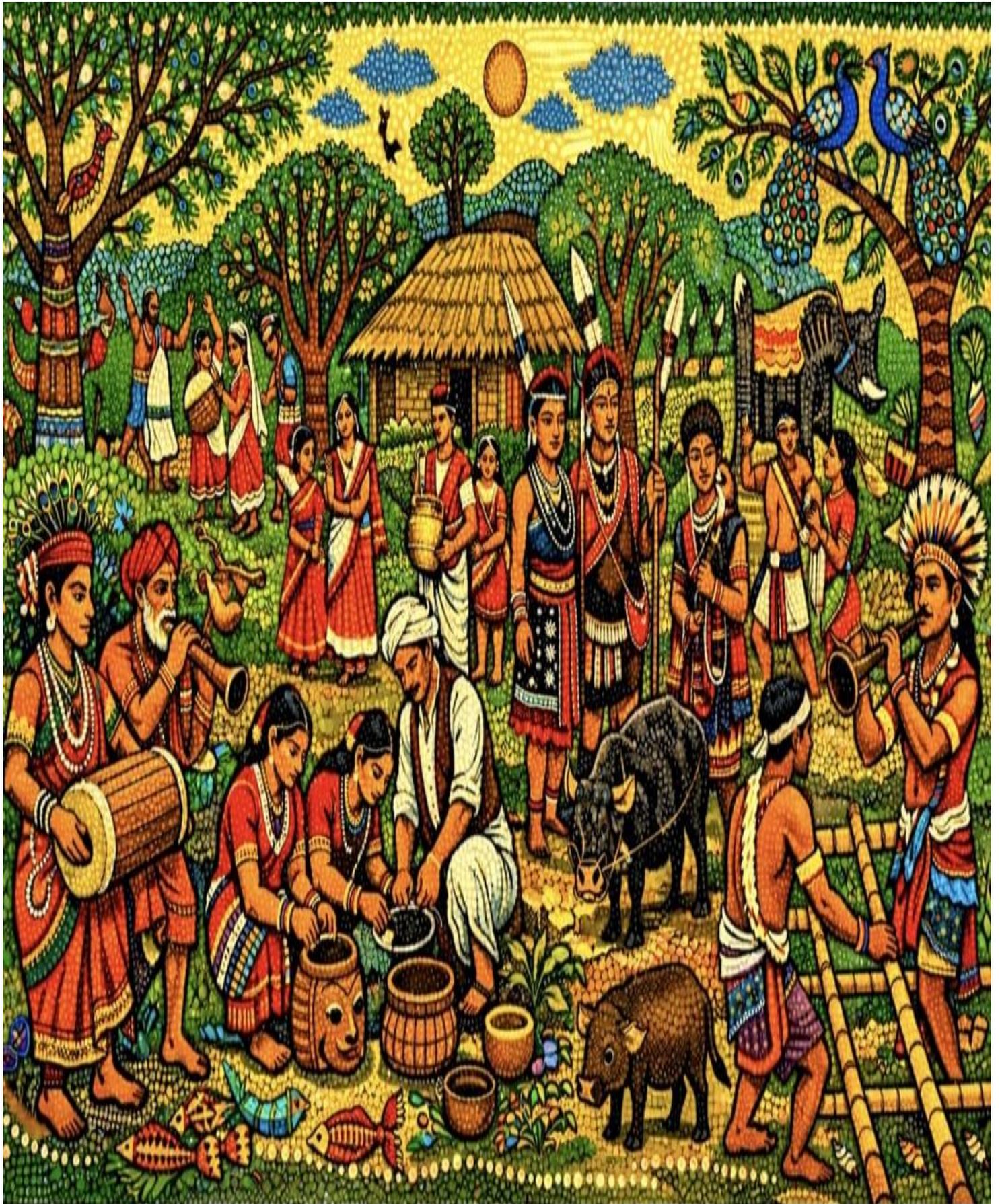


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LOKARATNA

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- To publish seminal articles written by senior scholars on Folklores, making them available from the original sources. It would help present the lives of folklorists, outlining their substantial contribution to existing resources.
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- To present interviews with eminent folklorists and scholars from India and abroad.

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From the Desk of the Chief Editor

In an age marked by conflict, fragmentation, intolerance, and restlessness of society, humanity continues to search for peace—not merely the absence of violence, but the presence of harmony, empathy, and shared belonging. One of the quiet yet enduring forces that nurtures this human peace is folklore. Rooted in collective memory and everyday creativity, folklore carries the wisdom, imagination, and ethical vision of communities. It reminds us that culture is not only heritage but also a living path toward social solidarity and creative coexistence.

Folklore is the language of the human heart. Through folktales, songs, myths, epics, and rituals, communities express their deepest concerns—love, loss, justice, courage, and hope. These narratives often resolve conflicts through wisdom rather than force, compassion rather than domination. Folk heroes are not merely warriors; they are protectors of truth, community, and moral balance. In many traditions, reconciliation, forgiveness, and collective welfare stand above individual gain. Such narrative ethics cultivate a culture of peace, teaching generations that harmony within society and with nature is the highest human value.

Equally, folklore is a profound source of creativity. It transforms ordinary life into meaningful art—songs woven from labour, stories shaped by landscape, and rituals inspired by cosmic rhythms. Creativity in folklore is not individualistic but collective; it belongs to the community. Each retelling renews imagination, allowing tradition to remain dynamic and inclusive. This creative continuity enables societies to adapt to change without losing their cultural soul. Folklore thus becomes a bridge between memory and innovation, tradition and modernity, stability and transformation.

Most importantly, folklore nurtures social solidarity. Shared stories create shared identities. When people sing together, celebrate festivals, or listen to ancestral tales, they reaffirm bonds of trust and belonging. Folklore transcends divisions of class, language, and region by emphasizing common human experiences. It gives voice to marginalized communities, preserving their dignity and knowledge, and reminding society of its plural foundations. Through oral traditions, communities learn cooperation, mutual care, and respect for diversity—essential pillars of peaceful coexistence.

Folklore also fosters harmony between humans and nature. Many folk traditions see the earth not as a resource but as a relative—sacred, nurturing, and alive. Stories of forests, rivers, animals, and seasons promote ecological ethics rooted in respect and balance. In a world facing environmental crisis, such cultural wisdom becomes a guide for sustainable living and collective responsibility.

In contemporary society, where technology often isolates and rapid change erodes memory, folklore remains a gentle yet powerful force of humanization. It reminds us that peace is cultural before it is political, and solidarity is emotional before it is institutional. By nurturing empathy, imagination, and shared values, folklore sustains the creative spirit of humanity.

Thus, folklore is not merely a relic of the past; it is a living pathway to peace, creativity, and social unity. In its songs, stories, and rituals, humanity discovers its shared voice—a voice that calls for harmony, celebrates diversity, and keeps alive the dream of a compassionate and creative world.

I am glad to witness the dedication of the Lokaratna Team, who have voluntarily pioneered literary work for writers, researchers, and scholars to disseminate the glory of Indian folklore in the global domain for a wider readership. Many thanks to Dr. Anand Mahanand, the Executive Editor, for his relentless efforts with his team in making this journal truly qualitative.

Let words become bridges that connect the hearts, nurturing joy, harmony, and shared happiness in the world.

Mahendra Kumar Mishra



EDITORIAL

Indigenous Folk Cultural Practices

Indigenous and folk cultural practices encompass beliefs, rituals, arts, crafts, performances, knowledge of folk medicine and other forms of knowledge of the indigenous people. Also known as folklore, they primarily exist in oral forms and are passed on from generation to generation. Although they are viewed as relics of the past by some, they are still alive and relevant to the contemporary society. For instance, the traditional knowledge and skills of the of the indigenous people about agriculture and the environment is useful to the modern society. It helps us for sustenance and harmonious living. There is a need for the modern societies to emulate some of the practices of the tribes when it comes to caring for the environment and live a harmonious life.

Many articles in the folklore section of this issue, explore different aspects of indigenous cultural practices. The article titled “Manoharshai Tradition in Manipur by Rajkumar Biswajit and Irom Rbindro Singh specifies the uniqueness of the folk form Manohar Shai and its role in uniting communities through cultural performances. Similarly, Dr Ranjan Kumar Nayak’s article “A Study on the Impact of Danda Nacha of Bhanjanagar, Ganjam, Odisha on Social Unity: A T-Test Analysis” studies the impact of Danda Nacha on social unity. Dr Susanta Kumar Bardhan’s article titled, “Some Socio-cultural Aspects of Bhadugan” describes the Bhadu Puja celebrated in the Rarh region of West Bengal and analyses the songs performed as part of the festival. He also delineates its social and cultural functions.

In their article “Beyond the Tourist Gaze: Documenting the Women-Centric Folk Practices of Dantea-Oriyo and Dhalo” Rupesh Kumar Pandey and Glenis M. Mendonca analyse Goanfolk songs and explore how women are referred to in these songs. The writers assert that women occupy a significant place in the folk sayings though they are not given so much importance in their domestic space. Dr Ritu Sharma and Dr Deepika Shah’s article “Indian Tribal and Folk Literature: A True Reflection of Native Culture” argue that tribal folk literature represents authentic native culture in India. The article “O YI YO AHO: A study on Angami Lullabies” by Thekrunguno Audrey argues that the lullabies are not merely to make children sleep but play a major role in transmitting cultural knowledge.

In the Literature section, the article titled “Lord Jagannath’s Living Traditions and Odisha’s Unified Consciousness” by Rajashree Bhanja, Shreya Pradhan and Srinath Bhanja deals with the living traditions of Lord Jagannath at Puri and the unified faith of the people of Odisha where people come together forgetting their caste, creed and sects. Dr Pradip Panda’s article “Amartya Sen’s Gift of India’s Cultural Unity and Voice of Heterodoxy” highlights India’s argumentative traditions that have been alive from the ancient time to the present. Dr Soumya Sangeeta Sahoo’s article “The Journey of India’s Womanhood in the Works of Fakir Mohan Senapati and Premchand” outlines the literary historiography of Indian womanhood. Ivy Hansdak’s article “Reading Resistance Narratives in the Context of Tribal Predication” explores the representation of tribal resistance movements in Indian literature. D.Murali Manohar’s article “Caste and Christianity in Bama’s Karukku: A Study with Reference to B.R. Ambedkar’s Concept of “Conversion as Emancipation” examines how Bama’s Karukku exposes the persistence of caste discrimination within Christianity, challenging the promise of spiritual equality. Through Ambedkar’s idea of “conversion as emancipation,” it questions whether religious conversion truly liberates Dalits or merely relocates caste hierarchies within a new faith.

The Language pedagogy section also has many articles that are not only relevant to the present context but useful to learners, teachers, material developers and other stake holders. Prof. Revathi Srinivas and Prof. M. E. Veda Sharan in their article “The Paradox of Simplicity: Age-Inappropriate Linguistic Complexity in Task Instructions of English Textbooks” analyse instructions in textbooks by applying criteria like clarity, simplicity, age appropriateness and so on and stress that instructions given as part of tasks play an important role in curriculum transaction. Dr. Gedam Kamalakar & Dr. Kandi Kamala in their article “Skill Development and Educational Access Among the Tribal Youth” deal with the way education has been making inroads into the tribal regions and how tribal youths are educated and initiated into skill teaching. Swati Verma’s article “Adoption of Competency Based Education in English Teaching: Perspectives of Trained Graduate Teachers in Delhi Government Schools” obtains views of teachers on competency-based language education in schools as advocated by NEP 2020. The Book Review section has two book reviews. Anand Mahanand Reviews Kailash C. Baral’s *The Empire’s Backyard: Colonial Modernity and North East India* and Anwasha Panda reviews Sidhartha Sarma’s *Year of the Weeds*. Thus, the current volume has become a varied tapestry of multidisciplinary and multicultural topics.

We must share a piece of good news here. Dr Mahendra Mishra, the Editor- in Chief and Founder of Folklore Foundation and *Lokaratna* has been conferred Padma Shri Award for his contributions to literature and education. We congratulate him on this joyous moment and wish him for greater achievements in future. We thank the contributors for their articles. The next issue of *Lokaratna* will be a special issue on Integrating History and Culture with Pedagogy. This will be based on the proceedings of the Two-Day National Conference organized in Panchayat College, Bargarh in December 2025.

I hope the current issue will be well received.

Anand Mahanand, Executive Editor

CONGRATULATIONS!!

PADMA SHRI AWARDEE 2026



DR. MAHENDRA KUMAR MISHRA

Trustee and National Advisor, Multilingual Education,
Language and Learning Foundation,

We are thrilled to announce that Dr. Mahendra Kumar Mishra, the esteemed Editor-in-Chief and Founder of the Folklore Foundation and Lokaratna, has been honoured with the prestigious Padma Shri Award for his exceptional contributions to literature and education. This accolade highlights his dedication to preserving and promoting folklore, enriching our understanding of cultural heritage, and inspiring many to appreciate its importance. The Padma Shri, one of India's highest civilian honours, acknowledges Dr. Mishra's tireless efforts to keep folklore alive and relevant. We extend our warmest congratulations to him on this joyous occasion and wish him continued success in his future endeavours!!

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Table of Contents

Section I: Folklore

1. **A Case Study of Manipuri Manohar Shai Tradition in Manipur** — Rajkumar Biswajit & Irom Robindro Singh 1
2. **A Study on the Impact of Danda Nacha of Bhanjanagar, Ganjam, Odisha on Social Unity: A T-Test Analysis** — Dr. Ranjan Kumar Nayak 18
3. **Beyond the Tourist Gaze: Documenting the Women-Centric Folk Practices of Dantea-Oviyo and Dhalo** — Rupesh Kumar Pandey & Glenis M. Mendonça 30
4. **Some Socio-Cultural Aspects of Bhādugān** — Dr. Susanta Kumar Bardhan 45
5. **Indian Tribal and Folk Literature: A True Reflection of Native Culture** — Dr. Ritu Sharma & Dr. Deepika Shah 57
6. **O YI YO AHO: A Study on Angami Lullabies** — Thekrunguno Audrey 69

Section II: Literature

7. **Lord Jagannath's Living Traditions & Odisha's Unified Consciousness: Global Perspectives** — Rajashree Bhanja, Shreya Pradhan & Srinath Bhanja 83
8. **Amartya Sen's Gift of India's Cultural Identity and a Voice of Heterodoxy in *The Argumentative Indian*** — Dr. Pradip Kumar Panda 100
9. **The Journey of Indian Womanhood in the Works of Fakir Mohan Senapati and Premchand** — Dr. Soumya Sangita Sahoo 114
10. **Reading Resistance Narratives in the Context of the 'Tribal Predication'** — Dr. Ivy Imogene Hansdak 123
11. **Caste and Christianity in Bama's *Karukku*: A Study with Reference to B. R. Ambedkar's Concept of "Conversion as Emancipation"** — Dr. D. Murali Manohar 131

Section III: Language Pedagogy

12. **The Paradox of Simplicity: Age-Inappropriate Linguistic Complexity in Task Instructions of English Textbooks** — Prof. Revathi Srinivas & Prof. M. E. Veda Sharan 144
13. **Skill Development and Educational Access among Telangana's Tribal Youth** — Dr. Gedam Kamalakar & Dr. Kandi Kamala 163
14. **Adoption of Competency-Based Education in English Teaching: Perspectives of Trained Graduate Teachers in Delhi Government Schools** — Swati Verma 170

Section IV: Book Reviews

15. **The Empire's Backyard: Colonial Modernity and Northeast India** — Reviewed by Dr. Anand Mahanand 197
16. **Year of the Weeds** by Siddhartha Sarma — Reviewed by Anwasha Panda 199

FOLKLORE

A Case Study of Manipuri Manohar Shai Tradition in Manipur

Rajkumar Biswajit

Research Scholar

Dr Irom Robindro Singh

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Manipur University of Culture

Abstract

Manipuri Manoharshai is a blended form of Indian Kirtan and flourished earlier than the present-day Nata Sankiratana in Manipur. It was developed in Manipur from the time of Maharaja Chandrakriti Singh (1831-1886). Manoharshai Gurus in the state accepted that the origin of Manipuri Manoharshai Kirtan was the land of Bangadesh. The original style is in fact the Deshi Sangeet of Bangadesh. Manoharshai Kirtan is a fussion/mixed style of old Bangadesh Kirtan viz Garerhati, Mandarini, Reneti, Manoharshai and Jharkhandi. This Kirtan has been performed in the ritual ceremonies in Meetei society with profound value from birth till death. The objective of the present study is to explore the origin and development of Manipuri Manoharshai in Manipur and its inner qualities and importance which are reflected in Manipuri literature. Manipuri Manoharshai has occupied an important place in Meetei society in Manipur as a result, a new trend needs to be studied. The study indicates the emergence of Manoharshai from West Bengal to Manipur and its growth in the state as another format of Meetei Nata SanKirtan. The study concludes that at present Manipuri format of Manoharshai also known as Manipuri Manoharshai plays a vital role in the state with regional value and blended of Meetei culture. In the finding of the study, not only the mixed style of Bangadesh Kirtan like Garerhati, Mandarini, Reneti, Manoharshai and Jharkhandi but there are also Manipuri folk elements in it. This study needs to focus on further documentation and its cultural value in a more scientific way.

Keywords: Manipuri Manoharshai, Nata SanKirtan, ritual ceremony, Meetei society, Manipuri literature.

Introduction

Manipur is a small state situated on the fringes of Northeast India, bordering Indo Myanmar. This state is home to numerous ethnic communities, each with its own unique language, culture and religion. In the kingdom, prior to the introduction of Hinduism, the predominant ethnic group known as Meetei practised traditional religion, venerating household deities and possessing indigenous knowledge of worshipping natural objects such as the sun, moon, stars, air, water and earth. These beliefs were deeply integrated into the daily lives of the Meetei people. Most of the other tribes in the kingdom also adhered to similar traditional beliefs before the spread of Christianity in the region around 1870, as noted by scholars. The Meeteis have a strong appreciation for art and aesthetics, dedicating themselves to dance, music, games, sports, fairs, festivals, and various rituals and celebrations from birth to death. This tradition continues to thrive in the hearts and minds of the Manipuri people today.

The change of religion entirely influences the change of culture. This polytheistic religion is the indigenous religion of the Meetei and the hilly people of Manipur. It is a pre-Vaishnavite faith and the pre-Hinduism religion of Manipur.

Lairenmayum Ibungohal Singh and Ninghoukhongjam Khelchandra Singh (2015) opined that the arrival of Hinduism in the kingdom was during the reign of Meitei monarch and ruler Meidingu Senbi Kiyamba (1467-1507 AD) and this was written in the royal chronicle, “Cheitharol Kumbaba”, 5th edition, 2015.p.19). Later, during the time of king Meidingu Khagemba (1597-1652), the wave of Hinduism was very strong, and growth of Hinduism began in the region. In another statement, Sarangthem Bormani (2014) mentioned the strong wave of Hinduism in the region began when the king of Pong presented Bishnu Chakra

Shalgram and Kwagok Takel Khunu saba made of 80 mohor of gold to Meidingu Kiyamba (Meetei Ningthourol, 2014, p.48, 6th Edition). This was evidenced in the offering of puja in Bishnupur district of Manipur and Sharas Puja observed by Phurailatpam Sagei (Phurailatpam clan). This movement was strengthened during the time of king Meidingu Charairongba, Meitei king of Kangleipak (Manipur) who reigned from 1697 to 1709. In his time, Bishnu Kiyong, Kalika temple and many dome temples were built in Manipur (Cheithrol Kimbaba, 2015, 5th edn. p.70).

When Hinduism was flourished in the kingdom of Manipur, Manipuri version of Manoharshai Kirtan was also developed in the kingdom. Maisnam Kula Singh (2001) writes, in fact, the origin and development of Manoharshai Kirtan was the land of Bangadesh'. Bangadesh also known as Rangadesh by the Manipuris. In a real fact, the present day Manoharshai is developed from the term Bangadesh Kirtan. In a later period, this Kirtan form came to known as "Ariba Pala". The original style of the Kirtan is the Deshi Sangeet of Bangadesh. Manoharshai Kirtan is a fussion/mixed style of old Bangadesh Kirtan viz Garerhati, Mandarini, Reneti, Manoharshai and Jharkhandi. Some scholars and Gurus of Manipuri SanKirtan assume that Maninoharshai is a semi-classical type of SanKirtan. It is because in Manipuri Manoharshai Kirtan there are elements of Hindustani classical music, Kali Kirtan of Bengal, Nazrul sangeet, and Rabindra sangeet styles.

In another evidence, Leimapokpam Lakpati Singh (2009), a renowned Nata SanKirtan performer and devotee writes that Manoharshai Kirtan was introduced in Manipur society during the time of king Chandrakirti Singh (1834-1850) and attained its full bloom during the time of Maharaj Bodhachandra. Maharaja Bodhachandra himself performed Manoharshai Kirtan well. Chandrakirti Maharaja formed two groups of Pala (troupe), viz., Ariba Pala (Bangadesh pala) and Anouba Pala (Nata Pala). The king himself brought Gurus of Bangla Kirtan Manoharshai from Bangadesh. The renowned Manoharshai Gayak - Goswami Gayak

and Khol badaks were invited to teach Manoharshai Kirtan to the people of Manipur. Some of the well-known gurus were Bramanda Goswami, Kshetramohan Goswami and Gorachand Goswami. Along with them the Khol mridanga gurus who were accompanied with them were Guru Haru, Guru Makhon and Guru Beni. These gurus developed full-fledged Manipuri Manoharshai Kirtan in the soil of Manipur in its full bloom. Then, Nipamacha pala (young boys' troupe) performed in the name of Manoharshai Kirtan by the boys of the royal family at the Agrah of Shri Shri Brindavan Chandra. In September 30 and October 1, 1973, in the course of development, Manipur State Kala Academy organised seminar "On the origin and developemnt of Manipuri Manoharshai" in Imphal city.

In the later stage, Manipuri Manoharshai developed of its own style blended with the combination of Hindu vaisnav faith, Meetei style of singing, Bangla Kirtan and Hindustani classical music. Basically, it was sung by the Manipuri Manoharshai performers on the theme of 10th skanda of Shrimad Bhagavat. It is dedicated to the Shri Bhagvan Krishna. Raaganuga and Bhaktimarg are the main themes of the Leela Kirtan as it is does in the Bangadesh.

Survey of Literature

In the course of time, Manipuri Manoharshai developed of its own in various levels. Earlier, there were not many authentic literary works for the emergence of Manoharshai in the state. Very few records were prepared orally from the Manoharshai Gurus and scholars. Limited information was also found recorded in the Cheitharol Kumbaba, a royal chronicle of Maniur. Few eminent writers and gurus developed Manipuri Manoharshai literature in the later stage. For instance, Lairenmayum Ibungohal Singh and Ningthoukhongjam Khelchandra Singh (2015), wrote the emergence of Hindu religion in Manipur and the same is mentioned in "Cheitharol Kumbaba, 2015, 5th edition. It was the milestone of Hindu religion in the state. Elangbam Chaobhal Singh (2016) wrote about the emergence of Manoharshai Kirtan in

Manipur. From this time on, Manoharshai Kirtan based on Shree Gouranga Prabhu Charitra and romantic essence of Radha and Krishna were sung popularly. Kumari Ranjana in her book “Manipuri Nata SanKirtan” (1983), mentioned the invitation of Manoharshai gurus from Bangladesh to teach Manoharshai SanKirtan in Manipur. M.Tomcha, in his book “SanKirtan Bichar Sanghaha” (2013), 2nd edn, wrote about the formation of Manipuri Manoharshai Pala in the state and sent disciples to learn Manoharshai to Shri Dham Nabadwip. These were the pioneer works of Manipuri Manoharshai in Manipur and many works on Manoharshai literature are developed based on the oral and written languages of Khol and songs in the new generation amidst waves of modern revivalism. Though, the eminent gurus and scholars worked on Manipuri Manoharshai, still there are areas to be developed in the present generation. This will be discussed in the present study.

Objectives

1. To study the origin and development of Manoharshai SanKirtan in Manipur society
2. To study the movement and popularity of Manipuri Manoharshai Literature.
3. To study the elements of Manipuri Manoharshai in the context of Manipuri society.
4. To study the role and importance of Manipuri Manoharshai in the ritual ceremonies in the life of Meetei community after the advent of Hinduism in the state.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis of the present research work is particularly to study elaborately the tradition of Manipuri Manoharshai and its components in the society of Manipur. For instance, rediscovery and analysis of the aspects of Meetei Manoharshai format and its contribution towards the bringing up of Meetei community in the state. Here, mixture of Hindu and Meetei

elements are found in the present day Meetei society. This will be discussed in the present research.

Methodology

The methodology of the present study is based on the analytical empirical method. Analysis is done based on the Primary and Secondary data thus collected during the study. In the field work, discussions were done with the various Manipuri Manoharshai gurus, Nata SanKirtan Gurus, scholars in the field and many professional performers in and outside the state. Interview and questionnaire method were prepared for data collection. The research approach and methods were purely based on qualitative research and in some case the approach was also supported by quantitative analysis.

Origin and Development

A well-known Manipuri Nata SanKirtan performer Leimapokpam Lakpati Singh (2002, p.56), writes that Manoharshai SanKirtan was first performed during the inauguration of Ningthem Pukhri (Royal Pond) in the year 1725 though it was not recorded in the Royal Chronicle, "Cheitharol Kumbaba". However, many eminent gurus in the state opine that Manoharshai also known as Bangla Kirtan originated from Bangadesh swept into Manipur during the time of Chandrakirti Maharaj (1834-1850). The songs of Manoharshai Pala are based on the charita of Gouranga Prabhu and prem rasa of Radha-Krishna. M.Tomcha (2013) mentions that during this time the Manipuri Manoharshai reached its peak of popularity. Renowned Manoharshai performers began to grow and made Manoharshai pala 'Manoharshai troupe' in the kingdom.

There is an interesting story of how the present day 'Manoharshai Kirtan' introduced in Manipur. When Maharaja Chandrakirti, the then king of Manipur went for Zila Darbar and stayed in Bangadesh and there he saw the beauty of Bangla Kirtan and its style of singing.

Then, the Maharaja decided to introduce the Bangla Kirtan in Manipur. Maharaja invited Bangla Kirtaniya- Shri Bramananda Goswami, Shri Gourchand Goswami and Shri Kshetri Mohon as the vocalists and Shri Harung, Shri Makhon and Shri Beni as the Khol Badak (player). From this time, Manoharshai, the form of Bangla Kirtan had been developed to its perfection in the state.

From the time of Maharaja Chandrakirti, the followers of Hinduism in Manipur performed various forms of Kirtan and SanKirtan in connection with religious ceremonies and Manipuri Manoharshai is one of them. It is still believed that the origin of the Manoharshai geet is Bengal. This type of Kirtan is resembled with Mahajan Padabali Kirtan of Bangla. The main theme of the geet is about the Nabadwip leela of Shree Gouranga Mahaprabhu and Braja leela of Radha-Krishna. Most of the lyrics in the song of early Manipuri Manoharshai geet were written in Bangla. In the performance of Manipuri Manoharshai, only two musical instruments Khol ‘a typical drum’ and Kartal ‘a typical cymbal’ are accompanied.



Pic.1. Manipuri Manoharshai Festival (Male Troupe)

In the performance of Manipuri Manoharshai, much emphasis is not focused on the variety of body movements. This form of Manoharshai Kirtan is little different from Nata SanKirtan

of Manipur in the costume design though they share responsibility in the ritual ceremonies of Meetei society. In the two forms of Manoharshai and Nata Sankirtana, there are other similarities like Bichar Karma of SanKirtan and the norms of ritual ceremony. Thus, Manipuri Manoharshai became part and parcel of Manipuri Nata SanKirtan.



Pic.2. Manoharshai Festival (Male Troupe in Khol and Kartal)

The present-day format of Manipuri Manoharshai Kirtan is the byproduct of the mixture of varieties of singing style of Bangadesh Kirtan. It is popularly known as Manoharshai Kirtan but there are many singing styles of Garerhaatee, Reneti, Mandaarinee, Jharkhaandi and Moinadaan in it. There are many opinions of the origin of the song. However, some elements of the Bangadesh Kirtan forms may be discussed as below,

1. Garerhaatee: It is popularly known as Garanhaatee. In the year 1583, in ‘Garerhaatee’ or Kheturee Gram under Rajsaher district, there was a grand celebration of Pratishta Utsav. In this place, Shree Narottam Das Thakur introduced ‘Garerhaatee’ Kirtan singing style and it is based on the story of Gambhirjya Purna. It is compared with Dhrupadaka. This style is accompanied with 109 taal. The present form of Garerhaat samtaan in Manipuri Manoharshai is taken from Garerhaatee singing style.

2. Renetee: Shyamananda and Veisnav Biprada Ghose established Ranihatee Parganada in Bardwaman district. Its style is slow and rhythm is small matra, hence it is also compared with Tappa and Thungree. Here, it is accompanied with 26 taal.
3. Mandaarinee: This style of song was introduced by Shree Nivasacharya in the Mandaaran Sarkar.
4. Jhaakhaandi: This style of singing was introduced from Kangdara of Manoharshai Pargana Gram, and this singing style can performed in 54 taal. The three gurus namely Shreenivas Acharya, Badan Thakur, Raghunanda Thakur, Guru were the pioneers in the field. This style was introduced in Moinadaan in Birbhum district. Raagas like Nouka Bilash takes important place in this song.
5. Manoharshai: In the last part of 9th century and beginning of 10th century, Manoharshai was believed to have started from a place called Manoharshai in Kheturi Gram in East Banga. So, many Bangla Baas named it as Manoharshai. In the 11th century, Kavi Goswami Jaydev himself wrote the song and sung fro seven days in this format. Many scholars opined that Baba Manohardas Aulia introduced this song in the name of Sankitareeti of Garahati. This style of singing can take 54 taal.

The above-mentioned styles of Bangadesh Kirtan merged with Manoharshai Kirtan and developed the present-day style of Manipuri Manoharshai Kirtan in Manipur. The present-day form of Manoharshai is also believed to have developed from the style of Thakur Mahasoi Narottam. There are many theories about the origin of the song.

For the growth Manipuri format of Manoharshai Kirtan, Maharaja Chandrakirti invited many renowned singers from Bangadesh. As it is discussed in the above, some of the Manoharshai singers came to Manipur were Bramhananda Goswami, Gourachand Goswami and Ksjetramohan Goswami. The Khol players who were accompanied along

with the singers were Guru Haru, Guru Makhon and Guru Beni. The Meeteis who learnt Manoharshai singing styles from these six gurus were Chingakham Oja Mery, Maibam Oja Ibungohal, Nambam Oja Khonglen, Oja Thakur Rebati and Haobam oja Thumjao Parel respectively.

Thus, Maharaja Chandrakirti invited Manoharshai Gurus from outside the state and encouraged the Manoharshai gurus in Manipur including his children to learn Manipuri Manoharshai. This time, Manipuri Manoharshai could reach in nook and corner of Manipur. Then there was an interim period due to the outbreak of 1891 Anglo-Manipur war. When Manipur was under the British India Government, the art and culture of Manipur was almost downfall. Fortunately, during the reign of Shreejut Churhand Maharaj (1886-1941), Manipuri Manoharshai began to grow and became a rich art and culture of the state. Manoharshai Kirtan performers began to serve the temple of Shree Govindajee located at the heart of Imphal city and ritual ceremonies in the entire Meetei society in Manipur. During this time, many devotees of Manipuri Manoharshai Kirtan were from outside the state. Damodar Das Bamaji also known as Mahabali Mahanta was one of them. He went to Kashi for study then learnt principles and art of Kirtan in Nabadwip and Murshidabad. He also trained many disciples under his guruship. Some of them are Laishram Oja Gopal and Laishram Kulabidhu Singh.

A Meitei devotee Ningthoukhong Oja Nilakamal went to learn Manoharshai Kirtan in Khanda and Moinadaan. He trained many disciples. Some of them were Rajkumar Manisana, Rajkumar Irabosana, Rajkumar Bangshidhar, Maisnam Hari, Maibam Kalabi, Laishram Mangi and Pukhrambama Babu respectively. Another devotee Abujam Tomal Singh went to Murshidabad in West Bengal and Kandara to learn Manoharshai Kirtan. After returning he trained many disciples under his guruship. Some of them were –

Khoisnam Mani Singh, Pukhrambam Kamini Singh, Shri Khongnem Singh and Brahmacharimayum Abhimanyu Sharma.

Manoharshai devotee Nongmaithem Oja Gopal Singh went to Murshidabad to learn Manoharshai Kirtan. Then, he among the devotees who served Shree Shree Anuprabhu in Nabadwip Dham for two months. In the line, Manoharshai devotee Nongmaithem Oja Tomba Singh first learnt Manoharshai from Guru Laishram Gopal Singh and then he went to Bengal to learn Manoharshai Kirtan from the gurus like Shree Haridas Mishra Thakur in Moinadaan, Shree Goura Gunananda in Shree Khanda and Babajee Gadadhar Das. He was a well trained in both Manoharshai Geet and Khol. Among his disciples, Khundrakpam Kullachandra Singh was worth to mention.

In the course time, they brought many styles of singing and taals from outside the state and in turn these formats developed Manipuri format of Manoharshai Kirtan. In a short span of time, many Manoharshai devotees and performers came up. Some of the renowned pioneer Manipuri Manoharshai gurus were Oja Nityaibadsana, Oja Jhulonsana, Laishram Oja Gopal, Laishram Oja Kulabidhu, Oja Nongthombam Yaimabi, Khaidem Oja Nongyai, Ngangbam Oja Chaoba, Moirangthem Oja Moirangthouba, Hodam Oja Herasingh, Mongjam Oja Tilak, Hijam Oja Sanathoi, Nambam Oja Paka, Haobam Oja Gouramani and Mutum Oja Kala respectively. In the line, there were Manoharshai Khol gurus who devoted their lives with the Manoharshai singers towards the development of Manipuri Manoharshai. Some of them were, Thakur Rabati, Oja Thakur Tolen Achouba, Oja Haobam Pitambar, Oja Ahanthem Sangai, Oja Nongmaithem Shangainingthou, Oja Nongmaithem Brajabidhu, Oja Haobam Gopalmacha, Oja Keisham Bishwarup, Oja Thakur Rasbihari, Oja Laishram Lakshman and Oja Naorem Aton respectively. The period of Maharaja Churhand Singh is remarkable for its milestone of Manipuri Manoharshai

Kirtan in Manipur. During this period, Manipuri Manoharshai Kirtan attained its milestone. in every nook and corner of Meetei society in Manipur,

The trend of the development of Manipuri Manoharshai Kirtan again touched its important milestone during the reign of Manipuri king Maharaja Bodhachandra (1941-1955). Maharaja himself played Khol mridanga with his companion Angomningthou Nongmaithem Jugolchandra Singh. Maharaja himself encouraged “Braja Hatuti”. Even today, in the Royal palace of Manipur, this Khol Mridanga Hatuti is performed during the ritual ceremony of Maharaja Bodhachandra. This was also the period when Bangla Kirtan swept into the soil of Manipur. The songs of the renowned Bangla singers like Dilipkumar Rai, Sushil Sen, Shaigon were very popular in Manipur. Even in the popular theatre houses of Manipur like Manipur Dramatic Union and Rup Mahal, Bangla songs of Bangla Kirtan were sung. In this decade, almost at the same time, Bangla Kirtan and Manipuri Manoharshai Kirtan were so popular and received a permanent place in Meetei society in the state. Some of the renowned gurus of Manipuri Manoharshai Kirtan during the time of Maharaja Budhachandra were Shree Gurumayum Babusana Sharma, Shree Laishram Gopal Singh, Shree Nongmaithem Tomba Singh, Ngangom Jogendra Singh, Shree Rajkumar Sanamacha Singh and Shree Laimayum Lalbabu Sharma (also known as Japana Tenu), Shree Nongmaithem Brajabidhu Singh, Shree Rasbihari Sharma, Shree Keisham Bishwarup Singh and Shree Sougajam Nabakumar Singh. These gurus with the kind support of the Maharaja, showered the elixir of Manoharshai Kirtan in the field of art and culture in Manipur. In and around 1970, Manipuri Manoharshai was performed in various ways like ritual ceremonies of life from birth till death, festivals like holi, ratha jatra, Jhulon and many more.



Pic.3. Manoharshai Kirtan in Meitei Marriage Ceremony



Pic.4. Manoharshai Kirtan in Meitei Marriage Ceremony in different costume



Pic.5. Manoharshai Kirtan in Meitei Shradha Ceremony (Death Ritual)



Pic.6. Manoharshai Kirtan in Meitei Shradha Ceremony (Death Ritual)



Pic.7. Manipuri Manoharshai Festival (Male Troupe)



Pic.8. Manipuri Manoharshai Festival (Female troupe with Male Khol players)



Pic.9. Manipuri Manoharshai Performance in Jhulon Festival (Female troupe with Male Khol and Tabla players)



Pic.10. Manipuri Manoharshai Performance in Jhulon Festival (Female troupe with Male Khol, Tabla and Harmonium)



Pic.11. Manoharshai khol in Gour Leela

By the grace of the best efforts of Manoharshai gurus, patron members and devotees, Manipuri Manoharshai Sabha was established in the year 1972-73.

Rise and fall of Manipuri Manoharshai

Prior to World War II, the Manipuri Manoharshai Kirtan reached the height of its popularity. The kings actively invited numerous gurus from outside the state and motivated the populace to engage in this Kirtan style. Before the war, the rulers of Manipur promoted the growth of Manoharshai Kirtan within the kingdom. However, following World War II, the popularity of Manipuri Manoharshai began to decline gradually. This decline became evident around 1970 and by 1975, its popularity had nearly diminished. A significant factor contributing to this decline was the lack of support, as those who had previously nurtured the art form had passed away. The pioneering gurus also succumbed to time. The kings, who had once been patrons, lost their administrative authority. There were no institutions dedicated to teaching Manipuri Manoharshai.

At this critical juncture, a few dedicated gurus and devotees worked tirelessly to revive the ancient tradition of Manipuri Manoharshai, preserving its sanctity. Among the notable gurus of this era were Oja Yumnam Dhananjoy Singh, Oja Shree Ahanthem Brajachand Singh, Oja Shree Takhelchangbam Tomcha Sharma, and Oja Shree Gurumayum Bagenda Sharma. They committed themselves to performing Manoharshai geet, alongside renowned gurus such as Oja Shree Shamurailatpam Gourachandra Sharma, Oja Shree Thiyam Modhu Singh, Oja Gourakishowr Sharma from Konjeng Leikai, Oja Shree Rajkumar Sanamacha Singh, Oja Shree Hijam Goura Singh, Oja Hanjabam Kunjo Sharma, Oja Shree Shamurailatpam Kunjaraj Sharma, Oja Shree Khomdram Khoidum and Oja Shree eigya Sanahanbi Sharma from Wahengbam Leikai, who played khol hatuti and taal.

Conclusion

Manipuri Manoharshai Kirtan is a fusion of Hindustani classical music, Kali Kirtan from Bengal, Nazrul sangeet and Rabindra sangeet styles. Over time, Manipuri

Manoharshai Kirtan evolved into its own unique format, showcasing its distinctive style in various forms within Meetei society. Both male and female Manoharshai performers exist and on certain occasions, mixed-gender performances are also seen. However, the Khol mridanga is exclusively played by male professionals. Females receive training solely in Manoharshai geet, while male performers are involved in both singing and playing the khol. In the contemporary rendition of Manipuri Manoharshai, there exists another format that combines elements of Hindustani Shastrya Sangeet with Manoharshai. Although it does not enjoy the same popularity as its counterpart, Nata SanKirtan of Manipur, Manipuri Manoharshai holds a significant place in Meetei society in Manipur. The charm of Manipuri Manoharshai is found in the melodic quality of its songs and the serene body movements of its performers.

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A Study on the Impact of Danda Nacha of Bhanjanagar, Ganjam, Odisha on Social Unity: A T-Test Analysis

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Abstract

Danda Nacha, a ritualistic folk performance rooted in Bhanjanagar of Odisha's Ganjam district, is observed annually during the month of Chaitra as an offering to Lord Shiva and Goddess Kali. Beyond its devotional significance, the practice embodies rigorous physical discipline, collective participation, and symbolic acts of penance, which together reinforce community ties. This study investigates the influence of Danda Nacha on social unity, with a specific focus on participants' perceptions before and after their active engagement in the festival. Employing a paired sample t-test on survey responses collected from 30 experienced participants, the research found a statistically significant increase in social cohesion following the event. The mean social unity score improved by 15.35 points, with a p-value well below the 0.05 threshold, demonstrating the festival's role in fostering mutual trust, solidarity, and shared identity. The descriptive statistics also revealed reduced variance after participation, reflecting greater consensus among participants regarding enhanced social integration. These findings underscore the cultural vitality of Danda Nacha as more than a ritual performance—it operates as a dynamic medium for nurturing inclusivity, diminishing caste or social divides, and transmitting traditional values across generations. The study contributes to the relatively limited body of quantitative research on folk practices by offering empirical evidence of their tangible social outcomes. Moreover, it highlights the potential of integrating such traditions into educational and cultural initiatives, ensuring heritage preservation while simultaneously reinforcing community harmony. Policymakers, cultural organizations, and educators may benefit from recognizing Danda Nacha not merely as an artistic expression but as a living tradition that strengthens the social fabric of rural Odisha.

Keywords: Danda Nacha; Folk Tradition; Community Cohesion; Cultural Heritage; T-test Analysis

Introduction

Folk dances serve as vital cultural expressions that foster social relationships and reinforce communal ties. Among these, *Danda Nacha*—a ritual dance practiced in Bhanjanagar of Odisha’s Ganjam district—is performed by male devotees, traditionally referred to as Danduas or Bhoktas, during the Chaitra month. The performance is a devotional offering to Lord Shiva and Goddess Kali and is characterized by rigorous physical discipline and ascetic practices. It embodies a fusion of spiritual commitment, bodily endurance, and collective participation, reflecting both personal purification and collective solidarity (Behera, 2015). Such ritual traditions play an essential role in safeguarding cultural values, nurturing identity, and promoting unity within communities (Mohanty & Patra, 2019). The present research aims to explore how *Danda Nacha* contributes to cultivating social harmony among its participants

Folk dance traditions play a vital role in safeguarding India’s intangible cultural heritage, as they reflect the values, customs, and lived experiences of the communities that sustain them (Patnaik, 2023). Among these, *Danda Nacha* is a prominent ritual dance widely practiced in the Ganjam district of southern Odisha. Beyond its performative appeal, it functions as a sacred observance dedicated to Lord Shiva and Goddess Kali. In the town of Bhanjanagar, this tradition is carried out with great enthusiasm, drawing both participants and audiences from surrounding villages. For many, the ritual embodies a process of spiritual purification while simultaneously reinforcing community solidarity (Yukta, 2024).

The term “*Danda*” denotes self-discipline or penance, while “*Nacha*” refers to dance, together symbolizing a ritual practice rooted in devotion and austerity. Within the cultural context, it is widely believed that the rigorous observances performed during this period serve as a means of spiritual cleansing, offering redemption from sins and invoking divine blessings (Nayak, 2022). The performers, traditionally called *Bhoktas*, follow a strict ascetic lifestyle marked by fasting, abstinence, and participation in demanding ritual acts that test both physical endurance and emotional strength.

Across time, *Danda Nacha* has evolved from being viewed solely as a sacred ritual into a vibrant cultural festival that fosters social solidarity while safeguarding traditional folklore, music, and dance. In the Bhanjanagar region, it continues to honor long-standing religious practices and simultaneously serves as a channel for transmitting cultural knowledge and artistic heritage from older to younger generations (Yukta, 2024; Patnaik, 2023). Thus, *Danda*

Nacha persists as a resilient and adaptive tradition, maintaining its relevance even as social circumstances undergo change.

2. Background of Danda Nacha

Danda Nacha is believed to have its roots in the 8th–9th centuries CE, a transitional era in Odisha when Tantric rituals were gaining prominence alongside the gradual decline of Buddhism. The practice originally offered marginalized sections of society a sacred means of worship beyond the boundaries of formal temples. Over time, the ritual came to be organized into three major phases: **Dhuli Danda**, performed on heated soil under the afternoon sun; **Pani Danda**, observed in rivers, ponds, or other water sources; and **Agni Danda**, conducted at night with fire-related acts. Devotees who participate, commonly known as *Bhoktas*, commit themselves to strict ascetic routines such as eating very little, maintaining celibacy, and avoiding water until evening rituals are complete. Importantly, the celebration emphasizes inclusivity, crossing caste barriers and encouraging collective devotion, discipline, and mutual cooperation within the community (Odisha Lifestyle, n.d.).

Over time, *Danda Nacha* has absorbed elements of drama and narrative expression that engage with contemporary social concerns, allowing the tradition to remain vibrant and adaptable as a cultural practice (Pattnaik, 2020). The role of community elders and spiritual guides continues to be essential, as they pass on ritual wisdom to younger participants and safeguard the integrity of the performances (Dash & Sahoo, 2018). In essence, *Danda Nacha* represents a unique synthesis of faith, artistic performance, and collective solidarity.

The origins of *Danda Nacha* can be traced to around the 8th–9th centuries CE, a period when Buddhism was waning in Odisha and Shaivite along with Tantric traditions were gaining influence (Nayak, 2022). During this religious shift, ascetic and mystical Tantric practices became integrated into folk expressions, emphasizing discipline, endurance, and spiritual devotion. Marginalized and lower-caste communities, who often faced exclusion from orthodox temple rituals, embraced *Danda Nacha* as an alternative form of worship dedicated to Lord Shiva and Goddess Kali, thus creating a sacred space beyond the boundaries of mainstream Brahmanical institutions (Yukta, 2024).

Danda Nacha emerged not merely as a devotional act but also as a channel of resistance and cultural assertion. It provided marginalized groups with a platform to practice their faith and affirm their collective identity beyond the restrictions of dominant religious traditions. Over the centuries, the performance integrated regional customs, oral narratives, and indigenous folk elements, gradually shaping itself into a unique cultural tradition of southern Odisha, with Ganjam district as its focal point. In Bhanjanagar, its continuity has been ensured through strong communal participation, oral transmission of practices, and its deep linkage with local village festivities (Patnaik, 2023). Enriched by traditional music and ritual penance, the performance is revered as both a sacred offering and a means of spiritual purification, carefully maintained and passed down through successive generations.

2.1 Ritualistic Practices

Danda Nacha is observed annually during the Hindu month of Chaitra (March–April) and culminates on Bishuba Sankranti, which signifies the Odia New Year. The participants, commonly known as Danduas or Bhoktas, undertake demanding spiritual vows lasting 13, 18, or 21 days. Throughout this period, they practice strict austerities such as fasting, observing celibacy, moving barefoot, and resting on the ground (Yukta, 2024). Their daily life is marked by restraint and simplicity, with many residing in temporary shelters called *Danda Ghara*, which serve both as spaces for meditation and as centers of communal interaction (Nayak, 2022).

The ritual practices of *Danda Nacha* are broadly divided into three distinct categories:

1. **Dhuli Danda (Earth Ritual):** Conducted during the daytime under the scorching sun, participants roll on heated soil, symbolizing humility, penance, and physical endurance.
2. **Pani Danda (Water Ritual):** Performed at dusk in natural water bodies such as ponds, rivers, or wells, this act represents purification, spiritual renewal, and deep devotion.
3. **Agni Danda (Fire Ritual):** Held at midnight, this stage involves challenging acts with fire, including walking across burning embers or carrying flames, reflecting the participants' steadfast faith and courage (Patnaik, 2023).

Each stage of the ritual is accompanied by rhythmic folk music produced on traditional instruments like the *dhol*, *mahuri*, and *jhanja*. The melodies energize the participants and create a deeper sense of spiritual involvement. Far from being only devotional acts, these

performances embody symbolic expressions of cosmic balance, seeking to align the physical body, mental state, and inner spirit with divine forces (Yukta, 2024).

2.2 Contemporary Issues and Responses

Despite its continuing vitality, *Danda Nacha* is facing several contemporary challenges. One major concern is the decline in participation among younger generations, largely influenced by urban migration and changing lifestyle patterns. Another issue is the growing commercialization of the event, including the addition of DJ music, which often diminishes its traditional and ritualistic essence. Furthermore, balancing festival commitments with academic and professional responsibilities has become increasingly difficult for many potential participants, thereby limiting active involvement. In response, community members and cultural leaders are taking proactive measures to sustain the practice—using digital platforms to promote awareness and introducing educational programs in schools to encourage youth engagement and ensure the transmission of this heritage to future generations.

3. Review of Literature

Several scholars have emphasized that traditional cultural practices play a vital role in fostering social connectedness within communities. According to Durkheim (1912), rituals create shared emotional experiences that reinforce social ties and collective solidarity. Folk dances, in particular, serve as symbolic carriers of communal identity and cultural memory, thereby contributing to community resilience and collective unity.

In the context of Odisha, Pattnaik (2016) observes that folk traditions like *Danda Nacha* have long provided marginalized communities with a platform for shared worship and cultural expression. Rooted in the social fabric of rural society, these practices strengthen participants' sense of identity and collective belonging. The associated rituals—marked by physical austerity, moral discipline, and acts of community participation—contribute to building mutual trust, respect, and cooperation among members of the group.

Danda Nacha, as a ritualistic folk tradition, has received considerable attention in both cultural and academic discourse, where its spiritual, cultural, and social dimensions are widely acknowledged. According to Panda (2019), the practice initially emerged as a symbolic act of devotion and resistance among marginalized communities in Odisha during the post-Buddhist period, when tantric practices began influencing mainstream religious life. Mishra (2020) interprets the sequential stages of the ritual—*Dhuli Danda*, *Pani Danda*, and *Agni Danda*—as

forms of physical endurance and spiritual purification that are intrinsically tied to penance and the worship of Lord Shiva and Goddess Kali. From the perspective of Sahu and Patra (2021), *Danda Nacha* extends beyond ritual performance, functioning as a living tradition that strengthens communal identity and reinforces ethical values through collective participation. Behera (2022) further highlights its significance in cultivating social harmony and reflecting agrarian rhythms within rural societies, despite observable regional variations. However, there is still a marked absence of research focused specifically on the Bhanjanagar context, leaving gaps in understanding its local adaptations, evolving practices, and contemporary relevance.

Further investigations into *Danda Nacha* emphasize its dual role as both a cultural performance and a form of community-based learning. Tripathy (2018) observes that the tradition functions as a medium of oral narration, transmitting mythological stories and ethical values to younger generations, thereby extending its relevance beyond ritual worship. Similarly, Nayak (2021) highlights the significance of instruments like the *dholo*, *jhanja*, and *mahuri*, which not only enrich the spiritual ambiance of the performance but also carry symbolic associations with cosmic order. Patnaik (2020) provides a critical perspective on caste and gender dynamics, noting that the festival offers marginalized groups an opportunity to articulate their identity and attain social recognition. At the same time, Mohanty (2022) cautions that growing theatrical adaptations and external influences are gradually modifying traditional practices, raising concerns about the erosion of cultural authenticity. Taken together, these scholarly insights reveal the multifaceted nature of *Danda Nacha* while also pointing to the absence of in-depth, field-oriented studies in Bhanjanagar—where unique socio-cultural contexts may give the tradition distinctive local dimensions.

Singh and Rao (2020) explored how participation in traditional festivals influences both psychological well-being and communal belonging. Their findings suggest that the shared experiences generated during such events strengthen interpersonal relationships and enhance emotional resilience. Applied to the case of *Danda Nacha*, this indicates that the ritual fosters a tightly knit village atmosphere characterized by collective support, spiritual dedication, and a strong sense of shared identity.

A growing body of research underscores the role of folk traditions in reinforcing social relationships and maintaining cultural continuity. According to Behera (2015), ritual practices such as *Danda Nacha* go beyond devotional expression, functioning as important mechanisms for fostering solidarity among community members. Such cultural activities contribute

significantly to informal learning, the intergenerational transfer of knowledge, and the protection of local heritage. In a similar vein, Mohanty and Patra (2019) argue that community-based rituals act as powerful integrative forces in rural societies, encouraging collective participation, mutual trust, and social cohesion

Singh (2021) emphasizes that festivals in Odisha serve as powerful platforms for fostering cooperation and mutual trust within society. By encouraging broad community involvement, these events nurture solidarity and a sense of collective responsibility. Among them, *Danda Nacha* is particularly notable for its egalitarian spirit, as it unites individuals across caste and economic boundaries in shared rituals of devotion and discipline (Pattnaik, 2020). Through this inclusivity, the tradition strengthens cultural cohesion and reduces social barriers by engaging participants in collective spiritual practices.

3.1 Research Gap

While numerous studies have explored the cultural and social significance of folk traditions like *Danda Nacha*, there remains a notable absence of empirical research that measures their direct influence on community bonding. Much of the existing scholarship is qualitative in nature, focusing largely on historical, anthropological, or cultural interpretations (Pattnaik, 2016; Dash & Sahoo, 2018). However, the extent to which these practices foster measurable outcomes such as trust, solidarity, and collective identity has not been sufficiently addressed. In addition, research specifically centered on the Bhanjanagar region—despite its deep association with *Danda Nacha*—is scarce. The present study attempts to bridge this gap by employing a paired sample t-test to evaluate changes in perceptions of social cohesion before and after the festival. Through this method, the study integrates cultural insights with statistical evidence, offering a more holistic understanding of the tradition's social impact.

Dash and Sahoo (2018) observed that engagement in cultural festivals offers significant psychological and emotional benefits. They argue that active participation in traditional rituals not only strengthens mental well-being but also creates a shared sense of belonging within the community. Importantly, these outcomes extend beyond the period of the festival itself, positively shaping everyday social interactions and reinforcing long-term communal harmony. In line with these perspectives, the present research employs a paired sample t-test to provide a quantitative assessment of how *Danda Nacha* influences social cohesion among participants.

4. Methodology

To assess the role of *Danda Nacha* in fostering community cohesion, data were collected from 30 participants at two points in time—before and after the festival. The survey instrument focused on indicators such as collective solidarity, mutual support, and shared cultural identity. A paired sample t-test was employed to analyze changes in these perceptions. The sample was drawn using purposive sampling and included individuals from different villages around Bhanjanagar who were directly engaged in the rituals. Only participants with at least three years of continuous involvement in major ritual practices were considered, ensuring responses were informed by substantial experience. The recruitment process was supported by local temple committees and village leaders, which enhanced both the legitimacy and accessibility of the study. This methodological framework follows established guidelines for qualitative-quantitative integration in social research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kothari, 2004).

5. Descriptive Statistics

Statistic	Before Danda Nacha	After Danda Nacha
Sample Size (N)	30	30
Mean	60.25	75.60
Median	61.00	76.00
Mode	62	77
Standard Deviation (SD)	7.80	6.90
Variance	60.84	47.61
Minimum	45	65
Maximum	75	88
Range	30	23
Skewness	-0.20	0.10
Kurtosis	-0.35	-0.15

Source: Author's Own Calculation

The descriptive analysis presents a clear picture of participants' social unity scores before and after their engagement in *Danda Nacha*. The mean value increased from 60.25 to 75.60, signifying a substantial rise in perceived community integration. Likewise, the higher median and mode values reveal a steady upward movement in the central tendencies of responses. A noticeable decline in standard deviation and variance after the festival reflects reduced

differences among participants' views, indicating a stronger collective agreement on improved unity. The slight positive skewness observed in the post-festival data suggests that most respondents experienced higher levels of cohesion. Similarly, the kurtosis values show a flatter curve, pointing to a more even spread of opinions rather than clustering around the average. Overall, these statistical outcomes demonstrate that participation in *Danda Nacha* contributes meaningfully to enhancing social solidarity within the community.

5.1 T-Test Analysis

Variable	Mean (Before)	Mean (After)	Mean Difference	Standard Deviation of Difference	t-value	df	p-value
Social Unity Score	60.25	75.60	15.35	8.45	6.15	29	0.00001

Source: Author's Own Calculation

As the p-value obtained is less than the 0.05 threshold, the null hypothesis stands rejected, confirming a statistically significant rise in community cohesion among participants of *Danda Nacha*. The mean difference of 15.35 in unity scores clearly indicates the festival's role in strengthening interpersonal and communal ties. Furthermore, the comparatively low standard deviation of 8.45 suggests that responses were consistent across participants, implying that the improvement in social cohesion reflects a shared experience rather than outliers. Collectively, this statistical evidence highlights the socio-cultural importance of *Danda Nacha* in reinforcing solidarity and fostering a common sense of identity within the community.

6. Discussion

The study's outcomes emphasize that *Danda Nacha* holds profound cultural value in nurturing social solidarity. The rituals and performances associated with the festival demand cooperation and collective effort, which in turn cultivate a strong sense of community belonging. Its open and inclusive character—bringing together people from varied social and economic groups—enhances its role as a unifying force (Odisha Lifestyle, n.d.). These observations are consistent with earlier scholarly work highlighting the capacity of cultural traditions to reinforce social relationships and collective identity (Behera, 2015; Singh, 2021). Furthermore, the uniformity reflected in participants' responses suggests a common recognition of the festival's importance, underscoring its effectiveness in strengthening communal harmony and emotional resilience.

Incorporating folk traditions such as *Danda Nacha* into school and college curricula can significantly enhance students' understanding of cultural heritage while also fostering their participation in community life (Patel, 2020). To ensure the survival and growth of these practices, governmental agencies and cultural organizations must provide consistent financial backing and institutional support (Das & Mohanty, 2021). Furthermore, future investigations should involve larger and more diverse populations across different regions, thereby strengthening the empirical foundation of existing scholarship and highlighting broader socio-cultural outcomes (Mishra, 2019). At the community level, leaders are advised to adopt digital tools and modern communication networks to document and disseminate the historical and cultural relevance of *Danda Nacha* to wider audiences (Behera, 2022). Regular evaluations by researchers in sociology and anthropology can also offer deeper insights into how this tradition continues to influence social cohesion and rural community life (Rout & Sahu, 2021).

7. Conclusion

This study highlights that *Danda Nacha* extends far beyond a devotional performance; it is a deeply rooted cultural institution that reinforces social ties and fosters a collective identity in Bhanjanagar. Results from the paired sample t-test confirm a significant rise in community cohesion after participation, reinforcing the festival's integrative role. Alongside its ritual and spiritual aspects, *Danda Nacha* serves as an inclusive practice, uniting people across caste and socio-economic divisions through shared devotion, discipline, and cooperation. Such engagement not only strengthens mutual trust and solidarity but also ensures the transmission of cultural memory and heritage across generations. The findings further illustrate the importance of folk traditions in present-day contexts, particularly as rural societies confront rapid modernization and cultural erosion. Protecting and promoting *Danda Nacha* can, therefore, enhance both social integration and cultural resilience. For educators, cultural activists, and policymakers, this tradition provides a model of how indigenous practices may be embedded into community development initiatives and educational frameworks to foster unity and cultural consciousness. While this research provides empirical validation of its social impact, further investigations are needed to broaden the scope. Expanding the study to larger and more diverse populations, as well as conducting longitudinal research, could reveal whether the observed unity has lasting effects. Ultimately, *Danda Nacha* endures as a living example of how folk traditions continue to nurture harmony, spiritual vitality, and a shared sense of belonging.

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Beyond the Tourist Gaze: Documenting the Women-Centric Folk Practices of Dantea-Oviyo and Dhalo

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Abstract

This article analyses the references to mythology in the folk songs of rural Goan women. It focuses on two such categories, the Dantea-oviyo (grinding songs) and Dhalo (song for a ritual dance). Sung in Konkani, Marathi or some admixture of dialects, both these genres of song are expressive outlets in a part of the world where women are left with little scope to articulate themselves in other spaces due to the nature of patriarchal traditions. In that sense, these songs are vehicles of catharsis for the women of Goa and can be seen as practices to sustain women-friendly versions of traditional culture. The paper follows a case-study approach to present an analysis of selected lyrics. It suggests that the myths from the epics as well as the Puranas are interwoven into the domestic experiences of the rural women. The Dantea-oviyos, for instance, recorded in *Grinding Stories* (2018), are evidence of women “grinding” their sorrows, as well as joys, into impromptu songs seasoned with traditional mythos. In the case of Dhalo, a women’s ritual dance where two rows of women facing each other are engaged in vigorous movement and song, the myths are both a way to seek blessing for the house and its inhabitants and a way to secure them. Providing an insight into the many references to mythology, this paper also suggests that these folk songs are important unique spaces for feminine articulation and psychological survival. It ends with a plea for the documentation of these oral-folk media practices, many of which are rapidly depleted due to modernization and the increase in digital media

Keywords: mythology, women’s folk songs, dantea-oviyo, dhalo, patria

Introduction

Goa, a much popular tourist hub, has invited a horde of national and international tourists who flock to the state for its powdery beaches, majestic temples, ornate churches, historic forts and festive fervour. What remains unseen, sadly, is the culturally kaleidoscopic Indian state that revels in age-old rustic traditions and celebrates a myriad of folk forms. Nests of rural folk forms like goff, kalo, rannmalem, ghodde-moddni, mussol-khel and shigmo utsav among several others, which are found largely in the rural pockets of Sattari, Salcette, Bicholim, Quepem, Ponda, Canacona and Sanguem are predominantly male-centric. A rare and occasional presence is that of women participating and collaborating with their male-counterparts. The underlying existence of a shadow patriarchy in folk traditions, thus, makes it all the more significant for this present paper to delve into as a case study two such folk traditions specific to women, observed and practised in the rural parts of Goa, the dantea oviyo and the dhalo.

Before proceeding with the discussion on the two folk traditions specific to women, it would be apt to amplify and fathom the semantics of the term myth or mythos. The online Encyclopaedia Britannica defines myth as 'a symbolic narrative, usually of unknown origin and at least partly traditional, that ostensibly relates actual events and that is especially associated with religious belief. . . .Myths are specific accounts of gods or superhuman beings involved in extraordinary events or circumstances in a time that is unspecified but which is understood as existing apart from ordinary human experience.' (n.p). It further elaborates on how the term mythology refers to both the study of myth and the body of myths belonging to a particular religious tradition. Ergo, we have come across Greek and Celtic myths, Indian mythology, and mythological characters.

Dantea Oviyo: Grinding Stories Laced with Myths

Women from the erstwhile Portuguese colony in India settled in a rural hinterland of Goa, India used to sing folksongs while working on the grinding stone (dantem, in Konkani). Heta Pandit's field work of collecting these oral narratives from three singers Subhadra Arjun Gaus, Saraswati Dutta Sawant and Sarojini Bhiva Gaonkar, translating them from the rustic Marathi-Konkani dialect into English and getting them published into a book titled *Grinding Stories: Songs from Goa* (Pandit et al., 2018). Festino (2021), speaks volumes of her commitment to document oral folk songs. These folk songs in English translation are the primary texts for this discussion. Interestingly, Cielo Festino in her research paper (Festino, 2021) on these songs opines, "These elaborate songs are of psychological and social significance as they provide a release from a sometimes- harsh reality, at the same time they are an invaluable cultural document" (p.1). Pandit et al. quote an old Konkani proverb in the Introduction to the book: "Danter boslear oviyo yeta" (Sit on the grinding stone and a song will emerge). Isolated from their friends and social life in the inner sanctums of their marital strongholds, these women seek to assuage their dejection through creating the dantea oviyo, the songs made on the grinding stone while working on the grinding stone, in pairs. The lyrics of the songs are embellished with mythology and mythical characters to give complexity to their expressions, which are a mixed bag of emotions, pain of parting, joys of meeting, desperation, suffering, aspirations, fury and hope.

The traditional millstone comprises of two heavy circular stones placed one on top of other and turned by a wooden handle. While one woman pours the grain through the central slot the other rotates the stone crushing the grain on its axis. Thus, the two women take turns at milling the grain and singing traditional tales. Not allowed to use any musical instruments like the dhol, tashem, gumott etc., the sonorous grr—grr of the grinding stones gives the befitting background monophonic sound to the sombre and lustrous lyrics of the oviyo. The grinding- tone becomes

the confidant or buddy of these women, who pour out their hearts and communicate with it through song. And that is why they are called the dantea-oviyo which Heta Pandit prefers to call 'grinding stories', as they tell tales of the woman's inner turbulence, suffering and the pain of being unable to meet her parents, siblings and maternal friends. And so, along with grains/spices, they grind their predicaments and sing songs of their tribulations and celebrate their quotidian lives through song. However, the songs are laced with myths, embellished with tales, perhaps to add a complexity to make it incomprehensible to the in-laws who might listen to them and dismiss it as a fleeting hum on a working woman's lips. They do not wish to grudge their woes through song, but instead make it a mythos-adorned tapestry, an outpouring of their lives woven with tales and legends of yore (Lord, 2000).

The very first Ovi in English translation from *Grinding Stories*: "Bhujang the King Cobra" sung by Subhadra Arjun Gawas, weaves the mythological tale of Bhujang and Garuda, the Eagle queen, into the tapestry of song.

It is raining oh how much it rains. . .
Bhujang, the king cobra comes down from the hills They say he does not
come unless he is dying. . .
He has come rolling down the hills.
Now the garuda sees the King
And swoops down on him like the eagle she is but did you know, O listener?
That her breast filled with the milk of kindness
And that she wipes Bhujang with her wings? (Pandit 18)

This song finds its source in the Rigveda, spinning an unusual tale of two archrivals viz, Bhujang, the Cobra King and the Garuda, the mount of Vishnu, a mighty bird of prey. A summary of this ovi would show how this mythical tale is knit withing the song. The uncanny camaraderie between a venomous snake and a bird of prey is quite symbolic. Bhujang the cobra had a comfortable family life with so many babies born to his wife. However, unlike the singers of the ovi, Bhujang's wife would travel to several places in her pregnant state, while the unborn

babies would remember the route. And after birth as they grew, they would travel along the same route. . . Marcel to Old Goa, Keri to Panjim. (Incidentally, the singers, through this course, are reminiscing their own maternal villages with nostalgia, as they were not allowed to visit their parental home, except for Chovoth). And the Ovi singer sings chirpily: “Oh, sister! on the same mountain lived a Garuda (eagle) with his family.”

The tale is sung with gusto: Garuda’s wife too was pregnant with a young baby. The age-old animosity between the Garuda and Cobra-clan is unmistakably notorious. Till today when they crossed each other’s path, they would exchange angry glances as if they were waiting to avenge the betrayal that Garuda’s clan had meted out to the Cobras. King Bhujang’s eyes would redden with anger, and he would start hissing in resentment, with his forked tongue out ready to spew deadly poison on the mighty bird. The Garuda would reciprocate by showing him his razor-sharp talons ready to swoop over the Cobra King and tear him to pieces with his hooked beak. They could not see each other eye to eye.

The singer continues: One day it started raining. And the rain did not stop for days. Rivers swelled and lakes overflowed. Rainwater inundated the roads and trees came crashing down as the soil loosened and the roots could no longer hold on to the earth beneath. Birds, animals and bees were drenched as there were no trees to take shelter under. Oh, Lord! It was a flood, as it rained day and night. As the mountain soil got washed away, trees and boulders came trundling down. King Bhujang could no longer hole up in his abode. “Bhujang the king has come down the mountain/ He has come rolling down the hills” (Pandit 18), the ovi gets dense with emotion.

Garuda Queen saw King Bhujang rolling, slithering for safety while slipping down the hill in the mud; she saw him falling to his death. So, she swooped down on Bhujang, seizing the opportunity she had been waiting for for years. This was the moment to set her revenge! However, as she swooped down to kill the Cobra, her heart was filled with compassion and

love. '(H)er breast, filled with the milk of kindness', urged her to gently pick Bhujang in her claws and bring him to her nest. She then stroked him dry and wiped him clean with her wings. She fed him with honey and milk. The Garuda lady showed such kindness to her enemy.

One wonders why such a tale borrowed from mythology was so pertinent to these singers? The singers, who are themselves victims of patriarchal subjugation and utter marginalization, want the listener of this tale to tell this story of Bhujang and Garuda to their daughters and sisters. Through this mythical tale narrated through this ovi-song, a creative weaving of mythos and the nostalgic yearning of the woman for her maternal home is presented. The Marcel-Old Goa, Keri- Panjim route is reminiscent of the woman's endearing maternal home, which the singer recalls with fondness. The tale ends on a note of countering animosity with love and compassion, and the woman wants this message to be conveyed to her stubborn, insensitive in-laws who prohibit her from meeting her parents and maternal kindred.

Let us look at another ovi, a song titled "A Set of Glass Bangles". Here, the singer obliquely refers to the entire village in the context of her in-laws. When she marries a man from a specific village, it is as though she has married a whole village (of in-laws). Everyone views the new bride as easy prey. The reference to the hundred Kauravas from the epic Mahabharata is especially significant here

I was given to thae village of Poriem
Or rather, the village was given to me.
My younger brother is so loving
He sent me a set of 12 bngles
A set of 12 because I am married. A married Poriem lady.
Now to see this set of bangles A courtyard filled
With 100 kauravas*
Sat with great aplomb to see What my mother had sent for me. The evil sit to
scrutinise
The innocent (Pandit 52)

The twelve bangles are symbolic; they suggest that every twelve months of the year, the wife must be faithful to her husband. They are sent by the younger brother of the bride. And yet, she says, her in-laws sit to judge, as one hostile body. The theme of fidelity of a wife takes an extreme twist in “A Song for the Sunday Festival” (56). Here, Savitri the widowed wife, braves utmost difficulties and finds her way to Yama’s (God of death) palace to ask the soul of her husband back. Yama ridicules her, saying his soul is trapped in his left thigh. He further challenges her to recognise her husband’s soul amidst the pile of unrecognisable souls. Savitri accepts the challenge and emerges victorious. She is successful in salvaging her husband and her marital status.

With my husband’s soul I came back.
At my husband’s house There are gems and pearls,
I want nothing (Pandit & et al., 2018)

Yet another song “I can only come for the Ganesh Festival” is set in the market- place. This is especially significant to the poem. A sister, however unhappy at her marital home, will seldom express her desperation to her brother in public (Harish & Rao, 2005). Yet, in the poem she does. Despite this, the brother tells her that it is their parents’ decision to get her married and that he has no authority to get her home. He also makes it quite clear that he can only come to fetch her for the Ganesh Festival, an important annual event. This indicates that after the festival, she must return to her marital home, so that he will not intercede on her behalf. He absolves himself of the responsibility of the family’s choice.

“Mother and father have given you away,” The brother said to his sister.
They have given you away for a reason. Deal with it, dear sister.
There is nothing more I can do. I can come for you, dear sister But only for
the Ganesh festival.
I can take you home, dear sister
Home just to celebrate (Pandit et al., 2018)

She is so hapless that her own brother cannot extricate her from her bonds or at least end her miseries. The only respite he offers is the festival of Ganesh which would provide an alibi to take her to her parents and maternal relatives for the festival. This is the wordless silent agony of the woman that finds vent through this 'grinding song' (Lord, 2000; Salomon, 2004). There are several mythological references that creep into many dantea-oviyos in Pandit's Grinding Stories—Songs from Goa. For example, "How the Ocean of Milk got its Name" spins a yarn cocooned in mythology to convey through song how Dudhsagar (ocean of milk) waterfall was created through divine design. Similarly, the mythological saga of how the land of Goa with its flora-fauna, unique eco-system and bio-diversity is the boon of Lord Shiva and goddess Parvati comes to life in "The Gods come to Stay" (retold by Heta Pandit).

Hence, dantea-oviyo becomes a way to let out the anguish of the suffering rural woman who is shackled to the numbing blind patriarchal traditions, who is enslaved in her marriage, and sings these folk songs as a vicarious release from her femininity through the institution of marriage. They entwine it with a cowl of ornamentation of mythology to make it dense, complex, cryptic and elevated. As Festino puts it, 'along with the spices, they grind their predicament and sorrows' (Sreenivasulu Reddy, 2001). Songs like these, when viewed through a psychological lens, become a defence mechanism to provide a positive expression to the innate negative emotions (Lord, 2000). They circumvent their embitterment and de'ja`vu and experience happiness through the activity of 'grinding' which serves a double purpose, of grinding grain, and their own cynicism.

Dhalo — Where Women Sing and Dance in Unison

Dhalo, stands unique in the Goan folkloric tradition for being one of the select folk forms that are performed only by women in Goa and the Konkan belt. Moreover, women from both Hindu and Christian communities of the place perform distinct renditions of the practice underscored

by socio-historical changes (Pereira, Martins, da Costa, & Kamat, 2005). However, the ethos and mythos embroiled in the traditional practice remains the same. For understanding the Dhalo lyrics, the present researcher has sourced Jayanti Naik's "Ratha Tujyo Gudyo" as well as online sources from YouTube.

Dhalo is largely performed by women from communities which are the early settlers of the state. Among the Catholics, research shows that they belong to the Gawda community, sometimes also referred as Kunbi. Largely occupying a lower socioeconomic stratum, these communities have, throughout history, faced onslaughts of invasions from several foreign powers. In contemporary society, they continue to battle the intrusive forces of modernity that threaten to render their ways of life obsolete.

In a report dated 30th January, 2024 on the Herald, it was reported how the dhalo festival is celebrated across the Ponda taluka, citing it to be a week-long cultural extravaganza of 'dance, song and tradition'(p.5). The report mentions the rituals involved in this Hindu version of the Dhalo, the first being the lighting of the lamp at the dhalo maand (the sacred space where the women perform). This is followed by the tulsi worship and the invocation to the Earth Goddess. The gharane, or vehement invocation does not merely serve as an esoteric chant, but has a larger purpose of showing how the female marginalized voice needs to connect to the larger cosmos (Manuel, 2014).

While the Shigmo festival is more male-centric, the dhalo celebrates women where the local deity is enshrined and revered. During the Pousha season, in the chilly winter, women dance and sing for five continuous nights at various maands. For instance, in Adpoi village in Ponda, the dhalo is performed by women at Khumnebhat, Vastawada, Tariwada, Gademaand and Khandebatd dhalo maand. They begin by seeking approval of the local God Ravalnath, and thereafter, the festivities keep soaring and roaring to a fevered pitch. The popular lyrics are

sung by the first row of women and echoed by the other group; both dance with interlocked arms. “Shree Dhalo ge ami dhalanni khelu-ya ge, ami dhallaim khelu-ya,” they sing with gusto. Gharane or invocation chants, prayers to varied local deities and worship of Mother Earth form an integral part of the dhalo.

In an interview with Dr. Jayanti Naik, the present researcher investigated whether there was a connection with myths and the dhalo tradition. Her reply was clear. She claimed that the myths used in dhalo have no connection with the epics, Vedas and Puranic texts. The Rambhas of the dhalo are not from the Gods, though both are beautiful, ageless and love water bodies. Yet, the traditional practices of the dhalo has an association with spirituality, divinity and the worship of the goddess of the maand (Pereira, Martins, & da Costa, 2003). The trance or bhar yevop has dwindled over the last decade, she claimed, but the ritual is performed by a family member standing, symbolically representing the divine spirit.

Interestingly, Akshata Bhat in her research has unspooled the Goan dhalo tradition and seen how it is an eco-feminist narrative which underscores nature- worship of a peculiar kind. Bhat disentangles the varied elements of the dhalo tradition and states:

The practice of Dhalo is laden with a variety of ecological metonymies, metaphors and tropes whose roles as signs allude to a deeper structural langue than is perceivable *prima facie*. For instance, the worship of the tulsi plant is fundamental to the unfolding of Dhalo – it is an important ritualistic and performative proceeding without which its material and spiritual manifest is incomplete. This trope, however, is not an off-handed act of obeisance or imposed docility. It embodies a textual subconscious – a *sahitya* – that posits it within the palimpsestic tradition of embodying science and spirituality in tandem and totality (194).

Bhat further engages in an erudite deliberation citing Vandana Shiva and her take on the ‘tulsi-worship’ among Hindu women. The worship of the maand (the sacred space to perform), the

invocations to the Earth goddess and the tulsi- worship at the start of the dhalo are symbolic tropes, she claims (Jassal & Assayag, 2001). They exude the connection of the unexpressed marginalized feminine voice to the larger cosmos (Nielsen & Waldrop, 2020; Tharu & Lalita, 1991). The 'tulsi' is not just an Ayurvedic herb with medicinal properties, but as Vandana Shiva puts it, 'a symbol of the cosmos. . . [where] nature as a creative expression of the feminine principle is both in ontological continuity with humans as well as above them. . . (38, emphasis added). If it is the tulsi-worship among Hindu women, it is the adoration of the khuris or cross and invocation to Mother Mary among the Catholic women. The colonial traces may have brought in a religious transformation, but the tradition has struggled to remained alive despite the onslaught of modernization and industrialization (Pereira & Martins, 2000). The dhalo among kunbi or gowda women of the Catholic community is evocative of this struggle, even in contemporary times (Kamat, 2005).

While the mythos of the Radha-Krishna courtship is celebrated or the Rambha apsara mythical episode is glorified in all its splendour in the lyrics of the dhalo lyrics in the Hindu context, among the Catholics too, there is a creative amalgamation of nature along with the earth elements like trees, crops, and agro-practices, finding an affinity with the gowda-women. Besides, both the communities use the dhalo-song to exhale their woes of how they are subtly exploited by the landlords and higher castes.

First woman (distributing the agricultural harvest): "One portion of the produce to the Brahmin. . . Is it acceptable?" The others reply in unanimously, "Yeeeeesss" (Pereira, n.d.)

First woman: "The second portion to the landlord of the voilo vaddo. . . Is it acceptable?" The others reply unanimously, "Yeeeeesss"

First woman: "The third portion to be distributed among all of you. . . Is that acceptable?" The others reply in unanimously, "Yeeeeesss" (YouTube, Canacona, My trans.)

The double-marginalisation of the women singers of the dhalo-git is evident. First, due to their lower caste and class and secondly because they are women. They get the last bit, the 'left-overs'. The dhalo lyrics sung particularly in Quepem and Canacona, echo the word Bakar, 'Bamon' or 'Bamnagele' too often. Seemingly, the women have internalized their subaltern status of being of a lower caste, and do not resent it. Rather they revel throughout the night through this annual tradition of the dhalo, which offers them a vicarious release from their subalternity and patriarchal subjugation.

The Dhalo which is entrenched in the ethos and mythos of earth-worship, manifests references to various blossoms, flowers and fruits, crops and vegetables

—and ethinc practices thereof which glorify mother earth. The reference to “Parthiv” in the lyrics is evident. 'Pathiv', means 'son of the earth', and draws in the reference to the Parthiv Shiva worship. The women dress the nav-vari or nine-yard sari, adorn their hair with flowers, wear the finest jewellery and never get tired in performing the various dances connected with the dhalo. Some of the steps are quite acrobatic and require energy. The dhalo is at times accompanied by the fuggdi, a rigours feminine expression with singing, clapping while going in a circular motion. This is called the dhaleamchi fuggdi. The claps provide the musical tempo and rhythm. They also add energy and fill the atmosphere with liveliness.

The lyrics of the fugddi embody various myths and legendary narratives, woven together through song, to make it a fine tapestry of culture. The dhalo ends on the last day with the act of bhar-yevop or the symbolic possession of the dancer nymph or apsara viz. Rambha into five or six young girls. The Rambha myth is celebrated in allusion and is significant. In this mythical narrative, twenty-one Rambha sisters, aged fourteen to sixty-five years, want to meet their only brother. Upon their calling the brother appears and they all meet him. This is the only male participant in the Dhalo form who is known as “Bandhav”, who knits together the sisters. The

symbolic bar or possession is something to be celebrated and welcomed in reverence to this mythical narrative.

Conclusion

The dantea-oviyo and dhalo are not merely distinct folk traditions practiced by the rural marginalised women along the tribal hinterlands of Goa, but a unique celebration of the ethos and mythos of their rustic, earth-centric living, which surges from their feminine subalternity. These women channel their creative energies through traditional folk forms, singing lyrical songs about their pains, passions, and joys. They celebrate sisterhood by locking arms in grinding narratives or singing on the dhalo maand. As seen in their several performances, they are never tired or bored of this routine weeklong dhalo or the sonorous gr..gr..grinding sounds. In fact, it acts as a musical cadence, not for mere entertainment, but a traditional practice which manifests their covert subjugation at the noose of patriarchy. This eventually, makes them use these folk traditions as a vicarious release from their stifled subalternity. Sadly, with the onset of modernization, industrialization, education and AI, there is a fear that these folk traditions may reach the brink of extinction. It is thus, the need of the hour to salvage, document and preserve such pristine women-centric folk forms in audio- visual, digital formats and re-claim them for all to observe, listen, learn, and research.

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Some Socio-cultural Aspects of Bhādugān

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Abstract

Bhādu puja coupled with song is one of major folk festivals in Rār̄h region of West Bengal mainly observed by the poor and lower middle section of the society in the villages. This is observed throughout the Bengali month of Bhādra (August-September) with the devotional songs composed by the local innocent people and its time and place of origin is in the mystery. This folksong in its contents upholds and maintains the traditional value system of the region and at the same time embraces the current emerging issues affecting their lifestyle, folk-philosophy and livelihood. The present paper attempts to explore the socio-cultural aspects of this rich folk festival songs born out of the real life experiences of the rural people affected by the economic, political and social milieu of the region and the country.

Keywords: folklore, Bhādugān, folksong, orality, culture,

The folklore, as it is born out of the ground reality and real life experiences and coloured by the inner vibration in the foundation of life and livelihood of the native innocent rural people, is undoubtedly the life-line of a community or race and reflects as well as enliven the community concerned. Folk culture generally connected with orality is not only a form of repertoire of language patterns, topoi and genes but also a whole world vision linked with both the birth-region and regions beyond that. Its importance in the community life can be traced from the (un)written history and cultural heritage of the ancient or modern civilizations across the globe. The folklore which conveys custom, beliefs, technical skills, language, art and craft, architecture, music, dance, drama, rituals, pageantry, games, etc., enriched with its various manifestations in forms and structures has been being lively cultivated and nurtured in the informal domestic or local settings. Several folk forms of entertainment are prevalent in different parts of India and are powerful media of public instruction and a unifying force for emotional and spiritual integrity. These regional festival-centric performances bring on the same plane or level the poor and rich together irrespective of their castes and creeds. Thousands of people undergo a healthy and pure entertainment which helps them forget for the time being their domestic and psychological problems and enjoy with their respective temporarily soothed selves.

However, it has conspicuously gained its wide, strong and durable room in the academic arena from the 1970s onwards, though it is mainly *oral* and not having formal institutional patronage and thereby has emerged as a competitor to the mainstream literature with all its forms. To put it in other words, the common rural people bereft of several urban complexities compose these folksongs with spontaneity and enthusiastic vibrancy. In spite of increasing industrialization and subsequent urbanization the importance-cum-significance of folklore has not decreased but rather has increased dimensionally as this, it can easily be felt, helps people enjoy the life in the true sense of the term in the midst of modern alienation-haunting situations.

The Rār̄h region (24°35' N to 21 °47' N latitude and 85°49' E and 88°25' E longitude) which covers the western districts of the state of West Bengal and eastern part of the states of Bihar and Jharkhand (lying between the Choto Nagpur Plateau and the Chief flow of the river Ganges) proudly possesses the rich tradition of different varieties of folklore and its allied components. One of the prominent folklores of this region endowed with the colours of this rural society is Bhādugān composed extemporaneously and sung on the occasion of the celebration of local deity Bhādu worshipping festival during the whole Bengali calendar month of Bhādra (August-September), depicting the Goddess as unmarried young girl. According to Ashutos Bhattacharya (2004), the Bhādu worship is actually the Hindu version of the Karam festival of the local tribal people. Both the Karam and Bhādu festivals are observed during rainy season. The debate and confusion prevail regarding the source or beginning and the evolution of Bhādu festival in the present shape. One very popular folk legend-like story linked with the history can be had in this region. The story runs in the following way: Approximately around 1813 AD, a famous king named Neelmani Singha was ruling the Panchakot (under Manbhum district) whose capital was Kashipur. Neelmani had a very beautiful young daughter i.e., princess named Bhādrābati or Bhādreswari (affectionately called 'Bhādu') but there was no indication of the possibility regarding her marriage which caused a huge agony not only in the royal family but also in the entire kingdom. Moreover, her premature death as a spinster was a huge shocking blow to Neelmani who got engulfed in bereavement. However, regarding the death of Neelmani's daughter Bhādu another oral story is also heard in several parts of Rār̄h Bengal. Bhādu's marriage was settled with the Bardhaman prince. On the very day of marriage the prince accompanied by the Bridegroom party, while approaching to Kashipur, was killed by a band of goons armed with bamboo sticks (locally called 'laThiyals'). Listening to the news of the death of her betrothed Prince Bhādu committed suicide.

The bereaved king announced the worship of his Late daughter Bhādu in order to overcome his deep shock and also immortalize her among the people within the jurisdiction of Panchakot province. His subjects obeyed his order with joy and fervour. Gradually, this folk worship-cum-song festival during the Bhādra month started spreading in the adjoining districts like entire Purulia, Bankura, West Bardhaman, Birbhum and West Midnapore of West Bengal and the districts Ranchi and Hazaribag of Jharkhand. This widely spread oral folk story, be it imagined or real, is traced in several modern versions of Bhādugān. However, Bengali folk-literature experts believe that Bhādu festival was prevalent in this region long before this story. And in the first half of the 19th century this story of Kashipur king got associated with the already existing Bhādu festival. It is religiously and culturally opined in this region that Bengali Bhādra month belonging to the rainy season of the year is the period of production of food grains like paddy, wheat, millet, etc. And so Bhādu is locally identified with Hindu Goddess Lakshmi (Goddess of riches).

On the very first day of the Bhādra month an idol of Bhādu goddess is made of clay, placed on the altar and worshipped by the girls of the concerned family or locality consecutively for three days. During the rest of the month from 4th day to the onwards Bhādra idol is carried by a group of both male and female members of the village singing various songs and dancing with musical instruments in the surrounding villages and towns. With such song-dance performances they collect money and / or rice and agricultural products from the households. On the last of the Bhādra, Bhādu idol is worshipped and immersed in the pond or river with a sad mood and tone and it is followed by a common feast at the cost of the collected money and materials.

This month-long folk festival is dominated by the songs composed by the mostly Primary school-educated or rather illiterate rural people in group or single person and these songs are carried orally from generations to generations and like other folklores or oral literature, in most

cases until recently the composers of these remain in oblivion. Even the exact time and place of their composition are not known to the present generation. Hence it is worthy to mention here that all the songs quoted in this paper have been collected from the books and papers listed in Work Cited and from the local people and these have been translated by the present author. The songs are based not only on the theme of origin and worship of Bhādu puja but also those of social, economic, cultural issues concerning the poor working class people to whom the very survival struggle is the main issue. Moreover, these folksongs reflect their own view points on the art of living which are local as well universal in nature.

The warm welcome of Bhādu is done with a variety of songs indicating the very closeness with the goddess to the devotees free from complexity and artificiality. See the following song:

Bhādur āgomone.

ki ānondo hoy gO mOder prāne.

Bhādu ājke e'lo ghore gO elO gO shuvodine.

mOr sāji bhorti phul tulechi gO joto sob songigone.

mOrā sārārāti korbO pujā gO phul diba gO corone.

onek sondesh thālā thālā khāOyābo Bhādudhone.

Bhādupujā nai jethāy je gO, ki kāj tāder jibone.

Kashipur rājār pujā gO, se pujā kore prothome.

se moner motO bor peyeche jā chilO gO tār mone.

Bhādu, boli tOmay, coron tOmar dibe āmār morone.

[Translation: - On the advent of our Bhādu goddess in the house, we pay homage to her by offering flowers collected by our young girls and plateful sweets. The girl who conducts this worship introduced by the Kashipur king is believed to get married to a groom according to her expectation. O' Bhādu, give the touch of your feet at the time of my death.]

Another welcome song celebrating the beginning of Bhādu festival can be cited here:

āmār ghorke Bhādu elen
kuthāke basābO
piyāl gācher talāy āsan pātbo nā nā,
āmār sOnār Bhāduke kOle tule libO.
Bhādu khābek kaRkaRā
mOtir dāNter āOyāj dibe
kuTur muTur maRmaRā.

[Translation: Bhādu has come to my house. Where shall seat her? I will NOT put the seat under the almondette tree. I will take my sweet girl on my lap. Bhādu will eat puffed rice mixed with fried grams by chewing with her pearl-like teeth with “kuTur muTur maRmaRā” sound.]

Such welcome songs which seem to be born out of genuine feelings of intimacy and love exhibit the very fact that Bhādu is heartily and cordially accepted and embraced as the unmarried daughter of the family, not the Goddess having anger and grandeur. The intimacy with the Bhādu goddess is no doubt one of the remarkable aspects of this festival fervently observed throughout the Bhādra month. While worshiping and praying Bhādu, the young girls of the village instantly and spontaneously compose songs dealing with the different rural familial and social aspects and having the least rigorous religious touch. For instance, let us see the following song:

bOli, OIO mokor.
āsche jāmāy nuton nuton phyasān lO purus ceye strii dāgor
jokhon purus hoy nai, (tokhon striyer boyos ek nochor.

[Translation: - Let us say, O Moker, groom is coming in the new fashions. Bride is older than groom. When groom was not born, bride was one year old.]

Bhādu āmār chutu meye kāporh poRte jāne nā.

Kāporh poRiye dāu gO tOmra poysā debo cār ānā.

[Translation:- Bhādu is my little girl child who does not know how to wear clothes. I request you to dress her with clothes and for this I will pay you four ānās (24 paise).]

Similar songs heard in the villages which are also of the same kind begin with “Bhādu āmār dāgor hoyeNche” [My Bhādu has grown young], “Bhādu, Bhādu kari ami, Bhādu nadir Opāre / O, nāure tOr pāye pari dāu nā Bhādu pār kare.” [I am repeatedly calling Bhādu but she is in the other side of the river. O boatman, please bring her from that side to this.]. Through this festival of the unmarried girls (Kumāri utsab) of Rārḥ Bengal, the local young girls celebrate their natural joy of freedom and get the means of leading and enjoying future life with simplicity, innocence, happiness and jubilation. The lively spontaneous fervor and innocence-mixed love and devotion are at the centre of this festival coloured by innocence-born life-force of the rural folk. Thus the unmixed enjoyment of the young girls in festive mood is identified with of this festival which cannot but embrace the on-going cultural changes and adaptations in the village-based social system of this Bengal region. It is evidenced by the presence of references to the towns like Kolkata, Bardhaman, Delhi etc., and the contemporary fashion elements like cosmetic items, costly garments and ornaments in the currently composed Bhādugāns. Again, as Bhādupujā is primarily family-centric or clan-centric, there prevails a sense of cooperative competition among the neighbouring families or clans organizing this. Accordingly such sense of competition can easily be felt or understood from the oral songs composed to convey the superior qualities of Bhādu idols of the family or clan concerned. Such healthy competition can vividly be traced from the two songs sung in appreciation of the glaring beautiful aspects of their respective Bhādu idols. Some lines of the following song sung to criticize the Bhādu idol of a neighbouring clan or family is an instance.

dekhe ja IO tOrā.

Bhādu dekhe hoichi IO dishehārā.

rupe chotā ghonoghotā IO, āIO, ghor āNdhār korā.

onumānete bōse āche, thik jeno kshepir pārā.

mukher chiri āhā mori IO, shrābon māser megh korā.

cokh dutO tar beler moton thik jeno āgun pārā.

[Translation: - Dear friends, Come and see Bhādu idol (of theirs). Seeing this idol I/We have become bewildered. The glow of Bhādu's complexion is such that the well-lit room gets darkened. I/We am sitting here on the assumption that the idol is like a mad girl. Her facial appearance is very mediocre and just like the black cloud of the Shrābon month (the month prior to Bhādra), Her eyes are the wood apple full of fire.- - -]

In protest against such composition full of scathing criticisms, the girls of the targeted family or clan react in the form of song (full of rhetorical devices) some lines of which are cited here.

bhai re, mone mone.

āmār Bhādur rup dekhe jwolis kene?

āmār Bhādur rupti tOder IO, cOkhe bol soibe kene.

Suryorer āIO dekhle pNecā lukay giye ghOr bone.

temni tOr Bhādudhone IO,dekhte nālli noyone

tOder Bhādu, āmār Bhādu, tofāt IO rātridin.

āmār Bhādu sworgoshObha IO, tOder pātāl bhubone.

[Translation: - - O' my fellow, why do you mentally burn in anger looking at the beauty of my or our Bhādu? Your eyes cannot bear with the beauty of my Bhādu. Seeing the sunlight owl goes to the deep forest. Similarly, you cannot enjoy the beauty of our

Bhādu. The difference between your Bhādu and ours is that between night and day. Our Bhādu is the heavenly grace, while yours is like hell - - -]

However, such criticism and counter criticism expressed through the songs, it is noteworthy, do not affect or hamper the societal harmony peace which are based on solid foundation of mutual understanding, trust, and Nature-centric life and livelihood of these hard-working agrarian communities. As Bhādu festival is mainly the festival of the marriageable young girls, a formidable number of Bhādugāns deal with the physical beauty, love-related desires and marriage of the young girls e.g., “nobin premikā Bhādu, koto shoto jāne jadu.” (Bhādu being a young new beloved knows hundreds of captivating means.), “nobin premiāka Bhādu IO, kemone ācho bhule./nobin prāne bandhur sone shuvo boron kore le” (O’ New lover Bhādu, how can you remain indifferent? Do make auspicious wedding welcome to the new lover-friend.), etc. Actually, through such oral songs, the young girls indirectly convey their deep seated desire for getting married and the planning of leading happy conjugal life. As the Bhādra month along with this youthful expectation-centric festival spread over the entire month approaches toward the end, a tune of sadness due to the impending departure of Bhādu (i.e., immersion of clay-made idol) on the very last day of the month dominates in the hearts and minds of the people, especially of the young girls. The following song is a glaring instance of such a song loaded with sad tune:

Bhādu, bidhumukhi.

esO, esO hridoye dhore rākhi.

bidāy kothā shune tOmār gO, obirol jhore āNkhi

(tumi) jeO nā IO, binoy kori āmāder dite phāNki.

(tumi) mOder prāner ādhār gO, tOmāy odhik bolbo ki.

(esO) bochor pore thāko dudin, āmāder kore sukhi.

[Translated:- Bhādu, moon-faced girl, come to us and let us keep you in our hearts. We are listening to the words of your departure and our eyes shed incessant flow of tears. Do not go by evading us. You are the life-container. We do not want to tell you more than this. As you come after one full year, stay with us for at least two more days and make us happy.]

As mentioned earlier, the people associated with Bhādu festival belong to the marginal part of the rural Rārḥ region mostly and are affected by poverty and allied problems in leading day-to-day life. Bhādugān as orality-based folksong or ballad functions as the living social history document by projecting the various aspects of the society of its birth and nurture. These songs represent dowry system, illiteracy issue, child-labour, epidemic, drought and its effect, inflation, politics, and the issues whatever affect their simple life. Let us quote some glaring one or two lines from the songs depicting the above mentioned issues.

1. “Bhādda māse Bhādu eO, kantOle tel amel hala / Cinir bājār care gela, ki kari upāy?” [in the month of Bhādra Bhādu has come and in the ration shop oil has become unavailable. The price of sugar has soared high. What means do we undertake (in this crisis)?]

2. Ki barsā neme gela abashes./ ābār āntrik rOge nāi kO Shānti / akālete jib khase. [The huge rain has started and we fear that the intestinal disease will affect us and several lives fall i.e., face premature death.]

3. Ejuge jār cārTe beTā, se beTā hay bejāy ThNeTā. [In the present age a person who has four sons behaves very shamelessly.]

The last four lines of a song is indicative of the composer’s frantic appeal for peace not in their region but also in the whole country i.e., India.

- - - -

Jibaner bhay tuccha kare ingrej jatke dile teRe,

Swādhinatār anek pare ghaTche e ki ghaTanā?

Eke ki rājniti bale, seTā kichu bujhi nā.

OgO Bhādu deshe kena shanti āse nā?

[Translation:- By trifling the fear of life the freedom fighters drove the English rules and brought our freedom. After elapse of so many years after independence what are a happening? Is it called politics? We do not understand these fearful hostilities. O Bhādu, why doesn't peace come to our country?]

By quoting this song Badal Saha (2015: 150) makes a very poignant comment in Bangla which deems to be mentioned here. The translation of Saha's comment in English is given below:

This eternal quarry is not only of Birbhum but of whole India, whole world. folksong can emerge as a voice of such protest uphold the eternal truth before all, help us explore the true nature of mass consciousness. Such Bhādugān of Birbhum is a burning instance.

It is to be noted that Bhādugāns differ in content and tune reflecting the unique special and cultural features or constituents of the different parts of this vast Rār̄h region. Several works have been published by the scholars of folk literature and culture. For instance, Dulal Choudhury's *Banglar Lokutsab* (1987, Ashutos Bhattacharya's. *Bānglār Lok Sāhitya* (2004), Subir Mondal's *Dakshin Bankurar LOkjibon O Sonskriti* (2014), Dr. Badal Saha's *Sonskriti O Sahitya: Prasanga Birbhum* (2015), etc., are the very leading works dealing with the folklore items including Bhādugān. In spite of the presence of the difference in content in Bhādugāns, it is remarkable to note that this folklore like others endowed with the true aesthetic height conveys the prevalent integral relationship between human beings and Nature and ethnographic identity of the Rār̄h people. Moreover it highlights the very necessity for maintaining this ecological consciousness and ecology-centric societal relationship even in the present life style in order to sustain the peaceful life as critically observed by Ramanuj Muphopadhyay (2021) in his paper 'Hāriye jāOyā Bhādugāner KhONje' ('In search of lost Bhādugān'). Thus

Bhādugān occupies a unique space in cultural philosophy and ethnography and its deep rooted existence in the memory of the common folk is the testimony of that.

Before conclusion, let me frankly state that the present article has been written with a view to giving a brief introduction to this very folk festival to the readers who have not got the flavor of this rich cultural aspect of Rārh people. Several strikingly important aspects of Bhādugān have been addressed or hinted at in this discourse so that rigorous academic research works can be undertaken by the scholars of folklore studies. Substantial body of Bhādugān centring round the particular socio-cultural and socio-economic issues and the analysis of the narratives in relation to each other reveals the community feelings, beliefs, struggles for life and livelihood and the allied issues affecting the people of the region. It suggests that in this milieu like other rural ones, both thought and expression tend to aggregative and concrete. The study of the songs indicates that these belonging to different places and times telescopically represent a broader world view from the community with which illiteracy is still attached. It can also be unhesitatingly claimed that orality cannot be considered to be synonymous with illiteracy so far as Bhādugān study is concerned.

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Indian Tribal and Folk Literature: A True Reflection of Native Culture

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Abstract

This research paper involves the description of tribes in Indian literature, explaining how they have been represented historically, with a tinge of their social, political, and cultural implications on our society. It describes the importance of tribal identity in the broader context of Indian society, examining key literary works and authors who have depicted tribal communities in the folk literature of India. It also deals with the preservation of indigenous cultures. This paper aims to explore the significance of tribal literature in shaping Indian culture, examining its functions in cultural preservation and conservation, social critique, and the expression of tribal identity, as it becomes quite interesting to find out the tribal narratives that challenge dominant cultural norms in contributing a more wide-ranging representation of Indian diversity. Furthermore, in a country as varied as India, the tribal people are spread throughout several states and regions. Folk literature helps us to know about our rich Indian cultural heritage, demonstrating that this community is the only group which has preserved unique languages, traditions, rituals, and artistic manifestations. They are the ones keeping the ageless culture and ideals alive. Communities living in forests have not only survived but thrived in India because all tribes share the same ecological viewpoints.

Keywords: Indian English literature, Folk literature, Tribes and indigenous people, Preservation of Indian culture.

Tribal literature in India incorporates a wide range of literary forms like oral storytelling traditions, folk songs, poetry, and modern literary works. The unique feature of the tribal literature is originated from the tribal communities' experiences and interaction with the world, whether it is about Bhils, Santhali, Munda or any other tribe, especially in the face of marginalization, colonization, and modernity. While most of the tribal literature is oral and poetic, some modern authors have greatly contributed to translate their ways in various written forms, documenting tribal life and issues in contemporary contexts.

Tribal literature in India primarily assists as a tool for preserving and transmitting cultural knowledge and values, often centred around nature, mythology, rituals, and communal life. It is also a form of resistance, challenging the socio-political marginalization of tribal communities and giving voice to their struggles. Through these literatures, tribes offer alternative worldviews that contrast with and critique the dominant narratives of Indian culture.

Unfortunately, very few books are written in English by tribal authors since English as a medium of education still remains a privilege for many tribal people. On the other hand, the author G.N. Devy has been significant in translating various indigenous languages into English and Hindi. Devy says, "After print technology started impacting Indian languages during the nineteenth century, the fate of the oral became precarious. A gross cultural neglect had to be faced by the languages which remained outside print technology."⁽¹⁾

But when we look close into our ancient scriptures like *Vedas* and *Purana*, we can easily find the references of the composite culture, a blend of exogenous communities, Aryans and Non-Aryans aboriginals which were popularly called *Adivasis* meaning, "Ancient man". The *Rigveda*, being one of the oldest texts in human history, primarily reflects the world of the

ancient Vedic society was rather different than direct references to modern India, we know it today. All the rules and regulations mentioned in ancient scriptures are strictly followed by most of the tribes of India.

For example, **Bharata**, a prominent tribe in the **Rigveda**, is considered a key reference point for the name of **India**. The name “Bharat” (or *Bharatavarsha*) is derived from the **Bharata** tribe, and it has been used in Hindu texts to refer to our great nation.

“In most parts of the world, the genuine and unself conscious practice of folk art no longer exist but it is still very alive in India. This is not to romanticise a quint essential village India. Of course, things have changed here as elsewhere in the world yet in spite of this India is unique and fascinating in the way older forms are not just replaced by new or once they frequently co-exist together so the ritual painter is still around a long side the photoshop designer.”⁽²⁾

There are multiple references of tribal rituals which are even practiced today. The customs like remarriage, polygamy, unification of class etc. was depicted in famous epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* which is practiced even today. The concept of Indian philosophy can also be found in most of the tribal stories. For example, versions of the *Ramayana* in tribal communities often presents the local interpretations of various characters. Not only this, Lord Ram is valued and followed by some tribal communities in India, particularly the *Ramnami Samaj*, who tattoo (locally *gondna*) his name on their bodies. Moreover, it is a belief in Santhal community that once Lord Shiva and his wife, Parvati invited the Gond community and its chief for a feast. While going back, the Gond Chief mistook Goddess Parvati for his wife. This enraged Parvati as she took the gesture as tarnishing her importance. To prevent a man from mistaking another woman as his wife, Parvati gifted the Gond women a Gondna Yantra, suggesting each woman could use this Yantra to get herself tattooed and help men avoid this mistake. This also helped the Gond women to build their collective identity.

In the specimen of the Oral literature of middle India, many folklores are collected from 1941 to 1951 which comes straight away from the communal life of Orissa. One of them is as follows:

One day long ago, Kittung went to draw water from a stream. There was a hole in his pot and the water began to leak; Kittung tried to stop the hole with mud, but it was no good. At last, he cut off a bit of his own flesh, a bit from his hand and put it into the hole. But even this did not stop the leak.

Kittung now thought, "I've cut off a bit of my own flesh; I must not waste it. I will make some sort of creature with it. He stuck the flesh on a stick, put it on the ground and said, "Become a crab and burrow down to get good earth which will stop holes in the pots." (3)

The above folklore describes the essence of our own Hindu philosophy. It completely matches with what Lord Krishna has said, "For the soul there is neither birth nor death at any time. He has not come into being, does not come into being, and will not come into being. He is unborn, eternal, ever-existing, and primeval. He is not slain when the body is slain...As a person puts on new garments, giving up old ones, the soul similarly accepts new material bodies, giving up the old and useless ones." (*Bhagwad Gita 2.20*)

The Vedas have various *Suktas* -devotional hymns to revive our soul by performing daily prayers to the *Panch Mahabhuta* – the basic five elements of Nature. The tribals being true sons of Nature enjoy the environmental surroundings to their eternal bliss. In fact, the folk culture has survived by experiencing this power of nature as a source of survival and also as the master to punish folks for any misconduct with it. The *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are very well known to each and every scholar and reader in India but many regional folk epics still remains largely unexplored. However, in western parts of India (especially in Gujarat)

numerous epics are still existing. Gujarat is accumulated with various culture, complex traditions and rituals etc in which folks is dependent mainly on the nature power, heroic godlings, disease deities, the worship of ancestors and saints, the malicious dead, the evils eye and the scaring of ghosts, tree and serpent worship, animal worship and witchcraft. For example, in the song given below in Gujarati reflects that the natural forces are supreme and thus involved in the glorification of God.

મંદિર તારૂં વિશ્વ રૂપાળું, સુંદર સર્જનહારા રે, પળ પળ તારાં દર્શન થાયે, દેખેદેખનહારા રે॥ નહિ પૂજારી
નહિ કોઈ દેવા, નહિ મંદિરને તાળાં રે, નીલ ગગન માં મહિમા ગાતાં, ચાંદો સૂરજ તારા રે॥

(Your temple is the beauty of the world, O beautiful creator, every moment you appear, O beholder. There are no priests, no gods, no locks to the temple, O moon and sun, singing your glory in the blue sky.)

Tribes of India worship forests, rock, rivers, mountains as sacred identities. They also believe in the spirits that live in nature and our natural surroundings which may/may not be compassionate for their life and livelihood. The importance to natural environment is unlimited as it is perceived that all natural elements are God-like and they believe that their ancestors live in this nature only. It of course then becomes their duty to take care of their ancestors. Indian folk literature is rich with tales, songs, and proverbs that promote environmental sustainability. Here are a few examples:

Bishnoi Community of Rajasthan– The Bishnoi community has a strong tradition of environmental conservation. It was founded by guru Jambheshwar who . this community is very well known for their courage and sacrifice to protect trees and wild animals.

Chipko Movement Songs (Uttarakhand) – The Chipko movement, which originated in the 1970s, has deep roots in folk traditions. Local songs and oral narratives highlight the importance of forests,

Panchtantra-Ancient fables like “The Bird with Two Heads” and “The Monkey and the Crocodile” teach us the lessons about coexistence, respect for nature, and the consequences of disrupting the balance of ecosystems.

Warli Tribal Art and Stories (Maharashtra) – Warli paintings often depict trees, animals, and farming, reflecting the tribe’s respect for the environment. Their folklore shows sustainable practices like shifting cultivation and forest preservation.

Baiga Tribe (Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh) – The Baiga people believe in a deep spiritual connection with the land. Their oral traditions discourage deforestation and promote sustainable use of forest resources

Tamil Sangam Literature (Tamil Nadu) – Ancient and unique Tamil texts like the *Kurunthogai* and *Purananuru* mention the importance of ecological balance and sustainable agricultural practices.

Garhwali and Kumaoni Folktales (Uttarakhand) – These stories often center around forests and rivers, teaching respect for water conservation and sustainable farming.

Most of India’s popular folk tales belongs to one of the three categories: The *Hitopadesha*, the Panchatantra and the Jatakas Tales. All of them carry a message related to some historical accounts or religious beliefs for adults as well as children. India is famous for multiple folklores and mythologies. Undoubtedly, these all are filled with moral teachings are relevant even in today’s world. Indian folk and tribal literature have always attracted readers round the globe.

Even in the present times, the diction and authenticity of each and every story have been gaining momentum worldwide.

यो हि यस्मिन् रतो धर्म स तं पूजयते सदा । (महाआश्वमेधीय पर्व)

(Anyone who is engaged in the religion of the Lord always worships it)

The tribal community in India has always been an integral part of Indian civilization. They are seen mentioned even in Indian epics: *Ramayana and Mahabharata*, where they were referred to as *Jana/Loka*, who differed in their physical appearance, worshipped Gods different than the rest of the country, and lived in isolated regions. Moreover, they can be considered as true worshippers of Lord. India's ancient history in its oldest literature holds the forgotten key to understanding our unified social fabric. In the great Epic *Ramayana* the *Nishada* have played a prominent role. The king of *Nishadas* named *Guha* was a very close friend of Lord *Rama* helping the latter and Sita cross the Ganges in Shringverpur. Guha says,

तवामरसुतप्रख्य तरतुरं सागरम् नदीम् ।

नौरियम् पुरुषव्याग्र ! ताम् त्वमारोह सुव्रत् !

(O tiger among men! Oh, Ram resembling a son of divinity! Here is the boat for you to cross the river which flows into the sea. Oh, virtuous one! (Pray) get into it.)

Lord Rama replies:

अथोवाच महातेजा रामो गुहमिद् वचः ।

कृत कामोस्मि भवता शीघ्रमारोप्यतामिति । ।

Then *Rama* with great splendour spoke to *Guha* as follows,

My desire has been accomplished by you let us embark with all speed .

The mutual love familiarity and respect is evidence from this dialogue that takes place between Lord *Rama* and King *Guha* the loyalty between the two is an indication of a closed net civilization fabric.

Another form of folk literature is observed in the folk songs. The folk music of India, often known as the music of the Earth is a local creation and one of the most heartfelt sounds we can ever hear. The tradition of folk music in India has been found in the Vedic literature which dates back to 1500 BC. *Pandavani*, for instance, is folk music famous in Central India (mostly popular in Gujarat and M.P.) which is considered to be as old as the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*. It is quite usual to begin the listen folk music and songs with mesmerizing and soothing patterns of Vedic chanting. Another example is that of *Meera Bai's* folk songs who was popularly known as a devotee of Lord Krishna. If we read her bhajans, we can find the inexplicable attitude and devotion which not only reflects a glimpse of spirituality with Shri Krishna in her writings, but an expression of devotional interconnection through words with the ultimate supreme power. One of her hymns is as follows,

अरे मोड़ो जागियों मूर्ख गिवार, मेवाड़ी राणा ओ।

पेला जागतों तो स्वर्ग ले जाती , सूतो राणों सुखभर नींद।।

(You are a fool as you got up late and felt pleased in sleep. If you have got up early, you would have reached Heaven)

It is in fact rightly said by Prof. V.S. Agrawala, “The Vedas have preserved a full and comprehensive account of the metaphysical and religious beliefs of the Aryan people very often cast in the language of *Yajña*-ritual which represented the practical side of religious observances. The Rigveda, Yajurveda and *Sāmaveda* are valuable documents of source material in this respect. Their detailed understanding especially of the metaphysical contents and of the cosmic symbolism of which an integrated system is implied in the Mantras, still remains a desideratum. They are a group of people who are socially and culturally different

from their neighbours and are being designated tribes and listed in a scheduled for special treatment by the constitution of India.”⁽⁴⁾

We also come across many practices that the tribal community share with Hindu communities specially in India, such as:

- The *gotra* system: The wedding practices are also linked to *gotra*. They don't marry someone from the same *gotra*.
- Weddings usually happen early in the morning in a *mandapa*.
- The use of *mangalsutra* in weddings.
- Tonsuring children when they reach certain age.
- Rituals, where cow is revered as the goddess *Kamadhenu*, for wealth and prosperity.
- Some rituals are directed towards the deceased or dead is similar or identical to many non-tribal communities such as bathing of the body.
- Tribal song is a deep poetic expression. It may just be sung or it may be accompanied by dramatization, movement and dance. It is never a solo performance which implies the feeling of integrity among all individuals.
- The custom of tree marriage.
- Song accompanied by dance is always in the community, with the community and for the community.

Many works were done in India in which we find an intricate depiction of various tribes. A very prominent author of Marathi, Vaharu Sonwane writes, “From the tribal point of view it is wrong to say that only written literature is literature. It is inconsistent like the walls that stand between literature and art, literature and life, in the society. There is no place in the tribal society to change these interpretations because many customs, folk songs and dramas with many other arts still exist in the tribal society even today. These may be not in written down

traditions. Still, they have been going on for thousands of years, have never stopped and are prevalent in their original forms as their integral part of tribal life.”⁽⁵⁾

The poetry of this community is a combination of diction, song, music and dance. Though uncivilized, it is a complete blend of simplicity, accessibility and communality, often anonymous, with characteristics of repetition, rhyming and alliteration. It serves as a medium to reflect various values, experiences and identity of the various communities.

“Songs and dances punctuate their individual and social life. Appropriate to different social and ritual occasions, different songs are sung and different dances are performed. To them, dances and songs are part of their life and source of enjoyment and relaxation. Different musical instruments (Nagada tamak, dholki, flute, cymbal, gong, string instruments) are used in accompaniment of singing and dancing wearing new flowers and eating new crops and fruits hunting curing illness Thanks giving to dead ancestors and unseen spirits and gods every occasion has its appropriate songs and dances.”⁽⁶⁾

For example, Draupadi finds more importance in the local tradition as Goddess which the original text fails to reflect her. In the folk literature, it is so different than the Draupadi elaborated by Ved Vyasa, which when observed carefully, one can easily induce that both have little /no resemblance. The Vanniyar Community of Tamil Nadu where the Draupadi-Amman Festival is celebrated annually constructs a different dialect *Mahabharata*, one that is interpreted through the centrality of the Goddess. The traditional folk song of Tamil Nadu, ‘Pucari’, is sung in the festivals to praise the beautiful and the compassionate mother-figure, Draupadi. Unlike the original text, here she is regarded as Vir Panchali, the protector of the five Pandavas.

If we lay an effort into the lives of tribal community exploring their history, customs, belief systems, and contemporary challenges, by unravelling their stories, we will be able to mark up their contributions which brought about many changes in this modernised world. Like,

- They are the non-government doctors who believe in the healing through various herbs and medicines, which people like us can't do.
- They have a symbiotic bonding with animals and birds which is reflected even in their paintings, folklores and folk songs.
- The living style of various tribes is ultimate to bridge a gap between *Vyakti and Parmesthi*. They set a model to bifurcate and classify the concepts both at- micro and macro levels.
- The community is very down –to –earth and believes in leading a very economical life. Usually, they opt thatch roofed homes.
- Apart from the tribals, no other community is capable of demonstrating the spirit of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*.

अयम् निजः परो वेति गणना लघुचेतासम्

उदारचरितानान् तु वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् [Panchatantra - 5.3.38]

(This person is ours (friend) and this person is not" is narrow minded thinking. But for the liberal broad-minded person the whole world is indeed one family.)

After getting these many clues of our own culture, it cannot be denied that tribal literature is the only original literature that promotes our Indian culture. To do this, we must all come together and bridge the divide between WE and THEY in order to become one with the tribal groups. By doing this, we may connect with all linguistic groups and make a significant contribution to global literature.

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O YI YO AHO: A study on Angami Lullabies.

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Abstract

Lullabies all across the world serve one main purpose, which is to lull babies to sleep. The concept of a lullaby is universal in all cultures around the globe, as much as it is among the Angami Nagas. These songs go beyond just the art of lulling, and what appears to be soft, simple songs are rather complex in nature as they function to transmit cultural knowledge of the community. This paper studies and understands the concept of the Angami lullaby, documenting collected lullabies and translating these lullabies while maintaining their original meanings. The study is done to understand and document Angami lullabies while preserving the vanishing traditions of singing folk songs to the new generations, as we face the challenge of continuity with the growth and influence of Western culture.

Keywords: Folklore, Lullaby, Angami lullaby, Folksongs.

Introduction

Folklore is the oral transmission of knowledge. Nabajit Deka (2018) states, “it is the oldest and earliest intellectual and cultural assets of human civilisation”. The word was first coined by English folklorist William John Thoms in the year 1846 to bring forth a proper scientific term for the earlier known labels such as *Popular Literature* and *Popular Antiquities*. The term was proposed by William Thoms, an apparent translation of the German word *Volkskunde*, which translates to *Knowledge of the people*, which denotes the life, practices and beliefs of the people passed down through generations.

Folklore can be divided into three categories, namely: Verbal lore, Material lore and Customary lore. Ricard M Dorson, known as the father of American Folklore, further reclassified the types of Folklore into Oral Literature, Material Culture, Social Folk Customs and Performing Folk Arts. This division remains foundational in folklore studies. Verbal Lore refers to the spoken, sung, or voiced forms of traditional expression passed down through generations, such as folktales, chants, songs, proverbs, riddles, historical narratives and more. Folk songs are a prominent form of verbal lore; these are songs made popular among a group of people or communities, have existed since ancient times, and often serve to reflect the social, ritual and spiritual views of the people.

Lullabies are classified as a type of folksong. They are short and simple songs sung to put babies to sleep, and they are soothing songs caregivers sing to calm and nurse children. It is also understood as a vocal piece of music specifically designed to lull babies to sleep by using repeated linguistic formula “that mimics the rhythms of comforting speech, reinforcing their emotional tones” (Tkach Anna, 2020). The German word *Weigenlied* comes from two words: *Weigen*, which means to rock and *lied*, which means a song. The general understanding of the word *Weigenlied* in German would mean a song sung in addition to a peculiar movement of

the body. Zoe Palmer, a musician working on a lullaby project in the Royal London Hospital, highlights shared characteristics of lullabies as orally performed with short and simple structure, followed by gentle body movements with slow and intermittent repetition of the song. Often described as *Gentle songs*, lullabies are considered to be the first genres of music children come in contact with. Steinhever (1997) observes, “The soothing singing of a mother before her child falls asleep is likely... a part of musical culture since humanity learned to speak and sing.”

As a form of folk song, lullabies are present in all walks of life, Daphinda War, *Pleasant Dreams* (2007) remarks “a lullaby is a song sung by mothers and nurses all over the world” which highlights the shared universality of these folk songs, Weisner (2000) further views “The oration of lullabies seems to be an international language of all humankind, irrespective of age, culture or time.”

Understanding Angami Lullabies

The Angamis are one of the major tribal groups of Nagaland, settled in Kohima district, Chumoukedima district and Dimapur district. The Angami community is divided into four major geographical regions, namely, Northern Angami, Western Angami, Southern Angami and Chakhro Angami. Though development and Westernization had dawned in on the Angamis at an early stage, the Angamis still hang on to many folk traditions, folk songs are one among many as the Angamis are music lovers known for their wide variety of composition of songs, lullabies are also a form of song widely sung by the Angamis, holding a status of great importance as it becomes a type of music man first come in contact with. Thus, it plays a crucial role in influencing the mind of an individual.

Lack of detailed ethnographic and observational data:

Lullabies, though considered simple folk songs, play an important role in understanding the psychological complexity of the human mind and a reflection of society, giving an insight into the interaction and growth of a community. Knowledge of the existence of the different types of lullabies among the Angami Nagas is poorly understood and needs further study to enhance the knowledge of these folk songs, all the while documenting them for cultural preservation and preventing them from diminishing under the influence of dominant popular cultures that flood the mainstream society today.

Lullabies seem to be gradually losing their popularity when compared to other folk songs due to the influence of Western culture, replacing the status of folk lullabies with popular Western lullabies or nursery rhymes, in the course of which the community eventually stopped the transmission of folk lullabies and contributed to the loss of their importance. The limited knowledge of these songs passed down to the younger generations serves as a lack of observational data due to their limited sources of active performance, whereby the transmission of the importance of these songs and cultural knowledge of the community preserved in these songs is ultimately lost. The study hoped to shed light on understanding the concept of Angami lullabies and make an attempt to translate collected lullabies, all the while preserving them as a form of intangible heritage.

Methodology:

The research methodology applied to the research work involved the collection of data from primary and secondary sources.

The primary source of information included field work with the application of the interview method in a non-participant observation method.

Secondary source of data collection included review of academic books, journals, articles, e-books and online articles.

Collection and translation of traditional Angami Lullabies:

Though we are made known that the principal purpose of a lullaby is to lull babies to sleep, identifying the types of lullabies gives us better insight into understanding. Stereotypical understanding of these songs as simple songs sung to put babies to sleep.

Some types of Angami lullabies are:

Soothing Lullaby:

Soothing lullabies are purpose-driven lullabies and are found to be the most popular type of lullabies. The calm and gentle nature of these lullabies de-stresses the child and then calms them towards a comforting state of being, all the while the lyrical composition provides emotional and mental comfort.

An example of a Soothing Angami Lullaby collected through a documented article of *The Folk Songs of Khonoma Village*:

<u>Tenyidie (Khonoma)</u>	<u>English Translation</u>
<i>A nei nuo-o, kra hei lo</i>	<i>Cry not, my little one.</i>
<i>Michie hie lo, a haki bazo</i>	<i>Fear not, for I am here.</i>
<i>Mha kehou puo vor shie rei</i>	<i>Come what may</i>
<i>A bou nu a npie bazo to ho</i>	<i>I will hold you in my arms.</i>

Another soothing lullaby popularly sung in Jakhama village was collected from Mrs Kevitsonuo Khieya from Jakhama village:

Tenyidie (Jakhama)	English translation
<i>A neinuo kra hei ta di</i>	<i>Do not cry, my little one</i>

<i>Ze lie luo</i>	<i>And go to sleep,</i>
<i>No we nzo vi mu</i>	<i>for you are good-natured,</i>
<i>A die zedi ze lie lo.</i>	<i>Obey me and go to sleep.</i>
<i>No ze lie di</i>	<i>If you go to sleep</i>
<i>Cho she lie li ro</i>	<i>and wake up</i>
<i>A kemou dzü khrü pie nstü tuo</i>	<i>I will buy you sweets,</i>
<i>A neinuo kra hie ta di</i>	<i>My little one, do not cry</i>
<i>Ze lie luo</i>	<i>and go to sleep.</i>

Praising Lullabies:

Praising lullabies are also a popular type of lullaby where the singer is seen invoking praises to the child to comfort them.

An example of a praising lullaby collected:

Tenyidie	English
<i>Suopuo anuo nei kemo chü</i>	<i>Who has made my child sad</i>
<i>Di anuo bu puo ne imo ga?</i>	<i>and made my child angry?</i>
<i>Mo, mo! Mo, mo!</i>	<i>Mo, mo! Mo mo! (non-lexical)</i>
<i>Anuo themei keviu sü</i>	<i>My good child</i>
<i>Pü zho vithor mu</i>	<i>My child is very warm-hearted</i>
<i>Zeta lie</i>	<i>(So) Sleep, my child.</i>
<i>Mo, mo! Mo, mo!</i>	<i>Mo, mo! Mo, mo!</i>
	<i>(non-lexical)</i>

Another praising lullaby collected:

Tenyidie	English
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<i>O ho! (×3)</i>	<i>O ho! (non-lexical)</i>
<i>Anuo themei keviu sü</i>	<i>My good little child</i>
<i>Kramodi ze ta lie</i>	<i>Do not cry and go to sleep</i>
<i>Ze nie theguo va lie</i>	<i>Have a slumber sleep</i>
<i>Di nu sher</i>	<i>And wake up</i>
<i>Themei kezha chü lie</i>	<i>To become a big person</i>
<i>O ho (×3)</i>	<i>O ho (non-lexical)</i>

Frightening Lullabies:

Frightening lullabies invoke elements of empty threats and fears to encourage the child to sleep.

An example of a frightening lullaby collected from *Folksongs of Khonoma*:

Tenyidie	English
<i>Azo vorlie lo,</i>	<i>Come mother,</i>
<i>Apu vorlie lo.</i>	<i>Come father.</i>
<i>Vorlie kemo sie</i>	<i>If you do not come</i>
<i>Lukha temi po</i>	<i>Yonder a spirit</i>
<i>Po nho nhie pfü</i>	<i>Wearing a raincoat</i>
<i>Po lokho pfü</i>	<i>Carrying a bag</i>
<i>Di khor a sele</i>	<i>Came up and met me</i>
	<i>(So come home)</i>

Another example of a frightening lullaby collected from “*Understanding Naga Lullabies: Translation, Documentation, and Feature Analysis*” Dr. Kethokhrienuo Belho, Dr Adenuo Shirat Luikham

Tenyidie	English
Oh iyo waho (oh waho)	Non-lexical vocable
Oh wa-ü waho (oh waho)	Non-lexical vocable
Kra Modi Zelie	Sleep without crying
Zelie kemo sa	If you don't sleep
Sakikha tsakha	At the place of the burial side
Temi puo noma	A spirit is there
Khorü ntelie tuo shie	Coming to catch you
Oh iyo waho	Non-lexical vocable
Nbu nnuo piepra	Take your child and go outside
Secümia kikha	At the side of Secümia
Meho shü nu shie	To look at it

Religious Lullabies:

Religious lullabies provide an insight into the belief system of the people, where the singer sings a prayerful lullaby to invoke the presence of the spiritual beings for the protection of the child.

An example of a religious lullaby:

Tenyidie	English
<i>Momo nuo</i>	<i>Momo nuo</i> (non-lexical vocable)
<i>Kramodi ze ta lie</i>	<i>Sleep now and don't cry.</i>

<i>Teigie deilie-o</i>	<i>My guardian angel</i>
<i>N theja sei anuo tsü</i>	<i>Give your blessings to my child</i>
<i>Anuo bu themei kevi puo chü lie</i>	<i>And let my child be a good person.</i>

Conversational Lullabies:

Conversational lullabies feature elements of dialogue. Exchange of conversations, questions, requests, etc. An example of conversational dialogues:

Tenyidie	English
<i>O ho! (×2)</i>	<i>O ho! (non-lexical vocable)</i>
<i>O yi yo a ho (×3)</i>	<i>O yi yo aho (non-lexical vocable)</i>
<i>O ho, O ho!</i>	<i>O ho, O ho! (non-lexical vocable)</i>
<i>O lo lo Seilhou</i>	<i>O lo lo (non-lexical vocable)</i>
<i>Nie nuo pfüpar</i>	<i>Seilhou</i>
<i>Tseisemia kikha</i>	<i>Carry your child and come out</i>
<i>Meho sü nu she</i>	<i>And look at the land of the people of</i>
<i>Meho a dzüzei</i>	<i>Tseisema</i>
<i>O yi yo aho!</i>	<i>Watching it makes me depressed and</i>
	<i>sad.</i>
	<i>O yi yo aho! (non-lexical)</i>

Yearning Lullabies:

Yearning lullabies portray the desires of longing for the presence of a person.

An example of a yearning lullaby:

Tenyidie	English
<i>Azo vorlie lo</i>	<i>Come, my mother</i>

<i>Apu vorlie lo</i>	<i>Come, my father</i>
<i>N nie vor mor o</i>	<i>If neither of you comes</i>
<i>A nuva ka pfi</i>	<i>I will pack my tiffin</i>
<i>A sü pe li pfi</i>	<i>I will fill my water jar</i>
<i>Hie ketsa tsa di nu vo</i>	<i>And go to the deep woods</i>
<i>Aputsa-o thu pfe ta to ho</i>	<i>To tend my grandfather's herd.</i>

Observation on the status of Angami Lullabies in contemporary times

Angami lullabies in the contemporary society urban areas are a combination of both traditional culture and modern culture, making it more refined, modified, lengthier and descriptive, making it a significant whole.

Over time, there have been immense changes in the context of traditional Angami lullabies. The freedom inherited by the singer in the lyrical composition of these songs has allowed the modern concepts and ideas to be intermingled with the traditional songs, which have also gained popularity and have been sung on a wider scale.

Another observation holds that though the existence of modern lullabies continues to maintain its connection with the traditional lullabies, the influence of the Western grows stronger, and the modern generation is seen to have replaced or is in the process of replacing traditional lullabies with modern lullabies. Though society works to preserve these folk practices, modern generations are still seen to have been ignorant, while some have failed to inherit any.

Observation and Analysis:

1. The process of translating the term “Lullaby” in Tenyidie is absent; the word lullaby in Tenyidie is untranslatable due to a lexical gap (which means the absence of a word in a language that could exist in another). The Angamis generally understand the existence

of such songs as *Nhi chou-mai peizie kechü tsali* when translated, would mean songs sung to put babies to sleep. This, however, becomes the definition of the word lullaby and not the word itself. The lullabies found among the Angamis are more popular with their tune “O YI YO, AHO. O IYO WE HO” (non-lexical vocable), a combination of nine syllables being synonymous with the absent term. All lullabies of the Angamis are sung on a single tune alone; the lyrical composition differs among regions, as the study shows no strict coherence to one lyrical composition.

2. Variations in Angami Lullabies:

The existence of variants in Angami lullabies is based on their lyrical composition. As stated above, Angami lullabies are generally composed from one basic tune; the lyrical composition can, however, differ from region to region. One particular composition may also witness variants due to Phonological and Orthographic variants. One major cause of the origin of variants is credited to migration, due to marriage, warfare, cultural interaction, trade and commerce. In certain cases, we find the same lullaby being sung in different parts of the Angami regions. The Orthographic variants are seemingly the physical evidence that shows the variants of the lyrical composition, the phonological variant follows with the phonology of the region the song settles upon.

Certain lullabies get adopted to new regions and become natural to them, eventually leading to the adaptation of minimal changes over time and becoming embedded in the culture of the region. This results in the inability and confusion in tracing the source of the song.

3.Types of Angami lullabies:

1. Soothing Lullabies
2. Praising Lullabies
3. Frightening Lullabies

4. Religious Lullabies
5. Conversational Lullabies
6. Yearning Lullabies

Conclusion

Study shows that Angami lullabies share similar features with lullabies worldwide, and observations indicate that these traditional lullabies serve more than just lulling babies to sleep; they are also a source of entertainment, education, and an important medium for cultural transmission of folk knowledge.

The Traditional Angami Lullaby have travelled over generations and continues to maintain its originality to a certain extent. There have been numerous changes in the status of traditional folk Angami lullabies in the present age, the freedom inherited from the singers in the lyrical composition of the songs has given rise to numerous variations. As seen in folklore studies, folk elements are subjected to changes as they are transmitted over time and with every transmission, these elements evolve with the environment it settles upon.

Though traditional lullabies continue to exist and are passed down to the new generation, there still exists a great concern for the survival of these traditional folk songs when Western influence continues to rise and takes its place in society. There is a need to understand the importance of these songs and the role they play in the transmission of cultural knowledge, and the documentation of these would contribute to the preservation of the cultural heritage of the community.

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LITERATURE

Lord Jagannath's Living Traditions & Odisha's Unified Consciousness:

Global Perspectives

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Abstract

The whole world's an expedition to the inner soul, and Lord Jagannath is the nucleus of mankind's pursuit for self-discovery and fulfilment. In the tapestry of Odisha's cultural consciousness, Lord Jagannath is a symbolic metaphor of Odisha's vibrant social fabric, not only shaping the everyday lives of 'Odias', but also the world, influencing generations and uniting nations. It is a tradition where tribals meet royals, the ordinary meet the affluent, and communities come together to sing the saga of humanity's faith instilled in the living God, Lord Jagannath, weaving tales of devotional love and humanity's triumph across centuries of struggle for identity and existence. In the present scenario, when the world witnesses a growing rift between countries, and there is an increasing need to mend fences by a universal spiritual vision, the article reflects upon the oral traditions and mythical culture associated with 'the God', having global perspectives for a unified culture, bridging relationships across boundaries. Lord Jagannath, being the symbolic representation of the universe, embodying cultural values, and shaping collective global understanding, the present study explores 'the Jagannath consciousness' in the light of eco-spiritual perspectives. An attempt has also been made to analyse 'the Jagannath narrative' as revealed, realised and perceived in the everyday usage of 'Jagannath vocabulary' in people's daily way of living across cultures. The saga continues.

Keywords: The Jagannath tongue, Badadeula's Voice, Mahodadhi's whisper, Odisha's Cultural Consciousness, Eco-spirituality

Introduction

In Puri's land, a tale unfolds,
Of Jagannath, the Lord of gold,
Universe's master, pure and bright,
Worshipped with love, day and night.
Humanity's lord, Jagannath, the living God
Resides in every Indian's heart's abode.

---poem by Shreya Pradhan



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<https://images.app.goo.gl/Yf1ThSTzBbJTM55PA>

The whole world's an expedition to the inner soul, and Lord Jagannath is the nucleus of mankind's exploration of the inner self for discovery and fulfilment. The religion of Jagannath is the pivotal point of Odisha's cultural consciousness and intellectual makeup, influencing the global course of action in the modern era. For ages, varied knowledge systems, beliefs, customs and capabilities, voices, topographical entities, religious impulses, ideologies and practices have defined and redefined the identity of the Jagannath cult. Several scholars like Rituparna Priyadarshini, Pallavi Kiran & Arpita Goswami (2024, pp. 145-146) have discussed Jagannath's beliefs and experiences, defining the character of Odisha.

A legacy carved out of “daru” (wood), the “Darudevata” or ‘Jagannath’ is the symbolic representation of the universe, embodying cultural values, shaping collective thinking and global understanding. Considered as the “central metaphor of Odisha’s identity” (2017, pp.169-170), researchers Mohapatra & Samantray find the lord’s cult “to be manifested in the living practices of the revered divinity”. (2017)

An amazing blend of the Satya and Sanatan, eternal and transitory, natural and extraordinary, tribal and royal, Hinduism and Brahmanism, “Jainism, Buddhism & Shaktism,” (Sarangi, 2014) Vedism and Tantrism, Jagannath Dharma possesses reverence to global principles of peace and world religion of humanity in a way that is eternal, intimate and “timeless”. The concept of timelessness of Odisha’s legacy has been mentioned by the editor, Mahanta, Brajabandhu (History of Odisha: Odisha’s Timeless Legacy, 2017), see <https://historyofodisha.in/cult-of-jagannatha-history-significance/>)

Lord Jagannath & the Spiritual Legacy of India

People of various cultures have embraced this unified faith, incorporating Jagannath culture in their everyday way of living. The cult, Jagannath faith enlivens India’s cultural past through living traditions, beliefs and rituals associated with people’s sentiments. It is a tradition where tribals meet royals, the ordinary meet the affluent, and communities come together to sing the saga of humanity’s faith instilled in the living God, Lord Jagannath, weaving tales of devotional love and humanity’s triumph across centuries of struggle for identity and existence. Exploring the boundless realms of Jagannath’s past, we get an insight into the indigenous past heritage associated with the Jagannath cult...

King Indradyumna, a devotee true,

Searched for the Lord, with heart anew,

Vidyapati, a Brahmin wise,

Set to find him, with eager eyes.

Vidyapati wandered, far and wide,

To find the deity in the dense foliage, hidden inside,

Viswabasu, the tribal chief, with all care,

Worshipped Nilamadhab, year after year,

Vidyapati learned of the secret place,

By following Viswabasu to the sacred space.

The king approached the site,

To find 'Nilamadhaba', vanished from the sight

Much with devotion, hard penance and pain

Did the king, 'Indradyumna', get signs from heaven?

To find 'Nilamadhaba' in the form of 'Daru' in Jagannath again.

(Based on the Skanda Purana, Part-V, 1998, pp. 31- 122) poem by Shreya Pradhan

History and the Skanda Purana (Part-V, Book-II, Section-II, 1998, pp. 31- 122) reveal that King Indradyumna's desire to worship Lord Vishnu in the form of Lord Krishna made him search for the Lord. The quest was fulfilled when Vidyapati, the king's brahmin priest, could tactfully discover "Nilamadhaba" in the dense jungle, being secretly worshipped by Biswabasu, the Sabara king. Lord Jagannath owes his origin of worship to this "tribal deity, Nilamadhaba, revered by sabaras, kept hidden in nature's holy abundance and secretly worshipped by

'Biswabasu, 'the tribal king. Having been discovered by Vidyapati, King Indradyumna arrived to find Nilamadhaba had disappeared from the place and the king's sight. Later with lots of pain and penance, meditation and devotion, did the king get divine indication to find 'God' once more in the form of 'daru' or "sacred wood" to be reshaped into "Jagat's Nath-Jagannath", meaning "the lord of the universe" (Joshi: 2007, pp 80-81) with his siblings, 'Balabhadra' and 'Subhadra', worshipped by millions today. (find details of the tale in JKYOG, From Neel Madhav to Bhagwan Jagannath: A Tale of Divine Transformation, 2024) (Sarangi, Asish, 2017) & (Bhagaban Mohapatra, 2007, pp 88-90)

Viswakarma, an elderly architect,

Carved idols, with love and respect.

The deities are unique, in form and hue,

Symbolize love, togetherness, true

--Shreya Pradhan

While the tribal dimension of Jagannath, as in (Skanda Purana, 1998, pp 31-122) traces his origin to Neelamadhaba as tribal deity, legend says, King Indradyumna's impatience and his wife, Queen Gundicha's eagerness and concern for the aged divine architect, Viswakarma, interrupted him in his work to make the idols of 'the trinity', to leave the lords carved incomplete. Concerned for the divine architect, Viswakarma, the queen opened the doors to find him disappear and to have left the idols incomplete, the shape in which we have been worshipping 'the trinity' for years. For details, see (JKYOG, 2024)

Eco- spiritualism & the Jagannath Consciousness

The very concept of worshipping Jagannath and his siblings in the form of "daru" (for details see Prasanta Mishra: 2017) or "sacred wood" lends a spiritual dimension to ecology and our

surrounding environment. The concept of “Darubrahma” could be explored in the light of eco-spiritual perspectives, showing not only the tribals’ deep-rooted connection and reverence for the trees but also different religious faith in the existence of ‘brahma’ in trees, so the revered ‘sacred wood’ is “Darubrahma”, the epicentre of human civilization, woven around trees and twigs. The tribals worshipping “Nilamadhava” amid dense green foliage and ‘God’ being re-incarnated in the form of “Darudevata”, highlights nature as our major source of spiritual bliss. The Jagannath narrative, shaping our relationship with the natural world, highlights the spiritual connection between man and nature that has existed since time immemorial. Study of the incomplete structure of Jagannath, carved out of “daru”, provides new dimensions and perspectives to study Jagannath consciousness in the light of eco-spirituality, hinting at the presence of divinity in nature, thus “Darubrahma” or mankind finding “brahma” in woods for a fulfilling existence in nature’s holy cycle. History and the Skanda Purana provide evidence that our soul lies in the trees, realised by mankind living during the Indus Valley Civilization, the Aryans living in the Early Vedic period, and the “tribes worshipping ‘Nilamadhava’ amid nature’s richness, to be re-incarnated to ‘Darubrahma’ or the sacred presence of ‘Nilamadhava’” (1998) permeating in the form of wood’, yet another manifestation of Vishnu as Jagannath, to be revered and worshipped by millions in the world today. It is quite clear that man and nature share an intricate relationship, each fulfilling in the presence of the other. Jagannath, the creator or ‘the Brahma in Daru’, is incomplete, to be completed in reciprocity, by mankind in the symbolic process of nature’s sacred cycle.

Rath Yatra, the spiritual journey of humanity

Rath Yatra or the chariot festival is the age-old tradition of “Lord Jagannath, journeying with his siblings, Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra to his aunt’s house from ‘Bada Deula’ to ‘Shree Gundicha temple’, from ‘Ratna Bedi’ to ‘Janma Bedi’” (Kanak News, 2023). The chariot procession symbolising humanity’s journey for spiritual emancipation is the festival

where myths and reality intermingle, legends get enlivened, the mythological past is recreated, and “the living God” participates in the people’s pleasure to behold him for an enchanting moment of a lifetime experience. It is the festival where rich, poor, tribal & royal come together to be a part of the world’s greatest living spectacle...

The Sabara’s whispers are heard from the margins

Lord Jagannath opens his doors for devotees.

The tribes and kings, sabaras and suaries

Daitas and Pariharis, Hindus and Muslims

All sing in the praise of the Lord

Ringing the chariot bells to be heard abroad

All come together in the divine communion

A cosmic vision realized in soul’s submission

The greatest part of this journey is to be one among the millions of faces-smiling, praying, bowing, prostrating, cheering, being overwhelmed by the presence of the deities and to be one with the ocean of humanity, wrapped in the love for the quintessential divine. It is the occasion where tears and cheers, tradition of millennium merge in an impressive display of cultural fiesta with dancers, singers, devotees from all around the world congregating to catch a glimpse of the holy countenance, radiating hope, moving stealthily, swaying, swinging, rocking, shaking, riding on chariots, graced by “parswa devas and devis” (side deities).



Sounds of trumpets, conches, gongs, bells, clattering of sticks, breaking of coconut to pieces, uproar of daitas, pujaris, pandas, songs of musicians, rhythm of dancers, giggle of children, hooting of sirens, shout of policemen fill the air, and every moment feels like a rare encounter with the divine. It is a spectacle, rare, mesmerising, elevating, endearing, unique in its own kind. Getting a glimpse of that divine, “Chaturdha Murati” is all encompassing and pervasive, beyond human comprehension. A moment in this ocean of upsurging human emotions is an experience of lifetime love, weaving bondage with the divine and humanity at large.

The Rath Yatra, a festival grand,

Millions gather, hand in hand,

The chariots roll, with joy and cheer,

Weaving memories with moments dear

Jagannath’s blessing brings the world together. --- Shreya Pradhan

This panoramic view of community performance, illuminating our past heritage, highlighting deeper religious sentiments, gives us a picture of Odisha’s rich cultural ecosystem, influenced by the ideologies of persons like Nanak and Chaitanya, Salabega, Bidura and Dasia Bauri with

enlightened minds and unwavering faith in Lord Jagannath to open ways for cultural amalgamation, rare in human history.

The story of Salabega, weaving an extraordinary tale of devotion and true love for God, transcending barriers of caste, clan and religion, is to be remembered for all times to come in the annals of world history.

Salabega journeyed to Vrindavan's land,

But Puri's Rath Yatra beckoned him to stand.

Falling ill on the way, feeling sorry, did he cry?

With a heart so heavy, he prayed to the Almighty-

“Wait for me, O Jagannath, to allow me your darshan; do not deny.”

The chariot moved, but then it did cease,

At Balagandi, it stopped, if you please.

Salabega arrived, with devotion so bright,

Offered prayers in gratitude and delight

And the chariot of God miraculously took flight.

In 1646, a miracle to share,

The Lord's chariot waited, with love to spare.

Salabega's prayer was heard with grace,
And honoured with love, in a sacred place.

With every step, the chariot's wheel,
Moved forward slowly, with a gentle feel.
The crowd cheered on, with joy and delight,
As Salabega's devotion shone with all its might.

The Lord's mercy knew no bounds,
Salabega's love, forever renowned.
In Puri's streets, his story's told,
A tale of devotion that weaves love manifold.

Through trials and tribulations, he stood tall,
Salabega's faith gave him strength through it all.
His legacy lives in every chant and prayer,

Weaving memories of warmth that's beyond compare. – (Shreya Pradhan)

History reveals that Salabega, a pious devotee of Jagannath, having immense faith in him, once desired to behold the car festival to worship the God to his heart's content. But on his way to Shreekhetra from Vrindavan, he fell sick. Desperate and feeling miserable, he made an earnest

appeal in his heart to Jagannath, the lord of the Universe, “to wait for his arrival.” (Odisha Review, Bhakta Salabega: Oct-2015, pp. 1- 2). Nandighosha, the chariot of Jagannath, to everybody’s surprise, “did not move but stopped and waited for the arrival of Salabega” (Odisha Review, 2015, pp. 1-2) while God was on his way back to Bada Deula from Gundicha temple.<https://magazines.odish.gov.in/Orissareview/2015/Oct/engpdf/1-2.pdf>

<https://shreejagannathapuri.com/nandighosha-lord-jagannath-chariot/>

The effort of thousands of devotees to move the chariot was in vain until the arrival of Salabega, the earnest Muslim devotee of ‘the lord’. No sooner “did Salabega have a glimpse of his dear divine, Jagannath” (Gayatri Heritage, Feb 06, 2025) than the chariot moved with this devotee’s dear love and adoration. Salabega’s fervent prayers to the lord were answered by the divine, and the world realized that “God sees the truth but waits.” It was proved that the bond between a devotee and God is invincible, indomitable.



The unflinching faith of Salabega in Jagannath speaks of his devotional love and the unifying force of the Jagannath cult, transcending boundaries, cultures and ages. The bhajans sung by this Muslim devotee still reverberate in the holy place, Puri and the divine ripples, perceived throughout the world, to weave timeless tales of immeasurable love surpassing distinctions of

caste and class. The “Salabega temple” at “Balagandi” (Market Chowk), Puri speaks of this devotee’s eternal tale of love for “Mahabahu”, unsurpassable, preaching the religion of humanism and inspiring values of world fraternity. (for story, see Bhakta Salabega, Gayatri Heritage, 2025)

“Badadeula’s” Language, Jagannath’s Voice, Mahodadhi’s Murmur & the Ever-widening Linguistic Topography of Odisha

The in-depthness of Jagannath consciousness is revealed, realised and perceived in the everyday usage of Jagannath vocabulary in people’s daily way of living across the nationalities. The sacred “Shreekhetra” is sanctified with the confluence of Shaiva & ‘the Divine Feminine’, Buddhist, Jainist, Tribal & Brahminic principles, all bathing in the glory of Jagat’s lord, Shree Jagannath. The Jagannath tongue has immensely contributed and enriched “the linguistic topography” (Sashini, Sasmita, 2025) of Odisha. Speaking on the richness of ‘the Jagannath vocabulary’, Sasmita Sashini regards the cult to be “the very essence of Odisha’s linguistic identity” (2025, pp.9-15). The sacred sea, engulfing Puri, is the murmuring “Mahodadhi”, the holy food of Lord Jagannath, “Mahaprasad”, and the ultimate divine, blessing humankind, is popularly known as “Mahabahu”. Walking on the “Badadanda”, leading to “Badadeula”, people yearn to have a glimpse of “Badathakura” with his sweet countenance, called “Shrimukha”. So vast is the linguistic landscape associated with the “Badabahu” and so rich is the diction attached to Shree Jagannath & his culture that a dictionary on Jagannath language is required to address the terms related to the lord’s temple, his siblings, his rituals, his traditions, his ornaments, his apparels, his culinary delights, his festivals and friends.

The Coastal Pilgrimage, Puri--“The Shreekhetra Dham”

“Shreekhetra” (Puri), also known as “Shrimandir,” houses the sacred deities of Odisha’s spirit, ‘Jagannath and his siblings’. Here, every road tells a tale, every temple unfolds a myth, every

Sahi has a ritual to perform, and every household is rooted in the religion of ‘the Jagannath’. Each day is a celebration of the divine, and every person shares moments of intimacy with the divine. Some stand long in front of “the Badadeula” revealing secrets to the dear “Bada Thakura,” while some others behold with pleasure, the sight of “Patita Pabana, admiring their beloved, ‘Jagannath’, who is revered as “the lord of the universe” and “the Jagat’s Nath” or Jagannath. (Pradeep Choudhury: Odisha Review, Jan-2015, pp 1-4)

Each morning in Puri, the coastal town wakes up, filled with the sound of morning prayers, the chants of priests calling upon the “trinity,” echoing through the air. Every person here seems to share a deep connection with the deity, a bond that is mysterious and hard to explain. Shree Rabi Narayan Mishra, a senior priest at the Mukti Mandap in the Jagannath Temple, says the daily activities of the living God are a collective effort of the indigenous, daitapatis, pandas, pariharis, brahmins, and kings, symbolizing a unified culture built on compassion, unity, and brotherhood.

The “Shreemandir,” or the Jagannath Temple, commonly called “The Bada Deula,” was built by kings Indradyumna and Anantavarman Chodaganga Deva (Wikipedia: Jagannath Temple, Puri, refer link https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jagannath_Temple,_Puri). Fortified by the strength and spirit of Odisha, the temple upholds strength and support, representing the roots of India that promote world fraternity and the idea of “Basundheva Kutumbakam.” The “Bada Deula,” or the grand structure of the Jagannath Temple, stands magnificently, sustaining countless devotees, worshippers, and believers who rely on Lord Jagannath for emotional strength during tough times and uncertainties.

In the temple, devotion abounds,

Love and faith, forever resound,

The Lord’s presence, felt by all,

A symbol of unity, standing tall. (---Shreya Pradhan)

Lord Jagannath & Odisha's Cultural Consciousness: Global Perspectives

The world is a journey of religion, and Jagannath is central to humanity's spiritual and cultural development. 'Jagannath' is the symbolic representation of the universe, embodying cultural values to shape collective global understanding.



The unifying force of the Jagannath cult shall definitely “re-establish India’s position as a Viswa Guru, a global beacon of knowledge and innovation.” (The New Indian Express, 24th June,2025). A symbolic metaphor of Odisha’s vibrant social fabric, evolving and shaping the everyday lives of ‘Odias’, Jagannath culture represents the robust cultural milieu of not only the state, Odisha, but also the nation, India, influencing generations and uniting communities. Researchers and scholars like Archana Kanungo (2013, pp 58-67), Swati Samantray, Guruprasad Mohapatra (2017, pp 169-178), Brajmohan Mahanta (2017), believe that anchored in Odisha’s literary, political and cultural history, Jagannath culture & the cultural legacy resonate beyond boundaries, nationalities and communities.

A unique blend of the ancient and contemporary beliefs, the Jagannath way of life accepts modernity in conformity with the present global societal demands for international piety. In the present scenario, when the world witnesses a growing rift between countries, and there is a growing need to mend fences, Jagannath tradition stands for a unified culture, bridging relationships. Lord “Jagannath’s unifying force” (Kanungo, Archana, 2013, pp 58-67)

embraces mankind as the life force to renew humanity's faith in the divine. The Jagannath cult, with its living traditions and epic festivals of 'Rath Yatra', 'Chandan Yatra', 'Snana Yatra', 'Hera Panchami', and many more, not only weaves a unified vision of a world for a spiritual resurrection but also has promising possibilities for humanity's renewal. The saga continues...

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**Amartya Sen's Gift of India's Cultural Identity and a Voice of Heterodoxy
in the Argumentative Indian.**

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Abstract

Amartya Sen is to take the reins to portray a multifarious picture of India's past. India has held herself upright despite the wrath and invasions of conquerors. The religious influences have encroached from time to time, but all have failed to bring about lasting changes. The imprints of foreigners are short – lasting to keep unaltered the permanent image of India and its citizens are dynamic, broad-minded and interactive to assimilate the cultural gifts of others to keep themselves shining, radiating and resplendent throughout. The fragrance of Hinduism attracts all religions to sit at the pedestal embracing all with the holiness of secularism offending none others. India has manifested to the world her poetry of eminence, sent religious emissaries to disseminate her pious offers and has taken up the cudgel to rise to the occasion to bear the burdens of distress, disasters and devastations. The face of *Hindutva* is never disfigured, the Muslim has been shared with a shelter nearby and the Christian is saluted at times to fetch the modernism of civilizations. India always is able to come around the selfishness of nationalism and toe the line with the grand participation in the fare of globalization. It is a mystic land of holy saints, whose songs reverberate with sweetness pacifying disturbances of inequalities, mitigating by perseverance poverty, wrath of disasters and obliterating ugly scenes of caste differences, class-based awkwardness by illuminating messages of humanity and fearless opinions of democracy and powerful weapon of non-violence. The rich heritage of sculpture, architecture and music has created footprints in the immortal history of the world. This paper makes an attempt to explore Amartya Sen's assertion of India's argumentative tradition

Keywords: Hindutva, Culture, Religion, Sectarianism, Secularism

Indians exhibit their dynamism; they put forth their arguments as active and resplendent participants with the movement of time, processes, events and occurrences. Indians to be original, authentic and the advanced ones often justify their actions through divine ways of justice and law of karma. It is *Arjuna's* duty to be performed by him at the advent of the war of *Mahabharata* which *Arjuna* denied at the beginning but reconciled to God's wise dictations when he was purged of the entanglements of illusions of belongingness to one's kith and kin. The panoramic scene of heterodoxy, plurality and diversity of religions, castes, communities and sects is reflected from *The Argumentative Indian's* personality that assimilates the expanded outer horizon with an inner quest to proliferate the secular cause amidst the presence of varieties of uniqueness of religions, a *vedic* bent of mind while the atheists and agnostics remain at the forefront, a philosophical attitude while the material causes of politics and society gain ground; the parochial drive of nationalism in the teeth of a global sharing of relations; the heterogeneous image of a nation when India seems the one and unified, the progress of Indian science since *Aryabhata* as illustrated by *Alberuni* in his *Tarik-I-Hind* when western science and rationality come to dominate the Indian scenario, the appreciation of Indian studies, literature and culture when Macaulay criticizes the unworthiness of Asian and Indian literature, "a single shelf of a good European library is worth the whole literature of India and Arabia"; a clarion call by Nehru at the dawn of Independence towards "tryst with destiny" when Indian was left in dismay at the aftermath of colonization. The sea-saw dynamics pervade the Indian imbroglio of cross-cultural complexities, and the *Upanishads* articulate the principles of action. Man's deeds are counted if they are theologically important. In this way is added elegance by *Bhagwat Gita* to Hindu philosophy justifying God's ways to men and man's way of life in the world. Christopher Isherwood and T. S. Eliot comment upon the Indian sacred text and Isherwood translated the very text for *Gita* to be cherished in the European culture. On the

contrary, J. Robert Oppenheimer's development of the bomb, the weapon of genocide equates God as the destroyer of the world. The debate persists in the matured Indian to assimilate religious affiliation and secularism simultaneously.

Indians are far ahead than others to give place to women and *Sarojini Naidu* could make her mark as the first woman President of Indian National Congress in 1929 much before the British people could choose *Margaret Thatcher* as a woman leader and the British Prime Minister only in 1975. The intellectual upsurge and involvement of *Gargi*, the valiant fight of *Rani Laxmibai* along with Indian mutineers in 1857 and *Draupodi* as the able instigator to *Pandavas* in the tussle against the *Kauravas* in the great epic of *The Mahabharata* are imminent features of Indians against bigotry of male-dominance.

Indian religions have inherent qualities of removing differences of castes, communities, sects and backgrounds of higher or lower social strata. *Kabir*, the weaver was loved by both Hindus and Muslims; *Ravidas*, the shoe-maker and *Sena-a-barber* despite belonging to humble backgrounds attract even the people of the higher castes in the sway of devotion to God exemplifying an equal and egalitarian society hanging after divine joy and elation of existence sharing fellow-feeling with one another.

Democracy has been featured in the Indian heritage being at par with the *Greeks* and the *Romans*. The disputes and conflicts not only of religions but also of social and civil lives were observed and settled in the great Buddhist councils of *Rajagriha*, *Vaisali*, *Pataliputra* (now-a-days-*Patna*) and *Kashmir*. The democratic sense of mutual consent, giving priority to reasoning than blind adherence to tradition was encouraged in the courts of *Ashoka* and *Akbar*. Public discussions for common cause were the prime dispositions and obligations to a civic

sense among Indians surpassed the direct democratic features of the *Greeks* pointing to the age of *Pericles*.

Our aim is to shelter under one roof. The different faiths are entreated to be together for a secular co-existence of social harmony and tolerance. *Akbar's Ibadat Khana* and his religion termed *Din-I-Illahi* and his principle *sulh-i-kul* allowed unity of all religions. A religious neutrality and impartiality gave way to integration in heterodoxy. A megalomaniac tendency to think one's own superior to others is to invite harm to one's own in return. Indian uniqueness lies in giving ample freedom to each one to possess his identity in the presence of many others. The establishment of a symbiotic life with empathy for that of another characterizes *sarva dharma samabhava*.

Indian cultural tradition has its part and parcel religion when atheists and agnostics of the *Lokayata* school of philosophy and intellectuality of the *cārvāka* system challenge and validate reasonably the materialistic sway of life being ignorant and unconcerned with the presence of God. In the similar strain, *Kautilya's Arthashastra* is a secular treatise on political economy and statecraft. The scientific inventions of Copernicus, Galileo, Newton and Darwin in the west instigated people to obliterate religious orthodoxy and step ahead towards heterodoxy questioning traditional credos. Indian science and mathematics blossomed during the Gupta period. *Aryabhatta* of fifth century CE, then *Varahamihira* (6th century) and *Brahmagupta* (7th century) presented innovative knowledge that was cherished by the Arabians, mainly the Iranians. Previously, in the *Ramayana*, *Javali*, the skeptical priest had advised *Rama* to believe what was within human experience boycotting other worldliness. In Europe in 16 century England Francis Bacon's objective arguments encouraged enquiry, observation and experiments to nurture human outlook and understanding. The findings of *Aryabhatta* on lunar and solar eclipses, the movement of the earth round the sun, not vice-versa and Indian works on trigonometry, decimal system and measurements in astronomy flourished

much in the *Arabian* world. *Alberuni* chose to translate *Brahmagupta's Brahmasiddhanta* in Sanskrit to Arabic language. *Aryabhata's* prominent work *Arya-Siddhanta* is lost; it was based on astronomical computations. Epistemology professed departures from traditional patterns of beliefs into heterodoxy.

The traditions of Asian countries and African nations surreptitiously impart a sense of democracy, and the needs of the hours make them encounter with heterodoxy. *Nelson Mandela* in his *Long walks to Freedom* indicates his attachment to democratic leaning right from the native congregations and meetings in South Africa. The argumentative tradition is reflected from the dispositions and personalities of *M. K. Gandhi* and *R. N. Tagore*. The confluence of Hindu, Mohemmedan and British influence is observed in the family of *R. N. Tagore*, a symbol of open-minded liberal and social feature. *Akbar* had championed the cause of reasoning in a multi-religious situation to make a good society. *Raja Ram Mohan Ray* promoted English learning, a movement against superstitions and advocacy of liberal ideas as a sign of advancement towards modernism. An articulation of the voice of Indians by undoing silence against iniquity and sectarian politics is to establish that we are sons of the same father, the God and cannot bear with much of differences along divisive forces of caste, colour and creed. The acceptance of plurality in the panoramic scene of India is somehow, a unitary feature. *Chandragupta II*, *Ashoka* and *Akbar* attempted unity and coherence amidst the vastness and distinctiveness of Indian scene of multiplicity. *Kalidasa* in *Meghadootam* entreat the cloud as the messenger of the banished husband to disseminate all over India his state of woe and suffering, thereby, connecting the thread, weaving separate locations into one for a common cause while his wife stayed at far within India. The dialogic discussion facilitates parts of Indian subcontinent into a united whole involving Pakistan and Bangladesh to overcome disputes of Kashmir and other separatist issues from time to time.

The attitudes of liberality and tolerance are observed along with the orthodoxies and sectarian outlook among Hindus and Muslims. *Kshiti Mohan Sen*, grandfather of *Amartya Sen* having his home at *Santiniketan* was intimately faithful to Hindu saints like *Kabir*, *Dadu* and others though he participated in heterodox religious congregations in Bengal. The *Babri Masjid* demolition and reincarnation of the *Ram Temple* is a picture of dismal scene when orthodox religious groups dash against one another. We can reach at a peaceful religious resolution only when we tolerate that of others and be liberal for a harmonious co-existence. We can find the solutions in the liberal expressions of non-aggressive Hindu leaders like *Gandhi*, *Tagore* and *Vivekananda*. We can opt for a broad and tolerant Hinduism that can undo our bellicose tendencies.

The rise of the BJP to the zenith of achievement along with the *Hindutva* movement has marked a remarkable establishment of Indianness with increasing reliability on the native religion, *Hinduism*. *Muhammad Ali Jinnah* had claimed for a separate theocratic state of Pakistan for the Muslims which aggravated the communal carnage of partition making the two-nation theory successful. *V. D. Savarkar*, a Hindu chauvinist had expressed his opinions of two distinct communities as two different nations and not two segments of one nation. *Veer Savarkar* had pronounced the idea much before *Jinnah*, a staunch Muslim. The *Sangh Parivar*, led by *Rastriya Swayam Sevak Sangh*, the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* (VHP) or the World Council of Hindus, *Sewa Bharti* and *Bajrang Dal* have offered to significant recent political phenomena. Their direct involvement in mass communal violence is accused internationally on grounds of human rights violation.

The strengthening of a social democracy is too tough in a Hindu majority nation. On the contrary, the population of the Muslims is very high in India except in Indonesia and Pakistan. The East and West Pakistan were separated not on the basis of religion but grounds

of language and literature. Thus, religion is not the identity of Indians; it can be humane and secular feeling within each one.

India is multi-religious country permitting identity to each community. Before the Muslims' invasion into India, India was mostly following Buddhism as the main religion, then Jainism and in between Sikhism. The Buddhist reciprocation spread to China, Japan, Korea and many other nations. The cross-cultural co-existence is exemplified by *Ravi Shankar*, the Hindu *sitarist* with *Ali Akbar Khan*, the Muslim *sarod* player on the celebrated pedestals of music.

The Muslims exposed both their barbaric and philanthropic attitudes. The bleak picture of Muslim invasions into India had spoiled the Hindus feeling of good-will and cooperation with Muslims. For instance, *Mahmud of Ghazni* looted the temple of *Somnath* ruthlessly and ruined the temples of *Mathura*, *Kanauj* and others. However, the religion of *Akbar* called *Din-I-Illahi* united all faiths exemplifying toleration and synthesis of all religious cultures. Aurangzeb's son, also called *Akbar* fought against his father uniting with the Rajputs and later on with the cooperation of *Raja Sambhaji*, the son of *Shivaji*, defeated his own dynasty, the *Mughals*. *Dara Sikoh* had translated *Upanishad* into *Persian* with the help of Hindu *Pandits* and disseminated Hindu philosophy in West Asia and Europe. Aurangzeb had murdered his own elder brother, *Dara Sikoh* on his way to the throne and not counted as the typical *Mughal* ruler. The *Mughals*, mainly *Shah Jahan*, were builders and not destroyers.

History has been attempted to be rewritten by the *Hindutva* movement in pursuit of truth and reflect the real image of India's past. A longing for that of Indians has led to recovery of *vedic* mathematics and *vedic* sciences of India's past. The renaming of Indus-valley civilization as *Indus-Saraswati* civilization was to honour the sacred and hidden mythical river *Saraswati*. NCERT textbooks have been remodeled to reflect Hindu's landmark achievements.

The pluralist society of present India and the heterodoxy of the past are in the indispensability of toleration and broad-minded acceptance when *Hindutva* arouses towards re-incarnation of India entangling mostly with religions & politics.

In the Diasporas of Indians, Indians want to retain their identities and origin when they are placed in a multi-cultural situation in abroad. It is a tough task to preserve one's own tradition in a dominant foreign tradition. For instance, to emerge as Hindus among Christians and Muslims of foreign countries seems challenging to Indians. The small India is available to Indians in India, but the large India includes the Indians in Diasporas of foreign countries. The dexterity and achievements in science, arts, aesthetics, sculpture and music of Indians irrespective of religion form real identity of Indians. For instance, *Ravi Shankar* and *Ali Akbar Khan* as musicians are celebrated in foreign countries also. The tradition of public reasoning, discussions, dialogues and congregations during the reigns of *Ashoka* and *Akbar* are followed in the present days to unite Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jains, Parsis and Jews in the strain of a worthy world civilization transcending parochialism and narrowness of religion.

The history of *Albiruni's Tahqiq-e-Hind* and James Mill's- "*The History of British India*" portray about ancient works on Indian science and Mathematics e.g. *Aryabhata* on diurnal motion of earth and force of gravity, decimal system and concept of zero. However, *Albiruni* had visited India thoroughly and James Mill did not visit and wrote Indian history. It speaks about the larger India, that is, the extending Indian influence.

India lacked public reasoning and Winston Churchill was not hopeful of Indian's ability for self-governance. *Jawaharlal Nehru* expressed the indispensability to tolerate heterodoxy and pluralism in India. *B. R. Ambedkar* expressed about the inefficacy of local governance. However, *Akbar* and *Ashoka* by virtue of permitting public discussions and dialogues had created roots of democracy. Buddhist achievement spread to China, Korea and Japan. For

instance, *Kumarajiva* had translated into Chinese the text “*Diamond-Sutra*”. *Fa-Hien* and *Itsing* as the Chinese visitors pronounced about Buddhism in India.

Amartya Sen says that an attempt for globalization is to recognize the international sphere that encompasses the world heritage. We have to interact with the broader world outside as Sanskrit came to us from Indo-Europeans; *Mandarin* derived from the Sanskrit word *Mantri*, spread from India to China through Malaya; languages and vocabularies were shared among Asian countries of Thailand, Malaya, Indochina, Indonesia, the Philippines, Korea and Japan.

The communication and exchange of cultures was headed by R.N. Tagore and *M. K. Gandhi*; *R. N. Tagore* through his poetry, *Gitanjali*, spread the mystic message of God and *Gandhi* was the emerging apostle to spread his principles of nationalism, *satyagraha* and a saint-politician seeking freedom for his people. *Tagore* called him the great soul or *Mahatma* and *Tagore* though differed from him in being concerned with humanity rather than being national, expressed his regards and salutes to him. The freedom of the mind was the essence for *Tagore* while *Gandhi* wanted sovereignty of the nation to be rescued from British suzerainty through *satyagraha*, soul force or moral force of non-violence as the chief weapon against British might. *Tagore* liked western industries in India, but *Gandhi* didn't. *Tagore*'s composed song *Jana Gana Mana* was accepted as the national anthem for India and *Amar Sonar Bangla* as the national anthem for Bengal. *Tagore* was open-minded but *Gandhi* believed in adherence to tradition and celibacy. Along with *Gandhi* and *Tagore*, *Nehru* and *Subhash* appreciated the national struggle ideology and principles of *Tagore*. *Tagore* wanted to return his knighthood to the Viceroy after the *Jallianwala Bagh* massacre of 1919. In 1908, while replying to the retort of *Abala Bose*, the wife of *Jagadish Chandra Bose*, a great Indian scientist, “patriotism cannot be our final spiritual shelter, my refuge is humanity. I will not buy glass for the price of diamonds and I will

Never allow patriotism to triumph over humanity as long as I live.” (page-108). *Subhash Bose* was admired as a non- sectarian fighter by Tagore and was communicated by *Rash Behari Bose* staying in Japan, who sought approval of Tagore for his advancement towards Indian Independence right there from. There were an exchange Asian values and western influences. The Bengali film production gained ground to add to indigenous culture. *Satyajit Ray’s Pather Panchali* won the special award in Cannes. James Mill’s *The History of British India* reflected India’s past. Charles Wilkins, Thomas Colebrooke, William Jones and the Asiatic society translated Indian classics, scriptures such as the *Gita*, legal treaties such as *Manusmriti* and the Sanskrit drama of *Kalidasa’s Abhijnanashakuntalam*. William Jones in collaboration with Warren Hastings had established Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal to create advancement in translation of Indian ancient texts to English. *I-Tsing* of China had studied medicines at *Nalanda* University in India. Silk trade flourished between India and China. *Hieun Tsang* gives prominent illustrations of the huge *Bamiyan* statute of the Buddha in Afganisthan. He also refers to Sanskrit grammarian *Panini* and others. Reciprocation and proximity in arts, sculpture, trade, science and mathematics flourished between India and China, India and Iran.

It is on the eve of independence J. L. Nehru reminds our nation about the “tryst with destiny”. India has to awaken herself from the long deep slumber to mitigate her problems of poverty, illiteracy, communalism and backwardness in science and technology to toe the line with the western counterparts. Indian democracy has to be judged by the effective exercise of public reasoning; Indian women remain illiterate whereas most of the Chinese women were literate i.e. 50% literate women is in India to 80% literate women in China. The impoverished people of India die of malnutrition and hunger. Thus inequality has probed into each corner of India creating differences between the haves and the have-nots. The Indian policies keep on changing through out to deal with education, health care, land reforms and gender equity. Inequality between women and men has been a curse in the male dominated society. The

Hindu-Muslim riot of 1944 gives a sordid picture of Hindu thugs killing Muslims and vice versa.

The downtrodden section of society with meager income is unable to enjoy two square meals a day. They are not influential in politics and deprived of enthusiasm in life. They are slum dwellers, low-earning urban employees and artisans from the countryside. The cash-wages being very less make them unable to buy sufficient food items. Inflation in prices put them into troubled waters. Undernourishment and starvation are the major crises of the society.

Gender inequality has fractured the fulcrum of society. Japan without having gender-bias also observes the predominance of males over females in administration and other sectors. USA has not yet given the top leadership to females. Women's movements have sought for social transformations providing women socio-economic and political opportunities. However, inequalities are marked as survival inequality pointing to higher female mortality rates than that of males; natal inequality involves preference for a male child, and sex-selective abortions; unequal facilities or opportunities restricted for women in defense, commerce, politics, fields requiring strength and skill specific areas of philosophy and science. It seems tough for women to express their voice and own responsibilities in commercial, economic and social arenas. Women share household duties indoors while men work outdoors in all societies. Violence is intermittently marked in dowry disputes and financial settlements. Women can influence less and don't possess a greater say in the social environment. China and South Korea have contributed much to women empowerment and female literacy.

Nuclear deterrence lies in understanding the global scenario for a peaceful world with disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation. Tagore's vision of humanity for serenity and harmonious existence is invited to undo aggressive competition for the cult of the bomb by India in *Pokhran* and Pakistan in *Chagai Hills*. J. Robert Oppenheimer, portraying nature and God being red in tooth and claw, had quoted from the Bhagwad Gita "I am become death, the

destroyer of worlds” when he had to be the principal agent of the world’s first nuclear explosion at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, i.e. he implied death exposed its violent and horrifying face as that of a furious monster.

The Indian identity has reached a consummation of experiences assimilating diversities of both Indian and western counterparts. Akbar emphasized the role of reason as being greater to the tradition that also amalgamates the native superstitions. Nietzsche denounced credulity on ethical reasoning and did not rely on the presence of God. The horrible experiences of world war and annihilation of human race in the first part of 20th century really coincided with Nietzsche’s pessimistic opinions. Our morality and reliance on God as prompted before by *Akbar* could be guided by critical reasoning. Jonathan Glover, an Oxford philosopher relates Enlightenment, 20th century horrors and Stalin. Enlightenment aspiring progress in Europe through pursuit of reason was a fiasco. Relating to the horrors of wars in 20th century, Glover insisted not to brood over what happened in the past but to control the evil or the monster within us and tame it not to let loose the devastations. The strongly held beliefs of Stalin were opposed later on.

Indian outlook has been shaped by the humanitarian outlook of *Tagore*, the secular longing of *M.K. Gandhi* despite being a traditional Hindu and the liberal and developmental upsurge of *J. L. Nehru*. An approach to secularism means the state must not have personal affinity with any single religion. The sectarian tinge breeds parochial and narrow tendencies that can be transcended by a larger attention to humanitarian cause of good will and fellow-feeling and a shared sense of existence with other communities. A uniform civil code for all as enunciated by the Directive Principles of state Policy in the Indian constitution is partly a solution in a multi-religious imbroglio. Looking back at the religiosity of Indian leaders in pre-pendent India, *Muhammad Ali Jinnah*, the advocate of two-nation theory and founder of Islamic Republic of Pakistan was not a devout Muslim as *Maulana Abul Kalam Azad*, the

President of India, National Congress and the Education Minister of independent India. *Shyama Prasad Mukhopadhyaya*, the *Hindu Mahasabha* leader had lesser attachment with Hindu rituals and practices than *M. K. Gandhi* who sat for daily prayers but was secular in outlook. *Nathuram Godse's* complaint against Gandhi was that despite being a strict follower of Hinduism, he was 'soft' towards Muslims without giving prime attention to Hindu objectives.

The Principle of tolerance has developed as illustrated by Ashish Nandy that the settlement of one sect after the other in India has made it natural in India. Secularism is not a political factor but it is produced out of the shared existence emerging from the togetherness of living of different communities. The joint effect of Hindus along with Muslims can be seen in paintings, arts, architecture, music and literature. *Tansen* was the prominent musician of *Akbar* and *Raja Man Singh*, a Hindu, *Akbar's* general. *Alberuni*, who had come with *Mahmud of Ghazni*, the destroyer of temples was too sad to report about his destruction but he stayed, roamed and wrote the History of India "*Tariq-i-Hind*" disseminating to the world on Indian science and mathematics, astronomy, philosophy sculpture and religion.

The Indian calendars are based on regions, religions and domestic issues. The global calendars are divided as Christians, Muslims, Buddhists and as such. The calendars are about the past of India, its religions, traditions, communities and their histories. The calendars can be *Kaliyuga* calendar, *Buddha Nirvana* calendar, *Vikram Samvat* calendar, *Saka* calendar, *Vedanga Jyotisha* calendar, *Bengali San* calendar and *Kollam* calendar.

The Indian and British collaborations can be observed in establishment of Tata industries. *Dorabji Tata* was an outstanding maker of industries and charismatic philanthropist and the elder son of *Jamsetji Tata*. *Jamsetji* had strong determination to create an iron and steel industry in India. *Jahangir Ratanji Dadabhoy Tata* (JRD Tata) succeeded *Dorabji* to establish Tata Airlines later called (Air India) and promoted Tata group into a nation-building enterprise. *Jamsetji* had been supported by Lord Curzon, the then viceroy of India to flourish his industries.

Thus, Indian identity lies in taking India towards economic independence and interdependence with other countries in business and commerce.

Prof. Michael Sandel has explained the life of the communities lies not in immediate choice of the present necessities, but the real need of the long-term existence with others. The attachment with one another is an inner attribute, not a superficial claim to each other. Prof. *Amartya Sen* defines “identity is a matter of discovery rather than choice”. (p.350)

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

Premchand

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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 adraash 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 Premchand's 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 a letter to her husband with the help of Padma. Finally, the husband decides to live with his wife. Chanda's woes do not end there as her mother-in-law and sister-in-law keep nagging the husband to leave Chanda. The 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 Algoujha 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. Dayakrushna falls in love with Madhuri and eventually she is able to trace the purpose of his visit and the cause of his love prentence. She condemns him by saying that "no woman becomes 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-objcets 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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Reading Resistance Narratives in the Context of the ‘Tribal Predication’

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In his book, *Tribal Society in India; An Anthro-Historical Perspective* (1985), the prominent Indian anthropologist, Kumar Suresh Singh, has identified three major phases of tribal revolt in colonial history: the first phase, between 1795 and 1860, which he has called the phase of primary resistance; the second phase, between 1860 and 1920, which, according to him, saw movements that combined agrarian, religious and political issues; the third phase, between 1920 and 1947, when the movements, according to him, were of a political or secular nature. K.S. Singh further separates the movements prior to 1920 which he describes as “sporadic, isolated and spontaneous” from those after 1920 which, according to him, were deeply influenced by Gandhi’s message and personality.ⁱ Another writer, L.N. Rana, also emphasizes the influence of Gandhi on the tribal people in his essay “Gandhi’s Constructive Programme in Jharkhand (1924-1929)”, which was published in 1999.ⁱⁱ

Interestingly, the position taken by K.S. Singh and L.N. Rana has recently been contradicted by Ramachandra Guha in his essay “Adivasis, Naxalites and Indian Democracy”, published in *EPW*, in August 2007.ⁱⁱⁱ Here, Guha argues that tribals, as a whole, have gained less and lost more from six decades of Independence, when compared to other deprived groups like the Dalits and Muslims. Explaining how the leaders of the other groups had managed to safeguard their interests, Guha writes:

“Even before Gandhi assumed its leadership, the Congress had to face the charge that it was essentially an upper caste Hindu party. To combat this criticism it had to reach out to Muslims and lower castes. This imperative became even more pronounced in the Gandhian era, when the Mahatma’s claim that the Congress represented all of India was strongly challenged by M.A. Jinnah, presuming to speak on behalf of all Muslims, and by B.R. Ambedkar, who sought to represent the lowest castes. The rhetoric of Congress nationalism, before and after independence, always had space

within it for special interests of Muslims and dalits...the Congress has never really understood the distinctive nature of the tribal predicament.” (Guha 3309)

Social scientists who have studied the ‘tribal predicament’ have traced two important strategies that were used by the colonial administration to integrate tribal regions within the provinces of British India: firstly, a paternalistic rule was imposed by district officers; secondly, a legal system that was at variance with the community system practiced by the tribals was also introduced. These impositions caused the disintegration of the traditional tribal institutions. At the same time, there were also attempts to categorize the tribes into uniform groups and erase their local differences.

At the economic level, tribal societies underwent two important changes during this period: firstly, the forested land where the tribals often lived and on which they depended for sustenance were reserved and fenced off; secondly, the tribals were forced to change from swidden (slash-and-burn) cultivation to settled cultivation. At the same time, the influx of outsiders from mainstream society was encouraged, many of whom turned out to be unscrupulous traders and moneylenders who forced tribals into bonded labour. Large numbers of tribals were also recruited as indentured labourers and taken to far-off plantations and mines. It is worth noting that mining and industrialization had started in India on tribal land during these years. In 1894, mining activities had started in the Jharia coal mines at Dhanbad, followed by the establishment of the Tata Iron and Steel Company Limited (TISCO) at Jamshedpur in August 1907. Both had caused the large scale eviction of tribals from their ancestral land.

All these factors caused great tension and unrest which found expression in a series of rebellions that occurred during the nineteenth century. The most well-known among these were the Kol Uprising of 1831-32 in Singhbhum, the Bhumij Revolt of 1832-33, the Santal *Hul* or Insurrection of 1855-56 in Santal Parganas, and the Munda *Ulgulan* or Rebellion of 1899-1900 in Chotanagpur. In the early twentieth century, there occurred some socio-cultural movements under the influence of mainstream society. Two of these were the Tana Bhagat movement of 1914 among the Oraon tribals and the Hari Baba movement of 1931-32 among the Ho tribals. Movements for political autonomy also started in the 1930s and 40s, gathering force after the formation of the Adivasi Mahasabha under the leadership of Jaipal Singh Munda, an Oxford-returned adivasi who would become a member of the Constituent Assembly. It is also a fact that large numbers of Mundas, Oraons and Tana Bhagats were involved in the Civil Disobedience movement of the 1930s.

At this point, it is pertinent to briefly comment on the five journeys undertaken by Gandhi to Bihar and Jharkhand between June 1917 and January 1927. As mentioned earlier, L.N. Rana's essay provides a detailed account of these five journeys. A careful study of Gandhi's activities during these journeys points to several motivations behind the interest shown by him in Jharkhand. On the surface, he was mobilizing the common people in his non-violent struggle against the British Raj. However, there were other motivations in these journeys that also need to be examined.

To begin with, he first came to Ranchi in June 1917 to meet Sir Edward Gait, the Lt Governor of Bihar and Orissa, and to discuss the agrarian crisis of Champaran. His second visit was to Jharia in February 1921, where he addressed the workers on the Non-Cooperation Movement. Gandhi's third visit to Jharkhand was longer and came about two weeks before the 18th anniversary celebration of the TISCO plant at Jamshedpur. Gandhi arrived at Jamshedpur on 7 August, 1925, accompanied by Jawaharlal Nehru and Rajendra Prasad. These Congress leaders were welcomed by the steel magnate, R.D. Tata, himself. Later, they went around the works with R.D. Tata and C.F. Andrews, who was then the Secretary of the All Indian Trade Union Congress (AITUC). This was the time when workers were agitating under the banner of the Tata Workers' Union (TWU). Gandhi, with the help of C.F. Andrews, managed to negotiate a deal that was found acceptable by both sides. (Rana 738) On 9 August, 1925, Gandhi announced this compromise deal at an event, then spoke of partnership between the labourer and the capitalist. Later, he attended several meetings where he spoke against liquor-drinking and untouchability, and asked people to patronize *khaddar* and *charkha*.

In his fourth visit in September-October 1925, Gandhi visited Bihar and Jharkhand again but did not go to Jamshedpur this time. During this rather lengthy journey, he went to many new places. Besides the growing industrial towns of Ranchi and Ramgarh, where settler populations from outside the region usually dominated, he also visited rural areas like Purulia, Chakradharpur, Chaibasa, Hazaribagh, Khunti and Mandu that were dominated by tribal populations. At Chakradharpur and Khunti he met groups of Ho and Munda tribals, among whom there was believed to be a silent reform movement. Gandhi was pleased to find the acceptance of *charkha* and *khaddar* among some of them, particularly the new sects of Tana and Birsait Bhagats. (Rana 741-742) Of the Tana Bhagats, it was said that not only had this

sect of Gandhian tribals embraced the *charkha* and *khaddar*, they had even given up liquor-drinking and meat-eating, to voluntarily become vegetarians.

During this visit, Gandhi also betrayed some intolerance towards Christian missionaries working among the tribals. According to L.N. Rana, he was pleased to see the schools run by Christian missionaries in tribal areas but “felt that it would have been nicer if the Christian missionaries rendered humanitarian service without the ulterior aim of conversion! He (Gandhi) visualized the coming conflict between Christian missionaries and the Hindu workers.” (Rana 742)

Thereafter, Gandhi journeyed to Patna, Bhagalpur, Deoghar, Giridih, Kharagdiha and Madhupur. At Deoghar, he visited the Baidyanath Dham which was becoming known as a pilgrim place for Hindus. Everywhere he went, the message of *khaddar* and *charkha* was preached along with admonishments against liquor-drinking and meat-eating. Gandhi also raised sizable sums of money at these places through contributions from the local people, who were usually a mix of Hindu traders and Gandhian tribals.

Gandhi’s last visit to Bihar and Jharkhand was in January 1927, along with Rajendra Prasad. He again addressed large gatherings at several places like Daltonganj, Dhanbad and Jharia, which were growing towns bustling with traders, businessmen and colliery workers. His message to them did not change – he still spoke against liquor-drinking and untouchability, and advocated the message of *khaddar* and *charkha*. This journey did not yield much funds from local contributions and what little was collected was “mostly in copper and nickels”. (Rana 746)

In studying these five journeys closely, one cannot help but notice that Gandhi did not seem to be aware of the “tribal predicament” referred to earlier. Hence, he failed to offer practical solutions to the tribal people’s problems, such as land reforms and legal action against usury and bonded labour. His offer of liquor-free vegetarian life as a solution to their existential problems seems to have been rejected by most tribals. This is clear from the fact that while the Tana Bhagat sect still exists in some areas of Chotanagpur, its influence on the local politics of Jharkhand after 1947 has been minimal. It is also noteworthy that Gandhi’s statue is conspicuously absent from public spaces in many towns of Jharkhand. For example, the three major *chowks* in Dumka town (in Santal Parganas region) have the statues of Sido-Kanhu, B.R.

Ambedkar and Vivekanand while two major *chowks* in Ranchi have the statues of Birsa Munda and Albert Ekka.

Since the 1980s, the elevation of Birsa Munda as an iconic tribal leader is noteworthy. On 10 October 1989, Birsa Munda's portrait was unveiled in the Central Hall of Parliament and on 28 August 1998, his statue was unveiled in the precincts of Parliament House by the President of India. This singling out of Birsa Munda from the plethora of tribal leaders who fought and died in the colonial period appears surprising, but can be explained by the fact that the Munda Ulgulan differed from earlier movements. While the earlier movements shared the common feature of being defensive and often violent rebellions against encroachment on tribal rights, the Munda Ulgulan led by Birsa Munda began as a rebellion against encroachment but later evolved later into a messianic movement with a strong revivalist character. K.S. Singh has even linked Birsa Munda's movement to the pan-Indian Renaissance and the emerging nationalist movement of the late nineteenth century. In his book, *Birsa Munda and his Movement (1872-1901): A Centennial Edition*, Singh writes:

“Post-independence writings have linked Birsa and his movement with the Indian renaissance and the freedom movement and read non-violence and nationalism into it. There is no doubt that the movement led and organized by the Munda leader manifested the same spirit of religious reform, social purification and cultural development as that which characterized the socio-religious movements in the nineteenth century which also fostered political consciousness and the growth of nationalism.”^{iv} (Singh xx)

Yet, has this honour being bestowed on Birsa Munda made any substantial change in the government policy towards tribals? In contemporary times, there have been a spate of minor and major uprisings among the tribals of Jharkhand, such as the Rajmahal Pahar Bachao Andolan of 1998-2006 in the Pakur district of Santal Parganas (led to the Keralean nun, Sister Valsa John, who was brutally murdered on 15 November 2011), the Nagri Rebellion of 2011-12 in Nagri village near Ranchi (led by the tribal activist, Dayamani Barla, on whom the acclaimed film, *Ballad of Resistance*, was made by Leela Manimekalai in 2012) and the Pathalgadi movement of 2016-2018 in Chotanagpur. All three uprisings have the same characteristics found in the early tribal movements, i.e., they are defensive reactions against

encroachment on tribal rights. Hence, despite the honour bestowed on Birsa Munda at high places, there has not been much change at the grassroots level. The basic motivations behind tribal rebellions, i.e., *Jal, Jangal aur Zameen* (water, forest and land), still remain.

I would now like to examine the literary writings of select tribal writers who have focused on resistance. In going through such writers from Eastern India, I have found the figure of the tribal revolutionary in the poetry of several male adivasi poets like Marshal Hembram, Anuj Lugun, and Mahadev Toppo. Their writings belong to the new genre called protest narrative or resistance narrative, which expresses the community's sense of *angst* over exploitation of natural resources, displacement and economic disparity that follows state-sponsored 'development'. The two short poems cited below reflect this *angst* and also suggest two ways of dealing with the exploitation. The first one, "Then I must Pick up the Bow" is by the Santal poet, Marshal Hembram, while the second one is "Poet of the Forest" by the Oraon poet, Mahadev Toppo:

Then I Must Pick up the Bow (*Ak' Sar Sap Tege Huyuk' Tena*) – Marshal Hembram^v

You tell me, screaming,
That this nurtured plot of land,
this pond, this farmhouse
you tell me, these are not mine?

You order me, with blazing eyes,
to leave all this
and go away
wherever – anywhere at all.
But this was the land of legends.
The land of thick jungles,
a desolate land of trees and vines.
We worked hard to clean it up
to make it liveable
and lived happily.

Now if you claim
that this nurtured plot of land,
this pond, this farmhouse
these are not mine
then, well,
I must reach for my bow and arrow.

Translated by Antara Dev Sen and the poet

Poet of the Forest (*Jungle Ka Kavi*) – Mahadev Toppo^{vi}

When all the rebellious
Voices of the forest,
The greenness of the forest's trees
The lush, green trees, standing tall
In the valley on the mountains,
Flutter with joy;

When they conspire to drown
The aspirations of the forest
In a bottle of *mahua*,
How can the poet of this forest
Remain silent?

He will pick up the bow
And mount the pen on the bow-string.
Also, a flute and a drum
Will he take up.

For the greenery of the forest
Must be saved;
The poet of the forest
Will beat the drum,
Will play the flute,
With the pen mounted on the bow-string.

Translated by Vasundhara Gautam

These two poems illustrate the essential quality of the tribal resistance narrative. It is noteworthy that while Marshal Hembram's poem expresses the fiery spirit of the tribal revolutionary who is willing to fight and die in defense of his land, the poem by Mahadev Toppo expresses the need to use his pen as a weapon of protest.

A prominent tribal writer from Nagaland, Temsula Ao, has also written fiction that may be termed as resistance narratives, but her stories are more nuanced and go beyond expressions of *angst* to explore the victim's psyche. Her collection of short stories, *These Hills called Home: Stories from the War Zone* (2006), are based on the conflict that swept through North-Eastern India during the 1950s. In the "Preface", she explains that her narratives go beyond the trauma of death, rape, maiming and other forms of violation to probe how the events of that era re-structured the Naga psyche. On a note of deep disillusionment, she writes:

"Nagaland's story of the struggle for self-determination started with high idealism and romantic notions of fervent nationalism, but it somehow got re-written into one of disappointment and disillusionment because it became the very thing it sought to overcome."^{vii} (Ao x)

These select examples from contemporary tribal writings provide an incomplete picture of the tribal resistance narrative. The old folksongs and folktales also need to be studied in order to glean more knowledge of this *angst* within tribal communities. Notwithstanding that, it is hoped this paper will help others to contextualize tribal literature in the socio-economic scenario of modern India.

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Caste and Christianity in Bama's *Karukku*: A Study with reference to B. R. Ambedkar's Concept of "Conversion as Emancipation"

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Abstract

This paper examines the complex relationship between caste and religion in the context of Dalit experience, drawing on Bama's *Karukku* and B. R. Ambedkar's essay "Conversion as Emancipation." It explores how caste-based discrimination continues to shape the lives of Dalits even after religious conversion, particularly within Christianity, which is often perceived as a space of equality and spiritual liberation. Through Bama's autobiographical narrative, the paper highlights the persistence of social exclusion, humiliation, and structural inequality within religious institutions. Ambedkar's reflections on conversion are used to frame the idea of religion as a potential means of social and psychological emancipation, while also questioning its limitations when caste hierarchies remain socially entrenched. The study argues that discrimination against Dalits operates not merely on religious grounds but through deeply embedded caste identities that transcend religious boundaries. By placing literary and socio-political texts in dialogue, the paper underscores the continuing struggle for dignity, equality, and true emancipation in both social and religious spheres.

Key words: Dalit, conversion, discrimination, religion, emancipation

Bama is one of the most significant voices in contemporary Tamil Dalit literature. Born into a Dalit Christian family in Tamil Nadu, she draws deeply from her lived experiences of caste discrimination, religious formation, and gendered marginalisation. Her writing is marked by honesty, anger, faith, and reflection, and it challenges both caste hierarchy and institutional hypocrisy. She came to wide recognition with her autobiographical work *Karukku*, which foregrounds the pain and resilience of a Dalit Christian woman navigating oppressive social structures. Through her works, Bama not only documents personal suffering but also asserts dignity, self-respect, and collective resistance. Her contribution lies in giving literary space to voices that were long silenced, while also questioning the contradictions within religion and society. Although Bama has been the subject of extensive academic inquiry, new critical possibilities still remain. One can find the gap to work on Bama's *Karukku* which is the practice of Christianity based on the theory of conversion as emancipation. The life of Bama is revealed in her autobiography *Karukku* which is a text known all over the world. Bama has become popular due to this text.

If one were to read this text one would know that Bama has been a Christian. Bama says:

In our house there were several pictures and icons of Jesus. Our Lady, St. Joseph, St. Anthony, St. Sebastian, St. Ignatius, Archangel Michael, the Holy family and the Crucifixion. There were several versions of Our Lady in any case; different pictures of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, Our Lady of Poondi, Our Lady of Velankani, Our Lady of Sorrows. (Bama *Karukku*: 79)

A careful reading of *Karukku* makes it unmistakably clear that Bama was raised within a deeply Christian environment. The passage in which she lists the many pictures and icons in her house is not a casual detail; it is a vivid description of a domestic space saturated with Catholic imagery and devotion. The presence of Jesus, St. Joseph, St. Anthony, St. Sebastian, St.

Ignatius, Archangel Michael, and the Holy Family reflects a structured religious upbringing shaped by church teachings and saintly intercession.

The repeated references to different forms of “Our Lady” — such as Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, Our Lady of Poondi, Our Lady of Velankani, and Our Lady of Sorrows — further show how Marian devotion occupied a central place in her spiritual world. These are not abstract theological figures; they represent localized and culturally rooted forms of Catholic worship in Tamil Nadu. By naming them so specifically, Bama demonstrates familiarity, intimacy, and emotional connection with these traditions.

This description serves as textual evidence of her Christian identity. It removes any ambiguity about her religious affiliation. At the same time, the detailed inventory of sacred images suggests that faith was not merely institutional but woven into everyday life. The home itself becomes a devotional space, where belief is visible, material, and constant. Therefore, the quotation establishes that Christianity was not peripheral in Bama’s life; it formed the spiritual and cultural framework through which she understood the world, even as she later critiqued the caste discrimination within the Church.

There is no confusion of whether she is a Hindu or Buddhist or Christian. She has described her own village Hindu gods that does not need to have any confusion. She has to talk about the local deity as she is worshipped. One needs to show the evidences of her being a Christian. Bama has been discriminated not just as a Dalit but also a Christian and a woman.

In this text Bama has extensively and boldly claims and practices Christianity without any ambiguity. Though I would like to touch upon Ambedkar but she has nothing to do with the influence of Ambedkar. This is the only text where Ambedkar has not been referred to among the Dalit writers whatsoever. There have been several texts that discuss with the influence of

Ambedkar in the works such as Sharan Kumar Limbale's *The Outcaste*, Narendra Jadhav's *Outcaste: A Memoir*, Omprakash Valmiki's *Jhootan*, Vasant Moon's *Growing Up Untouchable in India* and several others to mention only a few. In these texts the authors have acknowledged Ambedkar how he had emancipated them from the Hindu religion by converting to Buddhism. They are happy with the Ambedkarism and advocate to others in the above mentioned texts.

Let us see how Bama first describes how a Dalit is being treated in the society:

In this society, if you are born to a low caste, you are forced to live a life of humiliation and degradation until your death. Even after death, caste-difference does not disappear. Whatever you look, however much you study, whatever you take up, caste discrimination stalks us in every nook and corner and drives us into a frenzy. It is because of this that we are unable to find way to study well and progress like everyone else. And this is why a wretched life style is alone that is left to us.

If you are born to a lower caste, every moment of your life is a moment of struggle. People screw up their faces and look at us with disgust the moment they know our caste.
(Bama, *Karukku*: 23}

After explaining the status of a Dalit in general, she comes to the personal experience in the convent where the admission given for the Christian students,

Many people in the convent did not know what was meant by Dalit. And those few who had an extremely poor opinion about Dalits, they spoke ill of us. When they spoke about Dalits in such terms, I would often shrink into myself. They did not know that I myself was a Dalit, and in those early days, I did not have the courage to tell them. I was afraid of how they might talk to me or behave towards me if I told them. When I heard them speak in such a way about the oppressed Dalit people, I used to wonder how these

people could bring into being God's kingdom where there are neither the high nor the low.

Some of the things they said about Dalits:

“How can we allow these people to come into our houses? In any case, even if we were to allow them, they would not enter into our homes. They themselves know their place.”

“There is nothing we can do for these creatures. And we should not do anything for them, they will never make progress. Their natures are like that.”

“These days these people go about reasonably dressed. So you can't even make out who they are, sometimes.”

“The government goes and gives these people all sorts of privileges. Why do illiterate people need all these things?” (Bama *Karukku*: 99-100)

Having lived in the Dalit Christian life Bama has not been spared from discrimination. Whether the Dalit is in this religion or that religion, they are not spared from this untouchability. That is why Ambedkar suggests conversion for Dalits. Before I move on to the conversion let me cite what Ambedkar had to say about religion and the conversion. He suggests that Dalits will have emancipation from the caste discriminations only after the change of religion,

A religion in which an individual has no importance is not acceptable to me... I do not accept

a religion in which one class alone has a right to gain knowledge, another has a right to use arms, the third one to trade and the fourth, only to serve. Everyone needs arms... A religion which forgets this, and with an intention to educate few, keeps the rest in darkness, is not a religion but a craftiness to keep the people in mental slavery. (*Writings and Speeches* 2014)

Perhaps Bama's parents have realized this. Therefore, they have moved out of the Hindu religion and converted into Christianity. Bama has been a born Christian. She has been brought up in the Christian culture with the celebrations of Christmas and Easter festivals since her childhood. Bama says: "At home, we bought new clothes twice a year. Once, for Christmas. Then, for the Chinnamalai festival which was celebrated at the hill-grotto of our Lady. Apart from these two occasions we never bought anything". (Bama *Karukku*: 65) She has never worshipped any Hindu God. Being a Dalit Christian she has been subjected to discrimination in her school, college and workplace. In spite of the discrimination and casteism, she excelled in her education and community service.

In the whole text Bama narrates her life as a true Christian. She has been raised by her grandmother and mother with so much concern for her. Her brother has been instrumental in her education, boldness, and affirmation. Bama's father was a military man away from the family most of the time. However he sends money to the family which is not enough therefore her mother works as maid and looks after the daughter.

What does Ambedkar say about the status of a converted Dalit into Christianity?

...Has Christianity been able to save the convert from the sufferings and the ignominy which is the misfortune of every one who is born an untouchable? Can an untouchable after his conversion to Christianity take water from a public well? Are his children admitted to a public school? Can he enter a hotel or tavern which was not open to him? Can he enter a shop and buy things from inside? Will a barber shave him? Will a washerman wash his clothes? Can he travel in a bus? Will he be admitted in Public offices without compunction? Will he be allowed to live in the touchable quarters of the village? Will the Hindus take water from him? Will they dine with him? Will not the Hindu take a bath if he touches him? I am sure that answer to every one of these

questions must be in negative. In other words conversion has not brought about any change in the social status of the untouchable convert. To the general mass of the Hindus the untouchable remains an untouchable even though he becomes a Christian. (Ambedkar *Writings and Speeches*: 470)

It is not easy for a Dalit girl to study without discrimination. She has been discriminated at school, college and at work place. At school: “When I was studying in the third class, I hadn’t yet heard people speak openly of untouchability. But I had already seen, felt, experienced, and been humiliated by what it is”. (Bama *Karukku*: 11) At college: “... I finished my schooling in these parts and started my college studies at a village some distance away. I had thought that such a big college, at such a distance away, among so many different students, nobody would bother about such things as caste. But even there, they did certainly consider caste differences”. (Bama *Karukku* : 19) At workplace:

“... I completed my education and went to work. At my first place of work, a nun asked me, “Are you a Nadar?” I said, “No, we are Parayar.” When I recall the expression that came over her face. I want to laugh, even now. Most of the nuns there were Telugu people. They did not care for Dalits like us. Then, what else? The next five years that I worked there were a continuous battle. I had a lot of spirit and guts at that time.” (Bama *Karukku*: 20)

It is the one who undergoes the discrimination alone knows the pain and trauma. The outsider may say that there is no discrimination shown on the Dalits. One can find discrimination shown in the modern world. It is always in the subtle manner.

In order to be away from this “discrimination” Dr. B.R. Ambedkar opines as back as on January 31, 1944 in the Scheduled Castes Conference held at Cawnpore (Kanpur) “[w]e must resolve in that in free India of the future we will be ruling race. We refuse to continue to play a role of

subservience or accept a position in which we could be treated as servants, not masters,”....
(Narake et al. *Writings and Speeches* 2014)

Ambedkar has decided to convert from Hindu religion. There have been many doubts in the minds of the people. He clarifies all in his essay “Conversion as Emancipation”. He says: “For myself I have taken my decision. My conversion is sure.” (Ambedkar 2004: 30) Ambedkar analyses the situation for the Dalits to assess and take a decision on conversion. He says:

If anyone of you open a shop and it is known that the shopkeeper is an Untouchable, nobody will purchase anything from you. If any one of you apply for a job, and it is disclosed that the applicant is an Untouchable, you will not get the job. If anyone intends to sell his land, and one of you propose to purchase it, nobody will sell the land once it is known that the purchaser is an Untouchable. Whatever means you may use for the economic progress of your own efforts, will be frustrated due to Untouchability. Untouchability is a permanent one obstacle in your path of progress. And unless you remove it, your path cannot be smooth, and without conversion, this hurdle cannot be removed. (Ambedkar “Conversion”: 27)

In the above text we had seen even the person who was born as a Christian has also not been spared of discrimination. Whether one is a Christian or a Muslim or a Hindu one is not free from discrimination and untouchability. One instance I will bring in here is about the job for a Dalit if the recruiters come to know that the candidate is a Dalit he/she will not get the job. Here is the example from the text.

Bama says:

I got an interview at one place, after I answered an advertisement in a newspaper. I went. After I had answered a thousand and one questions, and even written an exam, I was told that the job would fetch a salary of four hundred rupees a month. At today’s price, in which corner of the world can you survive on four hundred rupees? In any

case, I didn't get that job. Why? Because I am a Dalit. It was a school that is governed and run by Nadar. It seems they only appoint Nadar women. I do not know why, in that case they make such a fuss about their interview, and invite us all to apply. If they had made it plain in the paper that the job was available only to Nadars, why would I have gone for it? (Bama *Karukku* : 101)

Before he advocates conversion he makes people understand how different religions look at the Dalits even after conversion to some religions. He says: "Those of you who have become Muslims are treated by the Hindus neither as Untouchables nor as unequals. The same can be said of those of you who have become Christians and are treated by the neither as untouchables nor as unequals. (Ambedkar "Conversion": 14-15).

Ambedkar argues that the so called Dalits have been in different religions. In fact they were all Hindus. They converted into Christianity, Sikhism and Islam. After conversion they have developed a lot. There is no merit in the castes Hindus arguing against the Christians, Sikhs, and Muslims. Otherwise they would not have prospered. Ambedkar says:

Most of the present day Sikhs, Muslims and Christians in India were formerly Hindus, majority of them being from the Shudras and the Untouchables. Do these critics mean to say that those who renounced the Hindu fold and embraced Sikhism or Christianity, have made no progress at all? And if it is admitted that the conversion has brought a distinct improvement in their condition... (Ambedkar Conversion: 26)

Thus, Ambedkar has always been saying based on his personal experience with reference to his *Writings and Speeches* that the Dalits have to move out from the Hindu religion. He says further:

Why do you remain in that [Hindu] religion which does not treat you as human beings?
Why do you remain in that religion which does not allow you to educate yourselves?

Why do you remain in that religion which prohibits you from entering a temple? Why do you remain in that religion which prohibits you from access to water? Why do you remain in that religion which obstructs you from getting a job? Why do you remain in that religion which insults you at every step? A religion which prohibits righteous relations between man and man, is not a religion but a display of force. A religion which does not recognize a man as a human being, is not a religion but a disease. A religion which allows the touch of animals but prohibits the touch of human beings is not a religion but a mockery.... A religion that compels the illiterate to remain illiterate, and the poor to remain the poor, is not a religion but a punishment. (Ambedkar "Conversion": 30)

Conclusion:

Ultimately Ambedkar suggests to Dalits to use the manthra of conversion:

I tell you specifically that man is not for religion, religion for man. To become human, convert yourselves. To get organized, convert yourselves. To achieve strength, convert yourselves. To secure equality, convert yourselves. To get liberty, convert yourselves. To make your domestic life happy, convert yourselves. (Ambedkar "The Condition of Convert": 30)

Though Ambedkar advocates conversion for Dalits in order to have a peaceful life, he never advocated any particular religion including his own choice of Buddhism. He has left it open for the individuals to decide. This is an important factor here. Please see this in the following:

I have divided this problem for the conversion into two parts. Whether to leave the Hindu religion or to remain in it, is the first part of the problem. If the Hindu religion is to be abandoned, what other religion should be adopted or whether a new religion should be established, this is the second part of the problem. Today, I have to decide

the first part of the problem; unless the first part is decided, it is futile to discuss or prepare for the second. Therefore, you must decide the first point. It will not be possible for me to give you another opportunity to decide this. According to what you decision take in this conference, I will chalk out my future programme. If you decide against conversion, this question will be closed for ever. Then whatever is to be done for myself, I will do. If at all you decide in favour of conversion, then you will have to promise me for an organized and enmasse conversion. If the decision is taken in favour of conversion, and the people start embracing any religion they like individually, I will not intervene in your conversion. I wish you all to join me. Whatever religion we may accept, I am prepared to put all sincere efforts and labour for the welfare of our people in that religion. You should not, however, be led away by emotion and follow me only because I say so. You should consent only if it appeals to your reason. (Ambedkar “Conversion”: 31)

One has to note that Ambedkar is not compelling any one to follow blindly what he says. He leaves the decision to the individuals either to convert or not. If they decide to convert, which religion they want to convert, it is left to them of their will. In other words Ambedkar says the decision should not be based on emotion. It should be out of logic.

The final conclusion that emerges is that a Dalit, whether situated within Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, or Buddhism, continues to face discrimination, suppression, and forms of untouchability. These practices may appear openly and violently, or they may operate in subtle, institutional, and everyday ways. Religious conversion, therefore, does not automatically guarantee social equality. The persistence of caste consciousness across religious boundaries reveals how deeply embedded caste remains in the Indian social structure.

The example of Bama offers a compelling illustration of this reality. In her autobiographical work *Karukku*, she records that even after conversion to Christianity, caste hierarchies continued to shape social relations within the Church and the broader community. Her experience demonstrates that discrimination does not simply disappear with a change of faith. In this context, the only lasting solution appears to be the complete dismantling of caste itself, as forcefully argued by B. R. Ambedkar in his seminal essay *Annihilation of Caste*. Ambedkar's call for the structural annihilation of caste remains central to any meaningful attempt at social transformation in India.

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LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY

**The Paradox of Simplicity: Age-Inappropriate Linguistic Complexity
in Task Instructions of English Textbooks**

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Abstract

Task instructions serve as one of the primary interfaces between learners and curricular activities, yet their linguistic properties remain largely unexamined in educational materials research. This study presents a systematic analysis of 251 task instructions from English textbooks for Classes 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 in the Telangana State Board curriculum, Telangana State, India. Using a seven-criterion framework grounded in principles of materials development, we evaluated instructions for clarity, simplicity, and age-appropriateness. Findings indicate that 38% of instructions exhibited notable deficiencies, with ambiguity and insufficiency being most prevalent. A qualitative analysis identified four recurrent problematic patterns. Most strikingly, a significant inverse relationship was found between student age and instructional complexity: instructions for younger learners were substantially more linguistically complex than those for older students. Class 2 instructions showed problematic complexity in 44% of cases, compared to only 9% in Class 10. These findings are interpreted through the lens of Cognitive Load Theory, suggesting that the instructional language in the examined textbooks may impose unnecessary cognitive demands, particularly on the youngest learners. This suggests that the very tools meant to facilitate learning may be inadvertently undermining it for younger students. We conclude that explicit guidelines for instructional design are essential to reduce extraneous cognitive load and enhance the pedagogical efficacy of textbook tasks.

Keywords: Task Instructions, Textbook Analysis, Cognitive Load Theory, English Language Learning, Instructional Clarity, Materials Development

1. Introduction

Textbooks remain the dominant pedagogical resource in many educational contexts worldwide, often functioning as the de facto curriculum, (Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991).

The making of the textbook has been subsumed under the term chrestomathy with the meaning of a collection of works by an author or authors to teach a foreign language. It also meant a desire for learning with the literal sense of “useful learning”. All these have pedagogical implications. It is important that the teachers and the learners be provided help on how to optimize the text and the textbook.

While extensive scholarly attention has been devoted to analyzing textbook content, the linguistic architecture of task instructions has received comparatively little scrutiny. Task instructions constitute what might be termed the "procedural language" of learning: they mediate between curriculum content and student activity, defining what learners are expected to do with the material presented. This would involve a knowledge of textbooks used earlier, and the kind of textbooks that would come—a cohesion and coherence of sorts.

Clarity in task instructions is a fundamental prerequisite for their effectiveness. An ambiguous or overly complex instruction may require learners to expend cognitive effort simply decoding what is being asked, before they can engage with the intended learning task. This issue is particularly critical in the Indian educational context, where English often serves as the medium of instruction but is typically learned as a second or additional language. In such settings, the linguistic accessibility of instructional language becomes a matter of educational equity.

Tomlinson and Masuhara (2018) starkly highlight the critical importance of this procedural language, arguing that it is vital that instructions for activities are absolutely clear. They directly counter the common assumption among materials developers that teachers will orally

clarify deficient written instructions, noting from global classroom observations that this is an unreliable safeguard. Teachers themselves can misunderstand imprecise instructions, and students who must rely on the textbook are often left confused, anxious, and negatively predisposed towards the learning activity. This evidence underscores the point that unclear instructions are not merely a minor inconvenience but a significant pedagogical barrier with real consequences for classroom practice and student affect.

To provide a theoretical foundation for understanding this barrier, we interpret our findings through the lens of Cognitive Load Theory (CLT). CLT posits that working memory is limited and that learning is hindered when cognitive resources are diverted to processing non-essential information—known as extraneous cognitive load (Sweller, 1988). The linguistic deficiencies measured by our analytical framework (e.g., ambiguity, complex syntax, insufficient information) are theorized as **direct sources of extraneous load**. For young learners and English language learners, for whom the intrinsic load of understanding English is already high, unclear instructions may therefore impose a particularly significant cognitive barrier (Gibbons, 2015). We emphasize that CLT serves here as an interpretive lens; our study identifies the *potential sources* of extraneous load through textual analysis, which subsequent research could correlate with actual cognitive impact.

This study addresses a critical gap by systematically examining the linguistic quality of task instructions, an often-overlooked aspect of textbook design. The uniqueness and significance of the study lie not only in applying a rigorous analytical framework but also in uncovering a previously unreported and counter-intuitive pattern pertaining to age-appropriateness. With this background, the study examines task instructions in English textbooks used in the Telangana State Board curriculum, focusing on the following research questions:

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1. What is the linguistic quality of task instructions in these textbooks, as assessed on the bases of criteria of clarity, simplicity, and age-appropriateness?
 2. What patterns of linguistic features characterize instructions that score poorly on these criteria?
 3. What implications do these findings have for materials development practices?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Textbooks as Pedagogical Artifacts

Textbooks are not neutral repositories of information but socially constructed artifacts that shape what counts as legitimate knowledge, and how that knowledge should be engaged with (Apple, 1991). Their influence on classroom practice is substantial, particularly in large-scale, standardized education systems (Pepin & Haggarty, 2001). However, most textbook analyses focus on content—what is taught—rather than on the procedural mechanisms—how students are directed to engage with that content. The present study contributes to this line of inquiry by examining how the 'procedural knowledge' of *how* to engage is constructed through instructional language.

2.2 Language Accessibility and Task Design

Research on comprehensible input in second language acquisition emphasizes that learners benefit from language that is accessible yet appropriately challenging (Krashen, 1985). Similarly, work on teacher talk highlights how effective teachers modify their language to scaffold student understanding (Gibbons, 2015). These principles suggest that textbook instructions should function as a form of 'textbook talk'—carefully crafted language designed to guide learners through tasks effectively. This positions clear instructions as a form of *designed comprehensible input* that is essential for managing cognitive load. Despite this, a pervasive assumption in materials development seems to be that written instructions are

secondary, as teachers will clarify them (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018). However, this assumption is problematic; observations reveal that teachers often misinterpret unclear instructions themselves, and students frequently rely solely on the textbook, leading to confusion, inconsistent task implementation, and negative learning experiences (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018). This gap between the ideal of textbook talk and the reality of classroom practice underscores the urgent need for empirical investigation into the linguistic quality of instructions themselves. Our analysis thus investigates whether textbook instructions function as effective textbook talk or if they fall prey to the problematic assumptions noted by Tomlinson and Masuhara (2018).

2.3 Cognitive Load Theory as an Interpretive Lens

Cognitive Load Theory (CLT) offers a robust framework for understanding how instructional design might facilitate or hinder learning (Sweller, 1988). CLT distinguishes three types of cognitive load: intrinsic (the inherent complexity of the material), germane (productive cognitive effort), and extraneous (effort imposed by poor instructional design). While CLT has been extensively applied to multimedia learning, its use as an analytical lens for written task instructions is less common. However, the theory's core principles concerning the limitations of working memory and the detrimental effects of extraneous load are universally applicable to any instructional communication that must be processed cognitively, including written text. The linguistic features we analyze—such as ambiguous language or complex syntax—can be theorized as potential sources of extraneous load. This theoretical connection will be explored in the discussion of our findings.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017), combining quantitative scoring of instructions against defined criteria with qualitative analysis of problematic features.

3.2 Sample and Data Collection

We analyzed English textbooks prescribed for students in Classes 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 from the Telangana State Board curriculum. Each textbook has 8 units. Details of the textbooks are given below.

Table 1: Details of Textbooks, Unit Selection, and Number of Instructions Analysed

Class	Textbook Title	Publisher	Units Analyzed	Number of Instructions Analysed (n)
Class 2	<i>My English World (Class II)</i>	SCERT, Government of Telangana	Units 2, 4, 6, 8	34
Class 4	<i>My English World (Class IV)</i>	SCERT, Government of Telangana	Units 2, 4, 6, 8	52
Class 6	<i>My English World (Class VI)</i>	SCERT, Government of Telangana	Units 2, 4, 6, 8	46
Class 8	<i>My English World (Class VIII)</i>	SCERT, Government of Telangana	Units 2, 4, 6, 8	49
Class 10	<i>My English World (Class X)</i>	SCERT, Government of Telangana	Units 2, 4, 6, 8	70
Total			20	251

Note: Units 2, 4, and 6 were selected as representative core instructional units. Unit 8 was included to sample from later, potentially more complex content, while Units 1 (typically introductory) and project work instructions (often structurally different) were excluded to maintain a focused corpus of standard task instructions. This number represents the total population of task instructions from the selected units, ensuring a comprehensive analysis of the target corpus.

This selection yielded a corpus of 251 instructions: Class 2 (n=34), Class 4 (n=52), Class 6 (n=46), Class 8 (n=49), and Class 10 (n=70).

3.3 Analytical Framework

We developed an analytical framework directly grounded in the principles for *Writing Instructions for Language-Learning Activities* proposed by Tomlinson and Masuhara (2018). From their eleven criteria, we selected and operationalized seven that are most relevant to the linguistic analysis of *written* instructions in a textbook context. While Tomlinson and Masuhara's framework primarily addresses vocabulary under the broader criterion of Simplicity, we elevated Diction to a separate, distinct criterion for two critical reasons: first, to precisely distinguish lexical complexity from syntactic complexity, as they present unique and independent challenges for learners; and second, to enable a more granular analysis of how vocabulary choice, separate from sentence structure, impacts instructional clarity. This adaptation allows for a more nuanced diagnosis of whether communicative failures stem from word-level or syntax-level choices. The seven criteria used in our analysis are:

1. **Simplicity:** The language is at a lower level than the main text, using simple syntax, familiar vocabulary, and avoiding subordinate clauses and coordinators. (Adapted from Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018, p. 348).

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2. **Sufficiency:** The instruction contains all information students need to carry it out as intended. (Adapted from Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018, p. 347).
 3. **Succinctness:** The instruction is free from unnecessary or redundant information and is presented in the most concise way possible. (Adapted from Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018, p. 348).
 4. **Specificity:** The instruction is specific about *what* to do and *how* to do it, clearly defining task scope, sources, and expected output. (Adapted from Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018, p. 349).
 5. **Unambiguity:** The instruction can be interpreted in only one way, avoiding ambiguous pronouns, adverbials of position, and synonyms. (Adapted from Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018, p. 350).
 6. **Clarity:** The instruction's meaning is immediately apparent, the required action is obvious, and the expected outcome is clear. This criterion represents the holistic comprehensibility of the instruction, synthesizing the intent of the original framework.
 7. **Diction:** The choice of words is precise, consistent, and age-appropriate, using clear action verbs. This criterion was added to focus on vocabulary choice independent of syntactic complexity.

Operationalized Rating Scales

A 4-point scale (1=Poor, 2=Fair, 3=Good, 4=Excellent) was developed for each criterion.

Detailed descriptors for each point on the scale were created to ensure consistent coding (see Appendix A for the full scoring rubric).

Coding Procedure: The first author coded all 251 instructions using these operationalized scales. A second coder independently coded a 10% sample (25 instructions). Inter-coder agreement, assessed using Cohen's Kappa, yielded $\kappa = 0.85$, indicating strong agreement. Discrepancies were resolved through consensus.

3.4 Qualitative Analysis

During coding, detailed notes were maintained on problematic features in low-scoring instructions. These notes were analyzed thematically to identify recurrent patterns.

Scope and Limitations: This study analyzes a purposive sample from one selected state curriculum. Findings are exploratory and specific to this context. The study does not include student comprehension data or teacher perspectives, which would be valuable future research directions.

4. Findings

4.1 Quantitative Overview: The Inverse Complexity Relationship

Of the 251 instructions analyzed, 156 (62%) received scores of 3 or 4 across all seven criteria, indicating generally adequate or good quality. However, 95 instructions (38%) received a low score (1 or 2) on at least one criterion.

The most striking finding concerned the criterion of Linguistic Simplicity. Contrary to expectations, instructions for younger learners were substantially more complex than those for older students. As shown in Table 2, Class 2 instructions exhibited problematic complexity in 44% of cases, nearly five times the rate observed in Class 10 instructions (9%). This decrease follows a consistent linear pattern across the grade levels. Furthermore, other criteria related to precision also showed high rates of deficiency in lower grades. For instance, issues with Specificity (38% in Class 2) and Unambiguity (35% in Class 2) were almost as prevalent as complexity issues, indicating a broader pattern of linguistic inaccessibility for the youngest learners.

Table 2: Prevalence of Deficiencies by Class Level: Percentage of Instructions Scoring 'Poor' or 'Fair' (1 or 2) on Individual Criteria

Criterion	Class 2 (n=34)	Class 4 (n=52)	Class 6 (n=46)	Class 8 (n=49)	Class 10 (n=70)
1. Simplicity	44%	25%	17%	14%	9%
2. Sufficiency	21%	25%	20%	16%	13%
3. Succinctness	32%	29%	24%	20%	17%
4. Specificity	38%	37%	30%	31%	20%
5. Unambiguity	35%	33%	28%	27%	19%
6. Clarity	35%	35%	27%	29%	19%
7. Diction	29%	27%	22%	18%	14%

Note: The table presents the percentage of instructions receiving scores of 1 or 2 (indicating notable deficiencies) on each criterion.

This pattern runs counter to the expectation that instructions for older students would naturally employ more sophisticated language. Instead, the data reveal that younger learners—those with the most limited English proficiency and the greatest need for linguistic accessibility—encounter instructions with the least appropriate linguistic complexity and precision.

4.2 Characteristics of High-Quality Instructions

A subset of instructions scored consistently high (4) across all criteria. Analysis of these exemplary cases revealed a common, effective structure: *Imperative Verb + Specified Source + Clear Action/Output*.

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- *Look at the picture and answer the questions given below.* (Class 2, pg. 14)
 - *Read the following words. Circle the verbs (action words).* (Class 4, pg. 53)

This direct format minimizes ambiguity and cognitive burden by providing a transparent procedural path.

4.3 Qualitative Patterns in Problematic Instructions

Thematic analysis of the low-scoring instructions identified four recurrent patterns, which were disproportionately present in the highly complex instructions designed for younger grades:

4.3.1 Vague Referents: Characterized by the use of pronouns or demonstratives without clear antecedents, as in the instruction, *Correct the following and write them.* (Class 4, p. 45).

4.3.2 Presupposition of Missing Resources: Where instructions referenced materials, such as underlined text, that were absent from the textbook page, rendering tasks impossible to complete as written, for example: *Change the underlined parts in the following paragraph...* (Class 8, pg. 31).

4.3.3 Extraneous Narrative Framing: Often obscured the core task, particularly in lower grades; for instance, a straightforward instruction to draw a fruit was embedded within a story about Sweety and a *magic tree* (*Sweety is in a tree. It is a magic tree. It gives any fruit you want. Draw your favourite fruit on the tree and colour it.* Class 2, pg. 19).

4.3.4 Age-Inappropriate Linguistic Complexity: Where instructions for the youngest learners employed subordinate clauses and advanced vocabulary, as seen in: *Your teacher will tell you about Sweety. Listen carefully and answer the following questions.* (Class 2, pg. 15, 19).

5. Discussion

This analysis reveals considerable variability in the quality of task instructions, with a substantial minority (38%) exhibiting notable deficiencies. The most significant finding is the inverse relationship between student age and the linguistic complexity and precision of instructions.

5.1 The Puzzling Inverse Complexity Relationship

The finding that Class 2 instructions showed the highest rates of complexity and specificity issues (44% and 38%, respectively, see Table 2) is both counter-intuitive and concerning. This suggests a systemic oversight in the design of materials for the most linguistically vulnerable learners, which may reflect a broader pedagogical blind spot where content presentation is prioritized over the procedural architecture of learning. Several non-exclusive explanations might account for this puzzling inverse relationship. First, different curriculum development teams may have been responsible for different class levels, leading to varying degrees of attention to linguistic accessibility. Second, a well-intentioned effort to boost engagement through narrative framing may have inadvertently prioritized this goal over the fundamental principle of clarity, thereby increasing linguistic complexity. A third possibility is an assumed reliance on teacher mediation in early grades, where materials developers might presume that oral clarification will compensate for written deficiencies, reducing the imperative for independently accessible instructions. Whatever the root cause, this pattern unequivocally suggests that explicit, mandatory guidelines for age-appropriate instructional language are most critically needed for early-grade materials to ensure they support, rather than hinder, the learning process.

5.2 Cognitive Load Theory as an Interpretive Lens

When viewed through the lens of Cognitive Load Theory, the identified linguistic patterns can be interpreted as direct sources of extraneous cognitive load. The mental effort a young learner must expend is effort not directed at the learning task itself. For instance, vague referents force a search-and-retrieval process in working memory to identify the antecedent. The presupposition of missing resources creates a problem-solving loop that is entirely divorced from the learning objective. Extraneous narrative framing and complex syntax increase intrinsic load by adding unnecessary elements that must be processed to locate the core directive. We emphasize that this is a theoretical interpretation based on textual features. Our study identifies linguistic features that theory suggests could increase extraneous load, but we have not empirically demonstrated that students actually experience cognitive overload. Such empirical validation would be an important next step.

5.3 Systemic Gaps in Materials Development

The persistence of issues across class levels suggests that instructional language may not receive systematic attention during materials development. Instructions may be perceived as secondary to content, and developers' expert blind spot may prevent recognition of ambiguities that impede novice learners. The observed variability in quality points to a need for dedicated editorial checks focused specifically on instructional language.

5.4 Limitations and Future Directions

This study has limitations: its sample is from one state curriculum, it lacks classroom observation data, and its coding, though reliable, involves subjective judgment. Future research should expand to other curricula, incorporate classroom observations, teacher interviews, and student comprehension testing to validate the practical impact of these textual findings.

6. Recommendations

The findings of this study point to actionable steps for improving the pedagogical efficacy of textbook task instructions. To address the identified deficiencies, we propose a multi-pronged approach directed at the key agents in the materials development and implementation chain.

6.1. For Materials Developers and Publishers

The primary responsibility for ensuring the linguistic quality of task instructions lies with those who create and publish the materials. We recommend that publishers and curriculum development bodies formalize their approach to instructional design. This should begin with the formulation and adoption of explicit guidelines for instructional language, treating it as a distinct design challenge that warrants dedicated editorial passes and consistency checks throughout the development process. Given the disproportionately high prevalence of complexity issues uncovered in early-grade materials, a mandatory and rigorous age-appropriate language review should be implemented specifically for Classes 1-4 to ensure linguistic simplicity is prioritized. Furthermore, for routine tasks, publishers should adopt a simplified default framework, such as the direct *Imperative Verb + Specified Source + Clear Action/Output* structure identified in our high-quality examples, to minimize cognitive load and ambiguity by default. Finally, a systematic pre-publication resource verification process must be established to ensure all referenced materials, such as underlined text or numbered diagrams, are physically present and correctly integrated on the page.

6.2. For Teacher Empowerment and Professional Development

While the ultimate goal is better-designed textbooks, teacher professional development can serve as a critical interim measure and a source of bottom-up advocacy. Educators should be equipped to recognize and remediate problematic instructions. Therefore, we recommend that teacher professional development programs incorporate training that empowers educators

to identify, clarify, and even adapt the problematic instructions they encounter. This training would foster a critical awareness of instructional language, enabling teachers to not only support their students more effectively in the moment but also to provide structured, evidence-based feedback to publishers, thereby advocating for long-term improvements in the resources they use daily.

7. Conclusion

This study examined the linguistic quality of task instructions in English textbooks from one Indian state curriculum, revealing that a substantial minority (38%) exhibit deficiencies, with a pronounced inverse relationship between student age and instructional complexity. The youngest learners encounter the most linguistically demanding instructions.

These findings suggest that instructional language warrants more explicit and principled attention in materials development processes. While well-designed instructions cannot guarantee effective learning, poorly designed instructions may create unnecessary barriers. The consistent finding that instructions become clearer as students age—when developmental logic demands the opposite—is more than an oversight; it is a systemic inequity that places the heaviest linguistic burden on those least equipped to bear it. Addressing this paradox should be a paramount concern for publishers, curriculum developers, and educational policymakers committed to equitable learning. If textbooks are to effectively support independent learning, the language that directs that learning deserves careful, critical, and consistent consideration.

Data Availability Statement

The dataset of coded instructions and scoring used in this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The textbooks analyzed are publicly available through the Telangana State Board of Education.

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Appendix A: Full Operationalized Rating Scales

A 4-point scale (1=Poor, 2=Fair, 3=Good, 4=Excellent) was developed for each criterion with the following detailed descriptors to ensure consistent coding:

I. Clarity

4 (Excellent): The purpose of the instruction is immediately evident; no mental effort is required to decode meaning; the action required is obvious; the expected outcome is clear.

3 (Good): The instruction meets three of the four criteria for excellence.

2 (Fair): The instruction meets only two of the four criteria; meaning is difficult to discern without re-reading or inference.

1 (Poor): The instruction meets only one or none of the criteria; the intended action and outcome are obscure.

II. Unambiguity

4 (Excellent): Instruction has only one possible interpretation; all referents are clear; avoids ambiguous pronouns and adverbials.

3 (Good): Instruction is largely clear with minimal, easily resolved potential for misinterpretation.

2 (Fair): Instruction allows for multiple reasonable interpretations; requires effort to resolve ambiguity.

1 (Poor): Instruction is confusing with multiple possible meanings; key referents are undefined.

III. Diction

4 (Excellent): All words are age-appropriate, precise, and commonly used at the target class level; no potential for misunderstanding.

3 (Good): Most words are appropriate; one or two words may be slightly advanced but meaning can be inferred from context.

2 (Fair): Several words exceed age-appropriate level or are imprecise; likely requires teacher explanation.

1 (Poor): Multiple words are inappropriate for the age level, overly technical, or imprecise; meaning is obscured.

IV. Simplicity

4 (Excellent): Syntax is simple and grammatically standard; easy to parse; vocabulary is familiar; appropriate clause structure for class level.

3 (Good): Generally clear structure with minor complexity (e.g., one subordinate clause); remains accessible.

2 (Fair): Complex structure with multiple clauses or grammatical irregularities; requires re-reading to parse.

1 (Poor): Highly complex, grammatically problematic, or convoluted structure; difficult to parse even for proficient readers.

V. Sufficiency

4 (Excellent): All information needed to complete the task independently is present; no external clarification required.

3 (Good): Most information present; minor details may need inference but task is generally doable.

2 (Fair): Critical information missing; task cannot be completed without teacher intervention or additional materials.

1 (Poor): Multiple pieces of essential information absent; task is impossible to complete as written.

VI. Succinctness

4 (Excellent): Instruction contains only necessary information; no redundancy or irrelevant content.

3 (Good): Mostly concise with minimal unnecessary information; one instance of redundancy.

2 (Fair): Notable redundancy or irrelevant narrative; essential instruction obscured by extra text.

1 (Poor): Excessive redundancy or irrelevant information; core instruction difficult to identify.

VII. Specificity

4 (Excellent): Task scope, source materials, and expected output are all explicitly defined; no ambiguity about what, where, or how.

3 (Good): Two of the three elements (scope/source/output) are clearly defined; the third requires minimal inference.

2 (Fair): Only one element is clearly defined; significant inference is required for the others.

1 (Poor): None of the three elements are clearly defined; task parameters are entirely unclear

Skill Development and Educational Access among Telangana's Tribal

Youth

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Abstract

This study explores the current landscape of educational access and skill development among tribal youth in Telangana, India. Despite targeted government initiatives, tribal communities continue to face significant barriers to equitable education, including inadequate infrastructure, cultural and linguistic disconnects, and socio-economic disadvantages. High dropout rates and low literacy levels—particularly among tribal girls—highlight the urgency for more inclusive and culturally responsive educational models. The research identifies key challenges such as the lack of trained teachers fluent in tribal dialects, rigid school schedules that conflict with community livelihoods and curricula that overlook indigenous knowledge systems. It also examines the limited reach of vocational and skill-based programs in tribal regions, which hampers employment opportunities for tribal youth. To address these issues, the study recommends a multifaceted approach: integrating local languages and cultural content into early education, expanding flexible and land-based learning models, and enhancing teacher training to include tribal pedagogies. Additionally, it advocates for the expansion of skill development initiatives tailored to tribal youth, including digital literacy, artisanal crafts, and community-based entrepreneurship. Ultimately, the study underscores the need for sustained

policy commitment and community engagement to bridge educational gaps and empower tribal youth as active participants in Telangana's socio-economic development.

Keywords: Tribal Youth, Skill Development, Educational Access, Telangana Tribes, Vocational Training, Inclusive Education, Equity in Education.

Introduction

Tribal communities in Telangana represent a significant yet historically marginalized segment of the population, facing unique challenges in accessing quality education and skill development opportunities. Despite several constitutional safeguards and targeted government interventions, tribal youth often remain excluded from mainstream education and employment ecosystems. The geographical isolation of tribal areas, economic deprivation, cultural barriers, and language differences continue to hinder their educational progress and integration into the skilled workforce.

In recent years, both central and state governments have emphasized inclusive development through various skill development programs and educational schemes tailored for Scheduled Tribes. Initiatives such as the *Telangana Tribal Welfare Residential Educational Institutions Society (TTWREIS)*, *Skill India Mission*, and specific livelihood programs under the *Integrated Tribal Development Agencies (ITDAs)* aim to bridge the gap. However, disparities persist in access, retention, and transition from education to employment among tribal youth.

This study explores the current state of skill development and educational access for tribal youth in Telangana, identifies key bottlenecks, and evaluates the impact of policy interventions. It seeks to understand how education and vocational training can serve as transformative tools for socio-economic upliftment, while also highlighting areas where further policy attention and grassroots engagement are needed.

Tribal communities in Telangana have historically faced barriers to education and skill development due to geographic isolation, poverty, and cultural marginalization. Since the formation of the state in 2014, several initiatives have aimed to bridge this gap, focusing on residential education, digital inclusion, and vocational training.

Socio-Economic Context of Tribal Communities in Telangana

Describe the major tribal groups in Telangana (e.g., Lambadas, Gonds, Chenchus). Highlight socio-economic indicators: poverty, literacy rates, employment patterns. Address geographic isolation, lack of infrastructure, and historical marginalization.

Skill Development Initiatives

The state and central programs (e.g., Telangana Tribal Welfare Residential Educational Institutions Society (TTWREIS), Skill India Mission, tribal youth hostels, and training centers). Vocational training, ITI centers, and skill development hubs in tribal regions.

Educational Access among Telangana Tribal Initiatives

1. **Gurukulam (TTWREIS) Expansion** – Residential schools and junior colleges exclusively for ST students.
2. **Skill Development Centers** – Partnered with NSDC, TASK, and Ministry of Tribal Affairs.
3. **Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS)** – Supported by the Government of India in tribal-dominated areas.
4. **Vocational Training Centers (VTCs)** – ITI and skill-based training programs for tribal youth.
5. **Digital Education & T-SAT Platform** – Digital classes and satellite education during and post-COVID-19.
6. **Post-Matric & Pre-Matric Scholarships** – Financial support to increase retention in higher education.

Year-wise Progress Table. 1 (2014–2024)

Year	Gurukulam ST Schools/Colleges	ST Student Enrollment (approx.)	Skill Training (ST Youths Trained)	Key Milestones
2014	135 TTWREIS institutions	45,000	~3,000	Formation of Telangana; Gurukulam restructured
2015	145	48,500	~4,000	Launch of new TTWREIS colleges
2016	160	52,000	~6,000	First Skill Development Centre in tribal areas
2017	175	55,000	~8,000	TASK and TTWREIS partnership for IT training
2018	190	60,000	~9,000	EMRS expansion begins
2019	200	63,000	~10,500	Skill training through ITIs in tribal belts
2020	210	65,000	~7,500	COVID-19: Digital education via T-SAT
2021	220	68,000	~11,000	Hybrid learning and digital access initiatives
2022	235	70,500	~12,000	Focus on soft skills and entrepreneurship
2023	245	73,000	~13,500	Girls' education emphasis, new hostels
2024	250+	75,000+	~15,000	AI, Coding, and Cybersecurity programs started

https://ecostat.telangana.gov.in/PDF/PUBLICATIONS/Socio_Economic_Outlook_2024.pdf

Outcomes and Gaps

Positive Outcomes:

- Substantial increase in tribal student enrolment and retention.
- Improved digital access and vocational skills.
- Gender parity improving due to girls' residential schools.

Gaps to Address:

- Limited tribal representation in higher education and industry jobs.
- Inadequate infrastructure in remote tribal belts.
- Need for localized and culturally relevant training modules.

Challenges**1. Geographical Isolation**

Many tribal communities reside in remote, forested, or hilly areas (e.g., Adilabad, Khammam, and Bhadrachalam districts), making physical access to schools, training centers, and digital infrastructure difficult.

2. Low Literacy and Educational Attainment

Tribal youth often come from families with low literacy levels, leading to limited parental support and motivation for higher education. High dropout rates, especially among tribal girls, remain a critical issue in secondary and higher education.

3. Inadequate Infrastructure

Many Ashram schools and residential welfare schools lack basic amenities like libraries, laboratories, internet connectivity, and vocational labs.

Poor hostel and transport facilities discourage enrollment and retention.

4. Limited Awareness of Skill Programs

Lack of awareness and outreach regarding government schemes like PMKVY (Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana), DDUGKY (Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana), and Telangana's Tribal Welfare Skill Development Programs.

5. Mismatch between Training and Local Employment

Skill development programs often don't align with the local economy, resources, or tribal culture. Trained youth may not find employment in their native regions, leading to underemployment or migration.

6. Language and Cultural Barriers

Teaching in non-tribal languages hinders comprehension and learning outcomes.

Skill development courses often do not incorporate tribal languages, culture, or context.

7. Digital Divide

Limited internet connectivity and access to digital devices reduce the effectiveness of online learning and e-skill training. Lack of digital literacy among tribal youth further widens the gap.

8. Gender Disparities

Tribal girls face multiple challenges: early marriage, domestic responsibilities, and safety concerns while traveling to schools or training centers. Cultural norms may not support girls' participation in technical or vocational training.

9. Institutional Gaps

Coordination issues among the Tribal Welfare Department, Skill Development Corporation, and local administration reduce program impact. Monitoring and evaluation of outcomes remains weak.

Recommendations

Culturally sensitive curriculum and local language inclusion. Strengthen digital and physical infrastructure in tribal areas. Public-private partnerships to link training with employment. Scholarships and mentorship programs for tribal youth. Community engagement and sensitization campaigns.

Conclusion

Empowering Telangana's tribal youth through equitable educational access and skill development is essential for bridging the social and economic divide that has historically marginalized these communities. While several initiatives by the state and central governments have shown promise, persistent challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, high dropout rates, and a mismatch between skills imparted and market demands continue to hinder progress.

Addressing these gaps requires a holistic approach—one that combines culturally responsive education, community participation, targeted skill training, and meaningful employment opportunities. By investing in the potential of tribal youth, Telangana not only upholds the values of social justice and inclusion but also builds a more resilient and equitable future for all.

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Adoption of Competency-Based Education in English Teaching: Perspectives of Trained Graduate Teachers in Delhi Government Schools

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Abstract

This research investigates the adoption of Competency-Based Education (CBE) for teaching of English from the perspectives of trained graduate teachers in the Directorate of Education, Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi. The study examines educators' views, experiences, and challenges in adopting CBE frameworks for teaching of English. Mixed-methods approach was employed for data collection. The results show positive attitudes towards CBE, highlighting its potential to enhance language learning outcomes, foster critical literacy skills, and promote individualised instruction in English. However, teachers also reported challenges including limited resources, inadequate training in CBE methodologies for language teaching, and complexities in assessing communicative competence. The study highlights the necessity for trainings and distribution of resources to ensure effective CBE implementation in English language education. The insights provided can be useful for policymakers and educational leaders in refining strategies for successful CBE integration in English language classrooms.

Keywords: Competency-Based Education, trained graduate teachers, implementation, perspectives, professional development

Introduction

In recent years, educational systems worldwide have been moving steadily toward Competency-Based Education (CBE) to better prepare learners for the demands of the 21st century. Unlike traditional education models that emphasise rote memorisation and uniform testing, CBE centres on the mastery of clearly defined competencies such as skills, knowledge, and attitudes that students must demonstrate before progressing. This approach enables learners to move at their own pace, ensuring deep understanding rather than surface-level achievement.

When applied to the teaching of English, CBE becomes especially relevant. Language learning naturally demands the development of multiple, interrelated competencies—linguistic, pragmatic, sociolinguistic, and strategic. In this sense, CBE aligns seamlessly with the communicative and functional goals of language education. The approach also echoes the vision articulated in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which calls for holistic, flexible, and skills-based learning. NEP 2020 underscores the importance of multilingualism, effective communication, and the ability to use English meaningfully across academic and real-world contexts.

Teaching English within a CBE framework requires more than a change in lesson plans, it represents a paradigm shift in both curriculum design and classroom practice. Trained Graduate Teachers (TGTs) of English are central to this transformation. They interpret policy, adapt curriculum, and implement CBE principles in their classrooms. Their understanding and attitudes directly shape how successfully these reforms translate into improved student learning outcomes.

English language teaching has long been dominated by grammar-translation methods and discrete skill instruction. CBE challenges this tradition by emphasising communicative competence, critical literacy, and global citizenship through language. Teachers must now

design integrated learning experiences that connect listening, speaking, reading, and writing, while fostering students' ability to use English for authentic communication, creative expression, and critical reflection.

However, despite the policy push and pedagogical promise of CBE, many English teachers still grapple with its practical implementation. Limited resources for communicative teaching, inadequate professional training in CBE methodologies, and uncertainty around assessing communicative competence often hinder progress. These gaps underscore the need for a deeper understanding of teachers' perceptions, experiences, and challenges as they navigate this transition.

Theoretically, CBE resonates with several well-established educational frameworks. Constructivist Learning Theory, as advanced by Piaget and Vygotsky, views learning as an active, socially mediated process, one where learners construct knowledge through meaningful interaction and reflection. CBE, in a similar vein, prioritises active learning and real-world application over passive content absorption. Outcome-Based Education (Spady, 1994) also informs CBE by emphasising clarity of intended learning outcomes and backward curriculum design. The 21st Century Skills Framework, proposed by the Partnership for 21st Century Learning (P21), further reinforces the integration of competencies such as critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and communication—core goals of CBE-oriented English education. Moreover, Personalized Learning Models (Pane et al., 2015) highlight the need for learner-centred approaches where instruction adapts to students' strengths, needs, and progress a principle that lies at the heart of competency-based progression. Formative Assessment Theory (Black & Wiliam, 1998) adds another crucial dimension, advocating for continuous, feedback-driven evaluation that supports learning rather than merely measuring it. Together, these

frameworks offer a solid theoretical foundation for understanding how CBE can reshape English language teaching into a more responsive, inclusive, and outcome-oriented process.

In Delhi's government schools, where students often come from multilingual backgrounds and learn English as a second or third language, the integration of CBE also demands sensitivity to linguistic diversity. Teachers must balance the goal of English proficiency with respect for students' mother tongues, as envisioned in NEP 2020's emphasis on multilingual education.

The present study, therefore, seeks to explore how trained graduate teachers of English perceive, interpret, and implement Competency-Based Education in their classrooms. It aims to identify practical challenges, examine enabling factors, and gather insights that can inform professional development initiatives and policy planning.

Ultimately, teaching English through a CBE lens requires teachers to move from being content transmitters to facilitators of learning guides who help students apply language meaningfully and confidently. This research contributes to understanding that shift, with the broader goal of enhancing the quality and relevance of English language education within the Directorate of Education. The aspiration is clear: to help students build not just linguistic knowledge, but true communicative competence that empowers them in both academic and real-life contexts.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do Trained Graduate Teachers of English incorporate the principles of Competency-Based Education (CBE) into their language teaching practices?
2. How do English teachers perceive the alignment of their CBE strategies with the objectives of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, particularly regarding multilingual education and communicative competence?

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3. What is the frequency and nature of activities designed by English teachers to promote higher-order thinking skills such as critical literacy and analytical thinking through CBE?
 4. How effective do English teachers find CBE approaches in enhancing student engagement and motivation in language learning?
 5. What challenges related to resources and training do English teachers face in implementing Competency-Based Education effectively in language instruction?
 6. How frequently do English teachers integrate real-world applications and authentic communication tasks into their classroom learning as part of CBE practices?
 7. What level of institutional support (training, tools, and materials) do English teachers report receiving for successful CBE implementation in language education?
 8. How do English teachers perceive the role of CBE in fostering students' communicative competence, cultural awareness, and global citizenship skills through language learning?
 9. To what extent do English teachers promote interdisciplinary learning and cross-curricular connections through English language instruction aligned with CBE principles?

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the attitudes and perceptions of trained graduate teachers of English towards CBE in language education contexts.
- To identify the specific challenges faced by English teachers in implementing CBE within language instruction frameworks.
- To analyse the instructional and assessment strategies employed by English teachers for developing communicative competence through CBE.

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- To investigate how English teachers integrate the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) within CBE approaches.
 - To explore teachers' perspectives on assessing communicative competence and language proficiency within CBE frameworks.
 - To suggest measures that can facilitate the effective adoption of CBE in teaching of English contexts.
 - To examine the role of technology and digital resources in supporting CBE implementation for English language instruction.

Hypotheses

- There is a significant relationship between English educators' views of CBE and their effectiveness in implementing CBE strategies for language instruction in the classroom.
- Teachers with greater understanding of communicative language teaching principles demonstrate higher levels of CBE implementation in their English language classrooms.
- The availability of appropriate resources and training significantly influences the successful adoption of CBE in English language education.

Operational Definitions of Terms

Competency-Based Education (CBE): Education that focuses on mastery of specific competencies rather than time spent in class or rote memorisation.

Trained Graduate Teachers (English): Teachers who have completed a recognised graduate-level teacher education programme with specialisation in teaching of English and are employed under the Directorate of Education to teach English at the secondary level.

Implementation: The process by which trained graduate teachers of English apply CBE principles, communicative language teaching strategies, and competency-based assessments in their English language classroom practice.

Perceptions: The beliefs, attitudes, and opinions held by trained graduate teachers of English regarding the value, effectiveness, and challenges of CBE in language education contexts.

Communicative Competence: The ability to use English effectively for communication, encompassing linguistic and strategic competencies as defined by language acquisition theory.

Critical Literacy: The ability to analyse, evaluate, and create texts in English whilst understanding the social, cultural, and political contexts that influence language use and meaning-making.

Delimitation of the Study

- The current research is delimited to trained graduate teachers of English working in my mentee schools under the Directorate of Education, Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi.
- The research focuses specifically on teaching of English contexts and does not include teachers of other subjects, primary teachers, administrative staff, students, or schools outside the jurisdiction of the Directorate of Education.

Review of Related Literature

Competency-Based Education has emerged as a significant reform in contemporary language education, building upon established theories of second language acquisition and communicative language teaching. The approach emphasises the development of communicative competence as proposed by Hymes (1972) and later expanded by Canale and

Swain (1980), who identified four key components: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence.

CBE in language education is grounded in the principles of task-based language teaching and content and language integrated learning (CLIL), which prioritise meaningful communication over form-focused instruction (Ellis, 2018). The approach requires alignment among curriculum objectives, instructional methodologies, and assessment practices to ensure that learners develop authentic communicative abilities rather than merely demonstrating knowledge about language (Richards & Bohlke, 2023).

Implementing CBE in English language contexts involves developing competency frameworks that address the four language skills whilst integrating cultural awareness and critical thinking components. Successful implementation requires comprehensive teacher training in communicative language teaching methodologies, task-based instruction, and authentic assessment practices (Nunan, 2021).

Teachers must facilitate collaborative learning experiences and employ formative assessment strategies to monitor students' communicative development. The integration of real-world communication tasks, project-based learning, and technology-enhanced language learning is emphasised to validate students' mastery of communicative competencies (Brown & Lee, 2023; Lightbown & Spada, 2022).

Research indicates that language teachers generally appreciate CBE's potential to enhance student engagement and develop authentic communicative abilities. However, educators also encounter significant challenges including limited access to authentic materials, insufficient training in competency-based assessment for language skills, and difficulties in evaluating communicative competence objectively (Harmer, 2023).

English teachers often express the need for clearer guidelines regarding the assessment of speaking and listening skills, access to technology for creating authentic communication opportunities, and professional development in designing task-based learning experiences (Thornbury, 2022). The transition from traditional grammar-focused instruction to communicative approaches requires substantial pedagogical reorientation and ongoing support. Studies demonstrate that CBE can significantly improve students' communicative competence, motivation for language learning, and confidence in using English for real-world purposes. The personalised nature of CBE allows learners to progress according to their individual language learning needs whilst developing autonomy and self-directed learning strategies (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2023).

Assessment in CBE language learning environments emphasises performance-based evaluation through portfolios, presentations, collaborative projects, and authentic communication tasks rather than traditional discrete-point testing (O'Malley & Pierce, 2022). This approach provides more comprehensive evidence of students' communicative abilities and language proficiency development.

Despite growing research on CBE in language education, significant gaps remain regarding effective teacher preparation programmes, scalable assessment strategies for communicative competence, and the long-term impact of CBE on diverse language learners. Further empirical studies are needed to identify best practices for implementing CBE in multilingual contexts where English serves as a second or third language (Cummins, 2023).

The literature emphasises the need for context-specific research that considers the unique challenges of implementing CBE in government school settings where resources may be limited and class sizes large. Additionally, more investigation is required into how CBE can

effectively address the needs of learners from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (García & Wei, 2024).

Recent literature highlights the crucial role of digital technologies in supporting CBE implementation for language learning. Online platforms, multimedia resources, and communication tools can provide authentic contexts for language use whilst enabling personalised learning pathways (Chapelle & Sauro, 2023). However, the digital divide and varying levels of technological literacy among teachers and students present ongoing challenges that require systematic attention.

The literature underscores the promise of CBE in improving English language learning outcomes and preparing students for global communication. However, successful implementation depends on robust teacher support, adequate resources, culturally responsive pedagogies, and effective assessment practices that truly measure communicative competence rather than discrete language knowledge.

Methodology of the Study

Research Design

the current research employs a mixed-methods approach to systematically explore the perspectives, experiences, and challenges of trained graduate teachers of English regarding the adoption of Competency-Based Education within language teaching contexts in the Directorate of Education. The survey method is selected for capturing a broad range of teacher perceptions and practices related to CBE integration in English language classrooms, whilst allowing for both quantitative analysis and qualitative insights.

Population of the Study

The target population comprises all Trained Graduate Teachers of English working under the Directorate of Education, Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi, who are responsible for English language instruction at the secondary level across various government schools.

Sample of the Study

A convenient sampling technique is utilised to ensure representation from five mentee schools within the Directorate of Education. The sample includes Trained Graduate Teachers of English, selected to provide diverse insights into CBE implementation specifically within language teaching contexts.

The selection of mentee schools provides the additional advantage of established professional relationships, which may encourage more honest and detailed responses from participants regarding their challenges and successes with CBE implementation.

Participants

The study includes 143 trained graduate teachers of English from five schools under the Directorate of Education. Among the respondents, a majority represent girls' schools, with 90 teachers from this category. Co-educational schools account for 49 teachers, whilst only 4 teachers represent boys' schools. This distribution indicates that the findings predominantly reflect perspectives from girls' school environments, with limited representation from boys' schools, which may influence the generalisability of results to all-boys educational contexts.

The gender distribution reveals 121 female and 22 male respondents. This distribution is consistent with the general gender composition of English language teachers in government

schools in Delhi and reflects broader patterns in the teaching profession, particularly in language education.

Regarding teaching experience, the sample demonstrates diversity across career stages: 76 teachers possess between 0 and 10 years of experience, representing the largest segment and indicating a substantial proportion of early-career educators. Teachers with 11 to 20 years of experience number 46, whilst those with 21 to 30 years represent 15 participants. For 6 respondents, experience data was not specified. The sample consists of early to mid-career teachers, with fewer senior teachers, which may influence perspectives on educational innovation and change.

Tools and Techniques Used for Data Collection

Structured Questionnaire: The primary instrument is a comprehensive structured questionnaire specifically designed to collect data on English teachers' awareness, attitudes, and practices related to CBE in language education contexts.

Instrument Validation: The validity and reliability of the data collection tools are established through expert review by experienced English language educators and researchers, followed by pilot testing with a small group of teachers not included in the main study. This process ensures that the instrument effectively captures relevant aspects of CBE implementation in teaching of English contexts.

Procedure of Data Collection

Ethical Considerations: Prior to data collection, necessary ethical approvals are obtained, and informed consent is secured from all participants, ensuring voluntary participation and anonymity.

Administrative Permissions: Appropriate permissions are obtained from school principals.

Distribution and Collection: The questionnaire is distributed to selected English teachers through Principals via WhatsApp groups. Clear instructions are provided regarding the purpose of the study and expectations for participation.

Response Enhancement: Follow-up reminders are issued to maximise response rates whilst respecting participants' voluntary participation. Additional support is provided for teachers requiring clarification about questionnaire items.

Data Security: All collected data are handled with strict confidentiality protocols, ensuring participant anonymity and secure data storage throughout the research process.

Procedure of Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis: Data from structured questionnaire are analysed using descriptive statistics, to summarise patterns in teacher perceptions and practices regarding CBE implementation in teaching of English.

Qualitative Analysis: Open-ended responses are analysed from thematic analysis to identify recurring themes, challenges, and insights related to CBE implementation in English language education contexts.

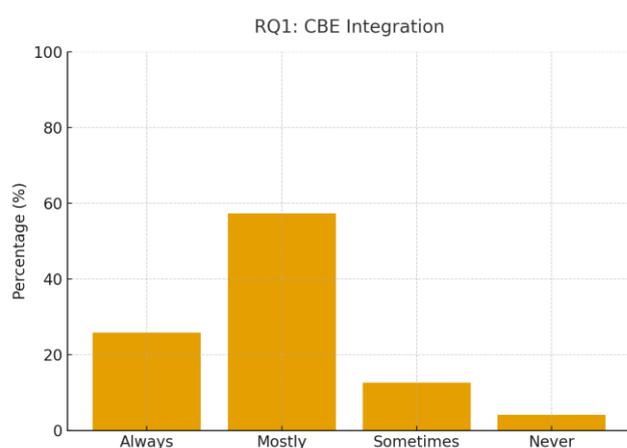
Integration of Findings: Quantitative and qualitative findings are integrated to provide an understanding of teachers' experiences with CBE implementation, allowing for triangulation of data and enhanced validity of conclusions.

Contextual Interpretation: All analyses are conducted with careful attention to the specific context of teaching of English within government schools, considering factors such as resource availability, student demographics, and institutional constraints.

Results and Discussion

Research Question 1: Integration of CBE Principles in teaching of English

Approximately 83% of English teachers frequently incorporate CBE principles into their language teaching practices, with 57.34% reporting they 'mostly' integrate these approaches and 25.87% stating 'always.' Meanwhile, 16.78% reported lower engagement levels, with 12.59% selecting 'sometimes' and 4.2% 'never.'

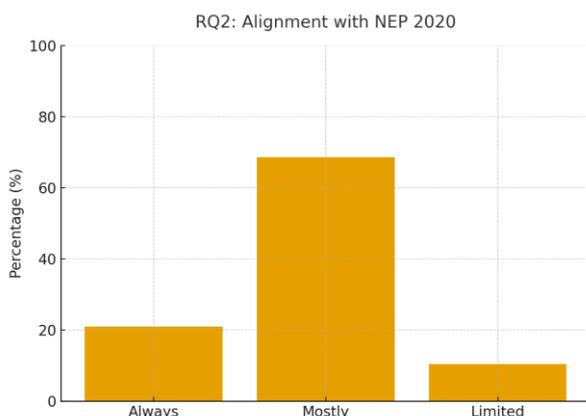


This strong positive trend toward CBE integration in teaching of English suggests that the majority of educators recognise the value of competency-based approaches for developing communicative competence. The high adoption rate indicates that teachers are moving beyond traditional grammar-translation methods towards more communicative and task-based approaches that emphasise real-world language use and practical communication skills.

However, the 16.78% of teachers reporting limited engagement suggests that some educators may require additional support, training, or resources to fully embrace CBE methodologies in their English language instruction. This finding highlights the need for training programmes that address specific challenges in implementing communicative language teaching within CBE frameworks.

Research Question 2: Alignment with NEP 2020 Objectives

Nearly 89.51% of English teachers perceive their CBE strategies as aligned with NEP 2020 goals, with 68.53% responding 'mostly' and 20.98% 'always.' Only 10.49% indicated limited



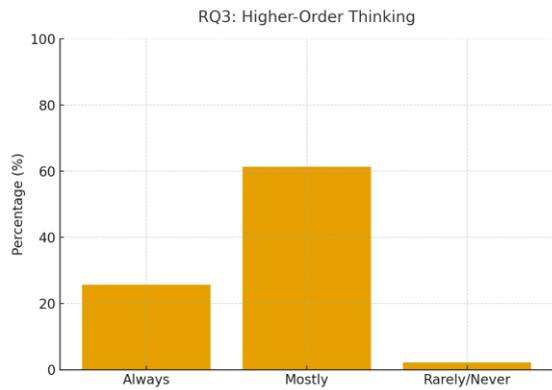
alignment.

This strong alignment perception is particularly significant for English language education, as NEP 2020 emphasises multilingual competence, communication skills, and global citizenship—all areas where English plays a crucial role. The high alignment percentage suggests that English teachers understand how their subject contributes to broader educational objectives including critical thinking, creativity, and cultural understanding.

The alignment with NEP 2020's goal of holistic education is evident in teachers' recognition that English language learning extends beyond linguistic competence to encompass cultural awareness, critical literacy, and global perspectives—all essential components of 21st-century education.

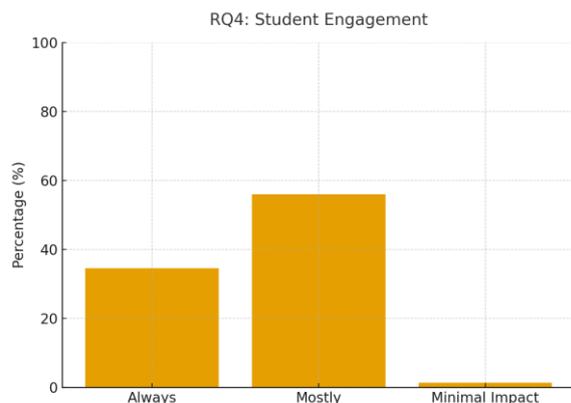
Research Question 3: Higher-Order Thinking Skills Development

A substantial majority (88.56%) of English teachers frequently engage in activities promoting higher-order thinking skills, with 61.36% selecting 'mostly' and 25.76% 'always.' Only 2.27% reported 'rarely' or 'never.'



This finding is particularly encouraging for English language education, as it indicates that teachers are moving beyond basic language skills instruction to incorporate critical literacy, analytical thinking, and creative expression. The emphasis on higher-order thinking aligns with contemporary language teaching approaches that view language learning as a tool for intellectual development rather than merely communication.

Activities promoting critical thinking in English might include literary analysis, argumentative writing, media literacy, creative writing, and cross-cultural communication tasks—all of which contribute to developing students' cognitive abilities whilst enhancing their English proficiency.



Research Question 4: Student Engagement and Motivation

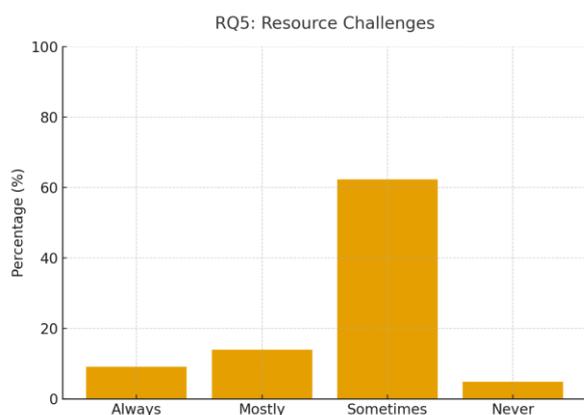
Approximately 91.61% of English teachers reported increased student engagement and motivation when using CBE approaches, with 56.03% responding 'mostly' and 34.56% 'always.' Only 1.4% reported minimal impact.

This finding is particularly significant for English language learning, where motivation plays a crucial role in successful acquisition. The high engagement levels suggest that CBE's emphasis on meaningful communication, real-world applications, and personalised learning resonates strongly with students.

The increased motivation may result from CBE's focus on authentic communication tasks, collaborative learning, and student choice in language learning activities—all factors known to enhance intrinsic motivation in language learning contexts.

Research Question 5: Resource and Training Challenges

Resource and training challenges remain prevalent, with 62.24% of English teachers experiencing them 'sometimes,' 14% 'mostly,' and 9.09% 'always.' Only 4.89% reported never facing these issues.



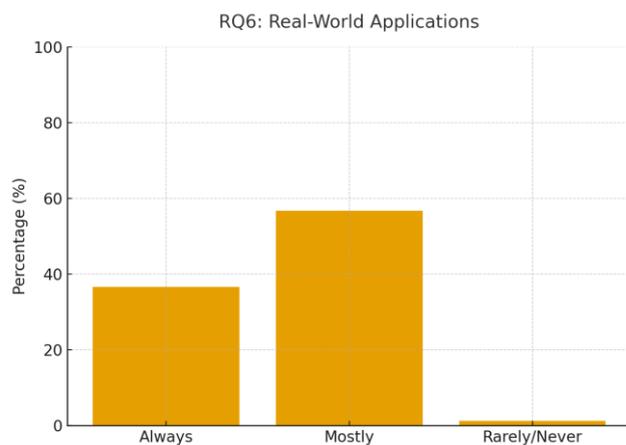
For teaching of English, these challenges may include limited access to authentic materials, inadequate technology for multimedia language learning, insufficient training in

communicative assessment methods, and lack of resources for creating real-world communication opportunities.

The prevalence of resource challenges highlights the need for targeted support in areas specific to English language education, including access to digital resources, authentic texts, multimedia materials, and professional development in contemporary language teaching methodologies.

Research Question 6: Real-World Applications Integration

Approximately 87.41% of English teachers frequently integrate real-world applications into their language instruction, with 56.71% responding 'mostly' and 36.57% 'always.' Only 1.22% reported 'rarely' or 'never.'

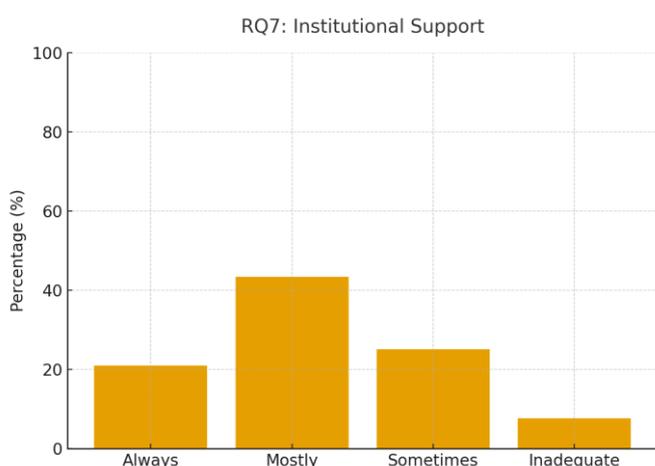


This strong emphasis on real-world applications is crucial for English language learning, as it helps students understand the value of proficiency in English for their future academic and professional endeavours. Real-world applications in English might include business communication, academic writing, digital literacy, media analysis, and cross-cultural communication projects.

The high integration rate suggests that English teachers recognise the importance of connecting classroom learning with authentic language use contexts, thereby enhancing the relevance and applicability of English language skills.

Research Question 7: Institutional Support

A majority (66.43%) of English teachers receive institutional support with 43.36% reporting 'mostly' and 20.98% 'always,' though 25.16% receive support only 'sometimes,' and 7.69% report inadequate support.

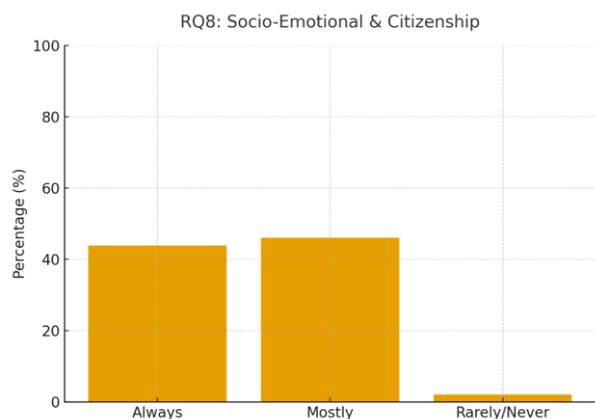


The variable levels of institutional support suggest that whilst many teachers receive adequate backing for CBE implementation, there remains room for improvement in providing consistent, comprehensive support for English language educators. Support needs may include access to professional development, teaching materials, technology, and collaborative planning time.

Stronger institutional support could significantly enhance CBE implementation by providing teachers with the resources, training, and collaborative opportunities necessary for successful communicative language teaching.

Research Question 8: Social, Emotional, and Global Citizenship Skills

Around 89.51% of English teachers agree that CBE effectively supports the development of social, emotional, and global citizenship skills, with 46.04% responding 'mostly' and 43.89% 'always.' Only 2.1% reported 'rarely' or 'never.'

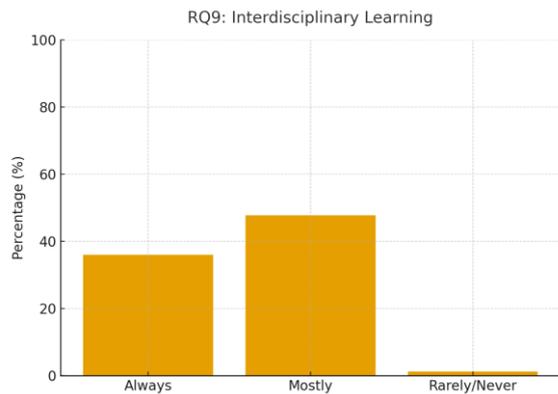


This finding is particularly relevant for English language education, as English often serves as a medium for developing global citizenship, cultural sensitivity, and cross-cultural communication skills. Through literature, media analysis, and communication projects, English classes can effectively contribute to students' social and emotional development whilst building language proficiency.

The recognition of English language learning's role in developing global citizenship skills aligns with NEP 2020's emphasis on creating responsible global citizens who can engage effectively in an interconnected world.

Research Question 9: Interdisciplinary Learning and Problem-Solving

About 90.55% of English teachers frequently promote interdisciplinary learning, with 47.7% responding 'mostly' and 35.97% 'always.' Only 1.24% reported 'rarely' or 'never.'



This strong adoption of interdisciplinary approaches reflects the natural connections between English language learning and other subject areas. Through content-based language instruction, literature study, research projects, and cross-curricular writing tasks, English teachers can effectively integrate knowledge from various disciplines whilst developing language skills.

The high percentage suggests that English teachers understand the value of using language as a vehicle for learning across the curriculum, thereby enhancing both language proficiency and content knowledge simultaneously.

Educational Implications

The findings of the current research highlight a transformative shift in teaching of English within the Directorate of Education through the adoption of Competency-Based Education (CBE). Teachers are increasingly moving away from traditional grammar-translation methods and embracing communicative, task-based approaches that prioritise authentic language use, critical thinking, real-world application, and interdisciplinary learning—key components of effective 21st-century language education. This shift aligns with contemporary second language acquisition theories and reflects a deeper focus on developing students’ communicative competence rather than mere linguistic knowledge. However, while the integration of CBE is evident, the study also reveals pressing needs for professional development, particularly in areas such as communicative assessment, use of technology in

language learning, authentic task design, differentiated instruction, global citizenship education, and media literacy. Curricular and assessment reforms are essential to support these pedagogical shifts, including the development of flexible pacing guides, performance-based rubrics, multimedia integration, collaborative learning structures, and portfolio-based assessments. At the resource and infrastructure level, systematic investment is needed to ensure access to authentic materials, digital tools, professional learning communities, collaborative planning time, and up-to-date teaching methodologies. Policy-level changes must offer systemic support for CBE, including reforms in examination systems, enhancements in pre-service teacher education, and a strong emphasis on multilingualism as envisioned by the NEP 2020. From a student perspective, the emphasis on meaningful communication and higher-order thinking under CBE leads to increased motivation, deeper engagement, and communicative competence preparing learners for participation in a globally connected world where English plays a central role. However, the study also underscores variability in institutional support, calling for stronger leadership, a culture of collaboration, and strategic distribution of resources in schools. Moving forward, the successful scaling and sustainability of CBE in English language education will require a unified and collaborative effort among teachers, school leaders, policymakers, curriculum designers, and the wider educational ecosystem. This transformation is not just a methodological change but a fundamental reimagining of language learning as a vehicle for intellectual growth, cultural understanding, and global readiness ensuring that English education contributes meaningfully to students' holistic development and lifelong success.

Conclusion

The current research affirms that Competency-Based Education (CBE) holds significant transformative potential for teaching English language within the Directorate of Education. The results show that many English teachers are already embracing CBE practices, leading to

increased student engagement, enhanced critical literacy, and the development of communicative competence.

Frequent integration of CBE principles marks a shift from traditional methods to more communicative learner-centred methods. This is particularly impactful in language education, where meaningful engagement with authentic texts and collaborative tasks is essential for developing language proficiency. Teachers' practices show strong alignment with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, contributing to broader outcomes such as critical thinking, cultural understanding, and global citizenship.

Despite this, the study highlights the need for systemic support to sustain CBE implementation. Teachers require ongoing professional development in communicative language teaching, access to authentic resources, and assessment frameworks that measure real communicative competence rather than isolated language skills. Addressing resource and training challenges is essential for enabling teachers to create meaningful, real-world communication opportunities in the classroom.

The implications extend to multiple stakeholders. Policymakers must provide comprehensive support structures, while school leaders should cultivate environments that support innovation and collaboration in English teaching. Teacher education programmes must also integrate CBE methodologies to prepare future educators for evolving classroom demands.

CBE appears to foster intrinsic motivation and student engagement—factors crucial for sustained language acquisition. Its emphasis on communication, critical thinking, and global readiness positions English learning as a holistic educational experience.

Moving forward, the continued success of CBE in English education depends on coordinated efforts among educators, administrators, policymakers, and institutions. Through a collaborative approach that ensures professional development, resource availability, and

assessment reform, English language education can meet the needs of 21st-century learners. The dedication already shown by teachers provides a strong foundation for further progress, ensuring that language learning becomes a powerful tool for intellectual growth and lifelong success.

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BOOK REVIEW

BOOK REVIEW

The Empire's Backyard: Colonial Modernity and Northeast India

Author: Kailash C Baral

Publisher: Routledge, London and New York, 2025, pp.258

Reviewed by Anand Mahanand

EFL University, Hyderabad

Empire's Backyard: Colonial Modernity and Northeast India, authored by Kailash C. Baral and published by Routledge (London and New York), is an ambitious and intellectually rigorous study that repositions Northeast India within broader conversations on colonial modernity. Its key strength lies in rejecting the portrayal of the region as a marginal “backyard” of the empire; instead, it depicts Northeast India as a dynamic and contested frontier shaped by encounters, negotiations, and transformative exchanges between colonial authority and indigenous worlds. Through a theoretically attuned yet historically grounded approach, the book offers a richly textured account of colonial power and indigenous agency. Though its wide archival canvas inevitably presents certain limitations, the study stands as a substantial contribution to colonial history, postcolonial theory, and the historiography of Northeast India.

One of the book's major achievements is its sustained challenge to reductive frontier narratives. Employing a postcolonial contrapuntal reading, Baral shows that modernity in the region was not simply imposed as part of a civilising mission but emerged through conflict, accommodation, and selective appropriation. By situating the regional within the wider landscape of colonial modernity in India, the book reveals modernity's uneven, entangled, and often contradictory character.

The chapter on missionary politics is particularly illuminating. By juxtaposing Portuguese, French, and British missionary engagements and tracing their intersections with colonial administration, Baral highlights the diversity of missionary strategies and the ideological impulses that shaped them. He demonstrates that missionary activity—far from being confined to spiritual uplift or education—was deeply enmeshed in the colonial civilising

mission, driven by paternalistic assumptions and closely aligned with colonial political, economic, and administrative imperatives. The analysis avoids both romanticisation and reductive critique of missionary activities, offering instead a balanced yet critical assessment.

One of the book's notable strengths is its sustained emphasis on indigenous agency. Baral portrays local communities not as passive subjects of imperial policy but as active negotiators, resisters, and participants in the colonial encounter. His analysis of development rhetoric—particularly in the contexts of tea plantations, forest regimes, and the exploitation of local labour—demonstrates how colonial narratives of progress concealed deep structures of resource extraction and dispossession. By examining these processes through both material and ideological frameworks, the study reveals the stark gap between colonial claims of development and lived realities on the ground.

The book further provides incisive insights into the formation of social, cultural, and political identities under colonial rule. Baral shows how administrative classifications, missionary interventions, and shifting power structures forged emergent collective identities whose legacies continue to shape the region's contemporary political and cultural landscape. Methodologically, the work sets itself apart through its deft integration of archival research with critical theory. While its theoretical density may challenge readers seeking a more straightforward historical narrative, this interdisciplinary framework substantially enriches the book's analytical depth, allowing it to speak meaningfully to broader debates in postcolonial and cultural theory.

Overall, *Empire's Backyard* emerges as a timely and compelling intervention in ongoing debates on colonial modernity in South Asia and the Northeast. Thought-provoking and conceptually robust, the book illuminates the historical and cultural specificities of Northeast India in ways that open up new pathways for understanding the region. It promises to resonate with scholars and students of South Asian history, postcolonial studies, cultural theory, and Northeast Indian studies, offering a substantive framework for continued reflection and critique.

BOOK REVIEW

Year of the Weeds by Siddhartha Sarma. Duckbill Books, 2018.

Reviewed by: **Anwasha Panda, Odisha, India**

Siddhartha Sarma's *Year of the Weeds* is a literary intervention in the discourse of environmental justice and postcolonial modernity. Set in the fictional village of Deogan at the Devi Hills in western Odisha's Bolangir district, the novel dramatizes the conflict between an Indigenous Gond community and the colluding forces of the state and mining corporations. Yet, it does not merely narrate a struggle for land. It probes deeper into the metaphysics of belonging, the violence of development, and the silencing of ecological wisdom.

At its heart stands Korok, also called "the boy with thin arms." Sarma builds him not as a symbol, but as a pulse who is alert, observant and rooted. Through him, the reader begins to see how the land is not an object to be owned or mapped but it is kin. Korok's gestures like tending of weeds, his devotion to the Devi Hills, his small acts of care, carry a kind of wisdom that runs counter to the state's language of "development" and "progress." That conflict is the novel's true battleground- between those who know the land by living it and those who know it only by measuring, renaming, and extracting it.

The state and the corporation enter Devi Hills speaking the tongue of authority, i.e. paperwork, surveys, reports etc. Words like "project" and "rehabilitation" arrive dressed as salvation. Yet each term conceals an act of dispossession. The villagers are told that the mining will bring prosperity, that the hills are merely resources waiting to be used. But for the Gonds, the hills are their ancestors. The soil holds their ancestors, their gods, their culture. To cut into it is to cut into their sense of being. The tension here is not only economic. It is also epistemic. The state's knowledge like the maps, the laws, the signatures, declares itself universal while the Gond knowledge of earth and spirit is dismissed as superstition. In this clash, Sarma lays bare the workings of epistemic oppression. In this work he highlights the silencing of one way of knowing by another that calls itself rational.

The bureaucracy in *Year of the Weeds* takes on a sacred tone of its own. The Collector's office is described by the villagers as the "holy of holies," a phrase that captures both awe and alienation. It is a shrine to power where the Gonds may enter only to be ignored or discriminated. Their petitions, written in an unfamiliar language, are swallowed by files and

stamps. The same structure that claims to protect them defines them as subalterns in their own land. The villagers' exclusion from decision-making is not an accident, rather it is the continuation of a colonial order that categorized them as primitive and incapable of self-governance.

The novel's realism, though rooted in the fictional Devi Hills, feels sharply true to the struggles of Odisha's tribal regions and environmental movements. The histories of rebellions from Gandhamardhan and Niyamgiri hills are turned into a fable of endurance. The struggle continues today as global conglomerates seek to mine bauxite from tribal land. Thus, this text performs an act of witnessing. The hills in this story carry a sense of timelessness. They have seen colonizers, officials, gods, and ghosts. Their resistance, too, seems older than the state. Sarma writes with an awareness that what is being destroyed is not just a forest but a system of meaning, an entire ecology of relationship between humans and the nonhuman.

Language, in this world, becomes a quiet tool of power. Government files and reports turn a living land into "plots" and "resources," as if it were an empty space waiting to be used. Once the land is reduced to data, the people tied to it are reduced too. The old Gond names, drawn from rivers and trees, begin to disappear from maps. Their songs, which once carried memory and belonging, find no place in the official language. The state, fluent in English and paperwork, cannot hear what does not fit its words. This slow loss is a softer kind of violence which hides behind the language of help.

The writing stays close to the texture of deprivation. There are no melodramas of poverty here. It portrays just dry fields, empty stomachs, and the fatigue of waiting. The drought in Bolangir becomes a double metaphor: the earth thirsts, and so does justice. The manipulation of data is a perfect image of how slow violence works, not through explosions or massacres, but through the patient cruelty of numbers. What remains invisible is denied existence.

Within this harsh landscape, the characters hold on to fragments of dignity. Majhi, the headman, represents moral steadiness, even as he stands powerless before the machinery of the state. Jadob, the educated villager, believes that knowledge might bridge the divide between the forest and the city. Yet his faith in bureaucracy falters as he realizes that reason itself has been captured by power. The friendship of Anchita, the DFO's daughter, and Korok opens a delicate space between two worlds- one taught to read the forest as data and the other as home. Through their interactions, Sarma suggests that solidarity requires unlearning as much as learning.

The image of the weed insistently threads through the narrative. On the surface, it belongs to Korok's daily work in the garden and his struggle against invasive growth. But the metaphor deepens as the story unfolds. The weeds stand for everything parasitic and persistent in society like corruption, greed, hierarchy etc. They thrive in neglected soil and feed on what others need to survive. Yet the novel also offers a paradoxical wisdom that not all weeds must be pulled at once. Some destroy others before they too are uprooted. Korok's understanding of this cycle becomes a metaphor for resistance itself. It teaches to be patient, strategic, aware of timing. Sarma transforms gardening into a political act, a lesson in how the oppressed endure.

The state, by contrast, operates like a monoculture. It seeks uniformity, obedience, and measurable outputs. The Collector, the Superintendent of Police, and the officer of the mining company- Ghosh form a trinity of control that sustains this order. Their strength lies not only in weapons or laws but in the power to define reality. When the villagers protest, they are branded as Maoists. Such label turns their defence of home into a crime. Sarma captures this inversion with quiet fury. In the postcolonial nation, the same rhetoric of "civilizing" and "developing" once used by colonizers returns in new clothes. The colonizer has changed but the grammar has not.

What makes *Year of the Weeds* remarkable is its restraint. Sarma does not romanticize tribal life or offer a sentimental picture of harmony with nature. He acknowledges the hardship, the hunger, the fractures within the community. Yet he writes from within their rhythm, letting their perspective guide the moral vision of the novel. His prose avoids spectacle. The power of the book lies in its stillness and the way a small act, a look, or a pause carries the weight of an entire history.

Beneath the political story runs a deeper meditation on how knowledge itself becomes a site of power. The Gond cosmology, where every tree and stone holds memory, defies the logic of ownership. It resists the modern impulse to categorize and possess. The mining company's assault on the hills, therefore, is not only an economic act but an epistemic one. It seeks to unmake a world by declaring it irrational. In this light, the novel reads as a quiet defence of plural ways of knowing and a reminder that wisdom is not limited to what can be written or proven.

Year of the Weeds leaves the reader with a kind of moral unease. It refuses to let us rest in empathy alone. The weeds in Korok's garden are not only his; they grow in the cracks of our own systems, our cities, our ways of seeing. This novel stands as a profound meditation on

survival, on the politics of land, and on the enduring wisdom of those who, though dismissed as marginal, hold within them the knowledge of how to live well on a damaged earth.