Miss Adela Quested; British intelligence fails to accept the happenings as cozy and soothing. In the conversation between Mrs. Moore, Miss Adela Quested and Fielding, it is illustrated, "A mystery is only a high-sounding term for a muddle". (Page-68) Gradually, it resists Mrs. Moore to think India comfortable. She cannot be progressive and affable in her affairs, hence forward. Miss Adela Quested, despite attempting to know more about Dr. Aziz's family affairs is frustrated a lot after the caves' experience. It offers her negative implications about India.

The intricacies of India appear not a possibility within the horizon of British understanding and the expanse and exploration of British outlook fail to touch the Indian minds able to both accept and reject experiences in the all comprehensive Indian scenario. The presence and absence of God, faith, occurrences and mysteries cannot be synthesized and acquiesced by the British that run after reason, science and logical explanation. The Mosque has Muslim significance, the caves fascinate the British but offer them failure of understanding and the temple is a unity of accepting both good and evil by Hindus believing in God's presence, e.g. by Prof. Godbole despite His absence, i.e. not visible or marked by human eyes. The tenacity of faith and the strength of divine love are the only ways to reach the divine equipoise recovering ourselves from doubts, discrepancies and differences. E M Forster says in the Temple section of *A Passage to India* "Infinite love took upon itself the form of SHRIKRISHNA, and saved the world. All sorrow was annihilated, not only for Indians, but for foreigners, birds, caves, railways and the stars; all became joy, all laughter; there had never been disease, no doubt, misunderstanding, cruelty, fear. (Page-283)

The impossibility of reconciliation between East and West is conspicuous from the failure of the Bridge Party. Rudyard Kipling in his poem, "The Ballad of East and West" says, "East is east and West is west, never the twain shall meet." The Bridge party is held to unite the Mohammedans, Hindus and the English rulers. It ends in a fiasco as the outcome of success is not at all felt. The haughty and rude behavior of Ronny Heaslop is to dominate and control unruly Indians by force. There is no amicable disposition by the British rulers towards Indians. Rather Indians are considered brutes who do not know to rule themselves. The British in the name of breeding civilization condemn the Indians as down to earth creatures and adapt force as the sole weapon to treat them as per their will and education for converting Indians to petty clerks and making them fit for minor jobs. The public School attitude of the English rulers is indicated in Ronny Heaslop's words to Adela Quested, "We are not out here for the purpose of behaving pleasantly". Then he adds, "We are out here to do justice and keep the peace." Further he adds, "India likes gods. And Englishmen like posing as gods." (Page-49) Then he continues, "I am out

here to work, mind, to hold this wretched country by force. I'm not a missionary or a Labour Member or a vague sentimental sympathetic literary man. I'm just a servant of the government. We're not pleasant in India and we don't intend to be pleasant. We've something more important to do." (Page-50)

Mrs. Moore rejects the disdainful attitude of his son, Ronny Heaslop and brings into account presence of God and human love even in India and urges his son to dispose gentle and cordial behavior towards Indians. Mrs. Moore tells Ronny Heaslop, "The English are out here to be pleasant." Then she adds, "Because India is part of the earth. And God has put us on the earth in order to be pleasant to each other. God Is love." Then Mrs. Moore continues, "God has put us on earth to love our neighbours and to show it and He is Omni-present, even in India." (Page-51)

Dr. Aziz, the Muslim represents the East and Cyril Fielding, the principal of Government College near Chandrapore represents the liberal man from the west. Despite availing of chances of reconciliation between them, they cannot meet together finally. Fielding is less cynical towards Indians. He propagates education in Indians. He hopes for a symbiotic life and coming together of Indians and Englishmen. But his liberal attitude simply is helpless to contain the panoramic scene of Indian imbroglio that encompasses diversities and adversities through and through. However, he is to be celebrated as he bears with in him philanthropic attitude of an altruist, "The world he holds is a globe of men who are trying to reach one another and can best do so by the help of good will plus culture and intelligence". (Page-62) He discards the herd attitude of the English to disparage Indians. Aziz when compared with Fielding differs in temperament. Aziz possesses the impulse of the East, the orient but lacks patience. Fielding has the sense of politeness, refinement and patience but lacks the impulse of Aziz. The orientation of temperaments being different in Aziz and Fielding causes a muddle in the companions and keeps the two poles apart despite sincere wishes of the two to be together.

Any kind of communal disharmony is suppressed with police force. The Chandra pore Mohammedans cannot pass the paper towers too large under the banyan tree. The Muslims attempt to cut one branch of the banyan tree inviting riots from the Hindu counterpart. Troops are fetched to control the bloodshed and Ronny Heaslop mentions the essence of the British presence to maintain peace and tranquility. Conciliation committees are built up under collector Turton's auspices to establish communal harmony. In the multicultural and multi-religious scenario, we feel a disturbance of cross-cultural chaos instead of a cross-cultural exchange. The British people are a third party adjoined with force to keep up with the chaotic situation. They care three books for the loss or gain of the parties in conflicts. They apply force with an iron hand to serve their own purpose in India.

Prof. Godbole is himself a sign of unity of all comprehensive features of India. A synthesis of presence and absence of Godhead leads us to the zenith of faith, pinnacle of beliefs. Hinduism

is not a distraction to Christianity or Muslim faith. God is one and encompasses all in the sway of humanity. Kindness, generosity, and love of man to man enchants in all love of God in man. Our distrust in God alternates with our firm trust in Him. The presence of evil makes conspicuous the presence of good in the world. It is sincere love of God that transcends us towards union of man with Almighty overcoming doubts, faithlessness and disparities created in the world. The inside and outside, the indoors and outdoors are understood in a synchrony as typified by the wasp imagery and Mrs. Moore. The inner and the outer merge to integrate our visions and upgrade them towards a cosmic echelon making our vision all-inclusive and not exclusive. Mysteries and muddles are not exclusive to one another. Humanity is seen to stretch beyond the educated man's horizon of comprehension, transcends the human to reach the cosmic, the limitless and the unending beyond the earthly and the worldly invitations. Christian love is not different from the divine hospitality of the Hindus and the Muslims. In God's home, there is no division between the black and the white. God shares his compassion with all without discrimination, connived differences and gaps created by man and his material environment. One can assemble in himself the concept of the larger universe when he negates the constriction of his own self. Self-obliteration is the only way towards the recognition of the cosmos and the divine universe. Divine potential is obtained when one foregoes narrowness, clumsiness, impulsive and illusory excesses of the self. Godbole's philosophy of universalism is illustrated as such, "Good and evil are different as their names imply. But in my humble opinion, they are both aspects of my lord. He is present in the one, absent in the other and the difference between presence and absence is great, as great as my feeble mind can grasp. Yet absence implies presence, absence is not non-existent and we are therefore entitled to repeat, "Come, come, come, come." (Page-175)

In the strain of the phrase "only connect" in Forster's novel, Howards End, the novel A passage to India, is designed to connect one race with the other keeping human love at its towering height undoing barriers and boundaries of separateness. To integrate one race with the other, one culture with the other, one person with the other is the motto of Forster. The philosophy of reconciliation to redeem from their racial prejudices is the prominent illustration of Forster. He lays bare the discord among Hindus, Muslims and Christians to alleviate the widening religious and racial chasms to make them arrive at the pedestal of friendship, integrity, peace and inter-cultural harmony. He observes the class between the rulers and the ruled, the aggravated hostility between Hindus and Muslims and puts forward a panacea for coming together of races, religions and communities. Aziz shouts before Cyril Fielding: "India shall be a nation! No foreigners of any sort! Hindu and Muslims and Sikh and all shall be one! Hurrah! Hurrah for India! Hurrah! Hurrah!" (Page-317)

The climax of the novel pertaining to racial conflicts is evident when Miss. Adela Quested accuses Aziz of attempting to rape and molest her inside the darkness of the *Marabar* caves. Aziz turns turtle when Miss. Adela Quested charges him of heinous crimes in the trial room of the court. Mc. Bryde, the Superintendent of Police points at Indians in general with a pungent racial remark

terming such mala fide intentions as *orient pathology*. Cyril Fielding partakes with Indians raising his voice that such accusations against Aziz are false. Thus Forster is sincere, authentic and bold enough to bring forth unison between the English and the Indians in the teeth of bitter hostility. Further, Forster to be a Good Samaritan of both races makes the Mosque a symbol of brotherhood as the pride of Islam as believed by the Muslims, the caves as the *spiritual wasteland* signifying break in human relationship and the temple as the unity in diversity of faiths.

Lamia Tayeb remarks the novel: “A Passage to India studies the viability of transcending the encumbrances of the colonial situation, on the part of both the colonialist and the native, in order to set up new formula of social interaction and cross-cultural exchange”.

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The Journey of Indian Womanhood in the works of Fakir Mohan Senapati and Premchand

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Abstract

Indian women have had a journey that is no less than extraordinary. Their passage from the clutches of patriarchy that suffocated their desires and ambitions to modern day fulfillment of the objective of life, has been a tale that is no less fantastical. Popular narratives such as literary fiction, theatres, cinema to street plays- all have captured the essence of Indian Womanhood and have tried to document this transition. Fakir Mohan Senapati and Premchand are classics who have represented the society of their times and also have fictionalized characters that lived in their vicinity. Their female characters are of varied nature and depict different sections of the society. Fakir Mohan Senapati's women exemplified the not-so glorious version of women of the times who struggled and failed to find a voice in the dominance of patriarchy. Whereas with Premchand one gets exposed to womanhood of varied kinds, some the ideal one who is sacrificial and timid and the other the progressive one that has surpassed the bondage of patriarchy. This article emphasises that in both these literary giants one gets to explore the shades of Indian Womanhood that is far from unidirectional and universal.

Keywords: Indian Womanhood, ideal woman, patriarchy, modernity, modern novels

Fakir Mohan Senapati attempted a kind of writing that was novel to Odia readership. He wrote at a juncture where literature highlighted the absolute opposites in characterizations- such as sensuousness and devotional; astuteness and frivolousness; virtuousness or sinfulness or the simple right or wrong. Fakir Mohan Senapati's style was against the grain as he represented the greyness of things, thoughts beyond goodness and evilness. It was neither the imitation of Western Victorian bourgeois idea of domesticity nor a straightforward answer to modernity's critique of indigenous traditions. He evoked a tradition which was rooted in Indian tradition yet aspired for modernity that reached progress. T.S. Eliot in his seminal essay *Tradition and Individual Talent* (1919) advocates in favour of striking a balance between the older traditions and the modern innovative practices. Senapati's characters especially the female characters struggle to achieve this balance and bear consequences accordingly. Fakir Mohan Senapati wrote in the peak of colonization and the times where land owning Zamindars controlled societies thereby inscribing rules and regulations. Patriarchy and colonization, the struggles of women in the domestic and the public sphere is well represented in Fakir Mohan Senapati's characters. In his autobiography, *Atmajivancharita*, Fakir Mohan Senapati recounts his life experiences that shaped the female characters in his works. Majority of his female characters are real life characters. His grandmother, his mother, his paternal uncle's wife (bada maa), his two wives, all bear semblance to the women that appear in his writings. These women are not from any other time periods rather they were the women-next door that one saw every now and then. They seemed like the reflection of womanhood that was constantly evolving.

Women characters of Fakir Mohan Senapati

Chha Mana Atha Guntha translated as *Six Acres and a third* has numerous shades of the rural Indian womanhood. They are vivid, conflicting, complex, non-sexual portraits of women that could be found anywhere and everywhere. Senapati's attitude towards the women is estimated through his own observations about these characters. Readers could easily recognise Champa or Saria "because human beings are known not by faces but by characters". Champa is the evil cohort to Mangaraj's greedy acquisition of land and property. She plays the wife's part in his life as she acts as a foil to Mangaraj's ambitions. A chapter titled as Champa gives glimpses into the status of women in the Nineteenth century Odisha. Saria, Bhagia weavers's wife, enjoys a blissful marriage. Her only deprivation of not having a child, allows Champa and Mangaraj to devise plans to acquire their Six Acres and a Third and her childlike cow named Neta. Saria's death in agony of the loss of her land and cow, leads even Bhagia to turn loose his mental stability. Saria's end brings about the end of Bhagia's life as well. The novel has another significant female character, the Saantani, the Zamindar Mangaraj's wife who is seen as a silent spectator to her husband's atrocities and illicit relationship with the househelp Champa. Saantani, is not assertive or dominating as she speaks just two sentences of five words in the entire text and paradoxically her only significant presence is her permanent absence that is the episode of her death. While living she appears most dead and while dead her kindness and her noble character is remembered and even Mangaraj is seen teary eyed for the first time. Very contrary to this invisible presence is that

of the story named after the protagonist Rebati. This story is the ongoing struggle of Rebati to get education and all the calamities that befall on her family resultantly. This particular tale on one hand advocates women's right for education and at the same time juxtaposes it with Indian orthodoxy towards women's progress. Fakir Mohan Senapati does reflect upon the sensitive topic of women's education but leaves it there as Rebati dies due to Cholera before getting educated. In a similar story Pathoi Bahu (the educated daughter-in-law), the illiterate wife of Gopal babu, Saraswati Devi goes on to commit suicide when she misunderstands her husband's longing for intellectual conversations with his male friends. Gopal babu's mother and sister were also illiterate so none of the women around him could understand the existence of intellectuality. Fakir Mohan Senapati is suggestive of the acceptance of a new environment where the traditional values are upheld along with new modes of learning and education. In Senapati's times Western education could not be fully accepted as it was believed to propagate moral degradation in men and women. It was also felt to be a threat to indigenous culture and outlook. Fakir Mohan's women could be categorised in two categories, the traditional one propagating orthodoxy and the modern one advocating progressive perception. Progressive thinking has also been explored in the character of the Babu Chandramani wife in *Patent Medicine* (1913), who gets to change the heart of her wayward husband through punishment.

Premchand's Female Characters

Premchand wrote in between the two world wars, a time of civil unrest for the entire world. India was struggling with colonial atrocities and Independence was still a distant dream. The age was an aggressive age of stark social inequalities between the rich/poor, zamindar/farmer, colonizer/colonized. Premchand's depiction of women was multicoloured and multilayered. Women of all stratas of the society found a representation within his stories. "His women belonged to various classes: the feudal, the peasantry, and of course the middle classes".

Premchand nurtured a quality for projecting realism and his women were products of his obsession with realist portrayals. These women are given a unique identity and they do not just repeat the actions and dialogue of a common womanhood rather they reflect a society with the multidimensional women's personality. Be it Anandi, the daughter of a respectable home, or Suman, the middle class housewife-turned prostitute in *Sevasadan* or Dhaniya the wife of a landless peasant or Malti the doctor in *Godan*. Each female character is indispensable and has a remarkable journey as portrayed in each of the narratives.

Literary representations speak louder in the inscription of history. Stories of Premchand had a significant impact on the North-Indian culture and vice-versa. Premchand was a critique of the colonisation and also detested the atrocities of the semi-feudal lords, the Zamindars. The Zamindars and their obsession with land and accumulation of wealth has been a constant theme in both Premchand and Fakir Mohan Senapati's works. A very significant and recurring concern that runs through their works is the conflicting position of modern women in the end of the century attitude. The position of women was a source of contention and stress for the Indian writers. With the participation of women in the Gandhi inspired freedom movements, the visibility of women

rose in society and in literature. Women became ‘a subject of enquiry, a subject of story and an agent of the narrative’. However, the position of women depended in the tussle within the liberal and the conservative groups of people and ideologies and this conflict has been depicted in both Fakir Mohan Senapati and Premchand’s stories. In the groundbreaking story *Rebati* by Fakir Mohan Senapati, the fate of Rebati’s education depended on this toss between the conservative and modern thought. The literary representation of womanhood reflected in their stories are inspired from life and do trace their multiple shades and types. They can be ideally divided as the one sacrifices for other good and the other who speaks for herself. The former is an embodiment of ideal woman, a silent sufferer of the traditional Indian woman quality that transcends one to the position of *devi*(goddess), *maa*(mother) and the ultimate *sadhvi*(female monk). They are ready to sacrifice their lives for the peace and prosperity of their household and families. They lead lives discarding their desires and hardly expressing their opinion and observations. In a letter to Dr. Indranath Madan, Premchand wrote, “meri nari ki adrash hai ek hi ek sthan par tyag, seva aur pavitrata, tyag bina phal ke asha ke...”. In short his definition of ideal womanhood is an embodiment of selflessness and sacrifice. In stories such as *Swarg ki Devi*(1925) and *Shanti* we meet Leela and Gopa who incur sacrifices in their lives for the prosperity of their families. Leela in *Swarg ki Devi* is married into a family of brutes where her father-in-law and mother-in-law mistreat her and husband a lazy buffoon who is reluctant to work for his and his family’s upkeep. Both her children die due to Cholera and she is left with her husband to share the sorrows. Her patience eventually compels her drunkard husband to change his ways and finally applauds the efforts of his wife and refers to her as the *Swarg ki Devi*. In *Shanti*, Gopa the widow mother leads a distraught life in poverty but does everything beyond her means to get her daughter married to an affluent family. She independently organizes a grand wedding for her only daughter without saving anything for her own future.

In *Bade Ghar ki Beti*(1910) is one of Premchand’s most popular stories and depicts the self-sacrificing daughter-in-law Anandi who swallows her pride for keeping united her family and for her attitude against the division of the family, actually saves the family. In story *Sati*(1932), low born beautiful Mulia is married to ugly Kullu. Kullu could never trust Mulia for she was very beautiful. In spite of his distrust she nurses him when he is ill and eventually he dies. After Kullu’s death, Malia gets many offers of marriage but she rejects all and decides to live as the widow of Kullu, thereby being a live Sati. In *Suhag ka Shav*, Subhadra and uneducated woman is married to Professor Keshav. They love each other dearly. Keshav gets a scholarship for going abroad. He goes abroad and falls in love with another woman named Urmila. He decides to leave behind his Indian marriage and arranges for his marriage with Urmila. Meanwhile, Subhadra decided to go to Keshav and she reaches England. She is disheartened to learn about Keshav’s plan of marrying Urmila. However, she sacrifices her happiness and her marriage for Keshav’s happiness. This is also implied in the story the end of her relationship with Keshav meant the end of her life. As Premchand believed that “aurat ko jeevan mein prem na mila toh uska marr jana behtar hai”. Death of the woman is a chosen solution in many of Premchands conflicts.

Premchand's picture of ideal womanhood is the sacrificial one however the other layer that he explores is that of modern Indian womanhood. This modern woman is influenced from western ideologies and wants to break-free from the shackles of the bondages of the society. Miss Padma(1936) is the story of an independent modern girl of the same name who equates marriage to slavery. She falls in love with Prasad and they decide to live together. However, Prasad is extravagant, starts ignoring her and leaves her with a baby. Premchand criticizes western liberalism for this. The anger is vented out on both Padma and Prasad for the disastrous end of consequences. Prasad is blamed for his shallow character and lack of responsible conduct and Padma is believed to be a symbol of degenerated womanhood.

In *Do Sakhiyan*(1928), Padma and Vinod are a modern married couple. Their marriage does not work out because Vinod is a spendthrift and Padma entertains an extra-marital affair. At this point Vinod thinks of ending his life but is saved by Kusum. Kusum advises Padma that men can only be won by sacrifice, spiritual love and utter dedication. Padma has a close friend named Chanda who leads a life that is opposite to that of Padma. Chanda's marriage is interrupted due to dowry and the groom returns without taking his bride. However, Chanda assumes the role of a dutiful wife and writes letter to her husband with the help of Padma. Finally the husband decides to live with his wife. Chanda's woes does not end there as her mother-in-law and sister-in-law keep nagging the husband to leave Chanda. Husband goes and stays separate for some time. Chanda gives up eating and drinking as a protest and the husband is finally forced to come back to her. Finally, her story reaches a happy ending when things improve in her life. *Premasutra*(1926), depicts Prabha, a traditional Hindu woman, devoted to her westernized husband, Pashupati. However, Pashupati is attracted to another woman. The other woman, Krishna, later rejects him. Then he goes abroad and marries an English woman who later elopes with an English man. At this point Pashupati is very disappointed and he returns home. His daughter is about to get married at that time and she encourages her parents to reunite. The dutiful wife Prabha could not deny and they lived happily after that.

Shanti(1920) portrays Premchand's counter-model women effectively. Shyama, a traditional housewife, lives in a joint family. Her husband is a lawyer and admires western culture. He wishes his wife to change accordingly. Eventually after becoming westernized Shyama alienates her husband and family. She even loses her good qualities of ideal womanhood. The husband loses all peace and confesses that he would find peace only when they went back to their older way of living. Shyama also realizes that western culture has taught her a lot of things but has also deprived her of true happiness and true character. She returns back to her older ways and they all live happily. A large collection of his short stories question the stigma against the social evils associated with women. It questions how society showed contempt for widow-remarriage. *Dhikkar*(1925) is the sorry story of Mani, a young widow who is looked down upon by her kith and kin. She is eventually proposed by a gentleman to marry and they secretly marry. However, her harassment does not stop, rather it intensifies. At last she commits suicide. Premchand

effectively portrayed the attitude of people towards widow-remarriage. Stories like Swamini and Algotjha further depict the conflicts around widow remarriage and its social acceptance. Premchand himself had married a widow, his second wife was married previously.

Women without sons are also mistreated in the society and that has been the subject of stories like Nairashya where Nirupam undergoes a life of ordeal for she gave birth to girls only. Prostitution has been dealt with a lot of sensitivity and the voices of the prostitutes emerged as one of the strongest voices in Premchand's narratives who look down upon society and its regulations. In the story, *Vaishya*, Leela's husband Singarsingh becomes a regular visitor to a prostitute named Madhuri. Leela requests her husband's friend Dayakrishna to bring back her husband. Dayakrishna falls in love with Madhuri and eventually she is able to trace the purpose of his visit and the cause of his love pretence. She condemns him by saying that "no woman become a prostitute by her own willingness, If I am corrupt, those of you who come here willingly, can you be less corrupt?" Madhuri eventually commits suicide. Many stories with prostitutes end on a tragic note with the death of the female character, but none of these women show signs of weakness, rather they emerge as fierce figures, bashing the society fearlessly and are capable of speaking their minds without inhibitions. *Do Kabren*, *Actress* and *Aga Peecha* depict strong female protagonists in the form of prostitutes. Premchand's stories expose the male-dominated society and his subjection of the female in both the spheres. In the home front wives and mothers were kept under control and in the public sphere the westernized woman and the prostitutes kept at the margins of the society by conferring them as deviants. The prostitutes and even their daughters are looked as mere sex-objects and kept at the lowest rungs of the society.

What clearly emerges from these literary representations is that Fakir Mohan and Premchand grasped the societal reality and problems faced by the women of their times and they could effectively transpire those into their stories. A critique of the societal rules and regulations could be seen but solutions for reform have not been initiated in the writings of either of the authors. Many of these stories might feel obsolete to our concerns and we might not relate with these where women could be mistreated inhumanly for we live in the year 2023. But have we not encountered, read or heard stories of dowry related conflicts, marriage denied due to gifts or car or jewellery? Do women willing take up prostitution in our times or prostitutes treated with respect and their No taken strictly for NO. Has patriarchy disappeared from our society? Do women get treated equally at home and workplace? Women may have found rights to education but a Jyoti Maurya case of marital infidelity could deprive hundreds of married women from their rights to education. Feminist discourses can glorify prostitution in movies but in reality there is hardly any acceptance that is accorded to such women. Women's fight for her rights, dreams will continue at the domestic and the public sphere. Exploitation has a newer face and patriarchy a newer modus operandi.

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Kahwa and Conversations: Food as a Medium of Cultural Dialogue in Kashmir

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Abstract

Beyond linguistic and geographic boundaries, food has long been a crucial tool for social interaction, cultural expression, and identity development. Kahwa, a fragrant tea laced with saffron, is a prime example of how culinary heritage and cross-cultural communication can coexist in Kashmir. In order to comprehend Kashmir's rich and complex legacy, this essay uses kahwa as a focal point to examine the larger function that food plays in forming cultural identities and establishing bonds between people.

Tracing the origins of kahwa through historical, geographical, and cultural lenses, this study situates it within global narratives of trade, migration, and exchange, examining its Persian, Central Asian, and South Asian influences. The research emphasizes kahwa's significance in both daily life and ceremonial contexts, highlighting its role as a symbol of hospitality, unity, and shared values. By examining the stories, rituals, and customs surrounding kahwa, this paper reveals how food can function as a cultural bridge, fostering understanding and dialogue in diverse and dynamic societies.

In addition, the paper explores how traditional food practices like kahwa reflect broader socio-cultural transformations, from colonial histories to contemporary globalization. The challenges posed by modernization, the erosion of artisanal food practices, and the commodification of cultural symbols are critically analysed, emphasizing the need to preserve culinary heritage as an integral aspect of cultural identity.

Through this comprehensive study, the paper presents food as a crucial lens through which to examine culture, history, and identity. It also provides insights into the ways in which intangible heritage, such as kahwa, can be crucial in upholding and celebrating a people's spirit while fostering communication across cultural divides.

Keywords: kahwa, cultural heritage, globalization, food narratives.

Objectives:

- i. To explore the historical origins of kahwa and its cultural influences.
- ii. To analyze the symbolic role of kahwa in Kashmiri society.
- iii. To understand how kahwa fosters cultural dialogue and community connections.
- iv. To address challenges to preserving this culinary tradition in a globalized world.

Introduction:

Known as “Paradise on Earth,” Kashmir is well-known for its breath-taking scenery as well as its diverse cultural heritage, which has been woven together over many centuries by interaction, migration, and custom. The region's distinctive culinary heritage, which goes beyond simple nourishment to serve as a powerful medium of social, spiritual, and cultural expression, is at the heart of this cultural legacy. The traditional saffron-infused green tea known as kahwa is one of Kashmir's many culinary gems.

Food has traditionally been a vital instrument for social interaction, cultural expression, and identity building that transcends linguistic and geographic barriers. It is what Salman Rushdie calls;

“Pickles of history... memory, myth, and nostalgia all bottled up” (Rushdie 102).

Rushdie's use of pickling serves as a reminder that history is never static and is instead kept through memories and stories that are frequently modified by feelings and individual viewpoints. The narrator, Saleem Sinai, acknowledges that recollection is prone to error and attempts to preserve both his personal experience and India's turbulent post-independence past. In the same way that pickles develop different flavours with time, his memories are infused with myth and exaggeration. The phrase “Pickles of history... memory, myth, and nostalgia all bottled up serves as a rich metaphor that intertwines themes of memory, history, and identity. In the novel, pickling represents the act of preserving the past, yet in a form that changes over time. Just as pickles undergo a process that alters their original state while keeping their essence intact, memory and history are similarly preserved but transformed by personal and collective interpretation.

One of the best examples of how Kashmiri cuisine and intercultural dialogue can coexist is Kahwa, a fragrant tea infused with saffron. Examining the Persian, Central Asian, and South Asian influences on kahwa, this study places it within global narratives of trade, migration, and exchange by following its beginnings via historical, geographical, and cultural lenses. The study highlights the importance of kahwa as a symbol of hospitality, solidarity, and shared ideals in both ceremonial and everyday contexts. This study shows how food may serve as a cultural bridge, promoting understanding and communication in a variety of cultural contexts by exploring the myths, traditions, and practices around kahwa.

Kahwa serves as more than just a beverage; it is a cultural artefact, a symbol of Kashmiri hospitality, and a means of storytelling. Brewed in samovars and served during gatherings, *kahwa* acts as a medium for dialogue and connection, embodying the spirit of unity and warmth that defines the valley. From the intricate preparation of this golden-hued drink to the communal act of sharing it, *kahwa* reflects the symbiotic relationship between food, identity, and heritage.

Knowing the function of kahwa in Kashmir provides important insights on the tenacity of regional identities at a time when globalization threatens the preservation of distinctive cultural practices. Using this perspective, the study emphasizes the value of culinary legacy as a tool for promoting communication, community, and continuity in a world that is changing quickly, in addition to serving as a vehicle for cultural expression.

Food and literature:

Food in literature serves various symbolic, thematic, and narrative roles. Its depiction goes beyond sustenance, shaping characters, plotlines, and cultural contexts. Here are key roles food plays in literature:

Cultural Representation

Food reflects cultural heritage, traditions, and social customs. In *Like Water for Chocolate* by Laura Esquivel, Mexican cuisine symbolizes love, passion, and emotional expression. Tita's emotions influence the meals she prepares:

“Tita was literally 'like water for chocolate'—she was on the verge of boiling over with anger” (Esquivel 35).

Laura Esquivel intertwines food with cultural identity, emotional expression, and familial tradition, using it as a symbolic medium to explore Mexican culture. The novel showcases traditional Mexican recipes, passed down through generations, symbolizing cultural heritage. Each chapter opens with a recipe, grounding the narrative in cultural customs linked to food preparation.

Symbolism and Allegory

Food can symbolize desires, power, temptation, or even spiritual nourishment. In *The Great Gatsby*, lavish feasts highlight excess, decadence, and social disparity. The extravagant buffet at Gatsby's party reflects the emptiness of material wealth:

“On buffet tables... spiced baked hams crowded against salads of harlequin designs” (Fitzgerald 44).

Identity and Memory

Food often connects characters to personal or collective memories, shaping their identities. Marcel Proust's madeleine in *In Search of Lost Time* triggers a cascade of childhood memories:

“No sooner had the warm liquid mixed with the crumbs touched my palate than a shudder ran through me... bringing with it the remembrance of things past” (Proust 48).

The taste of the madeleine dipped in tea acts as a sensory key, evoking memories beyond the narrator's conscious reach. Proust emphasizes that taste and smell, unlike sight or hearing, have a unique capacity to summon emotions and memories deeply buried in the subconscious.

This involuntary memory is spontaneous and uncontrollable, contrasting with deliberate recollections, showing how food can bypass rational thought and connect directly to past experiences.

Social Commentary and Critique

Writers use food to critique societal structures, inequality, and class struggles. Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* uses the gruel scene to expose the harshness of workhouse life:

“The harshness of life at the workhouse is epitomized in Oliver’s plea: “Please, sir, I want some more” (Dickens 14).

Oliver’s plea underscores the physical deprivation experienced by the workhouse children, who receive only the bare minimum to survive. The meagre portions reflect a system designed to dehumanize and punish the poor rather than support or rehabilitate them.

Food here becomes currency for survival, highlighting how essential needs were weaponized to maintain control over the vulnerable.

Ritual and Tradition

Food-related rituals signify community, religion, and social bonds. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez features ritualistic feasts tying family histories together. In the book, communal meals are central to family gatherings and life events, symbolizing unity and continuity. For instance, the lavish banquets at weddings and funerals reinforce societal customs and shared memory.

“The best thing in life is eating well, drinking well, and having a nice house” (García Márquez 92).

Food also has mystical connotations. In another novel, *Love in the Time of Cholera*, meals evoke nostalgia and passion, blending the sacred and the sensual. Food is not just nourishment but a ritual charged with emotional and symbolic meaning.

Political Resistance and Protest

In Literature, Food scarcity underscores the social struggle of migrant workers, symbolizing economic injustice and rebellion. John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* emphasizes the depth of human suffering and the resilience that comes from it.

“How can you frighten a man whose hunger is not only in his belly but in his soul?” (Steinbeck 216).

It conveys the idea that when a person is desperate on a spiritual level—feeling disconnected, oppressed, or hopeless—external threats, like hunger or danger, may seem insignificant in comparison. The quote reflects Steinbeck's exploration of the struggles faced by the migrant workers during the Great Depression, highlighting their profound deprivation and inner resilience.

Historical Context:

Origins and Influences of Kahwa

Kahwa’s origins are deeply intertwined with the history of trade and cultural exchange. Influenced by Persian and Central Asian culinary traditions, kahwa became a staple in Kashmir during the Mughal era. The introduction of saffron and spices through the Silk Road further enriched its preparation, making it a symbol of Kashmir’s cosmopolitan heritage.

Cultural Significance of Kahwa:

Symbol of Hospitality

In Kashmiri households, kahwa is a symbol of warmth and welcome. Serving kahwa to guests is a customary practice that signifies respect and generosity.

Rituals and Ceremonies

Kahwa plays a central role in Kashmiri weddings, where it is served during rituals as a gesture of goodwill and unity. Its presence at social gatherings fosters dialogue and strengthens community bonds.

A Medium for Storytelling

The act of preparing and sharing kahwa is often accompanied by storytelling, creating a shared cultural space that bridges generations.

Food as a Medium of Cultural Dialogue:

Bridging Communities

Kahwa's universal appeal transcends religious and social divides, making it a medium for fostering communal harmony.

Representation of Identity

As an emblem of Kashmir's heritage, kahwa serves as a culinary ambassador, representing the valley's unique cultural identity to the world.

Literary Responses:

From *Kashmir: The Valley of Kashmiri Sufis* by Muhammad Amin Pandit

Muhammad Amin Pandit is a well-regarded historian and cultural scholar specializing in Kashmiri Sufi practices. His research focuses on the spiritual heritage of Kashmir and its impact on daily life, including cultural customs and rituals centered around hospitality.

With a focus on Sufi customs, this text examines Kashmir's spiritual and cultural legacy. With kahwa representing warmth, kindness, and spiritual connection through group sharing, it highlights hospitality as a deeply embedded cultural tradition. Through its Sufi traditions, it emphasizes Kashmir's rich spiritual and cultural past. Pandit explores the ways that hospitality and cuisine are entwined with religious rituals in Kashmir. He presents kahwa as a cultural and spiritual symbol that is frequently used as a sign of warmth and closeness at family get-togethers and religious ceremonies. Sufi hospitality customs, which emphasize sharing meals and beverages as a means of spiritual fulfillment and community duty, are highlighted in the work. He writes:

“Kashmiri hospitality is not merely a practice but a way of life, woven into every cup of kahwa served, every meal shared, and every story told” (Pandit 34).

***The Cuisine of Kashmir* by S. Mohammad Yusuf:**

S. Mohammad Yusuf is a culinary historian and food writer focusing on South Asian and Central Asian cuisines. His book *The Cuisine of Kashmir* explores the evolution of Kashmiri food, with special attention to spices, beverages, and traditional recipes. In the book, he portrays kahwa more than a beverage;

“The preparation of kahwa, with its delicate balance of saffron, cinnamon, and cardamom, mirrors the harmony sought in Kashmiri culture” (Yusuf 56).

Yusuf's captures the symbolic essence of kahwa preparation. Each ingredient—saffron, cinnamon, cardamom—represents Kashmir's historical ties with the Silk Road, blending global

influences into something uniquely local. The balance in its preparation reflects the broader cultural ideal of harmony in the face of historical turbulence.

***The Valley of Kashmir* by Sir Walter Roper Lawrence:**

Sir Walter Roper Lawrence was a British administrator and author, best known for his historical and ethnographic work *The Valley of Kashmir*, based on his experiences during British rule in India. His work remains one of the most detailed historical accounts of Kashmiri life, culture, and traditions.

“The art of hospitality in Kashmir finds its purest form in the sharing of kahwa, a drink that carries the valley’s soul in every sip” (Lawrence 122).

Lawrence noted kahwa as a key component of hospitality while observing and documenting Kashmir's social practices. His portrayal emphasizes how kahwa is more than just a drink; it is a representation of identity, cultural resiliency, and the Kashmiri people's unwavering warmth throughout historical upheavals.

***Flavours of the Vale: Culinary Traditions of Kashmir* by R. N. Dhar**

R. N. Dhar is a historian of South Asian culinary traditions. His book *Flavors of the Vale: Culinary Traditions of Kashmir* is a comprehensive study of Kashmiri food culture, emphasizing traditional cooking methods, community feasts, and culinary symbolism.

Dhar views kahwa as a culinary tapestry that weaves together multiple cultural influences. The tea’s ingredients and preparation techniques reflect centuries of cultural blending, from Persian tea-making traditions to Central Asian spice trade routes. His analysis positions kahwa as a historical artifact that tells the story of migration, adaptation, and survival in the Kashmir Valley.

“In every cup of kahwa lies a trace of history, a blending of Persian elegance, Central Asian tradition, and Kashmiri ingenuity” (Dhar 101).

Globalization and Cultural Exchange

While globalization has introduced kahwa to new audiences, it also poses challenges to its authenticity and traditional practices. This duality highlights the tension between preserving cultural heritage and adapting to modernity.

Challenges and Preservation:

Threats to Authenticity

The commodification of kahwa has led to alterations in its traditional preparation, risking the loss of its cultural essence.

Modernization and Cultural Erosion

With the rise of modern beverages like coffee and factory-produced teas, traditional practices surrounding kahwa are diminishing.

Strategies for Preservation

Efforts to preserve kahwa include promoting it through cultural festivals, incorporating it into culinary tourism, and documenting its preparation methods as part of Kashmir’s intangible heritage.

Conclusion:

Kahwa is more than a beverage; it is a cultural narrative, a symbol of unity, and a bridge between communities. By preserving this tradition, Kashmir not only safeguards a significant aspect of its heritage but also strengthens its cultural identity in a rapidly changing world. Food, as exemplified by kahwa, holds the power to foster dialogue and understanding, making it a vital element in cultural preservation and exchange.

The conclusion reiterates that kahwa represents more than just a traditional drink—it embodies Kashmir's rich cultural narrative. Its preparation, serving rituals, and associated customs tell stories of the region's history, trade influences, and social values. The paper underscores the urgent need to preserve kahwa-making traditions, especially in the face of modernization and globalization. As modern beverages like coffee and packaged teas gain popularity, the authentic preparation of kahwa risks being forgotten.

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9. Hudum Deo: Folk Deity of Rain of Koch Rajbanshi Tribe
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Abstract

The Koch-Rajbongshis are one of the oldest indigenous tribe in Northeast India, primarily residing in the western part of Assam and the northern part of Bengal. This Mongoloid group also extends into Meghalaya, Nepal, and parts of Bangladesh. They possess a rich cultural heritage characterized by a complex array of rituals dedicated to both local and pan-Indian deities. The Koch-Rajbongshis have a rich and distinctive cultural heritage, including their own language. Their traditions are unique, reflecting their tribal way of life. With their distinctive sociolinguistic traits, the Koch-Rajbongshis form a separate cultural hub alongside mainstream Assamese culture. Their traditional practices—such as the worship of various deities, seasonal festivals, unique food habits, dress, and ornaments—differ from those of non-Rajbongshi communities. This article describes the folk deity of the Koch Rajbanshis of Western Assam.

Keywords: Koch-Rajbanshis, Mongoliad, sociolinguistics trait, cultural hub, mainstream

Their rituals are integral part to their agrarian lifestyle and reflect their profound connection to nature. Though the Koch Rajbanshi people of Western Assam follow the rituals-rules-traditions of Aryan culture, yet in most of the ceremonies the tribal characteristics are apparent. The Koch-Rajbongshis worship a diverse pantheon of deities which are associated with natural elements such as rain, rivers, trees, jungles, tigers and snakes etc. They worship these folk deities through traditional practices to ensure the prosperity and welfare of their communities. Singing and dancing are common features in many of these rituals and ceremonies. These rituals include Maroi Puja, Sannyasi Puja, Chauni Puja, Tistaburi Puja, Madankam, Bash Puja, Dharam Thakur Puja, Jagannath Puja, Dhankata Puja, Baruni Puja, Nayakhawa Puja, Hudum Deo, Kati Puja, Shaleswari Puja, Budha-Budhi Puja, Sonaray Puja, Suwachani Puja, and Bish hari. Each ritual serves a specific purpose, such as ensuring good harvests or seeking divine protection and blessings. However, in their religious practices there is a bend of Shaiva, Shakta, Vaishnavite, and Buddhist tantras. They also worship pan deities like Durga, Kali, Lakshmi, Narayan, Vishnu, Shiva, and Hari.

The Koch-Rajbongshis employ the terms "deo" and "thakur" to refer to deities, encompassing both benevolent and malevolent entities. This reflects a complex view of the divine, where deities can possess dual characteristics. To maintain favour with these deities, specific rituals and offerings are required; failing to observe these practices may be perceived as incurring divine displeasure. Sometimes a *deo* may be regarded as a deity or a spirit of a dead man who generally uses to live in a bamboo grove or a *sheora* tree or a *ximolu* tree, especially in a lonely place.

Objectives of the Study:

Keeping the originality of this research work, this work has designed some specific objectives in order to highlight the unique identity of Koch Rajbongshi folk culture. The objectives of the study are as follows:

- (a) To provide a comprehensive understanding of Koch Rajbongshi folk culture.
- (b) To analyze Koch Rajbanshi folk deities, with a focus on the Hudum deo.
- (c) To examine the rituals, festivals, and ceremonies, and assess their impact on the society and culture.

Methodology:

To carry out this research an analytical method is primarily used to study our subject, "Hudum Deo : Folk Deity of Rain of Koch- Rajbongshi Tribe ." Additionally, reference books and journals have been consulted to collect data. Extensive fieldwork was conducted, particularly to collect the songs, which are not available in written form.

Discussion:

In the rich folk cultural landscape of the Koch Rajbanshies Hudum puja occupies an important place. Hudum Deo - The God of Rain is one of the most prominent and revered folk deity of the Koch Rajbansies. It is associated with rain and fertility and holds significant importance in the folk beliefs of the Koch Rajbanshies. As a primitive deity Hudum Deo is often compared to the

Hindu deity Indra, who is also associated with rain and thunder. Despite these functional similarities, the worship practices of Hudum Deo and Indra exhibit notable differences. This ritualistic divergence has led to the development of a distinctive cult within the cultural landscape of the region that is characterized by unique practices and symbolic representations.

Hudum is a folk deity worshipped exclusively by the women and widows of the Koch Rajbongshi community. This ritual does not involve Brahmins or priests, and men are generally not allowed to participate, except for the drum player, who either has his eyes covered or is kept inside a secluded space. This ancient cult is practiced in a traditional manner, particularly during prolonged dry spells. Singing and dancing are integral to this ceremonial practice, which employs a unique approach to invoke the deity's presence and ensure rainfall. To appease Hudum Deo and bring rain during crucial agricultural periods, women engage in ritualistic acts that include being naked and singing songs with erotic content. Such a "ritualistic obscenity" may appear transgressive or obscene from an external perspective, within the cultural context of the Koch Rajbongshis, they are viewed as sacred and necessary for ensuring the community's survival. Such a rare practice of enticement certainly develop a unique culture in the vast cultural mosaic of India. Dr. Charu Chandra Sanyal, in his book "Rajbangsi of North Bengal", writes about Hudum Deo: "It is a special puja. When there is a protracted drought... they make a small image of the rain god with a plantain leaf stuck and install him in the field. In some places, a plantain tree is planted. Then the women strip off their clothes, untie their hair, allowing it to hang freely on their backs. Thus completely nude, they dance and sing (mostly obscene songs), abusing the rain god. It is a general belief that rain invariably falls shortly after the puja is done." 1

The origin of the word "Hudum" is uncertain, as there are no written records documenting its etymology. However, according to the folklore of the Koch Rajbongshi community, it is believed that the term "Hudum" may have been derived from "Hudu Poki," a rare bird in their society. The folklore narrates that two Hudu birds, a male and a female, sit on a tree branch facing each other and converse about the rain, which is said to trigger rainfall. This folk belief has led the Koch Rajbongshi people to catch wild Hudu birds and perform Hudum Puja, hoping to invoke rain during dry periods.

There is a myth associated with the origin of the Hudum Deo in the Rajbanshi society. According to this myth Hudum Deo is considered the offspring of Devi Basumati and Devaraja Indra. Basumati, who endured constant suffering, became pregnant through the blessing of Indra. Despite this divine favour, she was abandoned by other goddesses and faced widespread neglect and indifference. As she wandered in search of shelter, Basumati was repeatedly turned away. Eventually, she received the blessing of Aathiya Kala (Sticky Banana) and gave birth to her son, Hudum, beneath the plantain trees. This newborn is known as Hudum Deo, a deity revered for rain in Koch-Rajbongshi society.

Even though Rajnabshi society is patriarchal, women enjoys a wider space in all the aspects of society. In cultural practices women's role is integral and important in Rajbanshi society. Hudum Puja is essentially women centric; men are strictly prohibited. No priests or Brahmins are required in this rituals. Hudum Puja is typically conducted during times of severe drought, in a paddy field

located away from the residential area, usually on a dark night. It is performed on Tuesday or Saturday nights from the end of the month of Bohag (May) to the end of the month of Jeth (June). As part of the ritual, women create a small image of the rain god using plantain leaf stalks and place it in the field. They then make specific sounds with their tongues, known as *jogar*, as part of the ritual. Traditionally, two Hudu birds (owls) were captured and tied to a pole in the centre of the field, as these birds were believed to be symbols of Indra, the god of rain. It was believed that if the Hudu birds cried for three consecutive nights, rain would follow. However, due to the scarcity of these birds, a plantain tree is often used instead as a symbol of Hudum Deo.

The process of planting the plantain tree, or *Hudum Khuti*, involves using specific symbolic ingredients. These include rice bran, a bird's nest, the head of a crow, soil from a prostitute's home, spider webs, soil from an elephant's tusk, water from a cleaned traditional rice mill, water from seven different riverbanks, old yarn, and a plantain tree, preferably planted by a woman with only one child. These items are carefully tied into a tender banana leaf and cut in one breath. Offerings such as a bunch of sixteen bananas, sugar, unboiled rice, flowers, fruits, milk, rice, incense sticks, resin, and an earthen pot are also made to Hudum Deo, usually by a nude woman.

During the ritual, the women, completely unclothed and with their hair untied, perform a circular dance around the plantain tree, singing and making gestures that are often erotic in nature while cursing the rain god. In some regions, the ritual also includes two women kneeling on the ground and drawing a plough to scratch the earth, after which they spread paddy seeds or plant seedlings in the furrow. Additionally, in certain areas, the tradition of frog marriage is incorporated into Hudum Puja as another method of invoking rain.

The Koch Rajbongshies primarily depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. In this context Hudum Puja is a significant ritual in their society as it is mainly performed to ensure fertility, human prosperity, and to protect the land from drought. So in Koch Rajbbanshi society Hudum is revered as the god of drought, and the puja is particularly important to the peasantry, who rely on timely rainfall for successful cultivation. Given the monsoon season, which typically occurs from mid-June to August, the community conducts Hudum Puja to invoke the deity's favour and secure rain, preventing the detrimental effects of drought on their crops. Hudum puja is longstanding folk tradition in the Koch Rajbanshi community

The Koch Rajbongshi community relies heavily on agriculture for their livelihoods. Within this context, the Hudum Puja is a critical ritual designed to enhance fertility, ensure prosperity, and safeguard crops from drought. Revered as the deity of drought, Hudum Deo holds particular significance for the peasantry, who depend on timely rainfall for successful cultivation. This ritual becomes especially crucial during the monsoon season, which extends from mid-June to August. Given that both excessive rainfall and drought can adversely affect crops, the Hudum Puja serves as an essential practice for maintaining agricultural productivity and has been an enduring tradition in the Koch Rajbongshi society.

Songs of Hudum Puja :

In Hudum Puja, dance and music are not just supplementary but central to the ritual's execution. During the puja, women, including widows, perform dances while undressed, using sexually

provocative gestures and words to please the deity. Gidali is followed by the members of the troupe called 'Pali' to present songs related to Hudum puja. These folk songs are deeply rooted in the cultural identity of the Koch Rajbongshi community. These songs are traditional, oral, and impersonal, having been passed down through generations, and they reflect the unique social and cultural fabric of the community. In the song, they cover the three regions like *akas* (sky or heaven), *patal*(the lower region) and *Prithwi* (earth). (Ray: 2011: 29)

The Hudum Puja begins with the Hudum Jagani Gan (Hudum awakening Song) —a ritual song specifically designed to invoke Hudum Deo , calling upon him to arise for the night and bless their community with his presence. They worship the sky upper region and the snake of the lower region using a lamp as a symbolic gesture. This ritual song serves as both an invocation and a welcome for Hudum Deo.

Song:

Jagare Hudum ajikar rati
Grihaste kare puja diya chailan bati
Akasate kare puja akas kaoyali
Patale kare puja pataler nagini.
Kala megh dhaola megh dakiya an jhari
Andhar kariya deoya aise dabari
Ailo ailore desat Hudum ailore
Anore Hudumer mao chailan bati
Bariya neo Hudumok aji subha rati.

Translation:

(O God Hudum, awaken tonight. The worshippers honor you with a sieve and lamp. They worship the deity of the sky and the serpent of the lower realm. Summon black and white clouds for rain, and let the rains swiftly darken the sky. Hudum comes to our region. O mother of Hudum, please bring a sieve and lamp and welcome him tonight.)

During the Hudum Puja, women engage in highly secretive and exclusive rituals aimed at invoking Hudum Deo. A distinctive feature of the ritual involves enticing the deity through provocative practices, including singing obscene songs and performing erotic nude dances. This ceremonial aspect is integral to the puja. The ritual is characterized by the women dividing into two groups and entering the river, where they play with water in a spirit of joy and celebration.

Song:

Hudum Hudumir Biyaa Genu, Kaaner Shonaa
Daane Paanu
Hudum Naamer ke
Dhobol Ghoray Choriya Hudum, Khanto
Naame De, Aay re
Haariya Megh

*Aay Porbot Dhaayaa, Haariya Meghok
Baandhiyaa Thuisung
Gowaar Baal Diyaa
Dhouwala Megh Kaalaa Megh, Megh Sador
Bhaai, Ek Chilkaa
Jol Dao, Gao Dhuiyaa Jaai.
Deoyaa Jhori Aayre, Holo Daango Diyaa,
Moynaa Burhi
Pujaa Kore, Aathiyaa Kolaa Diya*

Translation:

(I went to attend the marriage ceremony of Hudum and Hudumi. I received earrings as a gift. Someone called for Hudum, who rushes in on a white horse. Please stop for a moment! Oh, please come, rigid cloud. Come, crossing the mountains. I have tied up the arrogant cloud by the hair. White cloud, black clouds, you are siblings—give a little water for a bath. Shower with thunder, making the courtyard flow. An old lady named Mayana is worshipping you with.)

In the Hudum Puja, women perform the rituals naked with their hair untied, symbolizing a deep, intimate connection with nature. This act of nudity is not considered sinful but is viewed as a way to please Hudum Deo, who is associated with fertility and the blessing of the land. The ritual underscores the importance of rain and water for agricultural productivity, essential for the Rajbanshi community, who are primarily agrarian. The songs and practices during the puja highlight the community's hope for rain to ensure the fertility of the land and protect them from natural disasters and diseases.

Song:

*Aaye re Deoya Gijji
Dhan Chal Jauk Bhiji
Aaye re Deoya Shosheya
Maang Niya Thhak Bhyashreya.
Aaye re Deoya Dakiya
Dhaan Chaul jauk Bhashia.
Aaye re Deoya dakiya
Doi chira dyang makhiya.*

Translation:

(O God! Come with thunder. Let the paddy and rice get wet. Come with the sound of the storm. The womb is ready for you. Come with a roar. Let the paddy and rice float away. Come with a call, and we will mix curd and flaked rice to offer you.)

In Hudum Puja, women not only seek physical sustenance but also ask for divine help to address environmental challenges. By calling on Lord Hudum, they aim to restore balance and ensure the fertility of the land, which is essential for their agricultural livelihoods.

Song:

Hudum Deo re Hudum Deo

Hagi Acchi Paanideo

Hamar Dyashot nai Paani

Haga tikaay Bara Baani. (Bhakat: 2008: 96)

Translation:

(Lord Hudum! O Lord Hudum! I am in distress; please provide us with water. Our land is dry and lacks water, so we are farming without the necessary cleaning after our work.)

The following song presents Hudum Deo not only as a deity but as a youthful and passionate figure, blending the divine with human experiences. It shows how traditional rituals and divine symbols are connected in Koch-Rajbongshi culture, highlighting the community's unique way of seeking divine favor through everyday practices.

Song:

Hura Hudumer Biyoo Hoy

Sitar Sendur Daane Paay

Joy Aaji Hudumer Biyoo Hoy

Kaaner Sona Daane Paay

Joy Aaji Hudumer Biyoo Hoy

Huda Hudumer Biyoo Hoy

Poroner Shari Daane Paay.

Translation :

(Hura and Hudum get married and receive vermillion powder (sindur) as a gift. Blessings, blessings, today is Hudum's wedding, and he receives gold earrings as a gift. Hura and Hudum get married and receive gold earrings and a sari as gifts.)

Conclusion:

Hudum Puja of the Koch-Rajbongshi community adds a unique dimension to Assamese folk festivals. The worship of Hudum Deo, the rain god, is central to this puja and is deeply connected to agriculture. Notably, this ritual is performed exclusively by women, who use symbolic gestures and explicit expressions to invoke the rain god. Their performances include various sexual gestures and the use of symbolic objects, such as rubbing against a banana tree, which is associated with Hudum. The songs sung during the puja often contain vivid and explicit references to sexual desire and female anatomy. These elements highlight the ritual's focus on fertility and the importance of rain for crop growth, reflecting its cultural and agricultural significance.

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Kumari Kandam – The Lost Continent of Tamil Folklore
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Abstract

The legend of Kumari Kandam, a lost continent submerged beneath the ocean, holds a pivotal place in Tamil folklore and cultural heritage. Described in ancient Tamil texts, Kumari Kandam is said to have been an advanced civilization flourishing in the southernmost regions of India before being engulfed by divine retribution or catastrophic natural events. This paper critically examines the origins, significance, and enduring impact of Kumari Kandam, tracing its roots in Sangam literature, Mythological and Cultural Analysis, and geological theories. By exploring the myth's role in shaping Tamil identity and nationalism, this research delves into the intersection of mythology, history, and modern cultural discourse. Through a multidisciplinary approach, integrating cultural, archaeological, and literary perspectives, the paper explores the legend's profound influence on Tamil culture, the potential historical kernels embedded within the myth, and the enduring quest to unearth the lost knowledge and wisdom attributed to Kumari Kandam. Ultimately, this research underscores the myth's timeless relevance as both a symbol of cultural pride and a cautionary narrative that continues to resonate with contemporary Tamil society.

Keywords: Kumari Kandam, Tamil folklore, lost continent, Sangam literature, mythology, Tamil nationalism, historical mythology, ancient civilizations, folklore preservation.

Introduction

Kumari Kandam, the legendary sunken continent of Tamil folklore, has captivated the imagination of scholars, historians, and cultural enthusiasts for centuries. Described as an advanced and prosperous civilization situated in the southernmost part of India, this mythical landmass is said to have vanished beneath the ocean in a cataclysmic event, leaving behind only fragmented references in ancient texts and oral traditions. While no definitive physical evidence exists, the enduring power of this narrative has shaped not only the historical discourse surrounding the Tamil people but also their collective identity. The legend of Kumari Kandam serves as a cultural cornerstone, intertwining myth with history, and reinforcing the Tamil sense of continuity and resilience.

The origins of Kumari Kandam trace back to the Sangam period, an era of remarkable intellectual and artistic flourishing. In the vast corpus of Tamil literature, this mythical land is portrayed as a cradle of knowledge, spirituality, and social order, where the Tamil language and civilization were born. The submersion of Kumari Kandam, often attributed to divine retribution or natural catastrophe, symbolizes the cyclical nature of human existence—where great civilizations rise, reach their zenith, and inevitably fall. The legend not only evokes a sense of loss but also offers a profound reflection on the fragility of human achievement and the enduring power of cultural heritage.

Despite the lack of conclusive archaeological evidence, the myth of Kumari Kandam continues to inspire discourse on the connections between mythological narratives and historical reality. This paper delves into the multifaceted legacy of Kumari Kandam, examining its implications for Tamil culture and its continued relevance in modern-day identity politics. By exploring the myth through linguistic, geological, and cultural lenses, this research seeks to unravel the complexities of a legend that transcends its mythical origins to shape the collective consciousness of a people and their enduring relationship with their ancient past.

Literature Review: Kumari Kandam and Its Cultural Significance

The myth of Kumari Kandam, a sunken continent located in the southernmost part of ancient India, holds a prominent place in Tamil folklore and literature. While Kumari Kandam has captured the imagination of scholars, historians, and cultural enthusiasts, its place in academic discourse has been marked by a lack of concrete archaeological evidence. Most of the studies focus on the myth's symbolic and cultural importance, rather than its factual historical existence. This section reviews the existing body of literature on Kumari Kandam, exploring the key themes in Tamil mythology, literature, and the intersection of myth with history.

Tamil Literature and the Legacy of Kumari Kandam: Kumari Kandam is most often referenced in Sangam literature, an extensive body of Tamil texts that date back to the early centuries of the Common Era. Sangam poetry, with its descriptions of the Tamil landscape and its people, often mentions a land submerged by the sea, drawing parallels to the story of Kumari Kandam. Scholars such as K. A. Nilakanta Sastri (1955) have suggested that Kumari Kandam may have been an early Tamil civilization that flourished in the prehistorical period, aligning with the description of a highly advanced society in the Tamil literary corpus. However, Sastri's assertion has been

criticized by others for the absence of archaeological evidence to substantiate the existence of such a civilization.

In more contemporary studies, scholars like T. S. Rajasekaran (2004) argue that Kumari Kandam should be viewed not as a literal historical entity, but rather as a symbolic representation of the deep roots of Tamil civilization. This approach suggests that the myth of Kumari Kandam highlights the enduring cultural heritage of the Tamil people, rather than seeking to pinpoint a specific historical event or location. Tamil cultural studies, including those by historians like M. Rajendran (2011), explore the significance of the myth as a central narrative that reinforces Tamil identity, especially in the face of colonialism and external cultural pressures. For Rajendran, the story of the lost continent evokes a sense of pride and continuity, underscoring the Tamil people's deep historical and cultural ties to their land.

Theories of Sunken Continents and Comparative Mythology: The notion of sunken lands or lost continents is not unique to Tamil culture; similar myths exist in other cultures around the world, most famously the legend of Atlantis in Greek mythology. In this respect, Kumari Kandam has been the subject of comparative mythology studies. Scholars like R. K. Pruthi (2006) have examined the similarities between Kumari Kandam and the Atlantis myth, drawing attention to the recurring motif of advanced civilizations destroyed by natural disasters. These myths, according to Pruthi, reflect human concerns with the impermanence of civilization and the cyclical nature of history. The recurrence of the lost continent motif across different cultures suggests a shared archetype of human experience, where great societies rise, flourish, and ultimately succumb to natural forces beyond their control.

Geological studies have also explored the possibility that Kumari Kandam could have been inspired by real historical events. In his work, geologist M. K. S. Nair (1999) proposes that Kumari Kandam could be rooted in a real event, such as the submergence of land due to rising sea levels or tectonic shifts in the prehistoric past. While there is no definitive evidence to support the existence of Kumari Kandam as a specific landmass, geological studies of the Palk Strait and the coastline of southern India have suggested that significant land changes occurred in the distant past, which might have been interpreted as the submergence of a great civilization. This speculative connection between geology and myth has been explored by scholars like S. K. Gupta (2003), who examines how ancient myths, including that of Kumari Kandam, might be rooted in real, albeit unrecorded, events.

Cultural Impact and Identity Politics: The impact of the Kumari Kandam myth extends far beyond its literary and historical interpretations; it plays a crucial role in the cultural and political discourse of Tamil society. The myth of the lost continent has been invoked in Tamil nationalist movements, where it is used to assert the antiquity and continuity of Tamil civilization. For instance, the myth has been central to the Tamil renaissance, with figures such as C. N. Annadurai using it as a symbol of Tamil pride and self-determination. Modern Tamil writers and intellectuals continue to use Kumari Kandam as a metaphor for Tamil identity and to express their connection to an ancient and illustrious past. In this context, scholars like A. R. Venkatachalapathy (2007)

argue that the myth functions as a tool for Tamil political and cultural assertion, especially in the face of external domination by colonial powers and the Indian state.

Contemporary literary studies also highlight how Kumari Kandam has found its way into Tamil popular culture. The myth has been retold in films, plays, and other forms of mass media, where it is presented as both a symbol of loss and a symbol of resilience. As a result, Kumari Kandam continues to shape modern Tamil identity, offering a narrative of survival and continuity in the face of overwhelming challenges. Scholars like S. V. Rajadurai (2010) suggest that Kumari Kandam's ongoing presence in the cultural imagination underscores its role as a symbolic bridge between past and present, linking ancient Tamil civilization with modern Tamil nationalism.

Conclusion of Literature Review: In summary, the literature surrounding Kumari Kandam highlights the complexity of the myth, which straddles the boundary between history, myth, and cultural identity. While there is no concrete evidence to substantiate the historical existence of Kumari Kandam, its role in Tamil literature, folklore, and identity is undeniable. Existing scholarship focuses on the symbolic power of the myth, its role in Tamil cultural continuity, and its place in comparative mythology. Furthermore, the myth's influence in modern Tamil identity politics demonstrates its ongoing relevance. This body of literature provides the foundation for this paper, which seeks to explore the enduring cultural significance of Kumari Kandam in Tamil history and identity, even in the absence of conclusive physical evidence.

Objectives

1. **To analyze the origins and evolution of the Kumari Kandam myth** within Tamil literature and oral traditions, and to explore how it has shaped Tamil identity and collective memory.
2. **To examine the cultural and symbolic significance of the myth**, including its role in Tamil nationalism and its impact on modern Tamil communities, especially in the diaspora.
3. **To explore alternative theories** (geological and cultural) that may offer insights into the possible historical or metaphorical roots of the Kumari Kandam narrative.
4. **To assess the role of Kumari Kandam in contemporary Tamil discourse**, focusing on its continued influence in literature, politics, and identity-building efforts.
5. **To present a balanced view by incorporating critical perspectives:** Address the challenges in reconciling the cultural importance of Kumari Kandam

Methodology

This research employs an interdisciplinary approach to explore the myth of Kumari Kandam. The methodology integrates literary analysis, comparative mythology and geological theories to provide a holistic understanding of the myth's origins, cultural significance, and modern implications. The primary source material consists of Tamil *Sangam* literature, historical texts, oral traditions, and contemporary literature. Comparative mythology will be used to identify parallels between Kumari Kandam and similar sunken continent myths, such as Atlantis. Cultural analysis will focus on how the Tamil language, its ancient roots, and cultural expressions might reflect the continuing legacy of the lost civilization. Furthermore, geological theories related to submerged landmasses off the southern Indian coast will be reviewed to provide a speculative connection

between the myth and possible historical or environmental events. Finally, cultural analysis will explore the role of the Kumari Kandam myth in modern Tamil identity, particularly in the context of post-colonial nationalism and the Tamil diaspora.

Mythological and Cultural Analysis of Kumari Kandam

The myth of Kumari Kandam, a sunken continent in Tamil folklore, represents a profound blend of mythology and cultural heritage. Rooted in ancient Tamil literature, it symbolizes both the grandeur of a lost civilization and the cyclical nature of human existence. This myth holds deep cultural significance, acting as a cornerstone of Tamil identity, linking the past to the present. Through its stories of a once-thriving civilization, Kumari Kandam continues to shape Tamil pride, resilience, and collective memory.

Symbolism in Tamil Literature: The myth of Kumari Kandam in Tamil literature transcends the mere idea of a lost geographical entity. It emerges as a profound symbol, representing not just the disappearance of a land but the vanishing of an entire, advanced civilization that was deeply connected to the Tamil language and culture. In the *Sangam* period, which is considered the golden age of Tamil literature, Kumari Kandam is often referenced as the cradle of Tamil civilization, a land where the arts, sciences, and spiritual practices flourished in an era of harmony between humanity and nature. The continent is presented as a sophisticated society, its language and culture believed to have been pure, ancient, and divine in origin.

The submersion of Kumari Kandam, according to these texts, is imbued with symbolic meaning. It speaks to the impermanence of human achievements, emphasizing the cyclical rise and fall of civilizations. The sinking of the land is not merely an environmental catastrophe but a metaphor for the transient nature of prosperity and human endeavour. In this literary framework, Kumari Kandam represents the zenith of human civilization, a height that is destined to be submerged into the depths of time and history, serving as a constant reminder of the fragility of all that is built. This loss, however, is not seen in a negative light; rather, it is part of the eternal cycle of creation and destruction, reflecting the natural order of the universe. The connection between Kumari Kandam and the Tamil language further intensifies its symbolic importance. The myth suggests that the Tamil language, along with its deep spiritual and cultural roots, was born from this lost land. The language itself is considered sacred and timeless, an unbroken thread that connects present-day Tamils with their distant ancestors. Through this lens, Kumari Kandam becomes more than just a geographical concept; it transforms into a spiritual and cultural foundation, anchoring the Tamil identity in a past that is both mythical and deeply meaningful. Thus, Kumari Kandam in Tamil literature is not only a symbol of loss but also a source of pride, representing an eternal link to an ancient, glorious civilization that continues to shape Tamil identity to this day.

Cultural Significance: Kumari Kandam holds profound cultural significance for the Tamil people, both as a symbol of their rich heritage and as a marker of their collective identity. In Tamil culture, the myth of the sunken continent is not merely an ancient story but a cornerstone of pride and continuity. The notion of an advanced civilization that once existed and thrived in harmony with nature serves as a source of collective memory, uniting Tamils across time and space. For the Tamil

people, especially in the diaspora, Kumari Kandam is more than a lost land; it is a cultural archetype representing the unbroken lineage of their civilization, language, and identity.

The myth of Kumari Kandam reinforces the idea that Tamil culture is not only ancient but also enduring. Despite centuries of foreign invasions, colonialism, and modern challenges, the myth continues to emphasize the resilience and continuity of Tamil civilization. By evoking the image of a golden age submerged beneath the sea, it serves as a reminder of the deep roots of Tamil culture, suggesting that the soul of Tamil identity is eternal, transcending time and adversity. This notion plays a crucial role in the cultural and national pride of Tamil people, particularly in Tamil Nadu, where the myth is closely tied to the idea of Tamil self-determination and the preservation of Tamil heritage.

The myth also functions as a cultural bridge, connecting different generations of Tamils across the globe. It fosters a shared sense of identity and belonging, particularly among Tamils in the diaspora who may be separated by geography but are united by a common cultural history. Kumari Kandam provides a narrative that strengthens the collective consciousness of the Tamil people, offering them a cultural touchstone that evokes unity and pride. Furthermore, it serves as a source of inspiration for the preservation and promotion of Tamil language, art, and traditions. The cultural significance of Kumari Kandam, therefore, lies not just in its role as a myth, but in its ability to sustain and elevate Tamil cultural identity in a rapidly changing world.

Comparative Analysis of Kumari Kandam and Similar Myths

The myth of Kumari Kandam, the sunken continent of Tamil folklore, shares striking similarities with other prominent myths of lost civilizations across the world, notably the 'Atlantis' myth from Greek tradition and the 'Mu' myth of Pacific Oceanic cultures. While each myth emerges from distinct cultural contexts, they all revolve around the theme of an advanced civilization submerged by a catastrophic event, often due to the moral or natural decline of its people. Through a comparative analysis, we can explore the universal human themes embedded within these myths, such as the fragility of human achievement, the cyclical nature of civilization, and the cultural need for a lost golden age.

1. **Kumari Kandam and Atlantis:** The Greek myth of Atlantis, first described by Plato, tells of a powerful and technologically advanced civilization that sank into the sea after its inhabitants became morally corrupt. Similarly, the myth of Kumari Kandam describes a magnificent land, home to a flourishing Tamil civilization, which was submerged by a great natural disaster. Both myths portray a golden age of prosperity, knowledge, and harmony, only to be lost forever when the land sinks beneath the waves. The submersion of these lands serves as a powerful metaphor for the fragility of human civilization. The downfall of both Kumari Kandam and Atlantis is framed not only as a physical disaster but as a cautionary tale about hubris, the impermanence of human achievement, and the inevitable return to nature. In both myths, the destruction signifies a profound loss of cultural knowledge and spiritual wisdom, reinforcing the idea that no civilization, no matter how advanced, is immune to the ravages of time.

2. **Kumari Kandam and Mu:** The myth of Mu, a sunken continent believed to have existed in the Pacific, shares significant parallels with Kumari Kandam. Like Kumari Kandam, Mu is imagined

as an ancient, spiritually rich civilization, with profound knowledge of the natural and spiritual worlds. According to legend, the continent was destroyed by a cataclysmic event, often interpreted as a natural disaster such as a massive flood or volcanic eruption. Both Kumari Kandam and Mu reflect the same underlying theme of an advanced civilization whose loss signifies the disappearance of not just a land, but a body of knowledge and cultural wisdom. While the specifics of Mu's civilization vary across sources, the myth echoes the Tamil tradition in presenting the submersion as a symbol of the impermanence of human existence and the transient nature of power. Both myths underscore humanity's enduring fear of losing sacred knowledge and the cultural trauma of witnessing a once-thriving society reduced to nothing but legend.

Common Themes Across Myths: Through a comparative lens, several key themes emerge across the myths of Kumari Kandam, Atlantis, and Mu:

The Rise and Fall of Civilizations: A common motif in all three myths is the inevitable fall of even the most advanced civilizations. These myths suggest that no matter how prosperous a society may become, it is subject to the forces of nature, time, or moral decay, reinforcing the cyclical nature of civilizations, where growth is always followed by decline and destruction.

Cyclic Time and Rebirth: In all these traditions, the destruction of the lost lands is not just an end but part of a larger, cyclical process. The idea that these lands will either be reborn or that their memory will continue to inspire future generations ties into a broader worldview of perpetual renewal, an understanding that destruction often precedes new creation.

The Loss of Knowledge: Another central theme in these myths is the loss of profound knowledge and wisdom. Kumari Kandam, like Atlantis and Mu, is not just the story of a land lost to time but the tragic disappearance of intellectual, spiritual, and cultural achievements. These myths reflect humanity's fear of forgetting or losing access to ancient wisdom and the desire to reconnect with a past that holds the keys to a more enlightened way of living.

Cultural Identity and Legacy: Finally, these myths serve as a source of cultural pride and identity for the people who revere them. For the Tamils, Kumari Kandam is a foundational myth that reinforces their deep connection to an ancient and glorious civilization. Similarly, Atlantis and Mu play important roles in Western and Pacific cultural pride, respectively, representing lost greatness that is often invoked as a symbol of national or cultural identity.

The comparative analysis of Kumari Kandam with the myths of Atlantis and Mu reveals shared themes that underscore universal human concerns about the impermanence of civilization, the loss of knowledge, and the cyclical nature of history. These myths, though originating in different parts of the world, reflect a common desire to understand the fragility of human achievements and the fear of cultural amnesia. They also highlight the human need to preserve and pass on the wisdom of past generations. Through these lost civilizations, we are reminded of our collective yearning for a golden age of enlightenment, and a profound understanding that while civilizations may fall, their legacy and lessons continue to shape our cultural consciousness.

Geological Theories of Kumari Kandam: A Review of Research and Evidence

The myth of Kumari Kandam, a legendary sunken continent in Tamil folklore, has captured the imagination of scholars, historians, and geologists alike. While it remains primarily a mythological concept, various geological theories suggest that the narrative may have roots in real geological events. This section explores these theories, examining the possibility of Kumari Kandam's existence as a submerged landmass, based on geological evidence, historical research, and the principles of plate tectonics, sea-level rise, and catastrophic natural events.

Geological Evidence and Submerged Landmasses: The most compelling geological theory surrounding Kumari Kandam posits that it could have been part of the ancient Gondwana supercontinent. According to scientific research on plate tectonics, the Indian subcontinent was once part of a vast landmass that included present-day South America, Africa, and Antarctica. As Gondwana began to break apart approximately 200 million years ago, the Indian plate separated and drifted northwards, leading to the creation of the Indian Ocean (Kumar et al., 2018). It is theorized that during this period, large portions of land in the Indian Ocean could have been submerged, possibly giving rise to the legend of Kumari Kandam. While there is no direct evidence of a lost Tamil civilization, the notion that a vast landmass could have existed and later sunk is supported by the geological process of continental drift.

Research by Yoshida et al. (2016), who studied submerged landmasses in the Indian Ocean, points to areas such as the Kerguelen Plateau as evidence of ancient landmasses that have since been submerged due to tectonic activity. This region, often referred to as the "lost continent," contains underwater ridges and mountains, suggesting that it could have once supported terrestrial ecosystems. While the Kerguelen Plateau is located far south of the traditional area associated with Kumari Kandam, it is part of a broader discussion about ancient landmasses that once existed in the Indian Ocean.

The Role of Seismic and Volcanic Activity: Geological theories also link the myth of Kumari Kandam to seismic events and volcanic activity. Many scholars, including Ramesh (2017), argue that a massive earthquake or volcanic eruption could have caused a catastrophic event leading to the submergence of a significant landmass. Similar natural occurrences throughout history, such as the eruption of Krakatoa in 1883, which drastically altered the surrounding landscape, show that large-scale natural events can lead to the sudden destruction of entire islands or coastal regions. The Indian Ocean region has experienced notable seismic activity, and there are records of significant earthquakes in areas like the Sunda Trench, located to the east of the Indian Ocean, that could have triggered such a disaster.

Historical evidence from the Sangam period literature in Tamil culture such as references to the submerged land and lost cities, suggests that the notion of an ancient land sinking beneath the waves could have stemmed from a real-world event. The Tamil epic Silappatikaram and other works contain references to coastal cities and lands that were believed to have been swallowed by the sea, further reinforcing the idea that catastrophic geological events played a role in shaping these stories.

Sea-Level Rise and Submerged Cities: A theory supported by Paleoclimatology is the idea that sea-level rise at the end of the last Ice Age (around 10,000 years ago) could have submerged vast stretches of coastal land, including parts of Kumari Kandam. Research by Sinha et al. (2014) on sea-level changes in the Indian Ocean reveals evidence that portions of the Indian subcontinent's coastline were once much more extensive, with significant land submerged due to rising sea levels following the last glacial maximum. This process could have led to the disappearance of low-lying regions and the eventual development of folklore surrounding sunken cities and lost lands.

In particular, areas such as the Laccadive Islands and the Seychelles have been theorized to be remnants of Kumari Kandam. The Seychelles Bank in the western Indian Ocean has been identified as a potential site for Kumari Kandam due to its proximity to the Indian subcontinent and submerged coastal features. Ghosh (2019) highlights the intriguing possibility that this area could have been a landmass during the last Ice Age, before being submerged as sea levels rose. Sivanandan's study on the Laccadive Islands provides a solid geological basis for submerged islands, but no significant research connects it directly to Kumari Kandam.

Interdisciplinary Research- Myth, History, and Geology:

Combining geological theories with cultural and mythological research offers a holistic view of Kumari Kandam's legacy. While geological theories provide a scientific basis for the existence of submerged landmasses, mythological studies suggest that Kumari Kandam could symbolize the loss of an ancient civilization rather than an actual landmass. According to Krishnamurthy (2020), the blending of oral traditions and historical events over centuries could have transformed a real geological event into a myth of a lost civilization. This interdisciplinary approach bridges the gap between folklore and science, showing how geological events may have been mythologized over time, contributing to the legend of Kumari Kandam.

While conclusive evidence for the existence of Kumari Kandam remains elusive, geological theories, supported by findings from plate tectonics, seismic studies, and submerged landmasses, offer a plausible scientific framework for the myth. Research into ancient landmasses, such as the Kerguelen Plateau and the Seychelles Bank, provides valuable insight into the possibility that Kumari Kandam could have been a real landmass swallowed by geological forces. Moreover, the theory of rising sea levels and seismic activity further supports the idea that natural events may have inspired the Tamil myth of Kumari Kandam. By integrating geological, historical, and mythological research, we can better understand the cultural and scientific significance of this enduring myth and its potential origins in real-world events. While these geological theories offer plausible explanations for the Kumari Kandam myth, it is essential to approach them with caution, as no definitive evidence exists to confirm the actual existence of the landmass.

Myth, Speculation, and the Challenge of Cultural Legacy

The myth of Kumari Kandam, despite its cultural significance, faces considerable criticism, particularly when examined through the lens of historical and scientific scrutiny. Central to this

critique is the lack of concrete archaeological or geological evidence supporting the existence of such a sunken civilization. Theories linking Kumari Kandam to natural phenomena like continental drift or the Kerguelen Plateau are largely speculative and unsubstantiated by mainstream science. These speculative claims often blur the line between myth and fact, leading many to question the credibility of such narratives when juxtaposed with established scientific knowledge. Without verifiable evidence, Kumari Kandam risks being relegated to the realm of folklore, undermining its status as a historical truth.

In addition, Kumari Kandam's role in Tamil identity, while undeniably powerful, invites criticism for its potential to perpetuate a sense of historical victimhood and nostalgia. Critics argue that the myth may hinder a critical engagement with Tamil history, promoting a romanticized version of the past rather than encouraging exploration of the actual historical and cultural complexities of the Tamil people. The insistence on a lost civilization can detract from the rich, documented history of Tamil culture that has thrived through centuries. This idealization of a mythical golden age may inadvertently undermine contemporary Tamil cultural achievements, focusing more on a lost past than on living traditions and progress.

In the same vein, Kumari Kandam is often invoked in political contexts to assert Tamil cultural superiority and regional autonomy, but this too has its drawbacks. By tying political and cultural claims to a mythological narrative, there is a risk of oversimplifying complex geopolitical realities and diverting attention from pressing contemporary issues. The myth's use in contemporary Tamil nationalism, while empowering for some, may alienate others who see it as an unverifiable claim that distracts from pragmatic concerns. This politicization of the myth raises important ethical questions about the balance between cultural pride and the need for grounded, factual discourse in the pursuit of cultural preservation and political autonomy.

Conclusion

The myth of Kumari Kandam, the legendary sunken continent, has captivated scholars and the Tamil community alike for centuries. While conclusive geological evidence remains elusive, the integration of various geological theories, historical research, and mythological interpretations reveals a rich and multifaceted narrative that extends beyond its origins as folklore. The hypothesis of Kumari Kandam as a lost landmass, potentially submerged due to tectonic shifts, seismic activity, or rising sea levels, provides a fascinating scientific context for the myth. These geological theories, while speculative, add layers of intrigue to the legend, suggesting that Kumari Kandam may not only be a cultural construct but possibly a reflection of real-world events from a time long past.

Despite the absence of concrete physical evidence, the enduring cultural significance of Kumari Kandam in Tamil identity cannot be overstated. The myth plays a crucial role in the preservation of Tamil heritage, acting as a symbol of cultural pride, continuity, and the resilience of the Tamil people in the face of potential loss and adversity. This myth has transcended generations, acting as a unifying force for Tamil communities both in India and across the diaspora. Whether viewed through the lens of mythological analysis, linguistic evolution, or historical significance, Kumari

Kandam serves as a powerful testament to the depth and complexity of Tamil cultural consciousness.

Moreover, Kumari Kandam's mythological richness provides invaluable insights into the interplay between history and myth, and how societies use narratives to explain natural phenomena and existential events. It serves as a reminder of how myths can function as both historical records and cultural artifacts, preserving collective memory long after the events themselves have faded. This enduring myth highlights the dynamic relationship between natural landscapes and human culture, illustrating how both evolve and influence one another across time.

In closing, Kumari Kandam's legacy is far more than just a geological or mythological enigma. It is a symbol of identity, heritage, and resilience, resonating deeply with the Tamil people, regardless of the available physical evidence. The myth continues to serve as a conduit for exploring the intersection of culture, history, and science, providing a rich field of study for both scholars and practitioners interested in the profound connections between myth and identity. Through further interdisciplinary research, including geological, linguistic, and cultural studies, the story of Kumari Kandam may continue to offer valuable insights into the intersection of human experience and the natural world.

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Meeteilon Short story and Novel in the Post-Independence Manipur.

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Abstract

During the time of pre independence Manipur, Meeteilon literature grew up in ancient theme and style. Except few works on folk literature, there were written religious texts, novels, short stories, epic poem, plays etc. because written works in Meeteilon started from the middle of 7th to the beginning of the 8th century A.D. (Archeological Studies in Manipur, Bulletin I. 1935). After independence, Meeteilon literature got its perfection as the offspring of the ancient or prehistoric literature. The objective of this paper is to trace the literary model of short story and novel in the pre and post independent periods of Manipur. There were works in and on Meeteilon literature but still there is room for more study in the functions of literature. The message, morale or spiritual value, motivation and aesthetic functions always encircle the short stories and novels of this period. The present study will be based on the resources of the previous works which were left unexplained and incomplete to some extent. The main theme and style of short story and novels were full of romance, war, history, mythology, social and legendary stories, discontentment in the heart, oppression and suppression by the atrocities, revenge etc. In its true sense, the original theme of the pre and post-independence Meeteilon literature is ancient but has modern essence. This paper presents a brief survey of novels and short stories in Meeteilon literature of both the periods. At any time interval, there is no distinct line between these two periods. The present study will explore the literary trend of short stories and novels in the trend of Post-Independence Meeteilon literature in Manipur.

Key words: *Meeteilon literature, literary trend, theme, novel, short story.*

Introduction

There is an interesting fact that Meeteilon is a member of the Kuki-Chin group of the Arakan-Burmese branch of the Tibeto-Burman sub-family of the Sino-Tibetan family of languages (M. A. Pie & F. Gaynor, 1954). Meeteilon is the connecting link between the two important languages, i.e., Tibetan and Burmese. The Himalayan, Assamese (Indic language) and Naga groups of the Tibeto-Burman Sub-family, separate Meeteilon in the North and North-East from the Tibetan. South and Southeastern side, there are Kuki-Chin and Kachin groups of the subfamily between the two sister languages, namely, Meeteilon and Burmese. In some way, Meeteilon is closely related to Burmese, Tibetan and in some ways to Chinese. Meeteilon and its three sister languages developed on parallel lines with their peculiar dialectal predispositions and often developed contradictory idiosyncrasies. However, Meeteilon literature has close connections with Bangla, Hindi and Sanskrit literature. Trace back to the early period, many features of writing, theme and style are found resemblance with the Sanskrit, Bangla and Hindi literature and lots of Sanskrit, Bangla, Hindi and Assamese words are found in Meeteilon literature.

In the history, the present Manipur was once called Kangleipak. During that time, there were seven independent kingdoms in the land, later on these seven kingdoms became seven clans under the king, Pakhangba who ascended the throne in 33 AD. Hence, Meitei society in Kangleipak was consisted of seven different clans, namely, Ningthouja/Mangang, Luwang, Khuman, Moirang, Angom, Chenglei and KhabaNganba, among which Ningthouja/Mangang clan was the most powerful one from 33 A.D. In the course of time, their dialects have also been coined into a common language as Meeteilon. This is the main reason why Meeteilon literature has got various social themes with various vocabulary items.

Post-Independence Meeteilon Literature

The modern period of Meeteilon literature started from 1819 AD and the literary resources of this period can be categorised into four subgroups based on the language used, style, and slightly variable themes. They are-

- a) Prose/poetry written without using any foreign vocabulary
- b) Literary pieces written using foreign, archaic and modern words.
- c) Poems written using a language mixed with Bangla and Brajaboli and
- d) Prose/poetry written using a completely modern language with some loan words as style and aesthetic value.

In the beginning of post independence Meeteilon literature, very few writers were there. Hijam Anganghal (1892-1943) Hawaibam Nabadwipchandra (1897-1946), Arambam Dorendrajit Singh (1907-1944), Khwairakpam Chaoba (1896-1952), Hijam Irabot (1896-1951) were the pioneer writers of post independence Meeteilon literature. During this time, Meeteilon literature flourished and genres of short stories, novels, dramas, poems, travelogue, essays, criticism, history, translation, arts and crafts on various themes came up. Textbooks, different books, journals and other periodicals began to appear. Theatre plays became more popular taking the theme of history, mythology, social and legendary stories. The religious songs which were already sung in Bengali and Brajaboli got translated into Meeteilon. In fact, after the World War-II, literary movement

revived with new ideas and style with Indian and western connections. Meeteilon literature goes up keeping pace with the changing society.

Post independence literature witnessed works of varied themes like romanticism, modernism, contemporary topics in poetry and in prose. The major themes and story line were showing the relationship of men and women, positive social values, problems of women, economy and differences between classes, degradation of traditional morality and rise of materialistic values, romanticism, etc. Out of many literary genres, Meeteilon novel and short stories are more popular genres in the post independence Manipur.

Short Story

There is no exact date of originating the art of storytelling. We assume that it might have been started from the very early period. Even in Hindu philosophy, the story of Ramayana and Maha Bharat are still famous. The Ramayana and Mahabharata are both ancient Indian epics that are believed to have been compiled by the 4th century CE. The earliest stages of the Ramayana are estimated to have been written between the 7th and 5th centuries BCE, and later stages may have been written up to the 3rd century CE ([https://en.wikipedia.org >wiki>Epic-Puranic chronology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epic-Puranic_chronology)). Even today, these two epics are the stuff of the Indian story tellers. Likewise, in Meeteilon literature, there are various stories including epic poem 'Khamba Thoibi', Moirang Kangleiron, many folk tales, story of kings and queens, Gods and goddesses etc. As a tradition in Manipur society, the talented men or women or the elders used to spend time by telling stories to their fellow beings, children and in the small gatherings. Most of the stories were full of moral and spiritual values, aesthetic value, motivational value and good message to the society as well as to the community. This art form has been inherited to younger generations from time to time and still existed. In the later period, these were written down by some talented and creative writers. Meeteilon short stories began to conceive from 1929-41. The modern period in Meeteilon short story begins with the publication of some stories in the journals like 'Yakairoi' (1929), 'Lalit Manjuli Patrika' (1933).

Then there was an interim period of World War-II. After the war, Meeteilon short story in its own taste began to grow from 1946-1960. This new genre has its firm foundation laid in the hands of R.K. Shitaljit Singh (1913-2008) with his collections of short stories, "Leikonungda (1946)", "Leinungsi (1946)". The idealist R.K.Shitaljit Singh depicts in his stories the ideals of womanhood, sacrifice and love. Next comes R.K. Elangbam (1929-2000) with the collections, "Chingya Tamya (1955)" (lit. The Countryside), "Yumgi Mou (1958) (lit. The married lady of the home) in which he portrays the romantic aspect of feminine sentiments. Nevertheless, in his later collections of short stories, "Leipaklei", he depicts the despair and suffering of Manipuri women.

A group of writers appeared on the scene in the 1960's. They are M.K. Binodini (1922-2011), Nongthombam Kunjamohan, (1935-2014), Khumanthem Prakash(1931b.), Shri Biren(1946-2011), Hijam Guno (1920-2010), Elangbam Dinamani(1940b), Chitreshwar Sharma (1939b), Nilbir Shastri (- 2005 d), etc. There is a strong release of Meeteilon short stories in the 1960s. The

works of these writers gave new color and direction to the Meeteilon short story as a fully developed art form.

M.K. Binodini's "Nungairakta Chandramukhi, (1965)", N.Kunjamohan's "Chenkhidra Icheh, (1965)", "Ilisha Amagi Mahao, (1973)", Kh. Prakash's "Ichehi Sam,(1965)", Shri Biren's "Leichillakki Thaja, (1967)", H.Guno's "Phijang Marumda, (1969)", E. Dinamani's "Thaklabi, (1970)", Chiteshwar Sharma's "Ngasidi Lakle, (1970)", Nilbir Shastri's "Basanti Charang, (1967)", etc. were the impressive production of the time; these writers started to view the social reality critically and depicted in their stories realistically the socio-economic and political issues of that period.

From 1960- 70 gradually the scope of short story began to expand on various themes such as changing political image, economic development, living standard, modernization and the history of contemporary society, discontent over the administration, social reformation etc. and important milestone of Meeteilon short story started from 1970 onwards.

The Meeteilon short story writers of the time dealt with common themes such as freedom movements, meaning of democracy, the futile hope of social life after the colonial rule, of the kings and queens, dispute of land, conflict among the communities, religious reformation, different movements on social issues, economic instability and its impact on society. In fact, it was the time of social reformation due to the factors like degradation of moral value, progression of materialistic life, fear, anger, insecure feeling and anxiety from the unwanted elements, corruption, loosening of the respect between male and female, deteriorating position of the common people were the popular subject matter of the post independence short story writers. Some of the renowned pioneer short story writers of the post independence Manipur were Nongthombam Shri Biren (2011b.), Nongthombam Kunjamohon Singh (1935b.), Khumanthem Prakash Singh(1931b) and Hijam Guno Singh (1920b.). They wrote in their own styles but mainly on social issues.

In Kunjamohon Singh's short story 'Wanomba', he depicts the selling of moral value of women for money and power. The story revolves around the character of one Priyalata who offers her flesh so nonchalantly to a senior government official so that her husband could get promoted to a higher rank. Kunjamohan also succeeds in portraying the imageries of poverty stricken people with extra sentimentalism and is shown best in his work "Ilisha Amagee Mahao, (1973)" (lit.The Taste of an Ilisha,).

Khumanthem Prakash's works "Manorama", "Icha" (My Child) and "Mama" (Mother) deal with the sensitive aspects of sexual taboo and illicit relations. In "Manorama", illicit relationship between a mother-in-law and son-in-law; in the short story "Icha" (lit.My child) for the hope of a son, a woman has illicit relationship with a stranger; in the story "Mama" (lit.mother), he depicts a woman's casual relation with her husband's friend etc. In and around 1974, there were some development and changes in the wave of short story. The writers had drawn closer connections

with western colour and style adopting the new techniques in the short story like allegory, symbol, dream, fantasy, folk element and more of the philosophical and psychological view in their form and expression.

As we discussed above, in the 1970's, number of young short story writers came up and they wrote on new approach for cultural identity, regional patriotism, ethnic issues, corruption, emancipation of women education, equality of right etc. In 1974 a group of writers - Shri Biren, Y.Ibomcha, Lamabam Viramani(1952b), Keisham Priyokumar, Laitonjam Premchand, Thochom Ibohanbi, and others., published a journal called "Meirik" (lit.Spark). These writers revolted against the exploitation of the people and depicted boldly the moral degradation, and many social ill feelings in a new expression. Then, this movement of Meeteilon short story was escalated by many writers. E.Dinamani's "Pistol Ama Kundalei Ama (1981)", Lanchenba Meitei's "Mikap Thokpada Manglaknaba, (1989)", Birendrajit Naorem's "Amambadasu Anganbadasu, (1992)", Memchoubi's "Leiteng, (1992)", A. Kholchandra's "Amamba Atiyagi Makhada, (1995)" were some of the eminent writers of that period. Among the contemporary short story writers of that period were the names of K.Priyokumar and his "Nongdi Tarakkhidare (1995)", L.Premchand and his masterpiece "Imagi Phanek Machet", L. Viramani and his work "Picnic Picnic". After 1990 there is a major change, and the ideas of emancipation, self-respect, identity, and cultural identity had emerged. Tracing back to their identity, the writers attempted to create a new history. They took more universal interest in metaphysical problems, intellectual isolation, etc. For instance, Yumlebam Ibomcha's writings predict the revolutionary feelings of the people, the sufferings of the common people as the victim of society. He tries to pull the scenes of Vietnam and Bangladesh to Manipur society. Ch.Ningomba, Premchand and Priyokumar's writings depict the restlessness amongst the youth of valley and the hill people due to their social and community clashes. Elangbam Dinamani Singh's (1940b.) masterpiece "Nangga Eiga Amattani,(2012)"(lit. 'You and I are One', is a writing moving with comic theme, an ironic impression and injustice of the present day society. Yumlebam Ibomcha (1949b.) expresses human relationship and the kinship terms as an artificial one in his work "Nong Ngankhriraba Ahing" (lit.The night never met daylight). In the 21st century, thousands of Meeteilon short story writers come up with their individual talents in various themes and styles.

Novel

The growth of novel in Indian literature appeared in the beginning of 19th century with the publication of Marathi, Bengali, Malayalam, Hindi novels etc. Baba Padmanji's Marathi novel "Yamuna Paryatan (1857)" is a simple story about the conditions of widows. Lakshmanan Moreshwar Halbe published his Marathi novel "Muktamal" in 1861. Then came Hari Narayan Apte's Marathi historical novel "Ushakala" in 1896. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's "Durgeshnandini (1865)", is considered today, the first major Bengali novel in the modern period of Bengali literature. Chandu Menon wrote first Malayalam novel "Indulekha" in 1889. Kandukuri Viresalingam wrote the first Telegu novel "Rajashekhara Caritamu" in 1878. Bharatendu Harishchandra was the pioneer of modern Hindi literature. The first Hindi novel is "Pariksāguru, written by Lala Srinivas Das came up in 1882. Premchand wrote in popular Urdu and then shifted to Hindi. Gandhiji and his views

on women, child marriage and dowry were influenced by Premchand's popular novel "Sevasadan (1936)". Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay (1876-1938) became the most popular novelist in Bengal and probably in the rest of India because of his uniqueness of storytelling in the simplest language (Source: <https://www.toppr.com/guides/the-history-of-novels>).

The movement of novel in Indian literature gradually swept into the soil of Manipur in the pre independence India with the publication of Dr. Kamal's evergreen romantic novel, "Madhabi (1931)", and R.K.Shitaljit's (1913-2008) novel "Thadokpa (Sacrifice) (written in 1940, published in April 1942)".

Then, there was an interim period of World War-II. After the war, the young creative writers of the time began to write novels on various themes and styles. The novelists of post independence India painted the story based on the contemporary social life with full of issues and they looked at the reality of life as social themes. The literary style and techniques were developed in all aspects, i.e. artistic expression, form in structure and presentation. The novelists wanted to write more on the objective, deeper level and focused on social realism. In fact, the novel writing was the social mirror of the postindependence era. In addition to it, a sense of romanticism in the Meeteilon novel was also a pleasant flavour. Therefore, the novels of post-independence era were blend of romance and the reality of life.

The pioneer Meeteilon novelists of post independence era were good enough to sketch Manipur society in a tremendous way. R.K.Shitaljit (1913-2008) was an idealist. All his novels – "Ima (1947)" (Mother), "Rohini (1948)", and "Nungshi Wakheiba(1951)" show the value of chastity, nobleheartedness, sacrifice, etc. After Shitaljit, came Ram Singh Leitongbam with his "Jat Onba (1954)" (lit. Transformation of caste). In his novel, he expressed the current and changing social practices in the Manipuri Meetei society in the post independence Manipur. A boy and a girl in the novel belong to families that are not socially permitted to enter into marital relations. They flee to the hills where there is no such a social restriction. Then, Ram Singh wrote another novel "Khangani Poloida(1963)" (lit. The last one will speak) as one of the best social experiment writings.

In the post-war period, Hijam Guno Singh was also one of the famous novelists in Manipur. Some of his novels—"Khudol (1964)" (lit. Gift), "Aroiba Paodam,(1965)" (lit. The last report), and "Laman, (1958)" (Indebt) were popular for his romantic essence associated with the realities of life. In "Bir Tikendrajit Road (1995, 3rd Edn.)", and "Ipam Meihoure (2002 1st Edn)", he expressed the complexities of modern life, the complex human relationship and the lost of moral ethics. Khumanthem Ibohal (1925), Th. Birchand, A. Chiteshwar Sharma, E. Sonamani, T. Ibomcha, Indrakumar Thiyam, etc. were some of the novelists who enriched the literature of post independence Manipur dealing with many social issues.

Pacha Meitei (1943-1990), brought a new trend in Manipuri novel. His novels— "Na Tathiba Ahal Ama (1969)", "Imphal Amasung Magi Ising Nungsitki Phibam(1971)", "Hajj (1971)", "Anouba Pao Ama (1973)", "Pigi Wari (1975)", "Lamdram Asida Eibu Khangba Amatangdi Thorakpa Phei (1976)", "Kalimai Mamangda Laibak Katpasu Yaowi Kattabasu Yaowi (1991)", "Meeoibagi Wakat (1996)", "Hayat Begam (1967)" etc. were famous for touching the reader's sentiments, the

downfall and corrupted feelings of contemporary society with bold experimentation in form, style and diction. During this time many novelists were begun to write in the same trend. Some of them are- B.M. Maisnamba, Arambam Biren, M. Borkeina, E. Dinamani Singh respectively.

BM Maisnamba (1946b.) is a writer who believes in the purity and the power of literature. As a writer he has the commitment to ameliorate the flaws and the loopholes of the society through the power of literature. The majority of his novels are structured into the frame of traditional writing. Some of his well known novels are- “Atithi Amagi Ahing (1978)” (lit. The Night of a Guest), “Sorarengi Machanupi (1980)” (lit. The daughter of Heaven), “Ahinggi Nupi' (1989)” (The Lady of Nights) , “Kangla Diary' (1999)” , “Imashi Nurabi (2004)”, etc.

Arambam Biren's (1947b) novels in social themes are “Padamini (1981)”, “Imung Amagi Wari (1994)” (lit. The Story of a Family), “Amrita (1989)”, “Ithil (1991)”(lit. The Instinct), “Punshigi Marudhyan (1992)” (lit. The Marudyan of Life), “Mangkhraha Lambi (1995)” (lit. The Lost Path).M. Borkeina's (1958b), “Singareigee Leikada)”(lit. In the Petals of Singarei), “Meiri”(lit. The Flame), “Leikangla (2006)” (lit. The Desert), “Nakenthagee Yenning” (lit. The Buds of the Autumn), etc. Elangbam Dinamani Singh's (1940b.), "Emeisuni Tourasuni Hang Hang (1983)", “Shangaishel (1997)”, “Lanjao Macha Achouba Sandhi (1998)”(lit. Small War but Big Treaty), “Nang Ei Amatani (2012)” (lit. You and I are the One) are worth mention in this period.

Three women writers of profound influence, Thoibi Devi (1920-1996), Khaidem Pramodini (1924-2006) and Maharajkumari Binodini (1922-2011)brought the wave of feminism in Meeteilon literature in the Post independence Manipur. Thoibi Devi and Maharajkumari Binodini were the two pioneer women novelists of Manipur. Thoibi Devi wrote four novels- “Kaina Echou (1957)”, “Radha (1965)”, “Nungshi Eechel (1967)”, “Chingda Satpi Eengellei (1979)”, “Lamja (1979)”. She writes in simple diction; the plot and characterization of the novel are simple. Thoibi Devi's novels portrays women of almost perfect personality, the educated, rational viewpoint mixed with traditional values, the women who could object to the social norms and dare to go their ways, the women who could dedicate themselves in the cause of humanity. M.K. Binodini Devi's novel “Bor Saheb Ongbi Sanatombi (1976)” is focused on the life of a woman in the royal family. The novel depicts the splendour of the royal court, the cultural life of the people, the romantic life between Sanatombi and Mr. Maxwell, the first British political Agent of Manipur. Binodini's novels are full of sobriety mixed with hilarity, which could charm the readers.

Conclusion

The novels and short stories of post-independent Manipuri literature, in a real sense are blended with the essence of early Manipuri literature. The contents of ancient myths, religion, social issues, conflicts, war, romance, folk tales, rituals, superstitions, ancient narratives, modern contexts, symbolism and supernatural elements were all reflected in the novels and short stories. Like other Indian languages, the writing of Meeteilon novels and short stories take the model of Sanskrit literature. In the course of time Bengali, Marathi, Telugu, and Hindi literature influence Meeteilon literature after the World war-II. At the later stage, Meeteilon literature adopted the techniques of world literature and developed of its own style. This study narrates briefly, how the short stories

and novels in post-Independence Meeteilon literature grow and how the theme, style, narrative techniques, symbolism and social structure are reflected in the writings of those writers.

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Pena Phamshak

A Perspective On The Performance Of Manipuri Oral Epic “Khamba Thoibi”

Dr Mayanglambam Sadananda Singh

The narrative culture of Manipur is enriched by the presence of Khamba Thoibi oral epic. The epic centres round the romantic affair of Khamba and Thoibi. Khamba, the hero of the epic is an orphan looked after by his sister Khamnu. Their childhood days had been entrenched with indigence, humiliations and sufferings. In his period of adolescent Khamba met Thoibi, a princess of unparalleled beauty in the kingdom Moirang. Their meeting had been solidified into true love. However, by the resentment of Nongban the villain by name who is the son of a nobleman put over tribulations. Nongban attempted many times to kill Khamba in several occasions, by making Khamba to catch a giant bull which has the supernatural power, again in a competition of foot race and in the ritual festival of arrow shooting (*Ukai kappa*). However, Nongban fails to translate his pursuit into action. Subsequently, Nongban persuades Chingkhua Naha Telheiba the father of Thoibi by his wily discourse. This led to the attempt of killing Khamba, tied to the elephant foot and dragged however, due to the intervention of lord Thangjing, Khamba was saved by Thoibi. By the judgement of royal court Nongban and Thoibi's father were imprisoned for three months. Thoibi was exiled to Kabo for three months as she rejected her father's order to get married with Nongban. After the completion of three months exile the verdict of Lord Thangjing came out, a man eating tiger appeared in Phubala and killed a lady. The lady's father requested the king to kill the tiger. The king decided that the man who could kill the tiger would be the groom of the princess Thoibi. In this trial Nongban was defeated and Khamba killed the tiger. Finally, Khamba and Thoibi got married; however an error judgement of Thoibi their earthly existence was come to an end.

The epic is embedded in both the landscape and cultural memory of the people. The process of transmission takes many forms: verbal forms like *Pena*, *Khongjom Parva*, *Khunung Ishei*, storytelling, folk plays, books, and more recently radio, television, films, and audio cassettes, internet, and nonverbal forms like dance, painting, sculpture, and so on. For hundreds of years the role of the *Pena Phamshak* has been of prime importance in this transmission.

Brief history and convention of *Pena* Tradition:

Pena is considered the earliest known musical instrument of the Meities of Manipur. It is a bowing-stringed instrument through the accompaniment of which different narratives, hymns, prayers, chants and various songs are sung. It is believed that the god “Ashiba” later known as Sanamahi- the household god of the Meities used

this musical instrument for the first time. Again it was played by lord Thangjing, the progenitor of Moirang on the occasion when the lord Pakhangba came to Kangleiapak at the end of his sojourn in Moirang. The first man who played this musical instrument was Nahaba Moirengchamba. The information about these is found in a manuscript called “Pena Meihoubarol”.

The very term *Pena* stands not only for the musical instrument but the style of singing also. On the basis of the songs and performance contexts, *Pena* is divided into two kinds; they are *Lairol* and *Pena Phamshak*. *Lairol* is a kind of song which sung in honour of gods and goddesses. While the *Pena Phamshak* concentrates on Meitei’s myths and legends which includes the legends of Moirang, more especially the Manipuri oral epic Khamba Thoibi. Khamba Thoibi thus has become very crucial in *Pena Phamshak* from the time of King Chandrakirti (1850-1886 AD). *Lairol* comprises *Yakeirol*, *Naoshumlon*, *Phamang thougal*, *Lamyin*, *Anoirol* (poetics of dance), *nongarol*, *Ikourol*, *pamsarol*, *yumsharol* and so on. Of these *Yakeirol* and *Naoshumlon* were also sung in royal bedchamber, the later to lull the king to sleep and the first to wake him up. Apart from these whenever the king went for an outing when there was a religious procession, *Pena* singers had to accompany him. This form of *Pena* is called *Lamin Pena*.

In August, 1874, king Chandrakirti made a trip to silchar to attend the famous conference with the viceroy of India. Historically this trip is known as Jilla Darbar. The king was accompanied by a royal *Pena* singer Chanamba Bapu Hanjaba who all along the way went on singing *Pena* song. Since the journey was too long and his songs were not enough to cover it and he begged the permission of the king to sing the story of Khamba Thoibi. With the consent of the king he sang some portions of the narrative. After on their returned from Silchar the singers of the time started attuning the Khamba Thoibi narrative to *Pena*. Subsequently the narrative could reach the scale of an epic with the performative and the innovative skills of *Pena* singers.

Performance of *Pena singer* which concentrates on the *Khamba Thoibi* stories follows a number of general conventions. To begin with, there is no any particular time or place restricted for conducting a performance. On any day or days, the performances may be organized. However, the events relating to the *rites de passage*, religious and seasonal festivals, social and communal gatherings are associated with the *Pena Phamshak*. In each event, there are some pre-performance rites which have to be conducted both by the organizer of the performance event and the performer. There is a widespread mobility of the performers throughout the Meitei villages of Manipur. This however, does not mean that the performer comes to the villages and performs, entertain, and earn money. A performance is the outcome of a formal invitation by a responsible person. The invitation is mandatory. Without such an invitation the performer may not initiate a performance. Until the 1980s it was prevalent that the invitation was sent on three pieces of betel nut and one betel leaf

placed on a banana leaf made in round shape which is known as *Pana Tanga*. This is no more in practice today, ten rupees' note is sent instead. The date, place and the fees for the performance to be made are discussed at the time of the invitation. At present, depending upon the distance of the place the fees for the performance ranges from Rupees three thousand to five thousand. The performance sessions, delivered by formally invited singer, are several days long and are generally held in the evening.

A performance has certain laws of its own. As the epic is very long the person or family or audience, according to taste, chooses an episode or episodes to be performed. The choice of the narrative parts rests with the one who invites the *Pena* singer, but even then the singer has a say in it. Each session normally lasts three to four hours.

The place of the performance is generally a *mandav* or the yard in front of a house or a *Shangoi* – a separate building enclosed on three sides with the open side facing the residence. In many cases the performer sits surrounded by the audience. Generally, only one lone performer is the master of the show. There are certain rituals to be performed by the singer before he proceeds to the performance. After these rituals are concluded the performer will take his seat. The entire narrative performance may be divided into six parts, they are:

- *Sheihou* (Invocation)
- *Ojabu Khurumjaba* (Prayer to the master)
- *Miyambu khurumjaba* (Prayer to the audience)
- *Warigi Langjilkangba* (Giving hints about the episode to be performed)
- *Wari Paring Taba* (Coming to the narrative episode)
- *Mikon Thagonba* (Prayer to the gods and the goddesses for peace and prosperity)

The singer is accompanied by two or three *Pena* players known as *khonbabgba*. He extends his repertoire by playing his musical instrument. A pillow is also placed on the left or right of his seat, which for the sake of emphasis he will beat many times while presenting his story. This very act will hold the attention of the audience and helps to increase the tempo of the narrative (and thus the focus of the audience) whenever there is particular point of emphasis, a small climax, a conflict, a crisis, etc. Moreover, musical rendering, the rise and fall of the voice in his song, acceleration and deceleration of speed that accompanies such visual methods make the narratives very exciting. As a means of verbal communication *Pena* singer is in part a physical act: he forms facial expressions as well as moving his head and arms. As the situation demands he will change his method of presenting his story as suits the purpose. While presenting a martial theme or creating a particular point of emphasis, he can stand on his knees and even kicks with his heel on his seat. During the course of the performance, the rapport between performer and the audience is intense and to a degree, interactive. They encourage the singer by giving a piece of cloth or currency

notes. Thus the performer can feel and understand the sentiment of the audience therefore he uses his skills and expertise to keep the audience interest.

Performance Strategies and Path of Composition:

Every creative artist has certain challenges that need to be addressed. In the context of this epic performance the performer's challenge is how to present a story that is already known to the audience. The art of telling the story is not necessarily in repetition but in improvisation. In this context what M. Mani Meitei has said may be recalled:

The success of a performance lies in the presentation of the story in an ever refreshing manner, by using rhetorical devices such as comparisons, similes, metaphors, innuendos, images, epithets, anecdotes, sayings and proverbs, hyperboles and litotes. (Kaushal, 2001: 252)

There are many versions of the Khamba Thoibi epic in writing. However, the singers are not intended to the book. They learned the narrative through oral tradition by listening to their gurus. When they learned the art of epic singing the teaching methods mainly concentrate on how to compose and visualize a narrative as living event into the perception of the audience. First of all, while learning the art, the primary focus lies in gathering the elements of the narrative and to learn presenting in variable manner on the tunes and rhythm of Pena. The storyline, standard descriptions of events, phrases, proverbs, riddles, similes, imageries, metaphors laments, epithets, etc. are learned to get by heart. Since these have been transmitted in oral tradition it is impossible maintain the exact wordings that their master taught them. Changes in the wording occur even though they keep the ideas, tunes, rhythm and the sentence structure. In addition to these, the learning process includes what they gathered from other popular singers' performance. Therefore, the process of composition of a narrative takes place during their performance. In this connection what A.B. Lord has said may be recalled:

Obviously, the moment of composition is the important one for such study. For the oral poet the moment of composition is the performance. (Lord, 1981: 13)

The primary locus of oral composition engaged in the performance of a particular epic is the singer's mind and consciousness. This can be described as a sort of archive in which all the traditional rules and elements reside. Such characteristics of performance text have been conceptualized by Finnish folklorist Lauri Honko as "mental text". "The basis of their renderings of same story is a mental text which keeps and develops in their memory. Mental text is not fixed in the same way as written text, yet it is easily recognizable as a particular story. It contains the storyline of the narrative in question, standard descriptions of event repeatable expression, phrases and formulas familiar from the performances of other singers, yet whole mental text

is the singer's making, i.e. individual, and cannot be transferred to another performer. Every singer must develop his/her own mental text of a particular story on the basis of hearing, learning and what may be called mental editing". (Honko, 2002: 4)

The narrative speech is replete with formulas, formulaic expressions and themes. In this regard Albert B. Lord writes:

By formula I mean "a group of words ... regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea" ... [By] formulaic expression I denote a line or half line constructed on the pattern of the formulas. By theme I refer to the repeated incidents and descriptive passages in the songs. (*Ibid*: 4)

The performance text of *Pena* singer has replete with the elements of formulaic composition. Some examples of formula from the Khamba Thoibi performance which may be mentioned are - Laglen Macha Ibemma, Nongban Atha Kongyanba, *Khuman Nongyai Khambaton, Kege Moirang Leibak, Moirang Ningthou puritlai, langoi sagol, tap, tam tam, phrang, sat sat* and so on. On the pattern of such words the sentences of the text are crafted and they may be studied under the lord's term, "formulaic expression". Few examples may be mentioned here - *Langlen macha Ibemma-na saba Jagoi yengbada mit kupkani kaokhre, Nongban Atha kongyanba-na macha ibemmagi dolaisi tap hekta pai, langoi sagol thourakpa uphul phrang houwi*. Moreover the standard description of event, lament, wrestling of Khamba and Nongban, gathering of people for watching an event, assemble of gods and goddesses in the sky, lament, prayer etc. may be analysed as examples of the "theme".¹

The narrative movement from one idea to another is marked by pauses, kinesics movements, musical renderings, beating the pillow, clapping etc. However, a change in the stanza is usually indicated by words, such as *Somdana Kamdouri* (what happens there), *ngashi lairen nongjada* (today), *nongma korou amada* (on a day) and so forth. He may project his personal feelings, share his knowledge on many subjects, and incorporate other folklore genres such as proverbs, riddles, anecdotes and jokes into the performance. These elements have no connection to the style of the narrative or to the plot, but form an important part of the telling session. From, the above discussion we may conclude that the Khamba Thoibi story favoured in *Pena Phamshak* are the thick corpuses created through performance in command of general conventions of oral epic.

Conclusion:

Over the past decades, various genres of folk literature have been involved as representatives of social and cultural harmony and pacific coexistence at political crossroads. Epic is one of the main genres which have been promoted by new patron,

¹ The examples of Albert B. Lord's terms are given from the performances of Pena Singer Sinam Achou which were taken place on 14th and 15th April, 2022 at the premises of the lord Laijingningthou temple of Thangmeiband Hijam Leikai, Imphal West District, Manipur.

presented in a variety of ways according to the intended audience and performance context. As we know epic has been a source of identity and cultural pride of a nation. Many communities in North East India today, are engaging in dynamic process of cultural revitalization. Epics have been a cultural marker created and employed to inspire people how to recreate the past and empower the present. Epics bridge crossroads of many kinds to connect the past traditions while also revealing fresh, creative adaptation in cultural productions. The legacy of spiritual wisdom and history of Manipuri culture and civilization are apparently demonstrated by Khamba Thoibi epic tradition. It is indeed the rich storehouse of traditional knowledge in which the collective memories of the people are entrenched. Having the power to transcend borders, time and space Khamba Thoibi Oral epic has been an ingredient part of Manipuri life style for centuries.

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Whispers of Ancestors: Folklore and Identity in Trans-Himalayan Narratives.

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Abstract

Folklore is verily the quintessence of any group of people. It defines them for it is their potentiality. The belief system, the cosmology, the foundational rituals, devices, songs and music transferred from generation to generation acts like a 'master commemorative narrative', an umbilical chord that nourishes and provides continuity to a people. Though very often we talk about a common 'folk kitty' that connects all humanity like the collective unconscious, we do find variations in the folk devices, rituals and practices. These variations are vital for they provide a distinction, an exceptionalism to the group which is a contributory to collective identity.

This paper strives to study the use of certain folk rituals in select works of three trans-Himalayan writers and further focus on how they segue into identity.

Keywords: Folklore, folk rituals, folksong, identity

Introduction

It is said that folklore's primordial nature makes it the fountain-head of creativity among other things. Thus a lot of folk material finds their way into contemporary literature either as principal background, a secondary factor or as an essential motive (Broddy 202). The primary characteristic of literature is its ability to record and preserve, as also propagate all that was hitherto confined to a people or space. This ability of literature presents it the opportunity to be a hand maiden to folklore by recording and preserving it in print. In doing so it ensures that all that folklore encapsulates gets preserved ensuring the continuance of the folk-life which entails the continuance of a folk and their distinct cultural identity. Folklore is often considered as a platform for holding high moral grounds which would have relevance to modern society too. By ensuring in print the continuance of all these aspects, literature acts as a repository of the treasures of the past, extending yeoman service to human civilization.

Hennig Cohen speaking from the vantage point of American literature says that, "folklore appears in literature in two ways: passively or actively, that is transcriptive or functionally. The passive is elementary and happens when a writer presents folk materials in its original state. It is mere recording or imitation of folklore. This type of folklore becomes lifeless when it is removed from the folk, whose creation it is, and put into print... that writers who are concerned with creating work of art rather than providing transcriptions from life use folklore functionally" (242). He goes on further to say that folklore has been made to advance the plot, to characterize, to provide structure, to explain and to raise questions about the nature of the society (243).

So literary works are also supposed to create free spaces where folklore is problematized and interrogated. This is also what Alan Dundes meant by the two steps of identification and interpretation as methodology of folkloristic studies (137).

It is perhaps pertinent here to go back to defining the basics. Folklore is closely related to culture which is defined by the anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor as "that complex whole which included knowledge, belief, art morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society"(Rurangwa 10). On the other hand MacEdward Leach defines folklore as, 'the generic term to designate the customs, beliefs, traditions, tales, magical practices, proverbs, songs etc; in short the accumulated knowledge of a homogeneous unsophisticated people"(Rurangwa 9). Folklore is the oral part of and is set in the culture of the people and reflects it. It follows the common criterion that of oral means of transmission. Thus Dan Ben Amos in his *The Idea of Folklore: An Essay*, encapsulates it as, "attributes of traditionality, irrationality, and rurality; anonymity, communality and universality; primacy and oral circulation have consolidated in the idea of folklore" (Amos 11). In other words folklore is part of folk culture. However it was felt that the word 'Folk- culture' was not inclusive enough hence a new concept of 'Folk-life' was introduced by folklorists like Richard Dorson to define 'folk culture' in its entirety (Pasayat 2).

Folklore has been down the ages classified into various categories. It has been divided into oral literature, material culture, social folk custom and the performing folk arts. Among the functions of folklore William R. Bascom talks about its role in validating culture and maintaining the stability of a culture. Folklore seems to justify rituals and institutions to those who perform and

observe them, it teaches the younger generation manners, beliefs, customs and practices. Folklore operates within a given society and thus also ensures conformity to accepted cultural norms and its continuity thus maintaining stability of culture (348). In other terms 'folk-lore' has an important role in the creation, revival, maintenance and expression of cultural identity of a people, hence the need to preserve it and ensure its continuity.

The donne of folklore is that it is handed down from generation to generation through oral tradition. This aspect of its transmission is also its primary undoing, as folk traditions hazard getting lost in transition in a world reeling under rapid globalization. Its pertinent here to define ethnic group and ethnic identity before we proceed to show the connect between folklore and identity. Edward Spicer says that, "the essential feature of an identity system is an individual's belief in his personal affiliation with certain symbols and what they stand for". Max Webber then defines an ethnic group as "human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both". Defining ethnic identity George De Vos says that an ethnic group is a group of people who hold in common a set of traditions...that ethnic identity of a group of people consists of their subjective symbolic or emblematic use of any aspect of culture in order to differentiate themselves from other groups" (116). Spicer's 'symbols', Webber's 'customs' De Vos's 'tradition's' all but fall under the rubric of folklore (Dundes 240).

Examined under the critical lens will be Madhu Gurung's *The Keeper of Memories* (2016), Chetan Raj Shrestha's *An Open and Shut Case* (The Kings Harvest 2013) and Indra Bahadur Rai's *Jaar : A True Story* (Bipana Katipaya 1970). The intent is to expose how their works document and incorporate folklore, to advance the plot, to characterize, to provide structure, to explain and to raise questions about the nature of the society (Ihuezee 1). It is also to be seen how the employed folk-devices fashion a 'master commemorative narrative' that help to connect with identity.

A perfunctory introduction to the writers is a requirement, Madhu Gurung from Dehradun, has a novel and a collection of short stories to her credit. Chetan Raj Shrestha is a young architect from Gangtok, with two books to his credit and writes in English. Indra Bahadur Rai from Darjeeling, is considered a 'towering mountain in Indian Nepali literature'. An essayist, critic, short-story writer, academic and a language activist is how one knows him. His works are in Nepali but there have been translated into English and Bengali. All the works draw from the folklore of the Gorkha people. They are a conglomerate of the ancient Khas and Kirat tribes and inhabit the region from the north of India to the north-east of India.

The Keeper of Memories

Madhu Gurung skilfully opens and closes her narrative in *The Keeper of Memories* (2016) with the folk device of the ritual of *Kul Deuta* worship. It weaves itself across six generations of a Gorkha family of Raipur, Dehradun and across three centuries as part of the ancestral worship that they indulge as part of their folk belief system. It all begins around the second decade of the 1800's fresh after the Anglo-Gorkha war, with a 'bahun' priest telling the matriarch of the family Rann Maya that an unhappy spirit of one of their relatives was troubling her son Jang Bahadur.

“ if you want your family to have good health, peace and prosperity, pray to this spirit along with your ancestors, make him your kuldevta, the guiding spirit of the family, and all will be well”(Gurung 6).

Rann Maya knew it to be her brother –in-law Sher Bahadur who had died alone, feverish and thirsty in the Selaqui forest of the Khalanga Hills during the British assault on the Khalanga fort. From the same area where the widows of that war had cremated Sher Bahadur, she picked a grey stone, said her prayers and placed it in the attic of her house.

“... in the grey stone resided the spirit of their ancestors who would guide and protect them. The kuldevta would now live forever in the house of the eldest son, for generations to come”(Gurung 7). Every Buddha Purnima day, the kuldevta puja was carried out with all rituals the high point being the sacrifice of a *chirmire* rooster.

“ Everyone took turn bathing in the canal...Shivkala lit the earthen lamp and incense...passed the wish-fulfilling red hibiscus flowers...as they knelt down low on their haunches, bowing low,touching their foreheads to the mud floor, then softly making a wish and leaving a flower around the grey stone. Shivkala applied a bright red vermilion on the rooster’s beak and head and sprinkled some rice and water” (Gurung 25).

This rooster would be sacrificed by the eldest son with a single stroke with the khukuri from the Khalanga war, “holding the severed head and ran it over the grey stone just as his father had once done”. As Prasad the family alone ate the meat and then buried the bones, plates of sal, entrails and feathers in a dug out as was the custom.

Dharmashila bajai who becomes the matriarch after the passing away of her grand mother-in-law Rann Maya, continues with the folk ritual, always with the advice, “whenever you are lost, pray to the kuldevta, he will always answer your prayers...believe in him and he will always be there for you too...whatever you do don’t forget your family and don’t forget your kuldevta. It will guide you’. Even when she has passed on she appears to her beloved grandson Kharak with the same advice. Who would remember it and also how she smelt of petrichor. On the thirteenth day of her passing away her son Bhim Bahadur a soldier during WWII thought lost had come back. Aghast at the passing away of his mother, his sister-in-law gives him the stockings that she had knitted for him, “he knew with each stitch, she had thought of him and prayed to the kuldevta for his safety” (Gurung 125).

Bhim takes the place of Dharmashila bajai at the Raipur house and keeps it for the family to come back to. He also carries out the folk rituals of the kuldevta puja once in a year asking all his family members to converge from far and wide. He passes away on one of the days of kuldevta puja. His nephew a retired Burma front veteran take up the position as the family head, to carry on the folk ritual of kuldevta, keep a safe haven from the family to come back to. The narrative ends with his niece Purnima’s homecoming. She had made a promise to her late father Kharak that she would make a film on the Gorkhas. It had been eight months since the film opened to a grand acclaim and she had come back like her kaka to ‘answer the call of my roots’.

“Ranu led her up the stairs to the kuldevta’s shrine and sat down with Purnima facing the grey stone. A copper plate full of freshly plucked red hibiscus flowers sat before it. Purnima folded her

hands, her lips moving in a prayer as she bowed before the grey stone, thanking him for his benevolence and guidance. Slowly she lit the earthen lamp and incense picked up a red hibiscus and laid it on the stone bending slowly to touch her forehead to the ground. Her senses filled with the smell of the first shower on parched earth. Something touched her hair lightly and landed on the floor beside her as she rose. It was a red hibiscus from the kuldevta's altar" (Gurung 365). This moment of Ranu and Purnima is a re-enactment of a moment that had taken place with Dharmashila bajai and Kharak a generation earlier. Thus folk ritual of kuldevta has strung together six generations of these Raipur Gorkhas rising from 1814 and reaching out to Purnima in 2010 giving a continuity, 'one of the key criteria in defining identity' (Dundes 241).It identifies them both as a distinct family as also belonging to a distinct ethnic group.

An Open and Shut case

Now to Chetan Raj Shrestha's *An Open and Shut case*. The narrative of the novella is about a not so open and shut case about police brutality, murder, forced incest and suicide. The major characters are an East European tourist Straun, and the local folk, Puran constable and Dechen OC set against the perfect natural setting of Sikkim. All of them and the myriad plots are strung together like beads on a folk-song *Resham Firiri resham firiri*. Since a folk-song or folk music is a part of folk-lore and folk-life, it carries all its attributes and hence the importance in the cultural identity of a people and society. It is defined by Maud Karpeles as the, "product of a musical tradition that has been evolved through the process of oral transmission... with continuity which links the present with the past...has originated with an individual composer and has subsequently been absorbed into the unwritten living tradition of a community...it is the re-fashioning and re-creation of the music by the community that gives it its folk character"(Gelbart 2). A folk song is pure and honest, relates to everyone, is written about specific events or emotions in simple stanzas with the refrain repeating sometimes to the point of madness for the listener and yes, orally transmitted.

Ramanujan opines that, "folklore items, like many other sorts of items in cultural exchange, are autotelic, that is, they travel by themselves without any actual movement of populations. A proverb, a riddle, a joke, a story, a remedy, or a recipe travels every time it is told. It crosses linguistic boundaries any time it is told. Neighbouring languages and regions have, therefore, a large stock of shared folk materials"(97). In the narrative, Straun the East European tourist is holidaying in this part of the world. He had been forced to buy the CD of the folk-song and then had begun the 'adoration of *Resham Firiri*' across his trans-Himalayan odyssey.

Resham Firiri. Resham Firiri.

Oorera jauki , danra ma bhanjyang, Resham Firiri

(Silk fluttering in the wind, wish I could fly over hills and valleys).

The verse changes with different rhymes but remains connected by the thread of a love theme.

The attempts at translation are by the author of the article.

Ek nale bandook, dui nale bandook, mirga lai take ko

Mirga lai maile take ko hoina mayalai take ko
 (Single barrelled-double barrelled gun aiming at the deer
 Not the deer but my dear is in its sight)
 Sano ma sano gaai ko bacho, bheeraima Ram Ram
 Chodera jana sakina mailay, baru maya sangai jau.
 (small calf on the precipice O lord
 Can't leave my here, best go with my love)
 Himalchuli pallo patti dumsi lukne doolo
 Suna chaandi bhannu matra maya raicha thulo
 (A porcupines den beyond the peaks
 Gold and silver are namesake, love is greater).
 Resham Firiri. Resham Firiri
 Oorera jauki , danra ma bhanjyang, Resham Firiri (Shrestha 8).

The refrain and the theme remains intact else the folksong is given to sheer musicality through bewildering and disparate sets of rhyming lines.

The second verse of the folksong employs a proverb, *Bhir ma jaanay goru lai Raam Ram bhanna sakincha kadh ma halna sakinna* (one can pray for a cow that goes to a cliff but cant shoulder it) meaning one can but, only pray for a desperado. This only complicates matter further.

He played it out at all spaces, restaurants, taxis hotels the works. His desire to hear it in its founding environment as its creators carried on their daily toil was overwhelming.

“Straun was mystified by his infatuation with the song. He prided himself on his reason acquired so diligently from sombre bearded professors in his east European university. He dissected his symptoms. His obsession, which was like a calm fever, had nothing to do with the songs lyrical content for its meaning would always elude him. The instruments too were common; he knew their Western variations and had no great attachment to any of them. The only cause of the malady then could be the tune, which haunted him. It brimmed with longing. It spoke of the mountains to him. It was sad and sweet and mysterious” (Shrestha 5).

One can almost recall Wordsworth’s *Solitary Reaper* here for the girl too was singing a folk-song. This was to the lyric speaker incomprehensible yet hauntingly beautiful and beyond the realm of comparison.

In the shared taxi to Gangtok he asks for the song to be played and immediately there is a sense of bonhomie as every co-traveller recalls their association with the song and their childhood. He asks for a translation, but it only compounds his problems, first by the process of transliteration. A young co-traveller tried to help with a transliteration “tickle the chicken and give the cat chicken shit. Your love and my love came up in mid-way”, another passenger volunteered the meaning of the final verse, “on the mountain, opposite side porcupine hiding in a hole. But love is greater than gold or silver” (Shrestha 8). Secondly, the protean character of the folk song is further fortified by the employment of images, lines and words, more for rhythm and rhyme and seemed disconnected from the central theme defying a meaningful translation.

He was furious at the Nepalis for inventing such a melody only to subvert it with bad poetry and worse logic (Shrestha 8).

To make matters worse a young co passenger opines that the song was incomplete

There is more? Straun asked

Yes, anybody could add anything (Shrestha 9).

Along the way a policeman *Puran constable* hitches a ride and as he gets down at his destination he whistles the same tune. It was New Years Eve and also the night *Puran constable* was brutally murdered by his wife. This was a fatal culmination to years of physical abuse peppered with extra-marital affairs. Next morning the mother and daughter surrender at the police station and the little daughter *Maya* has to give the gory details of the night. Among other things she recalls her father teaching her a new song for the New Year- *Resham Firiri* before the daily fight between the parents took a tragic turn. The in-charge of the police station was *Dechen OC* who had been a co-traveller with *Straun* the previous day and had been ‘ambushed by the song’. Today she was ‘assaulted’ for the second time again

“...the song infested the roots of her life. She remembered her father singing it to the strumming of a guitar. She had then known it as a lullaby; her mother had sung it for *Jayanti*. It must have been after their second father had left, for she remembered her younger sister singing it back” (Shrestha 26).

But the song seems to cling along later it is also played at a game of housie where both *Straun* and *Dechen OC* are present. The officer orders the song to be changed and another pop song comes on *Baby girl Everytime I see you cry,*

... ..

Babygirl farkera timi aai deu

Straun was outraged...what kind of people would turn their backs on a rich musical inheritance and adopt such crassness?” (Shrestha 32).

Straun here had unknowingly found the answer to his question, the answer which in many ways would be a marker for the listeners of the ‘pop song’. This answer was to be found in the centuries old claims of the German philosopher, poet and critic *Johann Gottfried Herder* that,

“ the soul of a people was expressed in that people’s folk-songs”(Dundes 241).

Jaar: A True Story

Indra Bahadur Rai’s short story is about two *Gorkha* families of *Gurungs* and *Thapas* against a rural setting in some distant past and revolves entirely around two folk customs which are intertwined. It is about these two families coming together and getting tragically separated on account of two folk traditions one about kinship and the other about honour its desecration and the punitive action thereof. Both these folk traditions of *Miteri saino* and *Jaar pratha* are integral to the *Gorkha* folk-culture. We are witness to relationships of blood and marital relationships but there is a third variant in folk-culture that of ‘*miteri saino*’. In *miteri saino* two unrelated persons or families come together of their own accord and form a sacral pact of a family on account of their closeness. It is an inclusive folk tradition and supposed to last seven generations. This folk

custom of *miteri saino* is also taken into the world of nature. The folk very early in the life of a child initiate a *miteri saino* ritual with a *Chilaunay*(Schinaa Wallichia) and *Bhalayo*(Semecarpus Anacardium) species of trees. Human contact with these trees result in irritable itchy rashes, the initiation of the ritual is believed to provide immunity, hence the child can safely wander about in the forest.

The *Jaar pratha* has to do with family honour and its protection, its violation resulting in punitive measures resulting in death of the violator. If a married woman takes another lover, that lover is termed as 'Jaar'. On the discovery of such a relationship the wronged husband has the right to seek a redress. This can be in the form of an apology in front of the folk whereby the perpetrator accepts his mistake and performs penitence by crawling under the limbs of the husband. In a severe form of redress the wronged husband has the right to cut down the perpetrator. Thus the folk tradition ensures that sexual promiscuity is kept in check through punitive action.

The first half of the narrative deals with the custom of *Miteri saino*.

...A day came when damai came and blew their shanai. Tapari plates were stitched out of Banyan leaves. Maity and Devi were pronounced mitinis. For them it was as though the dasai festival itself had arrived. Devi presented Maity with a queen Victoria rupee coin...Maity gave as a token to her mitini a Mahendramalli coin and a muga-silk handkerchief. "From this day on the two of you are related as mitinis; do not address each other by name, you are one soul now." Thapa announced to the daughters.

"And we two," said Ghalay to Thapa, "on account of these girls, have now become one family. There will be no marriages between the two households; that would be incestuous. Any such culprit shall be ostracized. Every bereavement shall be mourned by both families. Our children are henceforth brothers and sisters."

"I'll honour our ancestral traditions." Thapa vowed, head held high before the assembled guests (Rai 49-50).

In a folk twist to the eternal story of love the bystander casualties of the folk custom are Rudraman the eldest son of the Gurung family and Thuli the eldest daughter of the Thapas. Their love that had just started to sprout unknown to their respective families was cut short by Rudraman's return to his battalion and the *Miteri* custom. The two families having now become avowed kins, Thuli is married off to Harshajit the son of a paternal aunt. After many moons Rudraman returns to claim Thuli, as he believes their relationship predates the *Miteri saino*. Thuli in turn tells him that her marriage was an act of volition and since they were now kin, all matters of heart, were matters past. The folk custom outweighs the pangs of her heart for the moment and she even tries to kill Rudraman seeing him as the desecrator of her marriage. Here they are discovered and the second folk custom of the *Jaar* is brought into play. Thuli was someones else's wife and Rudraman was now kin to her. Caught and brought before the village elders, Harshajit makes the charge.

"Thuli is a daughter of his sworn family- she is his sworn sister by relation. He has committed incest-he is a sinner! His caste must be taken away first!"(Rai 39).

When moonstruck Rudraman pleads guilty, the village elder disavows him then;

“a Gurung stepped up, snatched and broke the Rupa caste thread with its nine-knots; with his short knife he cut it into many pieces and trampled them into the dirt” (Rai 40).

Finally the village elder declares the punishment-

“You have one night to think it through. Crawl under his legs to whom you have done trespass. If you say that is unacceptable to you, then it will be here, tomorrow, at this very time. You have aggrieved his honour- you will be given a lead of ten paces to run. Harshajit will run you down and cut you down. If you run and earn your escape to another land-that is your good fortune. As the offender you may not strike him back. You must outrun death to live”(Rai 41-42).

In all three works it can be noticed that the writers have adeptly adopted and adapted folk culture into their works; the folk-belief of *kuldevta* in Madhu Gurungs historical-fiction *The Keeper of Memories*, the folk-song *Resham Firiri* in the novella, *An Open and Shut Case* by Chetan Raj Shrestha and the folk customs of *miteri saino* and *jaar pratha* in the short story *Jaar: A True Story* by Indra Bahadur Rai. This dovetailing of folk culture into the narrative has a twin effect; the elements of folk give character to the narrative, and the narrative in turn records and preserves the folk lore. Since literature is a contested space, by providing a space to folk-lore it is also brought under the ambit of interrogations and negotiations. Where in *Jaar*, the two folk-customs are not only preserved but also questioned. They can be questioned on the grounds of gender equality, from Thuli’s point of view. She is the silent voice, though she acts honourably, the custom allows no space to hear her part of the story. She becomes a contested space too where two men fight for possession relegating her to a commodity. Thuli’s response though is worth retelling. When Rudraman comes to reclaim her, “the *miteri* kinship came later; my relationship is older than...either you come with me or I will kill than man” (Rai 52), Thuli agrees to meet him covertly. But unawares she comes with a different intent, she strikes at him twice with a ‘*khukuri*’ screaming, “how dare you do this to me!” (Rai 57). It is a patriarchal system where only the male honour is taken into account but Thuli asserts her rights to honour and self respect.

The *miteri saino* custom can be questioned on its ability to foster a feeling of community or otherwise. However the good the intention it is also foisted on the innocent girls who are unawares about the ramifications of the custom.

In the case of Shrestha’s narrative the folk song is not only preserved and transmitted but its attributes are also called into question. The narrative defines it, shows how it is embedded in a given culture, recalls and recreates memories and suggests its importance covertly. The use of the folksong to string the lives of the various characters creates a ‘web of significance’. Further the shape-shifting folk song irritates the patronizing westerner Straun, hurts his pride in a Western upbringing, a Western liberal education, a university degree, “absurdity was supplanting mystique and this appalled him” (Shrestha 8), just as it has the same effect on the police officer and both want a different song to be played. The folksong seems to encroach upon the authoritative space of both characters and subvert it. According to Kirin Narayan this is possible due to folklore’s latent potential to critique and contest central order (189). This potential of the folklore to become a counter-discourse can also be seen in the folk believed ritual of *kuldevta* or ancestral worship.

The ancestor who first makes it to the altar situated in British India is but a warrior who fought against the same British at Khalanga. He was also said to have been cursed for womanising below ones clan status. The folk-belief in *kuldevta* gives a unifying strength to the practitioners; the folk ritual has a binding, cohesive effect too amongst the family members, the clan members and resonates beyond the spatial and temporal realm. The folk-song binds an East European traveller to a jeep full of local commuter, to a murder victim, and to the police officer conducting an inquiry into the murder, and similarly the *miteri-saino* and *Jaar pratha* binds the destinies of two different families. The binding also acts as a 'branding' providing distinction to the group.

Conclusion.

All four folkloric devices are practiced by a distinct ethnic group, the Gorkhas which again raised the dual issue of sameness and distinctiveness that identity entails. Edward Spicer states that "relationship between human individuals and selected cultural elements-the symbols-is the essential feature of a collective identity system...in addition to land and language symbols, common constituents of identity systems are music, dances and heroes" (798). Talking about these symbols that are essential to a collective identity Dundes posits that the afore mentioned 'common constituents of identity are but folklore and as such "clearly the most important sources for the articulation and perpetuation of a group's symbols".(240).

Juwen Zhang is also of the opinion that, "in the midst of confrontations between traditional values and modern concepts ...(people) begin to question who they are and how their culture has shaped their identity in the global context. They need to seek an identity that is uniquely theirs. They find it only in their traditions, but they also find so many unsatisfactory elements associated with these traditions. They then find the ...(literary) expression to challenge, to explore, to release, and to satisfy and amuse themselves" (274).

Literature as we have seen has become a space where we see the connections between folklore and identity of a people. As Richard Bauman has observed that, "folklore is a function of shared identity"(31-41). Dundes adds that the idea that folklore expresses a groups identity is not new(241).

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Beyond Minority: A Study of The Parsis of Kolkata and their Cultural Legacy

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Abstract

When we talk about a minority group the first idea that crosses our mind is deprivation. It is most often seen that a minority group in an area living along with other majorities always faces some sort of discrimination. This discrimination comes in many forms starting from social opportunities to identity crises. Sometimes this crisis also arises from low economic development, low standards of living, poverty and lack of education in the minority sections of society.

The Parsis of Kolkata are one of the smallest ethno-religious minority groups. Their condition and standards of living are the opposite of what we conceptualize when we talk about a minority group.

My present paper attempts to discuss the social and cultural status of the Parsis of Kolkata and to study their historical account to describe their role as a citizen of Kolkata. I will also try to break the stereotype concept of minorities taking reference to the Parsis of Kolkata who are socially and culturally securing a noticeable position in the social picture.

Keywords: Parsis, Kolkata minorities, minority groups, ethno-religious community

Introduction

India can be termed a multicultural nation (India's culture: A diversified country, n.d), with a total population of 121 crores. India consists of diverse cultures. Multiculturalism can be defined as "the state of co-existence of diverse cultures. Cultures include racial, religious, linguistic, etc. which may have differences and distinctions in customary behaviors, cultural assumptions and values, thinking patterns and communicative styles". (KV, n.d)

The term 'Minority' can be defined in several ways. The constitution of India has used the word 'Minority' in Articles 20 to 30 and 350A to 350B, but it does not define it. (Kyndian, 2016). The Oxford English dictionary defines 'minority' as a smaller group representing less than half of the whole or predominant population. The United Nations Sub-Commission on Protection of Minorities defines a minority as "a group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a state which possesses and wishes to preserve stable ethnic, religious or linguistic traditions".(Kyndian.2016)

"The National Commission of Minorities Act 1992 in section 2(C) of the act defined a minority as a community notified as such by the Central Government. Acting under the provision on October 23, 1993, the Central Government notified the Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, and Parsi communities as a minority" (Kyndian, 2016).

Sociologist Louis Wirth defined minority groups as "any group of people who because of their physical or cultural characteristics are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination". (Racial, Ethnic and Minority Groups, n.d)

Anthropologists Charles Wagely and Marvin Harris have pointed out five major characteristics of a minority group. While defining minorities they state that the minorities face unequal treatment and less power in their own lives, they have distinguishing physical and cultural traits, skin color or language, a transmittance of membership by descent rules, their awareness of subordination and lastly high rates of endogamy. (Schuerkens, n.d)

Keeping in mind the various definitions of 'Minority' given by different scholars we can see in the Indian context that India also consists of numerous minority religious communities, out of which the prominent ones are 14.2% Muslims, followed by 2.3% Christians, 1.7% Sikhs, 0.7% Buddhists and Jains 0.4%. The other religions consist of 0.9% and the religions which are not stated are 0.1%. (Census, 2011)

Kolkata is a very unique and colorful city in eastern India. It is the capital city of West Bengal and is governed by the municipal corporation which comes under the Kolkata Metropolitan region. The provisional reports of the census 2011 state that the population of Kolkata is 4,496,694 out of which 76.51% population consists of Hindus followed by 20.60% Muslims, 0.88% Christians. 0.47% Jains, 0.31% Sikh, 0.11% Buddhists and 0.03% constitutes other religions followed by 1.09% religion not stated in the list. Several other small minority communities are coexisting with the mainstream population of Kolkata. They are the Parsis, Chinese, Tamils, Nepalis, Telugu, Oriyas, Gujarati, Anglo-Indian, Greeks, Armenians, Tibetans, Konkani, Maharastrians, Jews and Punjabis. (World population review, n.d) If we look into these communities carefully we will notice that these communities living in Kolkata are not dispersed rather they can be found in

several pockets within the city. A good amount of community members living together in a particular defined geographical pocket has benefitted them in maintaining their homogeneity. In this context, a very fascinating community of Kolkata is the Parsis, spread evenly in the central Kolkata region. They are a very small ethno-religious minority community in Kolkata. They are so few in number that they have not even managed to receive a separate mention in the census reports of the Kolkata population, and are kept under the category of "Other Religions". According to Das (2018), there are approximately 417 Parsees in Kolkata. Despite being so few in number the Parsis have a very prominent role in the historical sketch of Kolkata, they have been the residents of Kolkata since the 17th century. The Parsis of Kolkata have a rich and significant history. But standing in the present day, this dwindling community of Kolkata is facing many challenges and one among the most difficult challenges is their rapid population decline. The present paper attempts to explore the social and cultural status of the Parsis and also to study their historical account to describe their role as a citizen of British colonial Calcutta and present-day Kolkata. Further, the present paper will try to shed light on the challenges faced by the Parsis of Kolkata as an ethno religious minority community.

Methodology

The present study has relied majorly on primary data collected through interviews and group discussions. Purposive sampling technique was employed to identify participants from the Parsi community of Kolkata. In order to gather qualitative insights interviews were carried out with several important members of the Kolkata Parsi community. While primary data forms the core of this research, secondary data from several books and articles and research papers has been used to supplement the primary findings to provide a broader context. The Parsi community of Kolkata are dispersed unevenly across several areas of central Kolkata, therefore the area of the study was not confined to a particular locality, but scattered in different parts of central Kolkata neighbourhoods, including Park street, Chandni Chowk, Ganesh Chandra Avenue, Taltala ,Maidan, Esplanade etc to name a few.

Brief Historical Sketch Of The Parsis

Zoroastrianism is the oldest monotheistic prophetic religion in the world. Its origin can be traced to Central Asia between the 15th and 13th centuries BCE. The total population of the Zoroastrians community is roughly between 145000 and 17500. 70% of the Zoroastrians are located in India where they are known as the Parsis, 20% can be found in Iran and the rest 105 are dispersed in America and Europe. (Braun, n.d). Ahura Mazda is the one supreme god in the Zoroastrian religion. (Hintze, 2013)

The founder of Zoroastrianism was Prophet Zarathustra. Zarathustra was born in an era of violence; he grew up questioning the concept of goodness and evilness. According to a local folk belief, at the age of thirty near a river, he met an angel called Vohumana. The angel asked him who he was and what was the most important thing for him. Zarathustra responded by saying that he wants everyone in the world to be righteous, pure and wise. Lord Ahura Mazda was

pleased by his answer and he granted Zarathustra his vision with all his Archangels. It is from them Zarathustra learned the good principles of life which later helped him to found Zoroastrianism. (Cristian, 2017)

The moral philosophy of the Zoroastrian faith can be summed up in three expressive words: 'HUMANTA' (good thoughts), 'HUKHTA'(good words) and 'HVARSHTA'(good deeds). (Cranmer & Kapadia, 1905).

Zoroastrianism originated in Iran (earlier known as Persia). The Persian Empire was vast and mighty and its territory extended far and wide to the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf towards the south, the Caspian Sea and Caucasian mountains towards the north, the desert of Libya and Mediterranean towards the west and the river Indus and Oxus towards the east. The Zoroastrians were the master class and they are still known as the most powerful rulers in history. The splendor and prosperity of the Persian Empire attracted the Arabs to attack and control it. During the 7th century AD the Arabs under the leadership of Caliph Omar invaded the Persian province and overtook it. The Arabs overtook the Persian Empire and established their control and they forced the Persians to embrace Islam. Through their barbaric and cruel means, almost the whole of Persia was forced to convert to Islam but many among these people were unable to bear the pain of abandoning Zoroastrianism and escaped to the mountains leaving their homes behind. They lived there for almost 100 years, freely practicing their religion but their happiness was short-lived and the Arabs discovered their refuge, they were harassed and forced to leave the mountains. Later the Persians sailed towards the Indian Sub-Continent with a hope of a peaceful life and also the freedom to follow their religious faith. According to the *Kissa-I-Sanjan*, these Persian refugees first arrived at the port of Diew, a small island in the Gulf of Cambay, they stayed there for nineteen years and then from there they sailed towards Gujarat. During their journey, a harsh storm struck their ships but when it stopped they were swiftly carried to Sanjan, they reached Sanjan in AD 717. (Framjee, 1858)

Sanjan was a small Hindu kingdom located in Gujarat and was ruled by King Jadao Rana. (ibid) The Zoroastrians of Persia who sailed to India came to be known as the Parsi. The name 'Parsi' is derived from 'Fars', the Persian Province where they lived. (Kulke,1975)

There is a very famous fable regarding the Parsis first meeting with the king, the story is famous among the present-day Parsis as "Sugar in Milk".

According to the story, when the Parsis reached Sanjan, they sent their head Priest to meet the Hindu King Jadao Rana; the Priest requested the king to give refuge to them in Sanjan. The king refused to accept them by saying that the kingdom is already very populated, but the Priest insisted on the king. To make him understand, the King sends for a bowl of milk filled up to the brim and tells him that the present condition of his kingdom is like the bowl full of milk already populated and there is no space for them. In answer to that the Parsi Priest took a spoonful of sugar and dissolved it into the bowl of milk and said that we will be like "sugar in milk". The king was very impressed with his common sense and accepted them in his kingdom. (Marina Engineer, personal communication, August 27, 2017).

The king allowed them to stay with few conditions and asked them to adhere to them if they wished to stay in Sanjan. The conditions put forward to them were that the Parsi priest will have to explain their religion to the king, they have to accept Gujarati as their vernacular language, the women had to leave their traditional dress (Garb) and will have to wear sari, they have to surrender all their weapons and they have to organize their weddings only at night. By accepting all the conditions the Parsis proved their loyalty towards the king and also proved their adaptive nature. Their adaptive nature is the only reason that even being a minority in India they are surviving for 1200 years. (Kulke, 1975)

Sanjan was a vibrant trading post of that era and it has trade routes with Persia, China and Western Asia. The Parsis engaged themselves in trading activities and lived peacefully for a few hundred years in Sanjan. Roughly between the 16th and 17th centuries, Surat became a major trading place for the British, the Mughals and the Portuguese, this provided trade opportunities to the Parsis. They started coming and settling down in Surat and nearby areas. They looked for job opportunities and it was during that period when the Parsis were appointed as the mediators between the Mughals and the British and Portuguese traders. This particular job role perfectly suited them because they were fluent in the Persian language as it was the official language of the Mughal courts, and the Parsis were also not bound by the Hindu religious concept of 'Purity and Pollution', thus they could easily mix with the British and the Portuguese. They played a significant role as 'middlemen', and their association with the European traders resulted in their arrival to the port city of Bombay. (Roy & Roy, 2011)

Dorabji Nanabhoy was the first Parsi to arrive in Bombay. By the time the British took control over Bombay and established the East India Company, it became a focal point of job opportunities for the Parsis. (Nambiar, 2016). They worked in Bombay as excellent brokers, traders, ship-builders etc. and later to expand the reach of their trade and commerce and to get more exposure in business they dispersed to various parts of India. (Roy & Roy, 2011)

From the late 18th century Parsi businessmen started coming to Calcutta for trade and commerce. And since then the Parsis became an integral part in the history of Calcutta. (Bondyopadhyay, 2017)

Parsis Of The British Colonial Calcutta

Bengal has been the gateway to the eastern part of the Indian subcontinent. The geographical advantage made Bengal a commercial hub that connected the sea to the Silk route. Bengal has a strong naval base and the land was full of riches. Mirza Muhammed Siraj ud-Daulah was the last nawab of Bengal, during his rule he passed a license to the British to buy muslin and jute from Bengal. The British took advantage of this opportunity and for their benefit manipulated the ministers of Siraj ud-Daulah and bribed them to stand against him. Siraj ud-Daulah was betrayed by his ally Mir Jafar and in 1757 he lost the battle of Plassey. Thus Bengal lost itself to the hands of the British. As they took Bengal under their control and gradually the city of Calcutta became the capital of the British East India Company until 1919. (History of Bengal: from Stone Age to Trinamool congress, 2016)

The Parsis took interest in Calcutta when it became the economic center of British Bengal during the late 18th century. They arrived in Bengal to explore new business and commercial

opportunities. (Patel, n.d). 18th-century Bengal became the center of the Parsi settlement. (Parsi communities in Calcutta, n.d)

The first Parsi to arrive in Calcutta was Dadabhai Behramji Banaji in 1788. He came as a merchant on behalf of his family business in Bombay. He established a friendship with the political elites of Bengal as well as with British officials. One of his close friends was John Cartier who served as the governor of Bengal from 1769 to 1772. Apart from him, here are a few other records which claim the Parsi presence in Bengal during that time. Dorabji Rustamji Patel conducted business in Calcutta, Rangoon, China and Pegu. Jamshedji Kukaji Majaina also settled in Calcutta, he worked as a Dalal for a British firm. Rustamji Cowasji Banaji sailed to Calcutta for the purpose of family trade and business. After doing several trips to Ceylon and China, he settled permanently in Calcutta in 1819. Another prominent Parsi gentleman who changed the whole picture of British Calcutta was Dhanjibhai Byramji Mehta. He first came here as an employee but in 1868 he set up his own business. In the year 1860, he relocated his family to Calcutta along with his young son R.D Mehta who later became one of the prominent figures of Bengal. (Patel,n.d). Later in 1902 Jamshedji Framjee Madan shifted to Calcutta from Bombay and established the Elphinstone Bioscope Company. (The first theater in India was Elphinstone Palace in Calcutta, n.d)

The early Calcutta Parsis were rich businessmen who used Calcutta as a link for trade with the Far East, mainly Burma and China. (Patel, n.d). By the year 1911, Calcutta became the base of British India. The Eastern Triangular Trade between India, East Asia and Europe had its base in Calcutta. The Parsi sets found an important role in this triangular trade. They played the role of supply agents, translators and brokers. (Parsi communities in Calcutta, n.d)

Rustamji Cowasji Banaji along with one of his British merchant friends Robert Turner established an independent firm. Rustamji and Sons by the year 1834 established the first insurance company in India 'Sun-life'. Rustamji also invested his money in shipbuilding. In 1836 Rustamji jointly with four British merchants purchased the vast docks in Kidderpore where he established the Calcutta Docking Company. He owned nearly 27 to 40 ships which he used for his China trade. These ships also proved very important for the British. The British government used these vessels in the first Opium War. They also depended on the Calcutta Docking Company for ship repair. Rustamji's achievements were not just limited to business and trade but his political success is also praiseworthy. In the year 1835, he became one of the only twelve Indians in Calcutta appointed by the British government as Justices of the Peace. In 1837 he was also elected as a member of the city's Asiatic Society. He was a very close friend of Dwarkanath Tagore. Rustamji and Dwarkanath Tagore were the only Indians involved in the establishment of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce. Rustamji's close friendship with the Bengali elites gained him the nickname "Rustam Babu". He was also a member of several civic bodies and committees. For proper sanitation and ample water supply, he constructed a canal in northern Calcutta and also dug several tanks, all at his own expense. Rustamji was among the first Parsi who broke the social barriers and taboos regarding women's traveling in long voyages and brought his family women folks to Calcutta. He also encouraged his Parsi fellow traders and businessmen to bring their families to Calcutta thus transforming Calcutta from a mere trading post to a hub of Parsi residential settlement. Rustamji

also established the first-ever Parsi Fire temple of Calcutta which is located on Ezra Street. (Patel, n.d).

R.D. Mehta was the son of Dhanjibhai Byramji Mehta, he first joined an Armenian firm but later he shifted to his father's company. R.D. Mehta constructed the Empress Cotton Mills in Serampore. The mill turned out to be a great success. He further diversified his industry in Jute also. He also took an active part in Calcutta's civic and political affairs. He was the first Persian consul and Sheriff of Calcutta. He was also a member of the Asiatic Society and Vice President of the India Association. R.D. Mehta also served as the Municipal Chairman of Maniktala and was also involved in India's freedom movement. R.D Mehta was in constant touch with Dadabhai Naoroji during the nationalist movement and he served as an important link between Dadabhai Naoroji and the Bengali Intelligentsia. (ibid)

In 1822 Nowroji Sorabji Umrigar erected the Dakhma or The Tower of Silence, it served as the final resting place of the Parsis and one of the major pillars of the Zoroastrian faith. Even today the Dakhma is used by the Parsis of Kolkata in their funerals and final death rites. (Parsi communities in Calcutta, n.d)

The second Parsi Fire Temple was constructed in 1912. The Mehta family and other Parsis together constructed the temple situated at 91 Metcalf Street in honor of Dhanjibhai Byramji Mehta. This temple is still actively used by the Parsis of Kolkata. (ibid)

Jamshedji Framji Madan was one of the pioneers of film production in India. He was the distributor and producer of films and plays. In 1902 he moved to Calcutta from Bombay and established the Elphinstone Bioscope Company, he started producing silent movies there. In 1917 he produced Satyawadi Raja Harishchandra which was one of the first feature films to be shot in Calcutta. In 1919 Elphinstone Bioscope Company merged with the Madan theaters and together they adapted Bengali literature's most popular works on stage. Chaplin Cinema was Calcutta's oldest single-screen movie theater. This cinema hall was opened by Jamshedji Framji Madan in 1907, it was known as the Elphinstone Picture Palace. (The first theater in India was Elphinstone Palace in Calcutta, n.d)

The Parsis in several ways worked for the welfare and benefit of Calcutta. They consistently gave out donations and participated in civic affairs. Through their generosity, the Parsi sets gained a reputation in Bengal as responsible philanthropic citizens. (Patel, n.d). They have contributed crores in charity and public welfare. An English journal quotes (as cited in Das,2010) " The vast contribution made by the leading businessman of Bombay Seth Jamshedji Jeejibhai towards the Bengal Famine Fund has put to shame many Bengali Baboos who are wealthier than him". (Das, 2010)

Parsis Of The Present Day Kolkata

The population of the Parsis of Kolkata in the present day has reduced to 433 in the year 2017.(Bondyopadhyay,2017). Another source quotes that there are just 417 Parsis left in Kolkata in 2018 (Das,2018). Out of the total population 60% of the Parsis of Kolkata are above the age of 70 years. (Bondyopadhyay,2017). In a survey conducted on March 31st 2019 Noshir S. Wadia,

CEO of the Zoroastrian Charity fund quotes that “Calcutta has just 405 Parsis out of which 150 of them are over the age of 70 and 238 over the age of 60”. (Bhattacharya,2019)

Noomi Mehta, the senior most trustee of the Religious and Charity Fund states “young people are migrating to other places as there aren’t enough jobs in Calcutta”. (Roy,2017). Due to the present job scenario in Kolkata, more and more youngsters of the Parsi community are moving to Canada, Australia and New Zealand and many more are shifting to other cities in India. Senior trustee and community member Mr Bahadur Postwala (as cited in Arzan) states that the Parsis reached Kolkata from Surat in the late 18th century; their rise here parallels the consolidation of British Power in eastern India and the rise of the city as the capital of British India. He further quotes “not many are aware of the Parsi community here. We need people to be aware about us in the country”.(Parsi Khabar,2017)

The Parsi community of Kolkata is scattered unevenly in several areas of central Kolkata, mainly Park street, 84 Lenin Sarani,60 Grant Lane,Chandni Chowk, Ganesh Chandra Avenue, Taltala ,Maidan, Esplanade , madan Mitra Lane,etc. (Bondyopadhyay, 2017).

The present day Parsis of Kolkata are living a very content and simple life. They work as accountants, wine merchants, caterers, musicians, school and college teachers they also work in the airlines, ad agencies etc. (Das, 2010)

At present there are very few Parsis left in Kolkata but this small ethno-religious minority community is a great example of unity and brotherhood. They are a close knit group in constant touch with each other. They are like a big extended family. The Calcutta Parsi club plays a vital role in maintaining their unity and togetherness. (Yasmin Daraius Panthaki, personal communication, August 27, 2017).

The Calcutta Parsi Club plays a vital role in maintaining the close bond among the Parsis of Kolkata. Every Saturday and Sunday they come together and spend their evenings in the Club. They chat, play games and spend quality time together.(ibid)

The club was established in 1908. It is situated in Guru Nanak Sarani (Mayo Road), Maidan, Kolkata-700069. This is one of the oldest and the largest clubs in the Maidan. (Das,2018)

The present president of the club Mrs Prochy N Mehta (primary respondent) states that the club plays a fundamental role in keeping the community members together. Various events and community based programmes are organized by the club which binds the members together.

The trustees of the club occasionally organize *Ghambars*, a form of get-together of the community people where free dinners are arranged for everyone in the club. These are plain community dinners where everyone meets, feast together and make merry. This is organized keeping in mind to strengthen the bonds among community members.(Manek Bilimoria, personal communication, August 5,2018). The club also organizes *Annual Parsi Bazar* where the ground is set up with stalls. The showcase of Parsi cuisine is done. Different types of Parsi Foods are sold there, starting from drinks, to savories, Parsi meals and many of the authentic Parsi dishes like the *Keema Khichdi*, *Dhansak*, *Patrani Macchi*, *Pork Vindaloo* etc. The sweet dishes include authentic Parsi sweets like *Dhakra*,*Tori*, *Khajur ni Ghari*,*Patrl* and *Chapatis*. This *Annual Bazaar* is organized every year, and not just Parsi, everyone from any community is welcomed in it. The Club also organizes

Annual Athletic meet, Tin and Bottle Tennis Tournament, Tennis Tournament, Football Tournament etc.

The Parsi Zoroastrian Association was founded in 1935 by Dr. D.N Wadia, C.H.M Rustomji and E.S Olpadvala. The association deals with all the community related matters. It works towards preserving the unity within the community. (Das, 2018)

The Calcutta Zoroastrian Stree Mandal (CZSM) which was set up in 1936 works towards the welfare of needy and poor Zoroastrian families. It provides them with free education, food and health facilities. But CZSM does not limit itself in working towards only underprivileged Parsis but it also extends its support to the deprived people of other communities. It provides educational aid to the girl children of S.O.S villages of West Bengal. It also sponsors for literacy programmes for adults and vocational and educational trainings of poor village girls. The CZSM offers donations to organizations working for the differently-abled people.(ibid).

Today the Parsis of Kolkata have kept the legacy of their ancestors alive by maintaining their prosperity and extending their generous hands towards the underprivileged of West Bengal. They do not limit their philanthropic nature within their community but also extend their helpful generous hands towards others as well, outside their community.

But standing in the present day The Parsis are subject to some serious challenges. Their community is shrinking rapidly and if this trend continues there will be a time when this community will have no trace of it in Kolkata.

Something equally disturbing and of great concern is the gradual tearing down of the Heritage buildings of The Parsi community. The buildings which hold many stories and tales, which are an integral part of our history, are today of insignificance. The first Parsi Fire temple also known as the *Agiary* was constructed in 1839 by Rustamji Cowasji banaji in Ezra Street. (Patel, n.d). This Fire Temple was listed as a Grade-I heritage building (Roy,2018) on 6th October 2007(Edulje,2015). The last person who owned the trustee rights of the temple was Cursetjee Manackjee Rustamjee who died on April 10 2018. He was the last descendent of the Banaji Families who owned the temple (Roy, 2018). The temple was shut down in 1980 as the trustees were unable to manage it. (Edulje, 2015). Since then the temple has been subject to illegal encroachments. The plot of the temple originally measured 1 Bigha 18 Cottahs, but gradually it had been encroached and occupied by local vendors. There used to be a library inside which was occupied in 1989. Cursetjee used to live inside the temple premises and on the day of his death an attempt was made by the encroachers to break into his room. Md. Islam Haque, a 63 years old man and companion of late Cursetjee states that he has written to the Chief Minister and several police officers about some people trying to break into Cursetjee's home but no action has been taken from their end. (Roy,2018).

Today the building is in ruins, it is in bad shape and condition but the government is doing nothing to restore it. It is even though being a heritage structure has been totally ignored by the government.(Edulje,2015). The present Parsi Fire temple located in Metcalf Street the Tower of Silence and other Parsi buildings are retained by great effort and are maintained by the donations from its own community members.(Kolkata's Parsi community on the wane, 2017)

Conclusion

The population of the Parsis of Kolkata in the present day has reduced to 433 in the year 2017. (Bondyopadhyay, 2017). Another source quotes that there are just 417 Parsis left in Kolkata in 2018 (Das, 2018). Out of the total population, 60% of the Parsis of Kolkata are above the age of 70 years. (Bondyopadhyay, 2017). In a survey conducted on March 31st 2019 Noshir S. Wadia, CEO of the Zoroastrian Charity fund quotes that "Calcutta has just 405 Parsis out of which 150 of them are over the age of 70 and 238 over the age of 60". (Bhattacharya, 2019)

Noomi Mehta, the senior trustee of the Religious and Charity Fund states "young people are migrating to other places as there aren't enough jobs in Calcutta". (Roy, 2017). Due to the present job scenario in Kolkata, more and more youngsters of the Parsi community are moving to Canada, Australia and New Zealand and many more are shifting to other cities in India. Senior trustee and community member Mr Bahadur Postwala (as cited in Arzan) states that the Parsis reached Kolkata from Surat in the late 18th century; their rise here parallels the consolidation of British Power in eastern India and the rise of the city as the capital of British India. He further quotes "not many are aware of the Parsi community here. We need people to be aware of us in the country". (Parsi Khabar,2017)

The Parsi community of Kolkata is scattered unevenly in several areas of central Kolkata, mainly Park street, 84 Lenin Sarani,60 Grant Lane, Chandni Chowk, Ganesh Chandra Avenue, Taltala, Maidan, Esplanade, Madan Mitra Lane, etc. (Bondyopadhyay, 2017).

The present-day Parsis of Kolkata are living a very content and simple life. They work as accountants, wine merchants, caterers, musicians, and school and college teachers. They also work in the airlines, ad agencies etc. (Das, 2010)

At present, there are very few Parsis left in Kolkata but this small ethno-religious minority community is a great example of unity and brotherhood. They are a close-knit group in constant touch with each other. They are like a big extended family. The Calcutta Parsi club plays a vital role in maintaining their unity and togetherness. (Yasmin Daraius Panthaki, personal communication, August 27, 2017).

The Calcutta Parsi Club plays a vital role in maintaining the close bond among the Parsis of Kolkata. Every Saturday and Sunday they come together to spend their evenings in the Club. They chat, play games and spend quality time together. (ibid)

The club was established in 1908. It is situated in Guru Nanak Sarani (Mayo Road), Maidan, Kolkata-700069. This is one of the oldest and largest clubs in the Maidan. (Das, 2018)

The present president of the club Mrs Prochy N Mehta (primary respondent) states that the club plays a fundamental role in keeping the community members together. Various events and community-based programmes are organized by the club which binds the members together.

The trustees of the club occasionally organize Ghambars, a form of get-together of the community people where free dinners are arranged for every one of the club. These are plain community dinners where everyone meets feasts together and makes merry. This is organized keeping in mind to strengthen the bonds among community members. (Manek Bilimoria, personal communication, August 5, 2018). The club also organizes an Annual Parsi Bazar where the ground is set up with

stalls. The showcase of Parsi cuisine is done. Different types of Parsi Foods are sold there, starting from drinks to savories, Parsi meals and many authentic Parsi dishes like the Keema Khichdi, Dhansak, Patrani Macchi, Pork Vindaloo etc. The sweet dishes include authentic Parsi sweets like Dhakra, Tori, Khajur ni Ghari, Patrel and Chapatis. This Annual Bazar is organized every year, and not just Parsi but everyone from any community is welcomed in it. The Club also organizes the Annual Athletic meet, Tin and Bottle Tennis Tournament, Tennis Tournament, Football Tournament etc.

The Parsi Zoroastrian Association was founded in 1935 by Dr D.N Wadia, C.H.M Rustomji and E.S Olpadvala. The association deals with all community-related matters. It works towards preserving unity within the community. (Das, 2018)

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Today the Parsis of Kolkata have kept the legacy of their ancestors alive by maintaining their prosperity and extending their generous hands towards the underprivileged of West Bengal. They do not limit their helping nature within their community but are also benefiting others.

But standing in the present day The Parsis are subject to some serious challenges. Their community is shrinking rapidly and if this trend continues there will be a time when this community will have no trace of it in Kolkata.

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LANGUAGE AND PEDAGOGY

Gender Bias in Tamil Nadu Primary Grade English Textbooks: An Analysis

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Abstract

In the 21st century, societal dynamics surrounding gender roles have evolved significantly, challenging traditional stereotypes and promoting inclusivity. This research conducts a critical analysis of primary-grade English textbooks used in Tamilnadu, India, to investigate the presence of gender bias. The study adopts a framework based on Amini and Birjandi (2012), which includes five categories: visibility, firstness, generic masculine constructions, sex-linked occupations, and activities. Qualitative content analysis methods are employed to assess how genders are portrayed in terms of visibility (representation), firstness (priority or prominence), use of generic masculine language, depiction of sex-linked occupations, and portrayal in various activities. The findings will contribute to understanding how educational resources influence gender perceptions and norms among young learners. Recommendations based on the research findings will be provided to enhance gender sensitivity and promote educational equity in primary education settings.

Keywords: Gender bias, textbook, Tamil Nadu, primary grade

Introduction

Gender bias in educational materials is a pervasive issue that significantly impacts students' perceptions, aspirations, and opportunities. As educational tools, textbooks serve as fundamental resources that shape young minds and convey societal values. In the context of Tamil Nadu, a state with a rich history of educational reforms and a commitment to cultural preservation, understanding the nature and extent of gender bias in textbooks becomes crucial for advancing educational equity and social justice.

Despite significant strides in promoting gender equality, gender bias remains embedded in many educational materials, subtly influencing students' attitudes and reinforcing stereotypical gender roles. Textbooks in Tamil Nadu, while reflecting the state's diverse cultural and historical contexts, also bear the responsibility of representing gender in a manner that fosters equality and respect. The impact of gender bias in textbooks extends beyond mere representation; it influences students' self-concept, career aspirations, and interactions within educational and social settings. For instance, the portrayal of women in secondary or less dynamic roles compared to men can diminish female students' self-esteem and restrict their perceptions of potential career paths. Conversely, male-centric depictions of prestigious or action-oriented roles can reinforce narrow and limiting views of gender roles among both male and female students.

This research paper aims to conduct a comprehensive analysis of gender bias in Tamil Nadu's Primary grade textbooks by examining visibility (representation), firstness (priority or prominence), use of generic masculine language, depiction of sex-linked occupations, and portrayal in various activities adopted from Amini and Birjandi (2012). By systematically exploring how gender roles are represented, this study seeks to uncover underlying biases and assess their potential impact on students. The research will investigate various aspects of gender representation, including the frequency and nature of gendered depictions, the roles assigned to different genders, and the overall balance of gender representation across subjects.

Understanding gender bias in Tamil Nadu textbooks is not just an academic exercise but a necessary step toward effecting meaningful change. By identifying areas of concern and providing evidence-based recommendations, this study aims to support efforts to create more inclusive and equitable educational materials. The findings will offer valuable insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers, highlighting the need for reforms that align with contemporary values of gender equality and respect.

Furthermore, addressing gender bias in textbooks is integral to fulfilling broader educational and social objectives, including the promotion of inclusive learning environments and the advancement of gender equity. As Tamil Nadu continues to evolve its educational practices, it is imperative that textbook content reflects the principles of fairness and equality, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to envision and achieve their fullest potential. Through this research, we aspire to contribute to a more

equitable educational framework, one that empowers all students to challenge stereotypes and pursue their dreams without constraint.

Literature Review

Bhattacharya (2017) highlights a persistent issue in Indian education: despite policy efforts toward gender equity, English textbooks still contain gender discrimination and stereotypes. This gap suggests that while governmental and institutional aims seek to address gender biases, classroom materials often fail to align with these goals, potentially undermining efforts toward educational equity.

Rong et al. (2021) explore gender discrimination in school EFL textbooks, emphasizing the growing concern over gender bias in education. Textbooks, crucial in shaping students' ideologies, can negatively impact their self-confidence, enthusiasm for learning, and future career choices. The study analyzes gender bias in both visual and verbal content, concluding that public engagement, media coverage, and financial support are essential for revising educational materials.

Bachore and Semela (2022) examine gender representation in higher education textbooks using content analysis. Their findings reveal a significant male predominance in language and high-status professions, while women are often depicted in less prominent roles, highlighting entrenched stereotypes that shape gender perceptions.

Nandhi (2023) investigates gender discrimination in elementary school history textbooks through documentary research and content analysis. The study finds notable gender bias, with male characters disproportionately represented and females underrepresented.

The literature consistently shows that despite policy efforts and increased awareness, gender biases persist in textbooks across educational contexts. Bhattacharya (2017) and Nandhi (2023) reveal the ongoing prevalence of stereotypes, while Rong et al. (2021) highlight their harmful effects on students. Bachore and Semela (2022) further demonstrate the disparity in gender representation in higher education. Addressing these biases requires a multifaceted approach, including public engagement and media coverage, to align educational materials with progressive policy goals and promote gender equity. Overall, the literature underscores the importance of ongoing scrutiny and reform of educational resources to ensure they reflect gender equity.

Methodology

This research conducts a critical analysis of primary-grade English textbooks used in Tamilnadu, India, to investigate the presence of gender bias. Qualitative content analysis methods are employed to assess how genders are portrayed in terms of visibility (representation), firstness (priority or prominence), use of generic masculine language, depiction of sex-linked occupations, and portrayal in various activities. The study adopts a framework based on Amini and Birjandi (2012), which includes the five categories mentioned above.

Findings

This section discusses the findings from the data analysis. The data is discussed separately as five categories of visibility (representation), firstness (priority or prominence), use of generic masculine language, depiction of sex-linked occupations, and portrayal in various activities.

1. Visibility

Table 1

Analysis of Gender representation through images

Grade	Term	Sex	Number	Total	Percentage
1	I	Female	38	78	48.7
		Male	40		51.2
	II	Female	19	37	51.3
		Male	18		48.6
	III	Female	17	32	53.1
		Male	15		46.8
2	I	Female	37	89	41.5
		Male	52		64.0
	II	Female	10	15	66.6
		Male	05		33.3
	III	Female	08	15	53.3
		Male	07		46.6
3	I	Female	09	16	56.2
		Male	07		43.7
	II	Female	24	64	37.5
		Male	40		62.5
	III	Female	31	75	41.3
		Male	44		58.6

The analysis of gender visibility in textbook images across grades and terms reveals varying degrees of male and female representation. In Grade 1, images are fairly balanced,

with males slightly outnumbering females in Term I (51.2% male, 48.7% female). However, this trend shifts toward more female representation in Terms II and III, reaching 53.1% female by Term III. In Grade 2, representation fluctuates more significantly. Term I is male-dominated (64% male, 41.5% female), but this reverses in Term II, where females make up 66.6% of images. Term III slightly favors females (53.3% female, 46.6% male), indicating inconsistency across terms. Grade 3 presents a mix, with female dominance in Term I (56.2% female), but a shift to male dominance in Terms II and III (62.5% and 58.6% male, respectively).

Overall, the analysis shows no consistent gender dominance across the year, with an alternating pattern of representation that suggests attempts at balance, though the inconsistency may lead to mixed messages about gender roles in educational materials.

Apart from the quantity of male and female picture representation in the textbook, it is also essential to know how pictures are represented - *Quality over quantity*. Below are the examples taken from the textbook, how the female and male pictures are represented. Even though the female is represented more in the pictures, wherever the instances of crying, it is portrayed that the girl cries. In none of the instances, the boy is shown as crying in the textbook. Refer to Image 2. On the other hand, girls are represented progressively as well. Image 3, depicts the girls lifting heavy objects, riding, and climbing by challenging the traditional notion that girls are weaker.

Image 1

Grade 1, Term - 3, Pg 91 - A girl flying a plane

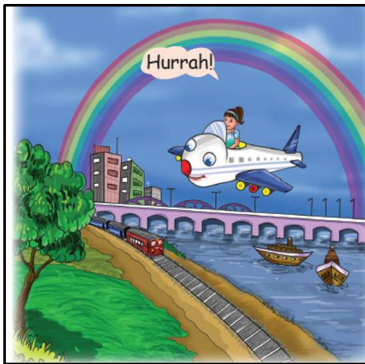


Image 2

Grade 3, Term 2, pg. 100 -



Image 3

Grade 2, Term 1, Pg. 96



2. Firstness

Table 2

Analysis of firstness in the textbook

Grade	Female first	Male first
I	2	4
II	-	-
III	-	-

The concept of "firstness," which explores the order in which female or male names, nouns, or titles are mentioned within a phrase, can reveal underlying social biases or norms. The textbook analysis provided offers insights into how this pattern manifests across different grades and terms, albeit with limitations due to incomplete data.

In Grade I, Term I, there is a clear preference for male firstness, with males mentioned first in four instances compared to two for females. This suggests a tendency to prioritize males in phrases involving gendered names, nouns, or titles, potentially reflecting societal or cultural norms favoring male prominence. The higher frequency of male firstness may indicate a bias in language use within this context. In Grades II and III, the data on firstness is sparse, with most terms showing no instances of male or female firstness. This is largely due to the textbook content featuring first-person singular or non-human characters, making it difficult to identify broader patterns or factors influencing firstness.

3. Masculine Generic Construction

The analysis of masculine generic constructions across grades and terms reveals a consistent trend toward using male terms or pronouns in contexts where both genders are implied. In Grade 1, Term I, there is a strong preference for masculine references, with four instances of male references and three cases of masculine generics (e.g., rat, rabbit,

monkey). This suggests that male-centric language is prevalent, even in situations where a neutral term could be used. In Grade 1, Term II, while masculine language remains dominant, the number of masculine generics decreases slightly, indicating a subtle shift towards balance. By Term III, the absence of male references and the presence of a single female reference ("puppy") suggest a shift away from masculine generics. In Grade 2, Term I and Term II show a balanced approach with equal male and female references. However, Term III reverts to a male-centric pattern, with no female references and a continued use of masculine generics. Grade 3 displays a high frequency of masculine terms in Term I, including generics like "ant," "butterfly," "knives," and "blender." This indicates a strong presence of masculine generics in non-gendered contexts. However, Terms II and III see a shift towards more neutral language, with no male or female references. The data highlights a prevalent use of masculine generics, with variations across grades and terms, underscoring the need for more inclusive and gender-neutral language in educational materials.

Image 4

Grade 3, Term 2, Pg. 95



Note: The picture emphasizes that cooking is general for all human beings irrespective of their gender.

Table 3*Analysis of Male Generic Construction*

Grade	Term	Female referenced	Male referenced
I	I	2	4 + 3 (Rat, Rabbit, Monkey)
	II	1	2
	III	1 (Puppy)	-
II	I	1	1
	II	1 (Squirrel)	1 (Dog)
	III	-	2 (Donkey, Ant)
III	I	-	6 (Ant, Butterfly, Knives, Blender, Spatulas, Strainer)
	II	1 (Bat)	-
	III	-	-

4. Activity

The analysis of gendered activities across different grades offers insights into traditional and evolving gender roles. In Grade I, there is a mix of traditional and progressive roles for both genders. Females are shown engaging in activities like "Flying an airplane" and "Playing volleyball," which challenge traditional expectations and indicate growing acceptance of women in diverse roles. However, activities like "Cleaning the window" and "Driving a two-wheeler" for males, while somewhat neutral, still hint at conventional gender biases. In Grade II, female-associated activities are primarily domestic, such as "Mom in the kitchen" and "Washing clothes," reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes that cast domestic tasks as female responsibilities. Male activities, like "Fishing" and "Carrying heavy things," align with conventional masculine roles, though there are hints of gender neutrality with activities like "Stitching" and "Gardening." Grade III continues the trend of traditional gender roles, with females linked to tasks like "Cooking" and "Washing clothes" and males to "Fishing" and "Carrying heavy things." This division emphasizes the persistence of gender stereotypes. Overall, while Grade I

shows some progress towards more inclusive roles for females, Grades II and III largely adhere to traditional gender roles, reflecting a strong tendency to categorize activities along gender lines despite some emerging shifts.

Image 5

Grade 1, Term 1, Pg. 127



Note: This picture shows the father doing the chores while the mother drinks coffee. The role is reversed emphasising gender neutrality over activities.

Table 4*Analysis of activities represented based on gender in the textbook*

Female	Male	Grade
Reading newspapers, Playing with kids, Pillion, Driving an airplane, Girls playing volleyball, Going to the office.	Cleaning the window, Driving a two-wheeler, pillion passenger of an airplane	I
Going to the office, Playing with grandkid	Going to the office, Playing with grandkid	II
Mom in the kitchen, Women selling, Carrying heavy things, Washing clothes, Making dishes in the kitchen	Gardening, Principle is giving a prize, Stitching, Riding a horse, Men selling, Fishing, and Carrying heavy things	III

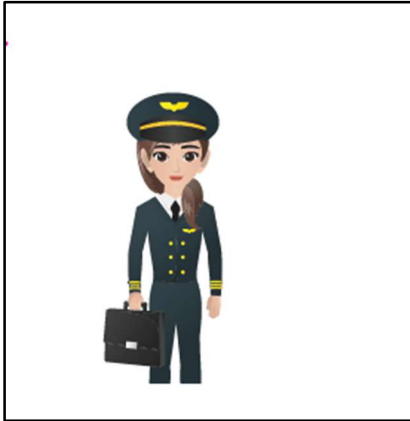
5. Occupation

The analysis of occupations across grades offers valuable insights into evolving gender roles. In Grade 1, there is a blend of traditional and less conventional choices. Females are associated with roles like "Pilot" and "Chef," with "Pilot" standing out as a challenge to gender norms in a traditionally male-dominated field. Males are linked to roles such as "Chef" and "Farmer," which, while conventional, also reflect a growing acceptance of diverse roles for men. By Term III, "Teacher" is listed for females, with no specific male occupations noted, reflecting a slightly progressive yet gendered approach. In Grade 2, the occupational roles become more divided. Females are associated with traditional jobs like "Flower seller" and "Teacher," while males are linked to roles such as "Shopkeeper" and "Doctor." The role of "Doctor," although traditionally male-dominated, suggests a shift towards broader career options. By Term III, the range of professions expands, with females taking on roles like "Magician," "Dancer," and "Pilot," challenging traditional gender roles. Males, on the other hand, are associated with diverse occupations like "Fisherman," "Firefighter," and "Carpenter." In Grade 3, the adherence to traditional gender roles remains strong, with females listed as "Vegetable sellers" and "Teachers" and males as "Shopkeepers." This suggests that while there is some progress, gender-specific occupations are still prevalent. Term III introduces a mix of traditional and professional roles for both genders, with males taking on jobs like "Police," "Fisher," and "Plumber," and females continuing in roles such as "Vegetable seller" and "Shopkeeper."

the data reveals a gradual shift towards more diverse and less gender-stereotyped occupational roles, particularly in higher grades where there is greater variation in job types for both males and females. However, traditional roles persist, indicating that while progress is evident, there is still a strong adherence to gender-specific occupations. Encouraging a wider range of career options for both genders is essential to challenging stereotypes and promoting more equitable representation in various professions.

Image 6

Grade 2, Term 3, Pg. 72



Note: The girl is represented as a pilot breaking the norms.

Table 5*Analysis of the representation of occupation based on gender*

Grade	Term	Female	Male
I	I	Pilot	Chef
	II	-	Farmer
	III	Teacher	-
II	I	Flower seller	Shop keeper
	II	Teacher	Doctor
	III	Magician, Dancer, Pilot, Tailor, Doctor, Policeman, Shopkeeper, Driver, Engineer.	Pilot, Farmer, Teacher, Postman, Fisherman, Firefighter, Carpenter, Plumber.
III	I	-	-
	II	Vegetable seller	Shopkeeper, Vegetable seller
	III	Police, Pilot	Fisher, Plumber, Doctor, Professor, Tailor, Horseman

Discussions and Conclusion

The analysis of gender representation across naming conventions, activities, and occupational roles reveals significant insights into traditional and evolving gender roles. Patterns of firstness show a consistent male-first bias, particularly evident in Grade I, where male names or titles often precede female ones. This trend underscores the enduring influence of traditional gender biases in naming practices, though some shifts towards more balanced representations are observed. This male-first tendency highlights a broader pattern of gender inequality, even as changes in naming practices suggest a slow movement towards greater gender parity.

The examination of masculine generic constructions further reveals a strong inclination towards using male terms or pronouns in contexts where gender-neutral language could be applied. In Grade 1, there is a notable prevalence of masculine generics, such as "rat" and "monkey," even in contexts that do not inherently favor one gender over another. This trend continues into subsequent grades, with masculine generics reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes. Despite some progress in incorporating gender-neutral language, the persistent use of masculine generics suggests that traditional gender norms continue to dominate.

The analysis of gendered activities reveals a clear division between traditional male and female roles, though there is some evidence of evolving gender roles, especially in Grade 1. For instance, activities such as "Flying an airplane" for females indicate a challenge to conventional gender expectations. However, in Grades 2 and 3, the division between male and female activities remains more pronounced, with females engaging in domestic tasks and males participating in traditionally masculine activities. This persistent division highlights the continued reinforcement of traditional gender roles, despite occasional shifts towards more inclusive representations.

Occupational roles further illustrate the persistence of traditional gender norms. In Grade 1, females are associated with roles like "Pilot" and "Chef," which challenge traditional gender expectations, while males are listed with more conventional occupations. By Grade 2, the occupational roles become more gender-segregated, with females in domestic or less professional roles and males in more varied or professional occupations. In Grade 3, a mix of traditional and professional roles appears for both genders, reflecting some progress towards greater diversity. However, the ongoing influence of traditional gender roles on occupational choices indicates that while there is a movement towards more diverse career options, entrenched stereotypes still play a significant role.

The findings from this study indicate that, although there is some progress towards more inclusive and diverse gender representations, traditional gender roles and biases continue to exert a strong influence. The analysis suggests a gradual shift towards more balanced gender representations, particularly in higher grades, but also highlights the need for continued efforts to challenge and transform these stereotypes. To foster greater gender equality, it is essential to promote gender-neutral language, encourage diverse activities, and incorporate a wider range of occupational roles for all genders in the textbook. Future research should explore the factors influencing these patterns and investigate strategies to enhance gender equality across various contexts.

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of gender representation through naming conventions, activities, and occupational roles across different educational grades. Females are associated with non-traditional roles like "Pilot," the overall patterns reflect a significant adherence to traditional gender norms, particularly in Grade 1. The division of activities and occupational roles along gender lines further underscores the ongoing influence of gender-specific expectations. However, the findings also reveal a strong inclination towards masculine generic constructions, highlighting traditional gender stereotypes. Furthermore, this research underscores the need for continued efforts to challenge gender biases and promote more inclusive representations.

Limitations

Several limitations of this study must be acknowledged. First, the sample size and scope may not fully represent the diversity of gender roles across different regions or educational systems. The data is limited to specific grades and terms, which may not capture the full range of gendered experiences and evolving roles over time. Additionally,

the study relies on the analysis of predefined categories of activities and occupations, which may overlook emerging roles or nuanced gender dynamics. The data collection methods and sources may also introduce biases, impacting the generalizability of the findings.

Implications

The implications of this study are multifaceted. For educators and policymakers, the findings highlight the importance of addressing traditional gender biases in educational materials and curricula. Incorporating more gender-neutral language and diverse role models can help challenge stereotypes and promote equality. Schools and institutions should consider implementing programs that encourage students to explore a broader range of activities and career options, irrespective of gender. Furthermore, future research should aim to expand the sample size and explore gender representation across different cultural and regional contexts. By doing so, it will be possible to develop more effective strategies for fostering gender equality and inclusivity in various domains.

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AI in English Classroom: Southeast Asian Teachers' Perceptions towards Improving Oral Proficiency in Primary and Upper Primary Learners

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Abstract

Speaking skills as part of the language acquisition process make learning more flexible, and individualized with the revolutionary impact of the existing AI tools. AI has made radical changes in education by providing environments and strategies that make learner's needs, and objectives more oriented toward self-directed learning. The present article focuses on new AI tools that build learner's engagement and improve their communication abilities. The research was exploratory with a semi-structured questionnaire considering participants from the International Training Program (ITP). The researcher analyzed and interpreted the data using NVivo 15, which includes AI features. It has text summarization and automated coding for efficient data findings. The data revealed that AI helps learners with individualized assessments, builds confidence, and engages them in a joyful and fun way. Nonetheless, a lack of teacher input may result in over-dependence on AI and less social interaction.

Keywords: Oral proficiency, developing nations, primary and upper primary learners, AI Tools.

Introduction:

Technological advancement with special reference to AI has brought a major change in the ELT practice through innovations, and personalized learning facilities. This has solved the main issues of first and second language acquisition and the teaching and learning process for learners and teachers. In Second Language Acquisition, AI improves individual lesson planning, interferes with learner interaction, and offers consistent support. Adaptive learning tools evaluated the learners' competencies and learning objectives. Learning progress is tracked based on the learner's proficiency levels and abilities. It uses diverse materials such as audio, visual, and textual content, to incorporate a gamification environment, multimodal learning assets, a review process of the work, assessments, and continuous feedback to sustain learner attention and engagement.

Literature Review:

Improving Speaking Skills through Conversational Practice with Chatbots aims to find out how conversational practice with Chatbots enhances speaking skills in ESL learners. The insights pointed out that chatbots may offer information capacity and development of their conversational practice experience leading to an equally significant increase in their practical preparedness and satisfaction. (García et al. 2023).

Empowering Introvert Students: How Artificial Intelligence Applications Enhance Speaking Ability emphasizes the benefits of using artificial intelligence software in teaching and learning English, particularly for introverted students. This study underlines the necessity of integrating Affective Filters of learners, motivational levels, and learning styles to incorporate AI technology in language education (Warman et al, 2023).

Enhancing Pronunciation with Voice Recognition Systems studied the possibilities of improving articulation skills using the speech recognition process. The results revealed that the efficiency and accuracy benefited students who used them. The data revealed that participants had more accurate pronunciation. The limitations of the study were the inability to understand speakers' accents and the lack of proper feedback. (Smith & Johnson, 2022).

Exploring the Use of AI-Powered Virtual Language Assistants for Speaking Practice investigated the role of the virtual assistants created through artificial intelligence to provide speaking practice in English as a second language. These findings revealed that instant response and feedback encourage students' oral interaction. However, some drawbacks indicated inability to identify fine distinctions in pronunciation for smoother interactions. (Zhang & Wang, 2018).

Another factor that could be affected by the instruction given to the participants while using online platforms is willingness to communicate (WTC) – the degree to which a learner is willing to communicate in a second language (MacIntyre, 2007: MacIntyre et al., 1994).

This can be related to the situated background that defines the desire to connect with other peers with confidence (Ayedoun et al., 2015).

AI Tools for Oral Proficiency

SmallTalk2Me is an AI system to improve and practice speaking for language learners in conversation sessions. It incorporates state-of-the-art technologies such as NLP and speech recognition to deliver natural, and lively speaking interactions. It takes a conversation where a user represents an everyday situation and discusses it with artificial intelligence. The learners receive several dialogues, and context-based prompts through AI. The approach helps the learner to engage in active retrieval of the material as well as using the language in the context of their application. It gives *Pronunciation Feedback* and corrects errors in accent, syllable, intonation, and pace of speaking with the help of speech recognition technology. It also provides specific corrections on words that the learner has managed to mispronounce and correct ways of pronouncing the same words. *Real-Time Error Detection* detects grammar, syntactic, or lexicon mistakes during speaking practice. They give immediate contingent consequences or a different way of going about it. It improves fluency in spoken English and also increases accuracy in spoken language immediately. It provides *Gamified Challenges with* role-play games, and functional scenario-mediated exercises and encourages learners to perform speaking assignments as expected to earn incentives. Thus, it ensures everyday attendance, and fun learning and promotes divergent thinking. The *Monitoring and Measurement* option records the performance based on fluency, pronunciation accuracy, and speaking over time. The *AI-Based Role-Playing* imitates the actual speaking circumstances, for instance; buying food, employment interviews, or interacting with people. In this model, the conversational partner or interviewer is AI. It builds communication activities and develops vocabulary and interactional strategies. The major courses covered are:

- **IELTS Speaking Test Preparation**
- **Job Interview Practice**
- **Everyday Conversational English**
- **English Level Test**
- **Vocabulary Booster**

Each course has multiple units giving access to the learner to maintain the Progress Index. As shown in Fig. 1, AI gives its feedback in case of insufficient words, thus ensuring minimum required speaking practice by the learner.

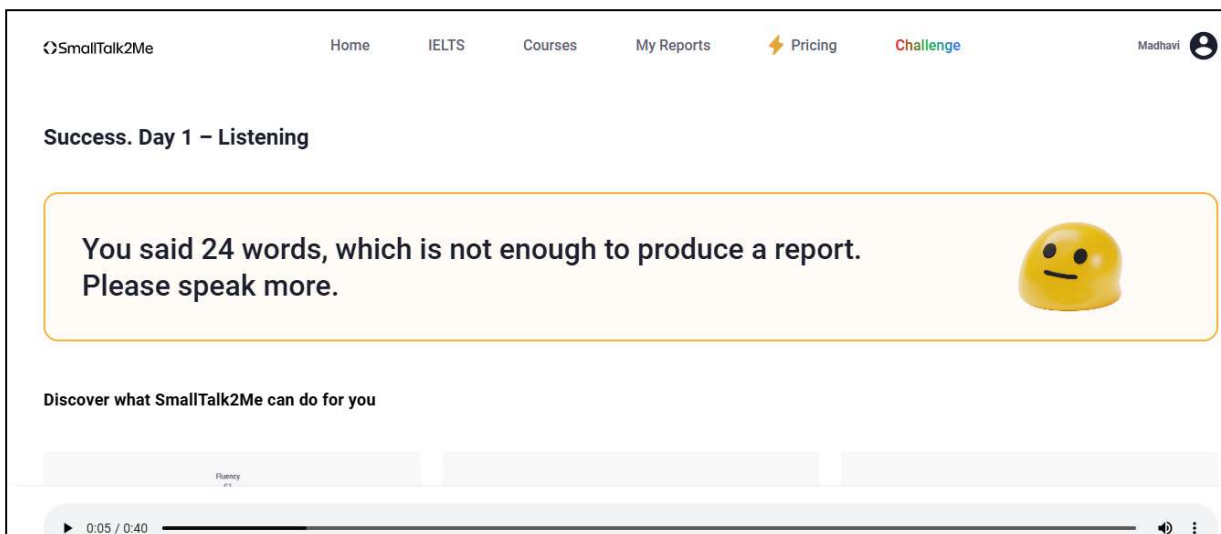


Fig. 1: The participant’s feedback on her speaking skills

In another example, if the learner practices the course ‘Job Interview Practice’, the AI assistant gives the questions prompts for the mock interview as

1. **Tell me about yourself/**
2. **What are your current job roles and responsibilities?**
3. **What do you know about our organization?**
4. **What is your present salary?**
5. **How much is your salary expectation?**

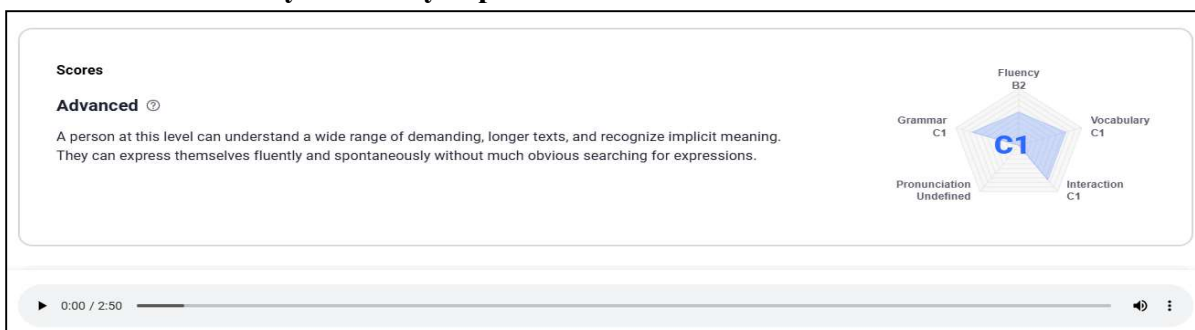


Fig. 2: Participant’s feedback and level of performance indicating as C1 (CEFR Level)

The learner records the answers. Once the recording is over, the AI tool generates a report based on the performance: As shown in Fig. 2, it gives feedback and grades the learner based on the CEFR levels. SmallTalk 2 is a valuable resource for anyone who needs to improve their self-esteem while speaking English in examinations, interviews, or in everyday practice.

Speakandimprove is an AI-based tool developed by Cambridge University to help people practice spoken English for free. It uses sophisticated speech recognition and analysis to give feedback on learners' spoken language covering fluency, pronunciation, and grammar. It supports language learners to record the chosen topic. The AI grades the speaker's fluency and correctness. It has the following units:

- Answer questions about yourself.
- Read Aloud
- Give your opinion
- Give a presentation about a graphic
- Give a presentation about something special
- Give advice or make a recommendation
- Answer questions about a topic

The *Automated Feedback* checks the learner’s speech and provides them with a CEFR score (Common European Framework for Reference Language). *It also provides tips on pronunciation, grammar, and word choice. It navigates through Diverse Topics and Scenarios and tasks concerning real-life situations and experiences such as describing a picture, narrating an event, or expressing an opinion. Pronunciation Training* allows learners to have understandable correct pronunciation of the spoken language. Another important aspect is *Fluency Enhancement*. It often measures the time during which a person is silent and when they hesitate before continuing speaking, as well as the rate at which they speak. Thus it provides insight on how to be an eloquent speaker and improves confidence during speaking. *Progress Tracking* enables learners to assess their accomplishments and establish a fulfilling course learning plan. It also aligns with *Exam Preparation* connecting with internationally recognized speaking tests such as IELTS and TOEFL.

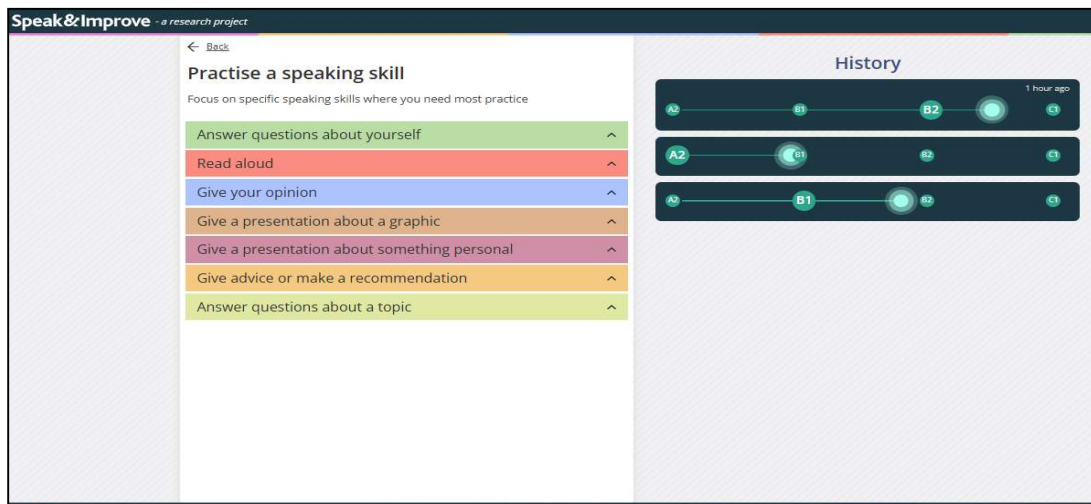


Fig. 3: The participant’s dashboard reflecting progress tracking history

For example, if you are practicing a unit, it provides prompts to speak about the topic within a time frame. After the recording, it analyzes your performance and grades you as per the CEFR framework. As shown in Fig: 4, the participant’s performance as B2 with feedback makes the learner realize his/her performance index and can repeat the same for *improvement*. All the recorded tracks will be stored in the dashboard to track progress.

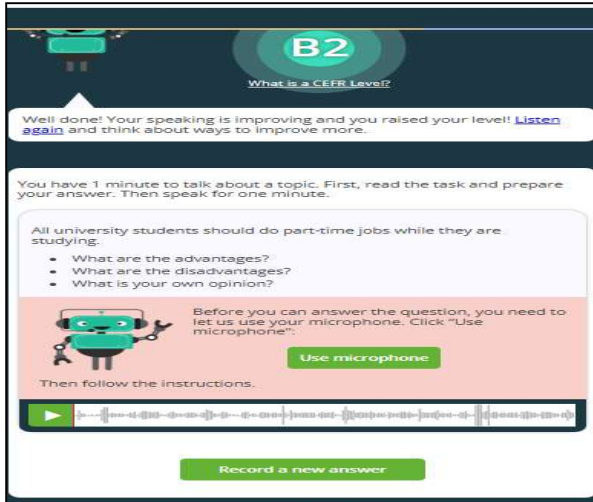


Fig. 4: Participant’s feedback reflecting B2 grade as per CEFR Framework

It is advantageous for learners who want to improve their speaking skills individually as Speak and Improve is an AI-based tool. The fast response, the compliance with the CEFR, and the multiple assessments make it a helpful tool.

Memrise is one of the most used web platforms for learning languages which includes game-learning, artificial intelligence, and spaced repetition to teach the language. The languages that Memrise supports are:

Global Languages	Regional and Lesser-Common Languages	Languages for Specific Communities
1. English (for speakers of other languages)	11. Arabic	25. Latin (classical)
2. Spanish (Castilian and Latin American variants)	12. Turkish	26. Esperanto
3. French	13. Dutch	27. Māori
4. German	14. Swedish	28. Scottish Gaelic
5. Italian	15. Norwegian	29. Welsh
6. Portuguese (European and Brazilian variants)	16. Danish	
7. Russian	17. Polish	
8. Chinese (Mandarin)	18. Finnish	
9. Japanese (including both kana and kanji focus)	19. Icelandic	
10. Korean	20. Czech	
	21. Greek	
	22. Hungarian	
	23. Romanian	
	24. Hebrew	

This *AI-powered learning* App accommodate students’ learning to proficiency level, thus allowing a teacher to focus on areas where learners may have difficulties and ensure efficient teaching. It uses *Spaced Repetition* and enhances long-term retention, avoiding amnesia-like situations where one forgets what he or she has learned. The *Real-Life Video*

Clips include native speakers' voices using actual situations in videos. This helps enhance learners' listening skills by familiarizing them with natural intonation and conversational passages, appreciating cultural differences, and creating lessons more realistic. *Gamified Learning* displays points, scores, a points system, trophy-like icons, scoreboards, and streaks, thus sustaining learners' interest and making learning enjoyable. The *Vocabulary Builder* emphasizes highly used words and phrases in daily speaking activities broadening the functional lexicon. The *Interactive Quizzes* allow the learners to make immediate corrections. The tool facilitates bilingual or multilingual learning, including custom user-generated courses and tailored content for specific needs.

The tool is user-friendly allowing the learner to explore cultural learning, and prepare for standardized tests like IELTS, TOEFL, or GRE. The *offline mode* promotes accessibility and learning space without time constraints.

An example shows the learner learning in bilingual mode: Hindi and English. The learner uses English and Hindi and responds to the prompts. The tool responds to the answer and accordingly converts the dialogue into the target language.

The screenshot shows a language learning app interface. At the top left, there is a 'MEM BOT' logo and a 'Back to home' button. At the top right, it says 'MemBot - powered by AI'. The main content area is titled 'Beginner: Saying Where You Live' and includes a goal: 'You just moved to a new neighbourhood. Discuss with your neighbour what you like and dislike about this new place.' Below this, there is a conversation between a 'Neighbor' and the learner. The neighbor's message is in Hindi: '[dostānā] namaste, pados me āpke svāgat hai kyā āp is sarak par rahatē hai?' with a Hindi-to-English translation: '[दोस्ताना] नमस्ते, पड़ोस में आपका स्वागत है। क्या आप इस सड़क पर रहते हैं?' and an English translation: '[friendly] Hi, welcome to the neighborhood! Do you live on this street?'. The learner's response is in Hindi: 'hāy vekam tu d nebarhūz hū yū lahv anī vī sṛīt।' with an English translation: 'Hi, welcome to the neighborhood do you live on the street.' and a Hindi-to-English translation: 'हाय, वेतकम तु द नेबरहुड हू यू लाहव अनि वी स्ट्रीट?'. The neighbor's next message is in Hindi: 'oh, mā'ima sṛī par kuch bhāik dūr rahatē hū. āpke is pados me kyā pasand hai?' with a Hindi-to-English translation: 'ओह, मैं एलम स्ट्रीट पर कुछ ब्वाँक दूर रहता हूँ। आपको इस पड़ोस में क्या पसंद है?' and an English translation: 'I like the neighborhood here, the place is very spacious, there are also many shops here, I really love it.'

Research Methodology: The research explored the benefits and challenges of using the powered tools mentioned in this research. The present research is exploratory considering participants from the International Training Program (ITP).

The International Training Programme from The Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) scholarships granted by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, to developing nations in Africa, South Asia, South East Asia, Central Asia, and Latin America. These courses arranged under ITP have been highly fruitful and innumerable Foreign Nationals of miscellaneous occupations (Secretaries Diplomats, Teachers, Doctors, Pilots, Police, Lawyers, Auditors, Journalists, and Officials from Various Ministries of over ninety different countries) have been able to attend courses in

English at this University. ITP conducts the course Progress to Proficiency in English at Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced levels thrice a year for 12 weeks respectively.

42 participants hail from different developing nations Belarus, Benin, Bhutan, Chad, Gambia, Ghana, Indonesia, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mali, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Togo, Turkmenistan, Uganda, Uzbekistan, Uzbekistan and Zambia. Ten teachers teach at the primary level, 13 at the middle school, and 16 at the high school. Some teachers teach at multiple levels; either at primary and middle/ middle and high school). 5 teachers teach at the college level, and 5 teachers teach at university. 5 school teachers teach vocational courses and one teaches vocational courses at college. The session, on the theme 'ICT in English Classroom, explored **SmallTalk2Me**, **Speakandimprove**, and **Memrise** tools. Hands-on experience helped the participants navigate the tools and check the benefits and drawbacks of using AI-generated tools in their classrooms. The following is a semi-structured questionnaire administered to learn more about the difficulties of teaching English, the measures taken, and classroom situations when learners do not speak English. The questionnaire was open-ended to allow full responses:

1. What language ability do students possess when they join your class, especially in English?
2. How often do you incorporate speaking activities in your lesson? What kinds of activities are you using?
3. What do you think are the main causes of student's failure to speak English in a classroom?
4. When it comes to language use in the classroom, how do you switch from using the home language to English?
5. Is there any technological application or media that you frequently employ to enhance the speaking skills of your subjects?

Data Analysis:

The data provided interesting facts leading to future recommendations to improve speaking skills. The language ability of the learners in all the classrooms ranges between A1 to B1 levels. A majority of the participants mentioned that 80% of the class had learners falling under the A2 level. The rest 20% fall under A1 or B1 level.

The interaction with the participants revealed the reasons, and implications for integrating speaking activities into the classroom. All the teachers expressed speaking as an additional skill rather than a core activity since it is not oriented toward an *Exam-Oriented Curriculum*. The standardized tests often test reading and writing skills, thus leaving listening and speaking components. The *Teacher-Centric Classrooms*, especially using prescribed materials, and focusing on rote memorization lead to limited speaking activities. The other important factor was *the Large Classes* between 60 and 150 students in each class. Speaking activities in large groups become cumbersome with no individual attention and feedback.

A majority of the teachers try speaking activities such as

a. *Picture Description* with an image or scene to the learner, promoting them to use adjectives, prepositions, better sentences, and other relative vocabulary.

b. *The self-introduction* activity where the learners introduce themselves to their peers about their interests or goals to improve their basic conversation, and structured speaking.

c. *Story Retelling* prompts to reconstruct the story from their experience by the power of their imagination after reading or watching a short video

Other tasks included *Daily Routine Description*, *Question and Answer Practice*, and speaking for a minute. Pair work and group activities were minimal because of the paucity of time, managing large classes, and targets for syllabus completion.

The whole class agreed that the learners lack confidence; fear of making mistakes and peer pressure make them anxious. The teachers are helpless due to limited resources such as audio-visual aids or technologies for providing practice sessions on speaking. Hence, the students often use their first language mainly to communicate with others.

Technological applications or media are a welcoming factor especially due to COVID protocols. All the teachers still use Google Classrooms, and WhatsApp for easy communication, and digital materials for conducting classroom activities, games, and quizzes.

Impressions on AI Tools: None of the teachers explored the above AI tools for improving speaking skills. The tools navigate toward individualized learning spaces, provide practice sessions by recording learners' own voices, revise their performance, give access to limitless rerecording facilities, record progressive feedback on the dashboard, and foster improvement levels. Such features impressed the teachers.

Recommendations: The findings revealed a positive impact of using AI to enhance oral proficiency. In spite of issues with regard to limited resources, slow learner engagement, influence of L1, paucity of time, and managing large classes, the teachers were eager to bring in flipped classroom techniques, make a hybrid learning environment more active and attentive, build guided instruction and pedagogical changes to improve English speaking ability.

The AI interventions can immensely benefit the learner in developing their confidence, reducing anxiety, and feedback. The teacher needs to intervene and prepare customized lessons considering their cultural contexts; define activities and tasks using AI tools; engage in frequent analysis of the learner's performance; provide constructive feedback and also conduct tests and online assessments occasionally to verify and note the proficiency levels of the learners. The pair work, team participation, and discussion activities create an interactive and collaborative environment.

Conclusion:

AI applications can provide an outstanding opportunity to speak correctly and improve pronunciation and intonation patterns. A technologically guided environment can lead to self-directed learning. However, to make use of these tools effectively, educators and

learners need to counter issues such as reliance, reduced social contact, and privacy issues. AI techniques should complement conventional real-life speaking practice, and the integration of the two has the potential to foster comprehensive speaking skills development.

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External Links:

- SmallTalk2
- Speak and Improve
- English and Foreign Languages University
- Memrise
- Contributing Factors on Students' Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

Engaging in Events Betides Learning and Convergence of Languages, Technology, Literature, Culture and Art Forms

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Abstract

National and International events like Integration Camps (NSS), Conventions (SPICMACAY), Conferences, Seminars, Workshops and Training Programmes have tremendous impact on the participants, hailing from different towns, cities, states or countries, gathering at one place for a minimum of two days, a week or two. The duration that the participants get to talk or collaborate might be reasonably short owing to the responsibility of their contribution to the events. However, merging with participants from different backgrounds or categories in terms of education, age, gender, languages and cultures, there is a greater probability of increase in the knowledge. This happens because of the purpose with which each participant partakes in the event, the motive being the enthusiasm or the curiosity to learn or exhibit their expertise. Even if the participation is either as an individual or being integrated into a team makes the candidate gain from their peers, but more so, when admitted into a team. It can be either tying the flag, learning a language, a dance form, a song, an activity or even watching a movie, or trying variety of dishes from different cultures. One of the professors of psychology, Tove Irene Dahl (2009) emphasizes that summer camps and even the place where it is conducted can foster learning and change in the behaviour of the participants.

Introduction

The participants, who attend the events out of curiosity, interest or by chance, might be ignorant of the outcomes. They may or may not understand the amount of learning or benefit they had for being a part of the event unless they realize at some point of time in future or when asked about what new things they have encountered or had challenges during the event. The participants who were a part of integration camps or conventions or conferences, etc. were chosen as the samples. When questioned about their experiences, the answers were many. There were complaints about the hardships and adjustments, and when specified about what they learnt and whether they wanted to attend more such events, most of them said 'yes' to attending more such events, and, from the observances, it was understood that they realized that their learning and experiences had an increased effect resulting in stopping them from complaining further. When probed about complaints they had, they expressed very little disappointment as against the joy and learning that they received from attending the events. It was easy to comprehend the opinion of the participants, more so, for attending some of the events along with them. One of the best examples was the convergence of languages and literature during the National Integration Camp (NIC-NSS, Gulbarga University, Karnataka, 2024), where the volunteers coming from the states of Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka sang a stanza of a song sequentially, which was in all the three languages of Telugu, Tamil and Kannada. This was possible because of coming together and sharing their experiences of what dramas they watch and what interests them. It was easy for them to share the meanings of the words from their language as they already knew the song in their own language. When questioned whether they learnt the words of the stanza of the other two languages, they confirmed saying 'yes' and responded that they all sang the final stanza together in one language.

It was heartening to know the amount of learning generated during camps, but there is little literature that is available on the significance of camps and how they imbibe learning in the participants.

Literature

Literature on the outdoor experience gained from attending camps, the transformation in the thought process and ingredients for active learning staying in summer camps, facilitating learning in conferences are some of the reviews that were found to be relatively similar to some of the learning outcomes are presented here.

Sibthorp, J. et.al (2020), confirms that participants identified a range of camp features, some from those have been identified to be active ingredients, and their relation to specific outcomes include: camp staff and the ways they support campers and serve as role models; camp programming that is novel, active, and provides opportunities to work with peers; a social context that is safe and supportive and fosters interaction among people from different backgrounds; and in overnight camp experiences, separation from home.

On the perspectives of the transformation in thought process for staying in summer camps, Lynch, M. L. et.al (2018) explored how divergent thinking and activity selection in residential summer camps are a force for 21st century learning. The results of their study indicated significant increases in divergent thinking across all scoring methods of fluency, flexibility, and originality. Participants who self-selected one or more artistic activities (e.g., dance, drama, arts and crafts) had significant increases on the tasks as opposed to participants who did not select any artistic activities (e.g., basketball, baseball & archery).

Bialeschki, M. D. et.al (2015), on the other hand published that camp activities emphasize outdoor knowledge and skills through small-group living that offers opportunities to develop social, emotional and cognitive skills that contribute to the total development of campers regardless of age.

On how the events like conferences may engage participants more and hence increase their learning, Ravn, I., & Elsborg, S. (2011) offered five design principles namely concise presentations, active interpretation, self-formulation, networking and knowledge sharing and competent facilitation.

However, there seems to be hardly any literature on how events like Camps, Conventions, Seminars, Conferences, Workshops and Training Programmes have found to foster learning and convergence of languages, cultures, literature, technology and art forms.

Methodology

To explore what has been learnt or converged, qualitative action research has been conducted. The samples chosen for the study were the researcher and the students of Rajiv Gandhi University of Knowledge Technologies, Basara, who attended a minimum of two events. Observation notes and casual interviews of the participants were the tools that were used to collect and analyze the data.

Discussion

From the analyzed data, it was clear that the participants had similar experiences because they happened to attend common events.

Languages:

In terms of the languages, the participants who were present at the NIC-NSS camp Gulbarga learnt some words from different languages like Kannada, English, Hindi, Marathi, Tamil and Oriya. Some Kannada words that they learnt were ‘Bunny or Barri’ that meant ‘come’, ‘Mouna Vagire’ (Maintain Silence), ‘Ili ba or Ilban’ (Come here), ‘Nan Idi Beda’ (I don’t want) and the most common ones like ‘Uta Aytha’ (Did you eat), ‘Namaskaragalu’ (Greeting) and ‘Dhanyavadagalu’ (Thank You). The same participants who attended the SPIC MACAY, the ninth International Convention programme learnt the Tamil words like ‘Romba

Kashta' (Very difficult), 'EllarikuVanakkam' (Greetings Everyone), 'Thanneru' (Water), 'Theriyadu' (Don't know), 'Nandri' (Thank You), 'Yaru' (Who), and 'Sollu' (Tell). They also began to feel and understand the language because of the amount of exposure to the languages in the camp. The other participants, apart from the chosen samples, being from different states, had also shared similar experiences on the final day of the NIC-NSS camp, as feedback, and stressed that they learnt different languages and cultures of different states.

Culture:

On each day of the (NIC-NSS) National Integration Camp -camp, National Service Scheme, conducted by Gulbarga University, Karnataka, one of the six participating states had to present their culture. On the final day, all the states can perform as individual groups or mixed groups. After the first day's performance by the participants of Telangana, many ideas were shared and the participants of the other states took assistance from the participants of Telangana. One of the students had to paint the face of a Tamilian in the colours of black and red, and in the process learnt that the person who was being painted was representing Kariappa Swamy, the protector of every village, that the Tamilians pray for and celebrate the destruction of evil. It was also learnt that there is a Kariappa Swamy temple at the outskirts of every village in Tamilnadu. The participants could relate to their own local Gods and temples, and how cultures are similar or vary from state to state. Over the next few days of the camp, there was a lot of union and combined work to help each other exhibit their culture, and in the process, understand and learn the cultures of the six states, because of the participants who were hailing and representing their cultures.

SPICMACAY (Society for Promoting Indian Classical Music and Culture Amongst Youth) has been one of the events organized across India as different module, with international conventions being conducted every year, this year, the 9th international convention being conducted in IIT Madras. It has a congregation of 1200 participants from 200 participating institutes that are spread across India, and over 70 top-grade artistes to perform and teach different art forms. SPICMACAY has been the best example to indicate the convergence of cultures. The participants could learn and understand what PungCholam of Mizoram is all about, the differences in Bharatnatyam, Kathakali and Mohini Attam, the Kathak of Uttar Pradesh, Goti Pua from Odisha, Purulia Chau of West Bengal, the Puppet Show, The Miniature and Matani Pe Chedi Painting, The crafts using Terra cota, The Theatre Arts, Carnatic and Hindustani Vocal, The Jugalbandhi of Violin and Tabla, Naad Yoga and Hatha Yoga, Meditation and many other forms which the participants had come across and volunteered for to have a glimpse and learning of each traditional and classical art forms of India being the take-away. The Sathwik bhojan, Ashram lifestyle, not using mobile phones have impacted the learners tremendously. Though some of the participants said that they missed their parents, this experience, they said would remain with them for a life time, and they, with great conviction said that they would attend many such conventions and be a part of the programme without any hesitation. With two intensive courses out of 32, and being learnt for 5 days, having a heritage walk and nature walk; it was filled with learning from 4 am to 9:30pm on all the five days.

Similarly, it was found that literature, technology and other art forms were found to be converged during events like conferences, seminars, workshops and training programmes.

Literature:

A conference that was held in IIST (Indian Institute of Space Sciences and Technology) Thiruvananthapuram, organized a panel discussion on poetry in Malayalam. The Malayalam poets were reciting their lines in Malayalam, and these were translated into English by the poet itself or the coordinators. One of the poets, recited a poem on inviting the crabs out of their hole – the recital – njandu raro raro raro raro ... This was a folk recital while the crabbers go to catch crabs. This was found to be interesting to the listeners with other languages as mother tongue who hailed from different parts of the country.

The participants in the conference also had the privilege to listen to Dr. Seetha Kakkoth (Professor in Anthropology) from University of Kannur, who briefed on her experiences of trying to empower a tribal community who lived in the forests of Kasaragod and Kannur districts, but returns empowered, on the aspects of their lifestyle in catching fish, eating only the required amount of food and not save for tomorrow. These recorded writings of hers, in her speech was the literature that the participants in the conference learnt.

Also from the songs sung during SPICMACAY InterCon9, there was immense knowledge gained about the history of our country, the epic stories that were celebrated for a reason and also about bringing back its glory in terms of unification of the people in the country. From the intensive courses that were conducted for a week on ‘Drupadh’, ‘Carnatic’ and ‘Hindustani’, the participants learnt valuable ethical lessons via the literature present in those art forms.

Art Forms:

Bharatnatyam, Mohini Attam, Purulia Chau, Kathak, Terracota, Painting of the Mughal Miniature, Roghan Art were some of the Art forms that participants witnessed and participated in, during the event ‘SPICMACAY InterCon9’. Learning these art forms, though on an intensive mode, and witness the artists perform, provided the participants, an experience that they would cherish, talk about, learn and also teach. These art forms that had the essence of how incredible our country was and still remains to be, and how these art forms continue to strongly hold our traditions and culture intact, acted as a great learning sources to the participants.

The participants were exposed to the performances of great artistes like Padma Subramaniam, Sunaina Hazarilal, Amjadh Ali Khan, Hari Prasad Chaurasia, Jayanthi Kumaresh, Kanyakumari, who won the Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan and Padma Shree awards. This led them to participate actively in the intensive courses and spread our culture and tradition to all corners of the country.

Puppetry, Meditation and Yoga were other art forms that had the learners learn perfection and patience that were vital in impacting their life to a great extent.

These art forms also helped the learners in understanding how each step in a dance form, or each posture in Yoga, had implications to support their health system.

Technology:

Learners learnt to avoid their cell phones for an entire week as it was prohibited in the event 'SPICMACAY InterCon9'. Such was the impact of the event. To control the excessive use of technology was to help the participants understand and focus on the importance of the event. End of the event, the participants were happy to receive their phones, but also stated that they were in a happy state when they avoided the phones. Volunteers on the other who were a part of the media team had to learn to stream the events that were happening, live on 'youtube'. Also, during the conferences, and integration camps, the participants learn to prepare PPTs, mail the organizers, and learn from the experts who assist in projecting a video or playing an audio. The participants, who presented papers on Artificial Intelligence assisting in health and in learning tools, helped the participants gain knowledge on the advancements in technology.

Conclusions

This paper illustrates several examples of how engaging in events ensues learning and convergence of languages, technology, literature, culture and art forms, and grossly correspond to the comprehensive development of the participant. It furnishes the researchers with further exploration on specific aspects in language, literature, culture or art forms. It encourages the institutions and the teachers to send the students to such events where there is surplus acquisition of knowledge and where the learners can be scaffolded to enhance their learning and learning strategies. The research might reinforce the policy makers to mandate these events in the curriculum on a quarterly, half-yearly or annual basis, to promote practically engaged learning that happens outside the classroom.

Keywords

Events, Camps, Conventions, Conferences, Seminars, Workshops, Training Programmes, Learnings, Convergence, Languages, Technology, Literature, Culture, Art Forms

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**Sliding down the ‘slippery slope’: A call for critical pedagogy for voice
demystification and construction in ESL student writing**

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Abstract

This paper explores the complexities and challenges surrounding the concept of "voice" in academic writing, particularly for ESL (English as a Second Language) learners. Academic writing has long been characterized by its formal and objective nature, often marginalizing the personal and cultural identities of writers. ESL learners, in particular, face difficulties in finding and asserting their unique voices within the rigid confines of academic conventions. The paper examines how traditional approaches to writing, dominated by "monolingualist assumptions," limit the expression of multilingual voices, forcing writers to conform to standardized norms that may not align with their linguistic backgrounds. Drawing on scholarship and personal experience, the paper discusses the inherent ambiguity of "voice" in academic writing and calls for a critical pedagogy of voice. By demystifying voice and making its nuances transparent in ESL classrooms, educators can create a space where students feel empowered to express their unique perspectives while engaging with academic discourse. The paper emphasizes the importance of a dialogical and transformative approach to teaching voice, enabling students to negotiate between dominant discourses and their own identities. Ultimately, the goal is to foster an inclusive academic environment where ESL learners can confidently assert their voices in ways that contribute to a richer and more diverse academic landscape.

Keywords: voice in academic writing, ESL learners, critical pedagogy, monolingualist assumptions, academic conventions.

The concept of "voice" in academic writing has long been a subject of debate, especially given the genre's traditional focus on formality and objectivity. Academic writing is often perceived as a depersonalized practice, where authors are expected to adhere to strict conventions that prioritize neutrality and detachment (Banga, S., n.d.). However, this focus on formalism can lead to a marginalization of the writer's personal and cultural identity, particularly for ESL (English as a Second Language) learners. For these learners, the challenge of finding and asserting their voice within the rigid confines of academic writing becomes even more pronounced. The struggle lies not only in mastering the technicalities of academic language but also in reconciling personal, cultural, and linguistic diversity with the expectations of the academic community. In many cases, the dominant approaches to studying multilingual writing are restricted by what Canagarajah (2006) refers to as "monolingualist assumptions," which favor a singular, standardized approach to writing. This monolingual bias often limits the ability of ESL writers to express their unique voices, as they are expected to conform to a particular set of norms that may not align with their linguistic or cultural backgrounds. As a result, ESL learners face a constant tension between meeting these academic standards and preserving their individual identity in their writing.

Moreover, the discussions surrounding voice in academic writing are further complicated by the inherent ambiguity of the concept itself. As Mitchell (2017) highlights, the idea of voice in writing reflects a deeper conflict—writers must balance the expectations of academic gatekeepers while simultaneously striving to maintain a sense of personal identity. Voice is not a fixed or easily definable concept; it is "variably defined," with significant confusion existing around its meaning, evaluation, and interpretation. This lack of a clear definition can make it even more challenging for ESL learners to navigate their way through the academic landscape.

Given these complexities, there is a pressing need for a critical pedagogical approach that addresses the nuanced and dynamic nature of voice in academic writing. Such an approach would demystify the concept of voice, helping ESL learners recognize that voice is not a singular or static trait but rather a flexible and evolving aspect of their writing. By becoming more aware of the "slippery" nature of voice, ESL learners can be empowered to develop their own distinct voices within the academic genre. This critical pedagogy would not only aid in their academic success but also encourage a more inclusive and diverse representation of voices within academic discourse. Ultimately, fostering an environment where ESL learners can confidently express their unique perspectives will contribute to a richer and more diverse academic landscape. This need to critically engage with voice brings us to a deeper exploration of the concept itself.

Let's talk voice: An overview



When I first began exploring the concept of voice for my research topic, I found myself repeatedly questioning, "What exactly is voice?" Every article I encountered seemed to present a different interpretation, leading to a growing sense of complexity. The more I sought a singular, definitive explanation or clear categorization of voice, the more elusive it became. Traditionally, the concept of voice has undergone continuous evolution over the past several decades, reflecting shifts in its understanding and application within various academic contexts. It was initially linked to individualism (Ramanathan and Atkinson, 1999) and later came to be largely seen as a means of creating personal identity and social relations in a discourse (Bakhtin, 1981; Ivanic, 1998). Similarly, Prior (2001) takes into account two primary debates on voice—personal and social—and finally comes up with a dialogic understanding of voice that surpasses the binary of the personal and the social. The debates and discussions on voice do not end with its personal, social, and dialogical categorisations. Besides these categories, voice in academic writing has been interpreted differently by different people. Some see it as a means of knowledge construction, some relate it with academic growth, while some see it as a writer's stance and identity. In fact, the interpretations are endless...

But the question is, how does one make peace with the concept of voice? Or is it even important to make peace with it?

To answer these questions, I will take my example and explain how I negotiated with the concept of voice.

To avoid confusions that exist over voice, we need to see voice as a 'slippery slope.' The metaphor of 'slippery slope' works at two levels. Firstly, it makes us understand the 'slippery' (Hyland, 2012) nature of voice, where any discussion on it will lead to a chain of never-ending discussions. A similar understanding of voice has been hinted at by many writers over the years. For instance, Bakhtin (1981) talks about the 'polyphonous' nature of voice, Ratcliff (1999) describes voice as 'ongoing negotiations', and Vengadasalam (2020) writes that "student voices are never static or inert, but evolving and diverse" (p. 14). Similarly, Canagarajah talks about the negotiated aspect of voice in relation to multilingual writers. According to him, voice can never be prescribed but negotiated. He explains,

Negotiation is made up of different, sometimes conflicting, layers. Authors have to negotiate these layers to gain a measure of coherence. The voice components mediate, modify, and motivate each other in the construction of voice. Providing even more scope for negotiation is the fact that voice also depends on the ways readers and writers negotiate these layers. The negotiations with the reader—sometimes confronting biases and impositions—can help writers develop a reflexivity and awareness of the multiple components of their voice. (Canagarajah, 2015, p. 125)

This understanding of voice as a negotiation between multiple conflicting layers takes us to the second purpose that the metaphor of 'slippery slope' is serving. It makes us

understand that the beauty of voice lies in the fact that it cannot be limited to a crystal-clear definition. It has to be constantly negotiated, which further lends writers the agency to reflect on their own understanding of voice. It makes them think critically of different conceptions of voice yet gives them the scope to see their own relationship with voice so that they do not fall into the trap of seeing voice through someone else's lens.

It becomes even more important for ESL writers to understand voice as a 'slippery slope' in order to find "appropriate ways of accommodating the strengths they bring from their nativized Englishes and vernaculars as they struggle for a voice that suits their values and interests in academic texts" (Canagarajah, 2005, p. 213). This understanding of voice as a dynamic and negotiable concept equips ESL learners to resist the dominant academic discourses that often suppress their voices. It opens the door to alternative forms of knowledge construction, allowing for a richer, more inclusive academic dialogue. In the following section, we will explore the challenges ESL writers face in maintaining their voice and examine strategies for overcoming the resistance posed by conventional academic norms.

Voices against voice: Resistance and regulation



Fig 2: 'I' the troublemaker in academic writing

For an extended period, I perceived the use of the pronoun "I" as problematic in academic writing. Upon reviewing my earlier academic essays and research papers, I often find phrases such as "This paper intends to..." or "The following essay aims to..." which reflect a tendency to distance myself from the work. This avoidance of personal pronouns raises the question: Why was it so difficult to assert the agency of my own work and simply write "I intend to..."? The reluctance to use "I" likely stemmed from the conventional belief that academic writing must remain impersonal and objective. However, this practice often disconnects the writer from the text, limiting the ability to engage more directly and authentically with the material. Nelson and Castello (2012) talked about the same conflict students face in using 'I' in their writing. They argued how students use it tentatively

without being sure if it is appropriate, and the same dilemma is reflected in their question: “Will using *I* make my writing seem less academic?” (p. 12). Now when I read more (or come across memes on the Internet like the one below) on the use of first-person pronouns in academic writing, I understand that it is related (to a great extent) to academic success.

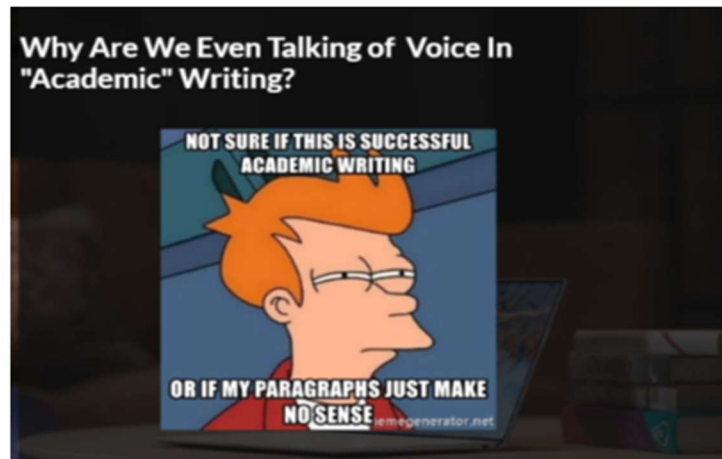


Fig 3: Why are we even talking of voice in academic writing?

But little did I realise that soon this negation of ‘I’ (use of first-person pronouns) got translated to cancelling out every other trace of my own voice in my writing. I never questioned the norms that we were supposed to follow, nor did I once think what purpose this parroting of conventions was serving but to take away my critical faculty. The blind adherence to ‘academic’ conventions made me feel disconnected from academic writing and apprehensive of the voices against voice or the resistance voice face.

While there is a growing scholarship of voice in the ESL writing context, there are also certain established standards and practices that deny ESL learners any freedom to find their way in academic writing. One such major hindrance to L2 students’ voice in writing “springs from the social and educational practices that restrict students from projecting their authorial self in the text and downplay their role as writers and researchers in the field” (Alharbi, 2022, p. 171). The same is argued by Lambert in her YouTube video, wherein she recounts the struggles of one of her students with academic writing. When asked about the reason behind the delay in her writing assignment, her student expressed that she feels stuck and detached from academic writing because her educational background hasn’t prepared her well for it or given her the freedom to express her opinions. Lambert also mentions how most of her students used to feel that the writing “assignment is done to them” instead of “they doing the assignment” (The New School, 2016). One reason why students feel a lack of agency/ownership over their writing is that they are taught to become slaves of dominant academic conventions into which they must fit.

According to Lillis (1997), dominant academic writing conventions “regulate student-

writers' voices in a complex way" (p. 197). She argues that a student's voice faces both direct and indirect regulation, which may, in turn, "marginalise writers and readers, and ensure that only a particular type of writer-reader relationship is maintained in academia" (ibid p. 197). The same kind of indirect regulation of voice is seen when L2 writers struggle to get their work published in international journals. The same struggle is recounted by Cangarajah (2002) in his book on the geopolitics of academic writing, wherein he shared his own experience in revising his writing to make it acceptable for publication in an American journal. Such prejudices against voice in academic writing need to be discussed more openly so that ESL writers are critically aware of how to balance their voice in their writing instead of adopting a singular academic English voice. This struggle with voice in academic writing leads to the broader issue of how voice is treated in ESL writing classrooms, which brings us to the next section.

Consciousness raising: A call for a critical pedagogy of voice

When voice is such a hotly debated issue in multilingual writing circles, why is there no explicit mention of the nuances of voice in most ESL writing classrooms? If I take my example, it was only in my PhD course *Academic Reading and Writing* (ARW) that we openly discussed issues related to voice, identity, and academic conventions. I was fortunate enough to be a part of the space (although at a very later stage of my academic career) where my instructors brought up such issues and made me think critically about my role as a writer. However, not many students get this chance as "surprisingly few studies of voice are situated in classrooms" (Tardy, in press, as cited in Canagarajah, 2015). Another reason for the lack of discussion on voice in writing classrooms is that "the large numbers of new L2 writers who are grappling with the fundamentals of syntax, lexis, and textual organisation need not be further burdened by (prescriptive) notions of voice" (Stapleton & Helms Park, 2008, as cited in Macalister, 2012). In other words, the focus is given to teaching the language and writing conventions first. But the question is if ESL learners are taught academic writing conventions right away will they be able to balance and interplay their unique voice and dominant academic discourses? Will it give them the confidence to negotiate academic conventions as per the purpose of their writing? Will it be a democratic practice? And most importantly, will such a writing pedagogy be informed by the real-life struggles and realities of ESL learners?

Therefore, there is a need for a critical pedagogy of voice in ESL writing classrooms. In fact, it should be the first step in making ESL writers aware of the slippery nature of voice, its nuances, ongoing discussions and debates, and its importance in academic writing. Such critical pedagogy of voice will transform classrooms into creative and dialogical spaces "involving relationships of teaching and learning so that students gain a critical self-consciousness and social awareness and take appropriate action against oppressive forces" (McKernan, 2013, p. 425). In other words, it is crucial to raise the critical consciousness of the students first to enable them to construct their voice in their writing, become agents of social change, and contribute to

academic discourses in a more informed manner.

This critical pedagogy of voice encompasses both Canagarajah's (2015) dialogical pedagogy of voice and Vengadasalam's (2020) transformative pedagogy of voice.

Canagarajah (2015) emphasises the importance of an amalgamated dialogical pedagogy in enabling multilingual writers to construct their desired voice in writing, enabling them "to engage with the ecological resources in the classroom to develop their texts and voices in their preferred trajectories" (p. 125), making them aware of their own values and diverse socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds, acquainting them with dominant academic norms yet providing them with "a safe and friendly environment for experimentation" (ibid p. 137), and encouraging them "to deploy their evolving awareness and strategies in new contexts of writing" (ibid p. 138).

On the other hand, Vengadasalam (2020) proposes the need for a transformative pedagogy in academic writing courses that can encompass S.E.A. principles of scaffolding, empowerment, and awareness as 'triple enablers' to develop graduate and undergraduate student voices. Such a teaching methodology, she argues, will enable students to contribute to scholarship, encourage risk-taking, trust-building, availability of choices, and shared authority. It will further promote equity, diversity and a multiplicity of voices in classrooms so that students do not "feel marginalized, silenced, or afraid of expressing their individual interpretations in their academic work" (p. 13).

Embedded in consciousness raising, dialogical classroom practices, and social change, the critical pedagogy of voice also allows learners and educators "to look at political, ideological, social, cultural, economic, and historical issues" (Wink, 2005, as cited in Quintero, 2019) related to voice, thereby subsuming to the multidimensional aspect of teaching and learning that critical pedagogy as a school of thought entails. In short, critical pedagogy of voice aims at the holistic nature of education and is informed by the actual challenges faced by the students in ESL

classrooms to make them understand the concept of voice, demystify voice, and develop their own voice in academic writing.

A critical pedagogy of voice, therefore, provides a foundation for helping ESL students understand voice, but it is essential to explore how this pedagogy leads to the practical demystification and construction of voice in their academic writing, which brings us to the last section.

Noise around voice: Voice demystification and construction

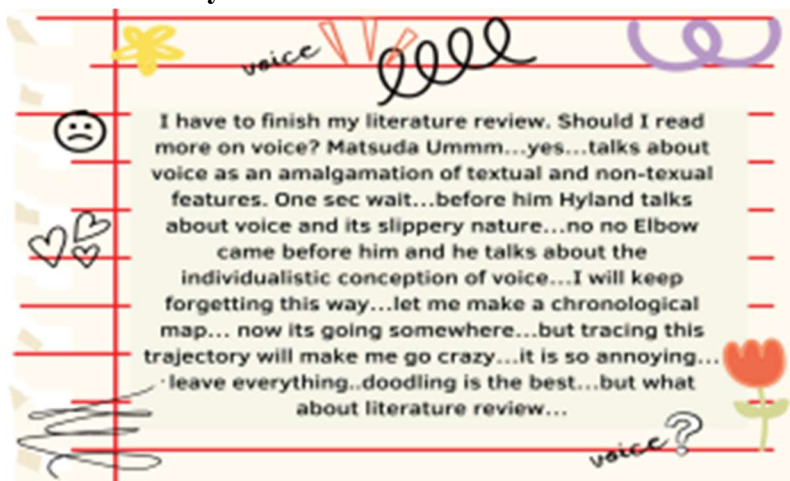


Fig 4: When will I get clarity?

Building on the need for a critical pedagogy of voice, it is essential to understand that the process of demystifying voice is not straightforward. Writing the literature review for the first draft of my research proposal was a messy process. I was struggling hard to trace the trajectory of voice. There were times when I used to get annoyed to the level of leaving everything behind and giving in to my creative side. Yes, those doodles in Fig 4! To be frank, I share a love-and-hate relationship with voice. As a person who becomes uneasy if things are not in order, making peace with voice was not a cakewalk. But at the end of the day, I found satisfaction in keeping my quest for the demystification of voice on. It is an ever-ending journey, and the only way we can demystify voice is by mystifying it—by creating more noises around it. It is only by explicitly talking about this 'slippery slope', by indulging in discussions on it, by experimenting with it, in short, by critically engaging with it (or becoming a part of a critical pedagogy of voice) that we can demystify voice as it is "a devilishly difficult concept to define" (Atkinson, 2001, p. 110). As Cameron, Nairn, and Higgins (2009) suggest, academic writing can be demystified by making the writing process more transparent. In the same vein, the complexities surrounding voice can be similarly demystified if its nuances are clarified and made transparent in ESL writing instruction. This requires educators to create an environment where students are encouraged to critically reflect on their relationship with voice, just as they are prompted to consider their connection to the writing process. By fostering an awareness of how their individual voices interact with established academic norms, ESL writers can begin to navigate the challenges of expressing their unique identities within academic discourse.

This process begins with recognizing the struggles inherent in developing a voice in writing, especially within the constraints of academic conventions. ESL writers, in particular, need opportunities to think about their relationship with voice and how their cultural, linguistic, and personal identities influence their writing. By facilitating this reflection, educators can help students understand that the development of a strong,

authentic voice does not require complete rejection of academic norms, but rather, a negotiation with them. As Canagarajah (2004) argues, achieving this balance means creating "room to negotiate, modify, and reconfigure—if not resist—dominant discourses" (pp. 268-269). Success in finding one's voice in academic writing comes when ESL learners understand that their voices must engage with established conventions, but not be subsumed by them. Writers can take these dominant discourses seriously, working within their frameworks while reconfiguring them to reflect their personal and cultural perspectives. The key to demystifying voice lies in this delicate balance—where the individual voice remains authentic, yet sensitive to the expectations of the academic community. It is at this point that writers gain both acceptance within academic discourse and the confidence to assert their unique perspectives. By guiding ESL learners through this process, instructors can empower them to develop a voice that is not only distinct but also relevant and effective within the broader academic landscape.

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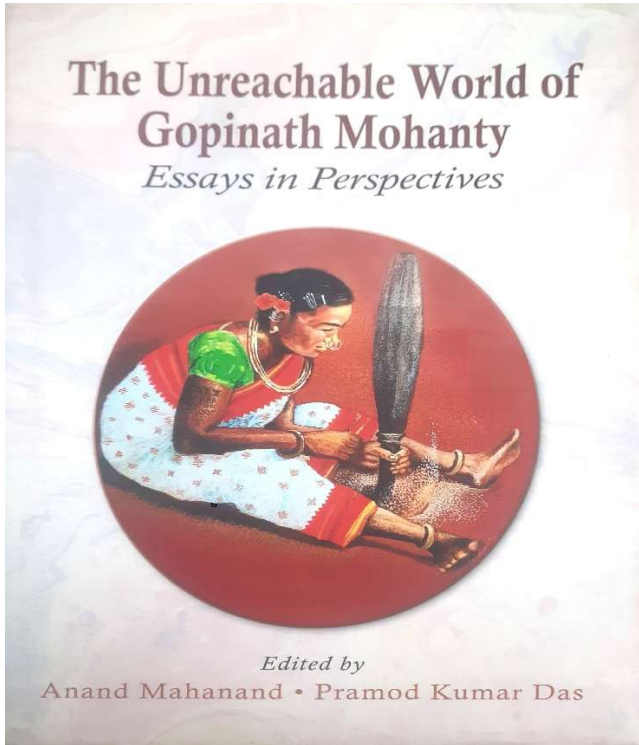
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Book reviews 1



BOOK REVIEW-1

A Reading Journey from the Unreachable to the Reachable.

Dr. Kanu Priya

The Unreachable World of Gopinath Mohanty: Essays in Perspective, edited by Anand Mahanand and Pramod Kumar Das. Pencraft International, Delhi, 2024, 222pp, INR 995.00

The Unreachable World of Gopinath Mohanty: Essays in Perspective is a compendium of essays on the works of one of the greatest Odia writers, Gopinath Mohanty. Published by Pencraft International, Delhi and edited by Anand Mahanand and Pramod Kumar Das, along with a detailed and informative foreword by Jatindra Kumar Nayak, the anthology covers a range of articles based on Mohanty's novels and short stories.

Gopinath Mohanty emerged as a promising writer in the Odia literary oeuvre during the 1940s with his works like *Paraja* (1945), *Dadi Budha* (1944), *Amrutara Santana* (1947) portraying the tribal world of Orissa that had remained oblivious for the mainstream world. The adroitness with which he sketches out his fictional world and characters emanates from his experience as a civil servant in the Orissa Administrative Services, which he served from 1938 to 1969. His body of work has been looked at through various lenses like,

anthropological, social and literary. This anthology interestingly brings all the three lenses together in order to give the readers a wholesome view of Mohanty's world and its relevance in today's society.

The essays are divided into four broad sections namely: Major concerns; Mohanty's *Paraja*; Mohanty's Other Novels; Mohanty's Short Fiction. The first section, 'Major concerns', contains six essays ranging from the issues of colonial modernity to tribal life and traditions to the representation of women characters in Mohanty's works. Mahesh Kumar Dey, in the article, "The Representation of Tribal Life and Culture in Gopinath Mohanty's Fictional Narratives", discusses the life of tribals as portrayed in two important novels of Mohanty: *Paraja* and *Amrutara Santana*. Along with the realistic depictions of tribal life and culture, Dey puts forth that Mohanty has also used the Kui dialect of the Paraja tribes in his novels, which marks a sense of authenticity in his fictional works. The essays "Gopinath Mohanty and a Critique of Colonial Modernity" by Chandan K. Panda and "Tribal Traditions and Modernity: A Critical Study of Gopinath Mohanty's Novel" by Jaya Pal bring forth the idea of colonial modernity that had a huge impact on the tribal ways of life and ethos. The colonial deterritorialization of Sukru Jani's tribal land in *Paraja* and ruination of the Lulla village in Dadi Budha due to intervention of the missionaries have been discussed in detail. The essay "Disintegration of Racial Culture: An Extensive Reading of Gopinath Mohanty's *The Ancestor* and Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*" by Aishwarya Mishra and Gurudev Meher takes the theme of colonial modernity further by taking two different tribal cultures from two different geographies and discussing the impact of colonial rule on them, especially on the village chieftains. The high priest, Ezeulu from the Igbo tribe and Dadi Budha, the demi-god of Lulla village of Koraput district of Orissa lose their hold on their respective tribes due to clashes between the colonial converts and belief systems of indigenous people. Pradip Kumar Panda's essay "The Downtrodden of Gopinath Mohanty: A Sympathetic Glance" moves a step further to discuss the exploitation of the tribals and Dalits by the non-tribals and upper castes in the novels like *Paraja* and *Harijan*.

The theme of oppression, law and lawlessness, land and resilience in *Paraja* has been dealt with in detail in a number of essays. Raj Kumar in Gopinath Mohanty's "*Paraja: A Study of Ethnic Oppression*" discusses the meaning of the word 'Paraja', which pertains to 'tenants' in Odia and he further analyses the oppression that Sukru Jani and his family had to suffer in the hands of the forest guard, the moneylender and police officers. The interception of urban values in the tribal world and the tribals' desire for social upliftment, he argues, led to the disintegration of the world of Parajas. In the essay, "Law and Lawlessness: Reflections on Authority and Individual in *Paraja*", Manoranjan Rath brings forth an important aspect of fear and ignorance of law among the tribals, due to which they fall prey to the oppressors. Taking the idea of law and rights of the tribals in

Paraja, Chinmayee Nanda discusses the helplessness of the tribals to protect their basic rights of life and food due to poverty and oppression by the officials. Jili, Mandia and the tribal villagers have no option but to give up their morality in order to protect their basic rights of survival. The essay rightfully observes how the political and social systems are connected to the economic system. Mohanty, not only talks about the destituteness of the Parajas, but also discusses the strong resilience posed by the tribals. Snigdha Subhrasmita, in the essay “Resilience Through Dispossession: Land as a Symbol in Gopinath Mohanty’s *Paraja*” analyses the presence of land as a mark of identity as well as a sacred entity; its exploitation; the emotional and mental trauma of losing one’s land and the role it plays in striking resilience and resistance.

Apart from the portrayal of life of tribals in Orissa, Mohanty has also represented the Dalits in his works as tribals and Dalits lived together in many villages. Anand Mahanand’s essay “Gopinath Mohanty’s Harijan: A Text for Multiple Interpretations”, describes the life of Dalits living in a ‘Mehentar basti’ in Nokadharpur. Soumya Sangita Sahoo looks at the same novel with the lens of ‘Dalit carnivalesque’. The instances like the village getting together for a religious carnival or people gathering around liquor shops at night or sensual desire of the upper caste men like Aghore babu for the Other, like Puni, do bring the upper caste and lower caste together but do not subvert the dominant identities. After a short duration everything gets back to original with the discrimination intact.

Mohanty portrays the women in his works with a similar deftness as his other characters. Few essays in the anthology dwells upon the portrayal of women in bringing out the variety in his works. Saroj Kumar Mahananda, in “Domestic, Public, and National: Women in Select Short Stories of Gopinath Mohanty” studies three women: Domi in “Da”; Kokila in “A Good Samaritan”; Kamaladevi in “Cricket”. The three women are from different eras, for example, Domi, a concubine, belongs to colonial Orissa who was relegated to domestic struggles; Kokila serves as a warder in a prison after the Indian Independence; and Kamaladevi is from a more recent past when building new national identities became essential. The essay by Sneha Mishra studies Jili’s character in *Paraja* through imageries like nest, butterfly, bird, snake, dark night in order to present her defeated hopes and desires which reduces her to a housewife or a ‘gharani’. The theme of marital disharmony and the social state of women has been taken up by Nilima Meher. She studies three short stories of Mohanty, namely “Guptaganga”, “Salasundari” and “Ranakhundi” published in 1967, 1979 and 1992 respectively to discuss the struggles and sacrifices of women (educated or uneducated) in a family setup. The analysis of the creation myth of Kotia Kandhas by Subhashree Mohanty show the supremacy of females in tribal communities as their creator was a virgin goddess.

Another important theme that Mohanty has put forth in his work is education. Anuja Khatua in “Theme of Education in Gopinath Mohanty’s *Apahancha* (The Unreachable)” explores the disruptive role that education plays in a tribal community. Influenced by the non-tribal ways of life, an educated tribal man, Tima, disowns his tribal identity, language, clothes and manners to fit in with the educated mainstream society. A beautiful reconciliation is also shown, espousing the education of both, the heart and mind. Apart from modern education, the “ancient values of caring and sharing” is also explored in Mohanty’s work like “Siba Bhai”, thus making his canvas huge and complete.

No work of literature is complete without the analysis and discussion of the narrative style. Gopinath Mohanty’s works appealed to an array of people because of his unique narrative style where he blended the objective as well as subjective points of view. This idea of narration has been discussed in detail in the essay, “The Author as Administrator: A Reading of Gopinath Mohanty’s *Paraja*.” by Ivy Imogene Hansdak. She takes instances from the text to understand Mohanty’s narrative technique, which is a blend of primitivist/romantic outlook and conventional realism (in the form of existential dilemmas). She also observes that the novel reads like a lyrical prose due to the inclusion of songs and descriptions of festivals and dances. Raj Kumar reads *Paraja* from the author’s point of view, critiquing the author’s “vision of an unchanging continuity of tribal culture”. Punyashree Panda and Swayam Sikha Srichandan offers a different take in the narrative style adopted in the short story “Ants”. They take the concept of ‘imaginative geography’ proposed by Edward Said in *Orientalism*, to mark the observations of the narrator, Ramesh, who is an outsider to the tribal community. His narration begins with a stereotypical description of the tribals and as his journey progresses, his point of view changes due to the provoking questions of tribals and the reality of their poor living conditions. This leads to the epiphanic vision of the distinct but universal human experiences, hence making the narration a discourse and not merely a recounting of events.

The anthology does congregate a range of issues and themes to dig out the ‘unreachable’ world of Gopinath Mohanty, however a little has been discussed about the aspects of translation, as most of his works are available to the readers in translation. Nonetheless, the twenty essays, meticulously edited by Mahanand and Das is an indispensable addition to the milieu of Indian English Literature as well as Tribal Literature. By placing the very significant and relevant works of one of the greatest writers of India for the contemporary scholars of Indian Literature, the book brings us a step closer towards the world painted in words by Gopinath Mohanty, tracing the reading journey from an unreachable world to a reachable one.

Book Review 2

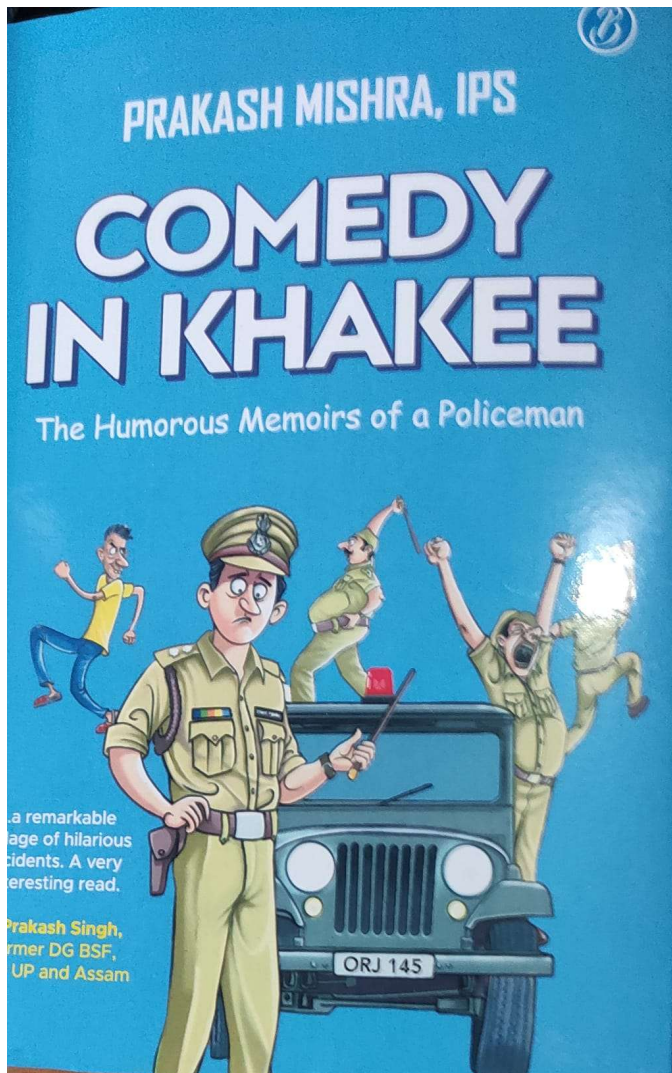
COMEDY IN KHAKEE The humorous Memoirs of a Policeman

Written by Prakash Mishra, Former DG Police. Book Review 3

Publisher Shristi Publishers , New Delhi

Pages 189 Price Rs. 350/-

Reviewed by Mahendra Kumar Mishra



Prakash Mishra, a former Indian Police Service (IPS) officer, turned a politician, brings a refreshing perspective to life with his lighter side. Inspired by the legendary comedian Charlie Chaplin, Mishra's experiences are infused with humour, comedy, and laughter. He emphasizes the vital role laughter plays in our lives, a natural instinct often overshadowed by the artificial constructs of power and authority. Through his engaging memoirs, he

shares insightful anecdotes from his everyday experiences, showcasing the humour that can emerge even in the most unexpected circumstances.

Mishra's narratives expertly capture the struggles and peculiarities faced by the protagonists he encountered, revealing the absurdities that often defy normal life. His school and college days brimmed with memorable and humorous events involving his Gandhian father, English teacher, friends, and others. While many may assume that a police officer's work revolves solely around serious crime, Mishra boldly challenges this perception. Instead, he focuses on the follies and vanities of officers, politicians, and everyday people, crafting comedic moments that resonate with authenticity.

Consider his English teacher, who, with a penchant for staring at girls, found himself cleverly outwitted by his students, leading to a humorous resolution. Mishra also recounts an extraordinary incident involving a sub-inspector in Champua, who organized a bamboo rafting event for his superior—an outing that ended with the senior officer's unfortunate drowning. Another memorable tale highlights a district judge in traditional dhoti and kurta, mistakenly detained by a tribal traffic constable for a traffic violation, a fact the judge ultimately had to acknowledge.

One of the standout chapters in Mishra's memoir is "The Uncanny Boss," where he keenly observes a whimsical and irresponsible ruler, akin to Camu's Caligula, who depended heavily on his bureaucratic entourage. The people of Odisha, often oblivious to their ruler's shortcomings, found comfort in anecdotes, all the while remaining unaware of the deeper issues at play. With humility and insight, Mishra exposes the flaws of the ruler and reflects on the collective silence of the populace.

The rest of his memories delve into his relationships with colleagues and superiors in the police department, the complexities surrounding Naxal issues in Koraput and Malkangiri, and a series of humorous incidents that highlight the absurdities of human behaviour. As a keen observer, Mishra skilfully crafts these stories to unearth the mistakes and misjudgements that society frequently ignores.

Each event Mishra recounts can be interpreted as serious, light-hearted comedy, or evidence to human dignity. His storytelling provides a glimpse into a vast array of events, with many more left unspoken and trivial details consciously excluded. Through his candid and straightforward writing style, Mishra not only articulates the truth but also reveals the underlying chaos of human experience.

Mishra's language is accessible, dialogic, and engaging, making his narratives both enjoyable and educational. Each anecdote carries valuable moral lessons, drawn from the mistakes and missteps of others. Ultimately, this memoir stands as a compelling account of Mishra's life in Odisha, enriched by his interactions with a diverse array of characters.

The events he chooses to share can be viewed as serious, light-hearted comedy, or reflections of dignity. Mishra presents just the tip of the iceberg, consciously omitting many

other events and trivial details. Despite his candid and impartial writing style, which speaks the truth, it simultaneously reveals underlying chaos.

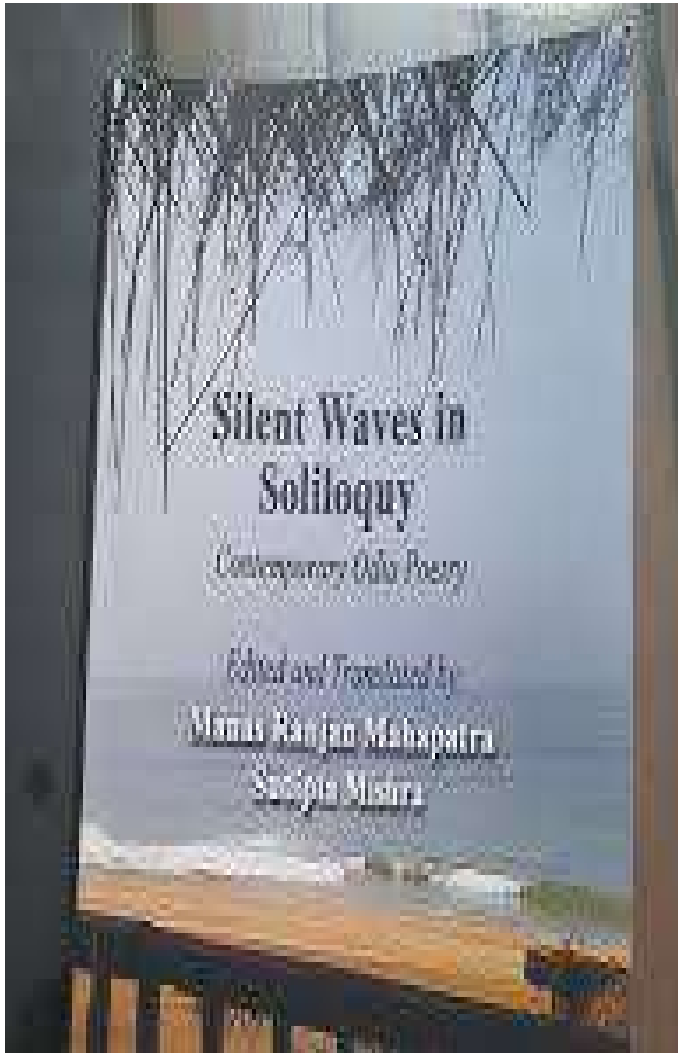
Mishra's writing style is characterized by its clarity and conversational tone, inviting readers into his world with ease. The language is straightforward yet captivating, ensuring that the narrative remains both enjoyable and enlightening. Each anecdote he shares is infused with valuable moral lessons, drawn from the experiences, mistakes, and missteps of those around him. Through these stories, readers gain insight not only into the human condition but also into the wisdom that can emerge from challenging situations. Overall, the book stands as a vibrant and detailed exploration of Mishra's experiences in Odisha, highlighting the richness of his interactions with a diverse cast of characters and the profound themes of understanding and growth that arise from them.

In view of the popularity of this book in A wider readership, Odi readers wish that the book should be released in Odia language also.

Mahendra Kumar Mishra

Book Review 3

Silent Waves in Soliloquy (A selection of contemporary Odia poems) Edited & Translated by **Manas Ranjan Mohapatra Sudipta Mishra**
Published by : Athena Books, Bhubaneswar-751002



Reviewed by Dr Chittaranjan Mishra

Poetry communicates at a deeper level. Before it gets written the poet undergoes a turmoil deep within himself. He seems to be talking to himself at this stage. But once the poem is written it acquires a body, a verbal structure and starts talking to the readers. A poem evokes multiple responses in the readers. Understanding and enjoyment of poetry take place on a dramatic plain. Voices emerge from the lines propelled by the patterns and cadence like waves, often as soliloquy. The present anthology, in consonance with this is entitled “Silent Waves in Soliloquy”. Since this is an anthology of poems translated from Odia, questions related to the limitation of translation in general comes to mind. Is it

possible to retain the literary merit and aesthetic appeal of the source text in another language like English? Is the spirit of the original present in the target language? The anxiety related to a common notion that the genuine beauty of poetry gets compromised in the process of translation has ever been a burden on translators. But despite that translation takes place and many a text of source language have become popular and widely known being translated into another language. Robert Frost's view that "poetry is what is lost in translation." is treated as a dictum by poetry translators who struggle to minimize the loss. Such losses are primarily caused by cultural differences between two languages. When the translator negotiates with 6 / Silent Waves in Soliloquy words that do not have equivalents in the target language, she takes liberties taking into account the aesthetic appeal of his translation. The choice of translator swings between fidelity and flexibility. History of translation in Odisha can be traced back to 15th century when Sanskrit scriptures began to be rewritten in Odia as a revolt against the hegemony of Sanskrit. Sanskrit was considered the language of God (Deba Bhasha). To make the scriptural knowledge accessible to common man poets like Sarala Das and Balaram Das used the language of the people. Sarala Das took liberties with the old texts and set an example for the later poets. In the hands of Jagannath Das translation became a means of transformation. His translation of Shrimad Bhagabata contributed to the standardization of Odia language. In the nineteenth century translation entered into a new phase. Translators were interested in English, the colonizer's language. They chose classics from English in their Odia renderings. Gradually Odia texts were translated into English after independence of India. In 1956 Gyanindra Barma had translated T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" into Odia. In a Prefatory Note to the work Eliot had said: "for the most important service that poetry of other lands and languages can perform for us, is the stimulus and the suggestions that it can give to our own poets. It is, therefore to the living poets of Oriya language that I should wish the Oriya version of my poems to be dedicated ." The poet who was more influenced by Eliot's poetry was Guruprasad Mohanty whose birth centenary is being observed this year. He wrote 'Kalapurusa' imitating the themes and structural elements of "The Waste Land". The Silent Waves in Soliloquy / 7 work is considered as a milestone in the shaping of modern Odia poetry. This suggests the importance of how culture and language of another country affects our literary productions. With the changing of times translation endeavor has become more exotropic. This has helped our writers reach a wider audience and gain international recognition. Odia poetry in English translation has become visible through many anthologies in addition to their publication in different literary journals. At the same time many poets from Odisha have written poems in English. Jayanta Mahapatra to whom this book is dedicated is a doyen of Indian English Poetry in whose poetic achievement we refer to with pride. Apart from writing poetry in English language he has translated Odia poems selected from poets young and old. It is a fact that many poets in Odisha writing today are bilingual. That makes the weather propitious for translational ventures in the state. In the recent years many translation anthologies of Odia poems have come out like

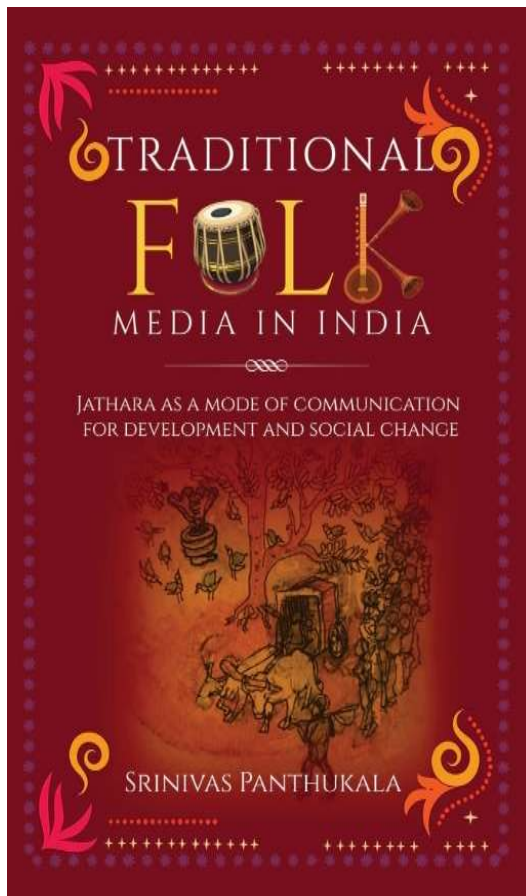
“Hundred Years of Odia Poetry”, “Parallel Speech”, “Footprints of Fire: The Black Eagle Book of Odia Poetry”, and “Varnamala Anthology of Odia Poetry”. “The Big Book of Odia Literature” published recently by Penguin Random House, India contains translation of a number of major Odia poems. When a poet translates poetry (his own poems or that of others) there arrives a feeling of comfort. At least one feels that his poem will come out as a poem and not a structure of incongruous amalgamation of fragments of literal translation. 8 / Silent Waves in Soliloquy For the genuine reader ‘poems originally written in English’ and ‘poems in English translation’ hardly matter as two distinct categories. Readers look for poems, stories, and novels proper whether they are originally written or translated. In fact, most of the world classics have reached us in English translation. This anthology includes translation of Odia poetry written by poets born after the middle of last century. Many of them are reputed and popular for their individual style and diction. Translation of poetry of women poets has enriched the collection. Since the translators are poets, the readers will perceive the encounter of sensibility with language. Sudipta Mishra, a young voice writes poems in English. Manas Ranjan Mahapatra is a reputed poet with a large body of bilingual output. Their translational excursion into Odia poetry through the present endeavor is sincere and praiseworthy. The readers, I expect, will perceive what is not lost in translation.

Book Review 4

Traditional Folk Media in India: Jathara as a mode of Communication for Development and Social Change.

Panthukala Srinivas. I Edition, White Falcon Publishing. 2021. 176 pp. ₹ 299 pbk.

Reviewed by: Gondi Surender Dhanunjay, Research Scholar, Department of Media and Communication, School of Communication, Central University of Tamil Nadu, Thiruvarur, India.



Srinivas Panthukala's "Traditional Folk Media in India: Jathara as a Mode of Communication for Development and Social Change" offers an in-depth examination of the potential of traditional folk media to drive social development. By focusing on the Jathara festival, Panthukala highlights the significant role that these vibrant cultural events play in the communication landscape of rural and semi-urban India. This book is an essential contribution to the Media and communication studies in general and development communication in particular. The book, which is divided into seven chapters, begins by providing an overview and review on traditional folk media in the first and second chapters. The third chapter deals with the theoretical framework of communication for development and

social change in the context of traditional folk media. The fourth chapter lays an emphasis on Jathara and its importance as a medium of communication for the development of the society. The Fifth chapter presents the case study of Nagobha Jatara of Raj Gonds as a communication tool for unheard voices. The sixth chapter presents the case study of Deccan Development Society which adopted Paata Pantala Jatara as a Development and Communication tool for Rural Development and Sangham Women empowerment. The final chapter deals with the traditional folk media in the context of 'Global village'.

Panthukala's Experience in Development Communication Sector and Academic experience is very well seen in the book incorporating interviews, participant observations, and case studies, which together create a vivid picture of the festival's role in community life.

Key Highlights of this books is in the effectiveness of folk media in engaging grassroots communities. The Author provides numerous examples of how Jathara has been used to spread information about health, education, and social justice, showcasing its potential as a vehicle for social change. The Book is notable for its depth of research and clear presentation. The Authors detailed examination of the Jathara festival, supported by empirical data and firsthand accounts, provides a comprehensive understanding of the subject. The writing is both scholarly and accessible, making the book suitable for a wide audience, from academics to development practitioners.

However, some readers might find the detailed descriptions of the Jathara festival's various components a bit overwhelming, particularly those unfamiliar with Indian folk traditions. While this thoroughness enriches the narrative, it may also pose a challenge for those seeking a more concise overview. Nevertheless, the book's detailed approach is one of its strengths, offering a rich and nuanced perspective on traditional folk media.

"Traditional Folk Media in India: Jathara as a Mode of Communication for Development and Social Change" is a significant contribution to the fields of communication studies and development. Srinivas Panthukala effectively demonstrates the transformative power of traditional folk media, providing insights that are both academically rigorous and practically relevant. This book is an essential read for Development Communication Course, scholars, practitioners, and anyone interested in the intersection of culture, communication, and social change.