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LOKARATNA

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

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- To invite scholars to contribute research papers on any aspect of folklore, literature, linguistics, and language pedagogy in English. They should be based on the theory and research methodologies widely adopted in the areas concerned and empirical studies with substantial field work.
- 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.
- To publish book reviews, field work reports, descriptions of research projects, and announcements for seminars and workshops.
- To present interviews with eminent folklorists and scholars from India and abroad.

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FROM THE DESK OF THE EDITOR IN CHIEF



The contemporary world is characterised by unprecedented cultural mobility, linguistic diversity and technological interconnectedness. Yet globalisation has not erased differences; rather, it has made questions of identity, memory, representation, ecology, language and social justice increasingly significant. In this context, the present issue brings together studies from folklore, literature and language pedagogy that, despite their disciplinary differences, share a deeper intellectual concern: how communities preserve knowledge, negotiate identity and respond to changing relations between culture, society, nature and power.

The collection may be read through a common philosophical framework of plurality and situated knowledge. Contemporary and postmodern scholarship has challenged the assumption that knowledge can be represented through a single universal narrative. Attention has consequently shifted towards local histories, oral traditions, vernacular knowledge, marginalised experiences and multiple forms of cultural expression. The essays in this issue participate in this movement by examining cultural practices and narratives not as remnants of the past, but as living forms through which communities interpret their present.

The folklore studies demonstrate particularly well that traditional cultural expressions continue to possess contemporary relevance. Festivals, myths, rituals and material cultural practices are not merely objects of antiquarian interest. They embody collective memory, community identity and locally developed systems of meaning. A festival can function as a space where cultural identity is performed and renewed, while a seemingly ordinary material object can preserve layers of historical memory and social meaning. Such approaches encourage us to understand folklore as a dynamic cultural process rather than as a static inheritance.

The exploration of supernatural narratives adds another dimension to this understanding. Supernatural figures and stories can provide symbolic languages for expressing experiences of fear, violence, exclusion and resistance. They may therefore reveal dimensions of social reality that conventional historical or institutional narratives overlook. In particular, the use of supernatural imagination to negotiate gendered violence demonstrates that folklore can become a site of agency and resistance. The seemingly fantastic can thus illuminate very real structures of power.

The literary contributions extend these concerns from cultural memory to historical experience and ethical reflection. Narratives concerning partition and displacement demonstrate how political events continue to inhabit bodies, memories and identities long after the formal event has ended. The intersection of gender, disability and historical trauma reminds us that history is experienced differently by different bodies and communities. Literature becomes particularly valuable here because it can recover intimate and marginal experiences that official histories may leave fragmented or invisible.

Historical travel narratives raise a related question concerning the politics of representation. Accounts produced by European travellers provide valuable evidence for reconstructing the social and cultural life of early modern Odisha, but they must also be examined in relation to the cultural assumptions of the observers who produced them. Representation is never completely neutral: the act of describing another society is shaped by the observer's own categories of knowledge. Critical engagement with such sources therefore requires both historical recovery and awareness of the power relations embedded in representation.

The collection's engagement with ecological narratives moves the discussion from human history to the relationship between human communities and the more-than-human world. Vernacular literature often preserves environmental knowledge developed through sustained interaction with particular landscapes. In such narratives, nature is not simply a passive setting for human action; landscapes, animals and other elements of the environment may possess narrative agency. This perspective resonates strongly with contemporary ecocriticism and ecological humanities, particularly at a time when climate change and environmental degradation demand alternative ways of thinking about human–nature relationships.

The ethical examination of war provides another important dimension. Conventional histories frequently define victory through military success, territorial control or political dominance. Literature can question such definitions by drawing attention to the moral and human consequences of violence. The relationship between duty, righteousness, responsibility and victory remains relevant in a world still marked by war and political conflict. Literary interpretation therefore becomes an ethical exercise: it asks not only who wins, but also what is lost and at what human cost.

The movement from folklore and literature to language pedagogy is therefore not abrupt. Language itself is a primary medium through which memory, identity and knowledge are created and transmitted. Contemporary linguistic landscapes reveal the coexistence of multiple languages and scripts in public spaces, while multilingual classrooms demonstrate that learners bring diverse linguistic resources into educational settings. These realities challenge older models that treat languages as isolated and hierarchically ordered systems.

The concept of translanguaging offers a particularly productive way of understanding multilingual education. Instead of viewing learners' different languages as separate compartments, it recognises their complete linguistic repertoire as a resource for meaning-making and learning. This perspective has important implications for contemporary curriculum and pedagogy, especially in multilingual societies such as India. The recognition of linguistic diversity needs to move beyond

symbolic acknowledgement towards classroom practices, teacher preparation, learning materials and assessment that genuinely accommodate multilingual learners.

The three areas represented in this issue—folklore, literature and language—therefore converge around a common question: how can diverse forms of human experience and knowledge be recognised without reducing them to a single dominant framework? Folklore preserves community memory; literature interprets historical, ecological and ethical experience; and language enables these experiences to be communicated, negotiated and transmitted across generations.

This question is particularly urgent in the present multicultural and multilingual world. Migration, digital communication and social mobility have produced increasingly complex cultural identities. Individuals and communities frequently inhabit more than one linguistic or cultural world. Education, cultural institutions and scholarship must therefore move beyond models based on uniformity and recognise diversity as a constitutive feature of contemporary life.

Such an approach also has significance for the continuing project of decolonising knowledge. Decolonisation does not simply mean replacing one canon with another. It involves widening the field of knowledge so that oral traditions, local histories, vernacular literatures, indigenous and community knowledge, marginalised bodies and multilingual practices can participate meaningfully in intellectual discourse. The studies in this issue contribute to that broader endeavour by placing regional and marginal experiences within larger theoretical conversations.

The significance of the present collection consequently lies not merely in the individual subjects it examines but in the conversations it makes possible among them. A local festival can be connected to questions of identity; a supernatural narrative to resistance; a partition narrative to embodied memory; a historical account to the politics of representation; an ecological story to environmental ethics; a war narrative to moral responsibility; and multilingual pedagogy to the democratic recognition of linguistic difference.

The issue thus reflects an important direction in contemporary humanities and social-science research: to understand knowledge as situated, plural and relational. Such scholarship does not reject universal questions; rather, it approaches them through the diverse experiences of particular communities, languages, landscapes and histories.

We express our sincere appreciation to the Editorial Board for its sustained intellectual and organisational efforts in bringing this issue together. The preparation of a scholarly journal requires careful selection, critical engagement, coordination and commitment, and the present collection reflects that collective endeavour. We are equally grateful to all the contributing scholars whose research has enriched the dialogue across folklore, literature and language studies.

At a time when cultural homogenisation exists alongside renewed assertions of identity, and when multilingualism is both a social reality and an educational challenge, the humanities have an important role to play. They can help us listen to diverse voices, interrogate inherited representations, recover neglected memories and imagine more inclusive forms of knowledge.

The present issue, in this sense, is an invitation to view cultural and linguistic diversity not as an obstacle to intellectual unity but as a foundation for deeper understanding. Its central message may be expressed simply: human knowledge becomes richer when multiple memories, languages, experiences and ways of seeing are allowed to enter into dialogue.

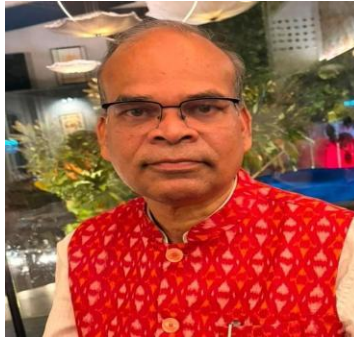
In this volume we have made a humble addition of the proceedings of the “Integrating History & Culture with Pedagogy ”Interdisciplinary Approaches in Education, Archeology, History & Culture :Seminar Proceedings of a Two-Day National Seminar held in 27th & 28th December) organized By- PG Dept. of History, Education & Department of Teacher Education (B.Ed.)

We would like to place on record our sincere gratitude to the Principal of **Panchayat College, Bargarh**, for his generous and voluntary collaboration with the Folklore Foundation in facilitating the publication of the proceedings of the seminar in the current volume of *Lokaratna*. The spirit of this collaboration is closely aligned with the larger intellectual purpose of the present issue: to recognise diverse forms of knowledge, preserve cultural memories, foreground local and marginal voices, and create meaningful dialogue across folklore, literature, language and pedagogy. By supporting the publication of these scholarly contributions for a wider readership, the Principal has helped extend this dialogue beyond the seminar itself and has enabled diverse cultural and intellectual perspectives to participate in contemporary academic discourse. We deeply appreciate his humility, academic goodwill and commitment to the dissemination of knowledge. His contribution, though simple and generous in spirit, will help connect these valuable reflections with researchers, teachers, students and readers interested in the plurality of human experience and knowledge.

Thanks to Prof Anand Mahanand, who has brought this collaboration with the Principal, Panchayat College, Bargarh which signifies the intensity of knowledge participation with Folklore Foundation and disseminates the knowledge of historical consciousness with adding values to folklore, language, ethnic studies and literature.

Mahendra Kumar Mishra

Editorial



Folk Memory and Performing Myths

Folk memory facilitates us to look at myths with interest and demonstrate them through performances. Festivals and rituals provide us platforms for such celebrations and performances. We witness storytelling, natak, songs and dance, and many different forms of enactment commemorating the events. It depends on the scale at which they are given space and how we celebrate them. If they are open to the public, they take a grand shape, like the world-famous Dhanu Jatra of Bargarh, Odisha. If they remain a private activity, they have no access to the public and receive no popularity.

The Dhanu Jatra of Bargarh is one such festival which is open to all, and the whole region participates in it. Because it is open to all, it receives a grand public response. Even people without visiting the spot know what episode is being enacted while ploughing their fields some 60 to 70 kilometres away. The open-air theatre is performed in the town of Bargarh, but all people feel that they are a part of it.

This volume of Lokaratna is based on folk performance. Specifically, it is devoted to Dhanu Jatra. The seminar proceedings section gives a glimpse of it. The Folklore section of this volume begins with articles dealing with folk performance.

Dr Suman Bantawa's article, "Sakela: A Festival and Myth of Nepali Culture", gives an introduction to the Sakela festival celebrated by the Nepali Rai indigenous community. The author foregrounds how myths and Nepali culture are reflected in the rituals and celebrations of the festival.

In the second article, titled “The Brass Fish of Belaguntha, Bhanjanagar, Ganjam (Odisha): A Theoretical Exploration”, Dr Ranjan Kumar Nayak highlights the famous handicrafts of Belaguntha, Bhanjanagar, Ganjam, Odisha. The article titled “Weaponising Beauty, Reclaiming Bodies: Women’s Supernatural Narratives as Resistance against Gender-Based Violence in Chattogram Hill Tracts, Bangladesh”, by Rash-ha Muntaqaa, examines how women in Bangladesh use woman-centred folklore as marks of resistance against gender-based violence.

In the Literature section, too, we have interesting articles that deal with aspects of culture and society. Dr Ankita Bhowmick’s article, “Afterlives of Disabled Bodies of Bengal Partition: Gender, Disability, and the Biopolitics of Partition in Bengal Narratives”, explores issues of gender and disability in the context of the Partition of Bengal by studying narratives on the Partition of Bengal.

Debanjani Tripathy and Dr Laxman Kumar Sahoo, in their article “Reconstructing the Folk Life of Early Modern Odisha through European Travel Narratives”, study the travel narratives of European travellers who wrote about Odisha. In his article titled “Eco-Narrativity in the Stories of Vijaydan Detha: Desert Ecology, Extra-Human Agency, and Vernacular Environmental Knowledge”, Dr Devendra Rankawat surveys the works of the famous writer Vijaydan Detha and explores the themes of folklore, folk ecologies and their interface in his works.

Dr Pradip Kumar Panda’s article, “Dharma as the Yardstick of Victory in War in Dharamvir Bharati’s *Andha Yug*”, studies Dharamvir Bharati’s verse play and highlights the importance of Dharma in war as narrated by the writer.

The Language and Language Pedagogy section has only one article. Dr Sushanta Kumar Bardhan’s article, “The Space for Linguistic Landscape and Translanguaging in NCF-SE 2023”, stresses the creativity each individual has to develop in one’s academic journey.

This issue has two Book Reviews. The first Book Review is on a book titled *Connecting with the World: Essays on Language, Culture and Communication*, authored by Professor B. N. Patnaik. The reviewer is Dr Pramod Kumar Das. The second Book Review is on *Paradise of Coexistence* by Dr Binu P. M., and the reviewer is Dr Sandhya Ravisankar.

In the Seminar Proceedings section, we have included the proceedings of a seminar organised by Panchayat College, Bargarh, on Dhanu Jatra. The articles showcase different aspects of the culture and tradition of the popular festival of Dhanu Jatra of Bargarh.

We thank the contributors for making the issue rich and resourceful. We are sorry for the delay in bringing out this issue of Lokaratna. The delay is due to many unavoidable factors. However, we are happy that it is ready to see the light of day. We wish our readers a happy festival season!

Professor Anand Mahanand

Executive Editor

CALL FOR PAPERS

Lokaratna December 2026 Issue

Lokaratna invites original research articles for its **December 2026 issue**. The journal welcomes scholarly contributions in the areas of **Folklore, Literature, and Language Pedagogy and Linguistics**. The journal also accepts **book reviews**.

All submissions must be original, unpublished, and not under consideration for publication elsewhere.

Areas of Submission

Research articles are invited in the following three sections.

1. Folklore

This section welcomes research on folklore, folk traditions, oral narratives, folk literature, folk performance, folk beliefs, cultural practices, indigenous traditions, and related areas of study.

2. Literature

This section invites scholarly articles on literary texts, literary criticism, comparative literature, cultural studies, literary theory, and related areas of literary research.

3. Language Pedagogy and Linguistics

This section welcomes research on language teaching and learning, language pedagogy, applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, language acquisition, language assessment, multilingualism, and other related areas of linguistic study.

Book Reviews

Lokaratna also welcomes reviews of recently published scholarly books relevant to the areas covered by the journal. Book reviews should provide a critical and scholarly assessment of the book and should situate the work within its relevant field of study.

Submission Requirements

Research articles should be between **3,000 and 6,000 words** in length.

Each submission should include the following.

1. A suitable **title** of the article.
2. An **Abstract of 250 to 300 words**.
3. **Five keywords** following the abstract.
4. The abstract and keywords should be presented on a **separate page**.

5. The manuscript should follow the **APA 7th edition** style throughout.
6. Authors must use **APA 7th edition in-text citations** consistently. Every source cited in the text must have a corresponding entry in the reference list.
7. The **References** should appear on a separate page at the end of the article. Please use the heading “**References**”, and not “Works Cited” or “Bibliography”.
8. All entries in the reference list must follow **APA 7th edition reference conventions**. Authors should carefully check that the details in the in-text citations and reference list correspond accurately.
9. Please do not use footnotes. Where explanatory notes are necessary, they should be provided as **endnotes at the end of the article**.
10. Authors are requested to read previous volumes of *Lokaratna* and follow the journal’s established format and presentation style.
11. Every submission must be accompanied by a **plagiarism check certificate**.
12. Manuscripts should be submitted as a **Microsoft Word file**.
13. Book reviews should also follow the journal’s formatting requirements and use **APA 7th edition** for citations and references where applicable.

APA 7th Edition Citation Style

Authors are required to follow APA 7th edition for both **in-text citations and references**.

For example, a paraphrased citation should appear as:

Folklore reflects the cultural knowledge and values of a community (Dorson, 1972).

For a narrative citation:

Dorson (1972) argues that folklore provides important insights into cultural life.

For a direct quotation, the page number should be included:

“Folklore is a body of traditional belief, custom, and expression” (Dorson, 1972, p. 2).

The corresponding reference should be given as:

Dorson, R. M. (1972). *Folklore and folklife*. University of Chicago Press.

****Authors should ensure that all sources cited in the article are included in the References and that every reference listed has been cited in the article.**

Submission Deadline- **30 October 2026**

Submission Email

Please send the completed article as a **Microsoft Word file** to:

lokaratnaindia@gmail.com

A copy should be marked to:

Professor Anand Mahanand

Executive Editor, *Lokaratna*

anand@efluniversity.ac.in

Authors are requested to ensure that their manuscripts comply with all the submission requirements before submission.

We welcome original scholarly contributions in Folklore, Literature, Language Pedagogy and Linguistics, as well as critical book reviews for the December 2026 issue of *Lokaratna*.

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Integrating History & Culture with Pedagogy

(Interdisciplinary Approaches in Education, Archaeology, History & Culture)

I. FOLKLORE

Sakela: A Festival and Myth of Nepali Culture

Dr. Suman Bantawa

Assistant Professor, Department of Nepali, KCTC College, Raxaul

Introduction to Sakela

Sakela is an important festival celebrated with great joy and enthusiasm among the Kirati-origin Nepali Rai indigenous community. In the Bantawa language, *Sakela* refers to a ritual worship performed by the Kirati people in which they pray to God for strength, using a bow and arrow (*Sayatali*), a slingshot, drums and cymbals (*Ken*), and water (*Wa*). In other words, for the Kirati Rai people, it is a ritual of honoring their ancestors by displaying the ancestral weapon *Sayatali*, dancing to the rhythm of drums and cymbals, and offering *Solonwa* instead of water, seeking happiness, strength, and abundant harvests (Walakhamcha, 2040 B.S., p.10).

This festival is not celebrated only by the Rai community; people of the Sunuwar and Yakha communities also celebrate it with great enthusiasm. According to *Mundum*, the inexhaustible source text of Kirati religion and philosophy, this festival is traditionally celebrated twice a year. According to Bhakta Rai, in the Bantawa language of the multilingual Kirati Rai people, *Mun* means "human" and *Dum* means "speech" or "utterance" (Rai, 2020, p.2). Thus, *Mundum* can be understood as "the speech or narration of human beings."

Every ritual (auspicious or inauspicious) performed within the Rai community is based on the *Mundum*. All customs, traditions, and ceremonial practices followed by the Rai people are conducted according to this orally preserved scripture. The *Mundum* has been transmitted orally from generation to generation. Based on it, the year is divided into two six-month periods known as *Ubhauli* and *Udhauli*.

In fact, when the sun begins its northward movement (*Uttarayana*), the rainy season is about to begin on earth. This period is called *Ubhauli* in the *Mundum*. From the full moon of the month of Mangsir onward, temperatures gradually rise in the plains, and birds and fish begin migrating toward the Himalayan region. At this time, the Kirati Rai people begin preparations for the Ubhauli festival.

The migration of birds and fish from the plains to the Himalayan region is considered a sign that the time for the Ubhauli festival has arrived in the Kirati Rai community. From this period begins *Baisakh Shukla Purnima*, marking the onset of spring. Likewise, when the sun begins its southward movement (*Dakshinayana*), the winter season starts, which is known in the *Mundum* as *Udhauli*. With the onset of winter in the month of Mangsir, birds and fish leave the Himalayan region and return to the warmer plains.

The Sakela festival has always been closely associated with agriculture. Since the creation of humankind, human beings have been connected with agricultural activities. This Sakela festival, prevalent among the Kirati community, is in fact a surviving remnant of an ancient agrarian way of life that remains alive within the community even today. Sakela is celebrated in two phases: Ubhauli and Udhauli.

Sakela: Ubhauli

Ubhauli is called *Dhirinam* in the Rai language. Once this period begins, people start ploughing and preparing their fields for cultivation. During the rainy season, water becomes absolutely essential for the germination, flowering, and fruiting of crops and plants. Rivers and streams begin to flow abundantly, floods often occur, and natural calamities and disasters may take place. Keeping this season in mind, the Ubhauli festival is celebrated. The *Mangpa* (priest) of the Rai community (Rai, Interview, 2018) inaugurates the Ubhauli festival by singing *Risiva*:

Oko Ubhauli Dhirinam, Hitifungsa Bapfungsa

Baradyolafungsa Chamasi Fungsa

Hitifungsa Bapfungsa Chhiwapura Diwapura

Khakuasamam Dolyasi Chichinsepman Dolyasi

Meaning:

"Now all of us are preparing our fields and planting the crops necessary for the sustenance of humankind. May no insects or pests damage or consume these crops. May the grains, flowers, and plants that we have sown continue to bloom and bear fruit. May peace, prosperity, and harmony always prevail in human society."

Sakela: Udhauli, Rituals, and Mythology

Sakela: Udhauli

After the period of Ubhauli comes to an end, Udhauli begins, which is called Chhirinam. During this period, all the crops planted during the previous six months (the Ubhauli season) mature and become ready for consumption. In other words, this is the season of harvesting and gathering crops. Before storing the harvested grains in granaries or bringing them into the house for consumption, the Udhauli festival is celebrated, and the newly harvested grains and fruits are first offered to the Earth and the Sky (Henkhama–Ninamma), Sumnima–Paruhang, and the ancestors. This is because the Kirati Rai community believes that their crops have yielded abundantly only through the blessings of nature and their ancestors. Therefore, as an expression of gratitude to nature and their forefathers, they celebrate this festival with great joy and enthusiasm.

On this occasion, the Mangpa (priest) (Rai, Interview, 2018) inaugurates the Udhauli festival by reciting Risiva (sacred chants/mantras):

Chhiwasyola Diwasyola Pokhoricha Watamma

Chauko Nayacha Bakhelicha Jharafungsungsa

Keaas Ukulyokam Kea Pupua Khaminadyou

Meaning:

"Now we are ready to eat the newly harvested grain. We shall consume these grains according to the traditions established by our ancestors. May no fault or impurity be attached to us. May no one become ill by consuming this food."

Ritual Procedure of the Sakela Festival

During both Ubhauri and Udhauri, the Mangpa (priest) of the Kirati Rai community first constructs a communal sacred shrine (*Sakela Than*) for worship. The presence of a water source and a tree is considered essential while establishing this sacred site.

After the chief Mangpa performs the Sakela worship according to ritual procedures—worshipping the sacred stone that symbolizes ancestors and nature—each household conducts ancestor worship in their own homes. During this ritual, a Bijuwa (ritual specialist) or the eldest family member worships the family deity.

Once the rituals are completed, all members of the village—elders, youths, and children—gather together around the Sakela shrine. The descendants of the Kirati Rai people (*Kirawa Chhachi*) stand in a circular formation and perform their traditional dance carrying black and white Pami (yak-tail whisks), Siliken (drums), Chamukhi (cymbals), and leaves of Khurmi and Katus trees.

This ritual dance is called Sili.

Example Song

At the foothills of Chomolungma lies a Kirati village,

Let us play the drums and cymbals.

On the full moon day of Baisakh, Let

us go and dance the Sakela Sili. *E...*

ho... kurr... ha... ha...

Sili Dance

On this occasion, various agriculture-related Sili dances are performed.

1. Aptarung Sili (The Hunter's Dance)

Also known as the Hunter's Sili, this dance depicts an early stage of Kirati civilization when people discovered fire and worshipped the hunting deity. It portrays a period when people depended on hunting for survival and expresses the transmission of knowledge concerning the continuity of material culture.

2. Chasum Sili

This dance represents the beginning of agricultural life initiated by Hechchakuppa at the dawn of human civilization. It illustrates how humans adapted culturally to the environment in which they lived.

3. Dakthoppa Sili (Weaving Dance)

Also known as Siki Sili, this dance narrates how Tayama and Khiyama first invented weaving tools and techniques to produce clothing for covering the human body. The dance highlights how this invention not only protected humans from nature but also contributed significantly to the development of industries.

4. Tayama–Khiyama Sili

Tayama and Khiyama were sisters. Through this dance, values such as emotional sensitivity, mutual affection, and human cooperation are portrayed.

5. Narowa Sili

Food production is essential for sustaining human life. Therefore, the arrival of Narowa (Karyangkurung birds) is considered a signal that it is time to plough fields and sow crops. This dance also expresses aspirations for an egalitarian society free from discrimination and a harmonious cultural community based on human solidarity.

Origin of the Sakela Festival: Myth (A)

A natural question arises: When and how did the Kirati community begin celebrating Sakela by associating the periods of Uttarayana and Dakshinayana with Ubhauri and Udhauri?

Various myths regarding the origin of Sakela exist within the Kirati community. One such myth is presented below.

According to this myth, in ancient times there was a king in the Kirat kingdom named Budhohong (Būdhohong). In order to regain his lost kingdom, he had to worship Henkubung, the Kirati deity of power, and obtain divine strength.

During this worship ceremony, his eldest wife Siltangkupma was entrusted with teaching the Sili dance to all the guests who had gathered there. His younger wife Wasangkupma was assigned the responsibility of organizing the ritual arrangements, while his sister Soisoila was given the task of preparing an ornate crown (*Dolo*) decorated with orchids (*Amlaribung*), peacock feathers, and precious jewels for Budhohong.

One day, Budhohong was performing worship to Henkubung in his palace while singing the Kirati Mundum. At the same time, Siltangkupma was teaching the Sili dance to the assembled guests,

and Soisoila was raising the dance movements while carrying the decorated crown she had prepared for her elder brother.

Budhohong was deeply impressed by the beauty of the crown and asked:

“Soisoila, from which bird are these feathers taken?”

Soisoila replied:

“Father, they are the feathers of the Bhiringuma bird.”

After hearing her answer, Budhohong instructed his attendants to beat the drums and cymbals rhythmically to the sound of “Bhringu, Bhringu.” The attendants began to do so, and Siltangkupma danced accordingly.

Meanwhile, Soisoila lifted the crown from the ground and ceremonially moved it over Budhohong's horse, waist, chest, shoulders, and finally toward his head. However, at that very moment, she unexpectedly began menstruating. Thinking that continuing the ritual in such a state might bring misfortune to her elder brother, she suddenly fled into the forest.

As soon as she disappeared, the crown fell from Budhohong's head to the ground and instantly transformed into a Shaligram stone. Everyone present was astonished and ran into the forest searching for Soisoila.

It is said that Soisoila never returned from the forest.

After this event, following Budhohong's command, the Shaligram stone was accepted as a symbol of his sister Soisoila and came to be known as Sakewalung—a sacred stone representing the mother, sister, ancestors, the earth, and nature. From that time onward, the tradition of celebrating the Ubhauri and Udhauri festivals began.

Popular belief holds that because Soisoila disappeared forever, the Shaligram stone became her symbolic embodiment, and people began invoking her name during the Sili dance. Even today, Rai people repeatedly chant:

“Soisoila! Soisoila!”

during the performance.

Example Chant

Singing Risiva and Mundum according to our traditions,

Together with brothers, sisters, and friends,

We dance Sili to the rhythm of drums and cymbals.

Soisoila, O Soisoila... Ho... Hurr... Ha... Ha...

Sakela: Myth (B), Myth (C), Sili Dance, and the Development of Kirati

Civilization Myth (B)

According to Myth (B), before marrying Sumnima, Paruhang lived in heaven. One day, Paruhang saw the beautiful Sumnima on earth and became attracted to her. He crafted a beautiful comb and sent it to her, intending to win her affection through his artistic skill. As a result, Sumnima and Paruhang were married.

After their marriage, they had four children. Later, Paruhang left Sumnima and the children in a hut on the banks of the Dudhkoshi River and went away for a long time without returning.

One day, while searching for food for her children, Sumnima noticed a beautiful root growing on a rock. She cut a small portion of it and tasted it. Immediately, she felt a great sense of happiness and strength arising within herself. Amazed by its power, she brought the root home and made an amulet from it.

Whoever looked at this amulet would involuntarily begin revealing the truth about their life.

One day, Paruhang suddenly returned home. Realizing that Sumnima was angry with him, he tried to appease her. After some time, Sumnima gave him the amulet she had made. As soon as Paruhang touched it, he became joyful and began to narrate everything in detail. He revealed that during his long absence he had been meditating in the lap of Sagarmatha (Chomolungma/Mount Everest) and circling both heaven and earth.

He also vowed that he would never again leave Sumnima alone. Hearing these words, Sumnima was filled with joy and began to dance. According to popular belief, that dance later became the traditional Sili dance of the Kirati community.

Myth (C)

According to Myth (C), one day Hetchhakuppa hunted a pigeon and brought it home. While cutting the bird, he discovered some grains inside its stomach. He threw those grains onto the ground and ate only the meat with his family.

After some time, the grains sprouted and gradually produced ears of grain. The grain was finger millet (Kodo), known as Sampicha in the Rai language. However, after eating it, all the family members fell ill.

Hetchhakuppa came to know from his wife Rinakha that this happened because the grain had not first been offered to the ancestors.

After this realization, Hetchhakuppa sat before the Suptulung (ancestral hearth/shrine) and invoked his ancestors in order to offer them the grain. As soon as he began doing so, his body started trembling, and he instructed Rinakha to perform Sili.

At that moment, Rinakha performed Chasum Sili, which depicts all agricultural activities through dance and enactment.

After performing Chasum Sili, they resumed agricultural life. From then onward, whenever crops ripened in their fields, they gathered ears of millet, sacrificed a chicken, and worshipped Sumnima and Paruhang, praying for continued agricultural abundance.

Thus, according to this belief, the Kirati people established the tradition of celebrating Sakela twice a year—once during the sowing season (Ubhauli) and once during the harvesting season (Udhauli).

Sakela as a Unique Festival

Sakela is a unique festival. The dance performed during this festival is an expressive and theatrical dance, known in the Rai language as Sili. It is a collective dance that combines song, dance, and dramatic enactment.

People of all age groups can participate. However, two figures play a central role:

- Silimangpa (male dance leader and guru)
- Silimangma (female dance leader and guru-mother)

Who are Silimangpa and Silimangma?

Various forms of Sili dances are performed during Sakela, such as:

- Chasum Sili
- Bhura Sili
- and many others.

Silimangpa is the chief male instructor and director who leads these Sili performances. Male dancers perform under his guidance.

Similarly, female participants perform under the direction of Silimangma, their female instructor and guide.

Thus, Sili is a collective dramatic dance directed by Silimangpa (male guru) and Silimangma (female guru).

The dance heavily relies upon:

- Black and white Pami (fly-whisks made from yak tails)
- Drums
- Cymbals

All dancers synchronize the movements of their feet and bodies to the rhythm created by these instruments.

Characteristics of Sakela

8.2 Development of Civilization

Civilization refers to a stage in human society where social organization, institutions, social structures, and economic relations have reached a high degree of complexity and are accompanied by political, administrative, and legal systems, as well as developed scientific, technological, artistic, and cultural knowledge.

Major civilizations of the world include:

- Sumerian
- Egyptian
- Assyrian
- Hittite
- Mitanni
- Semitic Jewish
- Ancient Chinese

- Indus Valley Civilization

These civilizations became the sources from which languages, cultures, customs, religions, scripts, and both tangible and intangible cultural traditions developed.

The Bantawa Rai community, the subject of this study, is one of Nepal's many ethnic communities and belongs to the larger Kirati Rai group. It is one of the principal linguistic communities that believes in and preserves Kirati civilization.

The development of this society and its civilization is vividly portrayed through the performative art of Sakela Sili.

Among the various Sili dances discussed earlier:

- Hunter's Sili (Aptarung Sili)
- Chasum/Chari Sili
- Siki Sili

all explain different stages of Kirati civilization.

Sakela and the Evolutionary Theory of Culture

According to the evolutionary anthropologist E. B. Tylor, the earliest stage of human society and culture was the stage of savagery.

During this period:

- People lived collectively.
- They were nomadic.
- Hunting and gathering were the primary means of subsistence.
- People caught fish from rivers.
- Fire began to be used.

- Symbolic language and intellectual thought were limited.
- There was strong belief in natural forces.

For example, Sili performances begin with Faglewa (Preparatory Sili) and then gradually depict:

- Catching fish
- Setting traps
- Cutting bamboo
- Making bows and arrows
- Going into forests for hunting
- Hunting pigeons
- Making fire by striking stones
- Cutting meat
- Cooking food
- Eating meat
- Washing hands
- Resting
- Moving the belly after eating
- Sleeping

These activities symbolize the earliest primitive stage of human existence.

Chasum (Chari) Sili and the Agricultural Age

The Chasum or Chari Sili performed by the Bantawa Rai community represents the Agricultural Age.

In the Bantawa language:

- Chari or Chasum means:
 - crops
 - agriculture
 - farming

According to Tylor, the next stage of cultural development is the Barbarism Stage.

This period was characterized by:

- Organized social life
- Security and warfare
- Permanent settlements
- Pottery making (ceramics)
- Animal husbandry
- Agriculture
- The use of iron tools (Tylor, 1830)

For example, Chasum Sili begins with Faglewa (Preparatory Sili) and then enacts:

- Clearing fields
- Removing grasses
- Preparing farmlands
- Digging irrigation canals
- Bringing water
- Digging barren land
- Constructing terraces
- Mixing mud with the feet
- Building field embankments

- Plastering embankments
- Transplanting seedlings
- Watering crops
- Weeding rice fields
- Harvesting rice
- Serving cooked rice
- Distributing food (as an act of service)
- Eating together
- Resting

The cultural materials used in these performances—such as the plough, hoe, spade, sickle, oxen, carts, mortar, and grinding stone—represent an agricultural society.

From the perspective of social evolution, Kirati society is shown to have progressed from a hunter-gatherer society to a pastoral society, and eventually to an agricultural civilization. These performative art forms indicate that, as animal husbandry alone became insufficient for sustaining life, the Kirati people gradually entered the age of agriculture.

Siki (Dakhoppa) Sili, Nature Worship, Cultural Ecology, and Reverence for the Earth

Siki (Dakhoppa) Sili and the Industrial Age

Siki (Dakhoppa) Sili represents the Industrial Age in the development of human civilization.

According to narratives prevalent in the Rai community, its origin is associated with Tayama (Tangwama), Khiyama (Khivama), and their son Hetchhakuppa (also known as Khokchilipa).

Since the Rai people are multilingual, the same individuals are known by different names.

This Sili begins with clearing and burning forest land (slash-and-burn cultivation) and ends with stitching and wearing clothes.

The sequence of activities includes:

- Faglewa (Preparatory Sili)
- Clearing burnt forest land
- Removing grasses and shrubs
- Burning the vegetation
- Sowing cotton seeds
- Weeding cotton fields
- Harvesting cotton
- Drying cotton
- Separating cotton fibers
- Removing cotton seeds
- Preparing cotton wool
- Cutting cotton on a spinning board
- Rolling thread into balls
- Installing the weaving apparatus (Dakthoppa)
- Making yarn
- Setting up the loom
- Inserting and tightening the *Wayangchung*
- Raising the loom
- Passing threads through the loom
- Collecting cords
- Measuring cloth against the body
- Cutting cloth

- Sewing garments
- Finally wearing a blouse or garment

Traditionally performed during Sakela, this Sili represents the transition from primitive life to an industrial stage within Kirati civilization. Through performative art, it depicts the emergence of textile production and early industrial activities.

8.3 Nature Worship and Ancestor Worship in Sakela Sili

The Bantawa Rai community bases its philosophy of life on the Mundum, which guides their everyday existence. Mundum is a repository of philosophy, history, and indigenous knowledge. History, in this context, is understood as the record of events from the evolution of human ancestors to the present day.

Mundum describes:

- The creation of the sky, earth, plants, and animals.
- The branching and spread of human lineages.
- The migration history of the Bantawa Rai community.
- The hardships and struggles they endured.
- Social transformations over time.
- The establishment of clan deities.
- Ritual procedures and ceremonies.

Mundum narratives describe ancestors traversing hills, mountains, and rivers in search of suitable places to live. They encountered animals and other communities, interacted with them, and gradually developed various forms of civilization before settling in their present locations. These

settlements were marked by the construction of historical and archaeological sites, forts, and territorial divisions (*Yak, Gadhi, Thum*).

Therefore, Mundum itself is history.

Alongside Sakela culture, traditions such as:

- Hearth worship,
- Fire worship,
- Hunter worship,
- *Sangchep* (marital exchange gifts and support),
- The ritual of giving *Chekuphila*,
- The mandatory participation of daughters in marriage ceremonies,

all indicate a strong emphasis on ancestral continuity. Hence, this dimension is referred to as ancestor worship (Pitrivada).

Human–Nature Interdependence

There exists an interdependent relationship between humans and nature.

Sili performances vividly portray the struggles humans faced in securing their basic necessities—food, shelter, and clothing—through interactions with nature.

Various forms of worship performed in Sakela include:

- Worship of the earth and soil
- Worship of forests
- Worship of springs and wells
- Worship of local deities and sacred sites
- Worship of rivers and streams

- Worship of air and water

All these rituals are essentially forms of nature worship.

The enactment of these themes in Sili performances symbolizes devotion and reverence toward nature.

Elements used in Sakela culture, such as:

- Earth worship
- Spring worship
- The use of Katus (Chestnut) branches

represent nature and natural symbolism.

Human life fundamentally depends on:

- Air
- Water
- Darkness and night
- Sunlight
- Stones
- Soil and the earth

These are basic elements necessary for human survival.

For example, on the first day of Sakela, spring worship is performed.

Worshipping a spring means honouring water itself. This act expresses the significance of water in human life and is, in itself, an expression of nature-centered philosophy.

Without water, life is impossible.

Human civilizations historically emerged along riverbanks, including:

- The Indus Valley Civilization

- The Nile River Civilization
- The Yellow River Civilization

Water has always been the most important foundation for civilization.

If water had existed on other planets, life might have been possible there as well. The absence of water explains why no known life exists on those planets today.

Thus, showing profound respect toward nature constitutes the essence of naturalism.

8.4 Cultural Ecological Knowledge

During Sakela, the Bantawa community establishes a separate Samkha Nakchhong (ritual arrangement) to pray to the revered deities Sumnima and Paruhang for:

- Agricultural abundance,
- Wisdom and knowledge,
- Economic prosperity.

People from every household bring:

- Maize (*Helawamang*)
- Rice (*Arawa*)
- Finger millet (*Totla*)

and offer them at the Sakela shrine, praying for a good harvest.

Another important feature is tree worship, also known as Sakela Seuli worship.

Traditionally, a sacred tree branch is planted in the middle of the household courtyard.

The branch must be from the Katus (Chestnut) tree, which symbolically represents all vegetation.

According to Mundum, ancestors spent a long period beneath Katus trees during the course of civilization and were among the first trees utilized by humans. Hence, it is an important sacred plant in Kirati tradition.

During Sakela Sili, people generally dance in a circular formation. Cultural objects important to Bantawa Rai life are placed in the center and worshipped as a sacred shrine (*Than*). Planting a Seuli branch is mandatory in such shrines.

Forests constitute the natural environment. They are essential both for extending the life of the earth and for sustaining human existence.

Since human livelihood depends on nature, trees are considered worthy of worship.

Cultural Ecology

Cultural Ecology is an approach that studies the relationship between human societies, culture, and their environment.

It emphasizes that every culture develops on the basis of its physical and social environment.

Human beings always live within an ecological setting.

This ecological relationship is reflected in dances such as:

- Narowa Sili (the Kangkurung bird dance)
- Hunter's Sili
- Chari (Agricultural) Sili

These dances are rooted in ecological principles.

The core idea of cultural ecology is that culture emerges and develops through continuous interaction between human beings and their social and natural environments.

This principle is clearly expressed through Sili performances.

8.5 Profound Respect for Haikhamma (Mother Earth)

Another important aspect of Sakela Sili is its deep respect for the Earth and soil.

There is a widespread belief that once one enters the Sakela Than (Bhume Shrine), ploughing or digging the land should not be done for seven days (though the exact duration may vary from village to village).

This practice still exists in many Kirati villages.

According to Mundum:

“O Earth, you are our life. You have given us Chasum/Chari (food grains). By eating them, all human beings survive, and other living beings survive as well. We have hurt you by digging, piercing, and stepping upon you. May no sin befall us for doing so. Without you, we would not exist. Sololo... Sololo... Sololo...”

This invocation expresses profound gratitude and reverence toward the Earth.

The Earth is not regarded merely as land but as the source of life itself, deserving respect, protection, and continual acknowledgment.

Conclusion

In essence, Sakela means the worship of crops and the worship of nature (Bantawa, 2050 B.S., p. 141). It refers to the veneration of agricultural produce, and among the Kirati Rai people it is also known by various names such as Sakewa, Sakel, Sakela, and Sakenwa. The dance performed during this festival is called Sili.

Sili provides insight into the evolution of human civilization. Through its movements, agricultural practices, and symbolic actions, it demonstrates how people advanced by applying indigenous knowledge and adapting to their environment. It expresses the methods of cultivation,

the skills required for survival, and the gradual progression of human society. According to Kirati scholars, there are twenty-two different forms of Sili.

Celebrated in the forms of Udhauli and Ubhauli, Sakela is an ethnic festival of the Kirati Rai indigenous community. It is celebrated with great enthusiasm not only in Sikkim, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Mirik, the Terai–Dooars region, Dehradun, and Assam, but also in neighboring countries and among diaspora communities in Nepal, Myanmar, Bhutan, Hong Kong, the United States, Australia, Britain, Japan, and Korea.

The Sakela festival is a rich expression of the traditional beliefs and ancestral experiences of the Kirati community. It is an important cultural heritage and a fundamental marker of Kirati identity that has made a significant contribution to the formation and enrichment of Nepalese culture.

In other words, Sakela is a beautiful expression of the interdependent relationship that the Kirati Rai indigenous community has maintained with nature since ancient times.

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Interview

- Kul Bahadur Rai (Resource Person), Interview conducted on 26 July 2018.

The Brass Fish of Belaguntha, Bhanjanagar, Ganjam (Odisha): A Theoretical Exploration

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1.Introduction

India's handicrafts are not only aesthetic creations but also repositories of cultural identity and social memory. Handcrafted objects embody values, beliefs, and practices that are transmitted across generations, thereby becoming an integral part of intangible cultural heritage (Mishra, 2010; Sen, 2004). Odisha, a state renowned for its diverse craft traditions, stands out in India's cultural landscape. From Pattachitra painting to silver filigree, stone carving, and tribal crafts, the state reflects a rich continuum of artisanal innovation (Tripathy, 2019). Among these, brass and bell-metal crafts hold a distinct position due to their ritual, domestic, and symbolic uses (Sahoo, 2016). Within this larger context, the Brass Fish of Belaguntha, located in Bhanjanagar subdivision of Ganjam district, occupies a special niche. The artifact is a product of the *Kansari* artisan community, who have preserved age-old brass-casting techniques. Oral traditions and cultural narratives link the brass fish to fertility, prosperity, and Vishnu's Matsya Avatar, making it both a religious and cultural symbol (Mishra, 2010).

This research aims to theoretically interpret the Brass Fish through multiple perspectives. The study employs material culture theory (Miller, 2005), which regards objects as carriers of meaning; symbolic anthropology (Geertz, 1973), which views cultural artifacts as communicative symbols; and cultural economy frameworks (Sen, 2004), which connect culture to livelihoods. Unlike

empirical studies, this paper is interpretive and conceptual, aiming to establish the Brass Fish as a living heritage object.

1.1 Significance of the Study

This study is important because it examines the Brass Fish of Belaguntha, a cultural artifact that has received limited scholarly focus despite its deep historical, symbolic, and economic relevance. The research documents and interprets this endangered tradition, highlighting its role as both a heritage symbol and a source of livelihood in rural Odisha. By applying perspectives from material culture, symbolic anthropology, and cultural economy, the study offers a conceptual framework that can be extended to other traditional crafts in India. In addition to its academic value, the findings provide practical insights for policymakers, NGOs, and artisan groups working to preserve cultural heritage while promoting sustainable development. Overall, the study strengthens understanding of Odisha's handicraft traditions and supports efforts to sustain them in a changing socio-economic context.

1.2 Statement of the Problem The Brass Fish of Belaguntha, once an important cultural emblem and livelihood source for local craftsmen, is gradually losing its relevance and sustainability. Historically significant for its religious symbolism, socio-economic contribution, and role in social exchange, the craft now faces serious challenges from industrial alternatives, increasing raw material costs, migration of skilled artisans, and declining interest among younger generations (Pradhan, 2018; Tripathy, 2019). Although distinctive in form and meaning, it has not received sufficient academic focus or institutional backing such as heritage recognition, Geographical Indication (GI) status, or effective cooperative organization. As a result, artisans remain exposed to economic uncertainty and cultural decline. The key issue is the growing gap between the craft's

historical significance and its fragile present condition, highlighting the need for strategies that ensure preservation, revitalization, and alignment with sustainable development goals.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study seeks to place the Brass Fish of Belaguntha within a wider cultural and scholarly context. It aims to trace its historical evolution and understand how its meanings have developed over time. The research also examines its cultural, religious, and symbolic significance, recognising the artifact as more than a decorative object. Further, it explores the socio-economic role of the craft in sustaining local artisans and shaping community identity. Drawing on perspectives from material culture studies and cultural economy, the study interprets the brass fish as both a tangible artifact and a bearer of collective memory. Finally, it identifies contemporary challenges facing the craft and proposes practical measures for its preservation and sustainable revival.

1.4 Hypothesis

The study hypothesises that the survival and revival of the Brass Fish of Belaguntha depend on aligning cultural preservation with contemporary market opportunities. Although the artifact continues to hold symbolic and economic value within the community, its decline is linked to limited institutional support, inadequate recognition, and competition from mass-produced alternatives. The hypothesis proposes that measures such as Geographical Indication (GI) recognition, design innovation, tourism integration, and digital promotion can restore its relevance. With targeted policy support and community participation, the brass fish can emerge as both a resilient cultural symbol and a viable source of livelihood.

2. Review of Literature

Although Odisha's handicraft traditions have been the subject of several scholarly works, research specifically addressing the Brass Fish of Belaguntha remains relatively limited. However, existing studies on Odisha's wider artisanal practices, cultural heritage, and symbolic anthropology provide a strong foundation to situate this unique artifact within broader academic discourse.

Mishra (2010) provides an extensive overview of Odisha's cultural heritage, with particular emphasis on the interconnections between craft traditions and community life. According to Mishra, handicrafts in Odisha cannot be reduced to decorative objects; rather, they function as cultural markers that reflect social organization, religious beliefs, and regional identity. In this context, artifacts like the brass fish are more than utilitarian commodities—they are cultural texts that embody the lived experiences of local communities and transmit values across generations.

Pradhan (2018) takes a livelihood-oriented approach to handicrafts, examining how traditional artisans in rural Odisha rely on crafts as a means of income and social recognition. His work highlights how handicrafts create avenues for rural employment but also documents the vulnerability of artisan households in the face of modernization, fluctuating markets, and limited state support. This perspective is particularly relevant for understanding the socio-economic positioning of the Kansari artisans of Belaguntha, who depend on the production of brass objects for survival yet face increasing pressures from cheaper industrial substitutes.

Sahoo (2016) provides a focused study on brass and bell-metal crafts of Odisha, emphasizing their historical continuity and the challenges posed by industrialization. His research underscores how these crafts, once integral to domestic life and ritual practices, are now declining due to shifts in consumer behavior and rising material costs. The analysis resonates strongly with the case of Belaguntha, where the brass fish risks marginalization unless supported through conscious revival efforts.

Globalization's role in reshaping the handicraft sector is captured by Tripathy (2019), who observes that mass-produced goods have disrupted the market for traditional crafts. Tripathy notes that globalization creates both opportunities and threats: while digital platforms expand potential markets for handicrafts, industrial substitutes erode local demand. This duality is crucial for analyzing how the brass fish can adapt to new contexts without losing its symbolic essence.

From a theoretical standpoint, Geertz's (1973) concept of symbolic anthropology provides valuable insights. He argues that cultural symbols should be interpreted as "texts" that communities use to communicate values, beliefs, and worldviews. Applying this to the brass fish, one can interpret it as a symbol of prosperity, fertility, and divine protection that speaks to the cultural logic of the Belaguntha community. Similarly, Mauss's classic work on the gift economy (1925/1990) remains highly relevant. Mauss demonstrated that gift-giving is never a purely economic transaction but a social act that establishes reciprocity and solidarity. The circulation of brass fish in marriage ceremonies and rituals aligns with this framework, highlighting its role in strengthening community bonds.

Sen (2004), writing from a development perspective, emphasizes the integration of cultural assets into strategies for social and economic progress. His argument that culture should not be viewed as a peripheral concern but as a central element of development provides an important backdrop for analyzing how the brass fish can contribute to both heritage preservation and livelihood enhancement.

Taken together, these works underscore three key points. First, handicrafts like the brass fish are deeply embedded in cultural and religious symbolism, making them essential to identity construction. Second, they are integral to rural livelihoods, even though modernization threatens their sustainability. Third, they can be understood within broader theoretical frameworks such as

symbolic anthropology, material culture, and cultural economy, which enable us to interpret their meanings and socio-economic functions. This review establishes a strong scholarly and theoretical foundation for examining the Brass Fish of Belaguntha as both a symbolic artifact and an economic resource.

2.1 Research Gap

Although Odisha's handicraft traditions have received considerable scholarly attention, the specific case of the Brass Fish of Belaguntha remains largely undocumented in academic research. Existing studies on brass and bell-metal crafts focus primarily on broad regional practices or on well-recognized artifacts such as utensils, decorative pieces, or temple objects (Sahoo, 2016; Pradhan, 2018). Very little has been written about the symbolic, socio-economic, and cultural dimensions of the brass fish, despite its unique role as both a ritual object and a livelihood source. Moreover, theoretical discussions in anthropology and cultural economy rarely engage directly with localized artifacts like the Belaguntha brass fish, which could provide fresh insights into how material culture embodies community identity and resilience. This absence of focused scholarship creates a significant gap, making it difficult to fully understand the artifact's historical trajectory, its contemporary challenges, and its potential role in heritage-led development. Addressing this gap through systematic and interdisciplinary inquiry would enrich the broader literature on Odisha's crafts while also supporting policy frameworks aimed at cultural preservation and sustainable livelihoods.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach suited to examining cultural artifacts whose meanings extend beyond numerical analysis. It draws mainly on secondary sources such as

academic books, peer-reviewed articles, and official reports on Odisha's handicraft traditions. The discussion also considers documented oral traditions and inherited cultural knowledge related to the Brass Fish of Belaguntha. The analysis is informed by perspectives from anthropology and cultural studies, including material culture theory, symbolic interpretation, and cultural economy. No primary surveys, interviews, or statistical techniques are used, as the paper remains conceptual in focus. Nevertheless, the framework proposed here can inform future empirical work using ethnography, household-level studies, or econometric methods on artisanal livelihoods.

4. Historical Background

Brass and bell-metal work in Odisha has deep historical roots, supported by archaeological evidence and historical records that show the use of metal objects in daily life and religious practices. The Kansari artisan community has played a key role in preserving and advancing brass craftsmanship across generations (Sahoo, 2016).

In Belaguntha, the making of brass fish is strongly connected to local traditions and beliefs. According to oral accounts, these objects were originally created for ritual purposes, representing fertility, prosperity, and the sustaining power of water. This symbolism holds particular relevance in the Ganjam region, where rivers and ponds have long influenced both livelihood and cultural practices.

Over time, the brass fish evolved from a ritual artifact into a broader symbol of good fortune and well-being. It gradually became part of festivals, ceremonies, and social exchanges. The survival of this craft reflects not only the technical skill of the artisans but also their success in preserving and transmitting cultural meanings alongside material craftsmanship.

4. 1 Symbolism of the Brass Fish

4.1.1 Religious Symbolism

The Brass Fish carries strong religious meaning in Hindu tradition. In mythology, the fish form—known as Matsya—is associated with the earliest incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Sacred narratives describe how Vishnu appeared as a fish to protect the Vedas and save humanity from a devastating flood. This story conveys ideas of divine care, renewal, and the preservation of cosmic balance (Mishra, 2010).

In Belaguntha and surrounding parts of Ganjam, the brass fish reflects this sacred symbolism. It is commonly viewed as a protective presence within households and is sometimes placed in temples or presented during rituals as an offering. In this context, it functions both as a devotional object and as a symbol of blessing (Pradhan, 2018).

Brass, regarded as an auspicious and ritually pure metal in Hindu practices, enhances the spiritual importance of the object (Sahoo, 2016). Therefore, the brass fish serves as a meaningful cultural artifact that connects local communities with broader religious beliefs, representing protection, prosperity, and trust in divine support.

4.1.2 Cultural Symbolism

The brass fish holds significance beyond mythology, embodying cultural values rooted in the agrarian life of Odisha. In communities sustained by rivers and coastal ecosystems, fish traditionally symbolize fertility, prosperity, and renewal (Tripathy, 2019). In Belaguntha, the brass

fish emerged as a tangible representation of these beliefs and was commonly kept in households as a marker of well-being and generational continuity. Its connection with water reflects the region's ecological dependence, particularly within the cultural setting of Ganjam district. Additionally, the craft tradition associated with producing the brass fish represents the preservation of indigenous skills passed down through generations. Thus, the artifact serves as a cultural symbol that integrates environmental realities with social identity.

4.1.3 Economic Symbolism

The brass fish has long represented wealth and good fortune in local society. Traditionally, it was gifted during weddings, dowry exchanges, and festive occasions, symbolizing social status and economic stability (Pradhan, 2018). Its circulation in ritual contexts helped sustain local craft production by creating consistent cultural demand. Thus, the brass fish embodied both economic utility and symbolic meaning, operating as a tradable good as well as a marker of prosperity (Sen, 2004). In contemporary times, it also offers scope for income generation through integration with digital markets and heritage-based tourism initiatives (Tripathy, 2019). This combination of cultural significance and commercial value makes it a relevant example for examining the relationship between traditional crafts and livelihood systems.

4.1.4 Social Symbolism

The brass fish also functioned as an important instrument of social interaction and relationship-building. In line with Mauss's (1990) concept of the gift economy, it may be viewed as a "total social fact," where the exchange of an object strengthens reciprocity, mutual obligation, and community solidarity. In Belaguntha, brass fish were customarily gifted during marriages, religious rituals, and community events. These offerings carried symbolic meanings of honour, goodwill, and enduring social commitment rather than mere material value. Through such

practices, the artifact helped maintain kinship networks and a shared sense of identity. Although contemporary changes have reshaped patterns of exchange, the brass fish remains a cultural symbol that reflects collective memory and community interconnectedness (Mishra, 2010; Sen, 2004).

5. Socio-Economic Importance

For many generations, the Brass Fish of Belaguntha has served not only as a cultural emblem but also as a vital source of livelihood. Kansari households engaged in brass casting typically worked from small, family-based workshops, where skills were transmitted through apprenticeship and oral tradition within kin networks (Pradhan, 2018). Production involved shared family labour, with members contributing to casting, shaping, and polishing. Artisans relied on village markets, seasonal fairs, and religious festivals to market their products, integrating the craft into local economic and social cycles (Mishra, 2010). Beyond the artisan families, traders and intermediaries also depended on this activity, forming a modest yet interconnected rural economy.

In recent years, however, the sustainability of this traditional occupation has weakened. The growing availability of industrial substitutes such as plastic and aluminum goods has significantly reduced demand for handcrafted brass items (Tripathy, 2019). Simultaneously, increasing raw material costs and limited institutional backing have constrained profit margins and heightened market vulnerability (Sahoo, 2016). Consequently, many younger Kansari members are shifting to urban employment, perceiving artisanal work as economically insecure, thereby endangering craft continuity (Pradhan, 2018).

Nevertheless, the Brass Fish continues to hold untapped economic promise. Research indicates that handicrafts can succeed in contemporary markets through strategic branding, heritage tourism, and digital outreach (Sen, 2004; Tripathy, 2019). Measures such as Geographical Indication (GI) registration, e-commerce participation, and inclusion in government handicraft promotion schemes could reposition the brass fish as a distinctive cultural commodity. With appropriate policy and market support, the craft can re-emerge as a sustainable livelihood while reinforcing local cultural identity in Belaguntha.

5.1 Analysis of the Brass Fish of Belaguntha

Table 1 Tabular Analysis of the Brass Fish of Belaguntha

Aspect	Description	Theoretical Lens	Implications
Cultural Symbolism	Prosperity, fertility, Vishnu's <i>Matsya Avatar</i> .	Symbolic Anthropology	Reinforces identity and tradition.
Historical Origin	Rooted in Kansari brass-casting traditions.	Material Culture	Heritage continuity and historical identity.
Economic Role	Livelihood source; used in rituals, fairs, and marriages.	Cultural Economy	Sustains rural artisan economy.
Religious Function	Temple offerings, auspicious household object.	Ritual Anthropology	Spiritual connection to community.
Social Exchange	Gifted in social and matrimonial practices.	Gift Economy (Mauss, 1925/1990)	Builds reciprocity and social cohesion.

Contemporary Status	Decline due to industrial substitutes and migration.	Globalization Theory	Cultural economy weakened by modernization.
Challenges	Lack of patronage, high costs, youth disinterest.	Development Studies	Sustainability threatened.
Opportunities	Tourism, GI tagging, e-commerce, design innovation.	Sustainable Development Framework	Revitalization possible with policy support.

Source: Compiled by Author

The Brass Fish of Belaguntha represents a rich blend of religious belief and cultural heritage. Associated with Vishnu's Matsya incarnation, it symbolizes prosperity, fertility, and continuity within community traditions. Rooted in the Kansari metalworking tradition, the craft reflects the endurance of local material culture. Economically, it serves both as a means of livelihood and as a culturally valued exchange item, especially in marriages and ritual ceremonies where it strengthens social bonds and reciprocity.

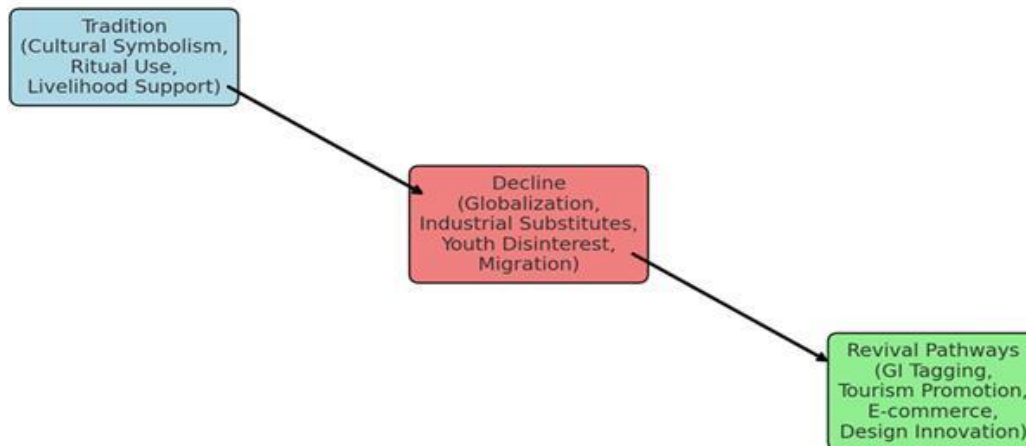
Today, the craft faces serious challenges. Globalization, migration, and the spread of machine-made alternatives have reduced its demand and social significance. Increasing raw material costs, shrinking customer support, and declining interest among younger generations further threaten its survival.

Despite these concerns, meaningful possibilities remain. Heritage tourism, GI registration, digital platforms, and product diversification can help revive and reposition the brass fish in wider

markets. With proper policy support and community participation, the craft can contribute to sustainable development by preserving tradition while generating income.

5.2 Interpretive Pathways of the Brass Fish of Belaguntha

Fig 1 Interpretive Pathways of the Brass Fish of Belaguntha



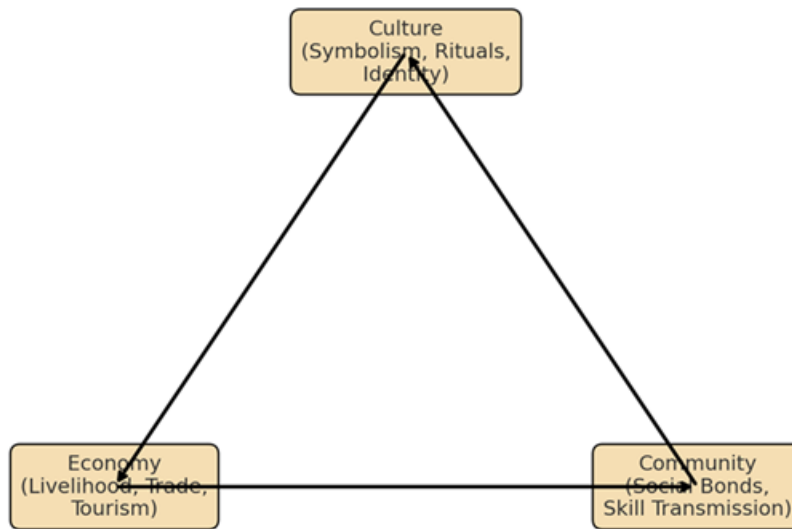
Source: Compiled by Author

The flowchart explains the journey of the Brass Fish of Belaguntha, tracing its movement from a revered cultural symbol to a craft now at risk, while also outlining possibilities for renewal. Traditionally, the brass fish represented prosperity, fertility, and divine blessing, and it played an important role in sustaining artisan families and local customs. Over time, however, challenges such as globalization, factory-made alternatives, migration of younger generations, and reduced cultural support have weakened its presence and demand. Despite these setbacks, opportunities for revival remain strong. Measures like securing Geographical Indication (GI) status, encouraging heritage tourism, expanding sales through digital marketplaces, and developing contemporary designs suited to present-day tastes can restore its relevance. Overall, the diagram shows that even

endangered cultural crafts can regain vitality through thoughtful adaptation and strategic support, ensuring both cultural preservation and economic sustainability.

5.3 Cultural Economic Community Cycle of the Brass Fish of Belaguntha

Figure 2 Cultural Economic Community Cycle of the Brass Fish of Belaguntha

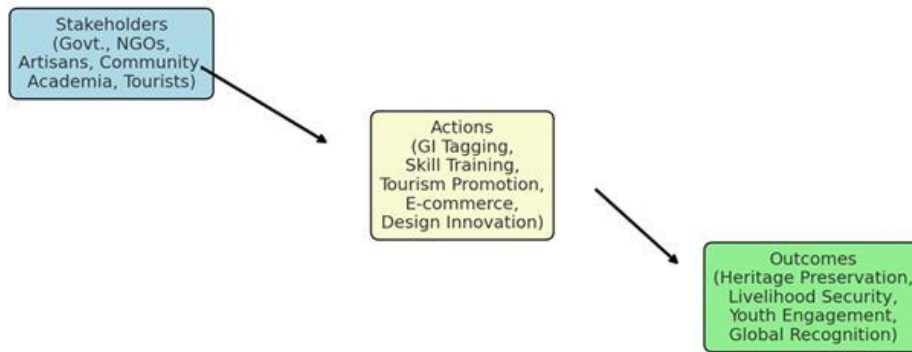


Source: Compiled by Author

The cyclical interpretive framework suggests that the continuity of the Brass Fish of Belaguntha rests on the interconnected relationship among culture, economy, and community. Cultural values give the artifact its symbolic and ritual importance, economic activities provide income through trade and tourism, and the community sustains the craft by passing skills across generations. The strength of this tradition depends on the mutual reinforcement of these three elements. If cultural relevance declines, markets weaken, or community structures fragment due to migration or instability, the system becomes vulnerable. Therefore, preserving the brass fish tradition requires coordinated efforts that protect its cultural meaning, expand economic opportunities, and support artisans in maintaining their heritage with dignity.

5.4 Policy Focused Framework for Reviving the Brass Fish of Belaguntha

Figure 3 Policy Focused Framework for Reviving the Brass Fish of Belaguntha



Source: Compiled by Author

The restoration of Belaguntha’s brass fish craft depends on joint action from diverse stakeholders. Public authorities can strengthen the sector by securing Geographical Indication (GI) status, extending financial assistance, and integrating the craft into official heritage programs. NGOs and educational institutions may assist through skill development, research documentation, and awareness initiatives, while local communities help sustain its cultural value through traditional practices and festivals. Additionally, digital marketing and tourism-based promotion can expand market access beyond regional boundaries. When these efforts operate in coordination, they not only safeguard cultural heritage but also create stable income opportunities and motivate younger generations to continue the tradition. In this way, the brass fish evolves from an endangered craft into a lasting emblem of cultural identity and economic resilience.

6. Contemporary Challenges

6.1 Cultural Decline

The Brass Fish of Belaguntha is increasingly losing its cultural centrality. Earlier, it formed an integral part of domestic rituals, temple worship, and local festivals, representing prosperity and divine safeguarding. Over time, however, changing patterns of worship and the spread of modern cultural preferences have reduced its ritual significance (Mishra, 2010). Many young people, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas, now opt for factory-made idols and decorative objects rather than handcrafted pieces. Consequently, the brass fish no longer holds the same symbolic value within community life. This shift illustrates a broader process of cultural attrition, in which modernization weakens the continuity of traditional practices (Sen, 2004).

6.2 Market Competition

The artisanal economy linked to the brass fish is increasingly challenged by mass-produced alternatives. Factory-made goods of plastic, aluminum, and low-cost alloys dominate rural and urban markets, offering cheaper substitutes that imitate traditional designs but lack their cultural significance (Tripathy, 2019). As a result, handcrafted brass items face declining demand, since artisans cannot compete with the pricing, scale, and distribution networks of industrial producers. In the absence of strong branding and product differentiation, the brass fish is at risk of being overshadowed by mass-manufactured replicas.

6.3 Youth Disinterest

A significant challenge confronting the Kansari community is the waning interest of younger generations in continuing traditional brass craftsmanship. Once regarded as a dignified and economically dependable occupation, the craft is increasingly viewed as uncertain and restrictive in today's socio-economic context (Pradhan, 2018). Many young members prefer higher education and urban-based employment, creating a break in the customary system of intergenerational

apprenticeship. Researchers note that this shift reflects not only economic considerations but also changing social aspirations, as youth attempt to distance themselves from caste-associated occupations (Sahoo, 2016). If this pattern persists, the continuity of technical skills and embedded cultural knowledge essential to sustaining the brass fish tradition may be seriously undermined.

6.4 Migration

Youth disengagement from traditional crafts is closely associated with rising migration trends. Skilled artisans increasingly relocate to urban centres such as Bhubaneswar and Berhampur, as well as other states, seeking more stable and higher-paying employment (Tripathy, 2019). Although migration may enhance household income through wages and remittances, it weakens the local cultural economy. The decline in the number of practicing artisans disrupts intergenerational knowledge transfer and reduces collective production systems rooted in community networks. If this pattern continues, the brass fish craft of Belaguntha risks gradual decline, surviving merely as cultural memory rather than as a sustained livelihood practice.

6.5 Lack of Institutional Support

The Brass Fish craft of Belaguntha continues to remain institutionally overlooked. In contrast to well-recognized Odisha handicrafts such as Pattachitra and Sambalpuri textiles, which have secured Geographical Indication (GI) status, this traditional metal craft has not yet obtained similar protection (Tripathy, 2019). The absence of GI tagging exposes it to duplication and limits the scope for heritage-based branding. Moreover, inadequate cooperative support and minimal governmental engagement reduce artisans' market strength and restrict technological upgradation. In the absence of focused policy support, skill development, and structured marketing initiatives, the brass fish craft persists at the margins of the state's handicraft sector, with limited visibility and formal recognition.

7. Opportunities and Policy Implications

The sustainability of the Brass Fish of Belaguntha depends on converting its cultural value into strategic action. Developing Belaguntha as a craft-based tourism hub can enhance visibility and generate income by showcasing the artifact's production process and symbolic meaning. Integrating digital marketing platforms such as Amazon Karigar and Flipkart Samarth can broaden market access beyond local exhibitions, enabling artisans to engage national and international consumers. Obtaining Geographical Indication (GI) status would further safeguard authenticity and strengthen brand identity. Continuous skill-development initiatives are essential to incorporate contemporary design elements while preserving traditional symbolism. Moreover, reactivating community rituals and festivals associated with the brass fish can reinforce its socio-cultural importance and stimulate local demand. Collectively, these approaches provide a comprehensive pathway for heritage preservation and sustainable livelihood development (Porter, 1990; UNESCO, 2003).

8. Discussion

The Brass Fish of Belaguntha represents a powerful case of how traditional artifacts exist at the crossroads of heritage and modernity. On one hand, it is embedded with layers of cultural, religious, and social symbolism that make it a cultural text, communicating values of prosperity, fertility, and divine protection to the community (Mishra, 2010). On the other, it is also a socio-economic object, historically providing livelihood opportunities to the *Kansari* artisans and functioning within systems of trade, gifting, and ceremonial exchange (Pradhan, 2018). This dual identity underscores the argument of material culture theorists that objects are never neutral; they embody meanings that extend beyond their physical form (Miller, 2005).

At the same time, the artifact illustrates the growing vulnerabilities faced by heritage crafts in a rapidly globalizing world. Industrial substitutes, declining ritual practices, and youth migration have weakened both its symbolic and economic relevance. Without deliberate action, the brass fish risks being relegated to a museum piece or decorative souvenir—valued as a relic of the past rather than as a living tradition (Tripathy, 2019). This situation resonates with broader concerns in heritage studies, where scholars argue that the greatest threat to traditional crafts is not their extinction but their transformation into disconnected commodities stripped of cultural context (Sahoo, 2016).

Yet, the challenges should not be interpreted as signs of inevitable decline. When viewed through the lens of cultural economy, the brass fish retains significant potential to adapt and thrive if linked with modern opportunities (Sen, 2004). Initiatives such as Geographical Indication (GI) tagging, integration into heritage tourism circuits, and digital marketing platforms can reposition the artifact in ways that preserve its symbolic essence while expanding its economic viability. Moreover, renewed community engagement through festivals, workshops, and intergenerational training can restore pride and encourage youth participation.

Thus, the discussion highlights a broader theoretical insight: cultural objects like the Brass Fish of Belaguntha cannot be sustained through economic measures alone, nor can they survive purely on symbolic recognition. They require a synergistic approach that integrates culture, economy, and community. By blending preservation with innovation, the brass fish can serve not only as an emblem of Odisha's heritage but also as a model of how traditional crafts can achieve resilience in the modern era.

9. Conclusion and Policy Implications

The Brass Fish of Belaguntha represents the intersection of material culture, spirituality, and rural economy. Emerging from the Kansari craft tradition, it carries layered meanings: devotion linked to Vishnu's Matsya incarnation, symbolism of fertility and prosperity, social exchange as a ceremonial gift, and economic value as a source of livelihood for artisan households (Mishra, 2010; Mauss, 1990). Thus, it functions not merely as a crafted object but as a dynamic element of Odisha's living heritage.

Yet, this tradition faces mounting pressures from modernization. Reduced ritual relevance, competition from factory-made substitutes, migration, and declining youth engagement have weakened its socio-cultural and economic foundations (Tripathy, 2019; Sahoo, 2016). Without strategic support, the craft may shift from everyday community use to marginal decorative status, reflecting the broader vulnerability of India's traditional artisanal sectors.

At the same time, the brass fish presents avenues for renewal. Framed within a cultural economy perspective, it can support both heritage preservation and sustainable livelihoods (Sen, 2004). Measures such as Geographical Indication (GI) recognition, targeted skill development, design diversification, and integration with heritage tourism and digital marketplaces could expand market access while safeguarding authenticity. Such interventions would enable the craft to adapt without losing its cultural core.

For these initiatives to be effective, efforts must extend beyond commercial strategies and involve active community participation. Reinstating traditional rituals, festivals, and oral narratives in which the brass fish once held importance can help restore its cultural meaning. Schools and colleges should integrate Odisha's craft heritage into their curriculum to cultivate awareness among younger generations. Additionally, NGOs and cooperative bodies can support

artisans by linking them to markets while ensuring equitable compensation and proper recognition.

In summary, the Brass Fish of Belaguntha stands at a critical stage between decline and renewal. Its future sustainability requires an integrated framework combining cultural conservation, economic support, and grassroots involvement. With consistent policy backing and collective commitment, this craft can evolve from a threatened tradition into a strong representation of Odisha's artisanal heritage. Furthermore, its successful revival may provide a replicable framework for protecting other endangered crafts in India, proving that heritage conservation and sustainable development can progress together.

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**WEAPONISING BEAUTY, RECLAIMING BODIES: WOMEN'S SUPERNATURAL
NARRATIVES AS RESISTANCE AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN
CHATTOGRAM HILL TRACTS, BANGLADESH**

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how indigenous women in Chattogram Hill Tracts, Bangladesh, employ supernatural folklore as covert resistance against gender-based violence and structural oppression. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork among Chakma, Marma, and Tripura communities, I analyse narratives of female ghosts and spirit possession that position women's bodies simultaneously as sites of oppression and instruments of power. These legends transform beauty from a vulnerability into protection, menstruation from stigma into spiritual authority, and spirit possession from subjugation into social regulation. Reading these narratives through legend scholarship, feminist frameworks, and the ontological turn in anthropology, I argue that the question of whether such accounts reflect belief or strategic performance imposes a distinction the narratives themselves refuse. The analysis reveals supernatural narratives functioning as touchstones for collective trauma, mechanisms of social cohesion, and repositories of indigenous knowledge regarding bodily autonomy and communal safety.

Keywords: Chattogram Hill Tracts, gender-based violence, legend, ontological turn, spirit possession

INTRODUCTION

During ethnographic fieldwork in Chattogram Hill Tracts (CHT), Bangladesh, a pattern emerged across multiple indigenous communities: women's supernatural narratives consistently positioned female bodies as simultaneously vulnerable and powerful, objectified yet autonomous. These accounts did not simply reflect women's oppression but actively reshaped it. When a Chakma woman explained that beautiful female ghosts render men incapable of desiring human women, or when Marma informants described menstruating women as handlers of dangerous spiritual forces, these narratives performed cultural work beyond mere storytelling.

The ethnic minority communities of CHT comprise less than two per cent of Bangladesh's population yet face sustained structural violence through militarisation, land dispossession, and systematic marginalisation since Bangladesh's independence in 1971 (Anwar, 2020). Women within these communities experience what Katrak (2006) terms the politics of the female body, wherein indigenous women face triple oppression: as female, as indigenous, and as members of militarised communities. This article focuses on how Chakma, Marma, and Tripura women employ supernatural folklore to navigate and resist gender-based violence within this context.

Existing scholarship on South Asian women's folklore has documented storytelling as resistance (Narayan, 1997), whilst work on spirit possession has explored women's agency through religious and ritual practice (Sarbacker, 2011; Malik, 2019). Research specifically examining indigenous women's supernatural narratives as mechanisms of resistance against gender-based violence in militarised zones remains limited. This article addresses that gap by analysing how women's ghostlore in CHT functions as covert resistance, social regulation, and collective memory.

The analysis draws on ethnographic fieldwork conducted throughout 2018, supplemented by online interviews during 2020 to 2022. Approximately one hundred individuals from Chakma, Marma, and Tripura communities participated through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The research followed purposeful snowball sampling across all three hill districts (Rangamati, Khagrachari, and Bandarban) to ensure geographic and demographic diversity. Interviews were conducted in Chakma, Marma, and Kokborok languages with assistance from native speakers, then transliterated into English.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This analysis employs legend theory as developed by Tangherlini (1990, 2009) alongside feminist scholarship on embodied resistance (Katrak, 2006; hooks, 1995). Legends operate politically, shaping ideology through cumulative narrative performance whilst maintaining believability.

Katrak's (2006) framework on the politics of female bodies in postcolonial contexts proves particularly relevant. She argues that women creatively invent covert means of resistance when overt defiance carries severe penalties: "When overt defiance of patriarchal structures carried severe penalties such as social exclusion and exile from community, and even death, women creatively invented covert means with which to resist. The goal was survival" (p. 142). This aligns with indigenous knowledge systems wherein oral traditions serve as collective memory and strategic knowledge transmission (Vizenor, 2008; Vansina, 1985). Recent scholarship on spirit possession has likewise shifted from viewing it as unconscious strategy to recognising it as instrumental agency created through community agreement (Keller, 2002, as cited in Malik, 2019).

A third analytical resource comes from the ontological turn in anthropology (Viveiros de Castro, 1998; Holbraad and Pedersen, 2017; de la Cadena, 2015). This body of work cautions against

treating other peoples' spirits, deities, and nonhuman beings as symbolic representations awaiting translation into the analyst's categories of belief, metaphor, or strategy. Taking informants' worlds seriously means allowing that the petni, the ghost pets, and the spirit husbands discussed below are, within the CHT lifeworld, beings that act, desire, and intervene. De la Cadena's (2015) account of Andean earth beings demonstrates that such entities can be political actors whose reality does public work regardless of whether outsiders credit their existence. This orientation matters methodologically for the present analysis. Where earlier possession scholarship asked whether women really believe or merely perform, the ontological turn suggests that this very question imports a division between the real and the represented that the narratives themselves do not observe. My informants did not offer their accounts as metaphors, and the analysis that follows does not reduce them to such.

WEAPONISING BEAUTY: "SHE WILL POSSESS YOUR ABILITY TO LOVE AND LUST"

The othering of women through beauty standards operates globally, yet in CHT this othering transforms into a protective mechanism through supernatural narratives. The petni, a female ghost of extraordinary beauty, haunts the collective imagination with strategic effect. Male informants described her:

"I would like to at least see the petni who makes you disregard any human woman's beauty after seeing her... She is so beautiful you wouldn't call her a ghost." (Male, 27, Chakma, Bandarban)

The legend's power lies in its claim: any man who encounters a beautiful female ghost loses the capacity to find human women attractive.

A Chakma woman's account illustrates this complexity:

"When my husband was a teenage boy, he saw one of them and fell in love. That woman fell in love with him too. Since then, my husband never liked another woman's looks... He sleeps with me only when she possesses me making me look like her... No, I do not look into the mirror when I become her, I am not within myself when she is me, I am her." (Female, 24, Chakma, Lama)

The final clause deserves particular attention. "I am not within myself when she is me, I am her" is not the grammar of pretence; it is the grammar of a person whose world contains more than one way of being a self. Viveiros de Castro (1998) describes Amerindian perspectivism as a cosmology in which bodies are exchangeable positions rather than fixed containers of identity. The Chakma narrator articulates something structurally similar, and an analysis that translated her words into either delusion or tactic would lose exactly what she said. The husband's inability to desire human women becomes attributed to ghost intervention rather than personal rejection, preserving social harmony whilst the wife maintains the relationship through possession. The narrative creates space for negotiation within patriarchal constraints without requiring the analyst to legislate what really happened.

The legend establishes behavioural protocols. Male informants confirmed that encountering a solitary beautiful woman in isolated locations triggers specific caution:

"Not only in the dark, even during daytime, if you see such a beautiful woman that attracts your attention, she might be it." (Male, 59, Marma, Bangalhalia)

Men learn to exercise restraint when encountering lone women in vulnerable situations, not necessarily from ethical conviction, but from supernatural consequence. Women gain a protective

buffer through this ambiguity. The performance of such encounters follows predictable patterns, creating what Malik (2019) describes as conversational terrain that both parties navigate:

"I have had a conversation to avoid such a female ghost. She was drawing me towards her with her otherworldly beauty, but I kept my eyes closed or pinned to the ground, and kept repeating how I had no intention of indulging in any sort of relationship or communication with her. She on the other hand kept laughing as if she was possessed and behaved like a lunatic with weird and abnormal hand gestures!" (Male, 28, Chakma, Rangamati)

The predictability of dialogue patterns allows women to deploy recognised scripts when threatened, transforming potential assault into ritualised avoidance. Whether a given encounter involved a ghost or a woman is, within the terms of the lifeworld, not always a meaningful distinction, and the protective effect does not depend on resolving it.

UTILISING BODILY MYSTERY: "I HANDLE DANGEROUS MATTERS"

Menstruation remains stigmatised across South Asia, yet CHT women transform this stigmatisation into spiritual authority through narratives of ghost keeping. Unmarried women are held to harbour thousands of microscopic ghosts within their wombs, feeding these entities through menstrual blood:

"They (unmarried non-mother women) raise and feed their ghost pets. These ghosts stay in their womb area, and feed off of their keepers' menstrual blood." (Male, 40, Tripura, Khagrachari)

This account performs several kinds of cultural work. It provides an indigenous explanation for sexually transmitted infections that runs alongside biomedical knowledge, and it positions

menstruating women as handlers of dangerous forces, drawing protective boundaries around a bodily process that mainstream society treats as shameful. Hoskins (2002) demonstrates that menstrual blood's power varies with its social management rather than following a universal pollution taboo, noting that Huauilu women expressed pride in controlling dangerous blood flow (p. 334). In CHT, secrecy intensifies the supernatural association. A male informant explained:

"If somehow word of mouth spreads from a person to another about a woman bleeding every month, the grapevine almost ruins that specific woman's social life."

Yet this very secrecy creates power. The ambiguity surrounding menstruation allows women to claim spiritual authority during their periods, reframing menstruation from shameful necessity to spiritual competence. The ghost pet narrative also builds a protective framework against sexual assault: sexual contact with unmarried women is held to transmit dangerous ghosts to men, with symptoms resembling sexually transmitted infections. The folklore operates as indigenous sex education, discouraging predatory behaviour through supernatural consequence rather than religious prohibition, and granting women bodily autonomy through spiritual threat where personal refusal alone carries little weight.

REPURPOSING OBJECTIFICATION: "I AM THE POSSESSION OF SOMEONE BIGGER THAN YOU"

Tourism development in CHT has transformed indigenous women into exoticised objects of the tourist gaze without community consultation or consent. Bathing areas traditionally used by women have been incorporated into tourist circuits, leaving women exposed to unwanted observation and photography. In response, supernatural narratives position waterbodies as domains of male ghosts who protect bathing women:

"They watch women bathing, like I said they're mischievous. When women bathe, the ghosts just watch. But if men of any age except for young boys come to the bathing areas at that time, the ghosts can get jealous. They can possess the men and make them fall sick and eventually take them into the water." (Female, 23, Chakma, Bandarban)

The narrative operates through strategic irony. The ghosts themselves engage in voyeuristic observation, yet respond violently to human male intrusion. By populating waterbodies with jealous male spirits, the folklore creates supernatural enforcement of women-only spaces. Men learn to avoid bathing areas during women's designated times, and the boundary holds where civil authority has failed to maintain it. Neimanis (2017) argues that human relationships with water centre on limits and habitability; here the waterbodies become gendered spaces whose limits are patrolled by beings the tourism economy cannot evict. Where tourism policy ignores indigenous women's privacy, the spirits reassert it.

The narratives also provide an explanatory framework for assault. Should harassment occur, the victim can attribute it to ghost possession rather than human perpetration:

"The ghosts ogling at these bathing women are referred to as male supernatural entities who may in some cases possess greater volume of lechery and can show them in offensive ways that men in those areas would not usually do."

This allows community members to condemn actions whilst preserving relationships, locating fault in supernatural interference rather than individual moral failing, and providing a vocabulary for discussing violation within culturally appropriate frameworks.

TRANSGRESSIVE RELATIONSHIPS AS BODILY BOUNDARIES: "DON'T ANGER 'HIM/HER'"

Spirit marriage narratives in CHT extend beyond possession to encompass ongoing supernatural relationships. These accounts describe women maintaining long-term partnerships with spirit husbands who provide economic support, emotional companionship, and protection from human male attention:

"He comes to me because I make him happy. He eats out of my soul, and for me he leaves gold and other precious metals in the hole of that big banyan tree's trunk. When I was younger, many men wanted to marry me. They used to disturb me... One day I was coming back home from the canal with water. It was evening. I got scared seeing a masculine figure, and fainted. I was in bed for a month after that... After a month, I recovered slowly and started talking to the manly figure. We became physically and emotionally close. Then we got married. A spirit priest completed the marriage ceremony late at night, seven years back." (Female, 33, Chakma, Bandarban)

Sarbacker (2011) explores spirit marriage in Indo-Tibetan contexts, asking whether such narratives reflect divine power struggles, metaphors for human relationship dynamics, or frameworks for non-normative identities. The ontological orientation adopted here suggests a further possibility: that the marriage is what the narrator says it is, a marriage, solemnised by a priest, with obligations and gifts. Within CHT lifeworlds it enables several forms of autonomy at once. It accounts for chosen celibacy, deters unwanted suitors, and underwrites economic independence. The extreme jealousy attributed to spirit spouses functions as boundary enforcement that kin learn to respect:

"We do not let our sister be friends with her anymore... But if it is a bad time to be near her, the ghost can react and hurt you, no sign needed for that!" (Male, 34, Marma, Rangamati)

The outcome is social respect for the woman's boundaries, physical space around her person, and justification for autonomous decision-making. Spirit marriage may also provide a culturally recognised position for non-normative gender identities and sexualities.

WOMEN AS SOCIAL REGULATORS: SPIRIT POSSESSION AS MORAL ENFORCEMENT

Possession narratives position women as enforcers of communal morality. Male informants consistently described scenarios wherein women become possessed by guardian spirits when men violate social norms, with possession enabling women to confront and punish wrongdoing:

"Whenever we (men) do something wrong, they (women) will be possessed by the ghost that controls our behaviour. They (women) stay indoors, they are not supposed to even know what we (men) are doing outside of the confinement. Yet, they react to our misbehaviour... The other day, one of us got heavily beat up by his wife, because he has been sleeping with another woman behind his wife's back... She stormed into him with a sharp knife, and charged... The way she spoke, aggressively, was not like her... Afterwards, everything calmed down, the wife fell unconscious or asleep, he carried her to bed and let her rest. The next morning she was the same old nice and sweet wife, as if nothing had happened." (Male, 34, Marma, Bangalhalia)

This narrative performs remarkable cultural work. It grants women authority to confront male transgression despite their socially subordinate position. The possession framework allows aggressive confrontation whilst preserving women's reputation for gentleness, since the possessed woman acts without accountability, her actions belonging to the spirit rather than to her. Malik (2019) argues that possession creates instrumental agency through community agreement rather than individual volition. In CHT, this collective recognition allows women's moral enforcement whilst maintaining patriarchal social structures: men accept punishment from possessed wives because the authority derives from the spirit world rather than from female autonomy.

The variety of guardian spirits reflects different social roles. Household deities possess women to enforce domestic order. Nature spirits possess mothers and daughters when men harm environmental resources. Moral integrity guardians possess wives when men engage in economic fraud or social harassment. Each possession type correlates with women's designated social responsibilities, yet extends their authority beyond prescribed boundaries. Kanaka Durga (2006) argues that in oral narrative women compose and disseminate creations revealing unexpected voices, projecting protest and resistance free from censorship. The possession narratives achieve this precisely: they enable women to voice anger, demand accountability, and enforce consequences whilst operating within culturally legitimate frameworks.

COLLECTIVE TRAUMA AND COLLECTIVE GUILT

The ghost narratives encode collective experiences of militarisation and violence. The Olive ghosts, named for military uniforms, haunt CHT landscapes with particular ferocity:

"In the hills and we believe all the areas where there have been armed forces, there are olive ghosts. They kill young men, they beat up and rape women, they set houses

on fire— everything that a living olive does. Olives are the worst, as humans as ghosts. They do exactly the same things as alive after death." (Female, 46, Chakma, Rangamati)

These narratives function as touchstones in Banks-Wallace's (2002) sense: stories that evoke deep-seated memories of shared experiences that cannot easily be articulated otherwise. The repetitive haunting scenes force collective witnessing of historical trauma, ensuring younger generations understand the violence their communities have endured. The Olive ghost narratives also generate collective guilt among Bengali youth who benefit from settlement programmes and military presence. Young Bengali male tourists reported supernatural encounters that evoke recognition of complicity:

"It (the story) makes me wonder if I could or we could do something for these poor young girls. The tourists do not even consider them women or humans, they are highly eroticised due to their different looks, languages, and natures than the mainlanders. It does not surprise me that some of them were raped and killed, and came back as ghosts to haunt us, and perhaps themselves, to remind everyone that their deaths have not been avenged." (Male, 25, Bengali tourist)

Wohl, Branscombe, and Klar (2006) demonstrate that reminders of historical group wrongdoing can evoke collective guilt and a desire to amend injustice, though perpetrator groups may legitimise their actions through various strategies. The supernatural narratives create space for guilt recognition amongst settler youth, potentially fostering empathy whilst simultaneously serving as cautionary tales that enforce protective boundaries.

LEGENDS AS RESISTANCE

The supernatural narratives discussed function as legends in Tangherlini's framework: performed conversationally, presented as potentially true, highly localised to CHT, and deeply political in their effects. Their believability stems from their reflection of shared values and collective experiences. Earlier drafts of possession scholarship would ask whether these phenomena are genuine spiritual events, psychological states, or deliberate performances, and would treat the undecidability as a methodological inconvenience. The ontological turn permits a stronger claim: the undecidability is not an obstacle to analysis but a feature of the world being analysed. Holbraad and Pedersen (2017) argue that anthropology's task is not to explain away the things informants live with but to allow those things to transform the analyst's concepts. In CHT, the concept transformed is agency itself. A woman who is not within herself when the petni is her exercises a form of agency for which liberal vocabularies of authentic individual will have no comfortable slot, and the analysis is better for admitting it.

As Fish (1980, cited in Tangherlini, 2009) argues, ambiguous narratives can be successfully communicated when tradition participants share interpretive frameworks. CHT community members understand possession scripts, ghost behaviour patterns, and appropriate responses regardless of their private metaphysical positions. The categorisation of these narratives as legends rather than myths or folktales carries significance: unlike myths, which explain cosmic origins, or folktales, which entertain, legends function as cautionary accounts with immediate practical application. They teach protective behaviours, establish social boundaries, and provide frameworks for navigating danger.

Valk (2014) argues that legends express anxieties caused by rapidly changing society whilst drawing social borders between in-groups and out-groups. In CHT, where military occupation, tourism development, and modernisation programmes transform traditional lifeways, the legends

encode resistance to these changes whilst adapting to contemporary realities. The ghost pet narrative, for instance, runs alongside biomedical knowledge of sexually transmitted infections whilst maintaining an indigenous spiritual frame. The legends' political nature becomes evident in their selective deployment. Women teach protective ghost narratives to daughters whilst omitting stories that would limit female autonomy. Men learn cautionary tales about respecting boundaries but may not receive full instruction in possession interpretation. Strategic transmission ensures the legends serve protective rather than restrictive functions.

CONCLUSION

Indigenous women in Chattogram Hill Tracts employ supernatural folklore as a sophisticated resistance strategy against the intersecting oppressions of patriarchy, militarisation, and ethnic marginalisation. The narratives analysed transform sites of vulnerability into sources of power: beauty becomes protection, menstruation grants spiritual authority, objectification creates boundaries, and possession enables moral enforcement. These legends function simultaneously as individual coping mechanisms, collective memory repositories, and social regulation tools.

The analysis demonstrates that resistance under extreme constraint necessitates creative covert strategies. When overt challenge risks violence or social exclusion, folklore provides a legitimate channel for contestation. The supernatural framework allows women to claim authority, confront transgression, and establish boundaries whilst operating within patriarchal structures rather than directly opposing them. Read through the ontological turn, however, the point sharpens. These are not merely stories women tell about power; they are worlds women inhabit in which power is differently distributed, and in which spirits stand as allies whose reality does not wait on outside verification. To call this superstition is to miss it; to call it strategy alone is to shrink it. The CHT women's ghostlore exemplifies what hooks (1995) identifies as art's transformative potential

within communities of colour, providing rare locations for transcendent acts with wide-ranging impact.

This research contributes to scholarship on indigenous women's agency, folklore as resistance, and legend theory in postcolonial contexts, and it suggests that the ontological turn has an underexplored feminist application: taking seriously the beings through whom marginalised women act.

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II. LITERATURE

Afterlives of Disabled Bodies: Gender, Disability, and the Biopolitics of Partition in Bengal Narratives

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Abstract

This paper explores the nexus between gender, disability, and historical trauma in the narratives of Partition of Bengal in Jyotirmoyee Devi's *The River Churning (Epar Ganga, Opar Ganga)* and Atin Bandyopadhyay's *Nilkantha Pakhir Khonje*. Although the scholarship on partition has thoroughly examined the themes of displacement, violence, and nationalism, it has mostly overlooked how these processes produce embodied debility and long-term disability, especially for women. In the context of Urvashi Butalia's assertion that histories of partition are marked by silences about women's experiences, this paper argues that disability is one such significant silence in dominant historiography. By drawing on the fields of disability studies and feminist theory, the paper conceptualizes disability as a socially and historically produced condition determined by structures of power, rather than individual pathology. In *The River Churning*, the protagonist finds herself socially and emotionally incapacitated as a result of psychological trauma from sexual violence and the subsequent social ostracization. *Nilkantha Pakhir Khonje* shows ways of 'slow violence' that lead to a debility over time in the exile, loss, and dispossession of the refugee experience. This paper makes use of the theoretical work of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Jasbir Puar to interpret partition as a biopolitical event which produces and governs the vulnerable

body through direct and structural violence. The study foregrounds the experiences of disabled and debilitated women and reveals the limitations of dominant partition historiography that prioritizes narratives of survival and recovery while marginalizing those marked by lasting bodily and psychological damage. Finally, it calls for a rethinking of partition studies through a disability lens that foregrounds women's bodies as central sites of historical trauma and ongoing marginalization.

Keywords: Partition of Bengal, biopolitics, disability studies, gender and trauma, feminist historiography, slow violence

Introduction

The partition of India continues to be one of the most studied ruptures in South Asian history, producing a vast scholarship on displacement, communal violence, and the making of postcolonial nationhood. Feminist historians have looked into this domain to recover the experiences of women who were abducted, raped, and forcibly 'recovered' in the new national borders. Urvashi Butalia's landmark oral history, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (1998), remains foundational in this regard. Butalia's decade-long project of interviewing survivors reveals how the human dimensions of partition, particularly the experiences of women, children, and the socially marginal, were left out of official nationalist histories, which favoured accounts of high politics and territorial division over the 'private pain' of those who lived through the event. Butalia writes of a history 'shrouded in silence' and one whose aftershocks survivors have continued to feel in private even where public memory has moved on. But even within this feminist historiographical corrective, an aspect remains strangely undertheorized, the disabled and debilitated body as a long-term, structural consequence of partition violence. While current

scholarship is attentive to sexual violence, abduction and the political economy of ‘recovery,’ it seldom considers what happens to a body and a life after the event, the woman who is cast out into permanent social death, the refugee whose body is gradually eroded by hunger and displacement, the survivor whose trauma is expressed as a durable incapacity rather than a resolved wound. This paper argues that disability is the critical absence in dominant partition historiography, not as an individual pathological condition but as a socially and historically produced state, an absence that is structurally continuous with the silences identified by Butalia.

The paper examines two major Bengali partition novels: Jyotirmoyee Devi’s *Epar Ganga, Opar Ganga* (1968), translated into English by Enakshi Chatterjee as *The River Churning: A Partition Novel* (1995) and Atin Bandyopadhyay’s *Nilkantha Pakhir Khonje* (1968), the first volume of his four-part partition tetralogy. Both novels are set in the borderlands of East Bengal in the years immediately surrounding 1947 and both are centrally concerned with what happens to ordinary people’s bodies and minds in the long aftermath of communal violence and displacement as opposed to the moment of violence itself. Read together, through the lens of disability studies, they offer a way to trace two distinct yet linked tracks of debility created by partition, namely the immediate, violent incapacitation of the sexually assaulted body, and the slow, cumulative wearing down of the displaced and hungry body.

Theoretical Framework: Disability, Biopolitics, and Slow Violence

The central theoretical move of this paper is to conceptualize disability not as a fixed biological attribute located within an individual body but as, what Rosemarie Garland-Thomson calls, a social and cultural production rather than a medical status. In her seminal text, *Extraordinary Bodies* (1997), Garland-Thomson frames disability as a social construction, shifting the analytic lens from

bodies themselves to the cultural rules that dictate what bodies are allowed to be or do. As she states in her seminal text, *Extraordinary Bodies*, “My intention is to defamiliarize these identity categories by disclosing how the ‘able-bodiedness’ are produced by way of legal, medical, political, cultural, and literary narratives that comprise an exclusionary discourse” (Garland-Thomson, 1997, p. 6). This rethinking of disability as a relation produced by power, norms, and exclusion is what makes it possible to bring disability studies into productive conversation with feminist theory and postcolonial historiography, for it asks the same question feminist historians ask of gender: not what bodies innately are, but what social and political processes make certain bodies unlivable, incapacitated, or unrecognized. Garland-Thomson (1997) also investigates the societal construction of the ‘disabled figure.’ However, she also articulates the need for recognition of “the singularity and perhaps the immutability of the flesh” where pain is located and where her struggle for naming her corporeal difference reflects as well as deflects the cultural norms of the “universal subject” (Garland-Thomson, 1997, p. 25). Yet, she similarly conveys the importance of recognition. Pushpa Naidu Parekh reads the disabled protagonist’s refusal of corrective surgery as a political act in Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy-Man*, as a form of resistance to colonial medical discourses that pathologize disability. Nor is this the only way in which partition fiction can function. The narratives from Bengal which are the subject of this paper present a different and stark configuration: debility is not chosen or resisted in this context, instead it is imposed, structural, and uncompensated. Michel Foucault’s discussion of biopower provides a vital vocabulary for describing how such processes operate at the level of populations. Foucault writes of the emergence of a modern form of power since the classical age, which is not just about the sovereign’s power to kill, but about the administration, optimization and regulation of life itself. This is a power to ‘make live and let die’ rather than to kill. In *The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1

(1978), Foucault writes that biopower functions by regulating the health, reproduction, and capacity of populations. Debility is produced in the very space between those bodies that a state elects to support and those it allows to perish. In this reading, partition becomes a biopolitical event, where the drawing of a new border was not only a territorial or administrative act but a device for sorting bodies into those that would be protected, recovered and rehabilitated, and those left to the slow attrition of displacement, hunger and social exile.

To extend this biopolitical framework into the register of grievability, Judith Butler's notion of precarity addresses the question of which lives are socially and politically legible as lives worth mourning, protecting, or repairing. As Butler states, precarity is "that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" (Butler, 2009, p. 25). The larger point that Butler makes, first in *Precarious Life* (2004) and further in *Frames of War* (2009), is that all life is precarious in the ontological sense, but that precarity is uneven and politically distributed, with some populations exposed to injury and slow attrition and others protected from it. This is precisely the differential distribution of precarity at stake in reading Partition's women and refugees: their bodies were made grievable in official nationalist rhetoric (as symbols of communal honour) even as their actual, ongoing suffering post-event was largely unrecognized and unsupported.

Jasbir Puar's *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* further hones this biopolitical framework by distinguishing disability, as a legally and medically defined category, from debility, an overarching state of bodily injury and social marginalization manufactured by economic and political forces that may not ever be formally recognized as a disability. Puar shows how debility, disability and capacity work together as an assemblage through which states govern

populations. She argues that some regimes exercise a ‘right to maim’ in addition to the sovereign right to kill. Power can debilitate populations gradually, keeping them alive but forever diminished, a condition that is often lucrative for existing economic and political arrangements and that disability discourse based on liberal rights is ill prepared to name. Puar’s framework, originally developed for Israeli state violence against Palestinians, provides a compelling, if imperfect, analogy for thinking about partition, a mass communal and political event that did not simply kill or spare bodies, but generated large populations of survivors whose debilitation, psychological, social, physical was neither planned as a discrete atrocity nor well understood as a lasting condition that called for redress.

Finally, Rob Nixon’s notion of ‘slow violence’ in his book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* provides a temporal vocabulary for the kind of harm this paper traces in Bandyopadhyay’s refugee narrative. ‘Slow violence’ is “a violence that happens slowly and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is not spectacular nor instantaneous but incremental and accretive” (Nixon, 2011, p. 2). Nixon’s framework is meant to explain environmental damage to the global poor, but its emphasis on the slow build-up of socially invisible harms, rather than the dramatic, immediately visible violence of riot or massacre, lends itself easily to the experiences of partition refugees, whose bodies suffered degradation over months and years of displacement, hunger and insecure resettlement, not in one legible act of violence. Together these frameworks enable this paper to consider the afterlives of partition not as a psychological trauma to be remedied through narrative or therapeutic recovery but as a biopolitical process that produced a durable embodied debility, a process best understood through close attention to literary texts that register what official historiography does not.

Historiographical Silence and the Absence of Disability

The singularly most influential intervention to establish that the history of partition is constituted as much by its silences as by its archive remains *The Other Side of Silence* by Butalia (1998). Butalia structures her book around categories long excluded from official history: 'Blood,' 'Women,' 'Honour,' 'Children,' 'Margins.' Butalia insists that the history of partition cannot be told through parliamentary records and demographic statistics alone. Rather, it must be recovered through oral testimony, memoir, and the reading of silences themselves.

Butalia (1998) speaks of the broad category of the silenced, which includes women, children, Dalits and other groups at the 'margins' of history. But disability does not always fall into this broad category. This is not a failing peculiar to Butalia, rather it is a symptom of a wider tendency in historiography; this element has received much less attention than sexual violence or displacement. The construction of abled/disabled binaries during partition often entails the construction of a social hierarchy, which in turn can result in individuals' prejudice, discrimination and cruelty. Butalia's book offers a detailed account of the sexual violence, forced conversion, and abduction that partition perpetrated on women's bodies, and hints at the enduring psychological and social trauma that the violence caused, but it does not explicitly organize this material around disability as a category of analysis. This is not a problem limited to Butalia but is characteristic of a broader historiographical trend where even the most feminist and restorative studies of partition tend to present women's post-partition experiences in terms of survival, resilience and, eventual, though incomplete, social integration, rather than admit a continuing incapacitation. This article challenges the tendency towards stories of survival and recuperation. It instead considers the stories that view disability as a permanent state, not something that needs to be fixed or solved.

Psychological Incapacitation and Social Death in *The River Churning*

Epar Ganga, Opar Gangaby Jyotirmoyee Devi was first published as a short story in 1966 and as a novel in 1968; Enakshi Chatterjee's English translation, *The River Churning: A Partition Novel*, was published in 1995. The novel is set against the 1946 Noakhali riots that preceded partition proper and follows the story of Sutara Datta, a young Hindu girl whose father is killed and whose mother drowns herself during a communal attack on their home and who is subsequently sheltered for months by a Muslim neighbouring family before being 'recovered' and reunited with her brothers in Calcutta. What follows this reunion is not restoration but exile within her own family. Sutara is forever marked as 'polluted' by orthodox Brahminical codes of purity, rejected by her own brothers, and pushed to the margins of the very community that was supposed to be fighting to save women like her. Crucially, Devi structures the novel so that the exact nature of Sutara's violence during her months in hiding is never explicitly described. Mookerjea-Leonard (2003) has praised *The River Churning* for its focus on women's absent histories, its re-inscription of "the obliterated, unspeakable women's bodily experience of the political division of the country as the new Stree Parva" (Mookerjea-Leonard, 2003, p. 36). She has also pointed out that Sutara's memory of the sexual assault she probably went through remains as a confused, nebulous memory. The text does not confirm the assault, but builds the remainder of the narrative around the social implications of what the reader is left to infer. This ambiguity of narrative should not be seen as authorial reticence but as a rejection of the conventions of the rape-narrative genre. Instead of dwelling on the violent act itself, Devi discovers Sutara's 'self' as a subject on the other side of the assault, whose interiority and social position have been completely reordered by an event that the text refuses to represent. This structure is important for a disability reading of the novel because it formally enacts the very process this paper is describing: violence that does not resolve into visible,

nameable injury but instead produces a durable, diffuse incapacity, social, psychological, and interpersonal that persists long after the event. The images of weeping and unspoken grief are repeated throughout the novel with Sutara's 'pathetic mental state.' It does not function as a symptom to be worked through and resolved by the end of the novel. Instead, it turns into a chronic condition of her adult life, an inability to be believed, an inability to marry within her community on ordinary terms and, as a lifelong marginalization sustained by a hypocritical obsession with women's sexual purity at the foundation of patriarchal Hindu respectability. The violence inherent in the very process of silencing and marginalization destroys later recuperative processes such that "the subaltern cannot speak" (Spivak, 1994, p. 104). Sutara's body is a pawn even in the game of nation building instrumentalized by the community's need to police communal honour, even as her actual needs, as a traumatised survivor in need of care and reintegration, go unmet.

According to Garland-Thomson's (1997) framework, Sutara's post-assault condition is not an individual psychological wound but a socially produced incapacity. It is the attack itself, not the community's insistence on her permanent ritual 'pollution,' that produces her continued social debility. In terms of grieving, Sutara represents a strange duality, as described by Butler (2009): she is grievable in an abstract sense as the violated nation/community, but ungrievable in a practical sense, as neither her family nor the state relief machinery that 'recovers' her really provide the continuous care required to address her real suffering; the inquiries she faces after her rescue are perceived by her as yet another form of exposure and threat. It is exactly the mechanism that Puar identifies, a debilitation that is not formally recognized as disability, nor appropriately addressed, but which persists as a permanent, unrecognized reduction of the survivor's social capacity.

Slow Violence and Embodied Debility in Nilkantha Pakhir Khonje

While *The River Churning* traces one acute episode of violence that results in a lasting condition of social and psychological debilitation, *Nilkantha Pakhir Khonje* by Atin Bandyopadhyay presents a contrasting model of enfeeblement, one that accumulates incrementally through the routine erosions of displacement, rather than through a single cataclysmic act. Bandyopadhyay himself was a refugee from his village Rainadi in Dhaka district to Murshidabad in West Bengal after the partition, and this experience was directly used in constructing his tetralogy. The first and most famous volume, *Nilkantha Pakhir Khonje* (1968), takes place in an East Bengali village, whose 'idyllic calm' is gradually disturbed, initially by the communal tensions of 1946, and finally by the very rupture of partition itself, a rupture that leaves families like the novel's central Datta household uprooted, penniless and homeless.

The novel has been praised in Bengali literary criticism as a work of genius for its documentary realism, and its slow and patient attention to the texture of rural life before its disintegration. One prominent Bengali writer compared the fidelity to lived experience of the novel to Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's *Pather Panchali*. This slow, accretive method of narration is significant in itself for a disability reading. Instead of staging partition as a single cataclysmic event, the novel depicts it as a process that unfolds gradually across a community's collective body, becoming fully visible only in its cumulative effects, displacement, loss of livelihood, and the eventual forced departure of families that leave members behind, untraced, when they are compelled to cross into West Bengal (Blind Persons' Association, 2019). And this is the type of harm that Nixon's (2011) notion of slow violence seeks to address, violence that is gradual and out of sight, dispersed across time and space, and thus, ordinarily not recognized as violence at all. In Bandyopadhyay's story, the refugee's body is not marked by a visible wound, but by the slow erosion of hunger and homelessness and the destruction of the agricultural and communal

structures that sustained bodily health. This kind of harm is hard to tell easily because it doesn't have the 'spectacle-driven' quality that Nixon argues typically mobilizes public attention and redress. Instead, it is, in Puar's (2017) terms, a kind of debilitation that never materializes into a legally or medically recognized disability and is thus easily taken up into the background of partition's larger historical narrative rather than named as a lasting harm in its own right.

Unlike *The River Churning*, *Nilkantha Pakhir Khonje* is, interestingly, still largely untranslated into English, and, therefore, underanalysed within Anglophone partition scholarship. This is a telling silence, as it means that the slow, cumulative form of embodied harm that the novel documents has received far less critical attention than the more legible, event-based violence that is addressed in works available to readers in the English-language. This asymmetry in the archive is not an incidental aspect of the argument of this paper, but rather continuous with it: the scholarly neglect of a text organized around slow, diffuse debility is a mirror, at the level of criticism, of the very historiographical erasure of slow violence that Nixon (2011) identifies at the level of politics.

Partition as a Biopolitical Event

Read together, these two novels allow for a rethinking of partition as what Foucauldian theory would call a biopolitical event, not simply a political and territorial division, but a mechanism that sorted populations according to differential exposure to injury, care, and neglect. The postcolonial nation-states that emerged after partition inherited, and in significant ways intensified, colonial administrative logics of population management and transferred them to new projects of recovery and rehabilitation, which were themselves selective in terms of who they served and how. Butler's analysis of the differential distribution of precarity illuminates why the women and refugees at the

heart of both texts could be simultaneously summoned as symbols of national and communal injury, worthy, in the abstract, of grief and protection, while remaining, in the concrete, beyond the reach of sustained institutional care.

Puar's analysis of the right to maim as an addition to sovereign power sharpens this point. Puar's own case study is a particular, contemporary state practice of deliberate maiming. This paper does not argue that the postcolonial Indian or Pakistani states deliberately debilitated the women and refugees of partition in the same calculated sense. Rather, it builds on Puar's basic insight that biopolitical power does not have to work through direct killing to produce mass debility: the failure to provide adequate, sustained care to survivors, whether through the stigmatizing logic of ritual 'pollution' that ostracizes Sutara or through the simple lack of resources for refugees displaced by the slow unravelling that Bandyopadhyay's novel documents is itself a biopolitical mechanism that produces disability as a durable condition at the level of the population, even where no single actor intends this effect.

Conclusion: Toward a Disability Historiography of Partition

This paper has argued that disability is an under-examined absence in the historiography of Partition, structurally continuous with the 'silences' that Butalia (1998) identified as constitutive of the field. In reading Jyotirmoyee Devi's *The River Churning* in conjunction with Atin Bandyopadhyay's *Nilkantha Pakhir Khonje*, we encounter two distinct narratives of how partition resulted in a lasting, embodied form of debility: the sudden violence of sexual assault that is crystallized into chronic social and psychological incapacity maintained by patriarchal codes of purity, and the slow, cumulative violence of displacement, hunger, and dispossession that eats away at the refugee body over time without ever producing a single legible injury. Both novels can be

read as literary articulations of a biopolitical process, based on Foucault's (1978) account of biopower, Butler's (2009) theorization of precarity and grievability, and Puar's (2017) distinction between debility and disability. The most feminist histories of partition have told this story largely in terms of survival and eventual, if partial, recovery.

To approach Partition from the perspective of disability studies demands that scholars entertain the possibility that recovery is not always the conclusion of the narrative: that some bodies bear permanent scars, some lives permanent diminishment, from an event that official historiography has favoured narrating as a closed chapter of national founding. To foreground the disabled and debilitated bodies of women in Partition studies is not only to correct a historiographical omission but also to challenge the very assumption on which much nationalist memory-making is based: that historical trauma is something that a nation and its subjects can eventually leave behind. For the women and refugees at the heart of these two novels the Partition did not end in 1947. Its afterlives were lived, and are being written, in bodies with its slow and lasting marks.

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RECONSTRUCTING THE FOLK LIFE OF EARLY MODERN ODISHA THROUGH EUROPEAN TRAVEL NARRATIVES (1500–1700 CE)

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Abstract

European travel narratives constitute an important source for reconstructing the folk life of early modern Odisha. Written by merchants, missionaries, physicians, diplomats, and adventurers between 1500 and 1700 CE, these accounts preserve valuable observations on the region's religion, festivals, pilgrimage, occupations, social customs, performance traditions, and everyday life. This article examines how European travellers perceived and represented the folk culture of Odisha and assesses the historical and anthropological value of their narratives. The study draws primarily upon the accounts of Duarte Barbosa, Caesar Frederick, Ralph Fitch, John Huyghen van Linschoten, Sebastian Manrique, William Bruton, Thomas Bowrey, Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, Jean de Thévenot, and François Bernier. Using a historical-anthropological and textual approach, it analyses their descriptions of the Jagannath cult, Rath Yatra, temple-centred society, folk beliefs, music, dance, hospitality, and village life. The study argues that despite cultural bias and religious preconceptions, these narratives remain indispensable sources for reconstructing the folk culture of early modern Odisha when critically interpreted alongside indigenous sources.

Keywords: European Travel Narratives; Folk Life; Early Modern Odisha; Jagannath Cult; *Rath Yatra*; Folk Culture; Historical Anthropology.

Introduction

Travel narratives constitute one of the most valuable sources for reconstructing the social and cultural history of the early modern world. Unlike political chronicles and administrative records, they frequently preserve valuable information on the everyday lives of ordinary people, including their religion, customs, occupations, festivals, food habits, dress, markets, and social practices. From the sixteenth century onwards, European travel writing expanded beyond geographical description and commercial information to include observations on peoples, customs, languages, and forms of government, thereby acquiring considerable historical and ethnographic significance (Rubiés, 2002, p. 242).

Although European travel accounts have frequently been used to study Odisha's maritime trade, political history, and the Jagannath Temple, their potential for reconstructing the region's folk life has received comparatively little scholarly attention. This article addresses that gap by examining these narratives through a historical-anthropological perspective, focusing on the everyday cultural practices of early modern Odisha. While the travellers were neither trained historians nor ethnographers in the modern sense, their observations on rituals, markets, festivals, occupations, and community life provide valuable ethnographic evidence when critically analysed and corroborated with indigenous literary, archaeological, and documentary sources.

Among the regions that attracted European attention, Odisha occupied a distinctive place because of its celebrated Jagannath cult, the annual *Rath Yatra*, flourishing temple traditions, and active maritime ports. Situated on the Bay of Bengal, the region linked northern India with the wider Indian Ocean trading world, while the fame of the Jagannath Temple drew pilgrims from across the subcontinent. These religious and commercial attractions brought merchants, missionaries, diplomats, physicians, and adventurers into contact with Odisha, although it was rarely their principal destination (Rubiés, 2000, p. 1).

Drawing primarily on the published accounts of Duarte Barbosa, Caesar Frederick, Ralph Fitch, John Huyghen van Linschoten, Sebastian Manrique, William Bruton, Thomas Bowrey, Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, François Bernier, and Jean de Thévenot, this study analyses popular religion, festivals, performance traditions, occupations, material culture, hospitality, and community beliefs through historical, anthropological, and textual approaches. It argues that, despite their cultural biases and limitations, European travel narratives remain indispensable sources for reconstructing the folk life of early modern Odisha and understanding the nature of cross-cultural encounters in the early modern Indian Ocean world.

Odisha in the European Imagination

The expansion of European maritime activity after the late fifteenth century brought the Indian Ocean into the centre of global commerce and geographical curiosity. Merchants, missionaries, diplomats, physicians, and adventurers travelled eastward in search of trade, religious missions, and new knowledge. Their journeys produced travel narratives that introduced European readers to unfamiliar regions and cultures. Within this expanding maritime world, Odisha gradually emerged as a distinctive region because of its coastal trade and the fame of the Jagannath Temple.

Unlike Goa, Surat, or Agra, Odisha was rarely the principal destination of European travellers. Most reached the region while sailing along the eastern coast of India or travelling between Bengal and the Coromandel Coast. Yet Odisha attracted considerable attention because of its strategic location on the Bay of Bengal, its prosperous ports, and its reputation as an important centre of pilgrimage (Mohapatra, 1989, p. 33).

European knowledge of Odisha initially developed through maritime commerce. Ports such as Pipli, Balasore, Hariharpur, and Hijli linked the region with Bengal, Ceylon, Malacca, Sumatra, and other trading centres of the Indian Ocean. Frederick (1904, p. 409) observed that ships regularly carried rice, cotton textiles, butter, sesame oil, lac, ginger, and long pepper from

Odisha to different parts of Asia. Similarly, Fitch described Hijli as an active port exporting rice, sugar, cotton textiles, and other commodities to Southeast Asia (Fitch, 1899, pp. 113–114; Fitch, 1925, pp. 58–59). These observations indicate that European familiarity with Odisha developed first through commercial networks rather than political contact.

Among the earliest Portuguese writers, Barbosa recognised Odisha as a distinct kingdom on the eastern coast of India and incorporated it into the geographical knowledge of the Portuguese world (Barbosa, 1918; Barbosa, 1921). Over time, however, Odisha became known less for its political identity than for the Jagannath Temple at Puri. Linschoten (1885, pp. 294–295) described its celebrated chariot festival, while Thévenot (1949, pp. 94–96) remarked that the province itself was widely identified with Jagannath because of the temple's enduring fame.

European perceptions of Odisha were therefore shaped by two closely connected features: maritime commerce and the Jagannath tradition. Together, they transformed Odisha from a coastal trading region into a distinctive cultural landscape in European travel literature and prepared the ground for later descriptions of its folk religion, festivals, and everyday life.

Folk Religion and Sacred Traditions

Religion formed the foundation of folk life in early modern Odisha, with the Jagannath tradition at its centre. European travellers consistently recognised that the identity of Odisha was closely associated with Lord Jagannath. Their accounts indicate that the cult extended beyond the temple and priesthood to shape the everyday religious life of the people. Pilgrims, merchants, artisans, temple servants, ascetics, and villagers participated in a shared religious culture that linked faith with community life. In this sense, the Jagannath tradition functioned not merely as a religious institution but as a living expression of Odia folk culture.

Pilgrimage was the most visible manifestation of this collective faith. Travellers observed that devotees from different regions and social backgrounds undertook long journeys

to Puri, often travelling in groups of families or entire village communities. Tavernier (1905, pp. 190, 432) described Jagannath as one of the foremost pilgrimage centres of India, while Thévenot (1949, pp. 94–96) noted that the province itself was widely identified with Jagannath because of the fame of the shrine. These observations suggest that pilgrimage shaped both the sacred geography and the cultural identity of Odisha.

The travel accounts also portray the Jagannath Temple as an important community institution. Tavernier (1925, pp. 175–179) observed that offerings made by pilgrims sustained the temple and supported the feeding of devotees and the poor, illustrating the close relationship between worship, charity, and community welfare. The temple thus functioned not only as a sacred centre but also as a space where religious devotion fostered social solidarity.

European travellers further recorded the participation of priests, musicians, dancers, and attendants in daily worship. Bowrey (1993, p. 13) noted that ritual music, dance, and ceremonial performances formed an integral part of temple worship, demonstrating the close relationship between sacred practice and folk culture. The narratives also preserve references to oral traditions associated with Jagannath. Tavernier (1925, pp. 175–179) recorded stories of the miraculous powers of the deity, while Bowrey (1993, p. 16) referred to popular beliefs concerning the divine protection of the temple. Although these accounts were often based on information supplied by local informants, they illustrate how collective memory and oral tradition reinforced religious faith.

Missionary travellers such as Manrique (1967, pp. 72–74) and critical observers such as Bernier (1891, p. 304) frequently interpreted these practices as superstition or priestly influence. Yet their criticisms also reveal the remarkable place of Jagannath in the religious imagination of the people. Read alongside indigenous traditions, these narratives demonstrate that pilgrimage, charity, ritual participation, and oral traditions together sustained a vibrant folk religion that shaped Odisha's collective cultural identity.

Festivals and Community Traditions

Festivals formed one of the most vibrant expressions of the folk life of early modern Odisha. They were not merely religious observances but community institutions that brought together people from different regions, occupations, and social backgrounds. European travellers repeatedly observed that these occasions combined ritual, pilgrimage, trade, music, and public participation, reinforcing social cohesion and cultural continuity.

Among these, the *Rath Yatra* of Lord Jagannath received the greatest attention. Almost every traveller who referred to Odisha described the annual chariot festival, making it one of the earliest Indian public festivals to appear consistently in European travel literature. Linschoten (1885, pp. 294–295) described the grand procession in which the deity was carried on a massive wooden chariot drawn by hundreds of devotees. He noted that pilgrims travelled from distant regions and regarded participation in pulling the chariot as an act of religious merit, illustrating the festival's widespread fame beyond Odisha.

Manrique (1967, pp. 72–74) likewise emphasised the large gatherings that accompanied the procession. By bringing the deities beyond the temple precincts, the festival transformed public space into a shared arena of worship and community participation. Bowrey (1993, p. 17) provided the most detailed account, noting that the celebrations lasted several days and attracted nearly 150,000 pilgrims. His description of the construction and movement of the enormous chariot highlights the collective efforts of artisans, carpenters, priests, musicians, traders, and devotees, demonstrating that the festival was a community enterprise rather than merely a religious ceremony.

The travel accounts further indicate that festivals stimulated pilgrimage fairs, local markets, and cultural performances. Merchants, craftsmen, entertainers, and temple servants assembled around the sacred centre, while music played on drums, pipes, trumpets, and other instruments accompanied the ceremonies (Bowrey, 1993, pp. 13, 17). Thus, the *Rath Yatra*

emerged as a folk institution where religion, performance, commerce, and hospitality converged, strengthening the collective identity and cultural continuity of early modern Odisha.

Folk Performance Traditions

Performance traditions formed an integral part of the folk culture of early modern Odisha. European travellers observed that music, dance, and ceremonial performances were closely associated with religious worship and public festivals. These performances were not merely artistic displays but collective expressions of devotion that reinforced community participation and preserved ritual traditions.

Among the performers associated with the Jagannath Temple, the Devadasis or temple dancers attracted particular attention. Bowrey (1993, p. 13) noted that dancing women regularly performed during daily worship, ceremonial offerings, and major festivals, occupying a recognised position within the temple establishment. Although he interpreted their role through contemporary European moral values, his account suggests that dance functioned as a sacred offering rather than a form of secular entertainment.

Music formed an equally important component of temple rituals. Bowrey (1993, pp. 13–14) described the use of drums, pipes, trumpets, and stringed instruments accompanying dance and ceremonial worship. Together, music, movement, and ritual transformed religious observances into shared cultural experiences involving priests, performers, pilgrims, and local communities.

The performance traditions also extended beyond the temple precincts. During festivals and processions, music and dance became public events witnessed by large gatherings. Bernier (1891, pp. 305–306) referred to the participation of dancing women in religious ceremonies, while Tavernier (1925, p. 175) described the elaborate rituals and ceremonial splendour of the Jagannath Temple. Although both interpreted these practices through European cultural

perspectives, their accounts demonstrate that ritual performance formed an essential part of community life.

Taken together, these narratives suggest that the ceremonial culture surrounding the Jagannath Temple nurtured performance traditions that continued beyond the temple into the wider society. Many elements of this heritage survive in the traditions of Mahari dance, Odissi, temple music, *kīrtana*, and festival performances, reflecting the continuity of Odisha's living folk culture.

Everyday Folk Life

European travel narratives offer valuable insights into the everyday life of early modern Odisha by shifting attention from courts and rulers to ordinary people. Although recorded incidentally, their observations illuminate patterns of livelihood, food habits, mobility, hospitality, and village life that formed the material foundation of Odia folk culture.

Agriculture sustained both the rural economy and the region's commercial networks. Rice was the principal crop, staple food, and a major export commodity. Frederick (1904, p. 409) observed that ships leaving Odisha carried rice, butter, sesame oil, lac, ginger, and long pepper to different parts of Asia, while Fitch described Hijli as an active port exporting rice, sugar, and cotton textiles (Fitch, 1899, pp. 113–114; Fitch, 1925, pp. 58–59). These accounts indicate that agricultural production was closely integrated with maritime commerce and linked village communities to the wider economy of the Bay of Bengal.

The coastal environment also shaped everyday occupations. Bowrey (1993, p. 199) referred to fishing and salt making as important sources of livelihood, while textile production, local crafts, and merchant communities connected rural settlements with regional and overseas markets. Bruton and Bowrey described the commercial activity of Balasore and Hariharpur and the presence of prosperous merchants engaged in long-distance trade (Bruton, 1745, pp. 277–

279; Bowrey, 1993, pp. 128–183, 153). Markets therefore served not only as centres of exchange but also as spaces of social interaction and cultural contact.

The travellers also recorded aspects of domestic life. Rice, fish, milk, butter, and ghee formed the staple diet, while Bowrey noted the simple dress of the people and the use of conch-shell ornaments by married women (Tavernier, 1925, p. 175; Bowrey, 1993, pp. 200, 206–207). Such observations reflect a material culture shaped by agriculture, riverine resources, and local traditions.

Mobility and hospitality were equally significant features of everyday life. Manrique described villages supplying travellers with food and provisions and referred to **Caramossoras** (travellers' rest houses) along major routes (Manrique, 1967, pp. 75–85). Bowrey (1993, pp. 131–132) likewise praised the road between Balasore and Cuttack, lined with gardens, ponds, and settlements. Together, these accounts portray a society sustained by agriculture, commerce, and traditions of hospitality, where everyday life was closely connected with pilgrimage, trade, and community cooperation. These observations demonstrate that the folk culture of early modern Odisha was rooted not only in religious traditions but also in the material practices of agriculture, trade, mobility, and hospitality that sustained community life.

Folk Beliefs, Oral Traditions and Popular Knowledge

European travel narratives preserve valuable glimpses of the folk beliefs and knowledge systems of early modern Odisha. Beyond describing temples and festivals, they recorded the legends, ritual practices, and popular explanations through which ordinary people understood the sacred world. Although many travellers interpreted these beliefs through Christian or rationalist perspectives, their accounts inadvertently document the oral traditions and cultural knowledge that shaped everyday life and collective memory.

The Jagannath tradition was sustained not only by ritual worship but also by a rich body of oral narratives. Tavernier (1925, pp. 175–179) recorded the widely circulated story of a

jeweller who attempted to steal a diamond from the image of Jagannath but was found dead before the temple gate the following morning, an event attributed to the miraculous power of the deity. Whether historically authentic or not, such narratives reinforced the sanctity of the temple and transmitted moral values through popular tradition.

Bowrey (1993, p. 16) encountered similar beliefs concerning the divine protection of the Jagannath Temple. Local informants attributed the shrine's survival to the spiritual powers of the deity and its priests. Rather than treating these accounts as historical facts, they may be understood as expressions of collective memory that strengthened the community's attachment to its sacred centre.

The narratives also preserve examples of indigenous knowledge. During his stay at Balasore, Bowrey (1993, pp. 33–34) observed people bathing after a lunar eclipse and performing rituals based on traditional beliefs. His attempt to explain the phenomenon scientifically illustrates the coexistence of European scientific reasoning and indigenous cosmological knowledge, each reflecting a different way of interpreting the natural world.

Popular faith also found expression through vows, offerings, pilgrimage, and confidence in ritual specialists. Manrique (1967, pp. 72–74) recorded local traditions concerning the origin of Jagannath, illustrating how sacred narratives circulated through oral transmission rather than written texts. Viewed from a historical-anthropological perspective, these accounts suggest that folk beliefs were not merely matters of faith but community knowledge systems through which people interpreted the natural world, preserved cultural memory, and reinforced social cohesion. Read alongside indigenous traditions, they provide valuable insights into the oral heritage and cultural continuity of early modern Odisha.

European Perceptions of Odia Folk Life

European travel narratives illuminate not only the folk life of early modern Odisha but also the ways in which foreign observers understood and represented an unfamiliar society.

Their descriptions were shaped by religious beliefs, commercial interests, intellectual traditions, and cultural assumptions. Consequently, these narratives reveal two parallel histories: one of Odia folk culture and another of the European imagination that sought to interpret it.

A prominent feature of these accounts is the tendency to interpret Odia society through the moral and religious framework of Christian Europe. Temple worship, pilgrimage, image worship, and ritual performances were frequently described as idolatry, superstition, or priestly deception. Bowrey (1993, p. 24) criticised Brahmins for sustaining popular beliefs through myths and magical practices, while Bernier (1891, p. 304) regarded many temple rituals as products of priestly influence rather than expressions of collective faith. Such interpretations reveal more about European intellectual assumptions than about the religious life of Odisha.

European travellers also explained Indian institutions through familiar cultural categories. Tavernier (1925, p. 175), for example, compared the Jagannath Temple with a Christian church, making its organisation intelligible to European readers but simplifying the complex relationship between folk tradition, ritual, and community life.

Despite these limitations, many travellers displayed genuine curiosity and attempted to understand the society they encountered. Barbosa (1815, p. i) collected information from people of different religious backgrounds before recording local customs. Bowrey (1993, p. 33) claimed to have learnt the Oriya language and discussed local beliefs with Brahmins, while Tavernier (1905, pp. i–vi) compared information from different informants before incorporating it into his narrative. Such efforts enhance the credibility of many of their observations on everyday life.

The narratives also contain expressions of admiration. Frederick (1904, p. 409) praised the security enjoyed by merchants, Bowrey (1993, pp. 14, 131) admired the road between Balasore and Cuttack and the elegance of temple dancers, and Bernier (1891, p. 304)

acknowledged the extraordinary devotion of pilgrims during the *Rath Yatra*. These observations suggest that European perceptions combined curiosity, appreciation, and criticism rather than simple rejection.

Cultural distance, however, often produced misunderstanding. Linschoten (1885, pp. 294–295) misplaced the Jagannath Temple geographically, while Thévenot (1949, pp. 94–96) misunderstood the administrative identity of Odisha under the Mughal Empire. Likewise, reports of miraculous events, immense temple wealth, or deaths beneath the chariot wheels frequently reflected hearsay and the European fascination with the exotic.

Viewed from a historical-anthropological perspective, these limitations do not diminish the value of the travel accounts. Instead, they reveal how Odia folk culture was perceived, interpreted, and represented across cultural boundaries. When read alongside indigenous sources, the narratives become valuable evidence not only for reconstructing the folk traditions of early modern Odisha but also for understanding the nature of early modern cross-cultural encounters and the making of European knowledge about India.

Travel Narratives as Sources for the Study of Folk Life

European travel narratives constitute an important source for reconstructing the folk life of early modern Odisha. Unlike royal chronicles, administrative records, and court histories, they shift attention from rulers to ordinary people and their everyday experiences. Merchants, missionaries, physicians, and travellers recorded religion, festivals, occupations, food, dress, markets, roads, hospitality, and popular beliefs, preserving dimensions of social life that receive limited attention in indigenous historical sources (Rubiés, 2002, p. 242).

The principal strength of these narratives lies in their contemporary observations. Manrique (1967, pp. 75–85) described roads, travellers' inns, markets, and communication networks across Pipli, Balasore, and Jaleswar, while Bowrey (1993, p. 33), who spent several years in eastern India and claimed to have learnt the Oriya language, recorded village life,

occupations, religious customs, and popular practices in considerable detail. Such accounts provide valuable evidence for reconstructing the social and cultural landscape of seventeenth-century Odisha.

From a historical-anthropological perspective, these narratives possess considerable ethnographic value. Although their authors were not trained ethnographers, they documented rituals, festivals, pilgrimage, performance traditions, hospitality, and everyday customs with unusual attention. Collectively, they reveal how religion, economy, and community life were closely intertwined in shaping Odia folk culture.

At the same time, these accounts require critical reading. Many travellers depended on interpreters and local informants, and their observations were influenced by Christian beliefs, commercial interests, and European cultural assumptions, resulting at times in misunderstanding or exaggeration (Bowrey, 1993, p. 24; Tavernier, 1925, pp. xxxii–xxxiii.). Their historical value, therefore, lies not only in the information they preserve but also in the perspectives through which that information was interpreted.

When critically compared with indigenous sources such as the *Madala Panji*, temple records, Odia literature, inscriptions, and oral traditions, European travel narratives become indispensable for reconstructing the folk culture of early modern Odisha and for understanding the dynamics of early modern cross-cultural encounters.

Conclusion

European travel narratives provide an important source for reconstructing the folk life of early modern Odisha. Although written by merchants, missionaries, physicians, and travellers for diverse purposes, these accounts preserve valuable observations on popular religion, pilgrimage, festivals, performance traditions, occupations, material culture, hospitality, and community beliefs. They demonstrate that the Jagannath tradition functioned

not merely as a religious institution but as the cultural centre that integrated faith, community life, and regional identity.

At the same time, these narratives possess significance beyond their descriptive value. When read critically, they offer early ethnographic insights into the everyday experiences and cultural practices of ordinary people, while also revealing the ways in which Europeans interpreted an unfamiliar society. Their limitations arising from religious prejudice, commercial interests, linguistic barriers, and cultural assumptions underline the need for careful contextual reading. Examined alongside the *Madala Panji*, temple records, Odia literature, palm-leaf manuscripts, inscriptions, and oral traditions, they contribute to a more balanced reconstruction of Odisha's folk culture and demonstrate the value of combining indigenous and foreign sources for writing the social and cultural history of early modern India.

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Eco-Narrativity in the Stories of Vijaydan Detha: Desert Ecology, Extra-Human Agency, and Vernacular Environmental Knowledge

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Abstract

Vijaydan Detha (1926–2013), affectionately known as Bijji in Rajasthan, holds a distinctive position in modern Indian literature (a fact borne out by his nomination for the Nobel prize in 2011 and the award of Padmashree in 2007) for transforming the oral narrative traditions of Rajasthan into a body of Rajasthani short fiction. His fourteen-volume *Baatan Ri Phulwari* (*Garden of Tales*), together with later collections such as *Chouboli and Other Stories*, demonstrates how folklore can become a means of negotiating questions of gender, caste, class, power, desire, and social justice. Detha's stories, however, have received comparatively less attention as ecological narratives. This paper proposes eco-narrativity as a framework for examining the ways in which Detha's stories narrate relations among humans, animals, plants, landscape, weather, water, and other-than-human beings. Rather than treating the environment as an ornamental backdrop to human action, the paper argues that Detha's narrative worlds frequently construct ecological relations as constitutive of plot, character, ethical conflict, and cultural memory. Stories such as “The Dilemma”, “Press the Sap, Light the Lamp”, “The Dove and the Snake”, “A Hound's Pride,” and “Countless Hitlers” reveal a vernacular ecology in which animals and landscapes participate in human affairs, while the arid environment of Rajasthan becomes an epistemological climate shaping modes of survival, desire, mobility, and community. Drawing on eco-criticism, environmental humanities, post-humanism, ecofeminism, and scholarship on Indian environmental thought, the paper seeks to re- conceptualize Detha's folklore as a form of ecological narrativity. It further argues that his

seemingly fantastical representations of talking animals, snakes, ghosts, trees, rain, desert spaces, and nonhuman agencies is a conscious choice of craft designed to challenge and destabilize the anthropocentric hierarchy separating human culture from nature. At the same time, the paper stays clear of labelling every representation of nature “ecological”; on the contrary, most of Detha's stories do not constitute environmentalist texts in the modern activist sense. Their ecological significance emerges instead through in-built relational ontology, interspecies imagination, and narrative refusal of a rigid human/nonhuman binary.

Keywords: eco-narrativity; eco-criticism; environmental humanities; Rajasthani folklore; desert ecology

Introduction

The emerging field of environmental humanities has increasingly questioned the assumption that ecological consciousness begins with modern environmentalism. Literary cultures predating the contemporary ecological crisis frequently preserve alternative understandings of the relationship between humans and their surroundings. Of course, the points of emphasis might have been different. Folklore is particularly significant in this regard because it transmits knowledge not merely through abstract propositions but through stories, proverbs, rituals, myths, animal figures, season-focused imagery, and culturally embedded practices.

Vijaydan Detha's storytelling is especially relevant for such an inquiry. Born in Borunda in Rajasthan, Detha emerged from a bardic storytelling tradition and subsequently transformed oral Rajasthani narratives into written literary forms. His collaboration with folklorist Komal Kothari and his association with Rupayan Sansthan were central to the documentation and preservation of Rajasthan's oral culture. Detha's *Baatan Ri Phulwari*, a fourteen-volume

collection, is based substantially on the region's folklore and oral storytelling traditions. His corpus comprises more than eight hundred stories and has been translated into several Indian and international languages (Gurjar 178).

Much of the critical reception of Detha has, therefore, understandably concentrated on his treatment of folklore, orality, gender, caste, class, sexuality, power, and anti-feudal critique. Critics have also emphasized his transformation of inherited folktales into contemporary literary narratives. Christi A. Merrill, for instance, highlights the linguistic and ideological vitality produced when oral Rajasthani idioms enter literary form, while Malashri Lal, a senior scholar based in Delhi, observes that Detha uses the folk narrative form to subvert established assumptions concerning gender, desire, power, caste, and hierarchy.(qtd in “World Literature Tour Recommendations:India”)

The present paper, however, proposes that another dimension merits critical attention: the ecologically aware organization of Detha's narratives. The argument is not that Detha was an environmentalist *per se*, or that his stories consciously advocate the conservationist politics. Rather, the paper seeks to examine how his narratives produce meaning through relationships between humans and the more-than-human world. In Detha, the desert is not merely scenery; animals are not merely metaphors; trees are not simply picturesque objects; and weather is not merely atmospheric description. These entities frequently figure prominently in his narratives. The stories allow snakes to become lovers, animals to speak, birds to possess knowledge, ghosts to inhabit trees, and the landscape to determine the possibilities of human existence.

This paper therefore asks: How do Detha's narratives depict ecological relationships? What happens when his stories are read not simply as folklore or social allegory but as narratives of human–nonhuman relationality? And can “eco-narrativity” offer a more precise category than the broader label of “eco-criticism” for understanding these stories?

Conceptualizing Eco-Narrativity

The term eco-narrativity is used here to designate the ways in which ecological relations become constitutive of narrative structure rather than merely part of the thematic content.

Traditional eco-critical approaches, especially those associated with Cheryll Glotfelty, ask how literature represents the physical environment and how literary texts participate in cultural constructions of nature. Glotfelty famously defines eco-criticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (xviii). Lawrence Buell subsequently emphasizes criteria such as the environment being more than a framing device, human interest being understood as part of a larger ecological relationship, environmental accountability becoming part of the text's ethical orientation, and the environment being represented as a process rather than a static constant.

Eco-narrativity attempts to extend these insights toward narrative form. It involves at least four dimensions: Ecological agency (the capacity of nonhuman entities to affect narrative events), relational narration (the representation of humans as embedded within ecological networks rather than existing independently of them), ecological temporality (narrative structures shaped by seasons, weather, reproduction, drought, migration, cultivation, or other environmental rhythms), vernacular ecological knowledge (knowledge of the environment encoded in folklore, oral traditions, and local metaphors).

Thus, a story need not explicitly discuss environmental problems to possess ecological narrativity. A snake that enters the social and erotic universe of a story, an animal whose intelligence disrupts human hierarchy or a desert whose material conditions determine patterns of settlement can all produce ecological narrativity. This distinction is particularly important in

Detha's case. To read his stories eco-critically does not mean simply counting references to trees, animals, rain, or desert. It means examining what narrative work those entities perform.

The existing scholarship on Detha broadly falls into four overlapping areas: folklore and orality; translation and linguistic form; social and political critique; and gender and sexuality. These approaches, therefore, may be seen as offering some angles for an ecological reading but they have rarely made narrative ecology itself the central object of inquiry. This paper addresses that gap by bringing together Detha studies and environmental humanities.

To this end, the paper employs a qualitative, interpretive, close-reading methodology. The primary corpus consists of select English translations of Detha's Rajasthani stories, especially: "The Dilemma" (*Duvidha*), "Press the Sap, Light the Lamp", "The Dove and the Snake", "A Hound's Pride", and "Countless Hitlers" (*Anekon Hitler*) These stories have been selected as together they represent several modes of ecological narrativity: landscape agency, animal agency, interspecies intimacy, anthropomorphic narration, and technological transformation of rural life.

Moving in this direction, the paper examines who or what performs narrative functions. If an animal, tree, desert, water source, or weather phenomenon changes the course of events, the nonhuman entity is treated as a narrative participant rather than simply a thematic object. The textual analysis is, then, situated within the ecological and cultural conditions of Rajasthan, particularly its arid geography and oral traditions. The objective is not to romanticize traditional knowledge but to investigate how local narratives encode relationships among humans and their environments.

The foundational framework comes from Glotfelty and Buell. Glotfelty's formulation places literature within the material world rather than treating nature as an external object. Buell's

work further emphasizes environmental representation as an ethical and imaginative phenomenon. Detha's stories invite precisely such a shift because their human characters inhabit an environment that cannot be detached from their social and emotional existence.

Additionally, the Environmental humanities expands eco-criticism beyond literary representation toward questions of culture, history, ethics, indigenous knowledge, materiality, and environmental justice. This is particularly useful for Detha because folklore itself can function as an archive of cultural memory. His stories preserve ways of imagining animals, trees, rain, desert spaces, fertility, mobility, and scarcity that cannot be reduced to “nature imagery.” Posthumanist thinkers such as Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti challenge the autonomous human subject as the unquestioned centre of meaning.

Detha's folklore frequently anticipates this decentring through narrative techniques that give animals, ghosts, plants, and other beings unusual degrees of agency. The talking animal is not merely a childish fantasy. It is a formal device that destabilizes the assumption that rational speech belongs exclusively to humans.

His animal narratives therefore constitute an epistemological challenge: if an animal can speak, know, desire, deceive, teach, or judge, then the boundary between human subject and nonhuman object becomes unstable.

Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism is particularly productive for “Press the Sap, Light the Lamp.” Val Plumwood's critique of Western dualism is relevant here because patriarchal structures have historically been associated with binaries such as: man/ woman, culture/ nature, reason/body human/animal, civilization/wilderness. Detha's stories repeatedly disturb these binaries.

The snake in “Press the Sap, Light the Lamp” is simultaneously animal, lover, supernatural being, and narrative agent. The story therefore complicates the rigid distinction between human sexuality and nonhuman nature. Recent scholarship has specifically interpreted Detha's story alongside *Naga-Mandala* and A. K. Ramanujan's “The Serpent Lover” from an eco-feminist perspective.

Rajasthan as Ecological Narrative Space

Detha's ecological narrativity cannot be separated from Rajasthan. The desert landscape is not simply an exotic visual backdrop. Aridity produces a distinctive cultural consciousness. Water, shade, animals, vegetation, monsoon, cultivation, migration, and seasonal rhythms acquire heightened significance in a water-scarce environment. Detha's narratives consequently inhabit a world in which environmental survival and social survival overlap. The desert becomes what may be called an ecological archive: a repository of memories concerning scarcity, endurance, mobility, cultivation, animals, weather, and communal survival.

This is one reason Detha's stories should not be reduced to mere fantasy. The supernatural is often integrated into a material world governed by environmental constraints. Ghosts inhabit trees, animals communicate, rain transforms landscapes, human beings negotiate their lives through animals and agricultural practices. The apparently magical and the materially ecological therefore coexist.

“The Dilemma”: The Tree as Narrative Threshold

“The Dilemma” is perhaps best known internationally through its adaptations by Mani Kaul in *Duvidha* (1973) and Amol Palekar in *Paheli* (2005). The narrative concerns a newly married woman whose husband leaves on a prolonged business journey; a ghost becomes enamoured of her and assumes the husband's form. An ecological reading begins at an apparently minor

point- the tree. The newly married couple encounters the tree, which becomes associated with the ghost's presence. The tree is therefore neither a neutral scenic object nor an incidental setting. It is a threshold between human and supernatural worlds.

It functions simultaneously as shelter, habitat, boundary, witness, site of transformation, and point of contact between human and nonhuman worlds. The narrative's ontology becomes spatially ecological: the human world does not end where the village ends. Other beings inhabit the same landscape. This is significant because the story's central dilemma concerns identity itself. Who is the “real” husband? What constitutes a human person? What happens when a nonhuman entity assumes a human form? The tree thus becomes a narrative device through which Detha destabilizes the human/nonhuman binary.

The story's famous tension between economic rationality and affective life can consequently be extended into an ecological reading. The merchant-husband's departure is motivated by commercial concerns, while the ghost's desire is affective and relational. The story does not offer a simple opposition between nature and commerce, but it does make visible two competing orientations toward life: accumulation and relationship. A contemporary critical discussion similarly emphasizes the story's contrast between mercantile priorities and human relationships.

“Press the Sap, Light the Lamp”: The Snake and the Collapse of the Human/Animal Binary

“Press the Sap, Light the Lamp” offers perhaps Detha's clearest example of interspecies narrativity. The story involves a woman whose husband fails to fulfil her emotional and sexual desires, while a snake becomes her lover. The snake is eventually killed, and the woman constructs an elaborate riddle-like response to the violence. The conventional reading

emphasizes female desire and patriarchal repression. An eco-feminist reading retains that argument but adds another dimension. The snake is not simply a symbolic representation of forbidden sexuality. It possesses narrative agency. It enters the woman's life, forms a relationship with her, generates emotional consequences, and becomes the object of human violence. The story consequently asks an implicit ecological question: Who has the right to desire, inhabit, and participate in the human world?

The woman's relationship with the snake creates a disturbing but productive disruption of anthropocentric categories. If the snake can love and be loved, the apparently absolute boundary between human intimacy and animal existence becomes unstable. The story therefore demonstrates a crucial characteristic of Detha's eco-narrativity: the nonhuman is not merely represented by the human; it enters the narrative as an actor. This also complicates eco-feminist theory. The woman and the snake are not identical victims, and nature is not simply feminized. Rather, the narrative produces an unstable network of desire, domination, vulnerability, and violence.

“The Dove and the Snake”: Animal Intelligence and Human Hierarchy

Detha's animal narratives frequently invert established hierarchies. “The Dove and the Snake” belongs to a tradition in which animals participate in ethical and political worlds normally reserved for humans. Detha uses animal figures to expose the absurdity of human claims to superiority. This technique resembles the strategy of animal fable but exceeds conventional allegory. The animals are not simply coded representations of humans. Their animality remains important. The story can consequently be read through the concept of more-than-human politics. The human being is no longer the sole holder of intelligence, strategy, morality, speech, desire, or political agency. This is consistent with broader criticism of Detha that identifies his

use of animals, ghosts, and other nonhuman figures to undermine conventional hierarchies of power.

“A Hound's Pride”: Animality and the Politics of Power

“A Hound's Pride” provides another important example of Detha's animal-centred narrative imagination. Its political allegorical possibilities have led scholars to compare it with George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Yet an ecological reading should avoid reducing the hound entirely to a human political symbol. The significance of the story lies partly in Detha's ability to make animal behaviour illuminate human structures of domination while simultaneously retaining the animal world as an imaginative space. The hound occupies an intermediate position: from animal to political subject to ethical participant and then to allegorical figure. This movement is characteristic of Detha's narrative technique. The animal is simultaneously itself and more than itself. Such double-ness is precisely what distinguishes eco-narrativity from simple nature symbolism.

“Countless Hitlers”: Technology, Agriculture, and Ecological Transformation

“Countless Hitlers” (*Anekon Hitler*) provides the most direct opportunity for examining technology and ecological transformation. The story involves five brothers who pool their resources to purchase a tractor. Their acquisition represents economic progress and technological modernity. Yet the tractor becomes associated with destructive consequences, including the crushing of a young person. The story therefore transforms a machine associated with agricultural progress into an instrument of violence. The environmental significance lies in the narrative's treatment of mechanized agriculture.

The tractor represents modernization, productivity, aspiration, economic mobility, mechanization, and potentially violence. The ecological reading does not require us to claim

that Detha rejects technology. Rather, he exposes the ambiguity of technological progress. The title is crucial. “Hitler” is not merely an external historical reference. The destructive impulse can emerge from ordinary human beings intoxicated by possession, power, speed, and technological capability. The story thus anticipates a central concern of contemporary environmental humanities: technology does not stand outside nature. Technological systems reorganize relationships among humans, land, animals, labour, and resources. In this sense, the tractor becomes a narrative machine of ecological modernity.

Orality as Ecological Memory

Detha's ecological significance is inseparable from his use of oral tradition. Oral narratives are not merely stories transmitted without writing. They are repositories of collective memory. They carry knowledge about places, animals, seasons, agriculture, kinship, customary practices, food, water, weather, and survival. His transformation of oral tales into literary narratives therefore constitutes a form of ecological memory work. The story becomes an archive. The preservation of a snake story, a bird story, a tree story, or a desert tale preserves more than a plot. It preserves a way of imagining the relationship between humans and their surroundings. This is particularly important at a time when traditional ecological knowledge can disappear through linguistic homogenization, technological transformation, migration, and changing modes of livelihood. Detha's literary project consequently operates simultaneously as cultural preservation, linguistic preservation, and ecological memory.

Is it legitimate to call Detha an ecological writer?

A potential objection is that Detha never wrote environmental literature in the modern sense. This objection should be taken seriously. Eco-criticism must avoid the retrospective

appropriation of every pre-modern or vernacular text as an environmentalist manifesto. A story containing a tree is not necessarily an ecological story. The present argument therefore makes a narrower claim. Detha is not necessarily an environmentalist writer. He is, however, an important writer of ecological relations. The distinction is crucial. His stories do not necessarily campaign for carbon reduction, conservation policy, climate action, wildlife legislation, or modern sustainability. Instead, they represent a world in which humans are ontologically entangled with animals, landscapes, weather, plants, and supernatural beings. That is a legitimate object of environmental-humanities inquiry.

A second debate concerns whether animals and trees in folklore are merely symbolic. The snake in “Press the Sap, Light the Lamp,” for example, can easily be interpreted as a symbol of desire. But if the snake is treated only as a symbol, its animal existence disappears. Eco-narrativity asks us to retain both levels: snake as symbol and snake as nonhuman participant. This produces a more nuanced reading than either purely symbolic interpretation or simplistic literalism.

A further danger is romanticization. It would be problematic to assume that everything encoded in folklore is inherently sustainable or ecologically ethical. Folklore can preserve wisdom, prejudice, hierarchy, superstition, exploitation, ecological knowledge, and ecological misunderstanding. The environmental humanities, therefore, needs a critical rather than celebratory approach to vernacular traditions. Detha's stories are particularly suitable for such an approach because they themselves are often ironic. His narratives do not simply reproduce traditional values; they frequently transform and question them.

Interestingly, Detha's stories can also be brought into conversation with Anthropocene studies, although such a connection must be historically qualified. The Anthropocene foregrounds the unprecedented scale at which human activity transforms planetary systems. Detha's stories obviously predate the contemporary Anthropocene debate. Yet “Countless Hitlers” offers a

particularly suggestive narrative of technological power, while the animal tales destabilize the anthropocentric assumptions underlying modernity. Detha's narrative imagination can thus be read as providing a vernacular critique of anthropocentrism without requiring the vocabulary of the Anthropocene. This is one of the productive possibilities of comparative environmental humanities: ecological thought does not need to originate within contemporary Western environmental discourse.

The central proposition of this paper can now be formulated more precisely. Eco-narrativity in Detha is not primarily a narrative about environmental degradation; it is a narrative structure in which human life becomes intelligible through relations with the more-than-human world. It appears to operate through the following:

Narrative element	Ecological function
Desert	Material condition of life
Tree	Habitat, threshold, witness, supernatural interface
Snake	Nonhuman agency and interspecies desire
Birds/animals	Alternative knowledge systems
Rain	Ecological and narrative transformation
Tractor	Technological modernity and ecological disruption

Narrative element	Ecological function
Oral tale	Archive of environmental-cultural memory
Animal fable	Decentring of human superiority
Ghost	Destabilization of human/nonhuman ontology
Landscape	Active narrative environment

This model helps distinguish Detha from writers whose ecological content is primarily descriptive. His ecology is structural rather than ornamental.

Vijaydan Detha's stories, thus, demand to be read beyond the categories of folklore, regional literature, gender critique, and social satire. Their imaginative worlds are also ecological worlds. The desert, tree, snake, bird, animal, rain, and machine do not merely surround human beings. They participate in the production of meaning. Through his transformation of oral Rajasthani traditions, Detha creates narratives in which human identity is porous, ecological boundaries are unstable, and nonhuman entities frequently possess agency.

“The Dilemma” situates the tree at the threshold between human and supernatural worlds. “Press the Sap, Light the Lamp” destabilizes the boundary between human sexuality and animal existence. “The Dove and the Snake” and “A Hound's Pride” challenge anthropocentric and hierarchical assumptions through animal agency. “Countless Hitlers” exposes the ambivalence of technological modernity by turning the tractor into an instrument through which progress and violence become entangled.

These narratives should not be simplistically classified as environmentalist texts. Their ecological significance is subtler and, in some respects, more profound. They preserve an imaginative world in which the human is not ontologically isolated from its surroundings. Detha's contribution to ecological literature therefore lies not simply in his depiction of Rajasthan's landscape but in his narrative redistribution of agency. The human being does not possess the story alone. The story belongs also to the tree, the snake, the hound, the bird, the desert, the rain, the machine, the ghost, and the collective memory through which these beings continue to speak.

In this sense, Detha's *Baatan Ri Phulwari* can be understood as an ecological “garden” not because every story explicitly advocates environmental preservation, but because its narrative universe repeatedly makes visible the interconnectedness of beings. His folklore offers an alternative to the anthropocentric imagination by reminding us that human stories have always been embedded in larger stories—stories of land, animals, weather, scarcity, desire, survival, and coexistence.

Eco-narrativity thus provides a productive new critical vocabulary for understanding Detha: it identifies the ecological dimension not merely in what his stories represent but in how their narrative worlds distribute agency among humans and the more-than-human. Detha's ecological significance lies in the narratological redistribution of agency from the human subject to a network of human and more-than-human participants.

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Dharma- as the Yardstick of Victory in War in Dharmavir Bharati's Andha Yug

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Abstract

It is to root out wars and conflicts *Dharmavir Bharati* pens down his verse play (drishya kavya) Andha yug. The episodes of the 18th day of *Mahabharata* war are reflected in his play to warn the people of the world that discontent between nations, states, political parties and dynasties can make us reap no corns of beneficence but bear with severe pain of destruction and annihilation. The flavours of healthy life and peace in the surroundings can be enhanced by mutual agreement, consensus for a good cause or a philanthropic issue can be promoted with a firm faith in *dharma*, accompanied by tolerance, a shared sense of conscientious good will for others. The conflicts and ruthless killings during Indo-Pak partition in 1947 seemed terrible. Thus *Dharmavir Bharati's* play Andha Yug warns us about the blind or Dark Age which lets loose the disasters of human race. It reminds us of William Butler Yeats' line in his poem, "The Second coming", "The centre cannot hold". The seat of power is insensitive, unable and maintains distance from the plight of the common folk or else the royal power is often disobeyed to spread commotion all around. The unruly temper either in the ruler or the ruled gives rise to chaos for an exasperation of the human race. Our duty is to spread fragrance of holy living from the self to the cosmos around.

[Key words: Dharma, Justice, Morality, War, Religion]

The cause of misery lies in the choice for immorality. Andha Yug by *Dharamvir Bharati* illustrates that *Duryodhana* meets a miserable end as he chooses the immoral path disdaining the ways of dharma, justice and piety. Lust, passion and caprices guide both *Dhritarastra* and *Duryodhana*, the father and the eldest of the hundred sons to suffer from defeat in wars, losing their kingdoms and enduring deaths of the members of the *Kauravas* as they humiliate the just, the meek and the humble *Pandavas*.

The pride of the *Kauravas* makes them bark up the wrong tree. Victory partakes with the morally upright beings and the virtuous ones. *Yudhistira* survives the wrath of war by the yardstick of dharma to emerge victorious and ascend to the throne of *Hastinapur* despite his regressive instincts and assumption of inabilities of his own brothers for statecraft. *Dharamvir Bharati* in translated version of Andha Yug by Alok Bhalla says,

“Bhima was proud by nature

And intellectually dull.

Arjuna had grown old and weary

Before his time.

Nakula was ignorant

And Sahadeva retarded from birth.

Yudhishtra, his brow marked deep with sorrow

Was the only one

Who saw the future?

As a nightmare.

(Andha yug, Page-127 and 128)

For instance, the *Pandavas* are martially dexterous and not adept as the rulers. They further, do not want to acquire the throne of *Hastinapur* after the death of their cousins. *Krishna* is more an embodiment of justice, *dharma*, truth and an *avatar* to represent the victory of the just who rely on patience, morality, laws of war, religion, God, regards for the code of conduct and ways of statecraft laden with scriptures. The different phases/acts are exemplary to illustrate the nullity of war. War is no panacea to establish peace and offer solace to the citizens. War damages both the victors and the losers.

Dharamvir Bharati illustrates through the instances of myths and Puranas that evil looks gorgeous and flamboyant to fall flat at the eleventh hour. *Dhritarastra* is the blind king in Andha Yug not to pay heed to the just ways of conduct and his passions, love and belongingness to his sons determine his code of conduct. He is insensitive to fairness of conduct and good-will for his subjects. The wishes and desires of his hundred sons determine his royal laws. *Dhritarastra* is full of passions and lust; his glory lies in playful existence of his own sons. He foregoes conscience to give place to the luxuries and feed the passions of his sons. A decision is often designed by sensual drags and emotional raptures; the covetous *Kauravas* pay no heed to equanimity of reasonable and impartial opinions.

The aftermath of eighteen days' war still displays the characters present in *Hastina*, the kingdom for which both the armies of *Kauravas* and *Pandavas* fight against one another *Sanjaya*, *Yuyustu*, *Kripacharya*, *Astwatthama*, *Dhritarastra*, *Gandhari*, *Krishna*, *Balarama* and the guards survive even after the death of the great *Kauravas'* martyrs such as *Duryodhana*, *Dushashana*, *Drona*, *Bhisma* and others. *Yuyustu* despite being a sibling out of the hundred sons of *Kauravas*, supported Srikrishna's words of worldly justice and disdains the *Kauravas* as they pick and choose '*adharma*'. He fights for the *Pandavas* to be humiliated before *Gandhari* after the passing away of all his own brothers *Gandhari* blames *Srikrishna* for all his sons lose their lives in the war where *Srikrishna* remains an adversary. He befriends the

Pandavas only to sabotage all her sons. Thus *Gandhari* curses *Srikrishna* that he will be killed by hunters as the wild animals are killed, with no regards to his body. The curse of *Gandhari* works out and is felt prominently when *Jara* kills *Srkrishna* apprehending *Srikrishna*'s feet as that of a deer. *Vidura* despite being a *Kaurava* descendant is devoted to Lord *Srikrishna* who leads the *Pandavas* and commands them till victory. The age is blind to the iron-laws of *Dharma* and faces the music at the point of termination of war.

Ashwatthama, no doubt, represents one of the foils of dharma but he incurs curse on himself shifting for *adharma*. He is able to avenge the death of his father, *Drona* who is dead not being able to make out the right sense out of *Yudhistira*'s half-truth that the dead being is *Ashwatthama* man or animal (an elephant). *Drona*, without weapons is pounced upon by *Dhristadyumna* and is cut to pieces. That's why *Ashwatthama* kills *Dhristadyumna* in similar fashion. He is made the new commander of *Kauravas*' army. He believes in killing time and again the enemies, the *Pandavas*. However, when his *brahmastra* is about to damage the child in *Uttara*'s womb *Srikrishna* comes to rescue the child and curses *Ashwatthma* that he will remain immortal being in unending restlessness.

The end of *Dwapara* leads to the beginning of *Kaliyuga* when obedience to moral laws becomes scarcely observed. *Dharma* has a tit for tat policy and never spares the sinner. The guilty one receives good thrashing by *dharma*. The sinner never turns tail from the sins. So *dharma* intervenes to punish the sinner to restore the just and the virtuous. The people of *Kaliyuga* need to be treated with draconian laws as forecasted in Andha Yug. The end of *Dwapara* exemplifies the victory of virtue over vice or evil. It is a reminder to the people of post independent India that the oppressor is made to lose before the common men who have suffered throughout in life. Suffering to access to the ways of *dharma* becomes the chief weapon to defeat *adharma*.

The drama Andha yug portrays figuratively anti-war issues pertaining to post-independent partition scenario. The last day of eighteen days' war disposes a few individuals alive after the death of innumerable soldiers. The corpses of the soldiers drag the vultures' overcasting the sky of *Kurukshetra*. The excess number of vultures in the sky appears like dark moving clouds. It is to prevent the world from genocide as wars and conflicts pay none. The mass destruction of world war-ii also has no sanction for further wars. An apprehension of shifting the world towards corruption and homicide forecasts the approach of *Kaliyuga*. To put an end to the ruthless cruelty of the age of blindness, *Srikrishna* professes the war of the helpless against the facilitated and the mighty that turn unruly and wicked. An ominous disaster of homicide features the war of *Mahabharata*. Such scenes in present days' world are proved null and void to add to misfortunes of annihilation. The pride of *Duryodhana* is the root cause of his own end and futility of his own kingdom. The other instances are many, for example, *Balarama* criticizes the violent behaviour of *Bhima*. In the end, *Balarama* and the *Kauravas* give in to the *Pandavas* and *Srikrishna*. The spirit of retaliation and vengeance is exemplified by *Ashwatthama* and his unreasonable rage sabotages many. He kills the mendicant who is reincarnated as *Jara* in the drama. His attempt to destroy *Uttara's* womb invites the curse of eternal suffering. The effects of *karma* in the past characterize the deeds of the present and the future.

The mendicant who turns out to be *Jara* pronounces thus:

Truth resides

in the acts.

We perform

what man does

at each moment

becomes the future

for ages and ages.

(Andha yug, page-58)

In the tradition of the myths and *Puranas*, evil rules the roost for a while and virtue gains ground after winning in the tug of war. Thus God designs worldly affairs to destroy the wicked down the ages. The translated illustration in *Srimad Bhagwat Geeta* is confirmed and it says,

Whenever there is

Decline of righteousness

And rise of unrighteousness

I incarnate myself

To protect the virtuous

And to destroy the wicked

From Age to Age.

(Geeta-IV-7/8)

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III. LINGUISTICS AND LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY

The Space for Linguistic Landscape and Translanguaging

in NCF-SE 2023

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National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) document is driven by and rooted to the fundamental Indian thought and philosophy relating to the pursuit of knowledge (*Jnan*), wisdom (*Pragyaa*), and truth (*Satya*) as the human goal and has mainly laid emphasis on the development of the creative potential of each individual learner from the very beginning of his or her academic journey. It has been framed on the basis of the principle that educational venture must attempt to develop not only cognitive capacities: the ‘foundational capacities’ of literacy and numeracy and ‘higher-order’ cognitive capacities: the critical thinking, problem solving and creativity but also the social, ethical, and emotional capacities i.e., the human values needed for a healthy society. The very first paragraph of ‘Introduction’ to the NEP 2020 document clearly and unambiguously spells out the very motto of this vision document:

Education is fundamental for achieving full human potential, developing an equitable and just society, and promoting national development. Providing universal access to quality education is the key to India’s continued ascent, and leadership on the global stage in terms of economic growth, social justice and equality, scientific advancement, national integration, and cultural preservation. Universal high-quality education is the best way forward for developing and maximizing our country's rich talents and resources for the good of the individual, the society, the country, and the world. India will have the highest population of young people in the world over the next decade, and

our ability to provide high-quality educational opportunities to them will determine the future of our country. (p. 3)

In order to materialize this noble and novel aim, NEP 2020 has categorically mentioned that the vision of this policy is

- - - - to instill among the learners a deep-rooted pride in being Indian, not only in thought, but also in spirit, intellect, and deeds, as well as to develop knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions that support responsible commitment to human rights, sustainable development and living, and global well-being, thereby reflecting a truly global citizen. (p. 6)

The most vital principle of an education system and its operational institutions is to **recognize, identify, and foster the unique capabilities of each student** with the cooperation of all the stakeholders. The policy has considered school education as the most fundamental part of education system as dealt with in **Part I: School Education** which introduces in place of 10+2 existing pattern of school education 5+3+3+4 pattern covering ages 3-18 and thereby has attempted to take care of the each student's proper physical, emotional, moral, mental growth. The *National Curriculum Framework-School Education (NCF-SE) 2023* has been developed and published in order to strive and achieve the goal fixed in NEP 2020 regarding school education. And our main concern in the present paper is the language education at the secondary level. It is well known to that the success of education system largely depends upon the strong foundational schooling system in which studies related to language, mathematics and general awareness about the surroundings or environment are given proper care and pedagogical impetus in terms of school's socio-cultural and socio-academic environment, quality of teaching-learning and proper scientific evaluation procedure and execution, etc, and

such ventures to create a supportive ecosystem are expected to result in competence-and-capacity building in the respective fields.

NCF-SE 2023 consists of 5 (**five**) Parts out of which Part C addresses ‘School Subjects’ in 10 (ten) Chapters. **Chapter 2: Language Education** (pp. 234-267) deals with the aims, principles and nature of language education and the related curricular and pedagogical issues of language teaching-learning in a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic pluralistic country like India. Note that this chapter in one way or the other is the replica of language policy of our country in which all the segments constituting the nation can develop a sense of participation and involvement in the progress of governance and nation-building. The importance of language education has been firmly reflected in the very opening paragraph of this chapter:

Languages are at the centre of human cognitive, social, and cultural experience. Language serves many simple and complex functions. It gives individuals the capacity to comprehend, analyse, and to relate to their own self and the world. It mediates knowledge acquisition as well as production. Language enables effective communication, which is integral to formation and functioning of societies, of culture and of identity. (p. 234)

A multi-lingual individual acquires the communicative competence in the wider arena and at the same time can tread in the expanding areas of knowledge with cognitive competence. Hence NCF-SE 2023 has laid more importance on the language teaching-learning in comparison to the NCF 2005. Here the central importance has been laid on the learning of and in mother tongue at the initial stages and on language learning across all the stages leading to multilingualism. Secondary level language education, Section 2.1 of NCF-SE 2023 (p. 236) categorically asserts, must specifically aim to achieve:

- a. Oracy and literacy,

- b. Effective communication skills,
- c. Literary and creative capacities,
- d. Multilingual capacities and
- e. Appreciation and engagement in culture.

Again, the scientifically framed language curriculum and its effective implementation need to be governed by the fact that a language is a **rule-governed system**, an **integral part of culture** and a **subject to constant evolution**. In order to give a roadmap of comprehensive language education planning and implementation of flexible *three language formula* as laid down in NEP 2020, NCF-SE 2023 has chalked out the teaching-learning of language skills in three languages at different stages and standards as summarily shown in the tabular format below on the basis of Section 2.4 Learning Standards (pp. 238-248). The three languages that our students will learn in course of their school years have been denoted as R1 (Mother Tongue or State Language), R2 (2nd Language), and R3 (3rd Language) in this document.

:

Stage	Goal
Foundational Stage	Building familiarity of students with two spoken Languages (R1 and R2). Reading and comprehending, writing simple sentences in R1. Gaining some familiarity with reading and writing in R2.
Preparatory Stage	Developing proficiency in speaking and Competencies in reading and writing in both Languages (R1 and R2). Students are expected to gain familiarity

	with R2, gradually progressing from basic communication skills to greater fluency and proficiency in speaking and writing.
Middle Stage	Teachers should aim to achieve similar levels of students' capacities in both R1 and R2. Some transfer of skills from R1 to R2 enables quicker learning of R2 in terms of appropriate structure, grammar, vocabulary, and creativity. A new third Language, R3, is introduced in this Stage. Students acquire familiarity with the spoken form of this Language, along with the basics of reading and writing.
Secondary Stage	Up to Grade 10, the Curricular Goals in R1 and R2 are almost the same. The same level of effective communication (both oral and written) in both languages must be achieved. In Grades 11 and 12, at least two languages will be studied, at least one of which is native to India, and would be chosen by students from the pool of language and literature courses that are offered. In addition to the possibility of continuing study in R1, R2, and/or R3, the choices for languages would include Sanskrit and other modern/classical languages and literatures of India like Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Odia, Pali, Persian, and Prakrit , etc., to ensure that these languages and literatures stay alive and vibrant. In addition to this, foreign languages, such as French, German, Japanese, and Korean would also be offered.

The clearly stated Goals (as presented above in abridged form) and Competencies (Cs) based on Curricular Goals (CGs), Content and Pedagogy and Assessment categorically fixed for each stage of schooling in Sections 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6 respectively attempt to ensure the teacher-student intensely integrated interaction in a great degree which is much needed for achieving the core

objectives of language (here three languages) learning, i.e., nurturing and consolidating communicative competence in socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-academic interactions at the regional, national and international levels. It is also remarkable to note that each and every CG along with its respective Cs surely generates and sustains the scope for interaction and between languages R1, R2 and R3 in the psycho-motor functioning in the learner's mental space. For instance, let us discuss one CG and its corresponding Cs.

Language 2 (R2)	Competencies
2.4.2.1 Preparatory Stage	
CG-2 Develops fluency in reading and the ability to read with comprehension	C-2.1 Develops phonological awareness further by blending phonemes/ syllables into words and segmenting words into phonemes/ syllables C-2.2 Examines the basic structure of the text and recognises words and sentences in print and basic punctuation marks C-2.3 Reads stories and passages fluently and accurately with appropriate pauses C-2.4 Comprehends the meaning of stories, poems, and story posters C-2.5 Demonstrates interest in picking up and reading a variety of children's books (p. 244)

The clearly stated CG relating to R2 reading skill and the corresponding five Cs at the Preparatory Stage shown in the above table emphasize on the learner's active involvement and engagement with cognitive consciousness for developing reading skill i.e., 'ability to read with comprehension' ranging from 'phonological awareness' to growth of 'interest in picking up and reading a variety of children's books'. This goal-based-achievement undoubtedly requires

the proper and constant utilization of the available physical and human resources for nurturing the inherent psychological and cognitive capacities of the learners concerned. At the same time we know that for R2 learning a learner starts with his or her R1 skills or competence already built at home and/or locality and is led to the learning of the target R2 in terms of LSRW. This is closely connected with the idea of ‘Interlanguage’ (IL) hypothesized by Larry Selinker (1972) which is a state between native language (NL), here R1, and the target language (TL), here R2, concerning (a) native language transfer, (b) overgeneralization of target language rules, (c) transfer of training, (d) strategies of communication, and (e) strategies of learning. The learner develops the ability to handle interlanguage data in which transfer across two or three linguistic systems plays a central role.

The intuitive critical observation and analysis of all the CGs and Cs mentioned for the learning all the three languages lead us to trace the continuous and (un)conscious interplay of the linguistic, social and cultural knowledge relating in the concerned languages. For the purpose of developing all the linguistic skills in those languages, the learners are expected to be engaged inside and outside the classroom in different activities like reading (non-)literary texts, authentic materials, etc., engaging in debate, group or panel discussion, symposium, meaningful coherent conversation, etc., and learning to organize related ideas, compose, narrate or express through descriptive, reflective, critical and or creative writings, report writing and letter writing as shown in detail in NCF-SE 2023. It is certain that the success of such well-thought-out CGs requires strategically innovative teaching-learning venture in which learner gradually builds linguistic landscape in his//her mindscape allowing the co-existence of the projection of the *signifiesd* in two/three languages. All such CGs coupled with related Cs focus in one way or the other on the learner’s simultaneous projection and portrayal of the facts or fictions in two or three languages. These phenomena are observed in almost all the (vernacular) medium schools which exhibit and can capitalize linguistic landscape (henceforth

LL) spread in the notice boards, signboards, billboards, classroom instructions, leaflets or pamphlets for various socio-cultural, medical, legal awareness campaigns, etc.

The LL field is the geosemiotic representation in which language and signs generate meaning in relation to the natural environment and the allied socio-cultural environment (consisting of the institutions like country club, hospital, rail station, bus stand, ethnic grocery store, offices, schools, etc.) in which they are placed. For instance, the languages being used in public signs indicate what languages are locally known or relevant, or give concrete evidence of what languages are becoming locally relevant from the social, political and academic point of view. (see for further discussion Hult 2009). Evidently, such scope for using the LL with creativity and effectiveness in teaching-learning activities or planned attempts to involve the learners is generated far and wide providing space for the projection of LL where descriptions or sketches projected in 2 or 3 languages being used for communication or taught in the school.

And LL which, according to Bourhis and Landry (1997: 23), refers to the "visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region" helps the students acquire 2nd and 3rd languages in a natural setting created by the school and the greater society, in addition to their usual textbook-based and allied learning items. In this context let us look at the linguistic landscape of our country India which is, as we know, home to various divergent linguistic groups, holding its rich traditions and culture together. Linguistically, India can roughly be divided into six major language regions: Central, East, North-East, South-Central, Himalayan, and Peninsular. These have a variety of languages spoken in each region. These distinct language communities are an integral part of Indian cultural heritage called 'Unity in Diversity'. Moreover, such linguistic differences emphasize the varied cultural landscape among the communities within India's population and create solid bridges between different parts of the nation.

In such circumstances, language education in the wake of NEP 2020 has got greater dimensional height due the focus on the teaching-learning of the home language, local or regional languages, and national and international languages. Even an attempt has been undertaken to bring the minority languages, mainly tribal languages, have been given due importance in their use in education system for the purpose of the universalization and democratization of education and the promotion of local or indigenous cultures of the different communities. This venture on the government and non-government academic institutions would honour the diversified LL of our country and definitely provide space for translanguaging which makes the learner's multilingual repertoire active and dynamic. Translanguaging categorically reflects the shift from monolingual ideologies in the study of multilingual education system to the multilingual ideologies and dynamic views of multilingualism. Pedagogical translanguaging help learners become the emergent multilinguals who can use mother tongue and other languages depending on the social or academic context with their active linguistic resources.

Translanguaging in education which develops and facilitates home-school links refers to 'using one language in order to reinforce the other, in order to increase understanding and in order to augment the pupil's activity in both languages' (Williams, 2002, qtd by Lewis et al. 2012: 40). This concept can be applied with proper planning in the teaching of language, be it home language or foreign one. Teachers need to activate the learners' multilingual and multimodal repertoires, and pedagogically capitalize translanguaging in facilitating learning according to the capability of the learners. Keeping in mind the LL of the local area, language teachers can incorporate various strategies based on translanguaging pedagogy along with more critical content and language integrated learning (CLIL) for lively classroom activity. In the multilingual classroom both teachers and learners are needed to be actively conscious of the linguistic features of the languages used by them inside and outside the classroom. At every bit

of communication they are trained to be co-sharer of geographical, socio-cultural and socio-academic aspects involved in the language use leading to the development of the participants' Communication Accommodation (Giles 1973, 2016) ability by which "human interaction is regulated by the conscious or unconscious desire to converge (and sometimes diverge) with the speech behaviour of other participants in the speech event" (Ghosh 2024: 54).

In this connection the language planning (LP) plays a crucial role by accommodating both LL and translanguaging. State LP and Family Language Planning (FLP) and allied issues related language education contribute to the implementation of the aims and objectives of language teaching-learning as laid down in NEP 2020 and NCF-Se 2023. Anik Nandi (2024: 37) in his essay "Human Agency in Language Policy: Family members at the Epicentre of language, Communication and Conflict" states:

Governmental stakeholders employ a range of policy devices such as public administration, education, religion and mass media to influence people's everyday language practices. In this regard, educational language policies often serve as the key instrument for manipulating and imposing language behaviours as every child must attend school. Top-down ideologies in education are often visible through the language of classroom instruction, curriculum, in textbooks and other teaching/learning related materials.

In the backdrop of the discussion made so far, it can be claimed that language education must be decolonized and localized for the benefit of the learners irrespective of their linguistic and cultural differences. Each and every learner belonging to this country should be given the equal right opportunity in education sphere. For the purpose of the effective implementation of NEP 2020 and the blueprint of NCF-SE 2023 in the multilingual and multicultural milieu of India the following measures (though not exhaustive ones) on the part of the implementation authorities need to be undertaken with seriousness and sincerity:

1. Proper honour should be given to the home language of the learners in the school education. If it is done, almost all the students will, we firmly believe, feel free to interact and exchange opinions among themselves without inhibitions. This is highly needed for the implementation of the inclusivity principle caimed in NEP. .
2. Textbooks should be written keeping in mind the local milieu of the learners, their levels of knowledge and experience and the CGs and Cs as earmarked in the NCF-SE 2023.
3. Gradation and selection of language items in the syllabus and material must be made keeping in mind the socio-cultural and socio-academic background of the learners.
4. Teaching materials should accommodate most of the texts based on Indian cultural heritage and written by the Indian authors. But at the same time it must be kept in mind that the texts written by foreign authors can be accommodated in abridged or original form in the textbooks if these are found to be universal, needed for the knowledge enrichment and expansion, and suitable with the objectives of the curriculum.
5. For the promotion of our innumerable home or minority languages, translation should be given priority. Otherwise, the aims and objectives of NEP 2020 willnot be honoured and post-Independence Indian education will remain alien to those minority linguistic communities as it has been so far.
6. Appointment of trained teachers for teaching those learners belonging to the minority languages is to be given priority.
7. Activity-based, participatory, cooperative and lively classroom teaching-learning environment should be ensured by the teachers and the school authority.
8. A comprehensive model of language teaching should be evolved by the synthetic combination of the modern theories of linguistics, applied linguistics, and educational psychology and sociology. That model would help the teachers and other related

persons evolve the proper scientific, learner-friendly and local need-based teaching methods and techniques.

9. Freedom of speech is to be nurtured among the learners. School environment should nurture sense of equality, empathy and cooperation among the learners i.e., the future citizens for better learning and better humanity.
10. Authorities should evolve the dynamic and flexible testing and evaluation system so that each and every learner does not get demotivated to learn. The system coupled with feedback will emerge as the assessment of learning, for learning and as learning as envisaged in NCF-SE 2023 (p. 116).
11. Above all, as school is the second of the learners, we need to develop an aesthetically and culturally rich, hygienic, and LL-projected school environment in which both the teaching and non-teaching staff and the students feel comfort in all respects ensuring the basic precondition of materialization of the objectives of education in broader sense.

Let us conclude this discourse with the hope of achieving a fear-free and equality-induced space in this country through proper education unambiguously proclaimed by our world poet Rabindranath Tagore in following poem from his *Gitanjali*:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments
By narrow domestic walls
Where words come out from the depth of truth
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way
Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit

Where the mind is led forward by thee
Into ever-widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

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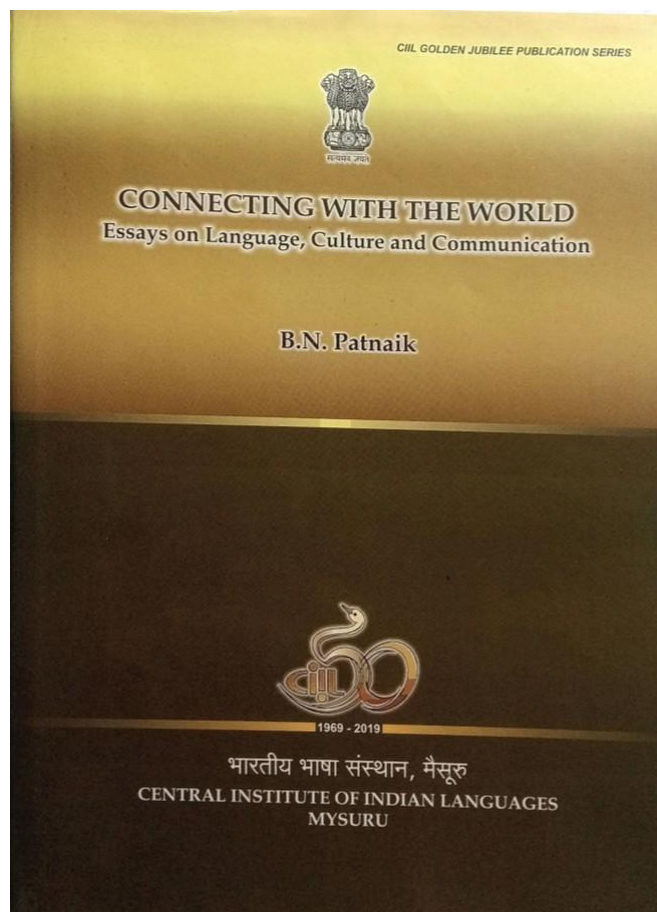
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Book Reviews

BOOK REVIEW-1



Connecting with the World: Essays on Language, Culture and Communication

B. N. Patnaik

CIIL Publication No: 1406, 2023

ISBN: 978-81-19411-03-0

Pages: 138

Price: Rupees 120 /

Reviewed by

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The book under review is a collection of fifteen essays that address various aspects of language, culture, and communication. These essays, written during 2004-17, deal with various aspects of language use in various contexts. The author of the book, B. N. Patnaik analyzes communication in relation to day-to-day speech, sociolinguistics, discourse linguistics, pragmatics, and different forms of conversation. The author has used apt day-to-day examples to substantiate his argument uniquely while offering new linguistic dimensions of language use. These essays offer new insights on how people connect with the world they live in through language. Some of these essays address different aspects of power in the context of language use, as the author rightly mentions: “how people use language to express and exercise power.”

The first essay is titled “Ancient Indian and Grecian Approaches to Non-Literal Meaning”. It studies ancient Indian rhetoricians’ and Grecian approaches to the study of non-literal meaning from a comparative perspective. The study finds that making sense of the context is vital to deciphering the meaning. Moreover, it emphasizes that linguistic resources alone are inadequate for understanding a linguistic expression.

The second essay is titled “Information and Conversation from the Grecian Perspective: A Review.” This paper deals with the question: ‘Is conversation always information-centric?’ Analyzing various examples, the author finds that conversational theory is inadequate for dealing with interactions in which exchange of information is not the central motif.

The third essay is titled “Confrontation: A Conversational Theoretical Perspective”. Analyzing Grice’s influential paper “Logic and Conversation”, this essay discusses various examples of confrontation and quarrel as two types of verbal engagements. The study finds that Grice’s skepticism about the inadequacy of his model to highlight what is labelled here as ‘negative interaction is not without substance.’

The fourth essay is titled “Gandhi as a Communicator”. It focuses on how Gandhi had developed an idiom to express himself to communicate with the common man. Analyzing Gandhi’s language and style, Patnaik brings a comparative perspective by discussing the same aspects dealt with by Churchill and Hitler in this regard and how these impactful communicators used religious language and invoked God to inspire people.

The fifth essay is titled “Remarks on Chomsky’s Activist Writing”. This paper offers a critique of some of his concerns as an activist writer. Patnaik discusses Chomsky’s concept of “Orwell’s problem” by analyzing suitable examples. The paper concludes by highlighting the fact that ‘Chomsky is an inspiring intellectual activist, who had relentlessly worked to uncover facts and exposed the hidden agendas of the establishment for the benefit of the people.’

The sixth essay is titled “On Language and Power: A Study of Some Pieces of Conversation”. The paper highlights how power is expressed in language. This study analyzes some conversational pieces from real-life interactions and literature, using the framework of Grice. The first part of the paper deals with ‘how power is expressed in language’ and the second makes an analysis of Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel *The Remains of the Day* on aspects of language and power.

The seventh essay is titled “On Language and Power: A Study of Edward and God”. This paper explores how language captures the exercise of power in specific interactional situations. Using Foucault’s conceptualization of power, the author analyzes Milan Kundera’s “Edward and God” in the context of fluctuating power equations among individuals and groups and how power is exercised in different situations at the interpersonal level.

The eighth essay is titled “On *Brata Katha* as Discourse of Power: A Study of Sarala’s “*Nityaani Gurubara Katha*””. This paper highlights how this unique *brata katha* (story associated with a religious observance) is a unique example of an expression of power/discourse of power compared to other *brata kathas* in Odia culture. Moreover, this paper showcases how Sarala Das was creating norms of discourse in Odia prose writings.

The ninth essay is titled “Football Writing as Protest Literature.” In this paper, an attempt is made to show *Soccer in Sun and Shadow* as an excellent example of protest literature on football.

The tenth essay is titled “Food Talk in Oriya” In this paper, an insightful observation is made about how food talk has significance metaphorically and culturally. By analyzing various real-life examples the author has shown how customary greetings like *Khailani/Khiapia helani?* (Have you eaten/Is your dining over?) can be a part of a conversation-starting strategy. Even a proverb like *soila puara bhaaga nahinn* (The sleeping son has no share.) could extend its meaning from food to money or property. Patnaik has made significant observations by bringing in various socio-cultural perspectives of Odia food talk.

The eleventh essay is titled “On Puri Boli”. In this essay, the author provides various examples of *Puri boli*, i.e. “the language/tongue of Puri” spoken by the traditional locals of the temple town of Puri in coastal Odisha. The author has attempted to draw attention to some stylistic aspects of *Puri boli* at the discourse level. Extracts from Sidheswar Mohapatra’s *Puri boli*, Surendra Mohanty’s *Nila Saila* and other examples are analyzed. The author suggests documenting *Puri boli* at various linguistic levels, and that the time is ripe to discuss it ‘as a carrier of a rich history and culture.’

The twelfth essay is titled “A Bhuta named Babana”. By analyzing the character of Babana *bhuta* (ghost) from Odia folktales and one from *Sarala Mahabharata*, the author has displayed the potential of a linguistic and cultural dimension of ghosts.

The thirteenth essay is titled “Language Endangerment and Affirmative Action”. In this essay, the author has highlighted the issue of language endangerment and how it is our collective effort to save endangered languages. The author emphasizes that it must become ‘a collective societal commitment rather than merely a governmental initiative’. The prominent factors to save languages are resources, infrastructure and collective will. Moreover, the author suggests documenting the relevant languages carefully and in great detail so that they can “live archivally”. The author emphasizes to document grammatical system (including phonological and morphological systems) of a language along with the folktales, folksongs, wise sayings, proverbs, riddles, idioms, etc.

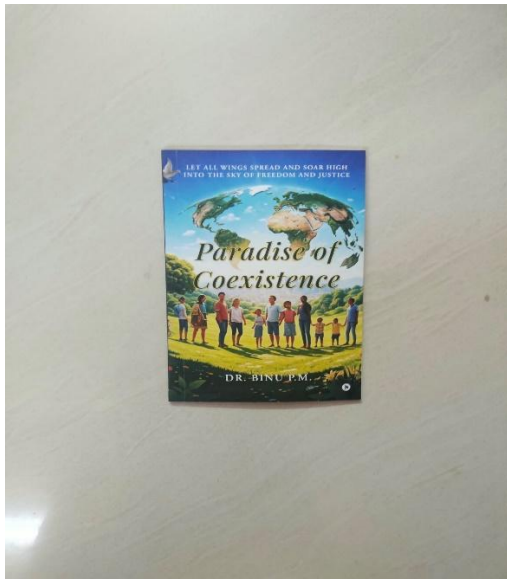
The fourteenth essay is titled “The Language of Rudeness”. In this essay, the author has used conversations from fictional works as examples to distinguish between abusive and rude

language; more specifically, the nature of rude language. The author finds that ‘better understanding of language-use can be acquired if one goes beyond the formal, explicit linguistic features.’

The fifteenth, which is the last essay in the book, is titled “A Study of Some Politeness Expressions in Oriya in Relation to Social Change”. In this paper, Patnaik studies the verbal and non-verbal etiquette system of Odia society by taking various real-life examples as well as instances from fictional works namely *Chhamana Atha Guntha*, *Matira Manisa* and two short story collections namely *Catura Binoda*, and *Manoj Dasanka Katha O Kahani* in the context of socio-cultural address behavior and linguistic change over time.

Overall, the book is a significant contribution to the field of linguistic enquiry in relation to cultural plurality and the culture of communication. I strongly recommend the book to students and scholars of language sciences to read the book and gain insights from the varied perspectives discussed in the context of culture and communication. The book is beneficial for general readers as well, as it deals with practical aspects of language use in cultural contexts. As Patnaik rightly observes:, “Everything is done in language; everything takes place in language: conveying (and making sense) of messages, issuing warning and threats, protesting and expressing displeasure, negotiating with others, transactions of all sorts, building of relationships, persuading and dissuading, opinion making and manipulating, among many, many others, not excluding expressing oneself with no particular target audience in mind.”

Book Review-2



Book Review: *Paradise of Coexistence* by Dr. Binu P.M

Reviewer: Dr.Sandhya Ravisankar

Some poetry demands interpretation. Some poetry invites connection. *Paradise of Coexistence* belongs to the latter.

Dr. Binu's collection of fifty-three short poems unveil what he calls "New Gen Poems" through his creative invention, the *Octo-Reel*. At first glance, the form feels contemporary and compact, almost like poetry shaped by the rhythm of reels and scrolling screens. Yet, beneath its brevity lies depth. If haiku captures a fleeting moment in nature, the Octo-Reel captures a fleeting moment in consciousness. It is sharp, immediate, and emotionally accessible—clearly and consciously crafted with Generation Z and Alpha in mind.

The poet included images with each poem to strengthen the appeal. As a reader, I feel more connected with the images because those binds with the text which do not stand alone but they converse with visuals. For a generation immensely preoccupied with intense visual culture, this blending feels natural rather than ornamental. The language is simple without being simplistic. Often, the lines feel like echoes of our own unspoken thoughts—as though the poet has quietly articulated what we have long felt but never framed.

One of the poems that lingers is "*Birds That Never Fly*." It evokes the timeless human predicament of feeling caged. Yet in today's context, that cage is not always made of iron. It may be psychological, social, or even virtual—constructed by screens, expectations, and invisible algorithms. The poem gently allows newer generations to see their own reflections in that metaphor of flight denied.

Love flows through the collection in multiple forms. In “*Love Spring*,” it gushes freely like a natural force. In “*Web of Love*,” it becomes boundless and intricate. “*Love Dome*” imagines a protected world warmed only by affection, untouched by hatred. And in “*Mad Love*,” the poet writes, “sweet memories make mind subdued to fallacies,” reminding us that love can both elevate and unsettle. Dr. Binu does not confine love to romance; he expands it into philosophy, longing, vulnerability, and hope.

Yet the collection does not remain in the realm of fantasy and tenderness. Poems like “*Billionaire’s Barf*” mock unchecked capitalism with biting clarity. “*Winner or Loser*” paints a sharp, almost satirical picture of power-hungry games. “*Blind March*” questions unexamined faith and collective obedience. These poems compel us to confront uncomfortable realities even as we wander through imagination.

What makes *Paradise of Coexistence* compelling is this balance—between softness and critique, fantasy and fact, brevity and resonance. Dr. Binu’s Octo-Reels may be short, but they open wide spaces for reflection. They are designed for a generation accustomed to speed, yet they quietly ask that generation to pause.

The collection ultimately leaves us with hope, captured beautifully in the line: “let’s hope for a world without arms and borders.”

In that single wish lies the spirit of the entire book. *Paradise of Coexistence* offers a fresh landscape of poetic expression—one that speaks in the language of the present while dreaming of a gentler future. It feels, unmistakably, like poetry meant for now.

The Reviewer

Dr. Sandhya Ravisankar is an avid reader and an astute scholar of English Literature. She is a Theatre enthusiast and an advocate for the integration of Theatre in Education. She is currently affiliated with Symbiosis International University, Dubai.

PART- II

Integrating History & Culture with Pedagogy (Interdisciplinary Approaches in Education, Archeology, History & Culture

(Seminar Proceedings)

Proceedings of a Two-Day National Seminar (27th & 28th December) on -

“Integrating History & Culture with Pedagogy”

(Interdisciplinary Approaches on Education, Archaeology, History, and Culture)

**Organized By- PG Dept. of History, Education & Department of Teacher Education
(B.Ed.)**

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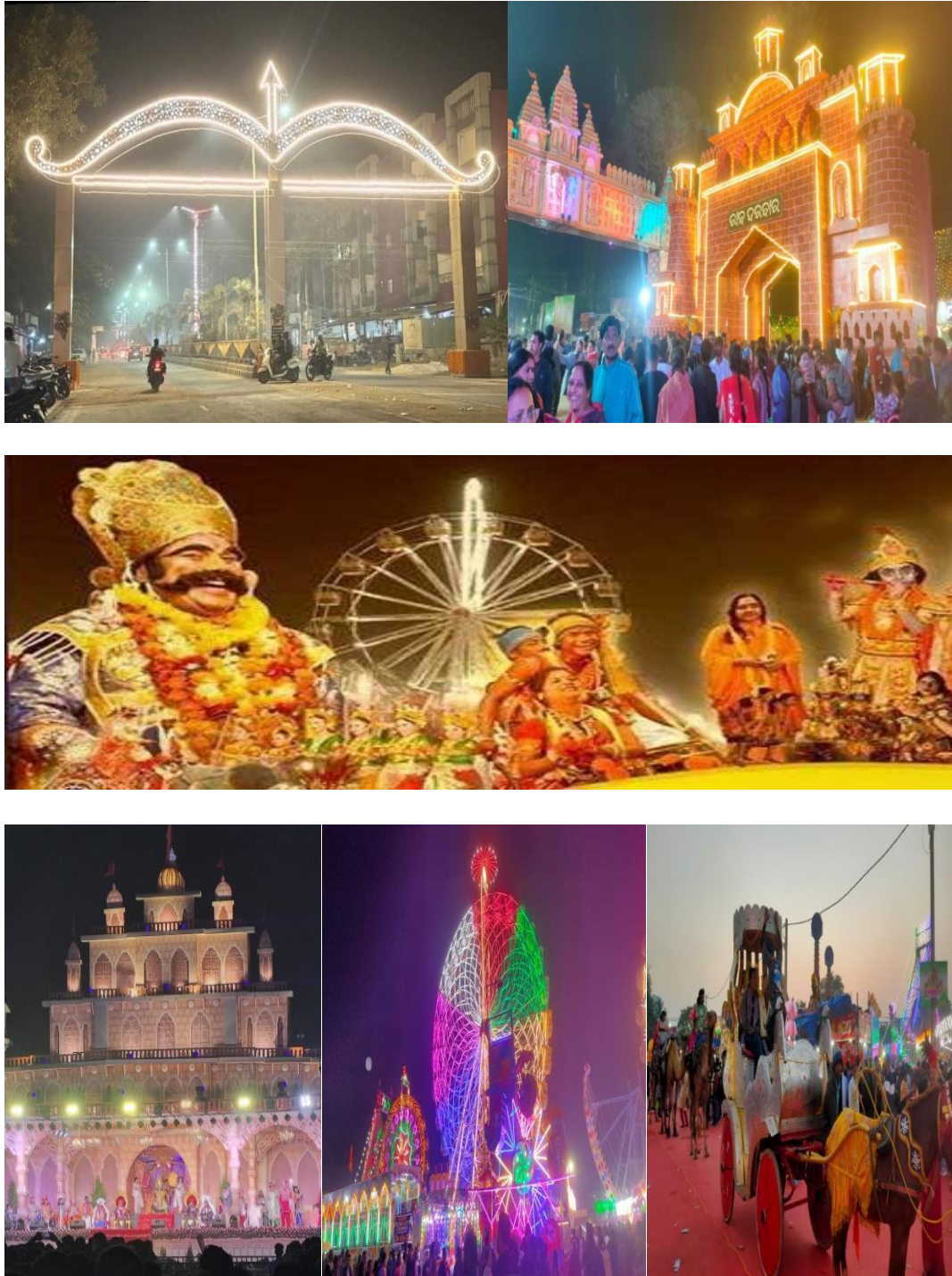
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Dhanu Yatra - World's Largest Open-air Theater, Bargarh (Odisha)



From the National Seminar on *Integrating History & Culture with Pedagogy*
(*Interdisciplinary Approaches in Education, Archeology, History & Culture*)





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Preface

When humanity is scourged by social upheavals, and unprecedented challenges threaten to sicken our heritage and economy, our practices and beliefs, traditions, myths, culture, and literature and their sustenance emerge as a fundamental endeavor, reviving mankind from the verge of extinction. Keeping in view the significance of historical consciousness in shaping modern education and human minds in the contemporary period, the National Seminar, “Integrating History & Culture with Pedagogy,” organized by the Dept. of History, Panchayat College, Bargarh, in the month of December, 2025, at the backdrop of the 77th year of the Bargarh Dhanu Yatra celebration, unfolded the civilizational history of Bargarh (converted to Mathura), exploring critical intersections of myth, history, culture, and archeology. Exploring the long and continuous historical journey of Dhanu Yatra with its civilizational roots in Bargarh, the conference brought together delegates and dignitaries, scholars, researchers and folklorists, educators and innovators, fostering interdisciplinary conversations, reimagining teaching and learning practices, and enriching academic understanding with the foundation of India’s deeply rooted knowledge tradition.

Often overlooked in global narratives and underrepresented in contemporary literature, ironically, folklore is “the living character of the nation” and its people, defining the country’s identity, heritage, and existence. Aspiring to create an intellectual platform where knowledge of folklore, archaeology, and literature converge to strengthen social and intellectual bonds and widen academic horizons, Dr. Ramesh Ku Parua & Soubhagya Padhan have attempted to integrate history and culture with pedagogy in the context of Bargarh, Odisha, in their article, “Integrating History and Culture with Pedagogy: A Study in the Context of Bargarh.” The role of youth being unquestionable to preserve heritage and the nation's identity, the write-up of Mr. Oshin Bamb on “Heritage, History, and the Detached Youth: Role of Pedagogy and

Effective Teaching Techniques” finds methodologies to integrate heritage-based knowledge into modern pedagogy, enhancing historical awareness in today’s generation. Ms. Mousumi Dash, too, in her article “Integrating History and Culture with Pedagogy (Interdisciplinary Approaches in Education, Archeology, History, and Culture)," explores various interdisciplinary approaches in education, joining the strands of archeology, history, and education for innovative teaching methods. Emphasizing the role of heritage and local history in shaping young minds, Dr. Puspita Rani Behera integrates local rituals and folkloric traditions into pedagogical practice in her article “Heritage as Classroom: Integrating Local History into Pedagogical Practice," expanding the boundaries and limitations of contemporary classrooms. While Dr. N. Suman Shelly redefines the role of technology as a tool, not as a teacher, reasserting the central role of educators in reviving local art for the country's identity in “Technology as a Tool, not a Teacher: Reasserting the Central Role of Educators," Swadhin Meher’s exploration “From Gurukul to Smart Classroom: Historical Teaching Methods and Its Relevance in Digital Education” opens new frontiers of history, incorporating digital learning into historical teaching methodologies, striving to make reading history and culture relevant and interesting in today’s context.

While the first section of the proceedings explores “Interdisciplinary Education & Pedagogy," promoting culturally-rooted teaching-learning practices, the subsequent section titled "Indigenous Knowledge Systems” integrates indigenous knowledge systems into modern pedagogy, spreading historical consciousness.

Reflecting a dynamic tapestry of people’s faith and belief in the indigenous knowledge system and cultural beliefs, the keynote poem, “Prem Paichan," of the conference proceedings by Padmashree Shri Haldhar Nag spreads messages of love, extolling love for the earth, region, and its culture to be above all. Reminding the society of its responsibility towards women's

emancipation and preservation of human dignity, the article of Ms. Gouri Majhi on “Education as a Pathway to Women’s Empowerment among the Kisan tribe of Sambalpur District” spreads messages on gender equity and security as society’s obligation, voicing the tribes' lacking public representation. Ms. Sonia Nayak’s article on “Sacred Stories and Village Voices of Odisha” explores connections between folklore, religious practice, oral history, and social change, promising possibilities rooted in the sacred stories of India’s rural tradition. Ms. Amrita Ekka’s write-up on “Indigenous Knowledge and Sustainable Living: A Study of the Kisan Tribe of Sundargarh” attempts to reconstruct the past heritage of commoners for a sustainable living, focusing upon the nation’s rich indigenous knowledge and translating the dreams of the Kisans.

Celebrating cultural history, and planting traditions of India, the third Section of the proceedings, “Cultural Histories and Traditions of India”, devotes studies on “Fakira Behera- A Great Freedom Fighter of Bargarh District” by Dr Nakul Seth, the Principal of Panchayat College, “Myth, Literature & Culture in Practice: Voicing Oral Narratives in Language Classrooms” by Rajashree Bhanja and Shreya Pradhan, “Deciphering History through Oral Literature and Streamlining the Past: A Study into the Colonial Period in Assam as reflected in Folk Songs of Bihu Festival” by Dr Mridusmita Mahanta, “From Ritual Tradition to Cultural Industry: an Explorative study of Ganda Baja and Modern Dulduli in Western Odisha” by Ghanashyam Sahu, Janmajaya padhan, Chandramani bhue, and Padmini Dansana, “Cultural Legacy of Amapali, Bargarh as a Goppur of Dhanu Yatra” by Biren Pasayat, “Nuakhai: The Living Soul of Western Odisha’s Identity” by Geetanjali Patel, “Contested Pasts and Polluted Narratives: Ideological Interventions and the Crisis of Historical Method in Contemporary India” by Krishnakant Lahangir & Mohit Pratap, “Dhanu yatra at Bargarh: Cultural Grandeur, Collective Memory and a Progressive Future” by Dr Mahesh Chandra Dash.

While Dr. Nakul Seth's article on the little-recognized hero, Fakira Behera, voices the struggle of the enduring personality and one of the great freedom fighters of Bargarh for his significant contribution, Rajashree Bhanja and Shreya Pradhan reflect upon classroom innovations to experience the living roots of Odisha's tradition in the perspectives of 'Dhanu Yatra,' focusing on the festival's living values of humanity. Dr. Mridusmita Mahanta's in-depth analysis of the 'Folk songs of Bihu Festival' in her write-up deciphers history through oral literary traditions, providing insights into the colonial period in Assam and depicting its relevance in the present times. "From Ritual Tradition to Cultural Industry: An Explorative Study of Ganda Baja and Modern Dulduli in Western Odisha" by Ghanashyam Sahu, Janmajaya Padhan, Chandramani Bhue, and Padmini Dansana echoes the rhythm of the local identity, reverberating the wedding and religious rituals. Biren Pasayat's "Cultural Legacy of Amapali, Bargarh as a Goppur of Dhanu Yatra" is a reflection on the geographical transformation of the village Ambapali into Gopapur, narrating the themed performances of the local actors. The write-ups on "Nuakhai:

The Living Soul of Western Odisha's Identity" by Geetanjali Patel and "Contested Pasts and Polluted Narratives: Ideological Interventions and the Crisis of Historical Method in Contemporary India" by Krishnakant Lahangir & Mohit Pratap not only emphasize the role of festivals like Nua-Khai in strengthening community bonds and cultural identity but also reflect upon the loss of traditional knowledge and cultural identity, driven by the contemporary society with economic needs. Striving to carry forward the identity of the state's culture and rituals, Dr. Mahesh Ch. Dash discusses 'Dhanu Yatra' as a symbol of cultural grandeur and collective memory, having a progressive future.

Section IV of the proceedings, subtitled 'Foundations of Education and Contemporary Teacher Training,' calls for the need of context-based teaching to make history educative and socially meaningful. While Soyom Prabha Sahoo, in her article 'Roots of Educational Lineages in Ancient Indian Tradition and Culture: Contemporary Relevance,' unfolds civilizational

history,

rooted in age-old knowledge systems and ancient heritage, Sanjay Kumbhar, in 'Institutionalizing Social-Emotional Learning in Educational Policy: Global Perspectives,' urges teaching innovations in the contemporary period, catering to the social-emotional needs of individuals and society. The article 'From Kansha to Global Dictators: Youth, Ethics, and the Future of Leadership' by Pratima Panda is yet another attempt, emphasizing the role of youth to resist tyranny and promoting responsible leadership through the character archetypes like 'mythical Kansha.'

Section V of this issue on digital humanities and documentation explores cultural potentialities as a tool, providing methods for safeguarding historical knowledge subjected to the inevitable decay of time. Dr. Umesh Ch. Mahapatra's article, "Deconstructing Linguistic Hierarchies and Literary Canons: The Role of AI and Heritage Documentation in the Indian Context," aspires to revolutionize learning the lessons of history and exploring the cultural assets of the nation. His article studies AI as a means to record and document cultural heritage, ensuring society's progress is embedded in its cultural roots, shaped by linguistic hierarchies and literary canons.

This special issue of Lokaratna on "Integrating History & Culture with Pedagogy" documents people's history through the lanes of Dhanu Yatra, exploring the socio-cultural aspects of a country's existence, carrying forward the people's identity across ages. Hope you enjoy your journey through the issue, being a part of this global open-air theater epic festival.

Dr. Nakul Seth

Guest Editor (Principal, Panchayat College, Bargarh)

Message from Padma Shri Haldhar Nag



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Acknowledgments

We express our sincere gratitude to the organizers of the Two Day National Level Seminar on *“Integrating History & Culture with Pedagogy: Interdisciplinary Approaches in Education, Archaeology, History, and Culture”* organized by the PG Department of History, the Department of Education, and the Department of Teacher Education (B.Ed.), Panchayat College, Bargarh, Odisha. The seminar provided an enriching academic platform for scholars, educators, researchers, and students to engage in meaningful discussions on the interdisciplinary relationship between history, culture, archaeology, and pedagogy. We remain deeply indebted to Dr. Nakul Seth, Principal-cum-HOD, PG Department of History, for his visionary leadership and constant encouragement that greatly contributed to the success of the seminar. We also extend our heartfelt thanks to Dr. Anindita Nanda, Convenor of the seminar, for her academic guidance and dedicated efforts in coordinating the programme. Our sincere appreciation is equally due to Sri Janmajaya Padhan, Organising Secretary, whose tireless coordination and administrative efficiency ensured the smooth conduct of the seminar proceedings. We would like to place on record our heartfelt gratitude to the esteemed members of the Advisory Committee Dr. Umesh Chandra Mahapatra, Dr. Bidut Prava Mohanty, Dr. Prajna Paramita Naik, Smt. Surjyakanti Sikandar, Sri Subal Meher, and Dr. Sesan Bisi for their valuable guidance, scholarly insight, and continuous support throughout the seminar. Their encouragement and academic suggestions significantly enhanced the quality and intellectual depth of the event. We gratefully acknowledge the support and cooperation of the District Administration headed by the District Magistrate Shri Aditya Goyal, IAS for extending necessary assistance toward the successful organization of the seminar. We are indebted Shri Ashwini Kumar Sarangi, MLA for the Bargarh Assembly Constituency in Odisha, for his

timely guidance and support throughout. We also express our deep respect and gratitude to Padma Shri Haldhar Nag for his valuable contribution to the seminar proceedings and for enriching the academic and cultural spirit of the event through his inspiring presence and literary insight. We also extend our sincere thanks to all the distinguished resource persons and invited speakers whose thought-provoking lectures and scholarly deliberations enriched the seminar proceedings and inspired meaningful academic discussions. Their contributions broadened the understanding of interdisciplinary approaches in education and cultural studies. A special note of gratitude is due to Smt. Rajashree Bhanja, Head, PG Department of English, for being a connection between the Seminar and the Journal Publication. Her linguistic & administrative expertise and scholarly suggestions greatly improved the quality and presentation of the publication. We are equally thankful to the editorial board and authorities of the *Lokaratna* for graciously agreeing to publish the seminar proceedings and thereby providing a wider academic platform for the dissemination of the research papers presented during the seminar. Last but not least, we express our sincere appreciation to the members of the Organizing Committee, faculty members, research scholars, student volunteers, and participants whose cooperation and dedication contributed to the successful completion of the seminar. We also acknowledge Panchayat College, Bargarh, for fostering a vibrant academic environment that encourages research, innovation, and interdisciplinary scholarship.

Editorial Board

Panchayat College, Bargarh (Odisha)

Editorial

Integrating History & Culture with Pedagogy: Reimagining Educational Futures through Heritage, Memory, and Living Traditions

The National Seminar on “*Integrating History & Culture with Pedagogy*” emerges at a significant epistemic moment in contemporary education. Across the globe and acutely within the Indian subcontinent there is a growing recognition that education cannot remain insulated from the civilizational, cultural, and historical currents that shape human consciousness. Knowledge is not merely transmitted; it is inherited, interpreted, contested, and re-created within living traditions. The seminar, and this edited volume that emanates from it, represents an intellectual endeavor to re-situate pedagogy within the layered terrains of history, archaeology, and culture, thereby fostering an educational imagination that is at once critical, rooted, and future-oriented.

In recent decades, education has been increasingly influenced by technological acceleration, standardized frameworks, and globalized models of knowledge production. While such transformations have enabled unprecedented access and mobility, they have also risked abstracting learning from context, detaching it from memory, locality, and cultural specificity. The present volume responds to this challenge by advocating an interdisciplinary dialogue among scholars of education, historians, archaeologists, and cultural practitioners. It proposes that pedagogy must be anchored not merely in content but in consciousness historical consciousness that situates learners within a continuum of time, tradition, and transformation.

At the heart of this endeavour lies a foundational question: What does it mean to teach and learn within a civilization as historically layered and culturally plural as India? The answer

cannot be confined to curricular revision or methodological innovation alone. It requires rethinking the epistemological foundations of education itself, how knowledge is constituted, validated, and transmitted across generations. History, archaeology, and cultural practices are not supplementary to education; they are constitutive of its very meaning.

Interdisciplinarity as Intellectual Imperative

The seminar foregrounds interdisciplinarity not as a fashionable academic gesture, but as an intellectual necessity. History provides narratives of continuity and rupture; archaeology uncovers material traces of lived experience; culture animates values, aesthetics, and symbolic worlds; education mediates these inheritances into structured processes of teaching and learning. When these disciplines operate in isolation, they risk reductionism. When they converge, they generate a more holistic understanding of human development.

The contributions in this volume demonstrate how archaeological sites can function as pedagogical laboratories, how historical archives can stimulate critical thinking, and how cultural traditions can be harnessed as experiential learning frameworks. Such approaches challenge the conventional textbook-centric model and open possibilities for place-based, inquiry-driven, and culturally responsive pedagogies.

Interdisciplinary integration also reconfigures the learner's role. Students cease to be passive recipients of standardized information; they become interpreters of heritage, participants in cultural continuity, and critical analysts of historical narratives. This shift resonates with broader educational theories that emphasize constructivism, experiential learning, and dialogic engagement. Yet here, these theories are grounded in indigenous and local contexts rather than abstracted universals.

Historical Consciousness and Educational Transformation

Historical consciousness is not merely knowledge of dates and events; it is an awareness of temporality, continuity, and ethical inheritance. It cultivates the capacity to perceive oneself as situated within broader civilizational processes. In societies marked by rapid modernization, historical consciousness can act as a stabilizing force, enabling individuals to negotiate change without severing roots.

Integrating historical awareness into pedagogy requires moving beyond rote memorization toward interpretive engagement. It involves encouraging learners to interrogate sources, to recognize multiplicity in narratives, and to understand the interplay between power, memory, and representation. Such an approach not only strengthens academic rigor but also nurtures democratic sensibilities and critical citizenship.

Moreover, archaeology contributes a tangible dimension to historical understanding. Material culture artifacts, architectural remains, inscriptions embodies stories that textual narratives alone cannot capture. Engaging students with archaeological knowledge fosters a sense of empirical inquiry and evidentiary reasoning. It also cultivates respect for preservation and heritage stewardship, aligning education with ethical responsibility toward cultural resources.

Culture as Living Pedagogy: The Case of Dhanu Yatra

While archives and monuments anchor historical study, living cultural traditions animate history in motion. A compelling illustration of this dynamic is the 78th celebration of Dhanu Yatra, held in Bargarh. Recognized as one of the world's largest open-air theatrical enactments, Dhanu Yatra transforms the town into a performative landscape where myth, history, and community converge. Rooted in the Krishna narrative, the festival reimagines episodes from

the Bhagavata tradition through an immersive civic drama in which the entire town becomes the mythic kingdom of Mathura.

In its seventy-eighth iteration, Dhanu Yatra stands not merely as a cultural spectacle but as a pedagogical phenomenon. For eleven days, everyday urban spaces, streets, marketplaces, and administrative buildings are symbolically transformed into mythological geographies. The actor portraying King Kansa assumes performative sovereignty, issuing mock decrees and engaging with citizens in theatrical dialogue. Spectators become participants; the boundary between performer and audience dissolves. This immersive enactment embodies experiential pedagogy in its most organic form.

What lessons does Dhanu Yatra offer for educational theory and practice?

First, it demonstrates how narrative can structure communal memory. The mythological story is not confined to scriptural recitation; it is enacted, negotiated, and collectively inhabited. Participants learn history, theology, ethics, and aesthetics not through abstraction but through embodied engagement. This aligns with constructivist educational paradigms that emphasize active participation and contextual learning.

Second, Dhanu Yatra exemplifies heritage-based knowledge transmission. Local artisans, performers, musicians, and organizers collaborate to sustain a tradition that is simultaneously ancient and contemporary. Skills are transferred intergenerationally; cultural memory is preserved through practice rather than documentation alone. Integrating such models into formal education could revitalize apprenticeship-based learning and community engagement.

Third, the festival underscores the importance of place-based pedagogy. Bargarh does not merely host Dhanu Yatra; it becomes Mathura. The physical environment is reinterpreted through symbolic mapping. Students exposed to such transformations can better appreciate

how space and meaning interact, an insight relevant to disciplines ranging from geography and anthropology to architecture and civic studies.

Finally, Dhanu Yatra reveals the democratic potential of cultural performance. While rooted in sacred narrative, it invites plural participation. Citizens across social strata contribute to its realization. As an educational model, it suggests that knowledge thrives in participatory ecosystems rather than hierarchical dissemination.

Culturally Rooted Pedagogies in Contemporary Context

The integration of culture into pedagogy must avoid romanticization. Heritage is dynamic; traditions evolve; interpretations shift. A culturally rooted pedagogy, therefore, must balance reverence with critical inquiry. It should encourage learners to analyze how traditions are constructed, how meanings change over time, and how cultural practices intersect with issues of gender, caste, class, and power.

The essays in this volume reflect such nuance. They explore how local histories can be incorporated into curricula without succumbing to parochialism; how archaeological findings can challenge dominant narratives; how oral traditions can coexist with archival research; and how educators can navigate tensions between global competencies and local identities.

In the Indian context, where educational reform increasingly emphasizes holistic and multidisciplinary learning, such integration gains renewed relevance. By situating learning within lived cultural contexts, educators can foster deeper engagement and authenticity. Students who recognize their own histories within the curriculum are more likely to experience education as meaningful rather than alienating.

Dialogue as Methodology

The seminar's commitment to dialogue among scholars, educators, and researchers reflects an understanding that knowledge production is collaborative. No single discipline monopolizes truth; rather, insights emerge through conversation, critique, and synthesis. This editorial volume embodies that ethos by juxtaposing diverse methodological approaches and theoretical frameworks.

Dialogue also extends beyond academia. Cultural practitioners, community historians, and heritage custodians contribute perspectives that challenge institutional assumptions. Incorporating such voices democratizes knowledge and enriches scholarly discourse. In this sense, the seminar operates not merely as an academic gathering but as a microcosm of participatory pedagogy.

Toward an Ethical and Imaginative Future

Integrating history and culture with pedagogy ultimately carries ethical implications. It affirms that education is not value-neutral; it shapes collective memory and social imagination. By foregrounding heritage and historical awareness, educators can cultivate empathy, resilience, and civic responsibility.

At the same time, integration must remain forward-looking. The goal is not to retreat into nostalgia but to harness the resources of the past to address contemporary challenges. Festivals like Dhanu Yatra demonstrate how tradition can coexist with modern infrastructure and digital dissemination. Similarly, education can blend technological innovation with cultural rootedness.

The seventy-eighth celebration of Dhanu Yatra serves as a symbolic milestone. Its longevity testifies to the enduring vitality of collective memory. Yet its continued evolution reflects adaptability. For pedagogy, this dual lesson continuity with change offers a guiding principle.

Convergence as Creative Possibility

This edited volume aspires to create an intellectual platform where diverse strands of knowledge converge. By exploring interdisciplinary connections among education, archaeology, history, and culture, it reimagines pedagogy as an integrative practice. By examining living traditions such as Dhanu Yatra, it illustrates how cultural heritage can function as a dynamic educational resource.

In bringing together scholars and practitioners, the National Seminar has initiated a conversation that extends beyond its temporal bounds. The essays collected herein represent not conclusions but beginnings open invitations to further inquiry, experimentation, and collaboration.

To integrate history and culture with pedagogy is to affirm that education is both memory and aspiration. It is to recognize that learners stand at the intersection of inherited narratives and emerging possibilities. And it is to envision classrooms not as isolated enclosures but as porous spaces where archives converse with performances, artifacts dialogue with aspirations, and tradition encounters innovation.

As we reflect on the rich deliberations of the seminar and the vibrant spectacle of Dhanu Yatra's seventy-eighth celebration, we are reminded that knowledge flourishes where continuity meets creativity. In that fertile convergence lies the promise of an education that is intellectually rigorous, culturally resonant, and ethically transformative.

Editorial Board, Panchayat College, Bargarh (Odisha)

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Section : 1

Interdisciplinary Education and Pedagogy

Integrating History and Culture with Pedagogy: A Study in the Context of Bargarh, Odisha

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Abstract

The integration of local history and culture into pedagogy has emerged as a transformative approach to contextualized learning in India. This paper explores how the rich cultural and historical heritage of Bargarh district in Odisha can be effectively incorporated into teaching-learning processes. Bargarh, known for its vibrant Sambalpuri culture, traditional art forms, and festivals such as Dhanu Yatra, provides a unique socio-cultural environment for culturally responsive pedagogy. The study adopts a qualitative approach using secondary sources to examine the role of indigenous knowledge systems, folk traditions, and community practices in education. The findings suggest that integrating local culture enhances student engagement, identity formation, and meaningful learning outcomes. The paper concludes with pedagogical strategies and policy implications for culturally inclusive education.

Key words: Cultural pedagogy, Bargarh, Sambalpuri culture, contextual learning, indigenous knowledge

Introduction

The contemporary education system, largely developed without adequate attention to the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of marginalised communities, often overlooks their rich traditional knowledge systems (Mahapatra, 2004). This neglect creates a pronounced gap between tribal learners and formal schooling, contributing to high dropout rates and

consistently low levels of literacy. Moreover, a rigid and standardized curriculum does not align with the experiential and community-based learning practices inherent in tribal societies, thereby reducing student engagement and fostering a sense of alienation (Bodding, 2003).

A major factor underlying this challenge is the colonial legacy embedded in formal education, which introduced a highly structured, text-oriented model that devalues indigenous modes of knowledge transmission (Murmu, 2011). In contrast, traditional tribal education systems have long relied on oral traditions, collective participation, and apprenticeship-based learning. These approaches emphasize practical skills, environmental understanding, and the preservation of socio-cultural values (Government of India, 2020). The lack of integration of such indigenous pedagogies into mainstream education not only marginalizes tribal students but also disrupts the intergenerational transfer of valuable traditional knowledge (Das, 2017).

However, recent pedagogical shifts emphasize the importance of integrating local knowledge systems into education, (NEP 2020). In regions like Bargarh in Odisha, where culture and history are deeply embedded in everyday life, such integration can significantly enhance the relevance and effectiveness of education.

Bargarh represents a culturally rich district with deep historical roots, diverse traditions, and strong community participation in cultural activities. Integrating this heritage into pedagogy aligns with constructivist approaches, where learners build knowledge based on their socio-cultural environment.

Historical and Cultural Context of Bargarh

Bargarh, located in western Odisha, is a district deeply rooted in history and enriched by a vibrant cultural heritage shaped by centuries of socio-political and ethnic interactions. Historically, Bargarh was part of the larger Sambalpur region, which came under the rule of various dynasties including the Chauhan rulers of Sambalpur during the medieval period. The Chauhans played a significant role in shaping the cultural and administrative structure of

the

region, leaving behind traditions that continue to influence local life (Dash, 2024). During the colonial period, the region witnessed resistance movements and socio-economic transformations, particularly in agrarian structures, which further contributed to its historical significance (Pati, 2001).

Culturally, Bargarh is considered a core area of Sambalpuri culture, known for its synthesis of tribal and non-tribal traditions. The district reflects a pluralistic cultural identity where indigenous communities, including tribal groups, have contributed significantly to language, rituals, and artistic expressions. The Sambalpuri language (Kosli) is widely spoken and serves as a medium of cultural transmission through oral traditions, folk songs, and storytelling. One of the most distinctive cultural features of Bargarh is the world-famous Dhanu Yatra, recognized as the largest open-air theatrical performance globally. This annual festival reenacts episodes from the life of Lord Krishna, particularly the story of Kansa, and transforms the entire town into a live stage. The participatory nature of Dhanu Yatra reflects strong community engagement and offers insights into religious beliefs, performative traditions, and collective memory (Panda and Panda, 2018).

In addition to festivals, Bargarh is renowned for its rich tradition of folk dances such as Dalkhai, Karma, and Humo, which are integral to social and seasonal celebrations. These dances are often accompanied by traditional music and instruments, reflecting agrarian life and local cosmology. The district is also a major center for Sambalpuri handloom, especially Ikat weaving, which demonstrates intricate craftsmanship and indigenous knowledge systems. These textiles are not only economic assets but also carriers of cultural identity (Jena et al. 2012).

Furthermore, local religious practices, village deities, and rituals highlight a close relationship between people and nature, emphasizing ecological balance and sustainability. Cultural practices in Bargarh are thus not static but dynamic, continuously evolving while

maintaining continuity with the past. In conclusion, the historical and cultural context of Bargarh presents a rich tapestry of traditions, beliefs, and practices. This heritage provides a strong foundation for integrating local knowledge into educational frameworks, making learning more contextual and meaningful.

Integration of History and Culture in Pedagogy

Integrating history and culture into pedagogy involves embedding learners' local contexts, traditions, and historical experiences into the teaching-learning process to make education more meaningful and relevant. In regions like Bargarh, this approach allows educators to connect academic content with students' lived realities, thereby enhancing engagement and comprehension. For instance, local historical narratives, folk traditions, and community practices can be incorporated into subjects such as social science, language, and art education. The use of culturally rich elements like Dhanu Yatra provides experiential learning opportunities where students can observe and participate in dramatized historical and mythological events, fostering deeper understanding.

Curriculum Contextualisation

Curriculum contextualisation involves adapting academic content to reflect the local history, environment, and cultural realities of learners. In the context of Bargarh, this means incorporating regional history, local heroes, folklore, and community practices into subjects such as social science and language. For example, lessons can include regional narratives, local geography, and cultural traditions that students are already familiar with, making abstract concepts more concrete and relatable. This approach not only enhances comprehension but also fosters a sense of identity and pride among learners, as they see their own culture represented in the curriculum. It aligns with learner-centered education by connecting prior knowledge with new learning experiences.

Use of Folk Art in Teaching

Folk art serves as a powerful pedagogical tool that bridges creativity and cultural expression with formal education. In regions influenced by Sambalpuri culture, traditional art forms such as folk dances (Dalkhai, Karma), music, and storytelling can be integrated into classroom teaching. These art forms can support language development, improve memory retention, and enhance students' emotional and aesthetic understanding. For instance, folk songs can be used to teach linguistic patterns, while dance movements can illustrate rhythm and coordination. By incorporating folk art into pedagogy, teachers create an engaging, multisensory learning environment that respects and preserves cultural heritage.

Experiential Learning through Festivals

Festivals provide rich opportunities for experiential learning by allowing students to observe and participate in real-life cultural practices. The famous Dhanu Yatra in Bargarh serves as a living classroom where students can witness the dramatization of mythological and historical narratives. Participation in such festivals helps learners understand social values, traditions, and community roles in a practical context. This hands-on learning approach strengthens critical thinking, collaboration, and cultural awareness. Experiential learning through festivals bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world experiences, making education more dynamic and impactful.

Integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Indigenous knowledge systems encompass traditional skills, practices, and wisdom developed by local communities over generations. In Bargarh, practices such as handloom weaving, agriculture, and ecological conservation reflect deep-rooted knowledge that can be integrated into education. For example, the mathematical patterns in Sambalpuri Ikat weaving can be linked to geometry, while traditional farming practices can be connected to

environmental studies. Integrating such knowledge into pedagogy not only enriches academic learning but also promotes sustainability and respect for local wisdom. It validates community knowledge and encourages students to appreciate and preserve their cultural heritage while applying it in modern contexts.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore how history and culture can be effectively integrated into pedagogy in the context of Bargarh district of Odisha. The qualitative design is chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of local educational practices, cultural narratives, and teachers' perspectives.

Research Design

The study follows a case study design, focusing specifically on selected schools and communities in Bargarh. This design allows for a contextual and holistic examination of how local history, traditions, and cultural practices are incorporated into classroom teaching and learning processes.

Study Area

The research is conducted in **Bargarh district of Odisha**, a region known for its rich cultural heritage, including festivals like Nuakhai, folk traditions, and indigenous knowledge systems. The area provides a suitable context to examine the relationship between culture and pedagogy.

Sample Selection

A **purposive sampling technique** is used to select participants who have direct experience with culturally responsive teaching. The sample includes:

- School teachers (primary and secondary levels)

- Students
- Local community members (folk artists, elders, cultural practitioners)
- Education administrators (where relevant)

Approximately **20–30 participants** are selected to ensure diversity of perspectives.

Data Collection Methods

Multiple methods are employed to ensure triangulation of data:

1. **Semi-structured Interviews**

Conducted with teachers, community members, and education officials to understand their views on integrating history and culture into pedagogy.

2. **Classroom Observations**

Observations are carried out to examine teaching practices, use of local examples, storytelling, and cultural references in lessons.

3. **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**

FGDs with students help capture their learning experiences and engagement with culturally integrated content.

4. **Document Analysis**

Analysis of textbooks, curriculum documents, lesson plans, and local cultural materials to assess the presence and scope of cultural integration.

Data Analysis

The collected data are analyzed using **thematic analysis**. Key themes such as cultural relevance, student engagement, indigenous knowledge integration, and pedagogical innovation are identified and interpreted. Coding is done manually to categorize patterns and relationships within the data.

Educational Implications

1. Enhancement of Student Engagement

Integrating history and culture into pedagogy significantly increases student engagement by making learning more relevant to their lived experiences. In contexts like Bargarh, when learners encounter familiar cultural elements such as local traditions, stories, and practices in their curriculum, they show greater interest and participation. This relevance reduces abstraction in learning and helps students connect emotionally and intellectually with the subject matter, leading to improved attention, motivation, and classroom interaction.

2. Development of Cultural Identity and Pride

Culturally integrated pedagogy fosters a strong sense of identity among students by validating their heritage and traditions. Exposure to elements of Sambalpuri culture within educational settings enables learners to develop pride in their roots and appreciate their cultural uniqueness. This not only strengthens self-esteem but also encourages respect for diversity, as students become more aware of both their own and others' cultural backgrounds.

3. Promotion of Inclusive and Equitable Education

The integration of local culture and history ensures that diverse voices, especially those of tribal and marginalized communities, are represented in education. This approach aligns with inclusive education by reducing cultural bias in curriculum and pedagogy. It creates a more equitable learning environment where all students feel valued and respected, thereby improving participation and reducing feelings of alienation or marginalization.

4. Improvement of Critical and Experiential Learning Skills

Incorporating cultural practices such as festivals, crafts, and storytelling promotes experiential learning, which enhances critical thinking and problem-solving skills. For instance, participation in events like Dhanu Yatra allows students to analyze social roles,

narratives, and values in real-life contexts. Such experiences encourage learners to reflect, question, and apply knowledge, moving beyond rote learning to deeper understanding.

5. Preservation and Transmission of Cultural Heritage

Education plays a crucial role in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. By integrating indigenous knowledge, traditions, and local history into pedagogy, schools become active agents in preserving cultural practices for future generations. This not only prevents the erosion of traditional knowledge systems but also ensures their continuity in a rapidly modernizing world. Students thus become custodians of their cultural heritage while adapting it to contemporary educational and societal needs.

Conclusion

The integration of history and culture with pedagogy in the context of Bargarh, disha, highlights the transformative potential of contextualized education in making learning more meaningful, inclusive, and effective. This study demonstrates that when local history, traditions, festivals, folk arts, and indigenous knowledge systems are incorporated into teaching–learning processes, students develop a stronger sense of identity, belongingness, and engagement with education.

By connecting classroom content with the lived experiences of learners, educators can bridge the gap between formal curriculum and community life. In regions like Bargarh rich in cultural heritage such as folk traditions, agrarian practices, and festivals this approach not only enhances conceptual understanding but also preserves and promotes local knowledge systems. It encourages experiential learning, critical thinking, and cultural sensitivity among students. However, the study also identifies key challenges, including lack of teacher training, rigid curriculum structures, and limited instructional resources. Addressing these issues requires policy support, teacher capacity-building programs, and the development of culturally responsive teaching materials.

In conclusion, integrating history and culture into pedagogy is not merely an instructional strategy but a necessary shift towards a more holistic and inclusive education system. It empowers learners by valuing their cultural roots while preparing them to participate actively in a diverse and dynamic society. Future research and educational practices should continue to explore innovative ways of embedding local contexts into mainstream education to ensure both academic success and cultural sustainability.

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Heritage, History and the Detached Youth: Role of Pedagogy and Effective Teaching Techniques

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A country such as India, which has a continued tradition of history, culture and education, relies heavily on the understanding of the past that has been put forth by the textbooks merely. A land that nurtured inquisitive minds and scholars through its own unique educational institutions, has somehow lost its legacy when it comes to connecting the youth with the heritage and history. At a time when the youth feel comfortable with binge watching an online series for hours, our textbook with no graphics do not keep the youth engaged. The high-quality research that is being done at esteemed institutions in and out of the country, remains limited to only a few privileged and elite sections of the society. So, History and Heritage are supposed to be elite issues? History and its narration(s) have been made linear, unengaging and less relevant. An indigenous community is being taught everything about the renaissance that happened thousands of miles away in a distant land but is not being exposed to the very heritage that these communities have been nurturing since generations. Our ideas of what comprises 'History' and 'Heritage' need brainstorming and a fresh perspective needs to come up. Only a thorough reframing of our previously held connotations of these subjects and the creation of a constructive alternative would help us to connect the youth of this nation with these very important, sensitive and yet the most relevant subjects in today's scenario.

This is not any research article per say, I imbibe here some part of what I have been exposed to, based on my limited experience as a faculty, a researcher, a student and as someone who genuinely wants Heritage and History to reach the larger masses. The focus of teachers and faculty in most of the institutions is on touching upon all that is given in the syllabus approved by a certain board of studies. In doing so, the essence of why even we teach History, is lost. Heritage and History are being taught at most of the places as mere subjects, where students should score well and appear for further examinations. Heritage and History have a far larger goal to serve. The bookish explanations not just at school level but also at degree and post-graduate levels are making the youth feel detached from the History which just talks about years, facts, events which is simply in a chronicle format. The narrative of relevance, impact, importance and outcomes are seldom thought about. The faculties while dealing with these topics are themselves not sure how and what addition these lessons would do to the life of students. Heritage and History are supposed to be the trajectory of human past, the wrong doings and the achievements. They are our identity, and identities are complex. They are the reminiscences of what our society has been through, what we endured and what we built together. Heritage and History have the message of our ancestors imbibed into tangible and intangible aspects, waiting for the teachers to make them reach the youth that stand before them. The youth is smart, inquisitive and efficient; if their inquiries and energies are not channelised in the correct directions, they have easy access of AI and internet. The content is easily available on such media and the youth becomes the largest consumers of such content which is not educationally relevant, false or scientifically incorrect, aimed to gain political support and create a rift between various identities, would only lead to a future generation that would not be able to have a peaceful living. But it is not enough to only criticise where we are going wrong, effective alternatives need to be put forward. Heritage and History should be taught in a way that appeal for a creation of rational, inquisitive and critical mind. A student

should not be discouraged from asking questions and the teachers should not hesitate to be updated with the latest discoveries, facts, researches and the better pedagogical techniques for their disciplines.

In the world of such dynamic character, the responsibility of teachers as mere information givers must change; they must assume the roles of facilitators of knowledge and be the engines for guiding the future generations of how to make the best use of this knowledge for the benefit of humankind. What sort of Heritage and History is it, if it does not relate to a larger mass? What History is it, if it only creates violence and hatred between communities or simply pictures one-sided images which are of use only to the people in power than to the youth? What Heritage is it, if it does not narrate an inspiration that can last for centuries and is just being treated as a ritual and sacred space of contention? We have forgotten that we, as teachers or students, have to look at Heritage and History as processes. While dealing with such complex processes, mere text-books would not help the students understand what meanings really lie behind construction of a temple or a fort or a stepwell or the reasons that led to wars and partitions. History is supposed to be a continuous dialogue between the past and the present; I believe Heritage is the bridge that actually makes this dialogue engaging. Monologues by the faculty can help complete the syllabus but they do not add up anything significant to the creation of an aware youth. As previously said, the teachers and even the students, should engage personally and should devise ways in which things would make more sense and create a better impact. Teachers should become the translators and representatives of History and Heritage. If these complex issues of detached youth are not addressed in time, we would not only lose our heritages and history, but we would lose an entire generation worth of knowledge and we would also lose the opportunity to shape the future when we could have stepped up for the cause of something that mattered to us and was crucial for our nation and society. If we do not make the youth engaged in Heritage and History, we would fail the very

efforts with which we sustained and prospered as a human civilisation through all the trials and errors of the past. This is because, a country with a mere dogmatic youth and uncritical attitude, are no good for a democracy in longer run. By this, we do not in any way mean that Heritage and History are to be glorified or merely criticised or romanticised or falsified just to entertain the youth, in fact it's quite the opposite. We should make them aware of the processes through which Heritage and History could be understood. Once we impart them the required enthusiasm and lend them the essential skill of thinking on their own in a suitable direction, we have half the battle won.

Pedagogy, if implemented in a way that makes learning easier and relevant, would be the best aid for enthusiasts who want to make Heritage and History reach the larger masses. One who is aware of the past, is bound to be a better human and a better asset to the humankind. For achieving this goal, our books should be made engaging and interactive. Activities such as documentary review, visiting and writing a report of a heritage site are fine but we have to take a step further. The use of PPTs that have graphics, virtual reality and engaging content should be used (of course only after being approved by experts in the field). Lessons should not be limited to lectures; they should transform into expressions of arts and content; something that the students would contribute into. Once they feel that they are being made a part of something, they will take up greater responsibilities. Establishment of heritage clubs could be done which would organise local heritage walks and create content that educates the commoners. Students with their easy hand on technology, would be happy to contribute. Taking brainstorming discussions, 'what if this happened in a different way in History' sessions, recreating historical events, documenting local Heritage and History especially that was passed down by generations, etc. could be multiple ways of entrusting Heritage and History to a responsible youth. Even the assignments should not be only about writing a thousand words in so and so font and a particular font style. They should be based on understanding the importance, impact

and relevance of a particular person or event and should take into account the unique ways in which each individual student can make sense of the Heritage and History. They should be given the liberty to express their understanding in whatever form they prefer—video, PPT, AI aided content, art, drama, song, etc. I remember studying Feminism as a part of my graduation course and the teacher in-charge gave us the liberty to express the history and relevance of Feminism through a street-play. We actually felt that what we did make a difference; this feeling of being able to be the change, attracts students and keeps them engaged in good academic pursuits. At one instance, I was discussing Mahatma Gandhi's concept of non-violence at an educational centre in a slum where recently two kids had engaged into a skirmish and injured each other. Instead of bookish details of Non-violent Movements, we explained them with the visuals of Dandi March. The real visuals made them understand and feel deeply what real strength, sacrifice and courage feels like. The details about the dates of the Dandi March may not have mattered to them, as much as the importance of non-violent protests which they learnt that day. If we expect students to perform well, focus in classes and learn faster, it is also the responsibility of the teachers to adapt to the needs of the times and step ahead to give them their space to show what they are capable of doing and to provide them validation and appreciation at necessary places. Instead of being the people who always scold students to correct them, for once, we should try and be the example that they can have in front of them. Activities such as quiz competition, fort making, currency designing, fashion show based on various historical periods, council of religions, bead making, pottery making, stone tool making, iron smelting, temple plan making, documentation, sculpting, rock-painting, on-site visits, historical drama and plays, group projects, poster presentations, enactment of historical personages, writing family histories, special Young Historian awards for encouraging more students towards these disciplines, etc. are so many ways in which we can facilitate Heritage

and History in an interesting way to the youth. Their feeling of being involved into something, increases their enthusiasm and personal engagement with such topics.

It is important to have some ideals in front of us when we think of incorporating creativity while dealing with pedagogy related to Heritage and History based studies. Dr. Kush Dhebar, who works with the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Haryana, has devised an interesting way of making History fun for students. He has taken up themes and characters from ancient and medieval India and through a story based on historical contexts, he creates a visual world in front of the young readers by incorporating all this in the form of cartoons and anime characters who play the roles in his books. His book Yoddhas of Hasan is one such successful endeavour in this direction where he highlights the history of wrestling in India. SWAYAM platform of the Ministry of Higher Education, Government of India, is an online learning platform where courses are offered free of cost. I have the privilege of being associated with Buddhist Tourism, a course offered on this platform. Dr. Shrikant Ganvir, the Course Coordinator of this course, curated it in such a way that multiple regions of the subcontinent and their heritages get represented fairly. The format of videos, PPTs, e-text, quizzes, live-sessions and discussion forum make such courses popular, so much so that many of the colleges have taken it as their extra course for 4-credits. Spoon-feeding notes and ready-made material are killing the research aptitude of the students for the sake of scores in examinations. The syllabus and the execution of these syllabi should focus on student-centric development and must take into consideration the role that the teachers have to play as peers and the students have to play as active-agents of learning. Skills such as usage of technology to document Heritage and History, making educational content, organising Heritage Tours, managing educational events and team works in the direction of Heritage and History awareness must be encouraged to connect the youth with these disciplines. Once we succeed in

doing this, we would be at a better position to engage with our past and be assured that it is being carried ahead with a positive zeal and spirit.

Students are eager to learn; our job is to not let that spark of curiosity within them die. We have to facilitate learning and make the students realise the responsibility that they carry as future custodians of the past. Its time that we reprogramme our teaching methods and objectives and focus on what is essential and beneficial for a better tomorrow. By adapting ourselves as facilitators of the past (than mere boring chronicle readers), we would really contribute to the domains of Heritage and History by taking them to the youth, in a way that they feel a sense of belongingness and responsibility towards contributing for a sustainable Heritage and propagation of awareness regarding History(ies).

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Integrating History and Culture with Pedagogy

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Abstract

Interdisciplinary education has emerged as a significant pedagogical approach in contemporary academia, emphasizing the integration of knowledge across disciplinary boundaries. This paper explores the role of interdisciplinary education and pedagogy in connecting education with archaeology, history and culture. The study highlights how interdisciplinary teaching methods promote holistic learning, critical thinking and cultural understanding among learners. Drawing upon theoretical perspectives such as constructivism and experimental learning, the paper examines how archaeological evidence, historical narratives and cultural practices can be meaningfully integrated into educational curricula. Special emphasis is given to the relevance of interdisciplinary pedagogy in the context of heritage education and the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020. The paper also discusses the role of teachers, curriculum design and innovative Pedagogical strategies such as project-based learning, field studies and digital tools. Challenges in implementing interdisciplinary approaches – such as rigid curricula and lack of teacher training are addressed, along with potential opportunities for future educational reform. The paper concluded by emphasizing that interdisciplinary education is essential for developing culturally sensitive, reflective and socially responsible learners capable of understanding complex historical and cultural realities.

Keywords: Interdisciplinary Education, Pedagogy, Archaeology, History, Culture, NEP 2020

Introduction

Education in the twenty-first century is increasingly shaped by rapid social change, globalization, technological advancement, and growing cultural diversity. In this evolving context, the primary purpose of education extends beyond the transmission of isolated facts and disciplinary knowledge to the holistic development of learners who can think critically, analyze complex issues, and engage responsibly with society. Traditional discipline-based education, which treats subjects as independent and compartmentalized, often fails to reflect the interconnected nature of knowledge and the realities of human experience. Consequently, there is a growing recognition that education must adopt integrative approaches that promote coherence, relevance, and contextual understanding.

Pedagogy plays a central role in translating educational goals into meaningful learning experiences. Conventional pedagogical practices have largely emphasized teacher-centred instruction, rote memorization, and examination-oriented learning. While such approaches may ensure content coverage, they often limit learners' ability to relate knowledge across disciplines or apply learning to real-world contexts. Contemporary pedagogy, therefore, increasingly emphasizes learner-centred, inquiry-based, and experiential methods that encourage active participation, reflection, and critical engagement. These pedagogical shifts demand instructional frameworks that can accommodate complexity and interdisciplinarity.

Interdisciplinary education has emerged as a significant pedagogical response to these demands. It integrates concepts, methods, and perspectives from multiple disciplines to provide a comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena. Fields such as archaeology, history, and culture are inherently interdisciplinary, as each contributes uniquely to the understanding of human civilization. Archaeology offers material evidence of past societies through artefacts, monuments, and inscriptions; history constructs chronological narratives and analytical interpretations of social change; and culture reflects values, traditions, beliefs, and social practices that shape human identity. Studying these domains in isolation results in fragmented

understanding, whereas an interdisciplinary approach enables learners to perceive their interconnections and collective significance.

Interdisciplinary pedagogy facilitates meaningful learning by encouraging students to analyze evidence, interpret multiple perspectives, and connect past human experiences with contemporary realities. Educational practices such as field visits, museum-based learning, heritage projects, and digital humanities exemplify how interdisciplinary approaches enrich learning. In the Indian context, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 strongly advocates multidisciplinary and holistic education, reinforcing the relevance of interdisciplinary approaches in integrating archaeology, history, and culture within education.

Thus, interdisciplinary education and pedagogy represent a transformative educational framework that aligns with contemporary intellectual, cultural, and societal needs. By bridging disciplinary boundaries, this approach fosters holistic understanding, cultural awareness, and critical inquiry, making education both meaningful and socially relevant.

1. Concept of Interdisciplinary Education

Interdisciplinary education refers to an educational approach that intentionally integrates knowledge, methods, perspectives, and analytical frameworks from two or more academic disciplines to explore complex themes, questions, or problems. Unlike traditional discipline-based education, which organizes learning into separate and often disconnected subjects, interdisciplinary education emphasizes connection, synthesis, and holistic understanding. It recognizes that real-world issues and human experiences do not conform to rigid disciplinary boundaries and therefore require integrative modes of learning.

At its core, interdisciplinary education aims to overcome the fragmentation of knowledge. Conventional education systems often compartmentalize learning, leading students to perceive subjects such as history, culture, science, and technology as isolated domains. Interdisciplinary education challenges this separation by encouraging learners to identify relationships among

concepts and apply knowledge across contexts. For example, understanding human civilization requires insights from history, archaeology, culture, geography, and scientific methods. By integrating these perspectives, learners gain a more comprehensive and meaningful understanding of the subject matter.

Interdisciplinary education is both a curricular and pedagogical approach. At the curricular level, it involves designing thematic units, integrated courses, and flexible subject combinations that promote cross-disciplinary learning. At the pedagogical level, it encourages inquiry-based learning, problem-solving, project work, and collaborative activities that require students to draw upon multiple disciplines. Research in educational psychology indicates that such integrative learning enhances higher-order cognitive skills such as critical thinking, analysis, synthesis, and creativity.

Another important aspect of interdisciplinary education is its learner-centred nature. Students actively engage with content by questioning assumptions, comparing perspectives, and constructing knowledge rather than passively receiving information. This process not only deepens conceptual understanding but also develops transferable skills such as communication, teamwork, and ethical reasoning. These competencies are essential in higher education, research, and professional life.

In contemporary educational contexts, interdisciplinary education has gained global recognition as a response to complex social, cultural, and environmental challenges. In India, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 strongly advocates multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary learning to promote holistic education and innovation. Thus, interdisciplinary education represents a progressive shift from fragmented knowledge transmission to integrated, meaningful, and socially relevant learning, aligning education with the realities of a complex and interconnected world.

2. Interdisciplinary Pedagogy: Theoretical Perspectives

Interdisciplinary pedagogy refers to teaching–learning approaches that integrate knowledge, methods, and perspectives from multiple disciplines in order to promote holistic understanding and meaningful learning. The theoretical foundations of interdisciplinary pedagogy are drawn from several influential educational theories that emphasize active participation, integration of experience, critical inquiry, and learner-centred education. These theories collectively support the idea that learning is most effective when students engage with knowledge in an interconnected and contextual manner.

One of the primary theoretical bases of interdisciplinary pedagogy is constructivism, as proposed by Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. Constructivist theory holds that learners actively construct knowledge through interaction with their environment and social contexts. Interdisciplinary pedagogy aligns with this perspective by encouraging students to integrate concepts from different disciplines and build coherent understanding. Through discussion, collaboration, and problem-solving, learners connect prior knowledge with new ideas, making learning meaningful and durable.

Experiential learning theory, associated with John Dewey and David Kolb, provides another strong foundation for interdisciplinary pedagogy. This theory emphasizes learning through direct experience, reflection, conceptualization, and application. Interdisciplinary pedagogy incorporates experiential activities such as fieldwork, project-based learning, heritage studies, and case analysis, particularly in subjects like archaeology, history, and culture. Such experiences enable learners to relate theoretical knowledge to real-life contexts, enhancing comprehension and retention.

Inquiry-based learning also significantly informs interdisciplinary pedagogy. This theoretical perspective encourages learners to ask questions, investigate problems, analyze evidence, and construct explanations. In interdisciplinary contexts, inquiry-based learning allows students to examine issues from multiple disciplinary viewpoints, fostering critical and analytical thinking.

It is especially relevant for historical and cultural studies, where interpretation and evaluation of sources are central.

Additionally, humanistic and holistic education theories emphasize the development of the whole person, including cognitive, emotional, social, and ethical dimensions. Interdisciplinary pedagogy supports these aims by integrating cultural values, ethical reasoning, and social awareness into academic learning. It nurtures empathy, cultural sensitivity, and reflective thinking among learners.

In essence, interdisciplinary pedagogy is theoretically grounded in constructivist, experiential, inquiry-based, and humanistic frameworks. These perspectives collectively transform education from fragmented knowledge transmission to integrated, reflective, and meaningful learning, making interdisciplinary pedagogy a powerful approach in contemporary education.

3. Integration of Archaeology, History, and Culture in Education

The integration of archaeology, history, and culture in education provides a holistic and meaningful understanding of human civilization. These three domains are intrinsically interconnected, each contributes uniquely to the interpretation of the human past and its continuity into the present. Archaeology supplies material evidence such as artefacts, tools, monuments, coins, and inscriptions; history offers chronological narratives and analytical interpretations of events, institutions, and social change; and culture reflects the beliefs, traditions, values, language, art, and social practices that define human societies. When taught in isolation, these disciplines often present fragmented knowledge; their integration within education enables learners to develop a comprehensive and contextual understanding of human experience.

Interdisciplinary education allows archaeological evidence to be interpreted within historical and cultural frameworks. For example, an inscription gains significance only when its archaeological context, historical background, linguistic features, and cultural symbolism are

collectively analyzed. Similarly, historical narratives become more authentic and reliable when supported by material remains and cultural traditions. Through interdisciplinary integration, students learn to critically examine sources, compare evidence, and understand multiple perspectives, which are essential skills in humanities education.

Educational practices such as field visits to archaeological sites, museum-based learning, heritage walks, and documentation of folk traditions play a vital role in integrating archaeology, history, and culture. These experiential learning activities connect theoretical knowledge with real-world contexts, making learning engaging and memorable. Research in education suggests that such experiential and interdisciplinary methods significantly enhance student motivation, retention, and cultural awareness. In addition, digital tools such as virtual museums, online archives, GIS mapping, and interactive timelines have further expanded opportunities for interdisciplinary learning, especially in higher education.

The integration of these disciplines also fosters cultural consciousness and heritage preservation. By engaging with archaeological remains and cultural traditions, learners develop respect for cultural diversity and a sense of responsibility towards protecting heritage resources. In the Indian context, this integration aligns with the objectives of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasizes experiential learning, inclusion of Indian knowledge systems, and cultural rootedness.

Thus, integrating archaeology, history, and culture in education enriches academic learning, strengthens critical inquiry, and promotes cultural awareness. It transforms education into a dynamic process that connects the past with present realities and prepares learners to engage thoughtfully with cultural heritage and societal challenges.

5. Role of Teachers and Curriculum Design

Teachers and curriculum design play a central role in the successful implementation of interdisciplinary education and pedagogy. While curriculum provides the structural framework

for learning, teachers act as facilitators who translate interdisciplinary goals into classroom practice. The effectiveness of integrating disciplines such as archaeology, history, and culture largely depends on how teachers plan, guide, and assess learning experiences within a flexible and inclusive curriculum.

Teachers in interdisciplinary settings must move beyond traditional subject-specific roles and adopt a facilitative and collaborative approach. They are expected to design learning experiences that encourage inquiry, discussion, and synthesis of ideas from multiple disciplines. For example, while teaching historical themes, teachers can incorporate archaeological evidence and cultural practices to deepen students' understanding. This requires teachers to possess not only content knowledge but also pedagogical competence, openness to innovation, and a willingness to collaborate with colleagues from other disciplines. Research in teacher education emphasizes that interdisciplinary teaching enhances professional growth and reflective practice among educators.

Curriculum design is equally significant in supporting interdisciplinary pedagogy. A rigid, compartmentalized curriculum restricts integrative learning, whereas a flexible and thematic curriculum promotes interdisciplinary connections. Curriculum planners should incorporate broad themes, project-based learning, and experiential activities that cut across subject boundaries. The inclusion of heritage studies, local history, cultural documentation, and museum education within the curriculum provides opportunities for learners to engage with archaeology, history, and culture in an integrated manner.

Assessment practices within the curriculum must also align with interdisciplinary objectives. Traditional examination systems often focus on rote memorization and subject-specific outcomes, which may hinder interdisciplinary learning. Therefore, curriculum design should promote alternative assessment methods such as portfolios, presentations, field reports, and

reflective journals. These methods assess learners' analytical ability, creativity, and understanding of interdisciplinary relationships.

In the context of contemporary education reforms, including the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, teachers and curriculum designers are encouraged to adopt multidisciplinary and learner-centred approaches. Continuous professional development, curriculum flexibility, and institutional support are essential to empower teachers for interdisciplinary teaching. Thus, the combined role of innovative curriculum design and reflective teaching practice is crucial in fostering interdisciplinary education that is meaningful, contextual, and socially relevant.

6. Interdisciplinary Education and NEP 2020

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a significant shift in the Indian education system by strongly emphasizing interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary education.

Recognizing the limitations of rigid, discipline-based learning, NEP 2020 envisions an education system that fosters holistic development, critical thinking, creativity, and lifelong learning. Interdisciplinary education is positioned as a core principle to prepare learners for the complexities of contemporary society and the demands of the global knowledge economy.

One of the key features of NEP 2020 is the promotion of multidisciplinary higher education institutions. The policy advocates the transformation of colleges and universities into large, multidisciplinary institutions offering flexible combinations of subjects across humanities, social sciences, sciences, and vocational fields. This approach enables students to integrate knowledge from diverse disciplines, such as archaeology, history, culture, science, and technology, thereby enhancing conceptual understanding and intellectual breadth.

NEP 2020 also emphasizes curricular flexibility through the multiple-entry and multiple-exit system, academic bank of credits, and choice-based course structures. These provisions support interdisciplinary learning by allowing students to pursue cross-disciplinary interests without being constrained by rigid degree frameworks. Furthermore, the policy encourages thematic

and experiential learning, which aligns closely with interdisciplinary pedagogy. Activities such as fieldwork, internships, research projects, heritage studies, and community engagement are integral components of the proposed curriculum.

Another important aspect of NEP 2020 is the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), culture, and heritage into education. By incorporating archaeology, local history, traditional knowledge, and cultural practices, the policy promotes culturally rooted and contextually relevant learning. This integration fosters respect for cultural diversity and strengthens national identity while maintaining global perspectives.

Teacher preparation and professional development are also central to NEP 2020's interdisciplinary vision. The policy stresses continuous professional development, pedagogical innovation, and research-oriented teaching to equip teachers for interdisciplinary instruction. Additionally, assessment reforms proposed under NEP 2020 move away from rote learning towards competency-based evaluation, which supports interdisciplinary outcomes such as critical thinking and problem-solving.

NEP 2020 provides a strong policy framework for the implementation of interdisciplinary education in India. By promoting curricular flexibility, experiential learning, cultural integration, and teacher empowerment, the policy aims to create an education system that is holistic, inclusive, and aligned with the needs of the twenty-first century.

7. Challenges and Opportunities

Interdisciplinary education, while offering significant pedagogical benefits, faces several challenges in its effective implementation. One of the primary challenges is the rigid structure of traditional curricula, which are often organized around isolated disciplines. Such compartmentalization limits flexibility and restricts opportunities for integrating subjects like archaeology, history, and culture. Similarly, conventional assessment systems that emphasize

rote memorization and subject-specific examinations often fail to capture interdisciplinary learning outcomes such as critical thinking, synthesis, and creativity.

Another major challenge is the lack of interdisciplinary training among teachers. Many educators are trained within specific disciplinary frameworks and may feel unprepared to design and implement interdisciplinary lessons.

This can result in superficial integration rather than meaningful synthesis of knowledge. Additionally, limited institutional support, inadequate resources, and time constraints further hinder collaborative teaching and curriculum innovation. In fields like archaeology and cultural studies, logistical challenges such as access to sites, museums, and research materials also pose significant barriers.

Despite these challenges, interdisciplinary education presents numerous opportunities. One of the most promising opportunities lies in the use of digital technology. Virtual museums, online archives, digital heritage platforms, and interactive learning tools enable students to engage with archaeological and historical content beyond physical limitations. These technological resources make interdisciplinary learning more accessible, especially in resource-constrained educational settings.

Policy support, particularly through initiatives like the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, provides a favorable environment for interdisciplinary education. NEP 2020 advocates curricular flexibility, experiential learning, and integration of cultural and historical knowledge, thereby addressing many structural challenges. The policy also emphasizes teacher professional development and research-oriented education, creating opportunities for capacity building in interdisciplinary pedagogy.

Furthermore, interdisciplinary education enhances student engagement and employability. By developing transferable skills such as analytical reasoning, problem-solving, communication, and teamwork, it prepares learners for diverse academic and professional pathways. In the

context of archaeology, history, and culture, interdisciplinary learning fosters cultural awareness, heritage conservation ethics, and social responsibility.

While interdisciplinary education faces challenges related to curriculum rigidity, teacher preparedness, and resource availability, it also offers vast opportunities through technological innovation, policy reforms, and pedagogical advancements. Addressing these challenges strategically can transform interdisciplinary education into a powerful tool for holistic and meaningful learning.

8. Educational Implications and Future Directions

Interdisciplinary education and pedagogy have significant implications for contemporary educational practices, particularly in the teaching of archaeology, history, and culture. One of the foremost educational implications is the shift from rote memorization to conceptual, inquiry-driven learning. By integrating multiple disciplines, learners are encouraged to analyze evidence, interpret diverse perspectives, and construct knowledge meaningfully. This approach enhances critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and reflective learning, which are essential outcomes of higher education.

Another important implication is the promotion of experiential and contextual learning. Interdisciplinary pedagogy emphasizes fieldwork, museum education, heritage documentation, project-based learning, and community engagement. These practices connect classroom learning with real-world contexts, making education more relevant and engaging. Studies in educational research indicate that experiential and interdisciplinary learning improves student motivation, retention, and long-term understanding, especially in humanities and social sciences.

Interdisciplinary education also contributes to cultural awareness and social responsibility. When archaeology, history, and culture are taught in an integrated manner, learners develop a deeper appreciation of cultural diversity, heritage conservation, and ethical responsibility

towards historical resources. This is particularly significant in multicultural societies like India, where education plays a crucial role in preserving intangible and tangible cultural heritage. In terms of future directions, curriculum innovation will be central to strengthening interdisciplinary education. Educational institutions need to design flexible, theme-based curricula that allow students to explore cross-disciplinary connections. Assessment reforms should also be prioritized, with greater emphasis on portfolios, research projects, presentations, and reflective writing rather than traditional examinations. Such assessment methods better capture interdisciplinary learning outcomes. Teacher education and professional development represent another critical future direction. Teachers must be equipped with interdisciplinary content knowledge, pedagogical skills, and digital competencies. Continuous training programs, collaborative teaching models, and research-oriented pedagogy can empower educators to effectively implement interdisciplinary approaches.

Technological integration will further shape the future of interdisciplinary education. Digital archives, virtual heritage platforms, artificial intelligence, and immersive learning technologies offer new possibilities for interdisciplinary engagement. These tools can democratize access to archaeological and historical resources and support innovative teaching–learning practices.

The educational implications of interdisciplinary pedagogy are profound, fostering holistic learning, cultural consciousness, and critical inquiry. Future advancements in curriculum design, teacher training, assessment, and digital innovation will be essential to realizing the full potential of interdisciplinary education in the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

Interdisciplinary education and pedagogy represent a transformative approach to learning that responds effectively to the complexities of contemporary knowledge and society. By transcending traditional disciplinary boundaries, interdisciplinary approaches enable

learners to develop a holistic understanding of education, archaeology, history, and culture as interconnected domains rather than isolated fields of study. This integration enriches academic learning by combining material evidence, historical narratives, and cultural interpretations, thereby fostering deeper insight into human civilization and its evolving social realities.

The adoption of interdisciplinary pedagogy enhances critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and reflective learning. Through experiential methods such as fieldwork, museum education, heritage documentation, and project-based learning, students actively engage with knowledge and connect theoretical concepts to real-world contexts. Such learning experiences not only improve conceptual clarity but also cultivate skills essential for research, higher education, and professional life. Moreover, interdisciplinary education nurtures cultural awareness, ethical responsibility, and respect for diversity, which are particularly significant in culturally rich and pluralistic societies.

Teachers and curriculum design play a pivotal role in translating interdisciplinary ideals into effective practice. Flexible curricula, collaborative teaching models, and innovative assessment strategies are essential to support interdisciplinary integration. Policy initiatives such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 further strengthen this approach by promoting multidisciplinary education, experiential learning, and the integration of Indian knowledge systems. These reforms provide a supportive framework for institutional transformation and pedagogical innovation. Despite challenges related to curriculum rigidity, teacher preparedness, and resource availability, interdisciplinary education offers vast opportunities through digital technologies, policy support, and evolving pedagogical practices. Virtual museums, digital archives, and interactive learning platforms have expanded access to archaeological and cultural resources, enabling inclusive and engaging learning environments.

Interdisciplinary education and pedagogy offer a meaningful and future-oriented framework for connecting education with archaeology, history, and culture. By fostering

holistic understanding, cultural consciousness, and critical inquiry, this approach prepares learners to engage thoughtfully with heritage, society, and global challenges, making education both relevant and transformative in the twenty-first century.

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Heritage as Classroom: Integrating Local History into Pedagogical Practice

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Abstract

This paper explores the concept of “heritage as classroom” by arguing that local history can be systematically integrated into mainstream pedagogy to deepen students’ historical consciousness, cultural identity, and civic engagement. Drawing on selected case studies from India and international heritage-education projects, the paper analyses how school visits to heritage sites, community-based oral histories, and local-history projects can be aligned with curriculum goals. It further highlights epistemological, methodological, and infrastructural challenges and proposes a framework for teachers to design context-sensitive, place-based historical learning. The study concludes that embedding local heritage into classroom practice not only enlivens history teaching but also strengthens students’ sense of belonging and critical-historical thinking.

Keywords: heritage education, local history, pedagogical practice, place-based learning, curriculum integration, India

Introduction

In recent years, there has been growing scholarly interest in the idea that “heritage” can function as an extended classroom beyond the four-walled school. In this conception, monuments, landscapes, museums, and living traditions are treated not merely as objects of preservation but as active pedagogical resources that situate students within their own histories and communities. Particularly in highly diverse, multi-layered societies such as India, integrating local history into pedagogy can help students connect national or global narratives with tangible, everyday experiences. Despite policy-level recognition of culture and local knowledge in documents such as the National Education Policy 2020, much school-based history teaching remains textbook-centric and de-contextualised. Against this background, this

paper examines how local-history-based “heritage pedagogy” can be conceptualised and operationalised in ordinary classrooms. It proceeds with a brief theoretical framing of heritage as pedagogy, followed by an analysis of possible models of integration, illustration with empirical and practice-oriented examples, and concluding reflections on implications for teacher education and curriculum design.

Heritage, Local History, and Historical Learning

Heritage education research increasingly defines heritage as a social and interpretive practice rather than a fixed list of monuments. In this view, “heritage” refers to what communities choose to value, narrate, contest, and transmit across generations, and this process is inherently pedagogical. When local history is brought into the classroom, students are not only learning about nearby temples, forts, markets, or folk traditions; they are learning how competing narratives about the past are constructed, negotiated, and mobilised in the present. Local history, in particular, provides a manageable entry point into the complexity of historical analysis. Because it is close to students’ lived environments, it can reduce the perceived distance between “then and there” and “here and now,” making abstract concepts such as change, continuity, and causation more tangible. Studies from India and other post-colonial contexts show that well-integrated local-history modules can improve students’ sense of identity, critical-historical consciousness, and civic awareness.

Models of “Heritage as Classroom”

Several models have emerged in which heritage functions as an extended classroom:
Site-based learning: School-led visits to temples, forts, museums, or colonial-era buildings, with guided inquiry tasks and reflection.

Community-based oral history: Students interviewing elders, artisans, or local historians to document migration, festivals, or craft traditions, thereby producing primary sources.

Heritage-classroom projects: Structured classroom units (e.g., 8–10 sessions) that combine local-history research, archival work, and creative outputs such as exhibitions or digital stories.

Living-heritage curricula: Integrating “living heritage” (e.g., performances, rituals, crafts) into formal lessons to connect history with contemporary social practices.

In all these models, the teacher shifts from a sole transmitter of canonical knowledge to a facilitator who scaffolds students' encounters with local sources, debates, and silences. This approach resonates with constructivist and inquiry-based pedagogies, which emphasise active meaning-making over rote memorization.

An Indian Context: Local History in School Curriculum

India's state and national education frameworks sporadically acknowledge the value of local and regional history, yet implementation remains uneven. Recent studies indicate that while local content is often mentioned in policy documents, it is rarely supported with adequate textbooks, training, or assessment mechanisms. Empirical work with social-studies and history teachers in India suggests that those who voluntarily incorporate local-history materials report higher student engagement and motivation, but they also face challenges such as lack of time, resource constraints, and pressure to prepare students for standardised examinations. In this context, "heritage as classroom" can help bridge the gap between policy rhetoric and classroom reality. For example, projects that link nearby heritage sites (such as Bargarh's temples, ghats, or craft traditions) to state-board history syllabi on regions, trade, and culture can transform local monuments and practices into core teaching resources rather than optional add-ons. By designing local-history modules that explicitly connect to prescribed learning outcomes, teachers can meet official requirements while simultaneously enriching historical understanding.

Case-Illustrations and Methodological Reflections

Drawing on selected international and Indian practices, the following examples illustrate how local history can be integrated pedagogically: Collaborative local-history projects using ICT: Magro's work with 7th-grade students in Europe demonstrates that even small-scale, school-based projects using digital tools (smartphones, GPS, simple apps) can stimulate discovery learning and collaborative research around local heritage. Students mapped nearby monuments, collected oral snippets, and produced short digital narratives, which were then discussed in classroom debates.

Living-heritage in Asia-Pacific classrooms: A UNESCO-supported resource kit on "living heritage" shows how teachers in the Asia-Pacific region integrate intangible cultural practices into everyday lessons, thereby linking historical processes with contemporary social identities. In India, similar methods have been adapted to local festivals, crafts, and oral narratives, aligning them with national themes such as "unity in diversity."

Practice-oriented local-history in higher education: In Ukraine, “local history educational and productive practice” at the university level involves students in fieldwork, archival work, and conferences, which in turn strengthens their research dispositions and professional skills. While this example comes from higher education, its emphasis on structured, credit-bearing practice can inform how school-level projects might be formalised and assessed. From a methodological standpoint, integrating local history into pedagogy requires a mixed-methods sensibility: teachers must combine documentary work, fieldwork, and oral-history techniques within the constraints of a typical school schedule. This calls for a flexible, cyclical model planning, field or community engagement, classroom analysis, and public reflection or presentation that can be adapted to different grades and subjects.

Challenges and Tensions

Several enduring challenges complicate the integration of local history into mainstream pedagogy: Curriculum overload and exam pressure: Many teachers feel that time spent on local-history projects cannot be justified when high-stakes board exams focus on national or textbook content. Lack of teacher training: Most pre-service and in-service training programmes do not adequately prepare teachers to design or assess heritage-based projects. Access and equity: Schools in remote or under-resourced areas may lack nearby heritage sites, transport, or digital infrastructure, raising questions of spatial and social equity.³⁴Contested narratives: Local histories often involve contested memories, caste, gender, or religious tensions, which can generate discomfort or conflict if not handled with care. These challenges do not invalidate the “heritage as classroom” approach; rather, they call for explicit discussion of ethical and political dimensions in teacher-education programmes. In India, for example, integrating local history must be sensitive to the risks of essentialising or romanticising particular communities, and must explicitly encourage multiple perspectives and critical-historical reflection.

Towards a Pedagogical Framework

This paper proposes a brief pedagogical framework that teachers and teacher-educators can use Place-based orientation: Begin each unit by mapping nearby heritage sites, local industries, landscapes, or community practices relevant to the syllabus. Question-driven inquiry: Frame local-history projects around clear historical questions (e.g., “How did trade shape our town?”) rather than vague “visit and describe” tasks. Multi-source engagement: Encourage students to work with monuments, archives, oral histories, photographs, and even digital sources, thereby practising source-criticism. Student-centred knowledge production: Support students in producing exhibitions, blogs, or short films that reinterpret local heritage

for peers and families. Reflective debriefing: Include structured discussions in class to help students reflect on how their understanding of local and national histories has changed. This framework can be flexibly adjusted for different grade levels and contexts, including the specific socio-cultural setting of Bargarh, Odisha, where combined temple, riverine, and craft histories offer rich material for place-based pedagogy.

Conclusion

“Heritage as classroom” is not a marginal or decorative addition to history education; it is a central strategy for making historical learning more meaningful, inclusive, and identity-sensitive. By integrating local history into everyday pedagogical practice, teachers can help students see themselves as participants in ongoing historical processes rather than passive recipients of distant narratives. In the Indian context, this approach aligns with calls for curriculum “localisation” and community-engaged learning, yet it requires institutional support, teacher-education reform, and careful attention to the ethical dimensions of contested pasts. Future research could systematically evaluate the impact of local-history-based heritage pedagogy on student outcomes, teacher practices, and civic attitudes.

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Technology as a Tool, Not a Teacher: Reasserting the Central Role of Educators

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Abstract

In today's educational landscape, technology has reshaped teaching and learning through digital platforms, artificial intelligence, and smart classrooms. These tools offer accessibility, personalization, and collaboration, yet debates persist over whether they can replace teachers. This paper argues that technology, while powerful, cannot substitute the human qualities educators provide empathy, ethical guidance, cultural awareness, and emotional intelligence. Teachers remain essential for holistic learner development. Technology can aid lesson design, differentiated instruction, and assessment, but over-reliance risks depersonalisation, inequity from the digital divide, and weakened critical thinking. To strengthen education, teachers should be empowered through digital pedagogy training, collaborative learning communities, and action research on technology integration. Education's future, therefore, lies in balance where technology is a complement, not a replacement, to teacher expertise.

Keywords: teacher role, educational technology, pedagogy, teacher empowerment, collaborative learning.

Introduction

In an era characterised by rapid technological development, educational systems worldwide have increasingly embraced digital tools. Smartphones, tablets, online learning platforms, artificial-intelligence-based tutoring systems, and interactive whiteboards have entered many classrooms. On the surface, these innovations promise more flexible,

personalised, and effective teaching and learning. However, as we integrate technology into language-teaching contexts and beyond, a critical question arises: Can technology replace the teacher? Or rather: What remains uniquely human about teaching that technology cannot replicate?

This paper asserts that technology must be viewed as a **tool**, not a **teacher**. In the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) and more broadly education, the human educator remains central. While technology offers enormous potential for example, in differentiated instruction, immediate feedback, and global communication it cannot replace the human qualities of empathy, ethical judgment, cultural nuance, emotional intelligence, and relationship-building. These dimensions underpin effective pedagogy, especially in language teaching, where nuance, identity, and interaction matter deeply.

The Promise and Pitfalls of Educational Technology

Digital pedagogy studies repeatedly show mixed effects: tools can scaffold practice and extend resources, but they also interact with institutional structures and social inequalities in unpredictable ways. Reviews of early-childhood digital pedagogy emphasise teachers' roles as co-designers and facilitators, suggesting that digital artefacts often become pedagogical *mediators* rather than substitutes (Yang et al.). Similarly, studies of generative AI highlight that promises of personalisation often reveal and amplify gaps in infrastructure, professional development, and assessment culture (Dangol et al.).

In India the NEP 2020's emphasis on DIKSHA, SWAYAM, and the National Digital Library presents a deliberately infrastructural response to scaling high-quality resources. Yet implementation is heterogeneous: CBSE's e-Pathshala and Delhi's DIKSHA modules expand access for urban and semi-urban classrooms, while many rural higher secondary schools in

districts across Odisha, Bihar, and parts of Jharkhand continue to contend with intermittent connectivity and single-shared devices. These contrasts matter: technology's impact is mediated by local pedagogical practices, teacher workload, and community norms. A teacher who adapts a DIKSHA module into a scaffolded classroom discussion is enacting pedagogy in a way a platform cannot.

The promise of efficiency is double-edged. Automated assessments save time but can narrow curricula toward what is measurable. Adaptive systems tailor drill and practice but may subtly privilege certain linguistic norms or assessmentable skills. Technology's effects thus depend on design choices, data regimes, and the distributive politics of implementation. As a quote puts it: "Technology is just a tool. In terms of getting the kids working together and motivating them, the teacher is the most important" (Gates). This helps anchor the argument: the teacher frames tasks, monitors engagement, sparks curiosity, builds trust and these remain human functions.

Why Teachers Remain Irreplaceable

There are several strands of argument here: relational, ethical/cultural, and cognitive. Firstly, the relational dimension. Teaching is not simply delivering content; it is building relationships, noticing learner moods, adapting to emotional states, encouraging, modelling, giving feedback, sensing when a learner is stuck, intervening, offering hope. As Haim G. Ginott wrote in his influential book *Teacher and Child* (1972):

"I have come to a frightening conclusion. I am the decisive element in the classroom. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather"(Ginott 13). Such introspection underscores that the affective dimension of teaching is deeply human, not algorithmic.

Secondly, ethical and cultural mediation. Teachers engage with students as whole persons: they help cultivate not just language competence but intercultural awareness, ethical reasoning, values, collaboration, resilience, empathy, and citizenship. In the Indian context, teachers in higher secondary English classrooms often negotiate multiple cultural registers between local languages and global English, between tradition and modernity. A teacher in a Tamil Nadu higher secondary school may use YouTube poetry recitations alongside class readings from Tagore or Kamala Das, helping students interpret emotional tone and cultural context. Here, technology serves as an amplifier of access, but human interpretation makes meaning.

Thirdly, the cognitive dimension. Teachers scaffold learning in ways that go beyond the mechanics of grammar and vocabulary. They design tasks that provoke critical thinking, peer interaction, negotiation of meaning, reflective metacognition, error correction in oral production, and feedback that is tuned to individual needs. For example, in Indian engineering colleges where English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses are taught, teachers blend Moodle-based quizzes with classroom discussions and peer evaluation. This “blended mode” encourages autonomy yet still depends on the teacher’s mediation for effective learning outcomes. As educational-technology researcher Marc Prensky asserts:

“Even with all our great new, quickly advancing technology, our need for great human teachers won’t go away. ... The teacher’s role is not to do what technology can now do well i.e. teach content but, rather, to do what technology can’t do well (or at all) i.e. provide respect, empathy, acceleration and motivation to students” (Prensky 1). Here, Prensky identifies exactly what makes teachers indispensable.

Balancing Technology and Teacher Expertise in ELT

Given these considerations, how should technology be integrated in ELT such that teachers remain central rather than sidelined? The key is balance and synergy. The teacher is not replaced; instead, the teacher uses technology to enhance pedagogy, free up time for higher- order tasks, personalise learning, extend reach, and enable collaboration.

In India, higher secondary and college teachers increasingly use **Learning Management Systems (LMS)** such as Google Classroom, Canvas, and Moodle to distribute assignments, share readings, and provide feedback. The University of Mumbai’s English department, for instance, runs hybrid literature seminars where students post critical reflections online before in-class discussion. Likewise, in the National Institute of Technology (NIT) system, technical English instructors employ AI grammar checkers like Grammarly alongside teacher feedback, making students aware of language form while preserving human evaluation for content and tone. These examples demonstrate how technology augments teacher functions rather than replacing them.

In practical terms, four pillars may guide this integration:

- **Digital pedagogy training for teachers.** Teachers need professional development not merely in using technology, but in integrating it knowing when a digital tool adds value, how to blend online/offline activities, how to maintain presence, how to scaffold learner autonomy, and how to monitor equity. Sahu and Bankira’s study in Odisha found that teachers in urban schools and with fewer years of experience “are highly digital-pedagogy oriented and competent” whereas others lag, indicating a need for systemic support.
- **Collaborative teacher communities and action research.** Teachers should form professional learning communities to share effective practices of technology

integration, reflect on what works in their context, conduct classroom-based research, and adapt their digital-pedagogy orientations. Initiatives such as the **CBSE’s Capacity Building Workshops** and **NCTE’s Integrated Teacher Education Programme** could embed digital pedagogy as a reflective practice component.

- **Clear role articulation: teacher as designer, facilitator, assessor.** The teacher designs tasks that use technology where appropriate, monitors student uptake, intervenes and gives human feedback, provides socio-emotional support, ensures comprehension of learners from varied backgrounds, and connects language learning to real-world meaning and cultural context.
- **Attention to equity, access, and ethical use of technology.** The digital divide remains real: students from rural areas often access online content via smartphones with limited data. Teachers in these contexts often curate lighter, offline-compatible materials, such as WhatsApp PDFs or recorded lectures. As Dangol et al. emphasise, educational technology adoption must navigate “sociotechnical dynamics including district policies, professional norms, and relational commitments” (Dangol et al.). Teachers must advocate for equitable access, ensure inclusive design, and foreground human interaction.

Risks of Over-Reliance on Technology

Over reliance on technology in education, particularly when it comes at the expense of the teacher’s central role, can introduce several unintended risks. One of the most immediate concerns is the **depersonalisation of learning**. While digital tools can enhance efficiency and access, they may also reduce meaningful human interaction in the classroom. When teaching becomes mediated primarily through screens and automated systems, the relational aspect of

education dialogue, empathy, and mentorship can weaken, making the learning environment feel impersonal or transactional rather than engaging and supportive.

Another significant risk is **the widening of existing inequities**. The COVID 19 pandemic clearly illustrated this divide, especially in contexts like rural India. Many students in remote or underserved areas lacked access to stable internet connections or digital devices, effectively excluding them from online learning. The *Annual Status of Education Report (ASER 2022)* found that 28% of rural learners depended entirely on phone calls or direct teacher visits to continue their education during this period. This underscores the indispensable role of teachers as accessible, adaptive facilitators who can bridge gaps that technology alone cannot address.

Excessive dependence on technology may also contribute to **the erosion of critical thinking skills**. Automated assessments and pre-structured digital content often prioritize speed and correctness over depth and reflection. When students engage primarily with multiple choice questions or algorithm driven feedback, they may develop a tendency toward surface level learning. This can limit opportunities for discussion, analysis, and the kind of intellectual struggle that fosters deeper understanding and independent thought.

Further, there is **the risk of teacher deskilling or marginalisation**. When institutions position technology as a replacement rather than a complement to teacher expertise, it can undermine the professional identity of educators. Teachers may feel devalued, leading to decreased motivation and fewer opportunities for growth and innovation in their practice. Over time, this could weaken the overall quality of education, as the system loses sight of the nuanced, human driven aspects of teaching that no technological tool can fully replicate.

Conclusion

In the evolving landscape of English Language Teaching (and education more broadly), technology offers remarkable opportunities. It can support differentiated instruction, extend reach, activate collaboration, provide immediate feedback, and foster 21st-century skills. Yet technology is not a teacher. It is a tool, a powerful one but only in the hands of a skilled educator will it realise its potential.

Therefore, technology is transformative but not determinative. Its educational value is conditional; it is a function of design, policy, professional capacity, and socio-economic context. In ELT and teacher education, human teachers perform interpretive, ethical, and relational labour that current technologies cannot replicate. The task for policy and practice is not to “choose” between technology and teachers but to cultivate ecosystems where technology amplifies teacher expertise, supports contextual pedagogy, and is governed to protect equity and professional agency.

This requires investment in nuanced PD, teacher-led inquiry, redistributive workload policies, and governance structures that embed teachers in decision-making. When technology is wielded by reflective professionals who understand local constraints and pedagogical aims, it is transformational; otherwise, it risks being promising but just a hollow substitute. The future of education, especially in complex, multilingual contexts like India, depends less on whether machines can teach and more on whether systems can enable teachers to teach better.

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ODIA

ଗୁରୁକୁଳରୁ ସ୍ନାତ୍ କୁସରୁମ୍: ଐତିହାସିକ ଶିକ୍ଷାଦାନ ପଦ୍ଧତି ଏବଂ ଡିଜିଟାଲ ଶିକ୍ଷାରେ ଏହାର ପ୍ରାସଙ୍ଗିକତା
ସ୍ବାଧୀନ ମେହେର, ବି.ଇଡି. ପ୍ରଥମ ବର୍ଷ, ଶିକ୍ଷକ ପ୍ରଶିକ୍ଷଣ ବିଭାଗ, ପଞ୍ଚାୟତ ମହାବିଦ୍ୟାଳୟ, ବରଗଡ଼

ସାରାଂଶ (Abstract):-

ଏହି ଗବେଷଣାତ୍ମକ ପ୍ରବନ୍ଧଟି ଭାରତୀୟ ଶିକ୍ଷା ବ୍ୟବସ୍ଥାର ଐତିହାସିକ ବିବର୍ତ୍ତନ ତଥା ପ୍ରାଚୀନ ‘ଗୁରୁକୁଳ’ ପରମ୍ପରା ଓ ଆଧୁନିକ ‘ସ୍ନାତ୍ କୁସରୁମ୍’ ମଧ୍ୟରେ ଥିବା ସମନ୍ବିତକୁ ନେଇ ଆଧାରିତ । ଏଥିରେ ପ୍ରାଚୀନ ଶିକ୍ଷାଦାନର ମୂଳଦୁଆ ଭାବେ ପରିଗଣିତ ହେଉଥିବା ଆବାସିକ ଶୈଳୀ, ନୈତିକ ମୂଲ୍ୟବୋଧ ଏବଂ ଶ୍ରବଣ-ମନନ-ନିଦିଧ୍ୟାସ ଭଳି ତ୍ରିବିଧ ସୋପାନର ଗୁରୁତ୍ବ ଉପରେ ଆଲୋଚନା କରାଯାଇଛି । ସମୟର ପରିବର୍ତ୍ତନ ସହିତ ଶିକ୍ଷାଦାନ କ୍ଷେତ୍ରରେ ଆସିଥିବା ଡିଜିଟାଲ ବିପ୍ଳବ, ଅତିଷ୍ଠ-ଭିଜୁଆଲ ଲର୍ଣ୍ଣିଂ ଏବଂ କୂତ୍ରିମ ବୁଦ୍ଧିମତା (AI) କିପରି ଜ୍ଞାନ ଆହରଣକୁ ସହଜତର କରିଛି, ତାହା ଏଠାରେ ବିସ୍ତୃତ ଭାବେ ଆଲୋଚନା କରାଯାଇଛି । ଏଥିସହିତ ଓଡ଼ିଶାର ସାମ୍ପ୍ରତିକ ଶିକ୍ଷା ନୀତିରେ ଗୁରୁ-ଶିଷ୍ୟ ପରମ୍ପରା ପ୍ରତି ସୃଷ୍ଟି ହୋଇଥିବା ଆହ୍ୱାନ ଏବଂ ପାରମ୍ପରିକ ମୂଲ୍ୟବୋଧର ଅବକ୍ଷୟ ଉପରେ ଏକ ସମାଲୋଚନାତ୍ମକ ଦୃଷ୍ଟିକୋଣ ପ୍ରଦାନ କରାଯାଇଛି । ସର୍ବୋପରି, ଏହି ପ୍ରବନ୍ଧଟି ଦର୍ଶାଇଥାଏ ଯେ ଜ୍ଞାନ କୌଶଳ ଯେତେ ଆଧୁନିକ ହେଲେ ମଧ୍ୟ ସାମଗ୍ରୀକ ବ୍ୟକ୍ତିତ୍ବ ବିକାଶ ଓ ସଂସ୍କାର ପାଇଁ ପ୍ରାଚୀନ ଗୁରୁଗୁଳର ଆଦର୍ଶ ଆଜି ମଧ୍ୟ ପ୍ରାସଙ୍ଗିକ; ତେଣୁ ଏକ ସମୃଦ୍ଧ ଶିକ୍ଷା ବ୍ୟବସ୍ଥା ପାଇଁ ଯାନ୍ତ୍ରିକ ଦକ୍ଷତା ସହିତ ମାନବିକ ସମ୍ବେଦନଶୀଳତାର ସମନ୍ବିତ ରକ୍ଷା କରିବା ଏକାନ୍ତ ଆବଶ୍ୟକ ।

ମୁଖ୍ୟ ଶବ୍ଦ (Key Words):- ଗୁରୁକୁଳ ପରମ୍ପରା, ସ୍ନାତ୍ କୁସରୁମ୍, ଡିଜିଟାଲ ଶିକ୍ଷା, ଗୁରୁ-ଶିଷ୍ୟ ସମ୍ପର୍କ, ସାମଗ୍ରିକ ବିକାଶ ।

ଶ୍ଳୋକ

“ନ ହି ଜ୍ଞାନେନ ସଦୃଶ ପବିତ୍ରମିତ୍ ବିଦ୍ୟତୋ”

ଅର୍ଥବୋଧ/ ବ୍ୟାଖ୍ୟା:- ଏହି ସଂସାରରେ ଜ୍ଞାନ ପରି ପବିତ୍ର ଓ ଶ୍ରେଷ୍ଠ କିଛି ନାହିଁ ଜ୍ଞାନ ମନୁଷ୍ୟଙ୍କ ଅଜ୍ଞାନକୁ ଦୂର କରେ ଏବଂ ତାଙ୍କୁ ସତ୍ୟର ପଥରେ ଆଗେଇ ନେଇଯାଏ । ଯେପରି ପାଣି ଦେହକୁ ପବିତ୍ର କରେ, ଠିକ୍ ସେପରି ଜ୍ଞାନ ମନ ଓ ଆତ୍ମାକୁ ପବିତ୍ର କରେ । ଏହି କାରଣରୁ ଭଗବଦ୍ ଗୀତାରେ କୁହାଯାଇଛି ଯେ ଜ୍ଞାନ ଠାରୁ ଅଧିକ ପବିତ୍ର କିଛି ନାହିଁ ।

୧. ଉପକ୍ରମ (Introduction):-

ଭାରତୀୟ ଶିକ୍ଷା ବ୍ୟବସ୍ଥାର ଧାରା ଏକ ପ୍ରାଚୀନ ଓ ବିଶାଳ ବଟବୃକ୍ଷ ସଦୃଶ । ପ୍ରାଚୀନ କାଳରୁ ଭାରତକୁ “ବିଶ୍ୱଗୁରୁ” କୁହାଯାଉଥିଲା, ଯାହାର ମୂଳ ଆଧାର ଥିଲା ‘ଗୁରୁକୁଳ’ ଶିକ୍ଷା । ସମୟର ଚକ୍ରରେ ଶିକ୍ଷାଦାନର ଶୈଳୀ ଓ ମାଧ୍ୟମରେ ଅନେକ ପରିବର୍ତ୍ତନ ଆସିଛି । ବୈଦିକ କାଳର ମୌଖିକ ଶିକ୍ଷାଠାରୁ ଆରମ୍ଭ କରି ଆଜିର କୃତ୍ରିମ ବୁଦ୍ଧିମତା (AI) ପର୍ଯ୍ୟନ୍ତ ଆମେ ଏକ ବଡ଼ ସଂକ୍ଷେପ ଓ ସଫଳତାର ପଥ ଅତିକ୍ରମ କରିଛୁ । ଏହି ପ୍ରବନ୍ଧରେ ଆମେ ପ୍ରାଚୀନ ପରମ୍ପରା ଏବଂ ଆଧୁନିକ ପ୍ରଯୁକ୍ତିବିଦ୍ୟାର ମିଳନ କିପରି ଶିକ୍ଷାର୍ଥୀର ସର୍ବାଙ୍ଗୀନ ବିକାଶ କରିପାରିବ, ସେ ବିଷୟରେ ଆଲୋଚନା କରିବା ।

୨. ପ୍ରାଚୀନ ଗୁରୁକୁଳ ଶିକ୍ଷା ବ୍ୟବସ୍ଥା: ଧାରଣା ଓ ବୈଶିଷ୍ଟ୍ୟ:-

‘ଗୁରୁକୁଳ’ ଶବ୍ଦଟି ‘ଗୁରୁ’ ଏବଂ ‘କୁଳ’ (ପରିବାର) ସମାରୋହରେ ଗଠିତ ଯାହାର ଅର୍ଥ ହେଉଛି ଗୁରୁଙ୍କ ପରିବାର । ଏହା କେବଳ ଏକ ବିଦ୍ୟାଳୟ ନ ଥିଲା, ବରଂ ଏକ ଆଧ୍ୟାତ୍ମିକ ଓ ସଂସ୍କାର କେନ୍ଦ୍ର ଥିଲା ।

- ଆବାସିକ ଶୈଳୀ: ଶିଷ୍ୟମାନେ ନିଜ ପରିବାର ଠାରୁ ଦୂରରେ ପ୍ରାକୃତିକ ପରିବେଶରେ ଗୁରୁଙ୍କ ସହ ରହୁଥିଲେ । ଏହା ସେମାନଙ୍କୁ ସ୍ୱାବଲମ୍ବୀ ଓ ଶୃଙ୍ଖଳିତ କରୁଥିଲା ।
- ନୈତିକତା ଓ ମୂଲ୍ୟବୋଧ: ଗୁରୁକୁଳରେ କେବଳ ଅସ୍ତ୍ରଶସ୍ତ୍ର ବା ଶାସ୍ତ୍ର ଶିକ୍ଷା ଦିଆଯାଉନଥିଲା, ବରଂ ଜୀବନର ମୂଲ୍ୟବୋଧ, ସତ୍ୟବାଦିତା ଏବଂ ପରୋପକାର ଶିକ୍ଷା ଦିଆଯାଉଥିଲା ।
- ନିଃଶୂଳ ଶିକ୍ଷା: ଶିକ୍ଷା କୌଣସି ବ୍ୟବସାୟ ନ ଥିଲା । ଧନୀ ହେଉ କି ଦରିଦ୍ର, ସମସ୍ତେ ସମାନ ସୁବିଧା ପାଉଥିଲେ ଏବଂ ଶେଷରେ ସ୍ୱେଚ୍ଛାକୃତ ଭାବେ ‘ଗୁରୁ ଦକ୍ଷିଣା’ ପ୍ରଦାନ କରୁଥିଲେ ।
- ଗୁରୁ-ଶିଷ୍ୟ ପରମ୍ପରା ଓ ସଂସ୍କୃତି: ଗୁରୁକୁଳରେ ଗୁରୁ ଓ ଶିଷ୍ୟଙ୍କ ମଧ୍ୟରେ ଏକ ପବିତ୍ର ଆଧ୍ୟାତ୍ମିକ ସମ୍ପର୍କ ରହିଥିଲା, ଯେଉଁଠାରେ ଗୁରୁ ଶିଷ୍ୟର କେବଳ ଶିକ୍ଷକ ନୁହେଁ ବରଂ ଜଣେ ପଥପ୍ରଦର୍ଶକ ପିତା ସଦୃଶ ଥିଲେ । ଏହି ସଂସ୍କୃତି ଶିଷ୍ୟ ମନରେ ଗୁରୁଙ୍କ ପ୍ରତି ଅଗାଧ ଶ୍ରଦ୍ଧା ଏବଂ ସମାଜ ପ୍ରତି ନିଷ୍ପାର୍ଥପର ସେବା ମନୋଭାବ ଜାଗ୍ରତ କରୁଥିଲା ।

୩. ପ୍ରାଚୀନ ଶିକ୍ଷାଦାନ ତ୍ରିବିଧ ସୋପାନ (Pedagogical Steps):-

ପ୍ରାଚୀନ କାଳରେ ଜ୍ଞାନ ଆହରଣ ପାଇଁ ତିନୋଟି ମୁଖ୍ୟ ପଦ୍ଧତି ଥିଲା, ସେଗୁଡ଼ିକ ହେଲା-

- କ. ଶ୍ରବଣ (*Listening*) : ଗୁରୁଙ୍କ ବାଣୀକୁ ଏକାଗ୍ରତାର ସହ ଶୁଣିବା । ଏହା ସ୍ମରଣ ଶକ୍ତିକୁ ପ୍ରଖର କରୁଥିଲା ।
- ଖ. ମନନ (*Reflection*): ଶୁଣିଥିବା ବିଷୟ ଉପରେ ଚିନ୍ତା କରିବା ଓ ନିଜ ଭିତରେ ପ୍ରଶ୍ନ ଉଠାଇବା ।
- ଗ. ନିଦିଧ୍ୟାସନ (*Realization*):- ଅର୍ଜନ କରିଥିବା ଜ୍ଞାନକୁ ବାସ୍ତବ ଜୀବନରେ ଚରିତ୍ରରେ ପ୍ରୟୋଗ କରିବା ।

୪. ସ୍ମାର୍ତ୍ତ କ୍ଲାସରୁମ୍: ଏକ ବିଶିଷ୍ଟ ଶିକ୍ଷା ବିପ୍ଳବ:-

ଆଜିର ଯୁଗରେ ଶ୍ରେଣୀଗୃହ କେବଳ ଚାରିକାନ୍ଥ ଭିତରେ ସୀମିତ ନାହିଁ । ‘ସ୍ମାର୍ତ୍ତ କ୍ଲାସରୁମ୍’ ହେଉଛି ପ୍ରଯୁକ୍ତିବିଦ୍ୟା ଓ ଶିକ୍ଷାର ସମନ୍ୱୟ ।

- ଅତିଓ-ଭିଜୁଆଲ ଲର୍ଣ୍ଣିଂ: ଜଟିଳ ବୈଜ୍ଞାନିକ ତଥ୍ୟକୁ ଆନିମେସନ୍ ବା ଭିଡିଓ ମାଧ୍ୟମରେ ସହଜରେ ବୁଝାଯାଇପାରୁଛି ।
- ବିଶ୍ୱବ୍ୟାପୀ ଜ୍ଞାନ: ଇଂଟରନେଟ୍ ମାଧ୍ୟମରେ ଗୋଟିଏ କ୍ଲିକ୍ରେ ବିଶ୍ୱର ଯେକୌଣସି ବିଷୟବସ୍ତୁ ଛାତ୍ରଛାତ୍ରୀଙ୍କ ନିକଟରେ ପହଞ୍ଚିପାରୁଛି ।
- AI ଓ ବ୍ୟକ୍ତିଗତ ଶିକ୍ଷା: ପ୍ରତ୍ୟେକ ଛାତ୍ରର ଶିଖିବାର ଗତି ଅଲଗା । ସ୍ମାର୍ତ୍ତ ଶିକ୍ଷା ଆତ୍ମଗୁଡ଼ିକ ଛାତ୍ରର ଦକ୍ଷତା ଅନୁଯାୟୀ ପାଠ୍ୟକ୍ରମ ପ୍ରସ୍ତୁତ କରୁଛି ।

୫. ଗୁରୁକୂଳ ବନାମ ସ୍ମାର୍ତ୍ତ କ୍ଲାସରୁମ୍: ଏକ ତୁଳନାତ୍ମକ ବିଶ୍ଳେଷଣ:-

ଗୁରୁକୂଳ ଏବଂ ସ୍ମାର୍ତ୍ତ କ୍ଲାସରୁମ୍ ମଧ୍ୟରେ ଥିବା ପାର୍ଥକ୍ୟ ଶିକ୍ଷାର ବିବର୍ତ୍ତନ ସ୍ପଷ୍ଟ ଭାବରେ ଦର୍ଶାଇଥାଏ । ଗୁରୁକୂଳ ବ୍ୟବସ୍ଥା ସମ୍ପୂର୍ଣ୍ଣ ଭାବେ ପ୍ରକୃତିର କୋଳରେ ପରିଚାଳିତ ହେଉଥିବା ବେଳେ ଏହାର ମୂଳ ଲକ୍ଷ୍ୟ ଥିଲା ଶିଷ୍ୟର ଚରିତ୍ର ଗଠନ ଏବଂ ତାକୁ ସଂସ୍କାର ସମ୍ପନ୍ନ କରିବା; ଏଠାରେ ଗୁରୁ ଜଣେ ପଥପ୍ରଦର୍ଶକ ଭାବେ ସମ୍ବୃଦ୍ଧି ଓ ଅନୁଭୂତି ମାଧ୍ୟମରେ ଜ୍ଞାନ ପ୍ରଦାନ କରୁଥିଲେ । ଅପରପକ୍ଷରେ, ସ୍ମାର୍ତ୍ତ କ୍ଲାସରୁମ୍ ହେଉଛି ଏକ ଯାନ୍ତ୍ରିକ ଏବଂ ଆଧୁନିକ ପରିବେଶ, ଯେଉଁଠାରେ ଇଣ୍ଟରନେଟ୍ ଓ ତଥ୍ୟକୁ ଜ୍ଞାନର ପ୍ରମୁଖ ଆଧାର ଭାବେ ଗ୍ରହଣ କରାଯାଏ । ଏଥିରେ ଶିକ୍ଷକ ଜଣେ ସହାୟକ (*Facilitator*) ଭାବେ କାର୍ଯ୍ୟ କରିଥାନ୍ତି ଏବଂ ଏହାର ମୁଖ୍ୟ ଲକ୍ଷ୍ୟ ହେଉଛି ଶିକ୍ଷାର୍ଥୀକୁ ବୃତ୍ତିଗତ କୁଶଳତା ଏବଂ ବୈଷୟିକ ଜ୍ଞାନରେ ନିପୁଣ କରିବା ।

୬. ତିଜିଟାଲ ଯୁଗରେ ଗୁରୁଗୁଳ ପଦ୍ଧତିର ପ୍ରାସଙ୍ଗିକତା:-

ଯଦିଓ ଆମେ ଟେକ୍ନୋଲୋଜି ବ୍ୟବହାର କରୁଛୁ, ତଥାପି ଗୁରୁକୁଳର ନିମ୍ନଲିଖିତ ଦିଗଗୁଡ଼ିକ ଏବେ ମଧ୍ୟ ଗୁରୁତ୍ୱପୂର୍ଣ୍ଣ:

- ମାନସିକ ଏକାଗ୍ରତା: ତିଜିଟାଲ ଯୁଗରେ ଧ୍ୟାନ (*Concentration*) ର ଅଭାବ ଦେଖାଯାଉଛି । ଗୁରୁକୁଳର ଯୋଗ ଓ ଧ୍ୟାନ ପଦ୍ଧତି ଏବେ ଶିକ୍ଷାର୍ଥୀଙ୍କ ପାଇଁ ଅତ୍ୟନ୍ତ ଆବଶ୍ୟକ ।
- ସମାଲୋଚନାତ୍ମକ ଚିନ୍ତାଧାରା (*Critical Thinking*): ମୌଖିକ ପ୍ରଶ୍ନୋତ୍ତର ପଦ୍ଧତି ଛାତ୍ରର ବୁଦ୍ଧିମତାକୁ ବଢ଼ାଇଥାଏ, ଯାହା କେବଳ କମ୍ପ୍ୟୁଟର ବ୍ୟବହାର କଲେ ହୁଏ ନାହିଁ ।
- ଫିଜିଆର ଓ ସାଇବର ଏଥିକ୍ସ: ତିଜିଟାଲ ଜଗତରେ ଅନେକ ବିଭ୍ରାନ୍ତି ରହିଛି । ଗୁରୁଗୁଳ ଶିକ୍ଷା ଦେଉଥିବା ‘ସତ୍ୟ’ ଓ ‘ନୈତିକତା’ ହିଁ ଛାତ୍ରକୁ ତିଜିଟାଲ ଅପରାଧରୁ ଦୂରେଇ ରଖିପାରିବ ।
- ଗୁରୁ-ଶିଷ୍ୟ ନିବିଡ଼ ସମ୍ପର୍କ (*Human Connection*): ଅନଲାଇନ୍ ଶିକ୍ଷାରେ ଗୁରୁ ଓ ଶିଷ୍ୟଙ୍କ ମଧ୍ୟରେ କେବଳ ଏକ ଯାନ୍ତ୍ରିକ ସମ୍ପର୍କ ରହୁଛି । ଗୁରୁକୁଳ ପଦ୍ଧତିର ସେହି ସ୍ନେହ, ଆଦର ଏବଂ ବ୍ୟକ୍ତିଗତ ମାର୍ଗଦର୍ଶନ ହିଁ ଜଣେ ଛାତ୍ରର ମାନସିକ ତାପ ଦୂର କରିବାରେ ଏବଂ ତାକୁ ସଠିକ୍ ଦିଗ ଦେଖାଇବାର ସକ୍ଷମ ।
- ସାମଗ୍ରିକ ବ୍ୟକ୍ତିତ୍ୱ ବିକାଶ (*Holistic Development*): ଆଜିର ଶିକ୍ଷା କେବଳ ଚାକିରି ପାଇଁ ପରୀକ୍ଷାରେ ନମ୍ବର ରଖିବା ଉପରେ ଗୁରୁତ୍ୱ ଦେଉଛି । କିନ୍ତୁ ଗୁରୁକୁଳ ପଦ୍ଧତିର ଶାରୀରିକ, ମାନସିକ ଓ ଆଧ୍ୟାତ୍ମିକ ବିକାଶର ନୀତି ଛାତ୍ରକୁ ଜୀବନର ସମସ୍ତ ପରୀକ୍ଷାରେ ସଫଳ ହେବା ପାଇଁ ପ୍ରସ୍ତୁତ କରିଥାଏ ।

୭. ଓଡ଼ିଶା ଶିକ୍ଷା ବ୍ୟବସ୍ଥାରେ ଏକ ଅଭାବନୀୟ ନିଷ୍ପତି: ଗୁରୁ ଓ ଶିଷ୍ୟଙ୍କ ପ୍ରତି:-

ସାମ୍ପ୍ରତିକ ସମୟରେ ଓଡ଼ିଶା ସରକାରଙ୍କ ଦ୍ୱାରା ଜାରି ହୋଇଥିବା ୨୦୨୬ ଶିକ୍ଷା ବର୍ଷର ନୂତନ ନିର୍ଦ୍ଦେଶାନାମା ଅତ୍ୟନ୍ତ ଦୁର୍ଭାଗ୍ୟଜନକ । ଯେଉଁ ମାଟିରେ ଗୁରୁଙ୍କ ‘ବ୍ରହ୍ମା, ବିଷ୍ଣୁ ଓ ମହେଶ୍ୱର’ ଭାବେ ପୂଜା କରାଯାଏ, ସେଠାରେ ‘ଗୁରୁ ଦିବସ’ (ସେପ୍ଟେମ୍ବର ୫) ଏବଂ ‘ଶିଶୁ ଦିବସ’(ନଭେମ୍ବର ୧୪) ଭଳି ଗୁରୁତ୍ୱପୂର୍ଣ୍ଣ ଦିବସ ସ୍କୁଲରେ ପାଳନ ହେବ ନାହିଁ ବୋଲି ନିଷ୍ପତ୍ତି ନିଆଯାଇଛି । ଏହା ସିଧାସଳଖ ଶିକ୍ଷକଙ୍କ ଆତ୍ମସମ୍ମାନ ଓ ଗୁରୁ-ଶିଷ୍ୟ ପରମ୍ପରା ପ୍ରତି ଏକ ବଡ଼ କୁଠାରଘାତ । ଶିକ୍ଷା ବ୍ୟବସ୍ଥାରେ ଫିଜିଆର ଆଶିବା ନାଁରେ ପାରମ୍ପରିକ ମୂଲ୍ୟବୋଧକୁ ବଳି ଦେବା କେତେ ଦୂର ଯୁକ୍ତିଯୁକ୍ତ ?

୮. ଉପସଂହାର (Conclusion):-

ଶେଷରେ ଏହା କୁହାଯାଇପାରେ ଯେ, ଶିକ୍ଷାଦାନର ପଦ୍ଧତି ବଦଳିଲେ ମଧ୍ୟ ଏହାର ମୂଳ ଲକ୍ଷ୍ୟ ଅପରିବର୍ତ୍ତିତ । ଗୁରୁକୁଳର ଶୃଙ୍ଖଳା ଓ ମୂଲ୍ୟବୋଧ ସହିତ ସ୍ୱାର୍ଥ କ୍ଲାସରୁ ମଧ୍ୟ ଆଧୁନିକ ଜ୍ଞାନକୌଶଳର ସମନ୍ୱୟ ହିଁ ଏକ ସମୃଦ୍ଧ ସମାଜ ଗଠନ କରିପାରିବ । ଭବିଷ୍ୟତର ଶିକ୍ଷା ବ୍ୟବସ୍ଥା ‘Hybrid’ ହେବା ଉଚିତ୍ ଯେଉଁଠାରେ ଯନ୍ତ୍ର ଥିବ କିନ୍ତୁ ମଣିଷପଣିଆ ହଜି ନ ଥିବ । Google ଆମକୁ ସୂଚନା ଦେଇପାରେ, କିନ୍ତୁ ସଂସ୍କାର କେବଳ ଜଣେ ଗୁରୁ ହିଁ ଦେଇପାରିବେ ।

୯. ସନ୍ଦର୍ଭ (References):-

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Section: 2

Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Prēm Paecān (Poem)

**Padma Shri Haldhar Nag - “Lok Kabi
Ratna” (People’s Poet)**

Bargarh, Odisha

ବ୍ରହ୍ମ ପଠନ

ବିଷୟ ହେଉ ଜଗତି ଉପରେ ବସିଥାଏ ଯେଉଁଠି କିଛି
ମାତ୍ରା ମହାବୀର ଧ୍ୟାନ ମାନେ ଏବଂ ସବୁ ହୋଇଗଲେ ସବୁ ॥
କେତେ ବନ୍ଦୁ ବନ୍ଦୁ ପଢ଼େ ସେ ଗୁଣାନ୍ତି ଚିନ୍ତା ସୁନ୍ଦର ଦିବ୍ୟ,
ଗୋପକେ ଘୋଡ଼ାକି ଏହାକୁ ପଠାନ୍ତି ନାହିଁ କେଉଁଠି କିଛି ॥
ଶକ୍ତି ପୁରାଣ ପେନ୍ଥାନ୍ତି ଛୁଟି ଆସି ବଳା ଘଣ୍ଟା ଲେଖି,
ସେମାନେ ପଢ଼ୁଛନ୍ତି ଏହା ଲୋକେ ଏହା ସବୁ ଶକ୍ତି ମାଟି ମେଣି ॥
କାହିଁ କୁହୁଛନ୍ତି ଜାଣିଛନ୍ତି ସେତେ ଶକ୍ତି ଉଠିବୁ ବୁଝେ,
କିନ୍ତୁ ଏହାକୁ ବନ୍ଦୁକାଳୀ ଏହା ମାରିବେ ଶକ୍ତି ଶୁଣେ ॥
ଶାଫ୍ଟ ପଢ଼ିବେ ଗୋପପୁତ୍ର ଶକ୍ତି ମହାନ୍ତି ହୁଅନ୍ତି ଆମି,
ନାହିଁ କେତେ ଗୋପକେ ନାହିଁ କେତେ କେତେ ମାଟି ॥
କାହିଁ କୁହୁଛନ୍ତି ଏହାକୁ କହୁଛନ୍ତି ଶୁଣୁଛନ୍ତି ଶୁଣୁଛନ୍ତି,
କିନ୍ତୁ ହେଉ ଏହି ମହାନ୍ତି ବଳି ସେ କୁହୁଛନ୍ତି ଶୁଣୁଛନ୍ତି ॥
କିନ୍ତୁ ସବୁର ବଳାତ ସେତେକେ ଏହା ନାହିଁ ଶୁଣି,
ଏହା କେତେକେ ଜାଣି ଯାଆନ୍ତି ଶୁଣୁଛନ୍ତି ଶୁଣୁଛନ୍ତି ॥
ହୋଇଲେ କେତେକେ କେତେକେ ତେଜ ମାଟି ବଳି ମାନ,
ହୁଏ କାହିଁ ମୁକ୍ତି ସେମାନେ ଏହା କେତେକେ ତାହା ଆସି ॥
ପୁଣ୍ୟ ମାତ୍ର ଯେଉଁ ପଢ଼ିବାଟେ ଯାଆନ୍ତି ମହାପୁରୁଷ,
ହେଉଛନ୍ତି କେତେ ଯାଆନ୍ତି ମାତ୍ରାକି ଏକା ଏକ ଘୋଡ଼ାକି ଶୁଣେ ॥
ନିମ୍ନରୁ ଏକା ଗୋପନ ଆସି ଶକ୍ତି ସମ୍ପଦ ପଡ଼େ,
ହୁଏ ପଠା ଯେ କାହିଁ ବଳିଆ, ଆମିକା ଏହାକି ॥
ଏହାକୁ କିନ୍ତୁ ଆମେ କେତେକେ ନାହିଁ ଆମିକା ଏହାକି
ତାହା କେତେକେ ନାହିଁ କାହିଁକି ଆମେ ସେମାନେ ଆସି ॥

ତେଣୁ ଲାଭ କରି ମାତ୍ର ପାହୁଣ୍ଡରେ ଉନ୍ନିନିମାନଙ୍କୁ ତୋଡ଼ ,
 ମୋଡ଼ ହୁଏତେ ଖୋଲି ନାହିଁ କିନ୍ତୁ ତେଣୁ ଲାଭିବା କିମ୍ବଦନ୍ତୀ ଲୋଡ଼ ॥
 ନାହୁଁମୁନିତ୍ତୁ କିମ୍ବାଣି କିମ୍ବଦନ୍ତୀ ମନେକେ ଲାଭିବା କିମ୍ବାଣି ,
 ଧନିଆଡ଼ିଆଡ଼ି ଉଦ୍‌ବୋଧ, କିମ୍ବାଣି କିମ୍ବାଣି କିମ୍ବାଣି ହୁଏତେ ॥
 ଲୋକମାନଙ୍କୁ କିମ୍ବାଣି ହୁଏତେ ଉଦ୍‌ବୋଧ ସିନ୍ଧୁ ମନ ମନୁ ଧନ ,
 କିମ୍ବାଣି କିମ୍ବାଣି ହୁଏତେ ମନୁ କିମ୍ବାଣି କିମ୍ବାଣି କିମ୍ବାଣି ॥
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 କିମ୍ବାଣି କିମ୍ବାଣି ଧନ ଧନ ଧନ ଧନ ଧନ ଧନ ଧନ ॥
 କିମ୍ବାଣି କିମ୍ବାଣି ହୁଏତେ ମାନବ ପାହୁଣ୍ଡ ଧନ ଧନ ଧନ
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ସିନ୍ଧୁଧନ ନାମ

EDUCATION AS A PATHWAY TO WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT AMONG THE KISAN TRIBE OF SAMBALPUR DISTRICT

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Abstract

Education is widely regarded as a vital instrument for social change and human development. It enables individuals to acquire knowledge, build confidence, and participate actively in social and economic life. However, in many tribal communities, women remain socially and economically marginalized due to poverty, limited access to education, economic dependence, and traditional social structures. The Kisan tribe of Sambalpur District in Odisha represents one such community where women continue to face various barriers that restrict their educational opportunities and personal development. This study explores the role of education as an important pathway to women’s empowerment among the Kisan tribe. The research focuses on how education influences women’s awareness, participation, and involvement in everyday decision-making within the household and community. The primary objective is to understand the contribution of education to improving the confidence, knowledge, and social position of Kisan tribal women. At the same time, the study attempts to identify the key challenges that prevent girls and women from continuing their education. The research follows a descriptive and humane approach that highlights lived experiences and community realities. Both primary and secondary sources have been used. Primary data were collected through field visits, personal interviews, informal conversations, and group discussions with Kisan women

from selected villages of Sambalpur District. Secondary information was obtained from census data, government reports, academic studies, and relevant literature on tribal education and women's empowerment. The findings suggest that education positively influences women's lives by increasing awareness about health, hygiene, children's education, legal rights, and welfare schemes. Nevertheless, poverty, early marriage, domestic responsibilities, and inadequate educational facilities continue to restrict educational progress.

Keywords

Education; Women's Empowerment; Kisan Tribe; Tribal Society; Sambalpur District

I.INTRODUCTION

Education is universally acknowledged as a powerful instrument of social change and individual empowerment. It enhances knowledge, skills, and critical thinking, enabling individuals to participate actively in social, economic, and political life. For women, education plays a transformative role by challenging gender inequalities and expanding opportunities for self-reliance, dignity, and decision-making within families and communities (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437). Despite its importance, access to education remains uneven, particularly among tribal communities. In India, tribal populations have historically remained marginalized due to geographical isolation, poverty, and socio-cultural exclusion. Although constitutional safeguards exist, significant gaps in education, health, and income continue to persist (Beteille, 2012, p. 103). Tribal women face multiple forms of marginalization arising from gender discrimination, economic dependence, early marriage, and limited access to educational institutions (Xaxa, 2008, p. 57).

Odisha has a high concentration of tribal population, especially in western regions such as Sambalpur District. Among the tribal communities of this region, the Kisan tribe is

traditionally agrarian, with social life organized around kinship, customary rituals, and community practices (Government of Odisha, 2018, p. 41). Women play a vital role in agricultural and household activities, yet their participation in formal education and decision-making remains limited due to patriarchal norms (Desai, 2007, p. 61).

Girls' education among the Kisan tribe is frequently disrupted by poverty, domestic responsibilities, early marriage, and language barriers, leading to high dropout rates

(Mohanty, 2010, p. 94). However, education has gradually emerged as an important pathway for change. Educated Kisan women demonstrate greater awareness of health, legal rights, and welfare schemes, and show increased participation in household and community decision-making (Dreze & Sen, 2002, p. 132). Against this background, the present paper examines education as a pathway to women's empowerment among the Kisan tribe of Sambalpur District, Odisha, focusing on awareness, economic participation, and decision-making, while also identifying persistent barriers to educational access and empowerment.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The primary aim of the study is to examine the role of education in promoting women's empowerment among the Kisan tribe of Sambalpur District, Odisha.

OBJECTIVES

1. To analyze the educational status of Kisan tribal women.
2. To examine the relationship between education and women's awareness and self-confidence.
3. To assess the role of education in women's economic participation and livelihood activities.

4. To understand the impact of education on women's role in household and community decision-making.
5. To identify major challenges and barriers to women's education and empowerment.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a descriptive and qualitative approach to explore education and women's empowerment among the Kisan tribe in selected villages of Sambalpur District, Odisha.

Primary data were collected through field visits, interviews with women of different age groups, informal conversations, and group discussions, while secondary data were obtained from reports and literature. Purposive sampling included women with varying education levels to examine differences in empowerment outcomes. Data were analyzed thematically under areas such as awareness, economic participation, decision-making, and social status. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity, were strictly observed.

DISCUSSION

The Kisan Tribe of Sambalpur: Social and Cultural Background

The Kisan tribe derives its name from the term "Kisan," meaning cultivator, reflecting the community's traditional dependence on agriculture for livelihood. Agriculture, supplemented by small-scale forest produce and wage labour, forms the backbone of their economy. The Kisan people follow a collective way of life, marked by cooperation, shared labour, and strong kinship networks that structure both social and economic activities. Their social

identity is reinforced through festivals, rituals, and life-cycle ceremonies, which preserve cultural heritage and strengthen community cohesion (Mohanty, 2010, p. 97).

Women occupy a central position in both domestic and economic spheres. They are actively involved in agricultural operations, food processing, household management, and participation in cultural rituals. Their engagement in rituals, such as harvest festivals and marriage ceremonies, underscores their importance in sustaining social and cultural continuity. Studies indicate that these practices serve as a medium for transmitting community values, moral codes, and collective knowledge across generations (Mohanty, 2010, p. 97). Women's participation in such activities demonstrates their indispensable role in the cultural life of the tribe, although it does not always translate into institutionalized social power or decision-making authority.

Despite their active participation, decision-making within households and community affairs is largely dominated by male members, particularly elders and heads of families. Patriarchal norms and traditional customs often limit women's autonomy, reinforcing gender-based hierarchies (Desai, 2007, p. 61). In this context, education emerges as a critical factor that can challenge entrenched inequalities. Literacy and schooling equip Kisan women with knowledge, critical thinking skills, and self-confidence, enabling them to participate more actively in household decisions, engage with local governance, and negotiate their social position (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437).

Recent interventions, such as government-led tribal education programs, non-formal literacy initiatives, and community-based self-help groups, have begun to expand opportunities for women to gain both formal and informal education. These programs have contributed to enhancing women's awareness of health, legal rights, and government welfare schemes, further strengthening their capacity to influence social and economic decisions (Dreze & Sen,

2002, p. 132). Nevertheless, structural challenges, including poverty, early marriage, and lack of nearby schools, continue to impede the full realization of women's empowerment through education (Xaxa, 2008, p. 57).

The Kisan tribe presents a unique context in which cultural richness and collective traditions coexist with gendered social hierarchies. Education offers transformative potential, serving as a bridge between women's traditional roles and emerging opportunities for empowerment and social participation.

EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF KISAN WOMEN

The educational status of Kisan women reflects broader patterns of tribal education in rural Odisha. Over the past few decades, government initiatives such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, mid-day meal schemes, and tribal welfare programs have improved access to primary education in many Kisan-inhabited villages. However, dropout rates among girls remain high at the secondary level due to multiple socio-economic and cultural factors (Government of Odisha, 2018, p. 52). Economic constraints, domestic responsibilities, and early marriage frequently interrupt schooling, particularly for adolescent girls, limiting their educational attainment and future opportunities (Xaxa, 2008, p. 57).

Older women in the community often have little or no formal education, reflecting historical patterns of exclusion and limited access to schools in earlier decades. In contrast, younger women display higher enrolment rates in primary and upper primary education, indicating gradual social change and increasing awareness of the importance of education. Yet, continuation beyond primary schooling remains a major challenge due to factors such as the long distance to secondary schools, concerns over safety during travel, and household economic pressures (Mohanty, 2010, p. 94). Linguistic barriers and the lack of culturally

sensitive curricula further contribute to difficulties in learning and retention, affecting educational outcomes.

Despite these challenges, even basic education has a tangible impact on Kisan women's daily lives. Literacy enables them to read signboards, maintain simple records, and communicate more effectively with government institutions, health centers, and local markets (Desai, 2007, p. 61). Educated women are better positioned to understand public welfare schemes, participate in community programs such as self-help groups, and make informed decisions about family health, children's education, and household finances. Studies have shown that even minimal literacy can foster confidence, self-expression, and greater awareness of legal rights, which are key components of empowerment (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437; Dreze & Sen, 2002, p. 132).

EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

Education helps Kisan women become more aware of health, hygiene, nutrition, and child care. Educated women understand these issues better than women who are not educated. They are more likely to maintain personal and household cleanliness, ensure safe drinking water, and adopt healthy food habits for their families. They also understand the importance of vaccination, maternal health care, and regular medical check-ups. Educated women often guide other family members on basic health practices and encourage timely treatment during illness. They also know about government welfare schemes such as maternity benefits, ration cards, pensions, and housing programs. This knowledge helps them use these services on their own and depend less on male family members (Desai, 2007, p. 61).

Education increases legal and political awareness among Kisan women. Literate women feel more confident attending village meetings and expressing their opinions in front of others. They gradually become aware of their rights and responsibilities as members of society. Educated women are more likely to understand basic rights related to property, inheritance, and protection against domestic violence. This awareness encourages them to participate in family discussions and community decision-making processes. In some cases, educated women also show interest in local governance institutions such as self-help groups and village development committees (Agarwal, 1997, p. 10).

Education also helps women read newspapers, notice boards, and official documents. Educated women can understand health messages, government notices, bank information, and financial documents. This ability allows them to manage small financial transactions, open bank accounts, and participate in savings groups or microfinance activities. In contrast, illiterate women often depend on others for such information, which reduces their independence and confidence (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437).

Furthermore, education develops self-confidence and critical thinking among Kisan women. It encourages them to ask questions, express their views, and make informed decisions regarding family welfare, children's education, and livelihood activities. Over time, this awareness strengthens their sense of dignity and self-respect. In this way, education plays a vital role in promoting self-reliance and gradual empowerment among Kisan women.

EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

Education plays a vital role in economic empowerment. Among the Kisan tribe, educated women participate in income-generating activities such as tailoring, small-scale trade, livestock management, agricultural work, and self-help groups. Self-help groups provide

training in saving money, maintaining accounts, and working together, which strengthens women's financial literacy and confidence (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437).

Education allows women to manage small businesses, keep records, and communicate with banks or government offices. This participation in economic activities increases women's bargaining power within households. It also improves their social status and recognition in the community.

Despite these gains, challenges remain. Limited employment opportunities, poor market access, and social norms restrict the full economic benefits of education. Many educated women still work in low-paying informal jobs or balance income-generating work with household responsibilities. Even so, earning income gives women independence, confidence, and a stronger voice in family and community matters (Dreze & Sen, 2002, p. 134).

EDUCATION AND HOUSEHOLD DECISION-MAKING

Education enables women to participate more in household decisions. Educated Kisan women are consulted about children's education, family health, household spending, and family planning. They can discuss issues, share opinions, and negotiate rather than simply follow decisions made by men (Agarwal, 1997, p. 10).

Education also helps women develop better communication skills. They can exchange knowledge with other women, participate in community programs, and collectively address household or social problems. These experiences enhance confidence and decision-making capacity. Although male dominance continues, education gradually allows women to influence family and community decisions, improve their autonomy, and challenge traditional gender roles (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438).

In addition, education fosters awareness of social rights and opportunities. Women learn about health programs, government welfare schemes, microfinance options, and legal protections. This knowledge increases their ability to plan for the future, support their children's education, and participate in community development. Over time, education empowers women to become role models for younger girls, promoting a culture of learning and gradual social transformation within the Kisan community.

INTERGENERATIONAL IMPACT OF WOMEN'S EDUCATION

Education among Kisan women has a strong and lasting impact on the next generation. Educated mothers are more likely to recognize the value of schooling and encourage their children to pursue education seriously. They emphasize the importance of regular school attendance, proper study habits, and the continuation of education beyond the primary level. In many cases, educated mothers show a stronger commitment to the education of daughters, challenging the traditional belief that girls require less education than boys. They also tend to discourage early marriage and instead promote learning, skill development, and personal growth for their daughters.

An educated mother usually creates a supportive learning environment at home. She helps children with basic reading and writing, monitors their school progress, and communicates with teachers when necessary. Even when resources are limited, such mothers try to ensure that their children have access to school materials and a regular study routine. Their awareness about the importance of education also encourages them to prioritize health, nutrition, and hygiene, which indirectly improves children's ability to learn and perform well in school.

Research indicates that maternal education has a significant influence on children's academic achievement, learning habits, and aspirations for higher education (Dreze & Sen, 2002, p. 132). Children of educated mothers often display greater confidence and motivation in their studies. Moreover, educated women frequently serve as role models within the community. Their achievements inspire other women and girls to pursue education and participate more actively in social life.

In this way, education becomes not only a tool for the empowerment of individual women but also a long-term investment in community development. It gradually helps break the cycle of poverty, reduces gender inequality, and encourages a more progressive attitude toward women's education and social participation in tribal society.

BARRIERS TO EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT

Despite progress, Kisan women face multiple barriers that limit the empowerment potential of education.

- **Poverty:** Many families struggle with low income. They prioritize household survival over schooling, making it difficult for girls to continue education.
- **Early Marriage:** Social norms and family pressures often lead to girls being married soon after puberty, cutting short their education.
- **Domestic Responsibilities:** Girls and young women spend substantial time on household chores, reducing time available for study and learning.
- **Language Barriers:** Schools often teach in Odia or Hindi, which are not the first languages of Kisan children. This makes learning difficult and discourages attendance (Mohanty, 2010, p. 94).

- **Infrastructure Gaps:** Secondary schools are located far from many villages, and poor transport facilities make travel unsafe or inconvenient. This reduces the chances of girls continuing education beyond primary school.
- **Cultural and Social Norms:** Traditional gender roles often prioritize domestic work over formal education for girls, limiting community support for female schooling.

These challenges indicate that education alone is insufficient to ensure women's empowerment. Supportive policies, community awareness, financial assistance, safe schooling environments, and culturally sensitive teaching are necessary to address these barriers (Beteille, 2012, p. 103). Only a combined approach of education, social support, and institutional backing can fully enable Kisan women to realize their potential and participate equally in social, economic, and political life.

CONCLUSION

The study finds that education is a powerful tool for empowering Kisan women. It enhances awareness, confidence, economic participation, and involvement in household and community decision-making. Educated women are more informed about health, hygiene, child care, legal rights, and government programs. They actively participate in income-generating activities, manage small businesses, and contribute to family and community decisions, gradually challenging traditional gender roles. Education also has intergenerational effects, as educated mothers encourage their children's schooling, delay early marriage for daughters, and create a positive cycle of learning and opportunity.

Education further helps women develop a sense of self-respect and independence. It provides them with the ability to communicate more effectively, interact with government institutions, and access welfare schemes meant for their development. Through education, many Kisan

women begin to recognize their rights and responsibilities within society. They also become more active in community organizations such as self-help groups, village meetings, and local development initiatives. These experiences strengthen their leadership abilities and increase their visibility in community life. As a result, education gradually transforms their role from passive members of society to active participants in social and economic development.

However, empowerment is not automatic. Poverty, early marriage, domestic responsibilities, language barriers, lack of infrastructure, and social norms continue to limit the full benefits of education. For meaningful change, education must be supported by community engagement, culturally sensitive policies, safe schooling environments, and livelihood opportunities. Ensuring access to schools, promoting adult literacy, and retaining girls in education are essential. A humane and inclusive approach to education can transform the lives of Kisan women, improve their social and economic status, foster self-reliance, and contribute to sustainable development in their communities.

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Sacred Stories and Village Voices of Odisha

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Abstract

This chapter examines the rich and complex traditions of folklore in Odisha, focusing on the interrelationship between sacred narratives and village level oral expression. Folklore in this region functions as a dynamic repository of cultural memory, ethical discourse, and social identity. Drawing upon interdisciplinary frameworks from folklore studies, anthropology, and cultural history, the chapter analyzes how oral traditions such as myths, legends, ritual songs, and performative genres including Pala and Daskathia sustain and transform collective knowledge. It highlights how sacred narratives are localized through everyday practices, thereby bridging the divine and the mundane. The study further explores how caste, gender, and community structures influence narrative authority and transmission, revealing folklore as a contested yet generative cultural space. Through examples drawn from Odia storytelling traditions, including the Lakshmi Purana, Kanchi Kavari, Tapoi Katha, and Dharmapada legend, the chapter demonstrates how oral forms embody both continuity and change. It also engages with the impact of modernity, migration, and digital mediation on traditional storytelling practices. By situating Odia folklore within broader theoretical debates on orality and performance, the chapter underscores its significance as a living tradition that negotiates identity and resilience in a rapidly transforming world.

Keywords: Odisha folklore, oral traditions, sacred narratives, village culture, performance traditions

Introduction

Folklore in Odisha constitutes a vital domain of cultural expression where sacred narratives intersect with everyday lived experiences. It encompasses myths, legends, ballads, ritual songs, and performative storytelling. Rather than being static, folklore is an active process through which communities construct and negotiate meaning (Dundes, 1965). In Odisha, this process is deeply embedded in rural life, where storytelling remains central to cultural transmission.

The sacred dimension of Odia folklore shapes moral values and religious practices, while village voices infuse narratives with humor, critique, and local specificity. This chapter explores this duality through examples and theoretical perspectives, drawing on orality (Ong, 1982), performance (Bauman, 1977), and cultural memory (Assmann, 2011).

Historical Context and Cultural Landscape

Odisha's cultural landscape reflects a synthesis of classical religious traditions and localized folk practices. While temple traditions provide formal religious structures, oral traditions flourish in village settings. These narratives adapt broader mythological frameworks to local environments.

For example, stories of village deities such as Mangala often reflect ecological realities, including rivers, forests, and agrarian cycles. In Mangala Katha narratives, the goddess appears in dreams to protect devotees or warn against moral transgressions. These stories illustrate how folklore integrates sacred belief with everyday survival.

Oral storytelling occurs during festivals, agricultural cycles, and domestic gatherings. This fluid mode of transmission allows variation and reinterpretation (Finnegan, 1992), ensuring that folklore remains relevant across generations.

Sacred Narratives and Mythic Imagination

Sacred narratives in Odisha blend pan Indian mythology with local adaptations. A key example is the legend of **Kanchi Kavari**, which recounts the victory of King Purushottama Deva with divine assistance. In oral performances, the story emphasizes devotion, divine justice, and political legitimacy. Performers often embellish the narrative, adding dramatic and moral layers that resonate with contemporary audiences.

Similarly, the **Dharmapada legend** associated with the Konark temple tells of a young boy who sacrifices himself to save artisans. Although historically unverifiable, the story persists as a moral exemplar of sacrifice and collective responsibility.

These narratives demonstrate Ramanujan's (1991) concept of multiple tellings, where stories evolve according to context. The mythic imagination allows blending of divine intervention with human experience, making sacred narratives accessible and meaningful.

Village Voices and Oral Performance

Performance is central to the vitality of Odia folklore. Traditions such as **Pala** and **Daskathia** transform stories into interactive events. In Pala, a lead performer narrates mythological episodes with philosophical commentary, while Daskathia employs rhythm and satire.

For instance, a Pala performance of a Krishna narrative may include commentary on migration or social inequality. This aligns with Bauman's (1977) view of performance as contextual and dialogic.

Village storytelling also includes **ghost narratives**, featuring spirits such as chudail or brahmadaitya. These stories regulate behavior, encode ecological knowledge, and express collective anxieties (Dundes, 1965). They illustrate how folklore operates as both entertainment and social regulation.

Gender and Narrative Authority

Women play a crucial role in sustaining Odia folklore, particularly through domestic storytelling and ritual songs. The **Lakshmi Purana** is a key example, widely narrated by women. In this story, the goddess Lakshmi visits a lower caste woman and challenges social hierarchies, asserting moral equality over ritual purity.

This narrative reflects themes of gender agency and caste critique, demonstrating how women use folklore to articulate alternative perspectives (Narayan, 1997). Similarly, **Tapoi Katha**, narrated during Khudurukuni Osha, portrays a young girl's suffering and eventual reward, reinforcing values of resilience and devotion.

These examples reveal that folklore is not merely conservative but can also serve as a space for negotiating gender roles and expressing resistance.

Caste, Community, and Representation

Caste dynamics shape the production and transmission of folklore in Odisha. Different communities maintain distinct narrative traditions, reflecting their identities and experiences. For example, tribal storytelling traditions emphasize nature, ancestry, and communal bonds.

The **Lakshmi Purana** again serves as a powerful example, challenging caste hierarchies by centering a marginalized character. Such narratives function as alternative archives that preserve subaltern voices (Blackburn & Ramanujan, 1986).

Folklore thus becomes a site of both reproduction and contestation of social hierarchies, offering insight into the complexities of community life.

Continuity and Change in the Modern Context

Modernization and digital media have transformed the landscape of folklore in Odisha. Performances of Pala and Daskathia are now recorded and shared online, reaching wider audiences. However, this shift raises concerns about commodification and loss of participatory context (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983).

Despite these changes, folklore remains resilient. Stories continue to evolve, incorporating contemporary themes while retaining traditional structures. For example, performers may address issues such as migration or economic change within mythological narratives. This adaptability underscores the enduring relevance of sacred stories and village voices.

National Education Policy and the Emphasis on Ethical and Moral Values

The National Education Policy 2020 emphasizes the integration of ethical reasoning, cultural awareness, and value based education within the curriculum. It advocates for an education system that not only imparts knowledge but also nurtures responsible, empathetic, and culturally grounded individuals (Ministry of Education, 2020). In this context, folklore traditions of Odisha offer a valuable pedagogical resource for fostering moral and ethical learning.

Sacred narratives such as the Lakshmi Purana and Tapoi Katha embody principles of social justice, compassion, resilience, and respect for diversity. These stories align closely with the objectives of value based education outlined in the policy, which include developing constitutional values, critical thinking, and respect for India's cultural heritage. By

incorporating such narratives into formal and informal education, learners can engage with ethical dilemmas in culturally meaningful ways.

Moreover, performative traditions like Pala and Daskathia encourage dialogic learning, where audiences actively interpret and question moral themes. This participatory approach resonates with the policy's emphasis on experiential and holistic learning. Folklore based pedagogy can thus bridge the gap between traditional knowledge systems and contemporary educational goals.

The inclusion of regional folklore in curricula also supports linguistic and cultural diversity, a key principle of the policy. By engaging with Odia storytelling traditions, students develop a deeper appreciation of local knowledge systems while cultivating universal ethical values. In this sense, folklore serves as both a cultural archive and a living tool for moral education, reinforcing the vision of an inclusive and value driven education system.

Conclusion

Odia folklore represents a dynamic interplay between sacred narratives and everyday experiences. Through examples such as Kanchi Kavari, Lakshmi Purana, Tapoi Katha, and Dharmapada, this chapter has demonstrated how folklore functions as a living tradition.

These narratives bridge the divine and the human, while village voices ensure their continued relevance. By incorporating humor, critique, and local knowledge, folklore remains a vital medium of cultural expression.

As Odisha continues to navigate modern transformations, its folklore traditions offer valuable insights into resilience, identity, and community. Future research may explore the role of digital media and environmental change in shaping these traditions.

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Indigenous Knowledge and Sustainable Living: A Study of the *Kisan* Tribe of

Sundargarh

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Abstract

The life of the *Kisan* tribe is deeply connected with nature and its protection. Their understanding of the environment does not come from books or any formal education or class, but from years of experience, careful observation, and traditions passed through generations. This form of knowledge, often called indigenous knowledge, grows naturally within the community. It teaches them how to live with their surroundings to protect nature and its belongings. Over time, the *Kisan* people have developed farming without using harmful things for the ecosystem, using forest resources, and organising their social life in harmony with nature. For the *Kisan* tribe of Sundargarh district in Odisha, farming is not just a job; it is a way of life. The word “*Kisan*” itself means “farmer,” and it reflects their deep bond with the land and cultivation. They treat the land with respect and care because they believe it supports not only human life but also animals and the entire ecosystem. Their agricultural practices are guided by natural cycles such as seasons, rainfall, and soil conditions. Instead of using harmful chemicals, they prioritise natural methods that protect the fertility of the land. This helps them maintain a healthy environment for future generations.

Food habits among the *Kisan* people also show their sustainable lifestyle. They mostly depend on locally available grains, vegetables, and forest products. This reduces their dependence on outside markets and keeps their lifestyle simple and eco-friendly. Their festivals and rituals are closely linked to nature. They celebrate important agricultural events like sowing and harvesting, which strengthens their emotional and cultural connection with the land. These practices bring the community together and create a sense of shared responsibility. Social life in the *Kisan* community is based on cooperation and mutual support. People often work together in fields and share resources. Decisions are made by keeping the well-being of the whole community in mind. This collective approach ensures that resources are used wisely and distributed fairly. Their way of living shows that sustainability is not only about protecting nature but also about maintaining harmony in social and economic life. However, these traditional practices are now under threat. Modern technology, changing lifestyles, and increasing pressure on natural resources are slowly affecting their way of life. Many young people are moving away from traditional practices in search of new opportunities. As a result, valuable knowledge that has been preserved for generations is at risk of being lost.

In this situation, it becomes important to understand and value the *Kisan* tribe's knowledge system. Their lifestyle offers meaningful lessons on how to live sustainably and respectfully with nature. Preserving this knowledge is not just about saving a culture; it is also about learning from it. There is a strong need to document these practices and include them in modern development

plans. This will help ensure that progress does not come at the cost of cultural identity and environmental balance.

Keywords: Sustainability, *Kisan*, Tradition, Culture, Adivasi, Indigenous Knowledge.

Introduction

India is known for its rich diversity of tribal communities, each with its own culture, beliefs, and ways of life. These communities have lived close to nature for generations, developing sustainable lifestyles based on observation, experience, and shared knowledge. This form of understanding, often called indigenous knowledge, helps them use natural resources carefully and respectfully. According to the Census of India, Scheduled Tribes make up about 8.6% of the country's total population (Census of India, 2011, p. 45). This shows that tribal communities are an important part of India's social and cultural structure.

One such community is the *Kisan* tribe of Odisha, mainly found in the Sundargarh district. The word "*Kisan*" means farmer, which reflects their strong connection to agriculture. For the *Kisan* people, farming is not just a way to earn a living; it is a way of life that is closely linked to nature. They depend on both agriculture and forest resources for their daily needs. Their farming practices follow seasonal patterns, soil conditions, and natural cycles, which help them maintain the balance of the environment. Instead of harming the land, their methods protect its fertility and support long-term sustainability.

The *Kisan* tribe's lifestyle is also deeply connected to their cultural values and traditions. Their rituals and festivals often celebrate natural events such as sowing and harvesting. These practices show their respect for nature and strengthen their bond with the environment. Their way of life combines economic activities with cultural and ecological awareness, making their system both practical and meaningful.

In today's world, environmental problems such as climate change, deforestation, and pollution are becoming serious concerns. Modern development often focuses on rapid growth, sometimes ignoring the importance of environmental balance. In this context,

indigenous knowledge systems are gaining attention for their sustainable approach. As Grenier (1998) explains, indigenous knowledge provides practical and locally suitable solutions to environmental challenges (p. 12). This makes such knowledge highly valuable in the present time.

India offers a strong example for studying these systems because many tribal communities live in areas rich in natural resources. They have learned to manage these resources without causing damage to the environment. The *Kisan* tribe is one such example, as their way of life reflects a balance between nature, economy, and society. Their practices show that sustainability is not a new concept but something that has been followed for generations.

This study focuses on understanding how the indigenous knowledge of the *Kisan* tribe supports sustainable living. It looks at their daily practices, cultural traditions, and environmental awareness. The research also uses ideas from eco-criticism and cognitive poetics to better understand their relationship with nature. In addition, it compares the *Kisan* tribe with other tribal communities to highlight similarities and differences in sustainable practices. The lifestyle of the *Kisan* tribe offers valuable lessons for modern society. Their knowledge shows how humans can live in harmony with nature while meeting their needs. By learning from such communities, it is possible to find better ways to deal with current environmental challenges without harming cultural traditions or natural resources.

Literature Review

The concept of indigenous knowledge has become an important area of study, especially in discussions of sustainable development. Many scholars have shown that traditional knowledge systems are not only valuable for cultural identity but also play a key role in protecting the environment and supporting community life.

Grenier (1998) explains that indigenous knowledge is not fixed or outdated. Instead, it is a dynamic system that changes over time through continuous interaction with nature (p. 9). Communities observe their surroundings, learn from experience, and adapt their practices according to environmental changes. This flexible nature makes indigenous knowledge highly useful in dealing with present-day environmental problems.

The concept of sustainable development was widely recognised after the report of the Brundtland Commission (1987), which defined it as development that meets present needs without harming the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (p. 43). Although this idea gained global attention in recent decades, tribal communities have followed similar principles for centuries. Their lifestyles naturally maintain a balance between human needs and environmental protection.

In the Indian context, several studies highlight how tribal communities manage natural resources carefully. Their dependence on forests, land, and water is guided by traditional rules and customs that prevent overuse. According to the SCSTRTI (2013), tribal groups in Odisha, including the *Kisan* tribe, follow community-based resource management systems that help maintain ecological balance (p. 9). These systems ensure that resources are used wisely and preserved for future generations.

Research conducted by the Odisha State Tribal Museum (2011) focuses on the agricultural practices of the *Kisan* tribe. It notes that they depend mainly on rain-fed agriculture and use natural fertilisers instead of chemical inputs (p. 6). Such practices help in maintaining soil fertility and protecting biodiversity. Their farming methods are closely linked to seasonal cycles and local environmental conditions, which makes them sustainable and eco-friendly. Scholars have also pointed out the importance of indigenous knowledge in addressing climate change. Traditional farming techniques, crop diversity, and water conservation methods help

communities adjust to changing environmental conditions. These practices reduce risks and increase resilience in times of uncertainty.

However, the literature also highlights serious challenges faced by indigenous knowledge systems. Modernisation, industrial growth, and globalisation have led to significant changes in lifestyle. Many young people are moving away from traditional practices, which results in a gradual loss of knowledge passed down through generations. This shift threatens the survival of valuable cultural and ecological practices.

Overall, existing studies suggest that indigenous knowledge is essential for sustainable development, but it is also at risk. There is a strong need to document, preserve, and integrate this knowledge into modern development strategies. Doing so can help create a more balanced approach to development that respects both cultural traditions and environmental sustainability.

The *Kisan* Tribe and Indigenous Knowledge

The *Kisan* tribe is recognised as a Scheduled Tribe and is mainly engaged in agriculture. The word “*Kisan*” itself means “farmer,” which clearly reflects their traditional occupation and close relationship with the land. For generations, their identity has been shaped by farming and their dependence on natural resources. The *Kisan* people are believed to have cultural and social links with the Oraon community, and they speak a language that belongs to the Dravidian family. Their culture is rich in oral traditions, including folk songs, dances, and rituals that are closely connected to agricultural activities and seasonal cycles (SCSTRTI, 2013, p. 5). These traditions are not only a form of expression but also a way of preserving knowledge and strengthening community bonds.

In terms of geographical distribution, the *Kisan* tribe is mainly found in the eastern part of India. They are spread across states like Odisha, Jharkhand, and West Bengal. According to the Census of India (2011), their total population is around 467,000 (p. 45), showing their

significant presence in these regions. Among these states, Odisha has a large concentration of the *Kisan* population. Reports suggest that about 331,589 *Kisan* people live in Odisha (Odisha State Tribal Museum, 2011, p. 3). Within Odisha, Sundargarh district is one of the major centres where the *Kisan* tribe is prominently settled. This district has a strong tribal presence, and the *Kisan* community forms an important part of its social and cultural life

(Census of India, 2011, p. 62).

A key aspect of understanding the *Kisan* tribe is their indigenous knowledge system.

Indigenous knowledge refers to the traditional knowledge that communities develop over many generations through direct interaction with their environment. It is not written in formal texts but is passed down orally and through daily practices. Grenier (1998) defines indigenous knowledge as “a body of knowledge built up by a group of people through generations of living in close contact with nature” (p. 9). This definition highlights the deep connection between people and their surroundings.

Indigenous knowledge includes many areas such as agriculture, traditional medicine, ecological practices, and cultural customs. In the case of the *Kisan* tribe’s knowledge helps to understand the farming patterns, seasonal changes, soil fertility, and the use of forest resources. It also guides their social life, rituals, and decision-making processes. Their knowledge system is practical, experience-based, and closely linked to sustainability. Overall, the *Kisan* tribe represents a group where culture, environment, and livelihood are deeply connected with nature and surrounding. Their indigenous knowledge not only supports daily life but also offers valuable lessons for sustainable living. Understanding and preserving this knowledge is important, especially in today’s world, where environmental challenges are increasing.

Objectives of the Study

1. To understand and analyse the indigenous knowledge of the *Kisan* tribe

This includes their traditional wisdom related to nature, agriculture, health, and daily life.

2. To examine their traditional and sustainable practices

The focus is on farming, forest use, water management, food habits, and social systems.

3. To explore sustainability in all aspects of *Kisan* life

This covers the environmental, economic, and social dimensions of their lifestyle.

4. To apply eco-critical and cognitive poetics frameworks

To interpret their relationship with nature and cultural expressions more

deeply. 5. To identify challenges faced by the *Kisan* tribe

Such as modernisation, migration, and the decline of traditional knowledge.

6. To suggest strategies for preservation and comparison

This includes comparing with other tribal communities and finding ways to protect and promote indigenous knowledge.

Hypothesis

H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis):

Indigenous knowledge systems of the *Kisan* tribe significantly contribute to sustainable living and ecological balance.

H₀ (Null Hypothesis):

Indigenous knowledge systems of the *Kisan* tribe do not significantly contribute to sustainable living and ecological balance.

Methodology

This study is based on a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical research design. It aims to understand the indigenous knowledge and sustainable practices of the *Kisan* tribe in a detailed and meaningful way. A qualitative approach is used because it helps in exploring people's experiences, beliefs, and daily practices in their natural setting. The descriptive method allows the researcher to present a clear picture of the community's lifestyle, while the analytical aspect helps in interpreting the data and identifying patterns related to sustainability.

Data Collection

The study uses both primary and secondary sources of data.

Primary data is collected through fieldwork which includes direct observation of the daily activities, normal works, such as farming, use of forest resources, and participation in rituals and festivals. Interviews are conducted with members of the *Kisan* tribe of study area to understand their knowledge, practices, and perspectives. Formal and informal conversation while the community activities like gathering, festival, farming work or their way of life.

Secondary data is collected from books, research articles, government reports, and census data. Some books are written by community member to provide data about the *Kisan* tribe, their population, culture, and socio-economic conditions for understanding the group. They also help in supporting and comparing the findings from the field.

The study follows purposive sampling. In this method, participants are selected based on their knowledge and experience like leader of the community. The focus is mainly on elders, farmers, and women of the *Kisan* community. Elders are chosen because they hold traditional knowledge and cultural memory. Farmers are included as they are directly involved in agricultural practices, while women are selected because they play an important role in household management, food practices, and the preservation of traditions.

Data Analysis

The collected data is analysed using thematic and comparative methods. In thematic analysis, the information is organised into different thematic prospective such as agriculture, element of forest and its use, social life, and cultural practices. This helps to understand; how different aspects of life are connected to sustainability. Comparative analysis is used to compare the practices of the *Kisan* tribe with those of other tribal communities, highlighting similarities and differences.

Overall, this methodology helps in providing a clear and in-depth understanding of indigenous knowledge and sustainability among the *Kisan* tribe.

Concept of Sustainability

Sustainability is an important idea that focuses on maintaining a balance between human needs and the protection of the environment. The term became widely known after the report of the Brundtland Commission. It defines sustainability as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland Commission, 1987, p. 43). This means that while we use resources for our current needs, we must also ensure that these resources are preserved for the future.

Sustainability is not limited to environmental protection alone; it includes three main elements: environmental, economic, and social. These elements are interconnected and work together to create a balanced and healthy system of living.

The first element is **environmental sustainability**. It focuses on protecting natural resources such as land, water, forests, and biodiversity. It encourages the careful use of resources so that nature is not damaged or depleted. Practices like conserving water, reducing pollution, and maintaining soil fertility are part of environmental sustainability. For example, many

tribal communities follow natural farming methods that protect the environment and maintain ecological balance.

The second element is **economic sustainability**. It refers to the ability to support livelihoods without harming natural resources. Economic activities should be stable and provide long-term benefits rather than short-term gains. In sustainable systems, people earn their living in ways that do not destroy the environment. For instance, using local resources wisely and avoiding overexploitation helps maintain both income and environmental health.

The third element is **social sustainability**. It focuses on maintaining social harmony, equality, and well-being within a community. It includes values such as cooperation, fairness, cultural preservation, and shared responsibility. A socially sustainable society ensures that resources and opportunities are distributed fairly among people and that cultural traditions are respected and protected. Sustainability is about balance. It requires equal attention to environmental protection, economic stability, and social well-being. When these three elements work together, they create a system that supports both present and future generations.

Sustainable Practices of the *Kisan* Tribe

The *Kisan* tribe spend a lifestyle that is deeply immersed in nature. Their daily habits, customs, and traditional knowledge reflect a sustainable way of living. They use natural resources carefully, avoid waste, and maintain harmony with the environment. Their practices show how indigenous communities can protect nature while meeting their social and economic needs.

Agriculture is the main occupation of the *Kisan* tribe. Most families depend on farming for their livelihood. Their agricultural methods are simple, practical, and environmentally friendly. They mainly depend on rainfall for irrigation and use natural manure such as

compost, cow dung, and organic waste. These materials improve soil fertility without causing damage to the land. The *Kisan* people also follow seasonal farming patterns based on local climate and experience. They grow crops according to weather conditions and natural cycles. This traditional system helps them maintain productivity while protecting the soil and the surrounding ecosystem.

Forests are an important part of *Kisan* life. Forest is the religious and business hub for tribal; they collect fruits, roots, leaves, firewood, and other useful materials from nearby forests. However, their use of forest resources is balanced and controlled without harming natural resources. They take only what is necessary and avoid harming trees or disturbing the natural environment. Traditional beliefs and customs guide their relationship with forests; they worship every element of nature. These practices prevent overuse of resources and help preserve biodiversity. Their respectful attitude toward forests shows a strong sense of environmental responsibility.

The *Kisan* tribe has rich knowledge of **herbal medicine**. They use plants, roots, and herbs found in nature to treat common illnesses. Elders and traditional healers often pass this knowledge to younger generations. This practice reduces dependence on expensive medicines for minor health problems. It also keeps alive an important tradition of natural healing. Their understanding of medicinal plants reflects the close connection between human life and nature.

Water is treated as a valuable resource in *Kisan* society. They depend on ponds, rivers, streams, and wells for drinking, farming, and household use. Because water is essential for survival, they use it carefully and avoid wastage. Water sources are often shared within the community, and people understand the need to preserve them. Their habits of careful water use reflect long-term thinking and responsibility toward future generations.

Festivals and rituals hold a special place in the life of the *Kisan* tribe. Many celebrations are linked with agriculture, rainfall, sowing, and harvesting. Festivals such as Nuakhai express gratitude for crops and nature's blessings. Songs, dances, and rituals performed during these events strengthen cultural identity and community unity. They also remind people of their dependence on nature and the importance of respecting seasonal cycles.

The **social system** of the *Kisan* tribe is based on cooperation and equality. Community members help one another during farming, festivals, and times of need. Shared labour and collective decision-making are common in village life. This spirit of unity reduces conflict and creates strong social bonds. Their cooperative way of life is an example of social sustainability, where mutual support benefits the whole community.

Sundargarh Context

In the study area, the natural environment has long supported the way of life and sustainability of local communities. Sundargarh is a district which is rich in natural resources. It is blessed with forests, rivers, hills, and fertile agricultural land. These natural elements play an important role in the lives of tribal communities and other residents. Among them, the *Kisan* Tribe has a close relationship with nature and depends on it for survival and sustainability. Their connection with the environment is based on ancestral knowledge passed from one generation to another.

Farming is one of the main occupations of the *Kisan* tribe in Sundargarh district. Many villagers still follow traditional agricultural methods. They depend on seasonal changes, rainfall patterns, soil conditions, and other natural signs for cultivation. Some families also practice mixed farming by growing different crops together and keeping livestock. Although modern techniques have entered rural areas, many *Kisan* farmers continue to reduce the use of chemical fertilizers because they want to protect soil fertility and maintain environmental balance (Dash & Mishra, 2020).

Forests are another important part of *Kisan* life in Sundargarh. Even in the age of modernization, many people still depend on forests for food, firewood, leaves, fruits, and medicinal plants. Forest resources support daily life like a backbone of the community. The *Kisan* people traditionally use forest resources carefully and collect only what they need. This practice helps protect biodiversity and keeps balance in nature. In many cases, tribal communities have also raised their voices against harmful mining and deforestation activities that damage forests and traditional lands (Nayak, 2019). Water is also a valuable natural resource for the *Kisan* tribe. Rivers, streams, ponds, and wells are useful for drinking, household work, irrigation, and livestock. Water sources are closely connected to village life and agriculture. Traditional communities often respect water bodies and maintain them through local customs and collective care.

However, Sundargarh is now facing many environmental and social challenges. Mining activities, factories, deforestation, and rapid modernization are putting pressure on forests, paddy land, and water sources. Pollution is increasing in some areas because of industrial development. These changes are affecting the traditional lifestyle of tribal communities and reducing access to natural resources (Behera, 2021).

Another challenge is migration. Many young people are leaving villages in search of jobs and better income opportunities. As a result, traditional knowledge is slowly declining.

Indigenous farming methods, customs, songs, language, and healing practices are not being passed on as strongly as before. If this trend continues, an important cultural heritage may be lost. Despite these difficulties, the sustainable traditions of the *Kisan* tribe remain valuable.

Their lifestyle teaches the importance of living in harmony with nature, using resources wisely, and protecting the environment. Preserving their indigenous knowledge can help build a more sustainable future for coming generations.

Conclusion

The sustainable practices of the *Kisan* tribe offer valuable lessons for the modern world. Their farming methods, careful use of forests, water conservation, herbal medicine, and cooperative social life show that development can exist in harmony with nature. Protecting and promoting such indigenous knowledge is important for building a sustainable future. The *Kisan* tribe offers a clear example of sustainable living through indigenous knowledge. Their practices show how humans can live in harmony with nature while maintaining social and economic balance. In today's world, where environmental problems are increasing, their way of life provides valuable lessons. Therefore, it is important to preserve and promote their knowledge systems so that they can contribute to building a more sustainable future.

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Section: 3

Cultural Histories and Traditions of India

FAKIRA BEHERA – A GREAT FREEDOM FIGHTER OF BARGARH DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

The Indian national movement stands as one of the most significant mass struggles in modern history, marked by widespread participation across regions and communities. Odisha, particularly Western Odisha, played a notable role in this movement, contributing actively to various Gandhian campaigns. Among the many unsung heroes of this region, Fakira Behera of Bargarh district emerges as a prominent yet under-recognized figure whose contributions deserve scholarly attention. This paper attempts to highlight the role and significance of Fakira Behera in the Indian freedom struggle, especially in the context of major national movements such as the Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, and Quit India Movement.

Fakira Behera was deeply influenced by Gandhian ideology and actively mobilized people in Bargarh and surrounding areas. During the Non-Cooperation Movement, he played a crucial role in spreading nationalist ideas, encouraging boycotts of British institutions, and promoting Swadeshi practices. His leadership extended to constructive programmes such as the promotion of khadi, anti-liquor campaigns, and efforts toward social reform, including the reduction of caste barriers. His active involvement led to his imprisonment, reflecting his commitment to the cause of independence.

In the Civil Disobedience Movement, Fakira Behera further strengthened nationalist activities by organizing public meetings, leading protests, and contributing resources for Congress activities. He also played a key role in mobilizing volunteers and encouraging student participation in Satyagraha. His dedication was evident in both political activism and social reform initiatives, including anti-untouchability campaigns and rural upliftment.

During the Quit India Movement, Fakira Behera emerged as a central figure in Bargarh, inspiring mass participation and coordinating anti-colonial activities. His leadership transformed Bargarh into an important centre of nationalist resistance in Western Odisha. Despite repeated arrests and imprisonment, he remained steadfast in his commitment to India's independence.

This study underscores the need to recognize Fakira Behera's contributions and integrate his role into the broader narrative of India's freedom struggle. His life exemplifies grassroots leadership, sacrifice, and dedication, making him an important figure in regional and national history.

Keywords: Fakira Behera, Freedom Movement, Bargarh District, Western Odisha, Gandhian Movement

INTRODUCTION

The history of freedom fighters in India was a great landmark in the history of mankind. It was undoubtedly one of the biggest mass movements modern society has ever seen. The movement under the Congress fold gave a severe blow to British imperialism. In the national struggle for freedom Odisha played a significant role (Das, 2005). It had immensely contributed to the cause of the nation. Regionally the whole Western Odisha in general and Bargarh in particular play a significant role in the freedom movement. There are many

unsung freedom fighters who have joined in the Gandhi Movement out of them freedom fighter Fakira Behera of Bargarh District was one (Guru, 2003). Fakria Behera was a great freedom fighter of this district is yet to come to light. In the present paper on the auspicious occasion of Azadi ki Amrit Mahotsav I have made an attempt to highlight on the role Sri Fakira Behera of Bargarh district in the national freedom struggle.

The people of Western Odisha, particularly of Bargarh District took leading role during the Gandhi mass movement. They were the flowers of Gandhi ideology and philosophy and that is why their participation in the Non-cooperation, Civil Disobedient movement and the Quit movement is quite remarkable (Sahu, 1991). Many freedom fighters participated in the mass movement such as Fakira Behera, Gahnasyam Panigrahi, Gouranga Meher, Uddhab Sahu, Krutathya Acharya, Nrusingha Guru, Laxminarayana Mishra, Durga Prasad Guru and Parvati Giri etc. Fakira Behera had some different unique roles so far as the above movement in Bargarh.

FAKIRA BEHERA AND NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENT IN BARGARH

The Non-cooperation movement was a remarkable landmark in the history of freedom movement in the world. Mahatma Gandhi started the movement in India with a policy of non-cooperation and non-violence (Sahu, 1996). Western Odisha played a valuable role in the Non-cooperation movement many leaders of Western Odisha took part in the Nagpur session of Indian National Congress. In West Odisha the Non-cooperation movement launched in 1921 (Mishra, 1987). The Zilla School students of Sambalpur were the pioneers in this movement. This movement also quickly spread in Bargarh under the leadership of Zilla school Students Krutartha Acharya and Fakira Behera of Bargarh. Fakira Behera and others leaders actively spread the idea and message of Gandhi in the nook and corner of Bargarh district, as a result of which students strikes and others programs such as boycott of schools,

colleges, government employees gave up their services, lawyers boycotted the court, members of different councils also boycotted, foreign clothes were also boycotted and burnt down. The only eminent leader Fakira Behera of Balitikra was imprisoned and sent to Hazaribag Jail as he was master mind of the movement (Who's Who, 1969).

REFORM DURING NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENT AND THE ROLE OF FAKIRA BEHERA

In course of the Non-cooperation movement, Gandhiji ideology impressed Fakira Behera and other leaders of Bargarh. They have brought some constructive reforms programmes such as collection of Swaraj funds, Use of Swadeshi Goods, spinning and weaving, abolition of literacy and spread of education, anti-liquor movement and abolition of caste system (Guru, 2009).

In the above mentioned programmes freedom fighter Fakira Behera took the leadership as result of which caste system was reduced in the town and villages area, Khadi was used by the peoples they also gave up the liquor, many schools were established for the students. So the role of Fakira Behera is a landmark in the history of the freedom movement in Bargarh district. It may be mentioned that he was the only person who was arrested and put into the jail (Hazaribag) by the British Government during the Non-cooperation movement in the district.

FAKIRA BEHERA AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT IN BARGARH

The decision of Gandhi to withdraw the non-cooperation movement surprised many leaders of India. They were dissatisfied with Gandhi, but in the Lahore session of Indian National Congress in 1929 many leaders participated where Pt. J. Neheru declared Poorna Swaraj and unfurled the tri-colour flag in the bank of River Rabi (Sahu et al., 1996). Gandhi again came

to active politics and wanted to have another movement against British Raj that is known as the Civil-disobedience movement. The Orissa Pradesh committee also launched the movement at Inchudi, a place 12 miles away from Balasore (Pattanaik, 1972). In Western Odisha this movement was also stated, places like Sambalpur and Bargarh were remarkable under the leadership of great freedom fighter Fakira Behera and others a grand meeting organized on 6th March 1930 in Bargarh to spread the messages and thoughts of Gandhi in which thousand people participated. The movement reached different places such as Barpali, Remunda, Panimura, Samlaipadar, Bheuria and other places and it became converted into mass movement.

Freedom fighter Fakira Behera donated a building for the leprosy and that building was nerve centre of Congress activities during the Civil-disobedience movement that implied the dedication and scarified of Fakira Behera during the freedom movement in Bargarh (Bariha, n.d.).

During the time of preparation of Puri congress a sub divisional congress committee was functioning in the Bargarh to collect and send the volunteers to Puri congress. Fakira Behera was appointed as president of the committee for preparation and collection of volunteers. He did it with great achievements. At the Puri meeting large numbers of leaders of Western Odisha participated and returned to Sambalpur and Bargarh with the idea of launching Satyagraha. With their arrival, Bargarh became the hot bed of nationalism. At Balitikira, which was the native place of the great freedom fighter Fakira Behera, the issue of Satyagraha was discussed. Fakira Behera as eminent local leader proposed that the student be involved in the Satyagraha movement and that was unanimously agreed by all the members.

In Bargarh the 2nd phase of Civil-disobedience movement was undertaken vigorously and a large number of local leaders including freedom fighter Fakira Behera undertook processes

and picketed against the government. As a result of which the government seized and locked up congress offices to suppress the movement. The great leader Fakira Behera with his followers broke the lock up of congress office done by the government. It showed the ability and spirit of Fakira Behera involvement in the freedom movement but at last he was arrested by the police.

FAKIRA BEHERA AND QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT IN BARGARH

In the Bombay session (1942) of Indian National congress the historic quit India movement resolution was unanimously passed. The year 1942 was a crucial phase in the history of the freedom movement in India (Senapati, 1971). In Orissa the echo of the quit India movement was a remarkable one.

Under the leadership of Fakira Behera Bargarh town played a significant role in the quit India movement. Bargarh became the hot seat of nationalism and from Bargarh Fakira Behera and his friends spread Gandhi ideology to different local areas. Moreover they have also created several local leaders by encouraging them with full enthusiasm, as a result of which thousands of people joined the Indian National Congress as active members. People participated in different anti-government activities. Prominent leader Fakira Behera of Balitikra took the leadership who appealed to the people of Bargarh to follow the mantra “Do or Die” called by Mahatma Gandhi (Guru, 2003).

The British authority at Bargarh felt that Fakira Behera was the mastermind of all disturbances in Bargarh. As a result of which he was booked under detention Act in 1942 and was imprisoned for two and half years at Berhampur Jail (Mishra, 1987).

Thus under the leadership of freedom fighter Fakira Behera Bargarh became an epicentre during the Gandhi mass movement like Non-cooperation, Civil-disobedience and Quit India

Movement. His brave, strong leadership and dedicated selfless freedom fighting is remembered in the history of Western Odisha.

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Myth, Literature & Culture in Practice: Voicing Oral Narratives in Language Classrooms (In the Perspectives of DhanuYatra, the Living Festival with the Living Values of Humanity)

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Abstract:

India's oral history is a powerful metaphor of the country's living traditions and cultural practices, shaping people's identity, rooted in the age-old values of secularism and democratic sentiments, binding all under the overarching religion of humanity. It speaks of the country's soul, yearning for togetherness, underlying the principles of fraternity, exhibited through customs and cuisines, beliefs and rituals, fairs and festivals. Rooted deep in India's civilizational ethos and its mythical traditions, Dhanu Yatra is a festival of immense social and cultural significance, living in continuity through people's beliefs, rituals and cultural practices. Known for its epic grandeur and magnitude of living theatrical tradition, the festival owes its origin to newly formed independent India, when it was celebrated, marking the end of the colonial regime of the Britishers, symbolised by the death of the demon king, Kansa¹, thereby justifying human values of truthfulness over vice. In the contemporary world, when civilization is threatened by racial conflicts and catastrophic risks, there is an increasing need for cultural unification, possible through festivals, fostering humanity's attempt to unite, and strengthening the social fabric. Keeping in view the magnanimity of the event, Dhanu Yatra, the epic traditions of grandiose literature in conversation, and intersections between history, culture, literature and myth, the present study focuses upon some innovative steps and engaging sessions, planned and practised at the institution, Panchayat College, Bargarh, thereby enabling the students, and the reader embark on a captivating and educative tour through the fields of 'Bargarh Dhanu Yatra', transporting them into mythical beings of "the Krishna Yuga". The article further suggests some

practices in language classrooms in an attempt to enliven the past and the bit of history rooted in our lives....

Key words: Literature in Practice, Living Values, Oral Narratives, Dhanu Yatra, Myths

Introduction

Culture's Existence & Society's Sustenance

India's oral history, being a powerful metaphor of the country's living traditions and cultural practices, underlying the principles of fraternity, an increasing need arises for cultural continuity and unity through people's beliefs, rituals, fairs and festivals, strengthening the social fabric of the nation in the realisation of the democratic principles of the nation. The very fact that the culture, shared values, beliefs and narratives form the basic edifice upon which a country's entity is foregrounded, entails responsibility to protect the cultural rights of the nation for culture's existence and society's sustenance. When civilisation is on the brink, culture supports, values, and living traditions navigate crisis, enabling communities to counter disconnection, reminding people of their deep-rooted past, guiding behaviour, fostering trust, and binding people together across cultures and races. In the contemporary world, where racial conflicts and catastrophic risks threaten civilisation, there is an increasing need for cultural unification, which can be achieved through festivals, fostering humanity's attempt to unite and strengthen the social fabric. Festivals mark the joyful occasions of togetherness in Indians' lives when happiness is redoubled by moments of sharing and caring.

Rooted deep in India's civilizational ethos and its mythical traditions, Dhanu Yatra is a festival of immense social and cultural significance, living in continuity through people's beliefs, rituals and cultural practices. Beginning on the auspicious occasion of 'Pausha Shukla Chaturthi', the festival of Dhanu Yatra was initially celebrated at Bargarh, Odisha, to be "accorded the National Festival status in November, 2014"²

Dhanu Yatra, A Shared Experience

(A Study of Grassroots History and Oral Narrations in the Perspectives of Performative Literature)



image link-<https://share.google/GvtGrLWoQzPLK8iNN>

In the heart of winter, when the fields turn gold,

A story awakens, ancient and bold.

Not on a stage, not behind a screen,

But in open streets, alive and seen.

This is DhanuYatra, proud and grand,

The world's largest drama, across the land.

Where villages breathe the tales of old,

And every path has a story to hold. (poem by Shreya Pradhan)

Based on the myths of “Krishna Janmashtmi”, “Mathura Vijaya”, and the preachings of the

Bhagwat Geeta, the festival, Dhanu Yatra, is the world's largest open-air theatre, celebrated

in Bargarh, Odisha, with splendid living performances and practices, oral narratives and episodes kept alive by the people, artists, actors, and spectators across ages, bounds and borders. It is a village and town wide ritual, a journey through the chapters of Indian history and mythology, giving a glimpse of Bargarh, transformed into Mathura Nagari, the village of



Ambabona, transformed to Gopapura and the Jeera River, transformed to Yamuna River, singing the saga of humanity's triumph over vice, exhibited by Lord Krishna defeating the demon king, Kansha, restoring order amid upheaval. The ten-day saga continues with a kaleidoscopic representation of Mathura, alive with fair and rides, foods and delights, and the noisy Kansha's voice echoing and thundering, shaking the

villages with horror. While the king Kansha's Raj Darbar allures people with mesmerising performances by the artists from far and wide, performing in the Ranga Mahal of the Raaj Darbar, the village, Ambabona, converted to Gopapura, is seen alive with the childhood pranks and miracles of Lord Krishna, his 'sakhas' and 'thegopis'.

Friends gather, families meet,

Sharing smiles, stories, and treats.

DhanuYatra is more than a tale or a play,

The festival's togetherness is evident in every way.

Under moonlight and starry grace,

Faith and fun share the same space.



From sacred scenes to market cheer,

Every heart feels close and near.

Bargarh becomes Mathura once more,

With laughter, music, and sacred lore.

The river flows as the gentle Yamuna,

Whispering songs of little Kanha.

A child is born in the darkest night,

Yet he carries the morning, warm and bright.

Krishna arrives with a smile so small,

But his courage is stronger than fear itself all.

Across the land walks King Kansha,

Loud and fierce, filled with anger and power.

He rules the streets, proud and tall,

Yet fate quietly waits for his fall.



Image link <https://share.google/BodfnqoCLR5drAmLW>

The 'Jatra' seems to be telling that –(Shakespeare,2006) “the whole world’s a stage and we all are actors”³, enacting our roles for humanity’s progress and restoring belief in ‘the Almighty’, who satisfies himself through the positive actions of people on earth, (Milton, 2005) “justifying the ways of God on earth”⁴. God incarnates himself as Lord Krishna to establish truth and righteousness on earth amid turmoil and tension caused by the demon king, Kansa, his courtiers and his subordinates like Putana, Chanura and Vakasura. The place, Bargarh, representing the global stage of the epic grandeur, witnesses a dramatic encounter with ‘God’ and ‘Demon’, representing virtues and vices as facets of human character, exhibited by ordinary persons from daily existence. Every household identifies its child with Lord Krishna as the Almighty’s divine manifestation, and the chanting of ‘Hare Krishna, Hare Gopal’ echoes through streets with the sound of conch shells, prayer bells, trumpets and cymbals, re-igniting the divine spark within, restoring humanity’s faith in divinity’s endeavour for peace and justice.

Drums beat loudly, conch shells cry,

As actors and people pass by.

No curtain falls, no role is apart,

The whole town becomes a living art.

Children run, elders smile,
Tourists stop and stay a while.
They don't just watch, they truly feel,
A story that time could never steal.
Krishna plays by the river's side,
With cowherds, laughter, and mischief wide.
Butter stolen, hearts won too,
In simple acts, divine love grows. As
evening falls with glowing light,
The town shines bright in colours so right.
Fairy bulbs dance, lanterns gleam,
Dhanuyatra turns into a joyful dream.
The Mina Bazaar opens wide,
With wonder waiting on every side.
Rows of stalls in cheerful lines,
Calling hearts with happy signs.
Days pass by like turning pages,
Scenes unfold across ages.
Good and evil walk hand in hand,
Enacting roles, surprising all on the land. (poem by Shreya Pradhan)

‘Dhanu Yatra’ is an epic story, translated to be the greatest drama on earth, enacted on the stage of Bargarh to be viewed globally. It is a history that repeats itself in the thunderous dialogue delivery of Kansa, the roar and the uproar of the spectators, the spiritual harmonising chanting of ‘Hare Rama Hare Krishna’, resonating in the environment and a culture experiencing its past through these living practices. The festival provides an in-depth insight into the local culture, narratives, oral history and cultural practices. It is the story of our civilization bound by classical traditions and local art forms.

The festival is an open stage performance, thriving without any written narratives, yet living with instant and spontaneous performances by actors and people from daily lives, offering narrative substance, emotional depth of understanding and interpretation of the festival’s cultural phenomena, shaping society’s cultural needs and aspirations. The festival must be ‘a study of oral history, an analysis of oral cultural heritage, promoting art through a study of literature in performance or performing arts. An attempt must be made to preserve ‘the oral cultural heritage’ through proper documentation, saving narratives in digital form in the repositories. Efforts must be made to save the local art form and theatrical literature through written journals, magazines and souvenirs. Write-ups on the festival and other related narratives must be preserved in universities, colleges and digital libraries for reference and strengthening local cultural expressions. Cultural studies, myth, literary expressions and oral history, when supported by diplomats, intellectuals and authorities in governance, strengthen human relationships and the social structure. Incorporating local art, oral history, oral narratives, and dance forms into the course curriculum could be a positive step, preserving continuity of the ‘oral cultural heritage’, and saving it from erasure. The connectivity between stage and text shall bring to life the culture that would otherwise be lost. The evolving cultural interaction shall enliven institutions into ‘living classrooms’, breathing societal values embedded in the festival of Dhanu Yatra.

Literary Episodes in Practice and Performances: An Attempt to Relive Past and Recreate History

Literature is the reflection of the chosen slice of life. When the chosen slice is that of somebody's culture, beliefs and practices, literature mirrors one's roots, practices and heritage, changing perspectives for experiencing culture as a part of the collective understanding of human experiences. The innovative practices adopted by colleges and other educational institutions, fostering the sustainability of cultural practices, envision the responsibility of the nation to safeguard its values and morality woven around living practices and traditions.

Lived Experiences in Living Classrooms: Weaving Narratives of Social Change



Keeping in view the magnanimity of the event, the epic traditions of grandiose literature in conversation, and intersections between history, culture, literature and myth, the present study focuses upon some innovative steps and engaging sessions, planned and practised at the institution, Panchayat College, Bargarh, by the Principal, Dr Nakul Seth, the college and the district administration, and also the language teachers to make the students and the participants, a part of the global celebration of Dhanu Yatra, where the realms of academia, myth, history, literature, and culture intermingle to unravel the cultural practices of Bargarh, voicing oral history and providing insights into the nation's rich mythical past.

Teachers play a pivotal role in redefining the culture and moral character of students. Role play or enactment of characters from myth and history enables the pupils to have an insight into India's rich traditional heritage and develop moral values, reliving the country's traditional spiritual knowledge.

Role Play by students, recreating past and the mythical characters of the 'Dwapara Yuga'





Panchayat College, Bargarh, Odisha experimented the activity of role play with the students as part of the cultural programme to be hosted on the occasion of the National Seminar on Integrating Practice and Pedagogy, where the students enacted roles of Kansha, Krishna, Vakasura, Chanur, Radha, Gopis, and many other characters, creating a mini stage of DhanuYatra in the college premises to prove the triumph of virtue over evil, imbibing the students with cultural values of the festival and practices. It was an enriching experience for the students, developing their knowledge of the living traditions and practices of the Dhanu Yatra, enacted in the open stage of Bargarh, as well as an attempt to combine myth, literature, history and culture, bridging gaps for a global future.

Outreach Programmes, Academic Visits and Study Tours:

Similarly, outreach programmes were undertaken by the Dept of Hindi and English of the college to the 'Dhanu yatra ground', 'the Meena Bazaar', and the 'Akhada Shala', where the students interacted with the local artists to know about the practices of the past, literary traditions and literature in performances. The students got an opportunity to culturally connect. They had a deeper understanding of living, foregrounded in their culture, practices and beliefs, contributing to the well-being of the society. An outreach programme to Bapuji Special School, meant for the disadvantaged children, proved that literature in performances, performing arts, is the best tool, instilling in the students a yearning for learning. The students who were visually challenged exhibited extraordinary skills, representing the character of 'Kansha' of Dhanuyatra. The students exhibited confidence in showcasing their talents in theatrical performances. Study tours & academic visits broaden students' perspectives, providing insights about real world scenario through increasing engagement and exposure. They strengthen the social fabric for the well-being of the people.

The statement of Mahatma Gandhi that "a nation's culture resides in the hearts and in the soul of its people", emphasises the underlying principles of India's democracy founded on the edifice of people's culture and living values. In festivals, therefore, reside the soul of culture, the nation's entity and integrity. Festivals with festive spirit, joyful practices and living traditions unite people. A nation's security lies in its conscious and responsible citizens. It is left to the teachers to ensure that a nation's community is voiced in the classrooms; the living classrooms, breathing culture, the living values, beliefs and promises of the society, shaping history and expressing the past. Urban modernity must not overshadow local traditions, rather adapt to social changes, reviving the ancient practices. Let us deepen the connection between the living classrooms and cultural past, breathing hopes for tomorrow, founded on yesterday's rituals, practices and beliefs. Teachers are the pivotal actors, shaping cultures, and texts are the vehicles, sustaining cultural practices.

O DhanuYatra, living flame,
You keep our roots, our hopes, our name
In simple streets and open skies,
Eternal stories never die. (Shreya Pradhan)

Notes

1. According to the puranas, Kansha, also a mythical character, was the dictatorial demon ruler of the Vrishni kingdom, and the antagonist uncle to Lord Krishna (for details, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dhanu_jatra), also see (<https://bargarhdhanuyatra.nic.in/>).
2. After long years of community celebration, the festival, Dhanu Yatra, was accorded the National Festival Status in the year 2014, for details refer (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dhanu_jatra), also see ("[National fest tag to Bargarh Dhanu Yatra](#)")
3. Shakespeare in his famous play, "As You Like It" (2006, Act II, Scene-VII), says through Jacques that "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players..."
4. The central conflict between individual will and divine justice in Paradise Lost is resolved by the author, Milton, "justifying the ways of God to men." (see Milton's Paradise Lost, 2005)

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**DECIPHERING HISTORY THROUGH ORAL LITERATURE AND STREAMLINING
THE PAST: A STUDY INTO THE COLONIAL PERIOD IN ASSAM AS
REFLECTED IN FOLKSONGS OF BIHU FESTIVAL**

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Not written down in books of gold,
But in the breath of young and old.
A tune that travels on the wind,
Where histories of the folk are pinned.
From humble lips the stories flow,
Of places lost, of long ago.

Oral literature sails as a troubadour. These narratives unfurl human experiences that have escaped the mainstream documentation throughout the ages. The inevitability of human happening gets oriented in the backdrop of what happened around be it in individual level or social level. Every bit of experience lived gets reflected in action. To narrate experience leads to the formation of the history of the nation.

Folksongs sing the hearts of the folk. Folk songs originate among the people of a linguistic group of any country. It needs no formally institutionalized knowledge to identify, to perform

or to remember the tone of the music. The changes that the folk songs continuously undergo due to the course of time mirror the socio-cultural milieu of the given time. Question arises if changes occur how the originality and authenticity of the folksongs will be preserved. Or what distinguishes the folksongs? The vocabulary or the music or the context in which it is sung or performed? Is there such a thing as originality in the genre of folksongs? These queries need to be addressed to realise the role of They are the parts of oral tradition that get transmitted from one generation to the other in an oral form.

A crucial role in historical studies is played by the wisdom of the common people reflected through folklore and folktales, especially in those historical settings where other sources of information are limited, scarce, and often rendered from an external perspective. There was a time in the history of Assam that have never seen a period of documentation. This paper tries to engage folklore items especially folksongs, folktales, and historical studies in general in relation to the overarching controversies in historiographical studies and the methodology of historical studies. It begins with an exploration of new conceptual frameworks in historical and historiographical studies and continues with an explanation of folklore and folktales as a cultural phenomenon deposited within a cultural memory in general. Usman Arif et.al (2025) delved upon the tendency of necessitating history for a community in a given context:

History arises when communities, or outstanding individuals within the community, enter into a continuous reflection on events happening within their surroundings that involve them either directly or indirectly, a process that scholars such as Pierre Nora (1989) refer to as the passing from lived memory into conscious historical record.

Consequently, they find ways of ensuring that such events remain in public memory and sometimes interpret what such events mean.

Public memory mostly consists in orality. Orality refers to the human communication wherein knowledge, art. Ideas, cultural material is received, preserved and transmitted

through spoken narrative. It served as shared tradition-based creation of a cultural community. This creation is an ongoing process, the process that receives multiple creators in multiple phases of time. Question may be raised, does it tell the timeline of the history of a nation? Do the folk songs These questions are answered with the concept of the defining quality of folk resources that being the product of folk mind it is free from the corpus of either 'authenticity' or 'originality'. Can we connect the historicity with the very fact of considering the folk resources to account for the tradition of real events? Does Oral literature get disconnected due to certain changes in the socio economic milieu? Or does it reflect the changes in and around the community in the given context?

The paper tries to look into how the wisdom of common people document the Socio cultural changes occurred during the colonial period of Assam. Historical evidences record the paradigm shift in every aspect of life during the colonial period in the panels Indian context. The noteworthy thing is that Assam, in the North-eastern part of India passed a strong phase of political power in the hands Ahom Dynasty. It records a long six hundred years of reign contributing to the formation of streamlining a sense of identity for the people of the land. Here lies the response of the common folk towards the peripheral changes seen around oneself.

Talking about peripheral changes in the socio cultural milieu, effort can be made to observe the wisdom of the folk regarding how common people respond to the changes in a given context. John Fage and David Tait named this perception quasi-historical when they observed that oral tradition is, in reality, an anecdote of experiences lived by people and the way they express. If the same events are looked into from a historian's point of view, the past is viewed from the timeline of documentation, in other words, to study the past from present. The blur boundary between 'past' and 'present' generates ambiguity to decipher history. From a theoretical perspective, deciphering history involves unfolding both primary and secondary

sources while establishing authenticity and filling up the gap of 'untold' realities of social life. What is recorded in political history entails a biased approach featuring the power structure in a given context. And this is how the narrative is structured. In the words of Steve Piscitelli (2025) 'to know history, we need to history'. Could we review every piece of evidence related to a specific issue? Of course not. However, we did try to discuss different perspectives.

Concentrating on the perspective focuss is placed on oral narratives. Oral narratives make an appearance only when they are brought in reference or remembered, told to an audience either individually or collectively, as narratives from the past. As far as the question of folksong is concerned, it might not be sung to an audience, folksongs are hummed for oneself too. Does this narration adheres to recall the historical foundation of a nation or community in a given context? Past is real and exists in the memories as the repository of human experiences. These narratives are a transmission of human experiences, that are at least generation old, passed on by word of mouth until it is disappeared. Leach (1996) puts forward his strong view in this respect:

Oral history and folklore play a crucial role in defining every region's culture. Folklore is unofficial knowledge of the world, its rules, taboos, customs, beliefs, folkways, language, music, dance, symbols, maxims, and signs. The study of folklores provides the necessary foundation by charting the social, cultural, and historical advancements of any civilization in order to comprehend the identities and beliefs of that region. Folklores are such unwritten, oral traditions that have been accepted by society for a long time. Every piece of folklore shares the same fundamental concept:

It involves the dances, songs, tales, Legends, and traditions, the beliefs and Superstitions, and the proverbial sayings of Peoples everywhere.

Considering Romila Thapar's idea of "choosing a particular item from the past and recreating it as a variant is in part, an act of historical significance" testifies the need of documentation through narrative either poetically. Song sings lived experiences. Folk songs are not learnt formally rather they are passed from one generation to the other as continuity; and thus the folk wisdom is handed over. It foregrounds the popular concept of articulating folk wisdom in the form of art.

The present study focusses on the folksongs of a specific area that too of a particular festival. The area under discussion is Assam situated in the north eastern part of India. The festival referred to here is Bihu, primarily connected with the harvest of paddy. Besides the rituals and food specification the festival is marked by singing songs known as *bihugits*, *git* meaning songs along with dance accompanied with it in specific dress code. Bihu is celebrated by the Assamese diaspora around the world in the onset of the Assamese new year at the advent of Spring season in mid-April. It is to be mentioned here that there are three *bihus*, viz, *bohag bihu*, *magh bihu* and *kati bihu* depending on the varied aspect of association with nature in three different times of the year. The *bihugits* are sung during *Bohag Bihu*. Assam is primarily a state where livelihood of people depends on agriculture. Bihugeet (Bihu songs) are not merely musical expressions; they serve as a living, oral history of Assam, chronicling the socio-cultural, emotional, and political evolution of the region, particularly within the Assamese agrarian community. These songs, deeply intertwined with the Rongali Bihu festival, provide a firsthand account of the daily struggles, agricultural rituals, love, and social changes experienced by the people over centuries.

The different stages of the cultivation process get reflected in the folk life. The same is true for the celebration of *bihu*. As far as the question of *bohag bihu* is concerned the environment wears colourful attire across hills and plains. The lyrics of the song mostly centre around describing the bounty of nature along with the associated human mood as well as sentiment.

Synchronising with the creative mood of Mother Nature people express their urge for being in the process and hence the *bihugits* sing of love. *Bihugits* are sung both individually and in groups and both by males and females. The lyrics of the *bihugits* keep on multiplying with the advancement of time and the changes brought through several socio-economic and political revolution.

Dr Birendranath Datta, a well-known folklorist of North Eastern India the area, claims that even if folklore is no longer regarded as a historical science. He (2002) nevertheless recognizes its connection to history by referring to two schools of folkloristics as "historical." First, scholars in Europe and America used the Historical-Geographical School as their most important theoretical and methodological framework. The second was the Historical-Reconstruction School, which sought to "recapture disappeared historical periods for which other evidence is not available.

The paper takes up both the approaches partially.

The researcher has a strong understanding of considering folklore as filling up the gap between documented and undocumented events and the response of the common folk in the historical study of a nation in a given context. No mainstream history writing can record the role of a folklorist who works on the day to day occurrence in a rustic life. There is no power structure to control over the creation of the common folk and which is not used for a formal documentation process. But to know a nation or a language community, it is narratives of shared experiences count a lot. Though there is no need to prove the authenticity of such narratives that it is being shared and carried on from generation to generation and being continuously modified in its content according to the contextualized socio-cultural milieu dots it originality to the level of acceptance.

The title of the paper defines a period, i.e. the Colonial Period. As mentioned earlier the entry of the British imperialism in Assam delayed due to the long term Ahom reign from 1228 to

1826. The rule of this dynasty ended with the Burmese invasion of Assam and the subsequent annexation by the British East India Company following the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826.

The British emperor took charge of the state and thus begun the colonial era of Assam.

The status of people during the days of colonization shifted from an relatively independent, feudal agrarian society to one distinguished by heavy taxation, widespread misery and resistance.

With change of administration, life of all strata faced paradigm shift. The period was marked by significant, often exploitative, structural changes, connecting the region to a global market while reducing the power of the indigenous ruling class. The response to this shift varies.

Awe and wonder occupy the lion's share as far as the question of the common folk is concerned. History records the presence of the foreign force; what is not found in the documented history creeps into the folk wisdom reflecting in the lyrics of the *bihugit*. The following instance presents a pragmatic scenario:

The bosom of the Brahmaputra

Is making thundering sound

With the huge ships

Making a cleave in the river

How sad is the river

How scared are the people (own translation)

The venue for performing bihu was mostly on the bank of the rivers. It is a group dance engaging both boys and girls, besides dancing boys play on varieties of instruments like drum, flutes, etc. But with the growth of urbanization and the approach on 'location of culture' in the words of Homi Bhaba lead towards location bihu performance on the stage. The study of bihu songs as telling of contextual happenings unfurls the pragmatic analysis of what has been perceived.

Another bihusong sings the introduction of wine imported from Britain and thereby polluting the land by dumping of the empty bottles on the ground:

The ships of the company

In its backward journey

Pollutes the land

By throwing bottles

After consuming wine.

Only bihu can restore originality. (own translation)

Another engaging bihu song follows here”

O my beloved

I loved you too much

But I can't marry you

Until and unless

I receive the final document

of my plot of land

In planet Mars. (own translation)

The content of the songs describes a clear picture of the society the people live in. The perception of the life is reinforced by a sense of chronology that verifiable with records of events. The source of information provided through the everchanging folklore items rest on memory and performance. Recording folklore poses its own sets of problems.

Misrepresentation, loss of meanings, translation etc. Therefore, the subjective approach to folklore may occur if it has been taken out of the chronology of historical events. Stories in conformity with established ideologies and interests get retained in folklore, and others get lost in the annals of time. thus giving distorted records of the past. It

The context of any item of folklore happens to be the specific social milieu in which the particular folk item is employed as well as performed. Therefore, the possibility to distinguish context from situation does not work to understand folk resources. Then question may arise what function does folk material carry out during performance. If the analysis is given synchronically, it will disclose the number of contexts through which the folksong pass. Created by folk mind as well as received by folk mind both recount for a sense of pragmatic orientation to accept the validity of the narration.

Bihu songs and Bihu dances are vibrant performing art forms. During performance groups of people get involved reinforcing a strong sense of national identity. To combat with the British power the role of Mahatma Gandhi also impacted in Assam. Bihu songs celebrate his visit on August 9, 1946 to Assam:

The blackish darkness engulfs everywhere

There is no need to get scared

We have to drive away the British Lions

Lets gather in groups

We do not care for guns and sticks

We will offer our bosoms for pistol

The cry of non-violence is being heard

Mahatma will be the witness. (own translation)

The unity brought by performing the dance and songs of Bihu ignited the mind of the folk, the call has been responded. Rimi Sarkar (2025) observes:

According to historical records from the era, the Assam movement's founders used a variety of traditional regional and micro-regional performances to disseminate their ideas. To unite people and bring up regional issues, performance forms including Bihu, Ojapali, and Gayana-Bayana were employed as symbols of Assamese

nationality. These cultural acts served to strengthen the calls for the revolution because they are closely linked to Assamese people as popular mass cultures.

Bihu songs serve as a call to unite:

Who set my mother Assam's chest on fire?

Orders are not necessary for us to defend our homeland.

Come, all of my friends, let's go save our homeland.

We don't mind dying

All we want is to save our homeland.

To conclude, historical study implies a study of the society from a multidimensional approach. It embarks in the greater domain of social identity from the perspective of participation of common mass. Social identity is also linked to the traditional behaviour of a group of people. The cultural acts serve to unite people at the time of social disintegration as a direct result of the British rule in Assam.

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FROM RITUAL TRADITION TO CULTURAL INDUSTRY: AN EXPLORATIVE STUDY OF GANDA BAJA AND MODERN DULDULI IN WESTERN ODISHA

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Abstract

Ganda Baja, traditionally performed by hereditary musicians from marginalized communities, is deeply embedded in ritual life and sustained through oral transmission and community participation. In recent decades, modernization, globalization, and socio-economic changes have facilitated the emergence of Dulduli, a stage-oriented and commercially viable musical form. This study explores the transformation of indigenous

musical practices in Western Odisha, focusing on the shift from Ganda Baja to Dulduli. An explorative qualitative design was employed, with purposive sampling of 20 participants, including Ganda Baja practicing artists and shifting artists those who shifted to Dulduli. Data were collected through interviews, observations, documentary analysis, and literature review, and analysed thematically across social, cultural, economic, and educational dimensions. Findings reveal that Dulduli promotes social inclusivity, economic opportunity, and cultural visibility, yet contributes to the erosion of traditional knowledge, ritual significance, and community identity associated with Ganda Baja. The study underscores the need for integrating indigenous musical heritage into formal and non-formal education while balancing modernization with cultural preservation.

Keywords: Indigenous Music, Ganda Baja, Dulduli, Cultural Transformation, Socio-Economic Change

Introduction

Indigenous music constitutes an essential component of cultural heritage, reflecting the traditions, values, and collective identity of a community (Gwerevende & Mthombeni, 2023). Western Odisha represents Bargarh, Bolangir, Boudh, Deogarh, Jharsuguda, Kalahandi, Nuapada, Sambalpur, Subarnapur, Sundargarh and Athmallik sub-division of Angul district shared common cultural tradition and has unique musical preferences (Guzy, 2013; Prajapati, 2022). The folk song along with traditional dance forms such as Rangabati, Mailajada, Rasarkeli, Dalkhai etc. make this region distinct (Suna, 2023). These song and dance forms are practiced along with local instrumental music called “*Ganda Baja*” (Guzy, 2013; Prajapati, 2022; Suna, 2023).

Guzy (2013) described Ganda Baja as an instrumental tradition (Baja), primarily performed by musicians from the marginalized scheduled caste (Ganda) that reflect its association with

community identity and social structure. Ganda Baja represents a prominent traditional musical practice that has been preserved through generations. It is deeply embedded in the social and ritual life of the people and is performed during festivals, marriages, temple ceremonies, and other community events (Prajapati, 2022; Suna, 2023). The ensemble of Ganda Baja, often referred to as *Panchabadya*, comprises instruments such as Dhol, Nissan, Tasa, Mahuri, and Timkidi, and is guided by the indigenous rhythmic system known as “*Sulo Bharni*”, which includes sixteen rhythmic patterns or “*Paar*” (Prajapati, 2022; Suna, 2023). This musical form not only serves as entertainment but also carries spiritual and cultural significance (UNESCO, 2003).

In recent decades, however, significant transformations have been observed in the practice and performance of indigenous music (UNESCO, 2003; Guzy, 2014). The emergence of Modern Dulduli, characterized by the use of electronic instruments, amplified sound systems, and popular musical styles, has increasingly replaced traditional Ganda Baja in many social and cultural settings (Guzy, 2005). This transition reflects broader processes of modernization, urbanization, and globalization, which have significantly influenced cultural practices and audience preferences (Nettl, 2005). The shift from Ganda Baja to Modern Dulduli is not merely a change in musical style but represents a deeper transformation in cultural practices, social structures, and economic conditions (Guzy, 2013). Traditional musicians are increasingly adapting to modern forms due to changing societal demands and the need for sustainable livelihoods (Tingey, 1994). Cultural theorists argue that such transformations often occur due to the interplay between cultural capital, social recognition, and economic survival (Bourdieu, 1993).

From an educational perspective, this transformation raises important concerns regarding the preservation and promotion of indigenous knowledge systems. Formal education systems often overlook local cultural traditions, leading to a disconnect between learners and their

cultural roots (Banks, 2006; Schippers & Grant, 2016). Integrating indigenous music into education has been emphasized as a means to preserve cultural identity and promote culturally responsive learning (Banks, 2006). Against this backdrop, the present explorative study seeks to examine the transformation of indigenous musical practices in Western Odisha, with particular focus on the shift from Ganda Baja to Modern Dulduli. The study attempts to understand this transition through social, cultural, economic, and educational perspectives, thereby contributing to the discourse on cultural preservation and educational relevance in a rapidly changing society.

Review of Literatures

Scholars in ethnomusicology and cultural studies have widely acknowledged that traditional musical forms are increasingly influenced by processes of modernization and globalization, which reshape their performance contexts and social relevance (Stokes, 1997; Turino, 2008; Suna, 2023). Studies indicated that economic pressures, declining patronage systems, and shifting audience preferences contributed significantly to the marginalization of indigenous musical practices (Schippers, 2009). In many cases, traditional musicians adapted contemporary forms to sustain their livelihoods, leading to hybrid musical expressions that blend indigenous and popular elements (Turino, 2008; Schippers, 2009; Prajapati, 2022).

Research in South Asian contexts also revealed that such transformations were closely linked to broader socio-cultural changes, including urbanization and the commercialization of folk traditions, which altered both the meaning and function of traditional music (Manuel, 1990).

While these adaptive strategies might ensure continuity, they often result in the erosion of traditional knowledge systems and performance practices (Schippers, 2009). From an educational perspective, scholars emphasize the importance of integrating indigenous knowledge and cultural practices into formal and non-formal education systems to ensure their preservation and intergenerational transmission (UNESCO, 2003; Schippers & Grant,

2016). International frameworks further recognize that safeguarding intangible cultural heritage requires active community participation, documentation, and educational engagement to maintain cultural diversity in a rapidly changing world (UNESCO, 2003). Therefore, the transformation of indigenous musical traditions can be understood as a dynamic process shaped by economic necessity, cultural adaptation, and the critical role of education in sustaining heritage practices (Banks, 2006). Despite extensive scholarship on the transformation of traditional music under modernization and globalization, existing studies remain largely generalized, with limited attention to localized cultural dynamics, except for contributions by Guzy (2005, 2013, 2014), Prajapati (2022) and Suna (2023) in Western Odisha. But, there is insufficient conceptual and contextual analysis of the transition from Ganda Baja to modern Dulduli as a shift from ritual tradition to cultural industry. Moreover, the implications of this transformation for cultural identity, caste relations, participation, and changing forms of cultural ownership remain underexplored. The role of education in mediating this transition, particularly in integrating indigenous knowledge with contemporary practices, also lacks adequate theoretical attention. Hence, a focused inquiry is needed to understand these interconnected dimensions within the specific context of Western Odisha.

Methodology

The present study adopted an explorative qualitative research design to understand the transformation of indigenous musical practices from *Ganda Baja* to *Modern Dulduli* in Western Odisha. Both primary and secondary sources of data were utilized to obtain a comprehensive perspective. Primary data were collected through informal interviews and discussions with key stakeholders, including practicing Ganda Baja artists and artists who have shifted to Modern Dulduli. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select a total of 20 participants, categorized into two groups: only Ganda Baja practicing artists and shifted artists from Ganda Baja to Modern Dulduli. Secondary data were gathered through an

extensive review of existing literature, research studies, and analysis of documentaries and audio-visual materials related to Ganda Baja and Dulduli. In addition, observational methods were used to examine performance styles, instruments, and contexts under the guidance of an experienced shifting artist. The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis, wherein responses and observations were organized into key themes such as social, cultural, economic, and educational aspects to derive meaningful interpretations.

Results and Discussion

The findings reveal that the transition from traditional Ganda Baja to modern Dulduli in Western Odisha is not merely a change in musical form but a multidimensional transformation shaped by social, cultural, economic, and educational landscape. This shift reflects broader processes of modernization, market expansion, and changing cultural practices. The findings of the study are presented below.

Social Perspective

Ganda Baja has traditionally been practiced within a caste-based occupational structure, where performance is limited to hereditary musicians from the marginalized Ganda community (Guzy, 2013; Prajapati, 2022; Samadhwani, 2022). This system reinforces social stratification, as cultural knowledge and performance rights remain confined within a specific group. Such a structure reflects Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, where access to recognition and status is unevenly distributed and contributes to the reproduction of social hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1993; Appadurai, 1996). Although this specialization preserves tradition, it restricts social mobility and wider recognition. In contrast, Dulduli represents a more inclusive and open form of participation. Individuals from different caste and class backgrounds can engage in performance, indicating a shift toward social mobility and reduced stigma (Giddens, 1990). However, this inclusivity also weakens traditional

community-based identities, as the collective ownership of Ganda Baja gradually diminishes (Guzy, 2014). This transition reflects a shift from ascribed, hereditary cultural roles to more flexible and inclusive forms of participation. At the same time, such openness transforms the structure of cultural ownership and identity, as practices once firmly situated within specific community contexts become dispersed across broader social groups, resulting in a reconfiguration of tradition, modes of participation, and the meaning of cultural belonging.

Cultural Perspective

Culturally, Ganda Baja functions as an embedded system where music is closely connected with rituals, social practices, and community life (Geertz, 1973; UNESCO, 2003). Its emphasis on rhythmic patterns (*Paar*), traditional instruments, and anonymous compositions reflects a shared cultural meaning that is sustained through practice (Suna, 2023; Prajapati, 2022). Ganda Baja, therefore, plays a vital role in maintaining cultural continuity and social cohesion (Guzy, 2013; Prajapati, 2022). Dulduli, on the other hand, represents a recontextualized form of culture. Traditional elements are adapted for stage performances, media, and digital platforms, shifting the focus from ritual to entertainment (Guzy, 2005, 2014; Appadurai, 1996). While Dulduli increases visibility and accessibility, it also alters the structure and meaning of the tradition (Guzy, 2013). The reduced emphasis on rhythm and the declining role of ritual indicate a gradual loss of indigenous knowledge systems such as Sulo Bharni (Suna, 2023). The transition signifies a deeper cultural shift from ritual authenticity, where music is embedded within sacred, community-bound meanings to performative representation, where it is recontextualized as a staged, consumable cultural product. This transformation not only a change in form and function but also a reorientation

of meaning, authority, and audience. The traditional symbolic depth and ritual significance are increasingly mediated through processes of commodification, mobility, and global cultural flows, leading to selective preservation, reinterpretation, and sometimes dilution of original practices. This shift embodies the dynamic interplay between local cultural identities and broader socio-economic forces, aligning with the interpretive insights of Geertz (1973) and Appadurai (1996).

Economic Perspective

Economically, the shift from Ganda Baja to Dulduli highlights a transition from a subsistence-based system to a market-oriented cultural economy (Throsby, 2014; Hesmondhalgh, 2013). Ganda Baja traditionally operates within a “gift economy,” where performances are part of social and ritual obligations, and payments are irregular and symbolic (Mauss, 2002; Prajapati, 2022). This limits income stability and keeps performers in economically vulnerable positions. Dulduli, in contrast, functions within a commercial framework where performances are organized for audiences and events, generating regular income (Guzy, 2005; Throsby, 2014; Muralisika creation, 2025). Bourdieu’s idea of the “field of cultural production” further explains how economic capital and competition shape cultural practices (Bourdieu, 1993). The influence of neoliberal cultural theory is also evident, as artists adapt to market needs to sustain their livelihoods (Hesmondhalgh, 2013). It is evident from the field that Ganda Baja performers typically earn ₹300–₹500 per day, with 45–60 days of work annually and smaller group sizes (5–7 members). In contrast, Dulduli performers earn ₹1200–₹1500 per day, with 90–120 days of engagement and larger groups (25–30 members). This transition improved income and expanded employment opportunities for performers. At the same time, economic advancement changes music from a

community-based cultural service into a market-driven commodity. This creates tension between earning a livelihood and maintaining cultural authenticity. Artistic expression becomes influenced more by consumer demand, standardization, and profit. As a result, ritual significance and traditional values gradually decline.

Educational Perspective

From an educational standpoint, Ganda Baja is transmitted through informal learning systems based on observation, imitation, and apprenticeship (Vygotsky, 1978; Guzy, 2013). While this method preserves traditional knowledge, the lack of formal documentation and institutional support limits its wider transmission and sustainability (Prajapati, 2022; UNESCO, 2003). Dulduli, due to its structured and adaptable nature, is more suitable for inclusion in formal and non-formal educational settings such as schools, workshops, and cultural programs (Banks, 2006; Schippers & Grant, 2016). This reflects a shift from informal, community-based learning to organized and systematized instruction (Vygotsky, 1978). Banks (2006) emphasizes that integrating indigenous cultural knowledge into education promotes identity, inclusivity, and meaningful learning. However, the focus on adaptable forms like Dulduli may unintentionally marginalize more complex traditions like Ganda Baja. International frameworks highlight the importance of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage through education and community participation (UNESCO, 2003). In this context, the decline of Ganda Baja reveals a critical gap between educational policy frameworks and the safeguarding of indigenous cultural practices. While Dulduli enhances access, visibility, and contemporary relevance, it does not adequately address the need for systematic transmission of traditional knowledge. The marginal presence of Ganda Baja within formal and non-formal education indicates a lack of institutional mechanisms to

document, sustain, and legitimize community-based cultural heritage. This absence reflects a broader tendency of education systems to privilege standardized and market-oriented knowledge over localized, practice-based traditions. Consequently, the continuity of Ganda Baja becomes increasingly fragile, as intergenerational transmission weakens and cultural expertise remains undervalued. Meaningful preservation, therefore, requires the deliberate integration of indigenous knowledge systems into curricula, pedagogy, and cultural education policies, ensuring both recognition and continuity within changing socio-cultural contexts.

Table 1. Transformation of Ganda Baja to Modern Dulduli

Dimension	Traditional Ganda Baja	Modern Dulduli
Social	Practiced by hereditary musicians from marginalized (Ganda) caste; strong caste-based identity; limited social mobility; community-bound participation	Open participation across caste and class; socially inclusive; greater visibility, recognition, and social acceptance
Cultural	Deeply embedded in rituals, festivals, and spiritual life; emphasis on rhythm (Paar); use of Panchabadya; anonymous compositions; high traditional authenticity	Stage-oriented and entertainment-based; emphasis on dance and visual appeal; hybrid form; inclusion of modern instruments; reduced ritual significance and stylized presentation
Economic	Non-commercial and service-oriented; dependent on ritual occasions; seasonal and irregular income; limited earning opportunities	Commercialized and performance-oriented; regular and higher income; increased demand in events, media, and digital platforms; improved livelihood opportunities

Educationa	Informal, hereditary learning	Can be formalized and
I	through oral tradition;	institutionalized; used in cultural
	intergenerational transmission	programs, training, and media
	within community; lack of	platforms; adaptable for formal and
	structured curriculum and	non-formal education systems
	documentation	

Conclusion and Recommendations

The transformation from Ganda Baja to Dulduli is shaped by interconnected social, cultural, economic, and educational factors. The shift promotes inclusivity, economic improvement, and wider reach but it also leads to the erosion of traditional knowledge, community identity, and cultural depth. Therefore, a balanced approach that combines modernization with preservation is essential for sustaining indigenous musical heritage.

- Efforts should focus on preserving traditional knowledge systems through documentation, archiving, and community-based initiatives while simultaneously enabling adaptive modernization that ensures livelihood security for artists.
- Integration of Ganda Baja into formal and non-formal education through cultural curricula, workshops, and performance-based learning can facilitate intergenerational transmission of knowledge while promoting cultural literacy.
- Policymakers and cultural institutions should collaborate to support cultural sustainability programs, combining economic incentives with heritage preservation.
 - Future research could explore hybrid models that maintain ritual authenticity while accommodating market demands, ensuring that indigenous musical traditions continue to thrive in contemporary society.

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Cultural Legacy of Amapali, Bargarh as a Goppur of Dhanu Yatra

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Abstract:

Dhanu Yatra, globally recognized as one of the largest open-air theatrical performances, transforms the town of Bargarh in western Odisha into the mythic city of Mathura every year. Within this grand cultural spectacle, Amapali village occupies a distinctive and symbolically rich position, often conceptualized as the “Goppur” (gateway) of DhanuYatra. This article explores the cultural legacy of Amapali, Bargarh, by situating it within the broader performative, ritualistic, and socio-historical framework of DhanuYatra. It examines how Amapali functions not merely as a geographical extension but as a cultural threshold that connects sacred narrative space with lived rural reality. Historically, DhanuYatra originated in 1947–48 as a celebration of India’s independence and gradually evolved into a monumental folk-theatrical tradition rooted in the Krishna-Kamsa mythological cycle. While Bargarh town becomes Mathura and Ambapali symbolizes Gopapura (the land of Krishna’s childhood), Amapali’s role has developed through community participation, ritual enactments, and collective memory. The article argues that Amapali serves as a symbolic “Goppur,” marking the transition from the mundane to the sacred, from agrarian locality to mythic landscape. Drawing upon oral traditions, local narratives, performative practices, and spatial symbolism, the study highlights how Amapali’s involvement reinforces regional identity, communal harmony, and intergenerational cultural transmission. The villagers’ active engagement—as performers, organizers, patrons, and ritual participants reflects a

living heritage model rather than a static folkloric relic. The performative geography of Dhanu Yatra redefines physical spaces into sacred-cultural zones, and Amapali's position exemplifies this transformation.

Furthermore, the article situates DhanuYatra within the broader framework of intangible cultural heritage, comparing its ritual dramaturgy with other large-scale performative traditions in India. By examining Amapali as a "Goppur," the study emphasizes spatial symbolism, cultural continuity, and localized agency in sustaining mega-folk traditions. It also underscores the importance of safeguarding rural cultural nodes that contribute significantly to Odisha's cultural tourism and heritage discourse.

Ultimately, the cultural legacy of Amapali lies in its ability to embody continuity between myth and modernity, locality and universality, performance and devotion. As a gateway of DhanuYatra, Amapali stands as a testament to the dynamic interplay of space, community, and cultural memory in shaping one of India's most vibrant theatrical traditions.

Key Words ;DhanuYatra; Amapali; Bargarh; Goppur; Intangible Cultural Heritage; Folk Theatre; Performative Geography; Cultural Memory; Myth and Modernity; Community Participation

Introduction

Dhanu Yatra is one of the largest open-air theatrical festivals in the world, celebrated annually in Bargarh district of western Odisha. Organized during the Hindu month of Pausa (December–January), the festival usually spans 11 days and dramatizes the mythological story of Lord Krishna and King Kansa from the Bhagavata tradition. What makes Dhanu Yatra unique is its transformation of an entire town into a living stage, where everyday spaces become sacred-mythical locations. The festival began in 1947–48, soon after India's independence. Initially conceived as a symbolic celebration of freedom from colonial rule, it metaphorically represented the overthrow of tyranny (Kansa) by righteousness (Krishna).

Over time, it evolved into a grand cultural spectacle blending mythology, devotion, folk performance, and community participation.

During Dhanu Yatra, Bargarh town is transformed into the mythic city of Mathura, ruled by King Kansa. The nearby village of Ambapali becomes Gopapura, representing the pastoral land of Krishna's childhood. The Jeera River symbolically serves as the Yamuna. This spatial reimagining of geography into sacred narrative space is one of the most fascinating features

of the festival. A central highlight of Dhanu Yatra is the portrayal of King Kansa. The actor playing Kansa enjoys significant authority during the festival period, often addressing public gatherings, interacting with citizens, and theatrically asserting royal commands. His performance blends humor, satire, and dramatic intensity, creating a dynamic engagement with the audience. Meanwhile, episodes from Krishna's childhood such as Putana Vadha, Kaliya Daman, Govardhan Puja, and ultimately the slaying of Kansa are enacted across different locations.

Unlike conventional stage dramas confined to auditoriums, Dhanu Yatra is a community theatre where thousands of local residents actively participate as actors, organizers, musicians, and spectators. The script is largely improvised, allowing flexibility and contemporary social commentary. Folk music, traditional costumes, dialogues in the Sambalpuri dialect, and ritual processions enrich its local character.

Economically and socially, Dhanu Yatra plays a vital role in regional development. It attracts thousands of visitors, boosting tourism and local trade. Temporary markets, food stalls, handicraft exhibitions, and cultural programs contribute to the festive atmosphere. It also strengthens communal harmony, as people from diverse backgrounds collaborate in organizing the event.

Culturally, Dhanu Yatra represents a vibrant example of intangible cultural heritage. It preserves mythological narratives through performative traditions while adapting to modern

contexts. The festival bridges myth and history, devotion and entertainment, ritual and public spectacle. In essence, Dhanu Yatra is more than a religious festival; it is a living cultural institution of western Odisha. By transforming ordinary spaces into mythic landscapes and ordinary citizens into epic characters, it embodies the collective creativity and cultural continuity of the region.

Amapali as Goppur :

Within the grand cultural framework of Dhanu Yatra, Amapali holds a distinctive symbolic identity as the “Goppur” or gateway of the festival. The word Goppur (derived from Gopuram) traditionally refers to the monumental entrance tower of South Indian temples, marking the sacred threshold between the secular world and the divine interior. When applied to Amapali in the context of Dhanu Yatra, the term becomes a powerful cultural metaphor that signifies transition, sanctification of space, and ritual entry into mythic time.

Dhanu Yatra transforms the geographical landscape of Bargarh into the mythological world of the Krishna–Kamsa narrative. Bargarh town becomes Mathura, Ambapali represents Gopapura (the land of Krishna’s childhood), and the Jeera River symbolically turns into the Yamuna. Within this sacred performative geography, Amapali functions as an important spatial and cultural link. It serves as a symbolic entrance to the mythic realm, marking the movement from ordinary rural life into the sacred theatrical universe created during the festival.

Amapali’s importance lies not only in its location but also in its living participation. The villagers of Amapali actively engage in the organization, performance, ritual support, and logistical arrangements of Dhanu Yatra. Their collective involvement transforms the village into more than just a backdrop—it becomes a cultural custodian of tradition. This participatory role strengthens the continuity of the festival and ensures intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge. Viewing Amapali as Goppur also highlights the concept

of performative space. During Dhanu Yatra, physical boundaries dissolve and everyday spaces are reimagined as sacred-cultural zones. Amapali stands at this intersection of reality and mythology. It symbolizes the threshold where devotion meets drama, where history blends with legend, and where rural identity merges with epic imagination. Moreover, the metaphor of Goppur emphasizes the importance of gateways in cultural consciousness. Just as a temple's gopuram prepares a devotee for spiritual experience, Amapali prepares participants and spectators for immersion into the narrative world of Krishna and Kamsa. It embodies the idea of entry into sacred time, communal celebration, and shared cultural memory.

From a heritage perspective, Amapali represents the strength of localized agency in sustaining mega folk traditions. Its contribution reflects how rural communities play a foundational role in maintaining intangible cultural heritage. Rather than being a passive space, Amapali actively shapes the festival's structure and symbolic order. Amapali as Goppur is both a spatial reality and a cultural metaphor. It stands as a gateway of faith, performance, and identity within Dhanu Yatra. By marking the transition from the mundane to the sacred, Amapali reinforces the festival's dynamic interplay of space, community, and mythology, thereby preserving the living cultural legacy of western Odisha.

Intangible Cultural Heritage :

The concept of "Goppur" in the context of Dhanu Yatra can be justified as an expression of intangible cultural heritage because it represents living traditions, performative practices, and collective memory rather than material architecture. While a Goppur in classical temple architecture signifies a physical gateway to sacred space, in Dhanu Yatra it functions symbolically as a cultural threshold—marking the transition from everyday life into mythological time and sacred performance.

Dhanu Yatra itself is a community-driven open-air theatrical tradition rooted in the Krishna–Kamsa narrative. The transformation of geographical spaces—Bargarh as Mathura, Ambapali as Gopapura, and surrounding villages as parts of the epic landscape—demonstrates how intangible meanings are superimposed upon physical locations. The “Goppur” thus becomes a metaphorical gateway through which participants and spectators enter a shared sacred-cultural experience. This heritage is intangible because it is sustained through oral traditions, ritual enactments, dramatic dialogues, folk music, costume practices, and communal participation. The knowledge of roles, performance styles, improvisation techniques, and ritual protocols is transmitted across generations within the community. No written script alone defines it; rather, collective memory and social continuity keep it alive.

Furthermore, the Goppur symbolizes the unity of space, devotion, and identity. It embodies community agency, as villagers actively create and maintain the sacred performative order of the festival. The living, evolving nature of Dhanu Yatra aligns with the broader understanding of intangible cultural heritage as practices and expressions that communities recognize as part of their cultural legacy. Therefore, the “Dhanu Yatra Goppur” is justified as intangible cultural heritage because it reflects symbolic space-making, living performance traditions, and intergenerational cultural transmission that together preserve the spirit and identity of western Odisha.

Folk Theatre and the Performative Geography :

Dhanu Yatra stands as a remarkable example of Indian folk theatre where performance transcends the conventional stage and transforms an entire landscape into a sacred dramatic arena. Unlike proscenium-based drama, this tradition operates through community participation, open-air enactments, and spatial symbolism. It merges ritual, mythology, satire, and social interaction into a living cultural practice.

One of the most significant aspects of Dhanu Yatra is its performative geography—the creative reimagining of real geographical spaces into mythological settings. During the festival, Bargarh becomes Mathura, Ambapali turns into Gopapura, and the Jeera River symbolically represents the Yamuna. This spatial transformation reflects how performance reshapes physical landscapes into sacred narrative spaces. Geography is not merely a backdrop; it becomes an active participant in storytelling.

Within this framework emerges the concept of “Goppur.” Traditionally meaning a temple gateway, Goppur in the context of folk theatre symbolizes the threshold between the ordinary and the sacred. It marks the entry point into mythic time and dramatic reality. The idea of Goppur thus reflects the transition from everyday social life into a collectively imagined epic world. It is both symbolic and experiential—preparing the audience and participants to immerse themselves in the Krishna–Kansa narrative.

The performative geography of Goppur highlights how rural spaces gain sacred-cultural meaning through enactment and communal belief. It demonstrates that folk theatre is not confined to scripts or stages but lives through space-making, memory, and participation. Therefore, Dhanu Yatra’s Goppur represents a powerful fusion of theatre, landscape, and cultural identity, reinforcing the dynamic and living character of intangible heritage in western Odisha.

Cultural Memory, Myth and Modernity

Dhanu Yatra represents a powerful intersection of cultural memory, mythological tradition, and modern public performance. As a community-based open-air theatre rooted in the Krishna–Kamsa narrative, it preserves epic mythology through living enactment. The concept of “Goppur” within this framework symbolizes the cultural gateway through which collective memory enters performative space.

Cultural Memory:

Dhanu Yatra survives not merely through written scripts but through oral transmission, ritual practices, and intergenerational participation. The roles of Kansa, Krishna, and other mythological characters are embedded in local consciousness. Villagers remember dialogues, performance styles, and ceremonial procedures year after year. The Goppur, as a symbolic threshold, embodies this shared remembrance it marks entry into a collectively remembered past that is re-enacted annually. Thus, the festival becomes a living archive of regional identity and devotional heritage.

Myth and Modernity:

While the narrative is ancient, the mode of presentation reflects modern sensibilities. Dialogues often include contemporary social satire, political commentary, and public concerns. The actor portraying Kansa interacts directly with citizens, blending mythic kingship with present-day governance symbolism. The Goppur, therefore, does not isolate myth from reality; it bridges them. It signifies the transition from modern civic life into sacred narrative, yet both coexist within the same social space.

In essence, Dhanu Yatra's Goppur symbolizes continuity—where mythological tradition adapts to modern contexts without losing authenticity. It reflects how cultural memory and contemporary relevance together sustain this vibrant folk heritage of western Odisha.

Conclusion:

The study of “Cultural Legacy of Amapali, Bargarh as a Goppur of Dhanu Yatra” reveals that Amapali is not merely a peripheral village within the spatial arrangement of Dhanu Yatra, but a vital symbolic and cultural threshold that sustains its living heritage. Conceptualizing Amapali as “Goppur” underscores its role as a gateway—marking the transition from everyday rural reality to the sacred, performative geography of mythic Mathura and Gopapura. Just as a temple gopuram prepares devotees for spiritual experience, Amapali

prepares participants and spectators for immersion into collective memory, devotion, and dramatic enactment.

The analysis highlights that Amapali's legacy lies in its active community participation, oral traditions, ritual engagement, and intergenerational transmission of performance culture. It embodies the dynamic nature of intangible cultural heritage, where space is not passive but culturally produced through belief, enactment, and shared identity. By sustaining the symbolic order and spatial continuity of Dhanu Yatra, Amapali reinforces regional pride and communal cohesion in western Odisha.

Furthermore, the metaphor of Goppur bridges myth and modernity—demonstrating how ancient narratives continue to thrive within contemporary civic life. Amapali thus stands as a cultural custodian and performative gateway, affirming that the strength of Dhanu Yatra rests not only in its dramatic spectacle but in the living participation and cultural consciousness of its people.

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Nuakhai: The Living Soul of Western Odisha's Identity

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Abstract

Nuakhai, the agrarian festival of Western Odisha, is far more than a seasonal celebration of new harvest; it represents the cultural essence, social cohesion, and living heritage of the region. Rooted in agricultural traditions and community life, Nuakhai symbolizes gratitude to nature, reverence for ancestral customs, and the collective identity of the people of Western Odisha. Celebrated predominantly in districts such as Sambalpur, Bargarh, Balangir, Jharsuguda, and Kalahandi, the festival transcends religious and caste boundaries by bringing communities together through rituals, feasting, folk performances, and social exchange.

This paper examines Nuakhai as an important marker of regional identity and intangible cultural heritage. It explores the historical evolution of the festival, its connection with agrarian economy, and its role in preserving local traditions, language, music, dance, and oral narratives. The study further analyses how Nuakhai strengthens intergenerational bonding and community participation while adapting itself to changing socio-economic realities in urban and diasporic contexts. In recent years, the festival has also emerged as a cultural symbol representing the pride and aspirations of Western Odisha at regional and national levels.

By interpreting Nuakhai as a “living soul” of Western Odisha, the paper argues that the festival serves not merely as a ritualistic event but as a dynamic cultural institution that sustains memory, belongingness, and continuity in a rapidly modernising society. The study highlights the importance of safeguarding such living traditions for cultural sustainability and regional identity formation.

Introduction

Nuakhai Festival, also called NuaParab or NuaBhatghat, is known as the harvest festival of Odisha for a significant reason. This festival is held a huge significance for the farmers and the agricultural community. It is basically observed to welcome the new rice for the season for which it is celebrated with huge joy and happiness.

Nuakhai or Navakhai is a famous agricultural festival mainly observed by the people of Western Odisha and Southern Chhattisgarh in India. Nuakhai is observed to welcome the new rice of the season. According to the calendar it is observed on *panchamitithi* (the fifth day of the lunar fortnight of the month) of Bhadrapada or Bhadraba (August–September), the day after the Ganesh Chaturthi festival.

The word ‘*nua*’ means new and ‘*khai*’ means food, so overall the term ‘*nuakhai*’ signifies the farmers are in a possession of the newly harvested rice. The festival is celebrated at particular time of the day which is also called as lagan. So when the lagan comes all the people first remember their village god and goddess, and then have their nua.

Origin of nuakhai festival

According to the local researchers, Nuakhai is of fairly ancient origin. Some historian believes that this festival seeks its roots from the “PralambanaYajna” and “KhalaYajna” of

the Vedic times. When the sages and ordinary people cutting and harvesting their grains and reverently offering it to the mother goddess.

Although the origin of this festival has been lost over time, but if we recall to the 14th century AD, which was the time of the first Chauhan king, RamaiDeo, the founder of the Patna state (which is currently the part of the Balangir district in Western Odisha) the festival got a new recognition. He realized that a shift from a hunting-gathering economy to settled agriculture was necessary for state-building.

Journey from the Past till Present

Well in the early years, there was no fixed day for celebration of the festival. It was predicted and held in between the Bhadrabasuklapakhya, or also called the bright fortnight of Bhadraba. It was the time when newly Kharif (autumn crop) of rice starts ripening. The food-grains are offered to the village deity prior to it being pecked at by birds or animals. Nuakhai was observed on the day suggested by the village priest. Later, Nuakhai transformed into a major socio-religious event in the Kosal area or western Odisha.

In early traditions, farmers would celebrate Nuakhai on a day designated by the village headman and priest. Afterward, under the patronage of royal families, this simple festival was altered into a mass socio-religious event celebrated in the entire Kosal region (Western Odisha region).

So this was all about the ancient Nuakhai- the harvest festival of Odisha. Till now you may have got to know its Origin, Rituals, and how it is celebrated among the locals.

Deities that are offered Nua

Every year, the tithi (day) and samaya (time) of observance was astrologically determined by the Hindu priests. Priests sat together at the Brahmapura Jagannath temple in Sambalpur and calculated the day and time. The tithi (date) and lagna (auspicious moment) were calculated in the name of Pataneswari Devi in the Balangir-Patnagarh area, in the name of Sureswari Devi in the Subarnapur area, and in the name of Manikeswari Devi in the Kalahandi area.

In Sundargarh, Puja (worship) was first offered by the royal family to the goddess Sekharbasini in the temple which is opened only for Nuakhai. In Sambalpur, at the stipulated lagna (auspicious moment), the head priest of Samaleswari Temple offers the nua-anna or nabanna to the goddess Samaleswari, the presiding deity of Sambalpur.

Rituals of the Nine Colors of Nuakhai Festival

People in the Western Odisha region initiate preparations for the event 15 days in advance. Nuakhai is known to be having nine colours, which is actually meant to be having nine rituals that is done prior to the main occasion. These nine colours include:

1. *Beheren* (announcement of a meeting to set the date)
2. *Lagnadekha* (setting the exact date for partaking of new rice)
3. *Dakahaka* (invitation)
4. *Saphasutura* and *lipapuchha* (cleanliness)
5. *Ghinabika* (purchasing)
6. *Nuadhankhuja* (looking for the new crop)
7. *Bali paka* (final resolve for Nuakhai by taking the prasada (the offering) to the deity)

8. *Nuakhai* (eating the new crop as *Prasad* after offering it to the deity, followed by dancing and singing)
9. *Juharbhet* (respect to elders & gift transfers)

Rituals of Nuakhai Festival

The Odisha State Government declared the day of Nuakhai festival as an official holiday, meaning the day of BhadrabaSukla Panchami tithi, which was finally decided to be the day of celebration of Nuakhai since the year 1991. Nuakhai festival is celebrated as domestic and also community levels. The initial rituals are performed at the temple of the village deity and then prayers are offered to the village deity and also Goddess Lakshmi in the residences of the villagers. People are adorned in new attires and the eldest family members distribute nua to the other members of the family.

The younger family members offer their reverences to their elders after receiving the nua. It is followed by the 'nuakhaijuhar', which is characterized by the interchange of greetings with relatives, friends and well-wishers. This ritual signifies the element of unity. Nuakhai Juhar is wished to the elderly members of the family who bless the junior with blessings of a long, healthy and prosperous life. Folk songs and folkdances are arranged in the evening which is termed as 'Nuakhai Bheghat'. People indulge in numerous Sambalpuri dances which include 'Bajnia', 'Dalkhai', 'Sajani', 'Nachnia', 'Chutkuchuta', 'Rasarkeli' and 'Maelajada'.

Nuakhai celebrated throughout India

Nuakhai is a cohesive and unified force between people of the Western Odisha living in Delhi, as they unite and celebrate together the occasion of Nuakhai. People from the Odisha now living

in Rajasthan Bangalore, Bhopal, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai, Surat and Visakhapatnam have been celebrating Nuakhai in their new cities for the past few decades.

Conclusion

Nuakhai is the vibrant soul of Western Odisha. It is a festival that goes beyond simple rituals to celebrate the deep-rooted connection between humanity and nature. By honoring the first harvest, the people of Odisha celebrate the continuity of life and the importance of sharing one's blessings with others. More importantly, through the tradition of Nuakhai Juhar, it is a greeting that carries the warmth of an entire culture it heals social divides and strengthens family bonds, proving that the festival is not just about 'eating new rice,' but about renewing the spirit of love and togetherness."

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Contested Pasts and Polluted Narratives: Ideological Interventions and the Crisis of Historical Method in Contemporary India

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Abstract

The writing of history in contemporary India has increasingly become a site of ideological contestation, where competing political, cultural, and religious narratives seek legitimacy through selective interpretations of the past. This paper examines the growing crisis of historical method caused by ideological interventions in academic discourse, public memory, and educational institutions. It argues that the politicisation of history has led to the distortion, simplification, and communalisation of complex historical processes, thereby weakening the principles of critical inquiry and evidence-based scholarship. The study explores how historical narratives are often reshaped to serve present-day ideological agendas through textbook revisions, media representations, digital misinformation, and selective appropriation of historical symbols and figures. Such interventions not only marginalise alternative voices and subaltern perspectives but also create polarised understandings of identity, nationhood, and cultural heritage. The paper further analyses the role of social media and popular culture in amplifying unverified claims, pseudo-history, and emotionally charged narratives that appeal to mass sentiment while bypassing scholarly scrutiny. By engaging

with debates on historiography, nationalism, memory, and public history, the paper highlights the urgent need to defend the methodological foundations of historical research, including source criticism, multiplicity of perspectives, and contextual interpretation. It contends that history, when reduced to ideological propaganda, loses its democratic and intellectual value as a discipline of critical reflection. Ultimately, the paper advocates for a more inclusive, evidence-driven, and ethically responsible approach to historical writing and pedagogy that can sustain pluralism, rational discourse, and democratic consciousness in contemporary India.

Introduction

History, as a rigorous academic discipline, is fundamentally anchored in the critical interrogation of sources, methodological precision, and the coexistence of multiple interpretative frameworks. It is neither a static repository of facts nor a malleable narrative that can be reshaped at will. Rather, history represents a continuous dialogue between the past and the present a process famously articulated by E. H. Carr, who emphasized that historical knowledge emerges through the dynamic interaction between historians and their sources. This inherently interpretative nature of history, however, does not grant legitimacy to arbitrary alterations or ideologically driven distortions. On the contrary, it demands a disciplined engagement with evidence, context, and scholarly debate.

The foundational premise of historical inquiry lies in its commitment to evidence-based reconstruction. From archaeological findings and epigraphic records to literary texts and oral traditions, historians employ a wide spectrum of sources, subjecting them to critical scrutiny through established methodologies. Scholars such as Marc Bloch have underscored the importance of a scientific approach to history, advocating for interdisciplinary methods and cautioning against the uncritical acceptance of sources. Similarly, Leopold von Ranke

emphasized the ideal of presenting the past “as it actually happened,” highlighting the necessity of empirical rigor, even though later historiography has problematized the possibility of complete objectivity. These intellectual traditions collectively reinforce the idea that while interpretations may vary, they must remain grounded in verifiable evidence and rational analysis.

Despite these well-established principles, contemporary India is witnessing a troubling trend: the increasing politicization and ideological appropriation of history. Historical narratives are being selectively reconstructed to serve presentist agendas, often blurring the boundaries between history, mythology, collective memory, and nationalist rhetoric. This phenomenon is not merely an academic concern; it has profound implications for public consciousness, social cohesion, and the integrity of knowledge systems. The deliberate distortion or oversimplification of the past risks transforming history into a tool of propaganda, thereby undermining its critical and emancipator potential.

One of the most contentious arenas of this crisis is the interpretation of ancient Indian history. Selective readings of texts such as the Vedas or epics like the *Mahabharata* are frequently presented as empirical historical accounts, while archaeological evidence is sometimes misrepresented or exaggerated to support claims of civilizational superiority. Such approaches often disregard the methodological distinctions between mythological narratives and historical data, leading to a conflation that compromises scholarly integrity. The misuse of archaeology through sensationalized claims about ancient technologies or unverified historical continuities further exacerbates this issue, creating a pseudo-historical discourse that gains traction in popular imagination.

Equally significant is the role of popular media, particularly cinema, in shaping historical consciousness. Films and digital platforms increasingly act as powerful vehicles for

disseminating historical narratives, often prioritizing dramatic appeal over factual accuracy. While creative reinterpretation is an inherent aspect of artistic expression, the problem arises when such representations are perceived as authentic history by mass audiences. Cinematic portrayals of historical events and figures frequently embed ideological biases, reinforcing stereotypes or glorifying selective pasts, thereby contributing to a homogenized and often exclusionary vision of history.

The communalization of medieval Indian history constitutes another critical dimension of this crisis. The period is frequently framed through reductive binaries Hindu versus Muslim, indigenous versus foreign ignoring the complex socio-cultural interactions, syncretic traditions, and shared histories that characterized the era. Such narratives not only distort historical realities but also perpetuate contemporary divisions, transforming history into a site of political contestation rather than scholarly inquiry. The selective vilification or glorification of historical figures further illustrates how historiography can be mobilized to construct divisive identities.

Underlying these developments is a broader decline in historiographical awareness and methodological literacy among both producers and consumers of historical knowledge. The marginalization of critical historiography in public discourse, coupled with the rise of easily consumable yet unverified information, has created an environment where misinformation can flourish. The erosion of academic standards and the diminishing authority of trained historians in shaping public narratives pose a serious challenge to the discipline.

In this context, the need to reclaim history as a disciplined, evidence-based field of inquiry becomes urgently imperative. This involves not only reaffirming methodological rigor and source criticism but also fostering a critical historical consciousness among the wider public. History must be defended against ideological appropriation, not by asserting a singular

“truth,” but by upholding the principles of critical inquiry, plurality of perspectives, and intellectual honesty.

This article, therefore, seeks to critically examine the ongoing crisis of historical authenticity in India through three interrelated lenses: the distortion of ancient history through selective interpretations of archaeological and textual evidence; the influential role of popular media, especially cinema, in constructing ideological histories; and the communalization of medieval Indian pasts. By interrogating these dimensions, it aims to highlight the broader implications of historiographical distortions and to advocate for a more rigorous, inclusive, and critically engaged approach to the study of history.

History and the Problem of Selective Reconstruction

History, as a disciplined mode of knowledge production, cannot be reduced to an exercise in selective remembrance or ideological preference. It is governed by the critical evaluation of evidence, internal consistency of interpretation, and methodological transparency. As Marc Bloch argued, the historian’s craft lies not merely in narrating the past but in interrogating it through a scientific spirit questioning sources, contexts, and silences. The problem of selective reconstruction emerges precisely when this critical method is abandoned in favor of narratives that privilege ideological coherence over empirical validity.

From a scientific historiographical standpoint, historical reconstruction must rely on verifiable data archaeological material, stratigraphy, carbon dating, linguistic analysis, and comparative anthropology. However, in recent decades, there has been a growing tendency to reinterpret the past through a teleological lens, where conclusions are predetermined by present-day ideological commitments. This approach often presents itself as a “correction” of

earlier historiography, yet in practice, it substitutes one form of bias with another, frequently less rigorous and less accountable to evidence.

Marxist historiography provides a particularly useful framework to critique such tendencies. Historians like D. D. Kosambi and Romila Thapar emphasized that history must be understood through material conditions, modes of production, and social relations rather than cultural essentialism or civilizational pride. From this perspective, the past is not a monolithic cultural entity but a dynamic process shaped by class structures, economic transformations, and interactions between diverse communities. Selective reconstruction, therefore, becomes problematic because it obscures these material realities and replaces them with homogenized and often mythologized narratives.

A critical example of this phenomenon is the ongoing attempt to privilege the notion of a “Saraswati Civilization” over the empirically substantiated Indus Valley Civilization. While geological and remote sensing studies have indeed identified paleo-channels that may correspond to the Vedic Saraswati, the leap from these findings to the assertion of a fully developed and culturally dominant “Saraswati Civilization” often lacks adequate archaeological corroboration. The Indus Valley Civilization, by contrast, is supported by extensive material evidence, urban planning, standardized weights, craft specialization, and long-distance trade networks documented across sites such as Harappa and Mohenjo-daro. The attempt to displace or diminish this well-established civilization reflects not a scientific revision but an ideological reorientation aimed at constructing a culturally continuous and Vedic-centric antiquity.

From a Marxist analytical lens, such reinterpretations can be understood as part of a broader ideological project that seeks to legitimize contemporary socio-political formations by projecting them onto the past. By emphasizing cultural homogeneity and civilizational

continuity, these narratives obscure the historical realities of diversity, conflict, and transformation that are central to any materialist understanding of history. They also marginalize the role of subaltern groups, whose contributions are often erased in favor of elite-centric or textually derived accounts.

The debate surrounding the origins of the Aryans further illustrates the intersection of historiography and ideology. Earlier formulations of the Aryan migration theory, based on linguistic and comparative philology, have been refined and contested through advances in archaeology and, more recently, archaeogenetics. However, the insistence on an exclusively indigenous origin of the Aryans often framed as a matter of national pride frequently disregards the complexity and provisional nature of scientific evidence. As Irfan Habib has argued, historical explanations must remain open to revision based on new data, but such revisions must adhere to rigorous standards of proof rather than ideological necessity.

Scientific research increasingly points toward patterns of migration and interaction in prehistoric Eurasia, supported by genetic studies, material culture parallels, and linguistic diffusion. These findings align with the broader historical understanding that human societies have always been shaped by mobility, exchange, and hybridity. From a Marxist perspective, migration is not an anomaly but a fundamental aspect of socio-economic development, often driven by changes in environment, technology, and modes of production. The rejection of migration in favor of an autochthonous and “pure” origin narrative reflects not scientific reasoning but a desire to construct a static and exclusionary identity.

Ultimately, the problem of selective reconstruction lies in its distortion of historical processes. By privileging certain narratives while excluding others, it transforms history into an instrument of ideological affirmation rather than critical inquiry. A scientific and Marxist historiographical approach, in contrast, insists on the primacy of evidence, the centrality of

material conditions, and the recognition of historical change as a product of complex and often contradictory forces.

In reclaiming history from such distortions, it becomes essential to reaffirm its methodological foundations source criticism, interdisciplinarity, and openness to revision while resisting the imposition of contemporary ideological frameworks onto the past. Only through such a rigorous and critical approach can history retain its integrity as a discipline and its relevance as a means of understanding the complexities of human society.

Myth, Epic, and Historical Interpretation

The attempt to interpret epics as historical fact must be situated within a broader critique of ideology and cultural production. From a Marxist historiographical perspective, texts such as the Mahabharata and the Ramayana are not merely literary compositions or repositories of timeless moral values; they are historically situated cultural artifacts shaped by material conditions, social relations, and structures of power. As Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels argued, the dominant ideas of any age are the ideas of the ruling class. Epics, therefore, must be read as ideological texts that both reflect and reproduce the socio-economic hierarchies of their time.

In this framework, the evolution of the Mahabharata from *Jaya* to *MahaBharata* and finally to its expanded form can be understood as a process of ideological accretion. Each phase of its compilation corresponds to shifts in social organization, particularly the consolidation of varna hierarchies, the expansion of agrarian economies, and the emergence of early state formations. Historians such as D. D. Kosambi emphasized that ancient Indian texts must be read against the backdrop of material transformations, including the transition from pastoralism to settled agriculture and the increasing stratification of society. The epic, in this

sense, becomes a site where these transformations are encoded, often in mythologized and symbolic forms.

Similarly, the Ramayana can be analyzed as a text that reflects the ideological consolidation of kingship, patriarchy, and social order. The figure of Rama, often idealized as the embodiment of dharma, also represents the legitimating of RAJSATTA (royal authority) and the moralization of obedience within a hierarchical social structure. From a Marxist perspective, such representations are not neutral; they serve to naturalize and justify existing relations of power. As Romila Thapar has argued, these texts must be read as part of a broader socio-political discourse that sought to regulate and stabilize an increasingly complex society.

The historicization of these epics particularly through attempts to identify archaeological correlates or to assert their factual accuracy can thus be seen as an ideological project rather than a scientific endeavor. By transforming myth into history, such efforts obscure the material conditions that produced these narratives and instead present them as timeless truths. This aligns with what Louis Althusser described as the functioning of ideology: it masks the real conditions of existence by presenting constructed narratives as natural and self-evident.

Moreover, Marxist historians have consistently highlighted the need to read against the grain of elite texts. The epics, largely composed and transmitted by Brahmanical traditions, often marginalize or silence subaltern voices women, lower varnas, and tribal communities.

Scholars like R. S. Sharma have demonstrated how early Indian society was marked by significant social inequalities, including the control of land and resources by dominant classes. Within the Mahabharata, for instance, while the narrative foregrounds royal conflicts, it simultaneously encodes tensions related to property, kinship, and succession issues deeply tied to material power.

The allegorical and symbolic dimensions of these epics further reinforce their ideological character. The great war in the Mahabharata, rather than being read as a literal historical event, can be interpreted as a narrative representation of social crisis perhaps reflecting conflicts arising from changing property relations or the breakdown of older kinship systems. Similarly, episodes in the Ramayana such as the exile of Rama or the trial of Sita can be analyzed as ideological moments that reinforce patriarchal norms and the subordination of women within a structured Social order.

Importantly, Marxist historiography does not dismiss these texts; rather, it repositions them as sources that must be critically decoded. As Irfan Habib has argued, literary sources are indispensable for reconstructing early Indian history, but they cannot be taken at face value. Instead, they must be analyzed in conjunction with archaeological data, inscriptions, and other material evidence, allowing historians to distinguish between ideological representation and historical reality.

The contemporary attempt to conflate myth with history particularly by asserting the literal truth of epic narratives thus represents a regression from critical historiography. It transforms complex cultural texts into instruments of ideological validation, often serving contemporary political agendas. By doing so, it not only distorts the past but also obscures the very processes class conflict, economic change, and social stratification that Marxist historiography seeks to uncover.

In conclusion, a Marxist reading of epics like the Mahabharata and the Ramayana reveals them as dynamic ideological texts embedded in specific historical contexts. Their value lies not in their supposed factual accuracy but in their capacity to illuminate the material and social conditions of their time. To treat them as literal history is to ignore their ideological

function; to read them critically is to recover the deeper structures of power, production, and social relations that shaped early Indian civilization.

Cinema and the Construction of Popular Histories

In the modern era, cinema has evolved into one of the most influential mediums for the production and circulation of historical consciousness. Unlike academic historiography, which is governed by methodological rigor and evidentiary constraints, cinema operates through visual storytelling, affect, and mass appeal. As a result, films often function as what can be termed “popular historiography”—a form of historical representation that reaches far wider audiences than scholarly works, but is simultaneously shaped by the demands of narrative structure, spectacle, and ideology.

From a film-historical perspective, historical cinema must be understood not as a transparent window into the past but as a constructed narrative shaped by the conventions of the film industry, audience expectations, and broader socio-political contexts. Directors such as Sanjay Leela Bhansali and Ashutosh Gowariker, through films like *Padmavat*, *Bajirao Mastani*, and *Panipat*, engage in what may be described as the aestheticization of history transforming complex historical processes into visually grand, emotionally charged narratives. These films deploy elaborate sets, stylized performances, and dramatic conflicts to create a sense of historical authenticity, even when the underlying narratives are selectively constructed.

For instance, films such as *Padmavat*, *Panipat*, *Bajirao Mastani*, *Manikarnika: The Queen of Jhansi*, and *Samrat Prithviraj* claim to reconstruct historical events and figures, yet their narratives often rely on a blend of documented history, folklore, and creative imagination. Film historians argue that such representations should be read as “historical fictions” rather

than factual accounts. The cinematic text, in this sense, is governed by what Robert A. Rosenstone identifies as the logic of historical film where compression, condensation, and dramatization are necessary to translate the past into a compelling visual narrative.

However, the issue becomes critical when these cinematic reconstructions are received by audiences as authentic history. The authority of the visual image its ability to simulate reality often creates what appears to be a “truth effect,” making it difficult for viewers to distinguish between historical fact and cinematic invention. As Hayden White has suggested, historical narratives themselves are shaped by emplotment and storytelling techniques; cinema intensifies this process by adding visual and emotional immediacy, thereby amplifying its persuasive power.

A recurring pattern in contemporary Indian historical cinema is the reliance on binary oppositions, particularly in the depiction of conflict. Films frequently construct narratives around the dichotomy of “heroic” indigenous rulers versus “foreign” or “invading” others, often framed along religious lines. This is evident in the portrayal of Rajput, Maratha, or other regional figures as defenders of cultural or national identity, juxtaposed against antagonistic representations of Muslim rulers. Such framing reduces complex historical processes—marked by alliances, negotiations, cultural exchanges, and shared sovereignties—into simplified and polarized narratives.

From a film-historical standpoint, this trend can be linked to the broader political economy of cinema. Films are not produced in a vacuum; they are embedded within specific ideological and market contexts. The rise of nationalist sentiment, the commercialization of historical spectacle, and the demand for emotionally resonant narratives all shape the way history is represented on screen. As a result, cinema often becomes a site where contemporary anxieties and aspirations are projected onto the past.

Moreover, these films frequently draw upon regional legends, oral traditions, and selectively interpreted historical episodes, reconfiguring them into coherent and marketable narratives.

While such sources are valuable in their own right, their uncritical incorporation into cinematic storytelling can blur the line between myth and history. The transformation of these narratives into visual spectacles further amplifies their impact, embedding them within popular memory.

The communalization of historical consciousness through cinema is thus not merely an unintended consequence but a structural outcome of this mode of representation. By privileging certain narratives and marginalizing others, films contribute to the formation of a selective historical imagination, one that reinforces contemporary ideological divides. The past, in this context, becomes a symbolic resource mobilized to construct identities, legitimize political positions, and evoke emotional responses.

Importantly, film historians do not argue that cinema must adhere strictly to academic historiography. Artistic freedom and creative interpretation are integral to the medium. However, there remains a critical need for historical responsibility an awareness of the distinction between representation and reality, and a recognition of the power of cinema to shape public understanding.

In conclusion, cinema, as a form of popular historiography, plays a crucial role in constructing and disseminating historical narratives in contemporary society. Films such as *Padmavat* and *Panipat* should be approached not as factual reconstructions but as interpretative texts that reflect the interplay of aesthetics, ideology, and market forces. A critical film-historical approach, therefore, becomes essential not to dismiss these works, but to decode their narratives, interrogate their assumptions, and understand their role in shaping the collective imagination of the past.

Communalization of Medieval Indian History

The communal interpretation of medieval Indian history represents one of the most profound distortions in contemporary historiography. By reducing complex historical processes to a binary framework of religious antagonism, such interpretations obscure the material, political, and institutional realities that shaped the period. In the tradition of Irfan Habib, medieval Indian history must be understood not through the lens of religious identity alone, but through the analysis of state formation, agrarian structures, revenue systems, and the dynamics of power.

A central problem in communal historiography is its treatment of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire as exclusively “Islamic” regimes defined primarily by religious motives. Such a characterization neglects the fundamentally political nature of these states. As Habib argues, these were pre-modern agrarian empires whose primary concern was the extraction of surplus through a structured revenue system, rather than the imposition of a homogenized religious order. Their administrative frameworks, land revenue mechanisms, and systems of governance were shaped by pragmatic considerations of control, resource mobilization, and political stability.

The issue of temple desecration, often foregrounded in communal narratives, exemplifies the dangers of reductive interpretation. While instances of temple destruction did occur, to attribute them solely to religious zeal is to ignore the broader political logic of pre-modern warfare. Temples in early and medieval India were not merely religious spaces; they functioned as centers of wealth, legitimacy, and political authority. Consequently, their desecration often symbolized the defeat of rival power structures rather than an attempt to eradicate a religion. This pattern is not unique to any one group or period but is characteristic of pre-modern statecraft across regions.

Indeed, a closer examination of historical evidence reveals a far more complex and nuanced picture. Rulers associated with the Mughal Empire, for example, frequently patronized institutions beyond their own religious affiliations. Land grants to temples, employment of Hindu elites in administrative positions, and the incorporation of diverse cultural practices into court life all point toward a Politics of accommodation rather than exclusion. Such practices were not acts of secular benevolence in the modern sense but pragmatic strategies aimed at consolidating authority and ensuring the smooth functioning of the state.

Conversely, acts of temple plunder or destruction by Hindu rulers such as those occasionally undertaken during Maratha campaigns demonstrate that such practices were embedded in the political economy of warfare rather than confined to a particular religious community. From Habib's perspective, these actions must be understood within the logic of surplus appropriation, territorial expansion, and symbolic assertion of dominance. To isolate them as evidence of religious hostility is to misrecognize their historical function.

The communalization of medieval history is further reinforced through the moralized comparison of historical figures. Juxtaposing rulers such as Akbar and Maharana Pratap, or Aurangzeb and Shivaji, in terms of "good" versus "bad," "tolerant" versus "intolerant," reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of historical analysis. Each of these figures operated within specific political, economic, and military contexts that shaped their decisions. For instance, the policies of Akbar cannot be understood outside the context of imperial consolidation, just as the strategies of Shivaji must be situated within the dynamics of regional resistance and state formation.

Habib's historiographical method insists on situating individuals within structures rather than elevating them into moral exemplars. Historical actors are neither heroes nor villains in an abstract sense; they are agents operating within constraints imposed by their socio-economic

environment. By detaching them from these contexts and reimagining them through contemporary ideological frameworks, communal historiography transforms history into a tool of identity politics rather than a field of critical inquiry.

At a deeper level, the communalization of medieval Indian history reflects a shift away from materialist analysis toward cultural essentialism. It replaces questions of land, labor, taxation, and class relations with a singular focus on religious identity. In doing so, it erases the shared experiences, interactions, and negotiations that characterized medieval Indian society ranging from agrarian cooperation to cultural syncretism.

In conclusion, the approach advocated by Irfan Habib provides a necessary corrective to communal distortions of the past. By foregrounding material conditions, political structures, and economic processes, it restores complexity to medieval Indian history and resists its reduction to simplistic religious binaries. The task of historiography, therefore, is not to affirm contemporary identities but to critically reconstruct the past in all its contradictions thereby preserving both its integrity and its analytical depth.

The Crisis of Public History and Misinformation

The proliferation of digital media platforms such as social media, YouTube, blogs, and news channels has democratized access to historical information. However, it has also facilitated the spread of misinformation and pseudo-history. Individuals with little or no training in historical methodology frequently present themselves as authorities, disseminating distorted narratives to large audiences.

This phenomenon is further exacerbated by the commercialization of history, where sensationalism often takes precedence over accuracy. Competitive examination platforms and popular history channels, in their quest for engagement, sometimes perpetuate simplified or

incorrect interpretations of historical events. The renaming of cities, roads, and institutions is another manifestation of this trend. While such actions are often justified as attempts to reclaim historical identity, they can also contribute to a selective rewriting of history that privileges certain narratives while erasing others.

Historiography and the Decline of Methodological Awareness

A particularly concerning aspect of this crisis is the declining awareness of historiography and historical methodology among students and scholars. Historiography the study of how history is written is essential for understanding the multiplicity of perspectives that shape historical narratives.

Different historiographical traditions such as nationalist, Marxist, imperialist, Subaltern, Annales, postmodernist, and structuralist approaches offer distinct frameworks for interpreting the past. Each of these approaches has its strengths and limitations, and no single perspective can claim absolute authority.

The failure to engage critically with these traditions results in a narrow and often biased understanding of history. It is essential for students and researchers to approach history with an open mind, recognizing the validity of multiple interpretations while maintaining a commitment to evidence-based analysis.

The Centrality of Historical Evidence

The integrity of historical writing depends fundamentally on the proper use of evidence. Historical sources can be broadly categorized into primary sources, secondary sources, and oral traditions.

Primary sources such as official documents, letters, inscriptions, artifacts, and contemporary accounts provide direct evidence of the past. They are invaluable for reconstructing historical events but must be critically evaluated for bias, context, and reliability.

Secondary sources, on the other hand, interpret and analyze primary sources. While they offer valuable insights, they are inherently shaped by the perspectives of their authors. Oral traditions occupy a unique position, particularly in societies where written records are limited. Although they can provide important cultural and historical information, their reliability must be assessed carefully.

The misuse or selective use of evidence is one of the primary causes of historical distortion. Without a rigorous methodological framework, historical research risks becoming speculative and ideologically driven.

History, Ideology, and the Responsibility of Scholars

The relationship between history and ideology is complex. While it is impossible to entirely separate historical interpretation from the historian's perspective, it is imperative to maintain a clear distinction between evidence-based analysis and ideological assertion.

In recent years, there has been a growing tendency to align historical narratives with political ideologies, particularly those rooted in religious nationalism. This has led to the marginalization of certain historical periods, figures, and perspectives, as well as the vilification of others.

Educational institutions and government policies have also played a role in shaping these narratives, particularly through curriculum changes and textbook revisions. The exclusion of

certain figures and the selective emphasis on others reflect broader ideological agendas that threaten the integrity of historical education.

Conclusion

The contemporary crisis of historical authenticity in India is not merely an academic issue but a societal one. The distortion of history whether through selective interpretation, ideological bias, or misinformation has profound implications for collective memory, identity, and social cohesion.

History is not a static or monolithic discipline; it is a dynamic field that evolves through critical inquiry and new evidence. However, this evolution must be guided by methodological rigor, intellectual honesty, and a commitment to truth. The conflation of history with ideology, myth, or propaganda undermines its credibility and diminishes its value as a tool for understanding the past.

As scholars, students, and informed citizens, it is our responsibility to resist the politicization of history and to uphold the principles of critical inquiry and evidence-based analysis. Only by doing so can we preserve the integrity of history and ensure that it remains a meaningful and reliable guide to the complexities of human experience.

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Dhanu Yatra at Bargarh: Cultural Grandeur, Collective Memory and a Progressive Future

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Abstract:

This paper studies the Dhanu Yatra of Bargarh city, Odisha, as a unique example of living folk culture, open-air theatre, and collective civic participation. Based on the Krishna-Kansa narrative, the festival transforms the entire townscape into a performative sacred geography in which Bargarh becomes Mathura, the Jeera river becomes Yamuna, and Ambapali is imagined as Gopapura. The paper argues that Dhanu Yatra is not merely a religious festival but a dynamic cultural institution that preserves myth, reinforces regional identity, and promotes community cohesion through large-scale public involvement. It further examines how the festival combines devotion, drama, memory, and social participation to sustain Odisha's cultural heritage in a contemporary context. The study also highlights the progressive possibilities of the festival by suggesting that its grandeur can be strengthened through responsible planning, civic care, and cultural stewardship. Dhanu Yatra thus emerges as a vibrant symbol of continuity, creativity, and public culture.

Keywords: Dhanu Yatra, Folk Culture, Cultural Heritage, Myth, Open-air Theatre

Dhanu Yatra at Bargarh is one of Odisha's most remarkable cultural achievements, not only because it draws upon the story of Krishna and Kansa, but because it transforms an entire town into a living and breathing dramatic world. The festival is deeply rooted in the Krishna

tradition and reflects the enduring place of myth, devotion, and ethical imagination in Indian cultural life. During the celebration, Bargarh symbolically becomes Mathura, the Jeera river is imagined as Yamuna, and Ambapali is recast as Gopapura. Through this powerful reconfiguration of space, the festival turns ordinary geography into sacred performance and communal theatre. Its uniqueness lies in the scale of this transformation and in the way the entire town becomes an active participant in the enactment (Mohapatra 52–53). For this reason, Dhanu Yatra is widely admired as an unparalleled open-air theatrical spectacle that unites religion, folklore, memory, and social participation in a single public event (Sahoo 1). What gives Dhanu Yatra its lasting power is that it is not a static or ornamental tradition. It is a dynamic cultural institution that renews itself each year through performance, improvisation, and collective enthusiasm. The story of Krishna's triumph over Kansa is not presented merely as mythology from a distant past; rather, it is brought into the public sphere as a living moral drama in which justice ultimately prevails over cruelty, arrogance, and oppression. The festival therefore serves both as a celebration of faith and as an affirmation of shared ethical ideals. It allows the people of Bargarh to experience narrative, ritual, and performance not as separate domains but as interconnected forms of cultural expression. In doing so, it preserves the richness of inherited tradition while also strengthening the bonds of community.

Another major strength of Dhanu Yatra is its ability to bring together people across social boundaries through a common cultural experience. It is not confined to a temple, a single stage, or an isolated audience. Instead, it unfolds across public spaces and draws citizens, performers, organizers, traders, and visitors into a large participatory framework. This collective structure gives the festival a democratic and inclusive character. It belongs not to a narrow elite but to the people as a whole. Such large-scale public involvement is one of the reasons for its lasting emotional power and cultural prestige. The festival becomes, in effect,

a shared civic celebration in which artistic expression and communal identity reinforce one another.

At the same time, Dhanu Yatra also points toward a progressive cultural future. A festival of such magnitude naturally invites questions of planning, sustainability, and public management, yet these concerns should not be seen as diminishing its value. On the contrary, they reveal its importance. A major cultural event that attracts immense participation deserves equally strong civic support. Better sanitation, improved traffic regulation, careful crowd management, cleaner public facilities, and environmentally responsible arrangements can further elevate the dignity of the festival. Such reforms would not weaken tradition; they would strengthen it by ensuring that the cultural grandeur of the event is matched by civic efficiency and public well-being. When a community invests thoughtfully in a festival of this scale, it affirms that heritage is not merely something to be admired, but something to be nurtured responsibly.

Dhanu Yatra also offers significant possibilities for cultural education and local development. It introduces younger generations to mythological narrative, dramatic performance, and regional history in a vivid and memorable way. It provides opportunities for actors, organizers, artisans, and local participants to contribute to an event of exceptional visibility. It also enhances the cultural reputation of Bargarh and reinforces Odisha's identity as a region of vibrant and living traditions (Pasayat 29). The festival demonstrates that folk culture is not marginal or outdated; rather, it can remain central to public life when it is sustained by participation, imagination, and institutional care. In this sense, Dhanu Yatra is not only a celebration of the past but also an investment in cultural continuity.

The special distinctiveness of Dhanu Yatra lies in the fact that it stages the story of Krishna through real actors rather than relying solely on symbolic representation. This gives the event a dramatic immediacy and emotional intensity that set it apart from many other religious

festivals. The figure of Kansa, too, is portrayed with theatrical richness. He appears not only as a tyrant but also as a powerful ruler moving through the city, holding court, and responding to the public world around him. The dramatic arc culminates in Krishna's arrival at Mathura, the defeat of evil, and the restoration of rightful order through Ugrasena's return to power. This movement from tension to resolution gives the festival a powerful narrative structure and ensures that its mythic core remains compelling year after year (Sahoo 2). Dhanu Yatra at Bargarh must therefore be understood as far more than a seasonal performance. It is a grand synthesis of devotion, drama, space, memory, and public participation. It preserves a mythological inheritance while also opening pathways for cultural renewal, civic pride, and progressive development. Its greatness lies not only in its scale, but in its ability to make an ancient story meaningful to contemporary society. As long as it continues to combine artistic vitality with thoughtful stewardship, Dhanu Yatra will remain one of the most luminous examples of living cultural tradition in India.

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Section: 4

**Foundations of Education and Contemporary
Teacher Training**

Roots of Educational Lineages in Ancient Indian Tradition and Culture: Contemporary Relevance

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Abstract

Culture and education are the backbone, meant to mold a society to its perfection, known to the world. It is a process, as old as the evolution of humanity. Ancient India has evolved an exclusive educational ecosystem firmly established in its cultural and philosophical traditions. As the premodern educational systems primarily focused on information accession and systematized testing, ancient Indian education begins from śruti (which is heard, the Vedas) and smṛti (which is remembered, such as Dharma and Itihāsa).

In ancient Indian Vedic knowledge system, we observe that education was not merely confined to bookish knowledge but focused on any instruction which strengthens the body and mind. Ancient Indian education system was aimed to help the individual to develop all-round universal qualities which in their base built a higher type of humanity.

The ancient Indian education was grounded by the Vedas and the Upanishads. Ancient Indians concluded that “Vidya” is the authentic strength in the world. The reflection of knowledgeshatters' illusion removes darkness and ignites the consciousness to understand the true value of life. It enhances efficiency, intelligence, and power.

These established sources sustain a universal knowledge system that combines spiritual consciousness, ethical building, social responsibilities, and intellectual growth. In this context, education was not merely the transfer of facts but the transmission of wisdom and overall development through a lived tradition of practice and reflection.

Central to ancient Indian epistemology was the idea that knowledge comes from direct experience, reflection (*manana*), and deep absorption (*nididhyāsana*), a process that differentiates contemporary reliance on mechanical memorization or technology-oriented learning. While modern institutions master scientific and technical knowledge, they often lack self-reflection, ethical building, and the development of inner awareness. In the age of artificial intelligence and rapid technological modernization, this imbalance has contributed to an educational crisis marked by estrangement, skill gaps, and a lack of purpose.

Ancient Indian educational ideas also signify connections between disciplines, individual and society, and between the material and the transcendent. Education was a means to harmonize personal tendencies with social responsibilities and cosmic order. The aim was not only career-oriented success but *svarūpa-jñāna*, knowledge of the self and one's place within the wider frame of life. Conversely, present-day systems prioritize significant outcomes, often neglecting moral and spiritual dimensions that ancient traditions considered fundamental.

Reuniting with these educational lineages does not imply rejecting modern pedagogy; rather, it put forward a union in which ancient understandings elevate contemporary practice.

Policies like India's National Education Policy 2020 gradually acknowledge the importance of Indian Knowledge Systems and *gurukula* inspired mentorship in developing creativity, ethics, and overall learning. establishing education in cultural memory and lineage can help students channelize the complexities of the modern world with realistic confidence and critical insights.

In conclusion, the educational traditions of ancient India offer a living heritage that remains relevant for contemporary society. By reestablishing lineage-based pedagogies, holistic formation, and ethical anchoring into modern curricula, educators can link the divide between culture and classroom, rebuilding education as a vehicle for character building, meaning finding, and human flourishing.

Key Words: New Education Policy; Indian Knowledge Systems; Ancient Indian Education; Cultural Pedagogy; Contemporary Education

Introduction

“The catastrophe of contemporary education is not technological but philosophical.”

Education is often considered today as an outcome of professionalism, productivity, and achievements. Such authority, while logically practical, reduces education to technical potency. However, Indian civilization historically identifies education as a **cultural ecology**, a dynamic system that shapes consciousness, ethics, and identity over generations. Culture not only externally shapes education but stands out as the root of it.

Ancient Indian education not only appears through centralized institutions but through **lineages**, networks of teachers, texts, practices, and lived values. These lineages support fluidity without rigidity, allowing knowledge to remain dynamic while rooted. This paper argues that the crisis in contemporary education is not only curricular or technological but sophisticated, resulting from the loss of bridge-based thinking. Re-connecting with ancient Indian educational principles offers not decadence, but regeneration.

Śruti and Smṛti: Knowledge as Living Transmission

The foundation of Indian epistemology lies on *śruti* and *smṛti*. Śruti, basically the Vedas and Upaniṣads, represents knowledge that is “heard” and internally realized rather than authored. Smṛti texts convert these metaphysical thoughts into ethical, social, and historical

foundations. Together, they form a dynamic knowledge continuum rather than a static canon (Joshi, 2011).

Unlike modern education, which begins with external data, ancient Indian education begins with inner awareness. Learning was not a combination of facts but a subtle purification of awareness. Knowledge (*vidyā*) was considered a force that dissolves ignorance and awakens discernment. This approach challenges contemporary delusion with speed, certification, and information overload.

From a pedagogical perspective, śruti–smṛti education focuses on depth over breadth, understanding over range, and wisdom over information. In an age dominated by artificial intelligence and algorithmic learning, this structure reminds us of intelligence without consciousness can lead to hollowness.

Śāstra and the Indigenous Knowledge System: Education Over Utility

Śāstra in the Indian tradition symbolizes disciplined inquiry based in experience and reflection. Whether philosophy, medicine, linguistics, astronomy, or aesthetics, śāstric knowledge combines theory with lived application. Ancient Indian education thus counter fragmentation where disciplines were joined through a common ethical and metaphysical vision.

Modern education often detaches disciplines, producing specialists who lack integrated vision. This fragmentation leads to what may be called **educated incapacity**, technical proficiencies without ethical clarity. Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) challenge this by restoring contextual, ecological, and moral dimensions to learning.

From my perspective, the relevance of śāstra today lies not in content imitation but in methodological humility, recognizing that knowledge must serve life, not dominate it.

Education must once again ask not only *how* to know, but *why*.

Guru–ŚiṣyaParamparā: Philosophical Foundations and Exemplars

The **guru–śiṣyaparamparā** (teacher–student lineage) is the backbone of this tradition. The guru is not only an information supplier but a living example and an inner guide. For instance, Kireet Joshi notes that the teacher’s “instruments are not confined to methods of instruction but include...the example of the inner character of the teacher and his capacity to enter into the depths of students’ inner souls” motherandsriaurobindo.in. We can find the reflection of the thought in the classical order of the Bhagavad Gītā:

In BG, 4.34: “Learn the Truth by approaching a spiritual master. Inquire from him with reverence and render service unto him. Such an enlightened saint can impart knowledge unto you because he has seen the Truth” holy-bhagavad-gita.org.

This verse tells the ethos of *pranipātena* (humble devotion) and *sewayā* (service) that prepare a disciple to receive knowledge. It distinguishes spiritual knowledge from minimal information. It is “revealed in the heart of the disciple by the Guru’s grace, when the disciple develops humility, and the Guru is pleased with the service attitude of the disciple” holy-bhagavad-gita.org. Secular education may be “bought for a price,” but spiritual wisdom flows only through the living link of teachers and students.

In the *Mahābhārata*, **Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna** exemplifies guru–śiṣya relationship. Arjuna approaches Kṛṣṇa in humility and with sincere questions (“prapannāḥpracetakāśvabhāvaḥ” – BG 2.7), and Kṛṣṇa responds by guiding him through the knowledge of dharma. Under Kṛṣṇa’s guidance, Arjuna experiences inner transformation, his despair is lifted, and duty is illumined by divine wisdom. Arjuna’s trust and obedience (“kṣīyatetvadīyasmṛti-jvaraḥ” – BG 2.67) show the ardent devotion a student must have and Lord Kṛṣṇa’s empathetic instruction shows the care of an ideal teacher.

These ancient ideals echo today. The guru-śiṣya ideal teaches that teachers are role models and students are aspiring seekers. Modern educators might see the guru not as authoritarian, but as mentor: one who observes each child's needs (as Joshi wrote)motherandsriaurobindo.in, adapts methods flexibly, and kindles the learner's innate love of learning. The mother of Sri Aurobindo, The Mother, highlights this: *"the school should be an opportunity for progress for the teacher as well as for the student. Each one should have the freedom to develop freely."* bharatshakti.aurosociety.org This reassures that, like the guru paramparā, contemporary schools should nurture both learners as well as teachers too.

Moreover, **New Education Policy 2020** collaborate with this lineage. NEP states that *"the teacher in India was the most respected member of society. Only the very best and most learned became teachers. Society gave teachers, or gurus, what they needed to pass on their knowledge, skills, and ethics optimally to students."* education.gov.in. It calls for *restoring the high status of teachers* and structuring teacher education so that educators can truly become mentors. For example, NEP proposes recruiting "local esteemed persons or experts as 'master instructors'" in traditional arts and craftsen.wikisource.org, extending the gurukul model of living teachers aligned in culture into modern schools. It also mandates unified, longer teacher-training (up to 4–5 years)motherandsriaurobindo.in, scholarships for rural *B.Ed.* candidates, and measures to ensure teacher continuity, so that each child can have a steady "guide on the side"en.wikisource.org. These reforms show the ancient focus on **individualized guidance**, just as a Vedic guru dedicated personal attention to each brahmacārī, today's system aims to develop **well**-prepared, context-sensitive teachers who truly know their students and speak their home languages.

The **New Policy's emphasis on overall education** by developing not just literacy but values, arts, and a connection to nature which are parallels ancient pedagogy. Banwala and Singh

(2024) find that restoring elements of the old system (like Sanskrit in curricula, moral-spiritual growth, and universal access) “could have fostered a strong sense of cultural identity and intellectual sovereignty” bpasjournals.com. They argue that integrating traditional wisdom in education makes learning **more humanizing**, bridging individuals with their culture and nature bpasjournals.com. In this sense, NEP’s focus on **Indian knowledge systems and ethics** can be seen as a modern continuity of the *paramparā*. Instead of cutting students off from their heritage (as colonial schooling did), the current reforms tend to make education an “opportunity for progress” founded in India’s own cultural soil.

The Aim of Education: From Career to Character

Ancient Indian education system aimed at *svarūpa-jñāna*, the knowledge of the self and one’s ethical role in society. Vocational skills were important, but they are secondary. The goal was the formation of a balanced human being who can be capable of responsibility, compassion, and perceptions.

Today’s education system often prioritizes performance over purpose. Students are trained to compete rather than contemplate, to achieve rather than understand. This has resulted in rising stress, identity confusion, and ethical erosion.

From my viewpoint, the relevance of ancient education lies in its demand that **character precedes abilities**. Without ethical anchoring, even advanced knowledge becomes destructive.

Technology, AI, and the Crisis of Meaning

Technological advancement has transformed education, expanding access, and capability. However, it has also intensified alienation. AI can process information, but it cannot foster wisdom, empathy, or moral judgment. The danger lies not in technology itself but in allowing it to define what education means.

Ancient Indian education system offers a corrective by re-centering human consciousness. Reflection (*manana*), meditation (*nididhyāsana*), and ethical inquiry confirm that knowledge remained humanized. Integrating these principles today can prevent technology from becoming an end.

Education, Culture, and NEP 2020: Beyond Politics

Education policies certainly operate within political structures, yet their success depends on cultural depth. The National Education Policy 2020 marks an important shift by recognizing Indian Knowledge Systems, multidisciplinary learning, and holistic development (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Rather than viewing NEP as a political document, it should be understood as an opportunity to restore **cultural continuity**. Its focus on value-based education, teacher autonomy, and experiential learning matches strongly with ancient pedagogical ideals.

However, implementation must avoid superficial addition. True integration requires rethinking pedagogy, teacher training, and educational purposes by not only adding cultural content.

What We Are Lacking Today

Contemporary education systems, despite their technological sophistication and expanding access, express a serious erosion of ethical grounding and reflective depth. Learning is increasingly evaluated through standardized assessments, rankings, and market outcomes, often staving off questions of moral responsibilities, social sensitivities, and self-understanding. A visible outcome of this crisis is the growing dependence on coaching cultures and exam-centric training models, where success is measured by scores rather than understanding or character. Students are trained to memorize, replicate, and optimize performance under pressure, yet are rarely guided to understand the meaning or consequences

of their knowledge. This instrumentalization of education has resulted in intellectual proficiency without ethical clarity, a condition ancient Indian thinkers cautioned against when they emphasized *vidyā* as a transformative force that erases ignorance and cultivates judgement.

Equally concerned is the weakening of teacher–student relationships and the loss of cultural rootedness within formal education. In many contemporary classrooms, the teacher is reduced to a syllabus executor and the student to a data point within an assessment system, leaving little space for mentorship, dialogue, or individualized guidance. The absence of sustained pedagogical relationships has also diminished inner discipline and reflective learning, contributing to anxiety, disengagement, and a sense of purposelessness among learners. Ancient Indian education system addressed this through lineage-based mentorship and culturally embedded learning, ensuring that knowledge was transmitted as dynamic wisdom rather than abstract information. Reintegrating these principles today does not require a rejection of modern educational frameworks but calls for a recalibration of priorities, where education once again serves human flourishing, ethical responsibility, and cultural continuity, rather than functioning as an instrument of economic growth.

Conclusion: Presenting Education as Lineage

This paper has attempted to re-examine education not only as an institutional or technical process, but as a cultural and philosophical continuum shaped by lineage, memory, and dynamic practice. Ancient Indian education system evolved as an organic system rooted in *śruti*, *smṛti*, and *śāstric* traditions, where learning was inseparable from ethical formation, self-discipline, and social responsibility. Education functioned as a means of cultivating consciousness rather than merely accumulating information, with the *guru–śiṣyaparamparā* serving as the central pedagogical framework through which knowledge, values, and wisdom were transmitted.

In contrast, contemporary education, while benefiting technological advancement and expanded access, often suffers fragmentation, instrumentalization, and loss of meaning. The dominance of exam-centric learning, coaching cultures, and performance metrics has weakened ethical grounding, reflective inquiry, and deep teacher–student engagement. As discussed, this crisis is not technological in nature but philosophical, arising from a rupture between education and culture. Ancient Indian educational thought reminds us that knowledge divorced from values leads to imbalance, and that true learning must address the intellectual, moral, and inner dimensions of the human being.

Re-engaging with these educational lineages does not imply rejecting modern pedagogy or global knowledge systems. Rather, it calls for a synthesis in which contemporary education is enriched by indigenous wisdom, cultural rootedness, and holistic aims. The National Education Policy 2020 offers a significant opportunity in this direction by acknowledging Indian Knowledge Systems, holistic development, and the restoration of the teacher’s role as mentor rather than mere instructor. However, the success of such reforms depends not on symbolic inclusion but on genuine pedagogical transformation.

Ultimately, reuniting education as lineage means restoring continuity between past wisdom and present needs, culture and classroom, and between knowledge and character. Such an approach envisions education as a process of human flourishing is one that nurtures thoughtful, ethical, and culturally rooted individuals capable of navigating the complexities of the modern world with clarity, responsibility, and purpose.

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Institutionalizing Social-Emotional Learning in Educational Policy: Global Perspectives

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Abstract

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has increasingly gained recognition as a critical component of holistic education, extending beyond traditional cognitive and academic domains. This chapter examines the institutionalization of SEL within educational policy frameworks across diverse global contexts. It explores how governments and educational systems integrate SEL into curricula, teacher training, assessment practices, and broader policy structures. Drawing upon comparative perspectives, the chapter analyzes policy approaches in both high-income and low- and middle-income countries, highlighting variations shaped by sociocultural, economic, and political factors. It further interrogates the challenges of translating SEL from conceptual frameworks into scalable, sustainable policy initiatives, including issues of standardization, cultural adaptability, measurement, and teacher preparedness. A critical lens is applied to examine whether institutionalization risks reducing SEL to technocratic metrics, potentially undermining its transformative potential. Additionally, the chapter considers the role of international organizations in promoting SEL agendas and the implications for policy borrowing and global convergence. By synthesizing theoretical insights and policy practices, the chapter argues for context-sensitive, ethically grounded, and participatory approaches to embedding SEL within education systems. It, therefore, emphasizes that institutionalizing

SEL requires balancing global frameworks with local realities to ensure meaningful and equitable implementation.

Keywords: social-emotional learning, educational policy, global perspectives, policy implementation, cultural context

Introduction

In recent decades, educational discourse has undergone a paradigmatic shift from an exclusive focus on cognitive achievement to a broader understanding of student development that includes emotional, social, and ethical dimensions. Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has emerged as a central framework within this transformation, emphasizing competencies such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, relationship-building, and responsible decision-making. While initially conceptualized within psychological and pedagogical domains, SEL has increasingly entered the realm of educational policy, prompting efforts to institutionalize its principles within formal education systems.

Institutionalization refers to the process through which ideas, practices, and norms become embedded within formal structures, policies, and routines. In the context of SEL, this involves integrating social-emotional competencies into national curricula, teacher education programs, assessment systems, and accountability mechanisms. However, institutionalizing SEL is not merely a technical endeavor; it is inherently shaped by cultural values, political priorities, and historical contexts.

This chapter explores how SEL is being institutionalized in educational policy across different global regions. It seeks to address three central questions: (a) How is SEL conceptualized and integrated into policy frameworks? (b) What challenges arise in translating SEL into systemic practice? and (c) How do global and local dynamics interact in

shaping SEL policies? Through a nuanced and critical analysis, the chapter aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the opportunities and tensions inherent in embedding SEL within education systems worldwide.

Conceptual Foundations of SEL in Policy Contexts

The integration of SEL into educational policy necessitates a clear conceptualization of what constitutes social-emotional competencies. While various frameworks exist, most converge on a set of core domains, including emotional awareness, self-regulation, social understanding, interpersonal skills, and ethical decision-making (CASEL, 2020; Elias et al., 1997). These competencies are often framed as essential for both personal well-being and societal cohesion (OECD, 2021).

From a policy perspective, SEL intersects with multiple domains, including mental health, citizenship education, and workforce readiness (UNESCO, 2019). This intersectionality complicates its institutionalization, as it requires coordination across different policy sectors and stakeholders (OECD, 2021). Moreover, SEL challenges traditional dichotomies between academic and non-academic learning, prompting a re-evaluation of educational goals and outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011).

The conceptual translation of SEL into policy language often involves standardization, which can both facilitate implementation and risk oversimplification (CASEL, 2020). Policymakers must navigate the tension between creating clear, measurable frameworks and preserving the holistic, context-dependent nature of social-emotional development (OECD, 2021).

Global Trends in SEL Policy Integration

Globally, there has been a marked increase in policy initiatives aimed at incorporating SEL into education systems (OECD, 2021). In high-income countries, SEL is often embedded within broader frameworks of 21st-century skills, emphasizing adaptability, collaboration, and emotional intelligence (UNESCO, 2019). These initiatives frequently involve comprehensive strategies that include curriculum development, teacher training, and assessment tools (CASEL, 2020).

In contrast, low- and middle-income countries may integrate SEL within initiatives related to life skills education, peace education, or psychosocial support (UNESCO, 2019). In these contexts, SEL is often linked to pressing social challenges, such as conflict, poverty, and inequality (OECD, 2021). As a result, policy approaches may prioritize resilience, conflict resolution, and community engagement (UNESCO, 2019).

International organizations play a significant role in shaping global SEL agendas by providing frameworks, funding, and technical support (UNESCO, 2019; OECD, 2021). While this can facilitate knowledge sharing and capacity building, it also raises concerns about policy borrowing and the imposition of external models that may not align with local contexts (Steiner-Khamsi, 2014).

Policy Mechanisms for Institutionalizing SEL

Institutionalizing SEL requires the development of coherent policy mechanisms that integrate social-emotional competencies across various components of the education system.

Curriculum Integration

One of the primary avenues for institutionalization is the incorporation of SEL into national curricula. This can take the form of dedicated SEL subjects or the integration of social-emotional competencies across existing disciplines. Cross-curricular approaches are often favored, as they allow for the contextualization of SEL within diverse learning experiences.

Teacher Education and Professional Development

Teachers play a pivotal role in implementing SEL policies. Effective institutionalization requires comprehensive teacher education programs that equip educators with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to foster social-emotional development. Ongoing professional development is also essential to support teachers in adapting SEL practices to diverse classroom contexts (UNESCO, 2019).

Assessment and Accountability

Assessing SEL presents significant challenges, as social-emotional competencies are complex, context-dependent, and not easily quantifiable (OECD, 2021). Nevertheless, many policy frameworks include assessment mechanisms to monitor progress and ensure accountability. These may involve self-report measures, observational tools, and performance-based assessments. However, the emphasis on measurement can lead to reductive approaches that fail to capture the richness of SEL (Biesta, 2015).

Whole-School Approaches

Institutionalization is most effective when SEL is embedded within the broader school culture. Whole-school approaches emphasize the alignment of policies, practices, and relationships to create supportive and inclusive learning environments (CASEL, 2020). This includes fostering positive school climates, promoting student voice, and engaging families and communities.

1. Challenges in Institutionalizing SEL

2. Despite growing policy interest, the institutionalization of SEL faces numerous challenges.

3. **Conceptual Ambiguity**

The lack of a universally agreed-upon definition of SEL can lead to inconsistencies in policy design and implementation. Different stakeholders may interpret SEL in divergent ways, resulting in fragmented approaches.

4. **Cultural Context and Relevance**

SEL frameworks often originate in specific cultural contexts and may not translate seamlessly across diverse settings. Concepts such as emotional expression, autonomy, and interpersonal relationships are culturally mediated, necessitating context-sensitive adaptations.

5. **Measurement and Standardization**

The push for accountability in education systems has led to efforts to standardize SEL assessment. However, this can conflict with the inherently qualitative and relational nature of social-emotional development. Over-reliance on quantitative metrics risks narrowing the scope of SEL and undermining its transformative potential.

6. **Teacher Preparedness**

Teachers may lack the training, resources, and support needed to effectively implement SEL. Additionally, the emotional labor associated with fostering students' social-emotional development can place significant demands on educators.

7. **Policy Coherence and Sustainability**

Institutionalizing SEL requires sustained commitment and coordination across multiple levels of the education system. Policy initiatives may be hindered by changes in political leadership, limited funding, and competing priorities.

Critical Perspectives on SEL Policy

While SEL is often presented as a universally beneficial framework, critical perspectives highlight potential risks associated with its institutionalization. One concern is that SEL may be used as a tool for behavioral regulation, emphasizing conformity and compliance rather than critical thinking and empowerment (Biesta, 2015). This raises questions about whose values and norms are being promoted through SEL policies.

Another critique relates to the alignment of SEL with neoliberal agendas that prioritize individual responsibility and self-management (Gillies, 2011). In this view, SEL may shift attention away from structural inequalities and place the burden of adaptation on individuals. Policymakers must therefore consider how SEL can be implemented in ways that promote equity and social justice (UNESCO, 2019).

Balancing Global Frameworks and Local Realities

The global diffusion of SEL frameworks underscores the importance of balancing international standards with local contexts. While global frameworks can provide valuable guidance and resources, they must be adapted to reflect cultural values, community needs, and educational traditions (UNESCO, 2019).

Participatory approaches to policy development can enhance the relevance and effectiveness of SEL initiatives. Engaging teachers, students, families, and community stakeholders in the design and implementation of policies can foster ownership and ensure that SEL reflects diverse perspectives.

SEL in the Indian Context: Operationalizing Policy under NEP 2020

The Indian education system offers a compelling case for examining the contextualization of SEL within national policy frameworks, particularly through the lens of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The NEP represents a significant shift toward holistic, multidisciplinary, and competency-based education, explicitly emphasizing the development of cognitive, social, emotional, and ethical capacities (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Alignment of SEL with NEP 2020 Vision

NEP 2020 envisions education as a means of fostering “good human beings” capable of rational thought, compassion, and ethical action (Ministry of Education, 2020). This vision closely aligns with SEL competencies such as empathy, self-awareness, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2020). Unlike earlier policy frameworks that prioritized rote learning and academic achievement, NEP 2020 foregrounds experiential learning, critical thinking, and socio-emotional development as integral components of schooling (OECD, 2021).

Curricular Integration in Indian Classrooms

In practice, SEL under NEP 2020 is not conceptualized as a standalone subject but as an integrated dimension across curricular and co-curricular domains (Ministry of Education, 2020). For example, the introduction of competency-based learning and reduced content load creates space for reflective activities, group work, and discussion-based pedagogy all of which foster SEL (NCERT, 2021). Classroom practices such as storytelling, art integration, and project-based learning provide culturally relevant avenues for developing emotional and social skills (UNESCO, 2019).

At the foundational and preparatory stages, play-based and activity-based learning inherently support SEL by encouraging cooperation, emotional expression, and social

(NCERT, 2021). At higher stages, interdisciplinary learning and real-world problem-solving further deepen students' socio-emotional competencies.

Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

NEP 2020 recognizes teachers as central agents in educational transformation. The policy calls for reforms in teacher education that include training in child psychology, inclusive education, and socio-emotional development. However, translating this vision into practice remains a challenge. Many Indian classrooms are characterized by large student-teacher ratios and exam-oriented cultures, which can constrain the implementation of SEL.

Professional development initiatives increasingly incorporate modules on classroom climate, emotional well-being, and student engagement. Nevertheless, sustained and context-specific training is required to equip teachers with practical strategies for embedding SEL in everyday teaching (Durlak et al., 2011).

Assessment Reforms and SEL

A key feature of NEP 2020 is the shift toward formative and competency-based assessment. This aligns with SEL by emphasizing continuous feedback, self-reflection, and holistic evaluation. Tools such as portfolios, peer assessment, and descriptive feedback can capture aspects of social-emotional development that traditional examinations overlook.

However, the challenge lies in operationalizing these assessment reforms within a system historically dominated by high-stakes testing. Without careful implementation, there is a risk that SEL may be superficially included without meaningful changes in evaluation practices.

Equity, Inclusion, and Cultural Context

India's socio-cultural diversity necessitates a context-sensitive approach to SEL. NEP 2020 emphasizes inclusion, multilingualism, and respect for cultural diversity, all of which

intersect with social-emotional competencies. For instance, fostering empathy and social awareness in Indian classrooms must account for differences in language, caste, religion, and socioeconomic background.

SEL in India is also closely linked to values education, which has deep roots in philosophical and cultural traditions. Integrating indigenous perspectives on well-being, community, and ethics can enrich SEL frameworks and enhance their relevance.

Challenges and Opportunities

Despite its progressive vision, the institutionalization of SEL under NEP 2020 faces several challenges, including resource constraints, variability in state-level implementation, and entrenched examination systems. Additionally, disparities between urban and rural schools may affect the extent to which SEL is effectively integrated.

At the same time, NEP 2020 presents significant opportunities for reimagining education in India. By embedding SEL within a broader framework of holistic development, the policy creates a foundation for nurturing emotionally resilient, socially responsible, and ethically grounded citizens.

Future Directions for SEL Policy

Looking ahead, the institutionalization of SEL will likely continue to evolve in response to emerging challenges and opportunities. The increasing integration of technology in education presents new possibilities for supporting social-emotional development, as well as new risks related to digital well-being.

There is also a growing recognition of the need to align SEL with broader efforts to promote mental health, inclusion, and sustainability. Interdisciplinary approaches that integrate

insights from psychology, education, sociology, and public policy can contribute to more holistic and effective SEL frameworks.

Conclusion

Institutionalizing Social-Emotional Learning within educational policy represents a significant shift toward more holistic and human-centered approaches to education. While considerable progress has been made in integrating SEL into policy frameworks, challenges remain in ensuring that these initiatives are meaningful, equitable, and sustainable.

This chapter has highlighted the complexity of translating SEL from conceptual frameworks into systemic practice, emphasizing the importance of context-sensitive approaches that balance global insights with local realities. The case of India under NEP 2020 further illustrates how national policy can adapt global SEL principles to local educational, cultural, and structural contexts. By adopting nuanced and critical perspectives, policymakers and educators can work toward embedding SEL in ways that truly enhance the well-being and development of all learners.

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From Kansa to Global Dictators: Youth, Ethics, and the Future of Leadership

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Abstract

This paper adopts a comparative historical and ethical framework to examine how the mythological figure of Kansa serves as an early archetype of authoritarian rule and how similar patterns persist in modern dictatorships. Kansa's reign, marked by fear of prophecy, elimination of perceived threats, and centralized control, reflects core features of authoritarian leadership. By drawing parallels with modern figures such as Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Benito Mussolini, and Kim Jong-un, the study identifies recurring strategies of power consolidation, including suppression of dissent, propaganda, and enforced loyalty. A central focus is the role of youth, who are both victims and instruments of such regimes, subjected to indoctrination, militarization, and ideological conditioning to ensure continuity of power. The paper highlights the erosion of ethical leadership, where power becomes detached from responsibility and obedience replaces moral reasoning. This ethical decline leads to dehumanization, evident in both mythological violence and modern practices such as surveillance and information control. The study also explores the role of cultural narratives, particularly the festival of Dhanuyatra, as tools of civic education that preserve historical memory and encourage critical reflection on leadership and authority. By bridging mythological and contemporary contexts, the paper underscores the continuity of authoritarian tendencies across time. It concludes that understanding these patterns is a moral

imperative. When ethical frameworks collapse and critical thinking is suppressed, especially among youth, authoritarianism re-emerges in new forms. The study advocates ethical leadership grounded in empathy, accountability, and inclusivity to safeguard democratic values and human dignity.

Keywords: Authoritarianism, Ethical Leadership, Youth, Propaganda, Power

Introduction

The exercise of power has remained one of the most defining forces in shaping human civilization. Across cultures and historical periods, leadership has determined whether societies flourish through justice and cooperation or deteriorate under oppression and fear. While ethical leadership promotes accountability, empathy, and collective well-being, authoritarian leadership often leads to repression, violence, and moral decay. A comparative exploration of mythological and historical figures reveals that the misuse of power follows recurring patterns, regardless of time or geography.

In the Indian mythological tradition, Kansa stands as a powerful representation of tyranny driven by fear and insecurity. His rule, characterized by paranoia and brutality, offers an early model of authoritarian governance rooted in self-preservation. In the modern era, leaders such as Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Benito Mussolini, and Kim Jong-un have demonstrated how similar patterns of domination persist in political systems. Despite differences in ideology

and context, these figures relied on fear, propaganda, and suppression to maintain control.

This paper argues that the continuity between mythological archetypes and modern dictatorships is not coincidental but indicative of deeper psychological and structural tendencies in the exercise of power. By examining these patterns through an ethical and interdisciplinary framework, the study highlights the urgent need for cultivating ethical

leadership. Furthermore, it emphasizes the critical role of youth in resisting authoritarianism and shaping a future grounded in democratic values and human dignity.

Review of Literature

The study of authoritarianism has been extensively explored across political theory, history, and ethics. Hannah Arendt (1951) provides one of the most influential analyses of totalitarian regimes, arguing that such systems rely on terror and ideology to dismantle individuality and critical thinking. According to Arendt, authoritarian leaders create conditions in which citizens become isolated and incapable of collective resistance, thereby ensuring the stability of oppressive regimes.

Similarly, Timothy Snyder (2017) emphasizes the gradual nature of authoritarianism, warning that tyranny often emerges not through sudden coups but through the erosion of democratic norms and institutions. Snyder highlights the importance of civic vigilance, arguing that the failure to question authority enables the normalization of oppression.

Martha C. Nussbaum (2010) contributes to this discourse by stressing the role of education in sustaining democracy. She argues that the humanities play a crucial role in developing empathy, critical thinking, and ethical reasoning, which are essential for resisting authoritarian tendencies. Without such education, societies risk producing individuals who are susceptible to manipulation and incapable of moral judgment.

Within the Indian cultural context, the study of mythological narratives and performative traditions provides unique insights into leadership and ethics. The festival of Dhanuyatra has been interpreted by scholars as a living pedagogical tool that dramatizes the consequences of tyranny. Panda (n.d.) suggests that the portrayal of Kansa in Dhanuyatra serves as a moral lesson, reminding audiences of the dangers of unchecked power. Such cultural narratives

function as repositories of ethical knowledge, bridging the gap between myth and contemporary political realities.

Kansa as an Archetype of Fear Based Power

Kansa, the tyrant king of Mathura, occupies a central place in Indian mythological narratives as a symbol of oppressive authority. His reign is driven by a prophecy that foretells his death at the hands of his sister's child. This prophecy becomes the foundation of his governance, leading him to commit acts of extreme violence in an attempt to secure his power. The killing of innocent children, imprisonment of family members, and suppression of dissent illustrate the extent to which fear can distort leadership.

Although Kansa's story is rooted in mythology, it reflects a broader psychological archetype of authoritarian leadership. His actions demonstrate how fear can override rational decision-making, transforming governance into a mechanism of control rather than service. The centralization of power in his hands eliminates institutional checks and balances, allowing him to act without accountability. This concentration of authority is a defining feature of authoritarian regimes, where leaders prioritize self-preservation over public welfare.

The ethical implications of Kansa's rule are profound. His reliance on violence and coercion erodes moral values and creates a culture of fear among his subjects. In such an environment, obedience replaces critical thinking, and individuals become complicit in sustaining oppressive systems. Kansa's eventual downfall serves as a moral lesson, illustrating the inevitable consequences of unethical leadership.

Authoritarian Patterns in Global Contexts

Modern dictatorships provide real-world examples of the patterns observed in Kansa's narrative. Adolf Hitler's regime in Nazi Germany was built on a foundation of racial ideology and propaganda. By constructing an "enemy" in the form of minority groups, Hitler justified policies of exclusion, persecution, and genocide. The use of propaganda ensured that citizens were exposed only to state-approved narratives, limiting their ability to question authority.

Joseph Stalin's rule in the Soviet Union further exemplifies the role of fear in authoritarian governance. Through purges, show trials, and labor camps, Stalin created an environment in which dissent was equated with treason. Surveillance mechanisms ensured that citizens were constantly monitored, reinforcing a culture of suspicion and compliance.

Benito Mussolini's Fascist regime in Italy demonstrates how authoritarianism can also operate through cultural and symbolic means. By transforming nationalism into spectacle, Mussolini cultivated a sense of unity and loyalty that masked the repressive nature of his rule. This performative aspect of authoritarianism highlights the role of cultural manipulation in sustaining power.

Kim Jong-un's leadership in North Korea represents a contemporary manifestation of these patterns. His regime combines strict information control, surveillance, and dynastic authority to maintain dominance. The isolation of citizens from external influences ensures that alternative perspectives are suppressed, reinforcing the legitimacy of the regime.

Indian Historical Parallels

In addition to global examples, Indian historical and mythological narratives provide further insights into authoritarian tendencies. Duryodhana represents the dangers of ego-driven leadership, where personal insecurity leads to the denial of justice and the humiliation of others. His actions demonstrate how the pursuit of power can override ethical considerations.

Ashoka, particularly in his early reign as Chandashoka, illustrates the consequences of expansionist ambition. The violence of the Kalinga war reveals the human cost of unchecked power, while his subsequent transformation highlights the possibility of ethical awakening.

Ajatashatru exemplifies the role of ambition and betrayal in the consolidation of power. His ascent to the throne through the imprisonment and death of his father reflects the extent to which individuals may go to secure authority.

Similarly, Alauddin Khilji and Aurangzeb demonstrate how surveillance, strict policies, and ideological governance can create stability in the short term but lead to long-term fragmentation and mistrust.

Comparative Analysis

A comparative examination of these figures reveals consistent patterns in authoritarian leadership. Fear emerges as a central tool of governance, whether in the form of prophecy, ideology, or political paranoia. The suppression of dissent is another common feature, achieved through violence, imprisonment, or cultural control. Propaganda and manipulation of information play a crucial role in shaping public perception and maintaining legitimacy.

Despite these similarities, differences in context and method highlight the adaptability of authoritarianism. While Kansa's rule relies on direct violence, modern dictators often employ more sophisticated mechanisms such as surveillance and media control. However, the underlying principles remain the same, emphasizing the continuity of authoritarian tendencies across time.

Below is a clear comparative chart of authoritarian rule:

Leader / Figure	Source of Power	Core Fear		Methods of Control	Treatment of Dissent	Impact on Society
		/	Motivation			
Kansa	Mythological kingship		Fear of prophecy	Violence, executions, centralization	Elimination of threats	Moral decline, fear-based rule
Adolf Hitler	Racial ideology, nationalism		Fear of “racial impurity”	Propaganda, terror, indoctrination	Imprisonment, genocide	Mass destruction, Holocaust
Joseph Stalin	Political authority, communism		Fear of opposition	Purges, surveillance, labor camps	Show trials, executions	Culture of fear, mass repression
Benito Mussolini	Fascist nationalism		Fear of instability	Propaganda, political spectacle	Suppression, censorship	Controlled society, loss of freedoms

Kim Jong-un	Dynastic rule	Fear of regime collapse	Surveillance, isolation, propaganda	Punishment, labor camps	Extreme control, limited freedom
Duryodhana	Royal entitlement	Fear of losing power/status	Humiliation, manipulation	Denial of justice	Social conflict, moral breakdown
Ashoka (before Kalinga)	Imperial expansion	Fear of resistance	War, violence, coercion	Suppression through force	Mass suffering, later transformation
Ajatashatru	Ambition for throne	Fear of losing authority	Violence, imprisonment	Elimination of rivals	Political instability, betrayal
Alauddin Khilji	Military and administrative power	Fear of rebellion	Surveillance, strict laws	Harsh punishments	Order with fear, loss of trust
Aurangzeb	Religious-political authority	Fear of diversity	Religious policies, control	Cultural suppression	Division, weakened unity

Ethical Implications

The ethical consequences of authoritarian leadership extend beyond individual suffering to affect the fabric of society. The dehumanization of individuals reduces them to tools or threats, undermining the principles of equality and dignity. Arendt (1951) argues that this process is central to totalitarian regimes, where moral judgment is replaced by blind obedience.

The erosion of institutions further exacerbates these effects, as systems designed to ensure accountability are weakened or dismantled. This concentration of power allows leaders to operate without constraints, increasing the likelihood of abuse. Over time, the normalization of fear and repression erodes societal trust, making it difficult to rebuild democratic systems.

Dhanuyatra as Cultural Pedagogy

The festival of Dhanuyatra serves as a unique example of how cultural traditions can function as tools of political education. By dramatizing the story of Kansa, the festival provides a platform

for reflecting on the nature of power and its ethical implications. The immersive nature of the performance engages audiences in a way that traditional forms of education may not.

For youth, Dhanuyatra offers an opportunity to develop critical awareness and question authority. By witnessing the consequences of tyranny, they are encouraged to reflect on the importance of ethical leadership. The repetition of this narrative reinforces cultural memory, ensuring that the lessons of history are not forgotten.

Youth and the Future of Leadership

The role of youth in shaping the future of leadership cannot be overstated. As the next generation of leaders and citizens, they have the potential to challenge authoritarian tendencies and promote democratic values. Education plays a crucial role in this process, providing the tools necessary for critical thinking and ethical reasoning.

Nussbaum (2010) emphasizes that education should go beyond technical skills to include the development of empathy and moral judgment. By fostering these qualities, societies can create individuals who are capable of resisting manipulation and advocating for justice.

Civic engagement is another essential component of ethical leadership. By participating in democratic processes and holding leaders accountable, youth can contribute to the preservation of democratic institutions. Historical awareness further enhances this capacity, allowing individuals to recognize patterns of authoritarianism and respond effectively.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of Kansa and modern dictators reveals a persistent pattern in the misuse of power. From mythological narratives to contemporary political systems, authoritarian leadership is characterized by fear, repression, and ethical decline. These patterns highlight the importance of understanding history and culture as tools for preventing the recurrence of tyranny.

Cultural traditions such as Dhanuyatra play a vital role in preserving this awareness, providing a means of engaging with ethical questions in a collective and meaningful way. Ultimately, the future of leadership depends on the ability of youth to cultivate critical thinking, ethical awareness, and civic responsibility. By learning from the past and embracing democratic values, societies can build a future that prioritizes human dignity and justice.

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Section: 5

Digital Humanities and Heritage Documentation

**Deconstructing Linguistic Hierarchies and Literary Canons: The Role of AI and
Heritage Documentation in Indian Context**

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Abstract

This paper critically examines the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in deconstructing linguistic hierarchies and reshaping literary canons within the Indian context. Historically, India's linguistic landscape has been shaped by colonial and caste-based power structures, privileging English and Sanskrit over regional and marginalized languages. AI-driven translation tools, digital archives, and algorithmic literary curation present opportunities to challenge these hierarchies by democratizing access to non-canonical texts. However, as postcolonial theorists like Gauri Viswanathan and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argue, language and translation are deeply political acts, often reinforcing existing structures of dominance. Drawing on Jacques Derrida's concept of *différance*, this paper interrogates whether AI serves as a genuine tool of linguistic democratization or if it remains complicit in perpetuating hegemonic literary traditions. The study explores AI's intervention in machine translation, its impact on canon formation through digital archiving, and the biases embedded in algorithmic selection of literary texts. While AI-powered platforms such as Pratilipi and StoryMirror enable vernacular authors to bypass traditional gatekeeping mechanisms, concerns about algorithmic biases and commercialization persist. Ultimately, this paper argues that while AI has the potential to decentralize dominant languages and amplify marginalized literary voices, its effectiveness depends on critical engagement with the ideological structures embedded in AI systems. A deconstructive approach to AI and literature is necessary to ensure that digital technologies do not merely replicate historical linguistic inequalities but actively contribute to the diversification of India's literary landscape.

Keywords: AI and literature, linguistic hierarchies, literary canon, postcolonial studies, deconstruction, machine translation, digital archives, Indian languages, AI bias

Introduction

The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) in literary and linguistic spheres has reshaped long-standing hierarchies of language and canon formation. In the Indian context, where linguistic diversity and colonial legacies have historically shaped literary production, AI presents both a challenge and an opportunity. AI-driven translation tools, text generators, and digital archives have the potential to decentralize dominant languages like English and Hindi while amplifying marginalized linguistic traditions. However, these technologies are not neutral; they are embedded in ideological frameworks that often reinforce existing power structures.

Rationale and Critical Perspective

The rationale for this paper lies in the urgent need to critically examine the role of AI in disrupting linguistic hierarchies and reshaping Indian literary canons. While technological advancements promise democratization, they often replicate existing socio-linguistic inequalities. As scholars like Jacques Derrida and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argue, language is deeply tied to power structures, and any technological intervention must be understood through a critical lens. AI translation, archiving, and publishing systems risk privileging dominant languages and canonical texts, thereby re-inscribing the very hierarchies they claim to dismantle.

This paper adopts a deconstructive approach, drawing on Derrida's concept of *différance* to examine how AI mediates linguistic representation in India. It also engages with postcolonial critiques, particularly those of Gauri Viswanathan and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, to understand how AI operates within India's colonial and caste-inflected literary landscape. By interrogating AI's role in literary production, this study seeks to uncover whether AI serves as a genuine tool for linguistic democratization or if it remains complicit in perpetuating entrenched literary power structures.

AI and the Colonial Legacy of Language in India

Language in India has long been a site of power struggle. The British colonial administration institutionalized English as the language of governance and higher education, creating a linguistic divide between the elite and the masses. As Gauri Viswanathan argues in *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*, the introduction of English literature into Indian curricula was a deliberate strategy to cultivate a class of intermediaries who would uphold colonial interests (Viswanathan 23). Post-independence, English continued to dominate literary production, relegating regional languages to the periphery.

AI, particularly machine translation and natural language processing (NLP) models, is now challenging this hegemony. Tools like Google Translate, Microsoft Translator, and AI-driven literary archives are facilitating the accessibility of Indian regional literatures across linguistic boundaries. These technologies can be seen as enacting what Derrida terms *différance*, a constant deferral of meaning and a disruption of hierarchical binaries (Derrida 25). By translating and disseminating texts across multiple languages, AI unsettles the primacy of English in Indian literary discourse.

AI and the Question of Canon Formation

Literary canons are historically shaped by institutional and ideological forces that determine what is deemed "worthy" of preservation and study. In India, the dominance of English and Sanskritic traditions has marginalized Dalit, Adivasi, and vernacular literatures. AI-based archival projects, such as the Digital Library of India and Project Madurai, have played a crucial role in recovering lost and overlooked literary traditions.

However, the process of digitization and algorithmic selection often reproduces biases inherent in existing canons. As Safiya Umoja Noble argues in *Algorithms of Oppression*, AI is

not an impartial tool but one shaped by the values embedded in its training data (Noble 12). If AI is trained predominantly on elite literary works, it risks reinforcing existing hierarchies rather than dismantling them. This raises a crucial question: Can AI truly democratize literary production, or does it merely extend the power of dominant linguistic structures into digital spaces?

Deconstruction and the Politics of AI Translation

One of AI's most significant interventions in Indian literature has been in the realm of translation. Traditionally, translation has been a deeply political act, often mediated by ideological and commercial interests. AI-driven translation tools have the potential to challenge these hierarchies by making lesser-known literary works accessible to wider audiences. However, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak cautions in *The Politics of Translation* (1993), translation is not a neutral act but one that involves the imposition of meaning from a dominant linguistic framework (Spivak 179).

For instance, AI translations of Dalit literature into English often fail to capture the cultural and political nuances of caste oppression. The AI model, trained on predominantly upper-caste and English-language texts, may render certain experiences illegible or dilute their radical potential. This aligns with Derrida's critique of logocentrism, where meaning is constantly deferred and reconstituted within structures of power (Derrida 30). AI, instead of merely being a tool of linguistic expansion, must be critically examined for the ways in which it mediates and potentially distorts regional literary expressions.

AI, Heritage Documentation, and the Expansion of Literary Canons

An important extension of AI's role in deconstructing linguistic hierarchies lies in its capacity to document and preserve intangible cultural heritage, thereby expanding the very

definition of what constitutes a literary canon. In the Indian context, literary production has historically privileged written texts in dominant languages, often excluding oral, performative, and community-based traditions. AI-driven documentation technologies challenge this limitation by enabling the preservation and circulation of vernacular cultural expressions that exist outside conventional literary frameworks.

The annual Dhanu Yatra offers a compelling case study in this regard. As one of the world's largest open-air theatrical performances, Dhanu Yatra transforms the town of Bargarh into a performative space where mythological narratives from the Krishna tradition are enacted through live dialogue, improvisation, and community participation in the Odia language. Despite its scale and cultural richness, such performative traditions have historically remained marginalized within formal literary discourse due to their oral and ephemeral nature.

This marginalization reflects the broader processes of canon formation discussed by Gauri Viswanathan, who highlights how institutional frameworks privilege certain textual forms, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who underscores the politics inherent in representation and translation. The exclusion of festivals like Dhanu Yatra from mainstream literary canons demonstrates how linguistic and cultural hierarchies extend beyond language into the very modes of textuality and preservation.

AI technologies particularly speech recognition, natural language processing, and digital archiving offer new possibilities for addressing these exclusions. Through automated transcription, multilingual translation, and large-scale digital storage, AI can convert oral performances into accessible textual and audiovisual archives. Such processes disrupt the binary between oral and written traditions, enacting what Jacques Derrida conceptualizes as *différance*, wherein meaning is continuously deferred and reconstituted across contexts. By

mediating Dhanu Yatra performances across languages and formats, AI unsettles the hierarchical distinction between canonical literature and vernacular cultural expression.

However, this apparent democratization must be approached critically. As Safiya Umoja Noble argues, algorithmic systems are not neutral but are shaped by the biases embedded in their training data and institutional design. In the case of Dhanu Yatra, AI systems may struggle to accurately capture dialectal variations, performative nuances, and culturally specific idioms intrinsic to Odia oral traditions. The risk, therefore, is that AI-driven documentation may standardize or dilute these expressions, reinscribing the very hierarchies it seeks to dismantle.

Furthermore, the digitization of intangible heritage raises important questions about cultural ownership and representation. When festivals like Dhanu Yatra are archived and disseminated through AI platforms, they may become subject to processes of commodification and global circulation that echo colonial patterns of cultural extraction as stated by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's critique of linguistic imperialism, wherein the translation and global dissemination of cultural texts can reinforce asymmetrical power relations.

Yet, despite these challenges, AI retains transformative potential when deployed within ethically grounded and community-centered frameworks. Participatory approaches that involve local practitioners in the documentation, annotation, and interpretation of Dhanu Yatra can help mitigate algorithmic bias and ensure more nuanced representation. In this sense, AI does not merely function as a tool of preservation but as a site of epistemic negotiation one that redefines the contours of literary canons by incorporating performative, vernacular, and marginalized cultural forms.

Thus, the integration of heritage documentation into AI discourse extends the scope of literary democratization beyond textual production to include lived cultural practices. By bringing traditions like Dhanu Yatra into digital and scholarly visibility, AI has the potential to not only deconstruct linguistic hierarchies but also to fundamentally reshape the boundaries of Indian literary context.

Conclusion

AI holds significant potential to deconstruct linguistic hierarchies and reshape literary canons in India. However, its impact is contingent upon critical engagement with its ideological underpinnings. AI is neither inherently emancipatory nor entirely complicit; rather, it reflects the structures within which it operates.

The inclusion of intangible cultural heritage demonstrates such as Dhanu Yatra demonstrates how AI can expand literary boundaries. Yet, as postcolonial scholars remind us; linguistic equity remains a political struggle. The future of linguistic democratization in India depends not merely on technological advancement but on sustained critical engagement with the cultural, political, and epistemological dimensions of AI. It may serve as a tool for amplifying marginalized voices, but its effectiveness will depend on how it is developed, deployed, and critiqued within India's complex linguistic landscape. Rather than viewing AI as a neutral force, scholars and practitioners must actively interrogate its role in shaping the future of Indian literature.

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Thank You