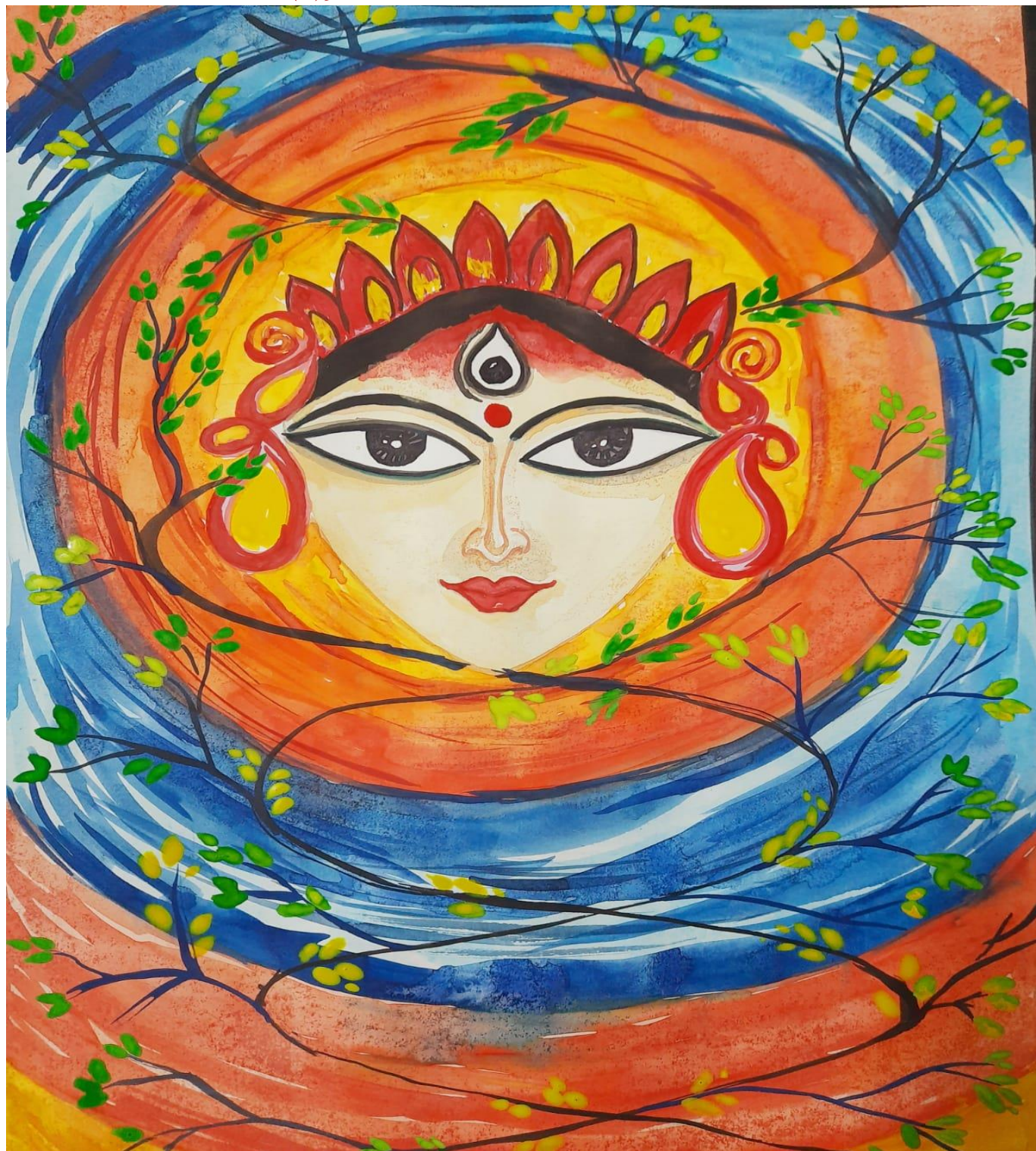


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Lokaratna is the e-journal of the Folklore Foundation, Bhubaneswar. *Lokaratna* is a peer-reviewed International journal with ISSN: 2347-6427. The purpose of the journal is to explore the rich cultural tradition of India for a wider readership. Any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

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The objectives of the journal are:

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From the Desk of the Editor in Chief



We are happy to launch the next volume of *Lokaratna* in the beginning of the New Year!

Though the last two years have been difficult times for us, we worked consistently and diligently in the pursuit of knowledge and scholarship. We could organize a good number of webinars under the aegis of Folklore Foundation. The talks delivered by eminent scholars like Professor D.P. Pattanayak, Niladri Das, Indranil Acharya and others as part of the webinars, will be memorable events to cherish. We have been regular in bringing out the *Lokaratna* issues thanks to the dedicated team of editors and contributors. We have decided to make *Lokaratna bilingual* now. We also working towards making it an indexed journal for the benefit of our contributors. We thank you all for your scholarly contributions and look forward to your continuous support in the years to come. Wish you all a Happy and Peaceful New year!

Dr Mahendra Kumar Mishra

Editor in Chief

Editorial



The Primordial Goddess in the Mundane World

Worshipping the primordial goddess exists in the Indian tradition from the ancient times. The stone images excavated from the Indus valley civilization show that the early inhabitants worshipped the mother goddess. This tradition continues to be there even in the present time too. Villages in many parts of India have their gram debis (village deities) who are integral part of the life and rituals of village. Villagers believe that the gram debis grant them well-being and protection. They are respected and worshipped by people to safeguard their crops and protect them and their live stocks from diseases. Many villages are named after their presiding deities. When a groom bids farewell to her village and prepares to go to her in-laws village, she visits the gram Debi and pays her respect, seeks Her blessings and leaves for her in-laws' village. The images of the gram debis are installed in hills and groves and such hills and groves are respected by the people. As a result, they are not destroyed. Worshipping the Mother Goddess is thus associated with ecology and welfare of the humanity.

Nature and the human civilization have an intimate relationship since time immemorial. Throughout the ages our indigenous traditions have been close to nature though we come across certain instances of disruption with the advent and influence of colonialism. In recent years, there have been several attempts to raise public

consciousness about environmental degradation in India. Awareness has been created in media and by government organizations for preservation of nature. We have substantial literature for creating ecological consciousness. However, the discourse about conservation of nature views nature from a utilitarian point of view. It views nature as resource or commodity to be preserved for the future sustenance of human beings. This as a modernist concept falls in the same paradigm of “develop-mentality.” However, it is interesting to note that certain indigenous communities consider nature not as commodity, but they maintain a kind of filial relationship treating different elements of nature as members of the family and live in close proximity. They humanize nature as mother. There are examples in the folklore showing adivasis adopt elements of nature as their family members. The adivasis consider nature as part of their world and as part of traditions to respect nature as they find it to be sacred and nurturing their life. In an article titled, “Friend and Freud,” in *Outlook* (2006), Shiv Visvanathan explains that the fishermen community on the Gujarat shore gave up hunting whales once they were convinced that the whales had been there in the forms of their ancestors. In the same manner, an indigenous community in Western Maharashtra considers a grove to be sacred and useful for sati Asra (water deity) and for treatment of snake bite of cattle. Hence they don’t cut them. As a result the grove is saved from the onslaught of deforestation. Madhav Gadgil and V.D. Varthak illustrate it in an article title “The Sacred Uses of Nature.” Thus, we find that nature worship has been a part of the traditions of many indigenous communities in India. Sarit K. Chaudhuri in his study on the Arunachal Pradesh tribe states that “most of the tribes believe that the forest is the abode of their numerous gods and spirits, both who are benevolent and malevolent in nature. For example, the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh believe that the huge tree like *Rotne* found in their surrounding forest is the abode of the spirit called *Epom* for which they usually don’t fell such tree... The concept of sacred plant is also traceable among the Hill Miri tribe. Certain plants such as Sigrek Sin, Tam etc are considered as sacred place and naturally Hill Miris don’t spit or throw stones or urinate in such areas which may affect the spirits residing there” (4-5). The tribals of India continue to maintain their

proximity with nature even today. They consider it not as their means of livelihood, but source of sustenance, life giving force, nourishing mother. Some communities seem to have a mythical link with different forms of nature. Nature worship has been a common practice among the tribes of India. Several tribes in India worship plants. Certain plants play an important role in their rituals and social events. The tribes of Sambalpur region of Western Orissa too give plants an important position in their festivals, rituals and social events. Their festivals such as Karma, Nuakhai are primarily about worshipping and venerating the mother earth. Some communities bury their dead and plant a tree on the grave. The tree grows so well there. The spirit seems to protect the tree. People don't desecrate it.

This volume of *Lokaratna* represents the themes: ecocriticism, divinity, ecological equilibrium, and welfare of the humankind. The cover page beautifully depicts these themes. The articles in the folklore sections also largely cover these aspects. One may wonder about the relationship between the Mother Goddess and ecology. We can juxtapose them by looking at the people's beliefs. People believe that the Mother Goddess is part of their lives. She is a witness to their personal and social activities. She not only protects their wealth and health and environment but also ensures peace and harmony in and around. According to myths and legends the Mother Goddess was invoked when there were disturbances caused by demons. This has remained as an integral part of people's cultural life even today. Even now people worship her through rituals and festivals. Ishani Saha in her article "Durga Puja: Some Localized Ritualistic Performances" gives an overview of the Durga Puja rituals as celebrated at different levels. Anandita Sarkar's article "And I cannot describe how my body feels: Folk Beliefs and Taboos among Menstruating Women in Rajbangshi Culture" describes how certain communities celebrate womanhood through rituals. Arunima Goswami in her article "Performance and Representation of Reconstructed Identity in North-East India Tiwa Cultural Festival" gives a detailed account of how efforts to patronize and preserve cultural festivals in recent times. Pawan Toppo's article "Re-Examining the Folklore

and Folk Festivals of the Oraon or Kurukh Tribe with Special Reference to the Oraons of Dooars” provides an overview of the festivals celebrated by the Oraons of Dooars. Aokumla Walling’s article “Folk beliefs of Rice in Naga Society” highlights the place of rice in the belief system of the Nagas and how that is reflected in their rituals and festivals.

Monali Sahu Pathange and P.V. Amith Kumar in their article “Reading the ‘Hybrid’ Mother: Representation of Divinity and Grotesqueness in the Mother Figure of Ben Okri’s *Abiku Trilogy*” ‘explore the mysterious and extramundane life of the Yoruba community as represented in the fiction of the celebrated African writer Ben Okri.

As mentioned above, maintaining harmony and equilibrium in the environment is important for a smooth and peaceful life. In the context of translation too it is required to maintain balance between the Source Text (ST) and the Translated Text (TT). Scholars have argued for faithfulness of the TT to the ST. But Aloka Patel’s article titled “Interrogating Fidelity in Translation: T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* in Odia” revisits fidelity in translation from a different perspective. She argues that fidelity becomes a desirable element in a translated text in view of its pedagogical use. She exemplifies this taking T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* and Gyanindra Varma’s *Podabhuin* as a case. Seemita Mohanty and J.M. Mohanty in their article, “Time and Timelessness in Sitakant Mahapatra’s Early Poetry” study Sitakanta Mahapatra’s poems and explore the concept of time and timelessness highlighting the ways Mahapatra juxtaposes traditional life based on mythical traditions with the mundane urban life. Minati Mohapatra’s article “The Narrative of a Writer as a female with Alice Munro” deals with the representation of human complexities as found in the novels of Alice Munro and as represented by her as a woman writer. Pradip Kumar Panda’s article “Mulk Raj Anand’s Early Novels A Panoramic View” foregrounds the theme of exploitation in the early novels of Mulk Raj Anand. Aditya Meher in his article “Nature Studies: A Walk Across *Kanthapura*” studies the relationship between human and the environment.

The pedagogy section has some interesting and relevant articles. They relate to information technology, English language teaching in ESP contexts and issues related to medium of instruction. Swami Bairi's article "Role of ICT in Determining the Vocabulary Coverage of English Coursebooks" informs that ICT tools can be a useful instrument to evaluate coursebooks mainly in finding out vocabulary coverage. S. Shravan Kumar argues that if proper coordination is maintained in needs analysis of ESP learners, materials development, and teacher training, it will benefit the learners a great deal. E. Kasthuri in her article "Medium of Instruction in Changing Contexts: A Study of Kerala" demonstrates that medium of instruction has been tilting towards English in spite of warnings from intellectuals and experts that mother tongue instruction is beneficial for young learners. She offers suggestions as to how government schools could be improved to maintain good quality education. Koteswara Rao in his article "The Teaching of English at DIET Colleges of Andhra Pradesh in India: Realities and Remedies" studies the problems of teaching English in rural A.P. and states that the problems are due to lack of appropriate training at DIET colleges. He suggests some measures to strengthen the methods and materials in teacher education at DIET colleges. The Book Review Section has a book review by Kandi Kamala. She has reviewed a book titled *Quality and Research in Higher Education* written by Kamalakar. The interview section has a conversation with Mr. Madhabananda Panda, the renowned writer of children's Literature in Odia.

All the articles are research based with innovative research ideas and insights. They touch upon new areas of enquiry. I am sure this volume will be like a feast of ideas to the readers! We offer this beautiful resource for reading to our dear readers!

Anand Mahanand

Executive Editor

Call for Papers

Lokaratna Vol. XV (June, 2022)

We invite original and un-published research articles, in the fields of Folklore, Literature, Culture, Pedagogy and English Language Teaching for the 14th volume of *Lokaratna*; a peer-reviewed International online journal with ISSN: 2347-6427. Contributors are requested to adopt the following guidelines to write their papers:

- Font - Times New Roman with 12 font size
- Line spacing - 1.5
- The paper should have an abstract of 150 -200 words.
- The abstract should be followed by about 5 key words.
- For in-text citation and references, please follow the APA style (6th Edition).

Deadline for the submission of the manuscript is **31.03.2022** and could be sent to the following:

Dr Mahendra Kumar Mishra

Editor-in- Chief, Lokaratna, Folklore Foundation, Bhubaneswar

lokaratnaindia@gmail.com, anand@efluniversity.ac.in

Please visit the following website for the previous issues of Lokaratna:

<http://folklorefoundation.org.in/>

Please follow the following tips while writing/revising your paper

- The Abstract goes after the title page. Title has to be in bold.
- Write your name and institutional affiliation after the title and before the Abstract. Only the author's name is in bold.
- It should have the same font (size and type) as the rest of the paper.
- It should stick to one page.
- Double-space all page text.
- Center and bold the word "Abstract" at the top of the paper.
- Don't indent the first line of the abstract body. The body should also be in plain text.
- For the keywords, place it on the line after the abstract and indent the first line (but not subsequent lines). The first letter in "Keywords:" is capitalized, italicized, and followed by a colon. The actual keywords are sentence case and in plain font.
- List each keyword one after the other, and separate them by a comma.
- After the last keyword, no ending punctuation is needed
- The word limit for an Abstract is between 150 and 250.
- Don't align the right margin of the Abstract or the paper

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Durga Puja: Some Localised Ritualistic Performances

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Abstract

India is known for the worship of many primordial Goddess from Ancient times. India has been worshipping Goddess for thousands of years, evident from those stone statues found in the ancient Indus valley sites, like Mahenjo-Daro, Harappa, Lothal. Evidence of worshipping Mother Goddess was the ‘Terracotta Figure’, found in Mahenjodaro. Hence the worship of Durga (the Mother Goddess) has its origin many times back in history. Each place (state > district > city > village) has its own cultural assimilation that demarcates their ritualistic performance from the other. The Bengali community is widely known for its greatest and iconic rituals of their biggest festival Durga Puja. It’s not only the celebration of victory of the Goddess (virtue of righteousness) over the demon (evil force); instead, we can say it is the celebration of Bengali tradition and culture. On that backdrop, West Bengal has its own variations of performing some customs. This paper has shown a very localized version of a small village under the Alipurduar district, Kamakhyaguri. The rituals that I have considered are Dhunuchi Naach Aratika/Arati, Kolabou or Navapatrika, Kumari puja or Kanya Puja, and Dashami Bhog Ritual.

Keywords: Myth of Goddess Durga, Worship of goddess Durga, Shaktism in Bengal, Dhunuchi Arati

Introduction

The myth behind Durga Puja is very much well known and not that much known to many of us in detail. Durga, the Mother-Goddess killed the buffalo demon ‘Mahiish-asura’. That can be observed in every pandal. People worship Devi Durga with quite oppositional aspects. Thus the rituals are also based on that several oppositional thoughts. These oppositions are between the peaceful, beautiful, lovable motherly figure, wife of ‘Siva’ and also she as ferocious, bloody, left-handed, avenging destroyer, powerful warrior. She is being empowered by ‘Trimurti’ (Brahma, Vishnu, Siva) and other Gods. Rituals like when the devotees see the Devi as warrior, perform the ‘Dhunuchi Naach Arati’ (ancient practice) to rejuvenate the Devi with energy. This is related to the mythical belief that before she went to the war, the Gods did an Arati (Dhoop Arati) to empower the Goddess with full energy. Apart from this, there are so many rituals which is either the celebration of Devi as the daughter or mother (like Dashami Bhog ritual) or she as Adi-Shakti / Parama Shakti (main form of many goddess) and feminine power of transformation (Kolabou-Navapatrika ritual and Kumari puja ritual). I have discussed these rituals. To understand it from some critical perspective, I have included theoretical lens of feminism.

‘Shakti’ Puja and ‘Dhunuchi’

There are certain type of Shakta beliefs and practices which in combination construct Bengali Shaktism. The devotional form or bhakti strand involves “...love of a particular form of the Goddess and her worships” (McDaniel 6). The power and worship of Goddess, which was done by tantric yogies, was transferred into the loving and

beautiful image of Goddess around the eighteenth century. Thus Durga puja can be appropriately seen from the angle of emotional bhakti in West Bengal. Hence Shakti Bhakti is not only simply obedience. As the objectives ‘love and beautiful’ emphasizes on the intense love of deity and emotional connection, is more valuable. If she is happy with the ritualistic performance, she (Durga) blessed the land with infinite harvest. If she is somehow not welcomed properly, she may curse. As the village nurtures the mythical idea that the Devi is coming on horse, ‘nouka’ (boat) may cause natural disasters (earthquake, drought and extreme rain) which may effect the harvesting and the villagers may face scarcity of grains. On the other side if she is coming in the ‘paalki’, or on back of elephant, it is supposed that she will carry the good fortune and wealth with her.

Shakta Religion and Durga Puja worship:

Bhakti

Path	Devotion
Goddess image	Mother and Daughter
Goddess abode	Statue, human heart, heaven
Practitioner roles	Child, Parent
Devotees/practitioners emotion	love, passion, affection
Religious experience	Self-love, darshan, dream command

Dhunuchi is an essential part of Shakti-Bhakti, Goddess worship in Bengal. It is said that Dhunuchi has its important role in purification. Whether it is in the scientific ground (by purifying the ground) or in religious ground (by purifying the heart of

devotees), it creates the pure devotional atmosphere. It connects people with the emotion of 'Bhakti Vaab' and sense of greatest Festival 'Durga Puja'. That huge extension of fragrant (dhoop) and intense smoke is only seen in Shakti puja in the village. Both Durga and Kali is warrior Goddess. The pandals amid that frankincense smoke, symbolically represents the victory of battlefield. According to the Vayu Purana, a Hindu text, said that God Shiva is of twofold nature (male and female) – Purusha and Shakti. Purusha is peaceful, meditative inner part. Shakti is the nature (destroyer and preserver), fierce, powerful, warrior figure. That's why Shakti is in need to restore and regain the energy time to time. That very concept is there behind 'Dhunuchi Arati or Dhunuchi Nritya'.

'DHUNUCHI' and 'DHAAK':



Fig 2: Saha, Govinda. *Sprinkling 'Dhoop' on Coconut Husk*. Pool Paar, Kamakhyaguri , 24 Oct. 2020.

'Dhunuchi', the container is made of soil. It's an earthen pot, flared shape. To lit up the 'Dhunuchi' several ingredients are being used. Here it is made of the combination of 'schoba' (coconut husk) and 'Dhoop' (the resin of sal tree). It is the spectacular sight to see the smoke dance or nritya Arati with the beats of Dhaak. Beating of Dhaak creates the ambience, filled the air with joy and Divine sound and dominates the heart of

devotees. Dhaak and Dhunuchi is the iconic sign of that biggest and greatest festival of Bengali people. A local purohit said that during the arati (which consist of seven elements), the Dhaak is beaten in different rhythmic pattern.



Fig 3: Saha, Govinda. *Musical Instruments Engaged in Dhunuchi Arati*. Pool Paar, Kamakhyaguri , 24 Oct. 2020. 'Khashor' on the left side and 'Dhaak' on the right side.

‘Dhunuchi Naach Arati’

Purohits

In most of the puja pandals, purohit performs the Dhunuchi Arati Nritya. I have done several telephonic interviews with the purohits about this ritual. During the Arati, they use various hand movements like four times at feet, two times at navel, around the face it is three times, and around the whole body, it is seven times. But the first thing I noticed was that they were the only ones to perform all the rituals. There is no one allotted to do the Aratika Separately. Many of them are ancient pujas. But if we move to Alipurduar ‘Durga Bari’ puja, we can see different purohits performing different rituals. Due to the scarcity of Purohit, this ritual is negotiated by only one Purohit in each pandal. But they fail to negotiate with Dhunuchi naach. That is what the memory of their body replicates time and again. The reasons are the Beats of Dhaak, the sound of ‘Kashor’ and

‘ulation’. In an interview, Subhajit Chakraborty stated, “this sound of Dhaak, kashor, ghonta arouse their Bhakti-vaab, and they can’t resist their feet from performing the delightful ritual” (my trans.). They feel close to Devi-Shakti and connect with the mother emotionally during the Arati. As Nagendranath claimed in the interview, “It’s all about Ananda!” (my trans.).



Fig 4: Saha, Deep. *Dhunuchi Arati by Puja* . Vivekanand Colony, Kamakhyaguri , 24 Oct. 2020. The picture is about Dhunuchi arati in Maha-Ashtomi. This is conducted by 'Mohila Samiti'. As we can see, the picture only focuses on the purohit's performance of Dhunuchi arati.

Devotees

So is the case with the devotees present in the pandal during arati. Dhunuchi connects the new generation with their old traditions. One male performer of Dhunuchi Nritya stated the exact reason of participation. Debu Mishro mentioned in the interview, “The huge idol amidst the fragrant smoke which makes the Devi more glossy and realistic. Such divine sight and the sound of Dhaak, move them internally” (my trans.). They follow no striking pattern but copy the mainstream Ritualistic Dhunuchi performance. But I observe a strange phenomenon in the village. It seems that Bengali Tradition is narrowed by Bengali society. The event is carried out by men who are the only one, continuing this ancient tradition. They follow the traditional dress code - Dhoti-

Kurta. But females are absent in those rituals though “there is no gender restriction” (according to the local purohit Debu Mishro). To find out the reason behind their absence in this ritual, I conducted a survey and interviewed many women. I subdivide the data into two parts :

1. ‘Puja’ is done in the household (private spaces)
2. ‘committee puja’ (public spaces).

In the village, there are three ancient pujas done by household members. And there are seventeen committee pujas (among them two are ‘mohila Somitis’). I found that females in family pujas or the periphery of the house are actively participating in Dhunuchi Arati Nritya. Even they enjoy the Maha-Ashtomi with their creative cross-dressing performances. Whether they are married or unmarried, this makes no difference in their contribution to continue that ancient practice.

On the other hand, the scenario is quite different in committee pujas, so to say. Accept some Brahmin females; other females are unwilling to come and help in the arrangements and do the rituals. So is the case with ‘mohila committee’ pujas. These are held in public places, and females(excluding the relatives of the purohit) are supposed to be the audiences of such a cultural form of dance performance. Everywhere male performers are seen taking an active role.

While analyzing their reasons, I found that they directly or indirectly hinted towards the shame of performing Nritya in public places.

- ☐ Lack of partner to perform with,
- ☐ Get nervous in front of age-old people in the pandals,

- Lack of extra Dhunuchi
- Due to dilemma, 'to do it or not to do it '.

But one thing is common to all women that they enjoy that Ritualistic performance thoroughly when it is being performed. Even when there is a lack of performer, they request male relatives to participate and enjoy the Divine ambience. During such celestial time, I observed females were more actively plugged with sound, rhythm, fragrance. They were responding through their facial and bodily expressions. While being asked to participate, they claimed their inability to dance. That is a very paradoxical situation. They are simply echoing and embodying the voice of patriarchy, "Angel in the house" (Patmore).

Feminist interpretation:

1. According to Materialist Feminism, women's suppression is not only done by patriarchy but also capitalism (unequal class and economic power). In that backdrop, women do not belong to the upper class (Brahmin, purohit family) are not seen on the field. Only committee puja "Chaurangi" has female participation from purohit family (upper-class females).

2. 'Pre-determined' subject position is another obstacle in the way of female participation. Many females said they don't perform because of 'Gurujon' of their houses. In that case, they are already in or trying to fit in the (pre-ordained) subject positions like mother, daughter, and wife. They are simply following socially acceptable gender roles. In that context, we can draw on Simone de Beauvoir's word – "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (The Second Sex 283).

3. Another vital point is that, 'Dhunuchi naach' used to be performed by male from ancient times. The committee is following that. Women (women's body) are historically excluded from public-political areas. As Merleau-Ponty claims 'Body' as a 'historical idea' in *The Phenomenology of Perception* on "The Body in its Sexual Being".

4. The village has some restrictions regarding how the woman should appear in public places. If they are not satisfied with their own mental interpretation of such restrictions, they avoid the public performance. That's how the conservative patriarchy is ruling over the female body and its appearance. Women are cooperating in the process by which their body (appearance) gain cultural meanings.

5. Women are being considered weak and irrational. They are always in need of the protection of males. Thus Femininity doesn't have that strength to balance the Dhunuchi and their dressing together to dance (body art). One of a woman, Popi Saha said, "to manage the sari and hold the dhunuchi and do the ritualistic arati with order is quite difficult" (my trans.).

6. On the last note, we can say that role of the female as a feminine body in 'Dhunuchi naach', is the localized version of "doing of gender" (as Butler says). As Butler said, Gender is not fixed; its value and meaning change over time, society, location, and cultural framework. It is being practised time and again. "this style is never fully self-styled . . . as a corporeal style, an 'act', as it were, which is both intentional and performative . . ." (*Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory* 521-522) How they should dress up, behave, act in public and private places, look like – all become the recognizable manners of women.

The Myth of 'kolabou'

Each place has its own reason behind the practice of any ritual. It always contains some influential and impactful stories or myths. Likewise, 'Kolabou' ritual has its diverse mythical story. The village nurtures a very hetero-sexualized myth. It is said that 'kolabou' is the wife of Ganesh (the God and son of Durga). It is the common people's understanding of such strange and imperfect marriage. I often heard that famous tale that many of us shared in my childhood days. It is said that nobody was prepared to marry the God Ganesha because of the physical deformity of the God Ganesha. Then the Mother – Goddess arranged the banana tree as the wife of God Ganesha. It was certainly a consolation prize for her dearest son. Ganesha was happy with that without any objections of his wife's Silence. Common people's belief is more strengthened by the appearance of "kolabou" beside Ganesha. It is draped in the traditional Bengali saree (laal paar saree), often called by local people as 'Goroder saree'. It is draped in a certain way that looks like a newly married woman (covering the head with the end of the saree). And the head looks in a way that fits down to earth structure. The characteristics justify the Gender Role.



Fig 5: Nandi, Ananya. *Figure of 'Kolabou'*. Shanti Nagar, Kamakyaguri, 6 Oct. 2019. The picture shows the upper portion of the tree is covered with the end of the saree. It looks like a woman standing with her head down to earth.

‘Kolabou’ as ‘navapatrika’

Apart from that interpretation, my survey says that only the purohit community knows the Hindu religious interpretation. The woman who has witnessed the ritual in detail also knows that ‘Kolabou’ is actually ‘navapatrika’. It is comprised of nine plants representing each form of Devi Durga. To qualify that figure as a motherly figure, they add twin bael fruits as the breast (the child feeding part). While I asked them the reason behind adding that fruit as breast, they (household women) replied, “without these, the Mother figure is incomplete” (my trans.). The localized version is the ‘sringar’ of these bael fruits. They apply turmeric in some circle pattern to draw the skin and add vermilion on the centre to indicate the nipple. That is seen in ancient pujas of the village. Due to the lack of Ganga river in the locality, they perform the Mahasnan of ‘kolabou’ at the altar (the home space). They don’t take her to any river (public place), which is mainstream tradition.

Feminist interpretation

The myth or the take on ‘the body appropriation’ of *kolabou* is designed on a heterosexual matrix of woman (gender) category. The myth tells how an inappropriate male figure (deformed masculinity) is condemned on the ground of marriage. That Ganesha’s body is not qualified as a socially acceptable male body. That’s why he is given that tree in feminine disguise. That is also shaping the consciousness of the patriarchal binary category of masculinity and femininity. And that is taught by parents through their storytelling. Along with that, if we took the kolabou as Mother-goddess, it is also working on the feminine (motherly) figure appropriation: “the size of bael is not that much big, but depends on the height of kolabou” (my trans.). The whole structure is very much feminine.

Kumari puja/ kanya puja

Now to talk about another important ritual is ‘Kumari Pujo’. It is carried out on the Maha Astomi in Bengali Durga puja. As of Goddess Durga is the greatest form of mother worship; they celebrate the ceremonious worship of girls. It is done with the faith of incarnation of different forms of Shakti in the young girl. This celebration is known as Kanya Puja in North Bengal. It is also held on the ninth or last day of Navaratri across the other Indian states. The reason behind selecting a young child is what Shri Ramkrishna said; ‘little girls at their tender age when they are away from negative forces of materialistic work are manifestations of the divine mother’. There are some characteristics for the girl selection – the pre-puberty face of her growth. Nowadays, a fair-beautiful girl is preferred (Nabanita Saha said in an interview). In other words, it is the sacred celebration of the celestial bonding between the divine and the human.

Cultural assimilation

But to look at the ritual in my place, ‘kanya Puja’ is almost dissolved in time. Considering the rules and regulations is quite different in some aspects. They perform only Brahmin cast young girls, though not beautiful at their pre-puberty stage. The authentic way of performing this ritual is neither in household pujas nor committee pujas. Household pujas perform that in a homely way. In that way, they invite some little girl (at the pre-puberty stage) and serve them with some famous Bengali desert-like ‘Mistanno’. Other things (arati, dressing in a crimson red-yellow saree, or adorned with Jewellery) are not seen. In honour to keep the account of that part of the ritual, they simply do it. It is the combined version of Kumari Puja in Navaratri (Marwari ritual) and Kanya Puja (Bengali ritual). It is not limited to one little girl rather, a number (five or seven) of girls are being invited. But in Committee Puja, they said it is difficult to find a

Brahmin Girl on one hand. On the other hand, the parents are not ready to allow their child to perform that tenuous, long-time ritual. So they avoid that part of the festival.

Dashami-bhog

As we know, the Durga Puja is the celebration of the victory of Shakti and another form of celebration that includes Bengali culture. It is the time to taste and know about the traditional Bengali Food – Durga puja Bhog Meal. Bhog is something that is served to the Goddess and then is being distributed to the devotees free of cost. This Bhog can be two types, one is vegetarian and another one non-vegetarian. Khichuri is most preferred rice item in the village with different Bhajas. But one impactful difference is in Doshomi Bhog. It has different Myth related to the food offering.

People say that during that due to three days elaborated meal arrangement, due to the scarcity of vegetables, Bhog is made of uncooked items in Dashami. Devi will be in so hurry early in the morning go to his abode, the devotees will not be able to prepare some delicious food. That's why typically 'Pantavaat' is being offered in mainstream culture. But in the village, the 'Tok Doi' or 'Kacha Doi' with 'Khoi' and fresh Kochu is being offered to Devi.

Doi

The significance of offering '*doi*' is having its own value attached to agriculture households. People in the village area, most of them are a farmer. They have cows and other domestic animals. Alongside, they farm their land. Due to the pressure of managing different works, they don't get that much time to cook in the morning. Thus, they prefer quick food for breakfast, which is available in their household. 'Doi' is one of the ingredients, and 'Khoi' is another made of rice and stocks at home. So, they consume

that food to satisfy their hunger. Though that agricultural activity is little less than that time, they still consume that ancient food recipe in different rituals to hold that practice. Durga puja is one of the practices. Dashami bhog is one of them. People in the village offer that homemade, easily available eating product by cow's milk to offer goddess and then consumed by the people present in puja pandal. Offering fresh vegetables are also a sign of agricultural influence.

Conclusion

To conclude the discussion, it is visible that each ritualistic performance in the village has its people's faith, beliefs, devotion, and cultural implications. And that depends very much on the celebration done by committees and those are being done from ancient times in some households. In Dhunuchi nritya arati ritual, the position of women in the village makes the difference. Not only that, the local myth related to 'Kolabou' and the structure of Navapatrika is in another way, intensifying the Binary category or Gender role of patriarchal society. Cultural assimilation is shown in the Kanya Puan practice. The combined local 'Marwari'-Navaratri – Kumari Puja and South Bengal's kumari puja in Durga Puja celebration. Dashami Bhog is a Bengali food meal. It gives us an authentic primordial taste of that place's rural traditional and cultural flavour.

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Rituals of the Namasudra Community: A Critical Study of *Garshi*

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Abstract

Folk rituals occupy an inseparable part in those communities that live closest to the natural world. Living mostly around the swamp of the lower Gangetic plain across Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal, the Namasudra community is one of the largest ethnic communities of Bengal delta and culturally very articulate and socially mobilized. Although their social and cultural emergence has recently been archived through research, publication, and documentation, research on their folk rituals remain less explored. Namo or Namasudra, as they are known to others has inherited a great sequence of calendrical and seasonal folk rituals from their ancestors over the centuries. The present paper studies one of their calendrical and seasonal rituals known as *Garshi*. Following the theoretical framework of Ritual Studies and seminal theoretical concepts drawn from Cultural Anthropology, the present paper explores the ritualistic performances of *Garshi*, examines its essential components, such as sacred and profane, social drama, ritual space, ritual time, and ritual action, and ancestor cult. It evaluates its symbolic and aesthetic functions and concentrates on the paper's central theme, i.e. their ethnic identity and cultural heritage.

Keywords: Garshi, Folk ritual, Namasudra, Ritual Studies, Cultural Anthropology, Symbol

Introduction

One of the largest ethnic communities in undivided Bengal (now divided into Bangladesh, Assam, and West Bengal), the Namasudra community has a distinct cultural heritage, ranging from an oral culture to written distinct religious culture to unified social and political culture. Being an ethnic community, they have nurtured their distinct folk ritual and oral tales and songs over the centuries. But before a systematic study of their folk rituals to be done, their community name has to be analyzed properly. The settlement of migrated Namasudras in West Bengal since 1947 and more intensely after 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War changed the state's demography. Their population figure in 2011 census report is 35,04,642¹, but popular opinion varies. The concerned people known as Namasudra in the Scheduled Caste list of governments of West Bengal² emerged as a consolidated community only in the second half of the nineteenth century in the colonial period. The word Namasudra is a combination of “Nama” or “Namah” or “Namo” and “Sudra.” Sudra as a noun is used first in the Rigveda (X.90.11-12)³ with a metaphor for feet. It is a symbolic representation of slavery as it has later been socially categorized as servile caste in Hindu society that has followed legal and religious certification of *Manavā-Dharmaśāstra* or The Law of Manu in Post-Vedic period. Sudra is used in *Atharvaveda* too (IV.20.4).⁴ V. S. Apte's *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (1893; 1956) provides for शूद्रः/ शूद्र the following meanings: “A man of the

¹ <https://censusindia.gov.in/2011census/PCA/SC.html>.

² <https://www.socialjustice.nic.in/writersddata/UploadFile/Scan-00206360523010555616230.jpg>.

³ Brereton, Joel P. and Srephanie Jamison, translators. *The Rigveda: The Earliest Religious Poetry in India*. Vol. 3, New York, Oxford UP, 2014, pp. 1537-1540. 3 Vols.

⁴ Griffith, Ralph T. H. translator. *The Hymns of the Atharva-Veda*. Vol. 1, Benares, E. J. Lazarus & Co., 1895, p. 160.

fourth or the last of the four principal tribes of the Hindus; he is said to have been born from the feet of Purusha (Rv: 10.90.12); or of Brahman, Ms. 1.87; and his principal business was to serve the three higher castes (1563-564). The Pali Text Society's *Pali-English Dictionary* (1921-25) provides the following account of it: "Sudda [cp. Vedic Śūdra] a Sūdra Vin ii.239; D i.104; iii.81, 95 sq. (origin); M i.384; A i.162; ii.194; S i.102; Pug 60; Sn. 314" (795). Buddhaddatta Mahathero's *Concise Pali-English Dictionary* (1968) provides the following meaning: "Sudda: (m.) a person of the Sudra caste" (301). But the Wisdom Library records the adjective meaning of Pali Sudda as "clean; pure; unmixed; simple."⁵ In Panini's grammar Sudra is blended with two components: root *śuc* or *śuk* + *ra* (qtd. in Sharma 56). Brahminical texts also echoed the concept of grief: "those who grieved and ran, and were addicted to manual tasks, and were inglorious and feeble were made Śūdras" (qtd. in Sharma 56).

On the other hand, there are different interpretations of the word "Nama" or "Namo",⁶ or "Namah." One mythical interpretation tells a story about one ancient Brahmin sage named Namas (Risley 183-89; Roy 110-116), hence Nama/Namo name or identity. The second interpretation is historical. Sunil Kumar Roy demonstrates that the concerned people addressed as Namasudra are primarily the Namo,⁷ a primitive group of people sharing their ancestral lineage with the inhabitants of The Great Namaland of Namibia, Botswana and certain parts of South Africa. (Roy 19-39; Roy 35-41). Swapan Kumar Biswas puts forward his arguments to establish the 'theory of Chandalhood.'

⁵ <https://www.wisdomlib.org/definition/sudda#pali>

⁶ Now-a-days, a group of young scholars and activists of this community are stating their views that they were never been within the four-fold of Hindu society. Therefore Sudra must be abolished from their community name. They are Namo or Nama, and not Nama-Sudra anymore.

⁷ Sunil Kumar Roy collected available archeological and anthropological records to claim it in his Bangla book *Itihase Namo Jati* (Namo Race in History) published in 2019. This book has gained a wider readership among Namasudra and other dalitbahujan readers and scholars. The present researcher tries to bring together different opinions regarding the genesis and development of the concerned people.

According to him, the people known as Namasudra are successors of the great Chandals.⁸ The Chandals sought to replace it by another name, 'Namasudra', in the second half of the nineteenth century, which according to Biswas is a homophonic connotation of 'Nabasudra' (New Sudra). (53-59). The next interpretation seeks the anthropological genesis of the concerned people by reviving the concept of 'Bango'. Showing no enthusiasm to 'Namo' or 'Namasudra' focuses on the name of geographical location to be the source of the people. Since the language is known as Bangla, the land Bengal, the bay Bay of Bengal, Dr. Upendranath Biswas did an extensive survey regarding the origin of Bango people in his *Bango: A Group of Indigenous People*⁹(2004). He claims that the indigenous inhabitants of the Gangetic delta were known as Bango. The rulers of Gandarides¹⁰ were Bango; Pala rulers¹¹ were Bango; he argues that the community known as Namasudra is the ancestral Bango's descendants. Despite their new caste name, they are indigenous, not a part of the four-fold caste system. (55-65). Besides, Dr. Upendranath Biswas echoes some of the leading historians and anthropologists of Bengal on the ethnic root of Namasudra and other castes having Austric lineage¹². It was Kapil

⁸ Swapan Kumar Biswas, a noted scholar has done some authentic works to establish his 'Theory of Chandalhood' especially in two important books. They are *Autochthon of India and Aryan Invasion* (1995) and *Untouchable Chandals of India: A Democratic Movement* (2013). In both of them, he shows with sufficient records drawn from Sanskrit texts primarily that two groups of races remain central of discussion: Aryan and non-Aryan or Vedic and non-Vedic. The frequent references of Chandals being savage and criminal gives rise to the enquiry: who actually they are. Biswas comes up with his theory that Chandals are one of the autochthons of this land. The people known as Namasudra were known as Chandals as the records show. It leads him to establish the validity of his claim that Namasudras belong to the indigenous groups of people.

⁹ This book has been translated into Bangla by Dr. Gyan Prakash Mandal. The citation has been taken from the translated text and then translated them into English. *Guruchand Charit* states that the present Chandal-turned Namasudra generations are the successors of the Buddhists of Pala dynasty. Therefore a link can be decoded between Biswas's theory of Bango who were the Pala rulers to that of latter's commentary on the Buddhist lineage of the concerned people.

¹⁰ See Biswas, Oneil Ranjan. *The Nama-sudras: Origin and Development*. Kolkata, World Ethnological Conference, Yuba Bharati Krirangan, 2004, pp. 34-56.

¹¹ After the fall of Gouda Kingdom (late 6th to early 7th CE) whose great ruler was Shashanka (590 CE to 625 CE), political and administrative situations turned into a chaos in Bengal. The native people of Bengal elected one Gopal as their king in c. 755 CE. Pala dynasty ruled Bengal and Bihar from 755 CE till 11th CE. Palas were Buddhists, patronized Prakrit and popularized Buddhism in far-off land. This period is known as the 'Golden Period Bengal.' See Bagchi, Jhunu. *The History and Culture of the Palas of Bengal and Bihar*. New Delhi. Abhinav Publications, 1993.

¹² Majumdar, R. C. *History of Ancient Bengal*. Kolkala, G. Bharadwaj & Co., 1971, p. 17.

Krishna Thakur, an eminent writer who traces the earliest use of the word in his recent Bangla essay. In a Bangla-Farsi dictionary prepared around 1775, the record of “Namo’ or “Nama” was found (Thakur 92-93). “Namosooder or Chandal” was mentioned in the list of castes prohibited from entering into Puri Jagganath Temple in a resolution by the East Indian Company in 1809 (Hunter 135-36; Wise 194; Thakur 92). In the census reports, the change of names has been well documented. The transition from an administrative designation of being ‘Chandal’ to being ‘Namasudra’ in 1911 census is a major shift in respect of this community’s identity and culture. In 1901 census, the caste name “Namasudra (Chandal)” was registered, and in 1911 census “Chandal was dropped.”¹³

But the first ethnographic and anthropological study of this group of people of lower Gangetic plain was done by British administrators, especially in the census reports between 1872 and 1931, in ethnographic notes by Dr. James Wise and Sir Herbert Hope Risley. In 1871-72 Memorandum of the first census, it was mentioned that among the castes of Eastern Bengal “... the most numerous tribes are the Chandals, a hardy race, chiefly found in the eastern districts of Bengal, aggregating about 1,650,000” (22). In 1881 Bengal census report prepared by J. A. Bourdillon, it was recorded that Chandals, Bagdi and other castes “are certainly not of pure Aryan extraction, and have traditions, corroborated by collateral evidence, of a time before the advent of Aryan invader” (135). It was Dr. James Wise who is credited with pioneering the anthropological study of this community. In his *Notes on the Races, Castes and Trades of Eastern Bengal* (1883; 2017), he observes: “The Chaṇḍāl is one of the lovable of Bengalís. He is a merry, careless fellow, very patient and hard working, but always ready, when his work is done, to enjoy himself” (260). In *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal, Ethnographic Glossary*

¹³ Resolution No. 3435 dated 14 July, 1913 General Dept.: Govt. Bengal. (under the signature of H. F. Samman. Secretary.)

(1892) Herbert Hope Risley writes about them: “Chandál ... a non-Aryan caste of Eastern Bengal, engaged for the most part in boating and cultivation....The Chandáls of Bengal invariably call themselves Nama-Sudra” (183-84). In respect of their ethnic antiquity, Risley observes: “It may perhaps be inferred from the present geographical position of the Chandáls that they came into contact with the Aryans at a comparatively later period when caste system had already been developed they may have offered ... a stubborn resistance to the Aryan advances” (185). With the census reports prepared with the best authentic knowledge of the subject and the quantitative as well as qualitative records put in those pages about each caste and tribe, the anthropological writings in India formally began in 1870s. In the context of the Namasudra community’s anthropological research, the ethnographic field notes taken from closest contact with the subject by Dr. James Wise and Sir Herbert Hope Risley in the second half of the nineteenth century have laid down the foundation of the study of their beliefs, marriage and family customs, and rituals. In other words, the ethnographic documentation records their demographic, financial, and professional status and faithfully provides the existing beliefs, customs, and rituals. Therefore, the study of rituals of the Namasudra community has been introduced by Dr. Wise and Sir Risley in their ethnographic documentation.

Dr. Wise first documents the ritualistic aspects of Chandal-turned-Namasudra. His authentic observation is the following: “The Chandáls retain many peculiar religious customs, survivals of an ancient and time-worn cultus. At Vástu Pújah on the Poush “Sankránt,”¹⁴ when the earth personified is worshipped, the Chandáls celebrate an immemorial rite, at which the caste Brahmán does not officiate” (261). Dr. Wise’s

¹⁴ The last day of Bangla month Poush (mid-January) is known across Bengal as Poush Sankranti. This day is also known as Pangal in Tamil Nadu, Makar Sankranti in North India. Bastu or Vastu (house) is the name of another major folk ritual celebrated by Namasudra on the last day of Poush.

ethnographic work was first published in 1883, whereas he was the civil surgeon in Dacca around 1860s. Dr. Wise conducted his ethnographic fieldwork among different castes, including the Chandal-turned-Namasudra in 1860s. *Bastu* ritual along with *Garshi* and *Hanchra* is a popular folk ritual that the present scholar documented in December 2019 in some villages in Nadia district, West Bengal. Taken two distinct periods together, one finds the ritualistic antiquity and the continuous practice of rituals from 1860s to 2019. It also proves that before the ethnographic fieldwork of Dr. Wise, these folk rituals were prevailing too. It is only in the 1860s that he documented these rituals, and in 1883, he published them. Sir Risley followed Dr. Wise and almost retained the former's research findings. Among the critical inputs, he provided is: "Although the majority of the caste profess the tenets of the Vaishnava sect of Hindus, they still retain many peculiar religious customs, survivals of earlier animistic cult" (187). Although very short, this observation of retaining an "earlier animistic cult" carries seminal cultural implications. It takes us back to the primitive belief system of this community and their non-Aryan, non-Hindu ethnic root. Besides the ethnographic research by Wise and Risley, the study of their rituals and other cultural aspects have hardly been documented, especially their folk rituals.

Derived from Latin *rītūālis* and *ritūs*, ritual is defined in various ways in OED: "Pertaining or relating to, connected with, rites"; "A prescribed order of performing religious or another devotional service"; "Performance of ritual acts" (991-92). Victor Turner defines ritual as "... forms of religious behaviour associated with social transitions.... Ritual is transformative, ceremony confirmatory" (95). Roy A. Rappaport defines ritual as "the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers" (24). Seen as an enactment of drama, ritual in Maria Leach's dictionary is defined as "A mimetic enactment addressed to

supernatural powers fundamentally for the attainment of a practical and as a later development for esthetic gratification, always as a religio-cultural expression” (Karuth 1946). Ronald L. Grimes provides a sequence of ritual characteristics exemplified in a domestic context: 1. Traditional or related to the life of ancestors in a family; 2. Adding sacred values or very special places other than daily chores of life; 3. Repetition of same act or behavior over and over again; 4. Singularization of ritual day, time, and action, i.e. once in a year or like; 5. Prescribed pattern of celebration to bring a homogenous arrangement and behavior; 6. Emphasizing non-regular attitude or some sort of meditative attitude to mark its significance; 7. Act and utterance for the invocation to any divine or supernatural being; 8. Situating the ritual celebration in a special place and time; and 9. Officiating the ritual with the help of a special person (194). Grimes also provides a set of structures and processes: 1. Ritualistic structure and performative process; 2. Experiential structure and emotional process; 3. Mythical structure and narrative process; 4. Doctrinal structure and cosmological or metaphysical process; 5. Ethical structure and legal process; 6. Social structure and cultural process; and 7. Physical structure and spatial process (197).

Catherine Bell outlines the origin of ritual as an important concept to understand society and culture in the following way: “The notion of ritual first emerged as a formal term of analysis in the nineteenth century to identify what was believed to be a universal category of human experience” (14). The two sides of ‘human experience’ are thought and action. Although theoretical discourse in ritual study focuses on both of them, the preference is given to its manifestation or ‘action.’ In other words, ‘ritualization’ as Catherine Bell uses this word comes to its fulfilment only when the ‘thought’ or a series of ‘mental blueprints’ are performed with a set of repetitive and imitative actions. Catherine Bell refers to “beliefs, creeds, symbols, and myths” as the mental concepts or

blueprints that become expressed through ritual celebration (Bell 19). The theoretical approach naturally tends to restore “the context of social activity” in the ritual study. Hence a sort of functionalist orientation is emphasized (Bell 7). The focus of the Functionalist approach to ritual and performance is “what ritual accomplishes as a social phenomenon, specifically, how it affects the organization and workings of the social group” (Bell 23). In this respect, ritualistic practices accompanied with respective songs and musical instruments function as a set of symbolic orchestration that encompasses not only a large space (in this research, it is rural space, the structure of which is different from urban space), but also a mass gathering in the respective locality which reflects upon the homogenous nature of belief, observances, language (in this case it is a dialect) and more importantly a consolidated identity of a respective community. Therefore, the performative manifestations of ritual transcend personal imagination and expression and become the representative ‘social behaviour.’

The ritual study begins with a fundamental question “whether religion and culture were originally rooted in myth or in ritual” (Bell 3). According to Emile Durkheim religion has two essential components: beliefs and rites. If belief is what is said (narrative) and the rite is what is done (action or performance) in the evaluation of human culture (34). William Robertson Smith (1846-1894), a noted linguist and Old Testament expert, emphasize the ritual in the genesis of religion and society by arguing “religion is made up of a series of acts and observances”, the important function of which is “the preservation and welfare of society” (28-29). Sir James Frazer (1854-1941), a student of Smith and the legendary editor of *The Golden Bough* sees ritual as “the source of most of the expressive forms of cultural life” (Bell 5). But the Functionalist approach owes its bulk of theoretical impetus to the writings of French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), whose *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912; 1982) is perhaps the most

influential work in formulating the “social phenomenon of religion” and ritual. Durkheim writes, “Religious representations are collective representations that express collective realities; rites are ways of acting that are born only amid assembled groups and whose purpose is to evoke, maintain, or recreate certain mental states of those groups” (9). Two fundamental concepts in Durkheimian theory of religion are ‘sacred’ and ‘profane.’ Durkheim points out that there are two sides to a person's social life: real and ideal. The daily chores of life are part of the reality they live. It is the manifestation of the material world. But there is another world, that is, the world of belief and rites, which constitute the ideal world. According to Durkheim, what is related to the material world is considered profane, but what is related to the ideal or imaginary world is considered sacred. He clarifies it by saying that “All known religious beliefs... present one common characteristic: they presuppose a classification of all things, real and ideal... generally designated by... the words *profane* and *sacred* (34-35). Whether religious or secular, rituals and performances reflect these two fundamental concepts.

Social drama is a celebrated concept developed first by Victor Turner. In his study of culture, especially social relations and rituals of the Ndembu tribe in Africa, Turner found that conflict with the rival groups and with the existing pattern of lifestyle at a certain point of time and steps to overcome this conflict are two essential structures of their social and cultural life. This irruption of conflict or tension and the ensuing liquidation of the same practically lead the society forward. Turner calls it ‘social drama’: “When the interests and attributes of groups and individuals stood in obvious oppositions, social dramas did seem ... to constitute isolable and minutely describable units of social process” (32). He extends his argument and promotes his theory of ritual as essentially ‘enactment of social drama’, that in each ritual celebration, the beginning relates with *separation* and ending with the *act of expiation and reconciliation*. The

separation includes pre-ritual space, time and action among participants, and expiation and reconciliation include enactment of ritualistic performance and post-ritual social, familial, and emotional equilibrium among participants, especially old and young generations.

Ritual is a potentially semiotic medium; that means it is a highly symbolic manifestation of human culture. Victor Turner provides some essential inputs about symbols in ritual in his “Symbols in African Rituals” (1973). He defines a ritual symbol as “the smallest unit of ritual which retains the specific properties of ritual behaviour... the ultimate unit of a specific structure in a ritual context” (1100). The “specific structure” has several attributes. First is “multiple meanings (significata)”, that is, one ritualistic practice may have more than one possible interpretation; second is “unification of apparent disparate significata”, that is, analogical status between two different ritualistic elements; third is “condensation”, that is, a balanced manifestation of diverse ideas, practices and behaviors in ritual; fourth is “polarization of significata”, that is, various ritualistic practices appear to be opposite to each other (1100). “Rituals tend to be organized in a cycle of performances... In each ... there is a nucleus of dominant symbols” (1101). But there are many less dominant symbols. With the dominant and less dominant symbols, each ritual irrespective of community, time and space, generate the ritual knowledge; this ultimately generates knowledge about the cultural heritage of a tribe or a community.

Apart from the seminal concepts of ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’ and ‘social drama’, other related concepts define ritual in diverse ways, such as ritual space, ritual action, and ritual time. These three form the tripartite structure of ritual performance in any given context. On the other hand, each ritual may also allude to some legends and myths. All

these put together, critical study of any ritual occupies a special place in Cultural Anthropology and other allied disciplines in Humanities and Social Sciences.

Among the rituals celebrated by the Namasudra community, there are three distinct categories: folk ritual, religious ritual, and secular ritual. In the folk ritual category, *Garshi* is a popular one being celebrated even today among almost all Namasudra rural households, especially among those who hailed from erstwhile East Bengal or East Pakistan to West Bengal. The origin and meaning of the word ‘Garshi’ are uncertain, but this word is used among the community members with its phonetic variations, such as *Gassi* or *Gaysi* as a name of their folk ritual. The present researcher's knowledge about *Garshi* primarily rests on his talk with the aged members of this community during his research fieldwork in respective villages in the district of Nadia, West Bengal. *Garshi* celebration starts at the last night of Bengali month Ashwin and continues until the next morning, the first day of the next month, Kartika¹⁵. There is a popular saying among the women about *Garshi* celebration: *Ashwin mashe randhe bare, Kartik mase khay/ Jei ja bor mange, sei bor pai* (We cook in the month of Ashwin and eat in Kartika/ One gets whatever boon she asks). The *Garshi* celebration is described in detail in the following pages. The family members, young ones in particular, are supposed to remain awake throughout the night of the last day of Ashwin and indulge in the study.

Meanwhile, the women make many clay-made lamps and cook seven items of vegetables and some pie such as *Kuli pithe*, *Sora pithe*¹⁶ at home that night. Besides, they

¹⁵ In Gregorian calendar the last day of Bangla month Ashwin and the first day of Kartika fall in different days between September and October in different year. Ashwin and Kartika are 6th and 7th month in Bangla calendar respectively.

¹⁶ Bangla word *pithe* means pie. The chief ingredient used to make *Kuli pithe* is dough made of rice powder. It gets steamed before it is eaten. *Sora pithe* is baked with liquid of rice powder poured into small spoon-shaped cooking pot. It takes the shape of spoon. This cooking pot is made of burnt clay called *sor* or *sora*.

cook another special type of food, called *til-jau*, a sweet mixture of husked sesame seeds and rice powder. With the time passing away comes the first dawn of the new month Kartika. Around four or four-thirty at dawn, the women first clean a small part of their courtyard by rubbing the space with water and soil; they decorate the rubbed space by putting different marks of rice powder liquid; in the next step, they bring a bamboo-made winnowing basket and place it at the centre of that decorated space; next, they put the following ingredients on the winnowing basket: a twig of mango tree having five leaves, few palm seeds, few raw turmeric, few raw tamarinds, twigs of neem leaf¹⁷, a small twig of banana leaf, few paddy seeds, a bunch of *durba*, a commonly found grass around villages, and some pies, such as *Kuli pithe* they made last night. Once the ground gets prepared, they start celebrating the main part of their ritual. Meanwhile, young boys and girls beat the walls of their house with sticks and recite a rhyme: *Idur badur bhatite ja/ Tarar mul khunche kha./ Amage bari oi/ Ai bari thui* (Rats, bats go away/ Go to stars to eat./ That is our house/ Let us leave this house). Women who directly participate in the actual ritual light up the clay-made lamps and put them on the doorsteps and around the house; then the women do the ululation, play the conch; in the next step, the women and young members of the family bow down their head before the decorated space; then the women bring a *shil nora*, a pair of grinding stones and put neem leaves and raw turmeric on it to make a paste; after the paste gets ready, the entire family members rub the paste all around their limbs and other body parts; next, they do their morning bath. They take the paste of *til-jau* and go to the paddy field; they rub the sprouted paddy flower with *til-jau* because they believe that the paddy is pregnant and that nourishment will make the paddy healthy she will bring forth abundant crops for them. The younger ones seek

¹⁷ Leaf of *Azadirachta indica*, commonly known as neem tree. It is native to the Indian subcontinent.

blessings from their elders; at last they distribute the pie among all and put an end to *Garshi* celebration.



Fig. 1. Women are lighting up clay-made lamps to illuminate their house in *Garshi* ritual (2nd week, December, 2019).

There is a folk belief lying behind this ritual. The belief is described below: the souls of the dead ancestors who secured their place in heaven come down on the earth at night on the last day of Ashwin and visit their present generations to see how they are doing in the mortal life. To welcome the dead ancestors and make them happy, the family members, particularly children, remain awake throughout the night. Young boys and girls are told to indulge in the study. Since the aim is to make the dead ancestors happy, they try to show studiousness and discipline. If the dead ancestors find anybody sleeping or making any mischief, he or she is forsaken. But if they find young ones

studying, they become very happy and award them with boons.



Fig. 2. Women are playing conch and doing ululation while celebrating *Garshi* ritual (2nd week, December, 2019).



Fig. 3. The researcher is taking an interview of villagers during *Garshi* ritual (2nd week, December, 2019).



Fig. 4. A woman is busy grinding neem leaves and raw turmeric to make a paste in *Garshi* ritual (2nd week, December, 2019).

With a general description of *Garshi* ritual, the following theoretical concepts have to be evaluated to give a critical study of this folk ritual of the Namasudra community: sacred and profane; social drama; symbol; ritual space, ritual action, ritual time; an ancestor cult. The seminal concept of sacred and profane by Emile Durkheim has universally been applied in rites, rituals and liturgies. *Garshi* ritual, like other rituals, justly reflects the characteristics of sacred and profane. These two are best understood within the tripartite structure of ritual space, ritual time, and action. Ritual space, ritual action, and ritual time are three dimensions that characterize the essence of physical aspects of ritual performance. In any ritual performance, the first thing to be found is a distinctly decorated space for performance. A closer look at any ritual space indicates that it differs in its decoration, presentation, exhibition, prestige, and importance from other related spaces within context. The space is revered and respected, and to a great extent feared provided the disrespect in stepping over it or polluting it may have resulted in a curse, hence sacred status is attributed. Space with its specific shape and dimension is the first physical characteristic found in a ritual. In the case of *Garshi*, the ritual space (see Fig. 1 & 2) is a chosen part in a courtyard. It has properly been decorated with embroidery made of rice-powder liquid. This decoration right in the courtyard usually differentiates it from other parts of the courtyard. That means it can be distinguished from other parts of the same courtyard after its sacred status, the foil of which is the profane status of other courtyard spaces at that very time.

Here comes the interconnected relationship of ritual time with space. Ritual time is the entire duration of ritual performance in this chosen space. It, like ritual space, makes a distinction from other times in the daily chores of life after its sacred status. It is considered sacred and therefore revered, respected, and greatly feared, as exemplified from the ritual behavior of the participants during the ritual time. In *Garshi*, the last night

of Bangla month Ashwin and the first morning of Kartika remain sacred, hence inseparable from their memory. Keeping the sacred importance of that ritual, the family members get ready to observe their ritual actions. When it becomes dawn on the first day of Kartika, women wake up and begin their prescribed ritual performance. The participants do not violate the dignity of the ritual time that is proven with their punctuality in actions. Ritual action or behavior is the physiological postures and verbal articulations that participants make during the ritual time in the ritual space. In this sense, ritual action is bound within the spatial and temporal dimensions. Since ritual is a set of repetitive and imitative actions made in a particular context, psychological orientation predominates. The preordained and predetermined postures and articulations have been exhibited. A child imitates the parents, so young boys and girls are their elders. The repetitive and imitative patterns of behaviors of elders in ritual space and ritual time form the very base of younger participants' prescribed actions. They follow what their elders do. In Garshi celebration, we see repetitive and imitative behaviours, such as lighting up the clay-made lamp, putting lamps on the doorsteps, ululation, bowing down their heads on the ground. The entire body movement and verbal or vocal utterances reflect upon the prescribed ritual action within the given space and time. In this respect, ritual space, ritual time, and ritual action form the very essential structural pattern of ritual performance.

Garshi ritual can be evaluated as a fitting ritual validating social drama. Victor Turner defines social drama as having two essentially interrelated phases: conflict or separation; and expiation and reconciliation. In *Garshi*, pre-ritual space, time, and action create separation among the participants. In other words, before the ritual celebration, participants remain busy in the daily chores of life, thus separating from each other with all familial and material concerns. It is only in the ritual celebration, i.e. ritual space, time

and action, that the participants come together and recognise others through ritual celebration. Since *Garshi* is one of the many folk rituals meant for domestic welfare, emotional and familial bonds among family members, especially old and young, appear to be the outcome of recognition. The ending of *Garshi* ritual shows reverence to old family members by young ones, distribution of pie and other sweets, bathing after rubbing the paste of neem leaves and raw turmeric all-around their limbs. This type of ending is a fitting example of reconciliation among family members, and to a great extent, among community members. With this pre-ritual separation and post-ritual reconciliation, social drama is enacted.

Garshi ritual abounds with symbols. The symbol quintessentially identified is lighting up clay-made lamps and putting them on the doorsteps (see Fig. 1 & 2). Since it is celebrated at dawn around 4 am at night; the lamp signifies the harbinger of light amidst darkness. The darkness pervading all over is the symbol of evil, whereas the light of the clay-made lamp is the symbol of good. Therefore, lighting up clay-made lamps at dawn in *Garshi* ritual is a potent symbol for driving away evil forces from family and bringing good, benevolent signs over all members. It is interlinked with the family's welfare and to a great extent, of the community. Another sort of interpretation is found: The first day of Kartika is welcomed and celebrated by lighting up a clay-made lamp in the sense that it is not only a new beginning in their community life but also indicative of the fact that in the days of antiquity, Kartika was perhaps the first month to begin their annual almanac.

An important part of *Garshi* celebration is a folktale that aged members share with young members. Since this tale is related to the soul of dead ancestors, the concept of ancestor cult is found here. The practice of ancestor cult has been found in practice among most of the primitive tribes and the followers of different organized religions,

such as Hinduism and Christianity. The standard definition of ancestor cult is remembering the memory of dead ancestors who (both distant past and near past) were an inseparable part of the existing family once upon a time. This remembrance very often takes the form of ritual performance on special occasions in the family, with mourning and prayer as common ritual behavior. Although some scholars think that the practice of ancestor cult is made out of the 'dread of the dead members, Nobushige Hozumi, a Japanese scholar, says it is a reflection of love for the dead members of the family (4-5). French historian Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges (1830-1889) studied the ancestor cult of ancient Roman and Greek cultures in *La Cité antique* (The Ancient City) (1864) and found that each family had a deep-rooted belief in their dead members of the family. Fustel goes deeper into the origin of mystery and the supernatural by studying the common people's experience of the death of family members. He explains that the cult of worshipping the dead "appears to be the oldest that has existed among this race of man. Before men had any notion of Indra or Zeus, they adored the dead; they feared them and addressed them prayers. It seems that the religious sentiment commenced in this way. It was perhaps while looking upon the dead that man first conceived the idea of supernatural" (28-29). Adolf Jensen provides insightful commentary in this practice: "The dead continue to belong to the community of the living; one even gets the impression that they are the more important segment" (287). If the existing folk belief among the Namasudra community that on the very night of the first day of Kartika the dead ancestors visit the family of their living members to see or inspect what they are doing in their mortal life, this belief bears quintessential characteristics of ancestor cult as studied by Fustel de Coulanges and Adolf Jensen. This belief consolidates their emotional bonding of living members of the family with the dead members.

As studied so far, the *Garshi* ritual celebrated during the intersection of the last day of Aswin and the first day of Kartika constitutes a special place in their calendrical ritual lists. It is an entry into the further discussion of other existing folk rituals in the Namasudra culture. *Garshi* alone is the bearer of a rich cultural narrative with its potential symbols, ritual practices, ingredients, and a composite, balanced family tradition. Every member participates in and observes this ritual solely dedicated to their dead ancestors. The emotional tie between the dead and the living within each family context exhibits rich layers of semiotic implication. It gets transmitted from the old generation to the young generation, thus weaving a sequence of cultural transmission in ritual celebration. It quintessentially shows the divergent ritualistic practices among most Namasudras, especially those rooted in erstwhile East Bengal, which is known as their ancestral land.

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“And I cannot describe how my body feels”: Folk Beliefs and Taboos among Menstruating Women in Rajbangshi Culture

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“The great mother whom we call Innana gave a gift to the woman that is not known among men, and this is the secret of blood.”

-Anita Diamant

Abstract

When we talk of performance and culture, we often lose sight of the parallel processes in our daily lives and tend to focus on significant events. Performance has no singular definition but simply implies ‘an act of doing’. In this paper, I propose to focus on menstruation as a performance. Menstrual performance in this paper does not refer to any aesthetic or political expression associated with the visualization of menstrual blood in art or visual culture, but as a part of women’s lives, whether they consciously consider themselves to be performers or not. Through this study, I endeavour to illuminate the overlooked dynamics within the socio-cultural structure of the Rajbangshi community. The focus here is primarily on the understudied issue of women’s lives or what Dorothy Smith calls the ‘everyday world’ of women, far from the documented legitimate knowledge. This paper argues that the prohibitions and injunctions associated with menstruation are not simply norms with ancestral origins but are grounded in the spiritual and mythical foundation. This paper shall try to determine whether there is any significant shift of the Rajbangshi women over time associated with the folk beliefs surrounding menstruation and menarche. This paper shall also theorize the duality of reception of the subject of menstruation among the Rajbangshi women, both as a blessing and a penance. Through this paper, I also aim to convey how the popular folk genre of the Rajbangshi community, Bhawaiyaa, vaguely touches upon the subject of menstruation and its psychosomatic aspects.

Keywords – performance, culture, menstruation, menarche, Bhawaiyaa

Introduction

“Menstrual blood is the only source of blood that is not traumatically induced. Yet in modern society, this is the most hidden blood, the one so rarely spoken of and almost never seen, except privately by women. Precisely what menstruation is, is not yet very well known”, notes American author and activist Judy Grahn. The earliest mention of menstruation in literature can be traced back to Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. Lady Macbeth pleads the spirits of darkness to ‘unsex her’, thus asking them to cease her periodic flow and block her genital tract. Lady Macbeth’s request to liberate herself from the basic biological characteristic of femininity is directed to free herself from the psychological characteristics of remorse and compassion, as it was believed that women are sensitive and emotional because they menstruate. The English physician John Sadler in his book “*The Sicker Woman’s Private Looking-Glasse*”, too has explained that when blood thickens, it becomes vicious and gross and blocks the passage of the womb, stopping the access to the heart from which emotions could flow. Thus, Menstruation throughout the ages has been considered a strange infirmity that infests women. The casual link between mind and body and the conventional beliefs about sexuality and gender is still evident in contemporary times, even when women are not only menstruators but transmen and intersex people too.

The onset of menstruation, i.e. menarche, generally has a strange significance; on the one hand, it is viewed as a ceremonious event marking the attainment of puberty, while on the other the family members, especially the women, become aware of the consequences of this symbolic event and tend to incarcerate the girl with myriad constraints. In Rajbangshi culture, menstruation is considered a rite of passage alongside birth, death, and marriage because it symbolizes the transition from girlhood to womanhood. However, this is an issue that remains to be shrouded in secrecy. In

Rajbangshi community of North Bengal the attainment of menarche is an auspicious event as the girl attains the status of womanhood, but no elaborate celebration is conducted to venerate the same. During this phase, she is often considered a blossoming flower. The mother becomes delighted and proud to witness her daughter's menarche as she would someday become a prospective wife and bear children. Women who do not start menstruating at an appropriate age are an issue of concern, and women who do not attain it at all are looked down upon as ill-fated and barren. It is pertinent to mention that certain strict mandates are placed on the "Rojoshola" (menstruating woman) due to the community's cultural beliefs. They believe that there is a deep and infallible relationship between the concepts of purity and profanity between menstruation. The folk beliefs surrounding menstruation had started as an old wives tale. However, it has become a tradition due to its continued practice. These traditions do not always have a significant scientific rationalization but are indispensable identity makers of a particular culture.

Method and Materials

This study was conducted in Coochbehar District, a sprawling locality in the foothills of the Eastern Himalayas. Coochbehar district is famed for being the only well-planned district in the North Bengal region. The Rajbangshi population densely populates this district. The Rajbangshi is an ethnic group mainly inhabiting in West Bengal region, Assam and Bihar. The Rajbangshis trace their origin to the Koch Dynasty under Biswa Singha. Interviews and systematic observation were used as tools for data collection, with questions being designed beforehand. The sample consisted of ten women aged between 10- 45. Three of them are University students, three homemakers, one school going adolescent and three employed women (state government and private organization).

Discussion

Myths and folk beliefs – “At dusk, when I returned from my routine stroll through the lush rice fields near my home, I was petrified as a stone to discover a patch of red on my pinafore”: All of the women interviewed had similar experiences of their menarche, if not identical. Menarche is a term that remains unfamiliar outside pathological concerns. It is a conjunction of Greek words ‘men’ meaning month and ‘arkhe’ meaning beginning. Most of the interviewed women have confessed to being ashamed, scared and embarrassed on witnessing menarche. The possible reasons they stated range from the unexpectedness of the event to the fear of the norms that would be mandated. The lack of preparation and awareness of menstruation can also be stated as possible reasons for their negative feelings. Sagarika Roy (28, Mathabhanga), who had her period at 14, shared, “I thought I had sustained a cut, I desperately tried to hide it with a handkerchief, but my grandmother noticed it.”

In Rajabangshi culture, when a girl attains menarche, she is considered a sacred ceremonial subject among the household women and her neighbourhood. Unlike the grand coming-of-age ceremony such as Tuloni Biya and Ritushuddi in Assam and South India, respectively, there is no such public announcement of the occurrence of menarche in Rajbangshi community. It is believed that at the onset of menarche, the girl is blessed by God, and she must follow certain measures to appease her benefactor. She is cleansed and tutored about the basics of menses. The woman is prescribed to intake vegetarian food mostly comprised of lentils and leafy vegetables. She is asked to maintain abstinence from non-vegetarian foods such as poultry, meat and fish because in Hindu culture, killing of animals is considered a grave sin.

Today, restrictions have lessened and certain modifications made in significant ways. Dakhina Roy (25, Chotosolmari) notes that their female ancestors were compelled

to plaster their kaccha house with mud and clay at the onset of menarche. She says, “Amar Thakur maa der ulto dike ghar lepte hoto” (My grandmother had to plaster their kaccha house with mud reversely). This ritual was practised decades ago to delay the onset of menstruation after menarche so that women could come to terms with the tangible changes in her body and the new complex set of rules. Women have recorded that they were tutored to maintain secrecy on the first day of menstruation and use certain euphemisms such as ‘sorir kharap’(illness) and ‘oshukh’(disease) to designate it. Designating the monthly discharge of blood with euphemisms such as sickness and infirmity speaks volumes of the negative way the Rajbangshi women perceive.

Older women have mentioned that they were advised to seclude themselves in a different room and stay there until the end of their menstruation. They were sometimes conferred with a cot or most often made to sleep on the ground. It was believed that women must confine themselves in a room to preserve their energy as menstruation deprived them of blood and made women fragile. This ritual in the Rajbangshi community aligns with the ‘Chaupadi’ tradition in Nepal where menstruating women are confined to menstrual huts. Although this rule of solitary confinement can be dubbed as a mechanism of control over women’s bodies, the women in rural households have used it at their own convenience. The older women who are house-makers have confessed that this isolation provides them respite from the household chores and debilitating work which they are not spared otherwise. They utilize this period to indulge in self-care and rest. Although the rule for seclusion persists, women today in the community pay no heed to this custom. According to their belief system, menstruation is contagious and menstruating women are to date commanded to refrain from sleeping or sharing the bed with other women. However, women today do not endure this liminal inhabitancy in four-walled rooms during their periods. On the attainment of menarche, a woman is

strictly asked to stay away from the members of the male sex under the fear of both the hormonal changes and the physical alterations occurring in her pubescent body. Young school-going girls from rural households have complained that they are often derided and pressured to break friendships with their male friends, much to their chagrin and disapproval.

At puberty, the woman is considered to possess dual powers. She is a subject who can birth children and tend them with her motherly touch, while the same touch under certain circumstances is believed to be potentially pernicious. Although menstrual blood is not censured and viewed with a modern scientific outlook today and considered a normal product of the biological process, Rajbangshi women have recorded that they are still debarred from entering sacred places like temples and the kitchen. To make a cross-cultural reference in this context, the Sabarimala Temple of Kerela had imposed a centuries-old ban on the woman of menstruating age on entering its premises but revoked it recently. The blood of a menstruating woman was considered abject that could defile a sanctum sanctorum space. The Rajbangshi women are coerced with fear to maintain distance from holy spaces under the threat that they would invite curse upon themselves and their families if they did otherwise. Sushmita Das (26, Chapararpar) notes that she maintains a safe distance from places of worship not under the threat of curse or any retaliation but because she reveres her ancestors and does not want to offend them. Bodily excretions are considered to be polluting, and therefore, a menstruating woman in Rajbangshi culture is asked to refrain from cooking and other agrarian work. A university going woman recalled how her mother used to make excuses during their childhood when they would plead her to serve lunch, “My mother would say that while walking on the road she trampled on some animal excreta, and therefore she was untouchable for the day and couldn’t enter the kitchen premises”. Women in the present day cannot abide by

this norm strictly due to the change in family structure from joint to nuclear. However, they still try to sequester themselves from the kitchen and particularly refrain from serving meals to the elderly male members of the family.

Some cultures attest to the symbolic value of water and consider it a physical manifestation of Hindu deities and therefore forbid women to cleanse themselves, especially for the first three days. Rajbangshi women strongly believe in personal hygiene and are asked to cleanse themselves thoroughly before sunrise. This early morning ritual is symbolically termed as “suddhi snan” meaning sacred bath, and is prescribed before daybreak so that the used cloth strips or pads are disposed of in secrecy and dark hours, lest it could prove pernicious to one’s eyes and mind. In the rural agrarian structure of the Rajbangshi community, rivers play a paramount role. Rajbangshi women are forbidden to cross rivers, let alone swim, when on their periods because they believe that the local river Goddess might get offended and bring forth misfortune. This practice is metaphorically parallel to the Ghanian community where menstruating women are banned from crossing the Ofin fearing enraging the local river God.

Unlike the western cultural milieu, where a menstruating woman’s gaze is thought to be malicious, causing something terrible to happen, in Rajbangshi culture, the woman herself is seen as a vulnerable subject and thus required to stay at home. Rajbangshi culture has evolved out of a synchronic relationship between man and nature, and they strongly believe that man is at the mercy of nature. Due to the discharge of blood during menstruation, the woman is considered weak and advised to stay indoors lest she could attract negative conflicting energies. Women are often compelled to stay away from sour foods such as tamarind, pickles and curd as these foods could exacerbate the monthly cyclical flow. In ancient times Rajbangshi women refrained from consuming

“sutki mach” (dry fish) before and during their menses. Sutki Mach is an ethnic food preparation of the community, made with the choicest dried fishes often tossed in assorted flavours and spices. This ethnic food preparation is rumoured to emanate a putrid and noxious smell, and women avoided it to circumvent stinking.

Apart from the hardships of isolation and seclusion, women to date are prohibited from touching cows during their monthly discharge, as cows are highly revered and often worshipped in rural agrarian settings and the hinterlands. Plants such as Tulsi (Holy basil) and Bael (Aegie marmelos) are sacred in the Rajbangshi consciousness and must not be touched by menstruating women. Tulsi is considered the earthly manifestation of Goddess Tulsi. The fruits and leaves of Bael tree are considered to have emerged from the sweat drops of Goddess Parvati in the Hindu Pantheon of deities. In Rajbangshi culture, menstrual cramps or menorrhoea is not reified as a pathological condition. Whatever be the intensity of pain, young girls and women are forbidden from taking medication. They believe that women must suffer through the pain as it would accelerate their tolerance and make them impervious to further suffering during childbirth. This cultural belief can be traced back to the Hindu myth of Indradev’s slaying of Vritra’s a Brahmin in a fit of rage. Indra dev was hereafter held guilty for committing the grave sin of ‘brahmana-hatya’(killing a Brahmin). On praying to Lord Vishnu, Indradev was advised to divide the burden of his crimes and a blessing. It is widely believed that women volunteered to share the curse in the form of menstrual flow and were rewarded with the boon of creating a new life.

Impact on women

Based on the available evidence, the conspicuous difference that I have noted is a wide gap between the views of women aged 10-30 and the older ones. It is undeniable

that women have felt ashamed, embarrassed, and scared of their own blood and flesh at one point in their lives. The reason mostly stated behind the feelings of ambiguity towards one self is the endorsement of the female body as undesirable and leaky compounded with the privileged position of the male ally without any repressive myths guiding their bodies. Misconceptions underpin the taboos of menstruation. It is interesting to note that Rajbangshi women in rural areas still use cloth strips as makeshift devices instead of pads to manage their menstrual flow. These women do not use sanitary napkins not because they consider it a luxury but because of the general embarrassment to procure it. The cloth strips they use are washed but not dried under the sun but in some private place unobtrusively as it is thought to have a harmful effect on society. This belief is in close conjunction to the Indian state of Jharkhand, where menstrual blood is considered malevolent, and women who don't destroy their clothes discreetly are branded as witches. Young women going to educational institutions and employed women have supplanted cloth strips with pads and tampons. They have emanated greater body-positive rhetoric and have shown neo-liberal attitudes towards the consumption of sanitary products. When I inquired whether women view menstruation as a blessing or penance, I have received a mixed response. Elderly women above 30 have branded menstruation as a penance. McHugh uses the term 'menstrual mourning' to symbolize women's negative feelings about it. In my endeavour to understand the reason behind the menstrual mourning, I have noticed that it stems from several reasons developing over time, ranging from the eerie fear of being married off at an early age on attaining menarche to the terrible ritual of 'seclusion' during their periods. The restrictions of mobility have also added to their misery. Although most women have stressed that the custom of banishment in a four-walled room remains to haunt them to date, the women under 30 recognize menstruation as a pure blessing. Despite the debilitating aspects of

menstruation, they perceive it as a boon in disguise because it makes them unique and powerful to procreate.

The culture of secrecy is still evident in the family structure of the Rajbangshi community; women in the household themselves act as surveillants who keenly monitor young girls and, time and again, remind them about menstrual etiquettes. Menstruation is so much hushed up and closeted that young women are chastised and derided for not teaching the behaviours of secrecy. Today, women going to educational institutions try to remain impervious to the ‘whisper’ culture surrounding menses. They have expressed an interest to combat the regressive discourse around it by positively talking about it. These women have interrogated the significance behind menstruation's customs and folk beliefs, trying to decipher any scientific rationalization. Elderly women in the community have meekly accepted the structural patterns as a part of their intangible cultural heritage and confessed that they have never tried to understand the values behind these parochial customs. One of the younger women has indignantly noted that she is visibly disturbed at the stunning display of menstrual denial in her neighbourhood, where women today abstain from visiting the gynaecologist, even after reporting severe menstrual problems due to the fear of judgment and censorship. It is worth mentioning that older women have opposed absolute civilization while the younger women have gladly welcomed modern ideologies. This shift in ideology and opinions related to menstruation among younger women is made possible due to rudimentary knowledge about puberty and allied subjects sanctioned by the schools.

Attainment of Puberty and Bhawaiyaa Songs

Songs and music are often repositories of pedagogical materials and are a rich source of inquiry. Bhawaiyaa is an iconic folk song genre that originated in North Bengal and is widely popular among the Rajbangshi community. Menstruation is a biological

process that entails significant physiological changes to the female body and causes both emotional and bodily ramifications. Although there is no explicit conjunction between menstruation and this popular folk song genre, Bhawaiyaa songs have often vaguely referred to this biological process and its psychosomatic aspects. For instance, in the song ‘Joliya Gela Moner Agun’, a woman complains to her lover about the perceptible changes that have taken place in her neighbourhood on witnessing her blossom into a woman.

“Joliya gela moner agun

Nibhiya gelen na

Dekhite dekhite gabhoru holu

Porar sengrai kore hai re hai

Moiyt pirit korung na

Sengra bondhu chare na”

“You have inflamed a fire in my heart,

But you have not cared to extinguish it

With the passage of time I have grown into a woman

The boys in my locality indulge in cat-calls

Its not me who chases love

But the boys won’t just let me be”

Bhawaiyaa songs have sarcastically talked about the pleasure-seeking desires of a woman, on the attainment of puberty. The Bhawaiyaa lyric, ‘Ki diya bandhiya rakhibo re’ adroitly touches upon the subject of restrictions imposed on a woman on attaining physiological alterations, while also captures her resentment and wish to evade these

strictures. The word ‘cage’ facetiously captures the tendency of society to incarcerate the woman figure who has attained puberty and suffocate her with appropriate etiquettes.

*“Moni nahoī, manic nahoī je,
Joibon aanchol e bandhibo
Guya nahoī, paan nahoī je
Oi taak othitik porishabo
Aar chaloro kumra nahoī je,
O taak poroshik bilabo
Nahoī jaale tuliya thoibo
Hai hai ki diya bandhiya rakhibo re
Aamar pora e joibon re”*

“Neither a pearl nor a jewel is youth,
That you will pack in the loose end of saree
Neither a betel nut nor its leaf
That you will offer your guests
And neither it is your rooftop gourd
That you will distribute among the neighbours
Or keep it lying on the roof as it is
Hai hai how shall you cage me
And, the bounty of desires that inflame in my heart”

The song ‘Paan piya sakhi’, composed by a woman, enables us to delve into a menstruating woman's unconscious sexual desires, a psychological manifestation of the significant changes within her body. In this song, the woman's voice heavily draws upon

imagery to entice her lover. This lyric stresses ‘carpe diem’ and employs fruits as euphemisms to depict the physical changes in the body of a pubescent woman.

“Paan piya sakhi

Dalim gache mur dalim aailo pakhi

Dalim hoilo dogmog

Rosh pore fatiya

Kotoi din rakhim dalim

Gaamchai bandhiya re”

“My dearest friend,

The pomegranates in my tree

Are ripening

The pomegranates are pretty luscious

And are overflowing with juices

How long shall I hide these pomegranates

In the folds of my towel.”

Conclusion

Although the indigenous practices surrounding menstruation constitute the regional history and are the Rajbangshi culture's identity, there is a certain shift in the folk beliefs and customs owing to the advent of modernization, compounded by the women's knowledge about puberty provided by the educational organizations. Women today have begun positively challenging the socio-cultural taboos and accepting the routinized biological process with all its fluidity and tangibility. The introduction of the ‘period leave policy’ has sparked a lot of debate on social media platforms and the like, when asked to comment on the same, Rajbangshi women have recorded a bisected

response. College going girls and employed women have appreciated this positive change attesting that it would positively impact physical and mental health. Homemakers and stay-at-home women, however, have not shown much enthusiasm on this burgeoning issue. It is worth mentioning that there is a sea change in how menstruation is viewed today in the Rajbangshi community. In my effort to document positive menstrual conversations among women, women mostly employed and affiliated in educational institutions have enthusiastically participated. The other interviewed women were initially hesitant, but they too tried to reach out. They have contended that they look forward to building a community where women can receive and confer empathy and share similar experiences, which would help them heal.

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Performance and Representation of Reconstructed Identity in North- East India Tiwa Cultural Festival of Tiwas of Assam

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Abstract

The contemporary time has witnessed the ubiquitous presence of cultural festivals. These festivals have become powerful agencies as well as contested spaces of meanings and significance. North-East India Tiwa Cultural Festival (NEITCF) is a creative extension organized by a group of plain Tiwa people of Assam every year since 2014. The performances and the representations in the festival space made a formalized and rehearsed spectacle to fortify a specific cultural discourse involving symbolic knowledge for voicing the priorities of the plain Tiwas. Decontextualization of traditional lifeways have become a realm of concern among the plain Tiwas. Thus the hill Tiwas received special importance during the festival in order to showcase their traditional performances, as the hill Tiwas have preserved their traditional cultural traits up to a more recent period. The organizers considered this festival in the context of shaping space, where identities were recreated, and belongingness was reconstituted. Further, the festival space operated at the contours of mainstream society by engaging intensified yet brief arrangements, such as seminars, games, processions etc. It cultivated a blended and multi-layered context that gave birth to so many subjectivities and relationships. The present paper reflects on how the narrative discourses, social ties and economic relations in the transient space of NEITCF, which is away from everyday life and space function to showcase reconstructed identity of Tiwas of Assam through performances and representations of highly summarized signifying system within a speculated time period.

Keywords: Festival, North- East India Tiwa Cultural Festival, Performance, Representation, Tiwa Identity, Identity Reconstruction

Introduction

The contemporary time has witnessed the ubiquitous presence of cultural festivals. These festivals have become powerful agencies and contested spaces of meanings and significance. They fortify a specific cultural discourse involving symbolic knowledge for voicing the priorities of the host community. Festivals are areas where extended knowledge is created and recreated in a common space, outside traditional context, in front of heterogeneous people, mirror and strengthen significant virtues and social order. Festivals under different titles with grand exterior spectacles are meant to celebrate staged performances for entertainment and reification of cultural fabrics of communities. Within regions of ethnic complexity, festivals are organized to reaffirm identity and strengthen solidarity, intertwining symbolic and economic involvements. Thus in present-day, cultural traditions observed in festivals give a synergistic interaction of serving the purpose of community life and the exultant purpose of performance culture.

Tiwas being one of the autochthones of the region of Assam, possess a large assemblage of cultural traditions imbued with allegorical means or having literal sense. Observances of these traditions solidify their association with the entire community and its legacy. It affirms their identity and helps them comprehend the righteousness of being a community member. The cultural ethos that these traditions usher makes it distinct from other cultures. It is perceived that the folk traditions imitate an unsophisticated and stable world, which is kept in earlier shape by that generation who stay far away from the chaos of the modern world. The cultural tradition of Tiwas sustains among the hill Tiwas,

who have made conscious attempts to restrict the influence of mass culture. The plain Tiwas seek to reaffirm their cultural identity in the face of a sense of displacement brought about by the process of globalization. They believe that for a diaspora, a festival may exhibit a sense of visibleness, a framed observance of identity beyond the edges of the community. Considering the distinctiveness reposed in their fairs and festivals, plain Tiwas have started organising North-East India Tiwa Cultural Festival (NEITCF) under the title *Sograsaal* every year since 2014, exhibiting their rich cultural heritage. These traditions have been restructured purposefully in the festival space to reaffirm a sort of cultural identity and belongingness. The arrangements of the festival are primarily dependent on the hill Tiwas as they have preserved their traditional traits up to a more recent period. Peeping into the NEITCF helps to receive an insightful fabrication of their worldview and meanings associated with their everyday life performances and coming in terms with the changes of times and transmutations that they hold on to. Thus the present paper reflects on how the narrative discourses, social ties and economic relations in the transient space of NEITCF function to showcase the reconstructed identity of Tiwas of Assam through performances and representations of a highly summarized signifying system. It also studies how the festival space consolidated a wide range of cultural meanings within a speculated period and in a common space that is away from everyday life and space.

Methodology

The methods of research followed in the present work have been designed keeping in mind the study of the cultural traditions of Tiwas in its present context. While planning to do so special attention has been given to collecting data from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data have been collected through observations, informal interviews, and recording and observation of different cultural traits observed in

Sograsal. Besides taking interviews, the researcher has also kept close contact with some informants to solve instant queries. Data collected from secondary sources include books, published and unpublished materials, articles, newspapers, magazines, electronic media, etc. The collection of material both from direct and indirect sources, the analysis focussing the personal observations and as has been suggested by the theoreticians while discussing cultural traditions still operational in the community life of the people, and at every point the changing scenario along with the factors responsible for changes carries equal importance in the present investigation. In the present work, more emphasis has been given to analysing the data collected by the researcher as first-hand information.

The Tiwas

The Tiwas, one of the major ethnic communities of the North-Eastern region of India, inhabit in different parts of Assam. Tiwas are divided into two groups based on their settlement pattern- the Hill Tiwas and the Plain Tiwas. In the case of the plain area, they are again scattered in many places. The majority of them are prominently concentrated in the Marigaon and Nagaon districts of Assam. The hill Tiwas are based in Karbi Anglong and Ri-Bhoi district of Meghalaya. The topography and ecology of hill areas and plain areas always differ from each other, so the geographical and environmental conditions directly impact the socio-cultural lives of hill Tiwas and plain Tiwas. They are also more or less influenced by their neighbouring tribes. Most of the hill Tiwa villages are not well approachable by road communication. So they are not keeping in good touch with the plain areas and adhering to the traditional lifestyle, unlike plain Tiwas.

Traditional Context of performances

Tiwas being a distinguished community of the state of Assam, own an affluent repository of beliefs and practices. The evolution of folk practices observed by the

community is rooted in man-nature relation. Therefore, nature is the prime constituent behind the fabrication of the structure of their culture and exists before culture. Tiwas regard hills, forests, ponds, rivers as their divine zones and have separate gods and goddesses. Thus they are followers of both naturism and animism. They have their tribal deities and consider *Pha Mahadeo* their supreme deity. Therefore, religion governs the everyday affairs of the Tiwa community, which further effectively works towards strengthening solidarity and consciousness. Ancestor worship is a significant part of their religious worshipping. Traditionally their religious practices are accomplished at *Nobaro* '. It is a very revered and holy place for the Tiwas. Before initiating any significant work, they offer prayer at the *Nobaro* '. Besides the religious utilization, *Nobaro* ' is also used as a place for dwelling by most of the hill Tiwa people.

Considering worldviews as repositories of human thoughts gather the consequences brought about by the inconsistent time. The sustenance of Tiwas revolves around the worldviews generated by them, which are being delivered in symbolic ways through observances of various cultural elements. Most of the traditional cultural practices of Tiwas are agro centric and associated with the wellbeing of the entire village, agricultural affluence, continuity of age-old tradition etc. The significant parts of these practices constitute both sacred and secular aspects. Some of their significant fairs and festivals are *Bisu*, *Wansuwa*, *Sogramisawa*, *Jonbeel Mela* etc. *Jonbeel Mela* is one of their momentous festivals. The compelling part of the festival is the continuity of the age old barter system. The presence of Gobha king in the *Mela* enhances its importance. He also initiates the age old community fishing through performance of some rites and rituals. Tiwa *Bisu* is distinctive from other communities of Assam, though some similarities with them cannot be denied. *Barat Utsav* is another community festival of Tiwas especially celebrated by the plain Tiwas to keep the society free from the

epidemic, pestilence, wild animals etc. *Sogra Misawa* being a springtime festival, is echoed with folk music and dance, worshipping of *Langkhun*, the sacrifice of animals etc. *Wansua* is another remarkable festival to relate their association with gods and goddesses, as they believe they accomplished the first harvesting with the cooperation of gods and goddesses. It can also be termed a festival of rice grinding, which creates a compelling atmosphere to grow likings between young boys and girls. *Chamadi* holds the central position in this festival. *Chamadi* is their youth's dormitory, where girls are restricted to enter inside. The young boys are trained in folklore, art and craft, musical lore, village protection etc., in a *Chamadi*. The main purpose of the Chamdi is to fulfil the village's socio, economic, cultural, and sometimes political activities. A traditional Tiwa society is highly structured with the system of the clan. They have several clans where some are dominant, and others are sub-clans. It is an indispensable part of their culture to abide by the rules of clan exogamy. Variety of clans leads to variety in language, tones of speech, customs and traditions. Tiwas have rich reservoirs of folk songs and dances. They specifically have two types of songs-*Lo Ho La Hai* and *Lali Hilali*. Every performance has its significance, approach and uniqueness. Being matrilineal society, women enjoy quite a significant position in their culture. In various religious performances, they have their woman priest and a male priest. They have their tribal judicial system in their villages. It is a matter of pride for the hill Tiwas and plain Tiwas to have a kingdom of their own. Gobha was the biggest among all other kingdoms of the Tiwas. Despite complying with the present political system, Tiwa people still adhere to their traditional customary laws and live in the presence of a hereditary king, the highest of authority in various socio-cultural matters. Tiwa king also takes part and initiate various socio-cultural ceremonies. The name of the present Tiwa king is

Deepsing Deoraja. The hill Tiwas have their own Tiwa Autonomous Council, which results from the continuous and joint expedition headed by various Tiwa organizations.

Regarding the traditional economic system of Tiwas they are considered to be dependent on agricultural production. Before shifting their interest towards agricultural production, they earned their livelihood through hunting. Such lived realities are symbolically represented and expressed through performances.

North-East India Tiwa Cultural Festival: A Brief Detail

North-East India Tiwa Cultural Festival was held for the first time in 2014 at Sonaikuchi hill, near Jagiroad, Assam, just a few kilometres away from Guwahati city. The festival venue was named *Sograsal*, and different ethnic and non-ethnic communities surround it. The whole event can be narrowed down into the following heads:

Objectives

The festival is the creative innovation of the cultural life of the Tiwas. The organizing committee had stated the following objectives behind the organization of this festival:

- a. To promote and institute Tiwa culture and identity among different region people.
- b. To unite plain Tiwas and hill Tiwas irrespective of generation.
- c. To make the young Tiwa generation aware of their rich cultural tradition.

Inauguration Programme

The four-day-long festival started with the inauguration of Gateway to *Sograsal*, by Deepsing Deoraja, the present King of Gobha Kingdom of Tiwas. It was followed by hoisting the festival flag by the president of the organizing committee and the inauguration of the transitory Guest House of the festival, temporary *Chamadi, Nobaro*'

and Tiwa Food Fair. These were inaugurated by the vice president of the organising committee, executive president of the organizing committee, a member of Tiwa Autonomous Council, a notable social worker, and Dr. Puniram Patar. The open meeting of the inauguration session was chaired by Ramakanta Dewri, a chief executive member of the Tiwa Autonomous Council; Gautam Bora, MLA and former minister; Bibekananda Doloi, Parliamentary Secretary (Veterinary); Prof Tulsi Bordoloi from the festival organising committee and also a former president of the Tiwa Sahitya Sabha. Mr Ramakanta Dewri appreciated this planned concerted endeavour to conserve the rich cultural heritage of the Tiwa community, as he feels the community is having several prongs of pressure to keep their rich cultural life intact. He also highlighted the responsibilities of the greater Assamese society to extend their helping hand in this regard. Bibekananda Doloi gave an anecdote of the initiative, saying that this venture would add more meaningful insights to the future's diverse structure of greater Assamese society and culture. Prof. Bordoloi, in his speech, revealed his worries regarding the threats caused by the impacts of globalization on the culture and identity of Tiwas. He believes this concerted arrangement would stand like a shield to resist all such probabilities that cause damage to their identity as well as culture. As part of the programme's inauguration, two Tiwa artists, Niharika Senapati and Tapan Bordoloi, were felicitated.

Other Programmes

In the first day, a cultural troupe from hills showed the celebration of *Wanchua* festival. This was inaugurated by the Chief Executive Member, Tiwa Autonomous Council. This spectacular celebration was witnessed by distinguished guests like Deputy Commissioner, Morigaon district and the Director, North-East Sangeet Natak Akademi,

and numerous prominent personalities from different areas. While releasing the festival's souvenir, "SOGRASAL" in the evening by the Principal, Morigaon College, he said – "a society gets destroyed not by war but an inappropriate cultural practice". He appealed to the young generation of the community to work united for the preservation and development of the rich cultural traditions of the Tiwa people. This session was attended by Principal of Kapili College, Jagiroad, as the guest of honour and some other distinguished people. The next day started with a commemoration programme conducted by the secretary of the organising committee and vice-presidents. It was followed by a special round of competition of traditional Tiwa games, which Executive member of Tiwa Autonomous Council inaugurated. Another significant part of the festival was a cultural procession. A symposium on the topic "Tiwa Folk and Tribal Cultural Diversities" took place, and some distinguished persons from and outside the community such as Shri Lalsing Madar, president of Tiwa Sahitya Sabha; Dr Anil Boro, Sahitya Akademi Awardee and Professor, Gauhati University; Shri Maheshwar Patar, former president of Tiwa Sahitya Sabha; Shri Lakhi Panging, former president of Missing Sahitya Sabha were part of this symposium. The next day Anita Konwar, president of Tiwa Makhon Lai Tokhra; Gita Darphang of All Tiwa Women's Union, Karbi Anglong district committee took part in another symposium on the topic. "Role of Women in the Socio-Cultural Development of the Tiwas". The attraction of the third day was the celebration of *Usha Barat Utsav*, which writer Murulidhar Das inaugurated. In the inauguration session, MP from Nagaon, Principal of Sonapur College and president of Jagiroad College Teachers' Unit, took part and gave their views on diverse aspects of the traditional folk culture. Followed by *Usha Barat* another significant ceremony of Tiwas, *Sagramisawa* was performed, where among the large number of audience, executive member of Karbi Angong Autonomous Council; Shri Prasanta Rajguru, executive editor

of Amar Asom; Principal of Dimoria College, Khetri; Shri Rituraj Konwar, senior photojournalist, was significant. On the concluding night of this four-day NEITCF a cultural night was organized, where various Tiwa artists performed Tiwa traditional songs and dances at *Sograsal*. A senior citizen of the locality inaugurated the cultural night. Munmun Das, a renowned Tiwa singer, was invited to perform at the cultural night. The musical evening was witnessed by a crowd of thousands of people drawn from in and around Jagiroad.

Analysis

A festival is a large text that can be written, rewritten, interpreted and reinterpreted enormous times. Festivals have become crossing space of inherited and borrowed cultural traits, resulting in forming a new version of the cultural model. They can be conceived as ritualistic or recurrent short term events in which community members participate to affirm and celebrate various social, religious, ethnic, national, linguistic or historical bonds (Benett et al., 2004, pp. 1-7). Thus festivals function to showcase representation of identity and encounter other facets of experimentation to reset a space that is away from everyday life and space.

Decontextualization of traditional life ways have become a realm of concern among the plain Tiwas. They have faced a sense of cultural dislocation ushered by the influence of their joint inhabitations with other community people; rapid transformation in the internal and external structure of culture due to globalization, modernity, and social mobility in the contemporary time. The way they perceive themselves and their identity with the hill Tiwa people considerably vary. In their perception of culture, the decontextualized Tiwas have conceptualized other ways to represent their signifying practices. Due to the increased bewilderment in their traditional practices, they have lost

the link between the ‘signification’ and ‘form’. When a group of Tiwas are losing their concern from these signifying practices, the maintenance of these signifying practices favoured by another group of Tiwas has become apparent. The increasing contact of the Tiwas with the mainstream Assamese society has had a far-reaching impact upon them in incorporating the culture of the mainstream homogenized society. Thus the need for the epistemologies of their past, which is romanticized as an unsophisticated world incompatible with the unstable and disordered present-day world, has become apparent in contemporary time. To substantiate Tiwa identity and spread its rich cultural heritage among the young members of the community, the NEITCF had been organized by a group of plain Tiwa people.

Turner (2017) had talked about two ideas—liminality and *communitas*. While discussing rites of passage, he mentioned certain ritual processes associated with it, which is constituted of three stages. The participants who observe rites of passage go through these stages to acquire a new status. They leave the structured world with old status, then arrive into a liminal phase and re-enter into a new status. This liminal phase had been considered as an anti structured form. In that liminal phase, the participants encounter *communitas* marked by solidarity, affinity and equality—drawing Turner’s understanding of liminality in their discussion on festivals. Purdue et al. considered festivals as liminal moments to observe pleasure and meaning, where new opportunities for individual identities are opened up. According to them, this “Do It Yourself” culture confronts with a symbolic system of mainstream society (Bennett et al., 2004, p.90). In the cultural homogenization process of mainstream society of Assam the NEITCF, representing pleasure and meaning, creates a sense of confrontation to the mainstream society by exhibiting the heterogeneous nature of the cultural system of Tiwas. In this way, they focus on their right to recognize them as a distinct ethnic community. On the

other hand, the non-Tiwa people can embrace these alternative traits to form a new collective identity by coming together in a common space.

With the emergence of NEITCF, the Tiwa culture has received a concrete structure with an organizing committee, rules and regulations, stage, programme schedule etc. Though the festival is locally organized, its theme or motif is quite regional and incorporates important cultural traits. Further attempts were also expatiated to create a global stratum. At the festival, the organisers' intentions received a high amount of visibility through the re-drawn of the cultural map. The following analysis attempts to consider a variety of nuances of the NEITCF from an empirical point of view. The following factors have been discussed briefly to have an insightful understanding of the festival.

a. The space

The Festival's topography has a major role in making a festival. Thus the observation of the situatedness of the festival comes into sight as a crucial aspect. The four-day long NEITCF took place in a space that emerged as an imbricated site of interdependence and cultural difference. It had been arranged in a beautiful location on the feet of Sonaikuchi hill, near Jagiroad. They named the venue *Sograsal*. *Sograsal* is easily reachable by road, rail and air transport. From the inauguration of the festival venue to the hoisting of the flag etc., the overall observation gave a scope to understand the multifaceted dimensions of the festival space. This temporary space that had been deployed to facilitate well being, belongingness and identity issues turned into an artificial laboratory. Thus, it is crucial to understand the synergistic relations between place, community identity, and cultural traits.

The image of a community is linked with visibility from the outside. Celebrations of traditions keep persons and the place visible. Thus a particular identification of the festival depends on creating a certain kind of ambience and vibes to curve up the spirit of a festival. The whole venue of *Sograsal* was decorated as a spectacle sight. The replicas of the various tangible cultural heritage of Tiwas were converged to showcase certain discourses, such as - harmony, uniqueness, integrity, and belongingness, to display the space as worth experiencing by the outsiders. The entire festival had become a formalized, rehearsed spectacle to fixate spectators' concentration on the whole arrangement in the fixed time frame.

One of the significant functions that this festival served was, it buttressed trans local relations that gave a new dimension to spatial and temporal interference for procurement and articulation of identity creation. As part of this experimentation facet, they carefully selected the space to observe the festival, which was away from everyday life and regular space. The space had no mythical or historical significance in the case of Tiwa culture; however, the scenic beauty of the venue surrounded by hills and its overall convenience displayed a reconstructed identity of Tiwas in such a compelling way that it had imitated the traditional way of living in a modern and more convenient way. As Dowd, Liddle and Nelson observed,

“Drawn together from geographically dispersed locations and away from the expectations of everyday life, fans and performers can immerse themselves in a particular culture and experiment with different identities (Bennett & Peterson, 2004, p. 149).”

Again, this space seemed conducive to cultivating interaction with culturally different people to go beyond ethnic boundaries. The interaction within this space

reflected the everyday routine of plain Tiwa people, where the traditional rules of participation were relaxed. However, this space's experience certainly differed from people's everyday existence in urban or rural settings. Therefore, the festival site served two purposes- the festival-goers encountered an experience that reverberated their established taste. At the same time, they understood a different kind of taste that bore no similarities with the established ones.

The observances of celebrations shared a customary relation between space and time. When these celebrations are observed outside its temporal and spatial setting, it results in rootlessness and placelessness. With an idea of recognition and acceptance, the festival venue had been designed, literally and symbolically, to recreate a sense of identity against the placelessness. This sense of placelessness of the space that associated Tiwas and outsiders temporarily was a condition that the festival visitors were comfortable with. This spatial experience was related to the experientially-based understanding of a place (Hubbard et al., p. 5). These experiences that people gather in a place can be immediate, instinctive and bodily. When people started moving away from their shared sense of community identity and idealized existence due to increased social or physical mobility, it created a gap between them. In the contemporary postmodern world, the sense of insideness has been overshadowed by eradicating the distinctiveness of places. The overpowering attitude of outsideness has created standardized space that has resulted in placelessness. The festival space characterized by placelessness resulted in an all-inclusive platform, where tourists and outsiders tried to relive a sense of community feeling and simultaneously included themselves in the functions of commodification. Therefore this festival space resulted in constructing a space of contested meanings. This spatial construction of new identity evoked new social relations. This placelessness also transformed the hill Tiwa performers into artists.

However, when they observe these performances within a natural context, they perform being members of the community, not as artists.

Another significant aspect of the shared aspect of the festival was it did not seem to be entirely artistic since every superficial space within the festival created different lived experiences through shared experiences of mundane activities such as cooking, buying food, eating together, queuing for toilets etc. The festival's activities also used public streets meant for vehicular access of the general public, for cultural procession and inauguration rituals. This momentary re-alignment of public space waved off the daily realities of the general public for a moment.

b. The People

People in a festival mean a large context that includes a collective representation. In NEITCF all the people involved in organizing or performing in the festival are members of the Tiwa community. They somehow or the other shared diverse interconnection identified based on different social networks such as clan or kinship, residence, age group and gender etc. However, the organizers, a group of plain Tiwa people, formed the authority over the festival in its management. The performers were hill Tiwa people. The elderly Tiwas took part in interpreting or experiencing the festival. Middle-aged Tiwas took hold of the managerial positions of the committee and took the ordinance to run the festival. The young boys from the hill were involved in various performances, whereas the young plain Tiwa people witnessed the whole experience. Tiwas have their traditional system of governance. But with changing times, this traditional system of governance has been overpowered by the rules set by the state government. In their traditional context the participation of the Tiwa king enhances the pride or dignity of the performance. However the role of the king was minimized in the

festival space, and politicians representing the state government had become the new audience. This kind of association produced scope to shade the unequal exercise of political power and navigate constructed social identities. Inviting and allowing other different categories of people in the festival space, such as academicians, researchers, media professionals and others, Tiwas put an effort to locate themselves within the wider arenas of socio-economic and academic spheres.

Thus this shared space, where the continuation of their cultural elements was subjected to the aesthetic understanding, recognition and admiration of ‘others’ fabricated new meanings of indigenous lifeways and all the folks who were part of the festival some way or the other became influential in shaping or articulating the festival.

c. Performances and Representations

Bodily movements give a deeper level of consciousness and incorporation than listening. The body movements with music and dance narrated Tiwas’ ways of being present in this world through a sense of connection. The performances selected to perform on the stage were *Wansua*, *Sogramisawa*, and *Barat Utsav*. These are traditional performances of Tiwas composed of singing and dancing. They all have significance and are subject to specific seasons and space for observation. Sacred and secular activities are important segments of all these performances. In the festival space, all these performances had been absorbed in the process of striving for indignity, recognition, and self-determination. The performances being the prime focus of the festival enacted the narration of their past, however not focused on the traditional worldviews. These performances within the festival space worked as portraits of the contemporary traditions accepting people’s articulation. For performances, the troops were invited from the hill. The performers involved situational performative facets. The actors tried to bring forth

the idea of openness in some particular context by deploying ways of seeing. This openness was not enjoyed in the same proportion by each audience. The audience took the liberty to re-read the cultural text and infuse meanings into them. Thus, it can be seen a shift from cultural performance to target audience performance.

Within the natural context, the traditional performances of the community are not rehearsed and do not constitute any clear beginning or end. In the process of the performances, the community members involved in the performance induce signs to create a sense of belongingness among the members of the community. They are driving forces to create social fabrications of the real world. The performances on the festival stage created a gap between performers and audience, unlike the traditional context. The performances performed within a fixed time frame were somehow detached from their deeper meanings and cultural moorings. Since the whole plethora of the festival enacted was controlled, hence the symbolic activities associated with these performances had been trimmed or orchestrated to exhibit different issues and transformations marking the contemporary status of the Tiwas in front of heterogeneous broader spectacle. While going for stage performance, songs sung to express love during the performance of *Wansuwa* did not convey the same sentiment since they were performed on stage in an artificial set-up. The involvement of the male performers in the performance of *Sogramisawa* after consumption of *zuⁱ* within its own natural setting brings liveliness and vigour to the performance, when it is performed in front of the own community members. But the same performance by the same performers without being intoxicated didn't turn into the same, since they were staged in front of heterogeneous groups of people in the festival space. Each performance went through a process of negotiated meaning, where meanings were not entirely fixed to be readily available for everyone present there. The reconstruction of folk performances either as local identity or as

touristic resource provided examples of fabricated authenticity. Most of the time the practitioners or performers were forced to embrace externally imposed social contexts and hardly reflected the concerns of the actual practitioners.

The selected performances as well as the replicas within the festival space served occasional purpose, where the resurgence of identity, integrity and belongingness could be resituated. The *Sograsal* was an instituted venue that created a larger space to accommodate performances and emerged as a new imagination to shape it as a cultural hub encircling many things to see, feel and taste in a common ground. The food stall that provided local Tiwa delicacies fostered their entrepreneurial spirit, and the buyers got an opportunity to exchange dialogues with those who were there to serve the Tiwa food. In this space of performance, the cooks were able to feed the buyers the literal sense of their cultural background and feed traditional delicacies. This led to the breakdown of the artists-audience boundary. In this way an exchange beyond aesthetics took place and the audiences got a demonstration of how different the Tiwas are. Addition of various types of other activities such as games, seminars etc. cultivated a blended and multi-layered context that gave birth to so many subjectivities and relationships. The competitions related to traditional sports were attached with rewards. The collective assemblage of signs and symbols such as- flag, souvenir, dress, temporary *Nobaro* and *Chamadi*, replicas of traditional artefacts etc were situated or created in the festival space as condensed forms to reflect their ideological significance. This symbolic system transformed their everyday realities into its representations.

All the meanings of the activities in the festival venue were conveyed through a highly summarized signifying system to consolidate a wide range of cultural meanings in a common space within a speculated time period. The festival became an accurate signifier to bring together all decontextualized Tiwa people to engage in taste and

cultural practices collectively. The various individual events also helped the festival-goers exhibit their collective and individual identities by individually or collectively investing in the cultural text and the tangible heritage on display. All the activities in the festival performed a kind of therapeutic function not only for the community members but also for the outsiders providing an interval from the tedious lifestyles of people.

d. Sacred and Secular Aspects of the Festival

The ideological structure of the festival being competitive keeps no difference between sacred and secular domains. Rituals are prone to be affected by changes, and observations in a festival venue mirror change and various kinds of stress and influences.

Tiwas establish a connection between the existence of this cosmos and their existence through a supernatural being. It shapes an alluring worldview. According to this view they are not an ordinary human group. Religion of Tiwas accommodates some sacred as well as secular affairs unaffected by the refine pursuits of theology. Tiwa celebrations are centred on both sacred and secular aspects. Apart from secular attitudes of a celebration such as- singing, dancing, eating, drinking, and merry-making, it also involves communication through offerings and sacrifices with mysterious or spiritual beings. These sacred aspects elicit certain kinds of emotions and attitudes, which are believed to be acquired and performed by the members within the cultural setting. Thus sacred aspects of a celebration can't be viewed outside its religious context. During the performances of *Wansuwa*, *Barat* and *Sogra* within the festival venue, certain degrees of rehearsed or choreographed performances outside its traditional context in front of heterogeneous people had worked against the notion of conventional context of sacredness. In contemporary secular atmosphere, Turner (1987) has argued that highly acknowledged recreational time has acquired the functions of the ritual forms. Thus

secular frames have become absolutely more consequential, organized and self-recognized ventures due to the transpiration of traditional performances outside the original spatio-temporal conditions.

e. Identity and Cultural politics

Representation is an eminent part of festivals, so thus the power structure, since representation embodies power. Resisting tradition in a constructed space involves various forms of power struggles to attain prominence and material ends. A festival not only creates thesis, it also creates antithesis simultaneously. That is how the elements of culture become part of the politicization of culture to serve self-interested ideologies and political and commercial benefits of a group of people. The organizational structure of the NEITCF demonstrated the nature of the power structure quite obviously.

When a group is in crisis, feel threatened, then resituating legacies becomes a major concern for them to maintain identity. Morrissey et al argue,

“Cultural identity depends not only on access to culture and heritage, but also on opportunities for cultural expression and cultural endorsement within society’s institutions (Bennett et al., 2004, p.143).”

In the identity formation process of Tiwas the sense of being excluded from the mainstream Assamese identity has strengthened their intuition to get included in the mainstream society through a process of assimilation. In this inclusion process, their identity has mostly become a constructed identity undertaken by a small group of Tiwa leaders based on some of their specific external traits. In the assimilation process, the plain Tiwas have mostly abandoned their significant cultural traits. It certainly has ignited a revivalist tendency, where the exclusion from the mainstream society has become more challenging. Because either they have accepted other’s cultural elements

totally, or they have embraced other's culture partially continuing their indigenous practices. This has happened due to their direct contact with the mainstream Assamese society. In this negotiation process, neither have they become intensely pledged by the outer cultural force nor can they stay aloof maintaining their cultural world. This has caused to emerge an assertive attitude to portray themselves as a distinct ethnic group with the growing realisation to unveil their rich cultural tapestry. In the process of identity formation through restoring their cultural traditions, the NEITCF had been constructed in a way to be a meeting ground, where tradition meets modernity and impromptu performances meet deliberate account. The aesthetic forms of those elements of their cultural system were taken up to show in the festival space which seemed to be different and could be framed as exotic image to receive admiration and recognition of outsiders.

The organizers who belonged to the plain Tiwas played the authoritative role in decision making process. In quest for originality the Tiwa performers were being invited from hill areas, as the hill Tiwas are still maintaining their culture to a large extent. However the lifestyles of the plain Tiwa exponents and the idea they generated to shape the event differed substantially from the hill Tiwa participants. Organization of the festival in a space that doesn't belong to the hill Tiwas also hints another aspect of cultural politics, where the desire of the plain Tiwas to control the whole scenario was visible. The Tiwas who came from hill were all dressed in traditional attire to represent authentic Tiwa tradition. This was a process of casting individuals as folk as part of the choreographed image, where the plain Tiwas were not part. The diverse interconnection could also be witnessed in distributing the tasks and the space based on gender and age. There was no women representation in the organizing committee, whereas the traditional Tiwa community is based on matrilineal system. However All Tiwa Women's

Association, which looks after the issues related to women's empowerment and women's education, organized a seminar within the festival venue. This academic work gave women's access to those spaces where they had no role in the past. The organizing committee being the authority of the festival guided other Tiwa people about how to represent ethnicity, how and what are the images to display in the festival space to trimming the festival atmosphere as an astounding one. Festival being a way of representation, was likely to intensify authority and power in the hands of organizers who disseminated their own ideologies. These fabricated celebrations under the festival title involved both consensus and conflict between the hill Tiwas and plain Tiwas.

The festival instantiated a form of obstinacy, which expressed an exclusive identity in an inclusive platform. The Tiwas claimed that this festival would help them to reach their culture to the global fraternity. In order to meet the demand of the global culture, the strategies of the festival had embedded more formal conventions. It started with an inauguration and also included flag hoisting, speech, book release, competitions, cultural function etc. In addition to that, seminars had also been organised to bring their cultural heritage under the purview of academic discourse through an intellectual terrain.

f. Commoditization

Festivals are occurrences, which evolve around the components of production, consumption and political scenarios. Socially constructed festival space works as an active ingredient in the productivity aspect of culture. Commoditization dapples at that point when the priorities lay on to present the folks, their culture and space as unique. This intrinsic nature while observing a festival certainly generates an idea to emphasize the demand of the consumers. Elederen (1997) had argued festivals as "symbolic transformation of public space to a particular form of cultural consumption." It can't

associate undeviating constituents. Therefore, within the festival venue, commoditization is substantial in this regard to reshape social ties, generating new audiences, economic relations, webs of communication, etc.

Commercialization being an innate segment of the political ideology has taken its way to reach the performance tradition of Tiwas. Performance tradition has been covertly utilized for the purpose of representation of cultural identity. The performative nature of the Tiwa cultural system was restructured to embrace the glamourized attitudes to deal with the increasing demand of consumers. The representations within the festival space were placed consciously to transform them into commodities, since all the displays certainly became powerful means to grab the attention of the festival-goers that aided them to seize the community life. This deliberate construction can't always be considered as disparaging. As celebration of identity and collective consciousness based on that particular time and space within a festival allowed people to discern the dynamic nature of culture of Tiwas. Azara & Crouch (2006) have argued

“...the shifting vectors of globalization have created new relations between the local and the global, the religious and the secular that constantly challenge traditional concepts of place, identity, the sacred and the just milieu. In this context, the festival needs to be linked to the wider sociological, economic and political context of change, as a site to adapt, reconstruct and re-enact meaningful narrations of the collective being in the---globally enlarged---world”.

Within the frame of the festival it was made intelligible to be exposed to different tastes. The organizers had tried to create a market within the festival space by selling traditional food, cultural artefacts and Tiwa traditional dress as an integral part of the festival with an aim to promote the festival as a tourist destination. This market created

larger economic opportunities for the community members seeking economic protection and recognition by expanding it to a global platform through media, which would have been a little difficult otherwise. People from the community consumed the products as much as the visitors did. At some point, this economic interest behind traditional traits disrupted traditionality and its position in a contemporary context.

On the other hand, this also generated self-sustainability. Further this structuring also necessitated the organizers to invite such people who were considered to benefit the motive behind organizing the festival. In this negotiation process, the meanings of traditional cultural context of these performances couldn't be perceived, since meanings shifted from their original context to make it a public display or consumer product. During the celebration time of the festival, the culture through the performances also took up some value. This value brought a material benefit to the performers. Here the culture was deployed as a concept to produce a symbolic system that could transform one social aspect to other and presented it for global display. With the shifting meaning the displays continued to be a segment of symbolic economy.

g. Other Significant Aspects of the Festival

Cultural festivals can be considered a creative extension of a community to render presence and challenge the forces that try to mark them absent in the world. A community is structured around meanings, manifestations and social ties. An indigenous knowledge system is constitutive of all these three significant traits. It is pretty common in every ethnic community that the indigenous knowledge system is being transferred from one generation to another in a structural manner. The knowledge receivers are responsible for maintaining intercommunity ties and holding on to the community's identity. However, contemporary time has witnessed a lack of continuation of

intergenerational transfer of knowledge. The lack of continuation is undoubtedly associated with socio-cultural desolation and creates adversities in keeping the community's identity intact. NEITCF is a possible avenue that buttresses a new sense of cultural transmission in a present day shared space. Moreover it would aid to resuscitate socio-cultural identities and significant ties by involving young Tiwas and invigorating their roles to realize the urgency of intercultural freedom of the community. They can significantly create an agency by understanding the possibilities of the present day shared space, where everyone needs to co-exist to maintain oneness and peace.

The NEITCF was caught between two worlds-modern and traditional, which were used as expedients to ameliorate internal issues and debates. To live meaningfully in a world always needs recognition, not only from the self but also from others. The festival created a larger visibility to stimulate socio-political norms that can favour or benefit a traditionally marginalized community like Tiwas. Festival provided a new space to delve into a relation between self and society. The Tiwas live along with an interdependent and interweaving process of meaning-making. The incorporation process of Tiwas into the nation-building process is often determined or limited by the mainstream discourse. The seminal, life strengthening worldviews of Tiwas, which reinforce their existence as a unique community, are rarely being considered by the government while implementing policies to improve their ways of life and appreciated by mainstream societies. Rather they come in terms with misunderstandings and inappropriate understandings by the outside community. An inequality is manifested by comparing the mainstream society based on income status, health ground, education level etc. The festival space developed counter culture to propound its existence over and against the social realities created by the mainstream societies. Thus the festival was meant to delineate existence and authority in a creative way and also to uphold an agency that could divert attention of the

policy makers to find a suitable space in the scheme of affairs. Morrissey et al (2007) have discussed that,

“A vital component of sustaining and supporting socio-cultural well-being is the creation of public spaces in which indigenous values, hopes, ambitions and imagined futures can be asserted over and against the social construction of reality by state practices and the mainstream.”

Culture is composed of worldviews and traditional lifestyles of Tiwas revolve around worldviews in everyday context. It is quite impossible to summarize everything about their traditional culture in few days of performance or display. However, the possibility of the festival as a constructed public space based on temporal and spatial conditions to overpower constraining and assimilative forces caused by dominant discourses to limit their abilities can't be overlooked. Thus, the transformational role of the festival transformed the perceptions of people and transformed an ordinary space into a space embedded with memories.

Conclusion

The festival is a symbolic event to produce integrating narratives that successfully mobilised meaningful metaphors of their rich cultural tradition to appraise numerous things to different folks. People in postmodern world seem to deal with a sense of rootlessness in everyday realities. Thus, reproducing cultural heritage in festival events principally celebrating community culture provides a new way to preserve it through celebration rather than not celebrating the same. Traits of culture always provide an altar in times of needs or conflicts and they are still doing the same though in a different context creating and recreating meanings.

The NEITCF no doubt, is an event created by the plain Tiwas to reassert identity and an innovative conglomeration framed by both potentialities and coercions of modernity. While this festival usher a good sense of tradition, it again creates negotiated equity between the visualization of the past and imposed modernity. Organized and spontaneous activities give it a look of a show. Authenticity is staged. In this process of recognition, the artists become tools infused with particular objectives and meanings. The connotations of the representations vary between organizers and the spectators. The organizers consider this festival in the context of shaping space, where identities are recreated, belongingness is reconstituted. The hill Tiwas don't find a sense of emotional attachment due to its romanticized nature. The organizers are trying to forge a new identity based on traditionality, which has not yet fully grown. Because of these two groups of Tiwas are based on two opposite spatial locations, they have not yet arrived into a consensus as to seek one-way direction to shape their identity. Therefore the ideologies and interpretations of the plain Tiwas come in direct conflict with that of their hill Tiwa counterparts. The non-Tiwa spectators find the entertaining and consumable elements of the festival as interesting. When the organizers aimed to bring all the Tiwa people under one umbrella, they ended up creating a new umbrella. The cynicism here is that the resonance of culture can't be sustained without the manipulation it perpetuates. So in this era of globalization where things are being digitally connected and reproduced, NEITCF with an aim to bring forth the members to their traditional lifeways, appear as banal in many ways but the sociability function to create an experience of solidarity works in positive direction. Festival space fabricates a perpetual atmosphere that stimulates acceptance or receptiveness to others and encourages fellow feeling through a sense of intangibility incorporating belongingness. The strategy here is to take a journey from traditional culture to secure a place in national culture. In the process of

reconstitution under changing conditions manipulation of resources in the name of touristification is to be taken into consideration.

To mediate the ideas of identity in the festival space apart from celebrating, singing and dancing also involved a lens of representation by replicas of other significant cultural traits, such as *Nobaro*, *Chamadi*, etc, since everything about the festival is crucial to the process of fertilization. The inclusionary and exclusionary processes such as- what to be performed and not to be performed were further complicated by the process of modernity. Performances of traditional cultural traits in a shared space may come in terms with the manipulation by modernity. The interaction between the tradition and modernity has uncovered the inherent contradictions and at the same time it has also led to the evolution of new structures. The festival created a nexus of relations and performances; however, separating it from local routes, webs of socio-cultural relations, and the production process caused a serious threat to the sustenance of its culture.

Thus NEITCF can be considered as an appendage of nurturing alternative socio-cultural reality in a creative way. It is an amicable weapon to fight for their sense of belongingness and webs of meanings in these conflicting modes of modern world.

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Re-examining the Folklore and Folk Festivals of the Oraon or Kurukh Tribe with Special Reference to the Oraons of Dooars

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Abstract

A festival is a community event in which members of a particular social or religious group take part. It acts as markers of social, historical or mythological events by recalling the heroes and legends of a particular community. It also indicates the beginning or ending of a season and other important phases of a year and serves as a medium of understanding a particular community as it's through their institutionalization that one can witness the tradition, the legends and the folklores which are associated with a particular community. It begins as mere occasion but ultimately turns into deep rooted tradition of a community. The Oraon or Kurukh are the men of festivals. The most of the festivals of Oraon are seasonal involving the whole village community and are attached closely to agriculture activities which reflect the relation that exists between the tribe, nature and their religious beliefs such as DhanBuni, Hariari, Ban-gari, Kadleta, Nawakhani, Khaliyani (Xalxo, 2007) etc. In the past, the Oraons celebrated almost all these festivals, but at present these festivals can hardly be found in one village (Roy, 2019). The Oraons who are living the tea estates (especially in Dooars) are unaware or indifferent of these festivals as these festivals are mainly concerned with agriculture. So, it's a matter of serious concern as many of their festivals are moving towards extinction. But the major festivals like Fagua, Sarhul, Karam and Sohrae are celebrated by the entire Oraon community irrespective of their different religious identification.

Keyword: Oraon Festivals, Rituals, Traditions & Customs, Folklore, Oraons of Dooars

Introduction

We study folklore because we are interested in the ways that people decorate their yards or use recycled items to create art, in how they use charms to foretell the sex of unborn children, in the cures they create for cold and hangovers, in rumors about government conspiracies circulated through e-mails, in family recipes, in stories about el chupacabra or cry baby bridges- and much more. For us, folklore is the way of understanding people and the wide range of creative ways we express who we are and what we value and believe.

- Martha Sims & Martine Stephens (2011).

As Beverly J. Stoelje (1992) writes a festival is, “an ancient and resilient cultural form, richly varied in organization and function across the world’s societies” (p.261). A festival displays certain characteristic features which include food, merrymaking and entertainment. It acts as social, historical or mythological markers by recalling the heroes and legends idiosyncratic to a specific community. The festivals also indicate the beginning or ending of a season and other important phases of a year. It is a well known fact that the festivals, which are engrossed into the social and cultural dimension of life, also become a medium of understanding a particular community as it through their institutionalization that one can witness the tradition, the legends and the folklores which are associated with that community. It usually begins as mere occasion but ultimately becomes an inseparable part and parcel of a community that carries a deeper meaning and cultural values.

The celebration of festivals involves certain ceremonies, rituals preparation of certain food items. According to Ajit K. Singh (1982) the festivals without any doubt are:

An occasion to wear clothes, decorate houses, sing hymns, let off fireworks, prepare special meals and exchange good wishes. They may have a religious meaning or be associated with a particular season, but be it in any part of the world; the festivals have much in common, for the joy of living and gratitude for nature's bounties are universal. The festival is a periodic religious celebration or series of performances of a certain kind, often held periodically. (p.03)

There is always a social and religious aspect of a festival. The social and cultural aspects of the festival can neither be denied nor overlooked, although the main purpose of most festivals is religious devotion towards various gods or deities. All the festival celebrations lead to general and communal merrymaking marked by social and communal interaction showcasing the fine dresses, sharing of delicacies and communal harmony.

The Oraon or Kurukh, an ethnic community inhabiting different states of India like Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Bihar, etc, are the men of festivals. Other names know the Oraons. According to Hahn, the term 'Oraon' is seldom used by the people themselves. Terms including Kurukh and Oraon have also been used to introduce these people (Qtd in Koonathan, 1999). S.C Roy (2004) stated that the name Uraon was given to them by the Hindus. The Hindus initially called them Raonaput or Orawan. Eventually, the name Orawan became Oraon. The Oraons also call themselves Kurux/Kurukh or Kuruxar/Kurukhar. According to Roy, the term Kurukh derives from Karakh – the name of a mythical king – Karakh of the country/place – Korkai (p.14).

Accordingly, Kurukh means a group of people from the community of king Karakh. Likely, Kurukhar refers to the inhabitants of Korkai – Karukh-Des – the country of king Karakh (Roy, 2004, p.10-17). Nowadays, the Oraons are also introduced by different terms in different parts of India. In earlier ages, Oraons were depended on the forest and farms for their daily livelihood but in present time most of them have become settled agriculturist while a huge amount of Oraons have migrated to the tea gardens of West Bengal and Assam. They mainly reside in the Dooars region, which consists of the Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri, Coochbehar and Darjeeling districts of West Bengal and Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon districts of Assam.

Traditionally the Oraons are the people who celebrate or observe various festivals irrespective of their life situation. Most of the festivals of Oraon are seasonal, involving the whole village community and are attached closely to agriculture activities that reflect the relation between the tribe, nature and their religious beliefs (Xalxo, 2007, p.15).

Oraons celebrate different types of festivals throughout the year, like hunting, forest, agriculture, cattle, and socio-religious gatherings. In this paper I would like divide these festivals in minor and major group (minor in the sense as the very few peoples celebrate it and major in the sense as it is celebrated by the majorities of the people). The minor festivals are:

1. Dhan Buni (sowing seeds celebrated in the month of Asarh)
2. Hariari (Germination of paddy shoot celebrated in the month of Asarh)
3. Bangari (Seedling transplantation celebrated in the month of Sawan)
4. Kadleta (Formation of winter rice grain in stalk celebrated in the month of Bhado)
5. Nawa khani (At the time of eating new Gora-rice celebrated in the month of Aghan)

6. Kharihani Puja (At the time of harvesting celebrated in the month of Magh)

In the past, the Oraons performed almost all these festivals, but nowadays these festivals are at the verge of extinction. On the other hand, the Oraons living the tea estates (specially in West Bengal) are indifferent to these festivals as these festivals are mainly concerned with agriculture. So it's really a matter of deep concern as many of their festivals are becoming dead. The major festival which are celebrated by the entire Oraon community irrespective of their different religious identification are-

1. Fagua/ Faggu
2. Sarhul
3. Karam
4. Sohrae

Despite their economic constraints, Oraons still perform all these major festivals round the year. Every festival includes appropriate dances, songs and stories which reflect the social, cultural and mythological aspects of Oraon people. The stories attached to the festival explain the beliefs and practices to be adopted by a certain person or group and the importance of the sacred performance and the festival (Stanley.G & Jaya, 1996, p.53-54). But with the modern cultural transition and transformation most of these festivals are at risk of extinction.

'Dhanbuni' is a festival celebrated by Oraons at the time of paddy sowing in the month of Asarh. On the festival day, the Pahan (the village priest), Pujar (assistant Pahan) and other villagers go to the agricultural land and scrap some space which is then daubed with cow dung. The Pahan sits there by facing east direction. Five kuris of arwa rice is made on the cleaned space and legs of five cocks usually of five colours- 'rangua' (red), black, white, copper, are washed with water. Then the cocks are allowed to eat rice

from these kuris and in the mean time their heads are separated from their bodies with a sharp knife by the Pahan. The blood of these cocks is then dropped into these kuris. These sacrifices are made on the name of village gods and deities.

‘Hariari’ festival is celebrated by the Oraons when the paddy seeds pushed out into new shoots in the month of Asarh. On the fixed date, the Pahan, Pujar, Gorait and other villagers go to the agricultural land where the festival is celebrated every year. Handful of arwa rice is kept in different kuri. All these kuris are placed in the name of particular spirit. Then they pray to the Oraon gods like Dharmes, Sarna Burhia, Darha and Khunt spirit by sacrificing some particular colours of cock.

The ‘Bangari’ festival is celebrated at the time of seeding transplantation in the month of Sawan. It is usually observed at the individual family level. The cultivators invite the Pahan when the paddy seeding is ready for transplantation. The Pahan and cultivator then proceeds towards the field to take a pot of Hariya/Hadiya(rice beer) and then pour Haria in the field. This pouring of Haria in the field is called “tapaon” to the mother earth or “Dhartimai”. The Pahan then prays to Dhartimai for healthy crops and plenty rain and he also plants five paddy seedlings on the same spot where the Haria was poured. The women then start transplanting the rest of the field.

The Oraons celebrate the ‘Kadleta’ festival when the rice grain form in rice plants standing in the don or the low lands. It is celebrated on the tenth day of the full moon in the month of Bhadra. On the festival day the Pahan, Pujar and other villagers go to a tarn (up) land and offer sacrifice to different gods and deities. Libation of Haria is also offered to the different rice kuris. The liver of the sacrificed cock is cooked separately by the Pahan, which is offered to the spirits and rest is eaten by the Pahan and village elders. After this a feast is followed.

The Oraons celebrate the 'Nawakhani' festival in the month of Bhadra when the upland is ripped and ready for eating. The offering of the first fruits of the crops is made to the 'Sarna Burhia' or 'Chala Pachcho'. On the festival day the Pahan or Pujar go to a paddy land and collect about two seers of paddy. The Pahan gives this paddy to his wife for making Chiura. When the Chiura is prepared the Pahan invites the villagers to his House. Then the Pahan purifies himself with water and offers Chiura to Sarna Burhia(deity). The Pahan also provides rice beer and some food to the villagers. When the village level Nawakhani is over the other villages celebrate it in their individual houses according to their own conventions.

'Kharihani Puja' is celebrated at the time of harvesting paddy. On the appointed date of Kharihani the village Pahan and other villagers go in procession to a tarn land. They take with them the arwa rice, fowls, vermillion, water and rice beer. Some space on tarn land is then scrapped and doubed with cow dung just like Dhanbuni festival. These are the minor festivals and they are basically concerned with agriculture. But the Oraons of Dooars are not that much concerned with agriculture as most of the Oraons of Dooars are tea dwellers or the workers of tea gardens. So most of the Oraons of Dooars are not even aware of these festivals, but they all know about the major festivals like Fagua, Sarhul, Karam, and Sohrae.

The *Fagua or Fagun* (specially called by the Oraons of Dooars), celebrated in the end of February or at the beginning of March, is the festival of New Year celebration of Oraons. In the past, this day was mainly celebrated as hunting festival but nowadays this is not possible due to the massive deforestation and clearance of deep jungles. Due to the exploration of tea gardens the forests have been vanished over time. But the Oraons still symbolically arrange for traditional hunting. On this day, Oraons also perform "Danda-kattna" ritual, a kind of religious sacrifice for Lord Dharmes(the supreme God). They

prepare a hut, made of straw and this hut is set on fire during the observance of the ritual. A group of Oraon youths go to the forest to cut a branch of Semar tree (*Bombax Ceiba*) and bring it to the place where the hut is prepared and put it in the middle of the hut. One of the village elders need to cut this branch into three pieces by three consecutive strikes. Then the hut is set on fire and all the villagers put a small pinch of ashes of the fire on their forehead as 'tilak'. This ritual symbolically means the cutting down of all kind of pains, sufferings and sorrows of life that they had gone throughout the year and pray for a happy new year ahead. After this festival they start collecting foods and engage themselves in food production. This festival is also considered as New Year celebrating festival.

Sarhul is another important festival of Oraons which is celebrated during the spring season. The Oraon tribes, the worshiper of nature, celebrate this festival when the Saal trees (*Shorea Robasta*) bloom with new flowers, leaves, and branches. The flowers and leaves of Saal tree carry an important aspect of the festival as these are used for worshiping the gods and deities. In fact the Saal tree is treated as 'Paigambar' by the oraons. The Oraons are primarily concerned with agriculture and this Sarhul festival beckons the arrival of agricultural seasons. This festival symbolizes the holy matrimony of the Earth and the Nature; depicting the masculine race and the feminine race among the numerous living organism in our planet. On this day they remember the Great Lord Dharmesh- the Supreme Being and thank him for the blessings showered on all the living things. It is held in the spring season signifying the birth of new-born all around the planet among many living species (*Sarhul Festival*, 2019). The Pahan or the village priest fasts for a couple of days to observe this festival. He brings three new earthen/ clay pots and fills them with water. On the festival day he wears a dhoti (pure cotton) after taking bath early in the morning and then inspects the level of water inside the clay pots.

If there is decrease in the level of water, he predicts that there would be less rain or harbinger of feminine. In the contrary if the water level remains the same, then he predicts of ample rain. The Pahan's wife seeks his blessings by washing his feet before the beginning of the rituals. The villagers surround Sarna Place (Worshiping place) during the ritual. After that the Pahan sacrifices three fowl (domestic cock) of different colours and dedicates them to three respective like Dharmesh, Village God and the ancestors of the tribe. There are various folklores of Sarhul festival popular amongst the popular of the Oraon tribes. This festival is also known as Xaddi or Khaddi, or Khekhel benja, which literally means 'marriage of the earth' (Xaxa, 1992, p.104). This festival is celebrated in all tribal dwelling areas of Dooars with great enthusiasm. The festival actually highlights the different colours of their life just like nature, which undergoes numerous changes throughout the year.

The Oraons celebrate the *Karam* festival on Bhado ekadoshi (the eleventh day of August or September). This festival is traditionally celebrated after the transplantation of paddy fields. This festival helps them to engage themselves in the rigorous work coming in the following harvest. The preparations for the festival begin prior to ten or twelve days of the festival. The girls (especially virgins) who want to participate in the festival have to sow corn/barley in their homes. They keep it away from direct sunlight, basically inside their homes, in shades. Then the water mixed with turmeric is sprinkled over it. Due to all these erasures, the barley shoots acquire a golden yellowish tinge and look beautiful, which is called "Jawa". On the festival day a group of Oraon people go to the forest and bring a Karam branch implanted in the Akhra (dancing ground) by performing certain rituals. After installing that all the villagers sit around the implanted Karam branches to listen to the Karam legends and stories, told by an Oraon elder. They drink (basically elders) drink Hariya/Hadiya(rice beer) on this special occasion and dance

around the Akhra. People belonging to all age group join this dance and it continues up to the following morning. Next day a village elder uproots the Karam branches and hands it over to the maidens who participated in first day's rituals. They take it to throw into nearby river or canal. Sometime they also implant Karam branches in the middle of paddy fields to insure better harvest. The festival signifies the protection of girls who bear the future generation of the tribe. The festival highlights the regeneration of their community along with the regeneration of their crops. It symbolizes the love and affection between brother, sister and community and their relation with nature. On the occasion in some areas of Jharkhand sacrifice of Rangua, Kasri and Tambi fowls are offered to *Gaon Deoti*, but in Dooars there is hardly any area where the sacrifice is offered on this occasion.

The Oraons celebrate *Sohrae* festival during the new moon day in the month of Katick (November). It's a cattle festival. They celebrate this festival at the beginning of winter when the weather becomes friendlier; it is neither too hot, nor too cold. In this period the villages become full of winter vegetables and harvested paddy and the days are fine, without any rain. The Oraons believe that the cattle play an important role in their day to day life. The cattle are a great help for their agricultural activities. The preparation for the festival begins with cleaning their homes and making it neat and clean. On the evening of the festival, newly made earthen lamps are lit in the Oraon houses, cattle sheds, and kitchen gardens. During the following morning, the cattle are bathed. The horns, forehead and the hoofs of the cattle are anointed with vermilion diluted in oil. Their hoofs are also sprinkled with rice beer. There are certain rituals performed on this day especially in the place where the cattle live. The Oraons sacrifice a fowl and also hold a feast in honour of their cattle. They do not eat food until their cattle are fed. According to the elders, this sacrifice is done for Goryanad (Ban Dewta), who is

supposed to protect animals and keeps all the animals away from all kinds of disease. In the earlier ages there was a tradition of scarifying a small pig on this festival but now no one follows this tradition. Instead of pig they make sacrifice of Rangua (red) fowl. The cattle are fed a special kind of food called “Kuhri” which is made of chickpea or vetch. The Oraons enjoy a lot by drinking Hariya and dancing throughout the whole night of the festival. After completing all these rituals the young Oraon youths (basically Gowalas/Cowboys) visit the houses of the particular village by chanting words like “Ayo pugiyu Dhaousi Re”. This is called ‘Dhausi’. All the Oraons of Dooars celebrate this festival.

In the view of above discussion it can be said that from very ancient times in the history of mankind festivals have been an important feature of group life all over the world. The festival plays an important role in the lives of Oraon tribe. Despite their different religious beliefs, the festival establishes communal harmony and helps them preserve the bond of brotherhood among themselves. Its religion which divides them but it is festival which unites them. Nature and natural phenomena also occupy a central place in Oraon ritual, festivals and customs i.e a cluster of Saal trees, which is a sacred grove, acts as place of worship and cult in Sarhul festival and Karam tree assumes a central place in Karam festival (Xaxa, 1992, p.105). So we may say that those Oraon folk festivals provide- informally teaching cultural attitudes (often to younger group members); escaping accepted limitations of our culture; maintaining cultural identity; and validating cultural norms- essentially boil down to one function (Sims, Martha & Martine Stephens, 2011, p.181) as William R. Bascom (1965) himself claims: “Folklore is an important mechanism for maintaining the stability of culture” (p.298).

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Folk beliefs of Rice in Naga Society

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Abstract

Rice plays an important role in the life of the Nagas as well as other tribal communities in Northeast India. Traditional Naga society is very closely associated with rice interwoven in its tradition, folklore and rituals. A number of beliefs, rituals and festivals are associated with rice. This paper is an attempt to understand the meaning of the diverse beliefs and practices that are associated with rice

(Keywords: Rice, Naga, belief, practice, ritual)

Introduction

Rice is the essence of life for the Nagas, which is interwoven in its tradition, folklore, ritual and even language. It is the staple diet and the most important cultivated grain for the Nagas, which has shaped the Nagas' history, culture, diet, and economy for generations. Life without rice is beyond imagination and quintessential for Naga society. Rice is held in high esteem in several parts of Southeast Asia, including the tribal communities in Northeast India.

Value of rice in Naga society

Rice was not easily available in early Naga society. One had to toil hard on the land for the cultivation and harvesting of rice. Rice was not just for consumption but used as a medium of exchange and considered the greatest wealth. However, it was not confined to cultivation and exchange but was visualized in everyday life, which had to be cautiously

used. Rice was believed to have a soul; thus, utmost care should be taken in its usage and nurtured with rituals to please God and procure a bountiful harvest. For the Nagas and the rest of the tribal communities in northeast India, rice symbolizes beauty, prosperity, fertility, and as a protector from the airy heat of the evil spirits.

Like the rest of the tribal communities in northeast India, Nagas associate rice with many beliefs and practices. A few among them are as follows:

Discovery of rice

Most of the oral narratives of the Nagas associate the origin or discovery of rice in swampy areas or with rats. The Ao Nagas believes in the ancestry of settling first in Chungliiyimti and migrating to the present inhabited area. Oral narratives opine that at Chungliiyimti, the Aos discovered rice and its usefulness. One day at Chungliiyimti, a father and son went towards *Tzüila* (Dikhu) river for collecting food. On their way, they saw a rat carrying a rice stalk and thought that the stalk that the rat was carrying could be an important food for men. So they ask the mouse to share the stalk with them. The rat replied that he would give them but in one condition that when he dies he should be given a respectful burial. The father-son duo agreed to the condition and took the rice stalk. They planted the rice in the field, and thus, rice became an important food for humans. The Angami and Rengma tribes have a similar belief on how men came to know about rice. They believe that when men did not know about rice, they saw a paddy stalk growing in a swampy area a long time ago. He did not know how to swim then and was helpless to bring the paddy stalk. The rat offered help in swimming across the lake and brought the paddy, and men promised to share his paddy with the rats in his field and granary. Such beliefs are similar to some parts of China, Vietnam and Borneo (Ahuja 2010) where they also associate the origin of rice in swamps. The Lolo in Yunnan, the

Muong in northern Vietnam and the Ngaju Dayak in southern Borneo also associate a dog or rat in introducing rice to being. These myths probably indicate the domestication of rice from an early period.

Sanctity of Rice

The richness of a person was recognized through the cultivation and accumulation of rice. A person who has enough rice can buy or get a mithun (*Bos frontalis*) and give a feast of merit to the villagers as a mark of his richness. After the feast of merit, the head of the *mithun* (*Bos frontalis*) is kept outside the house of the feast giver, where pounded rice powder is smeared on the head of the *mithun* (*Bos frontalis*). This is to give sanctity and purity to the animal as well as to the household of the feast giver.

Ao's believe that when a man returns from headhunting, rice powder should be sprinkled on their heads by the women folks. By sprinkling rice powder, it cleanses the head hunter and cast away any evils or bad spirits that might have come along with the *mangko* (head). The usage of rice to ward off evil spirits is also practised by the Santhals of Bihar and other rice-growing communities, eg. in Indonesia, where rice grains are used by *jagarias* or *dangarias* (shamans) to drive away evil spirits (Kharakwal 2007:85).

The hairband that the Naga women puts on their hair is dyed in rice porridge to make the cotton thread strong and stiff. There is a belief that the women's hairband, which looks like a string of rice when put on hair, reflects the hard work of the women in their paddy fields, which she proudly wears.

Every Naga household had a wooden instrument placed at their homes call as *sham shong* (Phom) *sem* (Ao) *tsang* (Sangtem) for pounding rice. Tree for making *sem* should be carefully selected. There should not be any holes in the tree trunk, the tip of the main trunk of the tree should not be broken. Even while cutting down the tree for making the

sem it should not make a big roaring sound but gently fall on the ground. Only those trees which fulfil these three criteria were used for making *sem*. It is believed that if these criteria are not fulfilled, the *sem* will not be firm and steady and the rice will fall during pounding. Since rice had a spirit and was held in high esteem, a man should refrain from physical intimacy with his wife before cutting a tree to make the *sem*. Maintaining a clean and sanctified body signifies the purity of rice. When the ready *sem* is brought home, an egg or a cock should be sacrificed, dedicating the *sem* as an observation of good omen (Sosang 2012).

Rice as living

The rice soul is highly venerated in Naga society. Nagas believe that the rice grain has soul and utmost care should be taken to please the rice soul. A person should not throw the cooked rice while eating. If did so, it is believed that the rice feels bad and does not come back making one poor. However, the Chakhesang Nagas believe in throwing some rice grains on the cooking area floor as an offering to the Gods and for blessing and prosperity. The Ao Nagas believe that it should never be blown while cooling cooked rice. If blown, the rice feels impure and unwanted, making *terok tsungrem*- Six God (God of wealth), who provides rice to human beings; angry, believing that the rice he has provided is not appreciated. Nagas also believe that one should not completely empty the rice box because the remaining rice calls the new ones to refill the box. The Chakhesang Naga also practiced sprinkling rice grains over the deceased person's grave believing that the deceased would have sufficient food and obtain wealth in their next life.

Ritual and festivals related to rice

Almost all the main festivals of the various Naga tribes are associated with rice cultivation. Various rituals were held that demonstrate their respect and gratitude to rice

god at various stages, from the sanctification of the forest for cultivation until post-harvest thanksgiving. Ritual observation for the spirits of the rice plant includes the obligatory taboos and the most sacred practices, including ceremonial food offering and community feast. All these are to please and acknowledge the God for a prosperous yield.

The rice rituals are mostly conducted by the high priest of the village known as *mewuo* or *thiivo* for the Chakhesang and *puthi* for the Lotha Nagas. The high priest has to perform all the rituals before commencement any activities related to rice in the village. As for the Angami Nagas, the first harvest is done by the oldest women of the village, known as *liedepfü* (harvest priestess) and the first sowing by the oldest men in the village, known as *tsiakrau* (sowing priest) (D. Kuolie, personal communication). Men as sowers and women as harvesters signify the reproduction cycle of rice and life for the Nagas. The Rengma Nagas associate all agricultural rituals in honour of a female goddess called ‘*Niseginyu, Asa or Aiyulaniza*’, who is particularly related to all the crops. However, the Ao’s and the Angami’s associate it to the supreme male God call as *Lichaba*, the creator of the earth by the Ao’s and *Kipurhuou*- God of heaven (highest god) by the Angami Nagas, seeking him to invoke blessing not just for the prosperity of seeds in the field but also for the wellbeing of the family.

Sanctification Ritual

Before the clearance of a new forest for the shifting cultivation, the priest should first sanctify all the trees and nature by killing a cock and sprinkling its blood in the forest. This is to ward off all evils and natural disasters like lightning, earthquakes etc. It is called *Sungkomesa- Sungko* (trees leaves and barks) *mesa* (sanctification of all trees

and living for the new field) by the Ao Nagas, which is the first ritual before the commencement of cultivation.

Cleansing Ritual

Before the villagers start cleaning their allotted fields, the cleansing ritual has to be observed. This ritual is known as *Heteuteur* by the Zeliang Nagas (Venuh 2014:883), which means ‘pulling of dog’. In this ritual, a dog is sacrificed and circled the field several times by a priest as a symbolic cleansing of the agricultural land from any evil spirit. According to the Ao Nagas, the priest will first clear a small patch of land, sacrifice a cock and worship *Lijaba*, the God of earth, for blessing. Unless and until the priest has carried out this act, none of the villagers can start cleaning the new field. This ritual is called *Lepdenmong* by the Ao Nagas.

Sowing Ritual

After burning down the forest for cultivation, the priest must carry out certain rituals before anyone sows in the field. This is known as *Motchu Rum or Ntsuk Thei* (Lotha) *Tentenmong* (Ao) and *Khuso- Meni* (Chakhesang). For the Angami Nagas, the first sowing must be conducted with an invocation to God by the oldest male member of the priest clan known as *Tsiakrau*. The priest first clears an area in the cleared forest and sows some rice asking God for blessings in the new field. Later he announces to the whole villagers to sow the rice at their respective fields. Until and unless the priest makes the announcement, none of the villagers can sow the grains in the fields. Before the sowing of the seeds, a tradition practised by the Chakhesang Nagas is also the baking of flat rice cakes and consuming it as a belief that the rice will sprout out quickly.

End of sowing Ritual

This is one of the most important rituals and festivals of the Nagas. Almost all the Naga tribes observe this festival during the paddy growing. This festival is celebrated between April to July by the whole villagers asking the God of the earth for healthy growth and bountiful harvest. It is called as *Moatsümong* by the Ao Nagas, *Monyü* by the Phom Nagas, *Nchang Ngi/Nchangbambi* by the Zeliang Nagas and *Selu- Nei* by Chakhesang Nagas. This festival is celebrated when all physical labour in the field is over, and the farmers anticipate a rich harvest as stepping into a newer and brighter phase of life. This festival certainly demonstrates agriculture as the main occupation and subsistence of life and possibly points out the antiquity of rice.

Growth Ritual

Longtsüng by the Ao Naga (to hold) is a ritual that the owner of the field can conduct at his own convenient time without the mediation of a priest. This is observed during June when the paddies flowering, and rice stalks hold the young rice. It is a ritual for bountiful growth and protection from various insects and calamities of the rice.

A similar ritual, *Motha- ratsen* is also observed by the Lotha Nagas, where the owner will take a chicken to the field and smear its blood among the crops. He then invokes prayers to *Oyak Potso* (sky God) and *Liko Potso* (Earth God) as:

Ora oru na ti thying tok khelo

(Let the insects not destroy the crops).

Nzyu motsango shilo otssok khosha rucho tok khelo

(May we yield lots of rice for this particular year)

The Chakhesang Nagas also observe this as *No-Ne* where they perform rituals so that hail and tempest do not destroy their fields during its growth.

Harvest Ritual

Mainly observed during August and September, this is the highest sacrificial ritual and main festival on rice cultivation for most of the Naga communities. The main purpose of this festival is for healthy and plentiful crops. This is celebrated mostly before or right after the harvest. The Ao Naga celebrates this festival as *Tsüngremong*- asking God for blessing in the harvest by worshipping and offering sacrifices to *Lichaba*, the creator of the earth. When the paddy had ripened enough, the Chakhesang Nagas celebrated the festival of *Dzü- Nei's* festival by praising the God for a bountiful harvest. The observation of a community feast also marks it.

A practice by Angami Naga is the preservation of some of the paddies in the field which grains are sequined full. These are kept in the field tied together till the last day of the harvest without taking it out from the stalk. A cup of rice beer is also placed below the preserved paddy as a sign for invoking blessing and pleasing the God. On the last day of the harvest, the preserved paddy is brought to the barn and placed above the basket of the newly stored paddies. The family should not consume the newly harvested paddies of that specific year till the day of the fasting, *vade* is observed. *Vade* is observed on the 5th day of the new moon on the last month of the year to invoke blessing for the longevity of granary and prosperity. This also reflects the longing for a blessing, an invocation that granary will last long. On the day of *vade*, the family's mother will observe fast and can consume rice only after the sunset. Only after observing *vade*, the newly harvested paddy can be consumed. Another interesting feature is consuming winter hibernating water creatures like frogs, snails and crabs while breaking the *vade* fast. The Angami Nagas

believes that hibernating water creatures also reflects fasting, and consuming these creatures reflects the totality of fast being taken, making *Kipurhuou*- God of heaven (highest God) pleased (D. Kuolie, personal communication). A similar practice is also observed in Vietnam where a married woman (preferably a mother) takes the special unhusked reserved rice from the attic of her house to the field. These are never pounded as they are supposed to be sacred (Ahuja 2010). Akin to this is also the *navakhani* festival celebrated by the Santhals of Bihar, wherein certain areas, rice plants, and grains are worshipped after harvesting, and cow dung is placed on the heap of rice so that the soul of rice will not go away (Kharakwal and Yano 2007:85). What is common to all these regions is that this festival is celebrated to worship the rice as living and invoke blessing from the rice God/Goddess.

Thanksgiving Ritual

After the harvest is done, there is a Thanksgiving festival during the month of November-December. It is one of the grandest annual festivals of the Rengma Nagas call as *Ngada* (Venhu 2014: 514) (*Nga*- merry- making, *da*- big) which means big merry making festival. It marks the end of agricultural year and welcoming of the 'New year'. After the *Ngada* festival, all the new agricultural sites can be cleared for new cultivation. Chakhesang Nagas also celebrate the Thanksgiving festival called the *Rünei*. The Phom Nagas observe the thanksgiving festival, *Pongvam mo*, when the rice is collected and kept at the barn. It is therefore also known as the barn dedication festival as well.

Discussion

Almost similar rituals are observed and performed at various stages of rice cultivation in Naga society and Southeast Asian countries, where elaborate rituals are conducted. Such communities are; Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia (Bali, Java and

Sumatra) and India -Odisha, Bengal and northeast states (Ahuja 2010, Kharakwal and Yano 2007). In parts of South- East Asia, rice cultivation is by and large done by shifting type of agricultural method. Various annals, myths, legends, and rituals in various parts of South-East Asia are associated with rice cultivation. Jong de and Josseling (1965) have given a detailed account of such practices and beliefs in South- East Asia, which shows a great similarity with the practices by the tribal communities in northeast India. For example, the ritual related to killing animals for sacrifice before planting in the field by the modern Malay and Indonesian farmers and the intervention of a priest or medicine man for a plentiful harvest are some practices that show great similarities between the two. The similarity in rituals, particularly connected with rice, is not merely confined to rice cultivation but can be visualized daily. The Malay society usage of rice to cure ailments and ward off diseases and spirits by applying rice paste on the forehead of the sick person (Ahuja 2010), the usage of rice powder as an offering to the spirits, the belief in the usage of rice as a powerful source in daily activities in Southeast Asia shows excellent similarities with Northeast India.

Rice is a major staple food in Northeast India, which grows in various ecological settings. It grows both in the lowland riverine flood plains and hilly areas through different practice methods. However, shifting cultivation, one of the earliest forms of cultivating rice, is still practised by the tribal communities in different parts of northeast India where much wild rice species are used and discovered in an archaeological context (Pokharia 2013). Wild counterparts of many domesticated plants and animals species are also found in the region. Geographers and botanists consider the region to be very important and ideal for early plant domestication and food production (Vavilov 1949, Saucer 1952, Harris 1973). Nagaland (lat.25°6'-27°6'N; long. 93°21'-95°15'E) lies in the eastern corner of northeast India. Geographically situated in between the Indian, Indo-

Burma- Malaysian and Indo- Chinese regions it serves as a physical and cultural bridge between mainland India and Southeast Asia. As a result, it becomes an attractive region for scientific investigations for understanding the origins and early domestication of many important plants, including rice. Nagaland witnessed heavy rainfall. The economy of Nagaland is dependent on agriculture, with both slash- and –burn and terrace farming as the main methods of cultivation. However, wet cultivation is also practised especially by the southern Nagas. Both wild and cultivated rice cohabit extensively in the region where the wild varieties of rice are also occasionally harvested with a cultivated crop which has also been found in the archaeological context in the region (Pokharia 2013, Jamir 2014a&b, Walling 2020).

Since domestication generally occurs in the region where the wild species are found, it is very important to recognize their wild progenitor species and identify their natural habitat. There are various wild rice species in Northeast India, such as *Orza rufipogan*, *Orza officinnalis*, *Orza perennis*, *Orza meyeriana*, *Orza granulate*, *Orza nivara* (Chang 1976, Pokharia 1998, Bakalial 2004 cited in Hazarika 2008a). It is estimated that at least 10,000 indigenous rice cultivars are found in this region (Hore 2005). In this regard, Glover (1985:27) writes “India is the centre of the greatest diversity of domesticated rice with over 20,000 (over of 50,000) identified species and Northeast India is the most favourable single area of the origin of domesticated rice”. Thus, considering the great varieties of wild and domesticated rice found in this region, Hazarika (2006 a&b, 2008 a &b) also argues for an early domestication process of rice in the region.

Conclusion

A wide diversity of flora and favorable climatic conditions in this region are considered ideal for early plant domestication (Pokharia 2013). Many practices associated with rice by the Nagas can provide immense evidence to reconstruct the history of man- plant relationship in the region. Though the efforts made to understand and identify the prehistoric plant domestication in this region are inadequate and still obscure, the folk practices which are part of our traditional knowledge system, clearly indicates that rice cultivation and its usage has great antiquity and can help in reconstructing the evidence of agriculture and subsistence in the region.

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Reading the ‘Hybrid’ Mother: Representation of Divinity and Grotesqueness in the Mother Figure of Ben Okri’s Abiku Trilogy

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Abstract

The mystery surrounding the essence of African culture and tradition has always seized the imagination of the postcolonial writers of Africa. The writings of Chinua Achebe, Ben Okri, Amos Tutuola, Wole Soyinka, and Chimamanda Adichie depict the socio-political conditions of pre-independent Africa and the post-independence civil wars and thus contribute to the African Literary Canon. They attempt to converge the mysterious and concealed world of the Igbo, Yoruba, and other prominent tribes in Nigeria/Africa and present an alternative reality in African society. This reality encompasses all boundaries of magic, mystery, mythology and mysticism that exist as a part of the existence of people in Africa. Furthermore, it puts forth the notion of mother nature as a divine entity, a goddess who nurtures life and keeps the cycle of ‘birth-death-rebirth’ in constant flux. In a similar note, Ben Okri’s writings speak volumes about the traumatised condition of the ‘abiku’ or spirit child in *The Famished Road* trilogy. The Yoruba community's enigmatic and extramundane practices and customs are meticulously spaced

in the lives of his characters who represent hybridized identities. His novels Okri's depiction of unconventional motherhood and the masculine-feminine exemplify the defiant femininity which is rooted in the character of Madame Koto. The paper explores the vicissitudes of magicality, divinity and grotesqueness in the female characters of Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* trilogy to explain the unconventional femininity that is presented in his writings. It exemplifies the relationship which exists between the female characters (Madam Koto and Mum) and nature to bring forth the importance of occult practices, magic and mystery in the lives of the Yoruba populace.

Keywords: Postcolonial Poetics, Hybridity, Unconventional Motherhood, Defiant Femininity, Motherism, Divinity, Grotesqueness, Magic, Mystery, Mayhem

Introduction

Ben Okri in *The Famished Road* trilogy portrays a society in need of change, continuously struggling to achieve it. The ghetto and its inhabitants who represent the Nigerian society are constantly choked and crushed by power hegemonies and socio-political upheaval. The novels of this trilogy bring forth the social inequalities prevalent in the Nigerian situation, which emerge from the political and economic crisis post-independence. His writings encompass the issues of unconventional motherhood, reciprocation of patriarchy and masculinity and also provide multiple accounts of defiant femininity. Okri's fictions are frequently punctuated with images and incidents, which are both magical and grotesque. The frequent magic realist interventions in the narration, create a multidimensional web of reality mingled with elements of the 'fantastic' which is native to the Yoruba culture. These further exemplify the social and political unrest and also denote the complicated position of a woman in the Nigerian scenario. In the

process of understanding the 'abiku' phenomenon, one realises that 'womanhood' in Okri's postmodern world advances towards self-depredation through the birth-death-rebirth cycle in his abiku narratives. As it is evident and exemplified in the form of Azaro's narration, the life of the mother of an abiku child is equally complicated and entangled in turmoil. She has to undergo an equally painful and repetitive journey of giving birth to the same spirit child over and over again. Being an abiku's mother is horrendous task, which Azaro's mother undertakes with great perseverance, patience, love and affection for her son. Okri's *Infinite Riches* (1998) demonstrates the importance of the position of women in the society and family. The private and the public roles of Okri's women are found to be frequently interfacing and defining one another despite their individual, independent positioning in the society to illustrate their nature, conduct and contribution to the social life. The women in his fiction exhibit an array of social roles such as businesswomen, mothers, homemakers, custodians and propagators of mystery, magic and many more of such illustrative occupations. The female characters in Okri's abiku trilogy present the confluence of divinity and grotesqueness, real and unreal occurrences, concrete and abstract existence which further mystifies their characters. Their close association with nature and its various forms substantiates their symbiotic existence with the elements of life which empower them and place them on a higher pedestal. These roles of Nigerian women in society present a plethora of the multidimensional status of a woman in Yoruba culture.

Understanding Femininity in the African Scenario

Femininity in African society (especially Yoruba culture) differ from the western idea of feminism and femininity. The evolution of the status and role of women in Africa (specially Nigeria) from the pre-colonial era to the beginning of 21st century presents the gradual advancement of oppression and marginalization of women in society. During

pre-colonial times, women occupied a central role in social and economic engagements, which lead to gendered division of labour. Women were in control of occupations related to food processing, mat weaving, pottery and cooking. In addition to these they also played an important role in trade and commerce. Among the Yorubas, women enjoyed special importance in business with opportunities for acquiring wealth and titles. The most successful women rose to the prestigious chieftaincy title of *iyalode*¹⁸, a position of great privilege and power. The basic unit of political organization was the family; the common matrilineal arrangement, provided a woman considerable authority over her children. A woman and her children formed a major part of the family. Age and gender determined the power politics in the household where senior women enjoyed a special position in the house and had strong voice on important issues. The overlapping public and private arenas further enhanced a woman's capability to channelize resources in trade and establish her as a powerful public figure. The ability to produce crops (food) bestowed her with respect and empowered her. An African woman (in the Nigerian context) is an embodiment of femininity and feminism intertwined and balanced into one, where on the one hand she evokes the power of the spirit or Gods in her favour and on the other she enjoys her simple world, her personal domicile in kitchen to interact with family and friends. The queen mother, a powerful title in the Edo¹⁹ and Yoruba traditions, is bestowed upon the king's mother or a free woman of considerable stature. In her own palace, the queen mother presides over meetings, with subordinate

¹⁸ Iyalode is a high position for a female chieftain in Yoruba culture who serves as a woman representative in the council and accomplished the role of a political and economic influencer in the pre-colonial and colonial Nigeria. She is usually referred to as "Oba Obirin" or "King of the women" and contributes to the decision-making policies of the council of high chiefs. Her role and function has been likened to that of the modern day feminist.

¹⁹ Edo is a tribe of Southern Nigeria to the west of river Niger who speak Benue-Congo branch of Niger-Congo language family. They are also called Bini as Edo is also the other name for Benin city which flourished from 14th to 17th century.

titleholders in her support. The Yoruba and Hausa²⁰ legends describe times when women were either the actual kings or leading ladies. Women of Nigeria as Moremi of Ile-Ife²¹ and Amina of Zaria are important legendary figures, equivalent to the powerful queens in the Ondo and Daura history.

During the 20th century, changes in patriarchal set up and colonization sanctioned impudence to the privileged status to women and altered the gender relations in the society. Collaboration of male chiefs and the British colonial administration in the collection of taxes and governance changed the power equations in the Nigerian socio-cultural arena. As a result of this calculative and programmed move by the colonizers and native male chiefs, the importance of female chieftains declined. Women receded to the periphery and were forced to focus on the production of subsistence crops.

In the late 20th century, formal education in Nigeria empowered its women with the introduction of modernity in their outlook, perception and understanding. The emergence of educated, elite, intelligent and confident women brought changes in the social and cultural life of the Nigerians where women challenged many aspects of patriarchy and gradually ensured that the political arena expanded and accommodated them. Avant-garde African feminists emphasize on the notions of gender roles, patriarchy, power politics and their relationship with imperialism and African communities. The African notion of feminism and femininity is different from the western understanding of femininity and feminism. The myriad gender relations, practices and identities in Africa speak volumes about the uniqueness of feminism that is prevalent in the Nigerian situation. The multiple voices of African (Nigerian) women

²⁰ Hausa is an ethnic tribe residing in the North-western Nigeria and Southern Niger region.

²¹ Ile-Ife is a town in Osun, south-western Nigeria and is considered to be a holy city and the birth place of humankind by the Yorubas. It is the oldest town of Yoruba people and Ile-Ife kingdom had great political and cultural influence on the Edo kingdom.

bring forth an alternate feminist-feminine narrative, which is in contrast to the western feminist narrative. The different perspectives subsumed by African feminism presents the varied reception of feminism in Africa namely, Africa/diaspora feminists, black feminists, womanists, postcolonial feminists and varying forms of engagement with western feminism.

‘Motherism’: An Alternate to Feminism

Most writers who identify themselves as black feminists, womanists and African feminists' opine that women's socially- inscribed identities in Africa are completely different from women's acquisition of gender identities in the West. According to Shulamith Firestone, a Canadian-American radical feminist, Gender inequality arises from the patriarchal societal norms imposed upon women because of their bodies. She argues that the social, physical and psychological trauma and pain inflicted on women result from pregnancy, childbirth and their upbringing. She regards pregnancy and childbirth as "barbaric" and the nuclear family as a key source of women's oppression. She suggests that, contraception, *in vitro* fertilization and other advanced means of conception and childbirth will liberate woman from the physical and psychological trauma of parturition. She insists on the emergence of a new type of artificial reproduction, referred to as the “bottled baby.” The rejection of motherhood by Firestone is completely different and in opposition to the African way of feminist thinking. In particular, the realization of motherhood in the African context resonates with the valorization of women in the society. An African woman's identities (of a mother) frequently challenge the myths and stereotypes linked to western notions of femininity. The role and importance of mother in African/Nigerian culture emphasizes the juxtaposition of African feminism as against Western feminist ideology.

A few feminist theorists exhibit their concern for evaluating African women's 'difference', which leads them to equate social roles and attributed identities with alternative feminisms. To cite an example, Catherine Obianuju Acholonu, writes that "Africa's alternative to feminism is Motherism and Motherism denotes motherhood, nature and nurture"(1995:110). Oyeronke Oyewumi's work elaborates and explains the difference in the perception of motherhood in the western feminist understanding and the African scenario. The meanings and symbolism affiliated to motherhood is different across cultures and geographical boundaries. Unlike the western feminist approach where, motherhood/mother is reduced to a mere gender category which is perceived as weak and oppressed, the African (more specifically the Yoruba community) understanding of 'mother' places the woman in a more privileged state and seat of respect. (mother). Mother features as a natural connecting link/bond between all her children, which is unbreakable. She is the nucleus of the family and the most important bond is that of the mother and the child. Okri beautifully presents the bonding of a mother with her son through Azaro and mum's relationship. In Azaro's case, he comes to the world of humans intending to leave it and resume the birth- death- life cycle. But as he observes his mother's helpless face, her love for him, her desire to see him survive, he abandons the idea of leaving this world of humans. In fact, he decides to undergo the trials and tribulations of this world and forego the comfort of the other world. Azaro mentions in one of the chapters of the novel that, the mothers experience a greater degree of pain during parturition, when the same spirit child is born to her again and again. This change in his perspective is the result of the desire that his mother displays. Azaro's desires are conditioned by his mother's desire. These instances and descriptions about the bond between an 'abiku' and his/her mother exemplify a certain kind of divinity

attributed to the mother in Yoruba tradition. The mother's resilience, patience and endurance.

Young Azaro, decides to stay in the world of the living and sacrifice his happiness which he experiences in the world of spirits. To establish a strong bond which results in the unity of Azaro and his mother, he is ready to suffer in the hands of his spirit companions, who torment him. He defies the law of the spirit land to make his mother happy and in the process the torture that he experiences, ultimately turns pleasurable to him. As Oyewumi aptly says, "The idea that mothers are powerful is very much a defining characteristic of the institution and its place in society".

Oyewumi's work elaborates on the contextualization of gender and gender roles among the Yoruba tribe. The traditional Yoruba family can be best described as non-gendered because labour roles and categories are not gender-differentiated in the family. Consequently, the power centre in the Yoruba family setup is well balanced and properly distributed and does not adhere to any specific gender. The fundamental hierarchy within the family is age specific and not gender-dependent, kinship categories encase seniority instead of gender. Seniority is the social ranking that exists in the Yoruba community, which is based on the person's chronological ages. The words 'egbon' refers to the older sibling and 'aburo' to the younger ones, regardless of gender. This principle of hierarchal order among Yorubas is dynamic and fluid; unlike gender, it is not rigid and inflexible. In a typical Yoruba family, 'omo', a term to denote a child, is a word that represents 'offspring' which is used for both a boy and a girl child. The employment of unisex system of nomenclature to refer to sons and daughters further brings forth the non-gendered thinking of the Yorubas where discrimination does not exist. Terminologies, which are employed to denote gender, further exemplify the absence of gender discrimination in family relations and this makes the Yoruba tribe unique. Words like

‘oko’ and ‘iyawo’ do not represent gender, rather they distinguish between those who are birth members of the family and those who become part of the family through marriages. This particular form of distinction places ‘oko’ as superior to ‘iyawo’ in a family. It is not gender-specific because an ‘oko’ female is superior to an ‘iyawo’ female. Relationships and gender roles in a Yoruba family are dynamic and the social roles assigned to each one is situational and context-driven. Linguistically, the male-female dichotomy does not exist in the Yoruba world and thus the notion of gender is complex and multilayered.

Divinity in Yoruba tradition: A Nature-Culture Union

Beliefs about the abiku child exist among other Nigerian ethnic groups as well; the Igbo, for example, call such a child *ogbanje* as depicted in *Things Fall Apart*. The *Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952) is a novel published by the Nigerian author Amos Tutuola that narrates the tale of a man who follows his brewer into the land of the dead, encountering many spirits and adventures. Tutuola’s attempt at narrating the escapades of the protagonist intersecting them with Yoruba folktales is laudable. The novel is controversial, inspiring both admiration and contempt between the Western and Nigerian critics and significantly contributes to the African literary canon. The traditional roles related to magic in the Yoruba society are medicine man, diviner, rainmaker and priest-magician and these can be traced in the works of the two writers. Okri employs characters who are medicine men or ‘herbalists’ to intermingle the world of science with the sphere of magic. This commingling of supernatural elements with everyday objects results in the exotic position of the herbalists. In a similar vein, divination is an attempt to form and possess an understanding of reality in the present and predict events and reality of a future time. Cultures and tribes of Africa to the year are still performing and using divination, both within the urban and the rural environments. Diviners at times function

as herbalists. Divination is a social phenomenon and functions as an important role in the lives of the African people. Okri punctures his writings with references to myths that exist in the African folklores. One such example is the story of the rain queen. In Africa, rain-makers are thought to possess magical powers, although they possess these powers because they (the powers) are bestowed upon them by the sky God or the Great Spirit. Rain-making is something which depicts both the religious and the magical aspect of African society. Another important member of the African society is the priest-magician who grasps reality in many ways; understands the nature of climate, the forms of energy of the universe, the functions of material objects. The priest-magician controls forces of nature, and thus understands the control of these super humanly forces. S/he is aware of the impact of these forces upon perception and people's human consciousness and minds.

Madam Koto, the 'hybrid' mother

Okri in his abiku trilogy presents hybrid and unconventional motherhood through the character of Madam Koto. Okri etches Madame Koto's character in a manner, which has multiple layers, and these facets of her character are gradually revealed as the story progresses. Madame Koto does not adhere to any singular gender identity as she is feminine in her appearance and outlook, but her actions and conduct exemplify her masculine-feminine nature. She is a complex female character who undertakes a journey from anonymity to the limelight. Her hard work and strategic moves catapult her status from a mere bar owner to a powerful, wealthy and cunning businesswoman who runs bars, brothels and restaurants. Unlike a conventional woman who is docile and submissive, Madame Koto exhibits her power and strength by single-handedly driving the problematic elements away from her bar. She reinforces masculine behaviour in her actions (where she holds a drunk customer and throws him on the bar floor) to break free from the confinements of 'male-identified femininity'. Inclusion of masculinity in a

woman's character and behaviour further subverts the notion of patriarchy. Madame Koto's possession of earthly and other- worldly powers and riches accentuates her persona as a supreme power, which in turn places her on a pedestal above any gender equation. She surpasses the subservient subjugated position of a woman through her display of masculine powers and material riches. The authority she exerts upon men and women of the ghetto pronounce her as a singular autocratic power bereft of any gender identity. She challenges her own limitations and strives to attain social well-being in a world diseased with deprivation and hardships. Her refusal to succumb to the male-dominance prevalent in the society ascends her status as a socio- political force, which subverts patriarchy. As Azaro mentions the power and aura of Madame Koto in *Infinite Riches*;

I could occasionally understand the language of the dead, the spirits and the half-humans. These numinous pilgrims from the underworld of our history had come to pay their respects to our Madame Koto: whorehouse owner, Power broker, priestess of a new and terrible way (224).

Though we observe a realistically portrayed Madam Koto in the first part of the trilogy. *The Famished Road*, we are introduced to the mystical side in *Songs of Enchantment*. Here, the physicality of Madame Koto is replaced with her magicality and her baffling nature. An inscrutable weirdness surrounds her existence in the Songs of Enchantment – a weirdness that is at once an abstruse riddle and during other times, a premonition foreboding destruction. The fact that she is a witch with a beard is emphasised and the readers are alerted that she can cast a necromantic spell upon the population. There are secrets concerning her existence that no one knows of. The reader learns that she is part of several clandestine manoeuvrings that are shrouded in mystery. She needs the people belonging to the ghetto to surrender themselves to her power and

presence. She repeatedly warns the people that any rebellion portends utter devastation. What she commands is for a complete submission, without any trace of arrogance or spirit of disagreement. The following instance from *Songs of Enchantment* brings to light her oracular and threatening nature: Touching the moonstones round her neck, which glowed pink under the radiant sky, while the rainbow faded into a lilac mist, she said: ‘What does it take to make you people fear me, eh? Heaven knows that I am good to you.’(2003b: 191).

Okri transforms the imagery when Madam Koto is angry. We observe how the rainbow fades into a “lilac mist” and her anger turns the moonstones into radiant pink. We are earlier informed that her “spell-breaking incantations” give rise to “goose pimples” in the stomachs of the people watching her. Her rituals convert the blue snails on her car into writhing and despicable insects that turn golden-red, then black. She pours hot water on places and utters magical incantations that turn things into unrecognisable disparate entities. She is capable of playing havoc with the lives of the people living in the ghetto. As a witch, she can destroy and protect the people. She demands that the people around the ghetto should fear her cabalistic rites and miraculous powers. In an admonishment that borders on an oracular foreboding, Madam Koto informs the villagers about the secret of her birth:

My father was an iroko tree. My mother was a rock. The tree grew on the rock. it still stands deep in the country. The rock itself has grown. Now it is a hill where people worship at the shrine of the great mother” (Songs 191-92).

She explains to the masses that any attempt to destroy her will be futile and counterproductive. According to Madam Koto, the rock swallowed and seized them when her enemies sent thunder and lightning. When the enemies wanted to explode the

rock they saw the rock bleed and the enemies either went mad or died. Her alliance with supernatural elements is so strong that her friends are protected and her foes are destroyed beyond redemption. As she says, “My enemies will turn to stone, will go mad, go blind, lose their legs and hands, forget who they are” (Songs 192).

Thus, Madam Koto lives on the liminal boundary between the real world and the mystical domain. Her lust for wealth and power marks her presence in the real world as an avaricious and gluttonous woman whose stomach keeps growing bigger until it reaches a point where it would rather burst than grow more. On the flip side, she possesses certain mystical attributes that make her a supernatural being capable of devastation and decimation of the clan. Her bar becomes the space where both pragmatic as well as irrational forces, operate. Her mind is a perplexing maze that shifts alliance and loyalty as and when it deems fit. Her body epitomizes grotesqueness and incongruous weirdness, making her an outcast from the general populace of the ghetto. Not only does she assert her individuality but also her ‘illegitimate’ motherhood. What is illegitimate to patriarchy is questioned by Madam Koto, thereby problematizing gender inequality. Okri brings out a woman who is not afraid of exhibiting her private space and concerns to the people of the ghetto.

As the abiku trilogy advances, Madame Koto is pregnant with three abiku children in her womb (as Azaro can see). Her stomach is bloated with this pregnancy. Madame Koto who symbolises colonial power in Nigerian ghetto, is carrying three abiku children (evil and unfortunate) who will never be born/survive in this realistic world. The three children denote the negative repercussions of colonial rule: oppression, violence and humiliation. They even symbolically stand for the three provinces that Nigeria was divided into: Northern, Southern, and Eastern. They were indirectly controlled and governed by the Empire through the local representatives. Irony is reflected in the name

of Madame Koto when Ben Okri attaches 'Madame' to the name 'Koto' in the novels. 'Madame' in French is a title used to address a married woman; Madam is a polite way of addressing a woman. This courteous term doesn't go well with the name 'Koto' which literally means "Not satisfied". The greedy nature of Madame Koto defies the norms of the accepted mannerisms of a woman, a lady-like figure in the society. In fact, her meteoric escalation into the world of wealth and supposedly divine origin does not transform her into a lady overnight. She struggles under the burden of her wealth and false divinity. Okri's ironical presentation of Madame Koto is portrayed in her death and multiple funerals that are held. Madame Koto dies at the zenith of her career, stabbed by her own followers. Just before her coronation, her sudden demise pushes her ambitions, glory and glamour down a huge abyss and they hit the nadir of failure and darkness. Her death returned her to the world of the ordinary. The evilness, divinity, power, wealth, and greed vanish into thin air with her death. She dies the death of a normal human being unlike what she has presented and preached to be (a divine queen). As is described in the final installment of the novel *Infinite Riches*:

The time of miracles, sorceries and the multiple layers of reality had gone. The time when spirits roamed amongst human beings, taking human forms, entering our sleep, eating our food before we did, was over. The time of myth died with Madame Koto (331).

Reading magical bodies: Madam Koto as a Godmother

In Okri's *The Famished Road* trilogy, Madame Koto is the personification of magic. Her gradual and calculative rise to the powerful social and political position, her extraordinary capability of working towards women empowerment by providing them employment in her bar, which later transforms into a brothel for the elite customers,

contributes to her supreme and indomitable spirit. Her followers, the earliest women employees, most of whom were prostitutes, pay their homage to Madame Koto, their patroness and had opened new roads for them. These women, now wives of highly placed officers, judges, businessmen and politicians, were once the victims of social oppression, sexual assaults by family members, witch hunting, rape and tyrannical parents. Madame Koto provided them the required skill and shelter to flourish and advance in the new world full of opportunities. Madame Koto is an embodiment of great physical and emotional power, who featured as a Godmother to many distressed women who were victims of social oppression and marginalization. She wasn't a woman made of mere blood and flesh but a human being who had the masculine power and authority to subvert male dominance running in her veins.

Madame Koto has always ignited curiosity regarding her actual physical appearance in the mind of young Azaro. Koto's physical transformation from a plain-looking bar owner to a beautiful matriarch is an authoritative woman of great calibre. As Azaro is stunned to see Madame Koto in her new clothes, jewellery and make-up, he realizes the magical powers she possesses to claim such an enchanting physique. As she acquires more wealth, name and fame, Madame Koto grows bigger in size. She continues swelling to a point where she could no longer bear the burden of her unborn children. She recedes into the nadir of madness. The herbalists strived to revive Madame Koto's strength and beauty in the process of preparing her body for the delivery of her three monstrous children. They chanted multiple incantations and infused her body with various chemical potions to purify her blood and milk. The magicity involved with Madame Koto's body in giving birth reveals the agony of her body, which has experienced many struggles and strife to achieve the position she holds. As Okri describes the grotesqueness of Madame Koto's magical and mysterious pregnancy,

Her face was swollen and ugly. A wound in her shoulder seeped blood through her expensive lace blouse. She had an aluminum libation on her lips. Her stomach heaved. And her wrapper fell from around her waist, revealing luminous rashes and cicatrices (1998: 29)

Madame Koto's suffering during her last days is heart wrenching as she struggles to reclaim her supernatural power. Her beautiful body and face gradually decomposed into a repugnant and sickening figure. Even as her dead body decomposes and the pungent smell lingers for weeks over the ghetto, it benefits its inhabitants. Azaro's dad regains his sense of hearing as the body of Madame Koto decomposes and lets out a foul smell. These instances of magic realist description and depiction of magical bodies in *Infinite Riches* further enrich the writing style of Okri.

Conclusion

Okri builds the narrative epistemology on the varied hues and colours of the Yoruba community. As an ethnic group, the Yoruba people are composed of many culturally and linguistically related subgroups scattered over a wide area in southwestern Nigeria and the neighboring nation of Benin. They are traditionally urban people who inhabited towns and cities prior to the British colonisation. They lived in urban space surrounded by farmland and separated by expanses of forested wilderness. The Yorubas believe in the relationship between earth and heaven—Aiye and Orun, respectively. Aiye is the domain of human beings; Orun, the heavenly abode of orisa (Yoruba gods) and ancestors (spirits of the Yoruba dead). Aiye and Orun have a symbiotic relationship where the Gods and ancestors have a great impact on the lives of the Yoruba people. According to the belief system prevalent in Yoruba community, human beings travel between the spheres of earth and heaven via reincarnation. They believe each individual

has, two spiritual components — an ori and an emi. The emi is an individual's personality in a particular incarnation; the ori is the soul's ultimate destiny that encompasses particular incarnations. While the emi remains in heavenly abode after a person's death, the ori finds a new body, a new incarnation. Descendants continually appeal to their ancestors for guidance, organize a special festival in their honor, the egungun festival. In this particular festival, a cultural renaissance, the Yoruba maintain that spirits return to the human world by choice to reunite with their families. Some spirits do not wish to reincarnate and thus resist life by dying in their infancy. Such spirits are known as abiku, literally "born to die." The Yoruba believe that a particular abiku will be born again and again to the same mother. When a woman gives birth to a series of children who die in infancy, the parents suspect that all of them have been the same abiku child.

The narrator of *The Famished Road* is an abiku child who forsakes his abiku companions in Orun, choosing instead to stay and experience life in Aiye. One of the methods the Yoruba invoke to try to keep an abiku child in Aiye is oogun. Oogun, a concept that falls somewhere between medicine and magic, refers to remedies, poisons, love potions, truth serums, and invisibility charms, among other paraphernalia. Oogun is a physical substance composed of plant, animal, or mineral materials and sometimes must be combined with the recitation of a spell. Anyone may use oogun, and most Yoruba know at least a few ooguns, although some individuals have greater expertise than others. Oogun experts may sell their services, as do the herbalists in *The Famished Road*, or, like Madame Koto in the novel, use oogun for their own purposes. Through the story of the abiku Azaro transports the readers to a Nigerian (African) spiritual realm. Classic examples are stories of 'King of the Road' and the 'Rain Queen' (Modadji) further elevate the atmosphere of divinity in *The Famished Road*. The Yoruba folk Gods

and their rituals, religion, divinity and myths contribute to the elements of spirituality and divinity in the novel.

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Interrogating Fidelity in Translation: T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* in Odia

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Abstract

A vibrant tradition of translation in India has resulted in major classical texts being translated into different regional languages. However, many of these translations are in the nature of “free” translations, suitably adapted to the local conditions. This paper counters such free translations as a major concern of pedagogical practices in Departments of regional languages where students are denied access to significant texts from the western canon, such as T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* due to the absence of “proper” translations. Not many translations of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* exist in Odia. The earliest translation was Gynindra Verma's *Poda Bhuin* (1956); the most popular version in Odia is Guru Prasad Mohanty's *Kalapurusha* which appeared only four years later in 1960 may be called a “transcreation,” an alternate model of translation. This paper is concerned with the possibility of miscommunication of the content and meaning of the “original” text, and the spacio-temporal facts of its creation through works like Guru Prasad Mohanty's *Kalapurusha* (1960), keeping aside the challenges posed by inter-linguistic and inter-cultural translation, while translating canonical English texts into Indian languages;

Keywords: Guru Prasad Mohanty, Kalapurusha, Poda Bhuin, Eliot, The Waste Land

Introduction

From the time the British support to Arabic and Sanskrit studies was withdrawn in the early nineteenth century, and studies in English language and literature were introduced in higher learning institutions in India, fidelity to the ‘original’ has become a major debatable concern for Indian translators. Ganesh Devy (1998) for example, and very rightly so, points to the ambiguous nature of what is “original” in the Indian context, as opposed to the Western theoretical insistence on translation as an “exile, a fall from the origin” (p. 182). My argument, however, rests on the necessity for fidelity in translation, particularly for translations of canonical literary texts as far as practicable, to the “original” or source text, if not for popular reading, then at least for pedagogical purposes. More so, considering the undeniable fact that English literary texts continue to shape pedagogical practices in our country. Academic engagement with translated texts in the departments of regional languages becomes difficult for scholars, who often find themselves at a disadvantage due to non-availability or limited availability of “proper” translations of English and other European classical/ canonical texts in regional languages. This view of mine was vindicated and established when in a Seminar on “Issues in Translating English Texts into Indian Languages” jointly organized by the Departments of English, Hindi and Odia of a neighbouring university. I presented my argument in 2016, and some participants suspected I had read the Odia *Kalapurusha* by Guruprasad Mohanty (1960). The assumption was that as a student of English literature, I had failed to notice the “originality” of Mohanty’s translation of T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922). Keeping aside the difficulties of inter-linguistic and inter-cultural translation, my concern is with the possibility of miscommunication of the content and meaning of the “original” text, and the spacio-temporal facts of its creation to the readers.

I claim no theoretical underpinnings to my stand. What follows are personal views as a student of literature as I read T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, its Odia translation *Poda Bhuin* (1956) by Gyanindra Verma, and Guru Prasad Mohanty's *Kalapurusha* (1960). More than half a century after Eliot's death, and after volumes of Eliot's letters have been published during this decade of the twenty-first century; it is indisputable that any reading of Eliot's works, whether in original or in translation, cannot avoid a more careful study of his life, and of the form and style that he adopted to convey to his readers the modern man's failure of communication. Not many translations of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* exist in Odia. While *Poda Bhuin* happens to be only a very early translation of 1956, Mohanty's *Kalapurusha* appeared only four years later when not much research into the author's biography had been done, and even while Eliot was still living. It is necessary to point out that Guruprasad Mohanty's *Kalapurusha* exemplifies an alternate model of translation that some might refer to as a "transcreation." For me this "transcreation" of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, although an appreciable imitation of the poem, can hardly be a desirable model for a translated text.

We agree with Peter Bush and Susan Bassnett (2006), who believe that we would like those who read translated works to recognise translation as an art to be celebrated, not concealed (p. 2). A translated text which tries to be "loyal" to the original by being a literal translation of the source text, I believe, is more desirable than one which attempts to address the local or regional reader by "contextualizing" foreign language literature, its culture and the socio-historical condition in which it was written, to the local people and their culture because otherwise, it would be incomprehensible to them. We must, however, not forget that the English *The Waste Land* was perhaps as incomprehensible to the early (and even later) first-time readers of Eliot as the Odia translation, *Poda Bhuin*

was to its Odia readers. On the other hand, a text like Guruprasad Mohanty's *Kalapurusha*, although written in the line of *The Waste Land* passes off as an original text, so much so as to win him a Kendra Sahitya Akademi award (1973). In my reading of Guruprasad Mohanty's *Kalapurusha*, I cannot but agree with Dr. Mayadhar Mansingh (1967) when he comments on the lack of originality among the "modern" Odia poets. Even within a few years of its publication, Mansingh, in his *Odia Sahitya Itihaas* (1967) while tracing the history of Odia literature, had noted the sudden emergence of, what he calls pseudo-Eliots and Pounds in post-war Odia literary scenario: "ବର୍ତ୍ତମାନ କ୍ଷେତ୍ରାଧିକାରୀ କେତେକ ବୌଦ୍ଧିକ ବାମନ, ଏଲିୟଟ ବା ଏବ୍ରା ପାଉଣ୍ଡଙ୍କର ଢିଲା ପୋଷାକ ପିନ୍ଧି ରଙ୍ଗମଞ୍ଚରେ ଆବିର୍ଭୂତ ହେବାର ଦେଖାଯାଏ ।" (p. 356). He picks on the title of an anthology of poems "*Nutan Kabita*" of Bhanuji Rao and Guruprasad Mohanty published by Jatindra Mohan Mohanty, and disapproves of them as lacking in originality. If not plagiarized then certainly imitations: "'ନୂତନ' ବା 'ପ୍ରଗତି' ଦଳର ଅଧିକାଂଶଙ୍କର, ଅପହରଣ ନ ହେଲେ ମଧ୍ୟ, ନକଲିକରଣ" (p. 356), says Mansingh. In his opinion these poets draw upon Eliot without any clear understanding of the Western man's experience of their contemporary socio-political or historical circumstances that gave rise to "modern" art and literature (p. 357). He roundly dismisses that the "*Nutan Kabita*" has any merit comparable to Eliot's representation of modern Western man's sense of futility and anxiety: "ଏହି ନକଲି ଏଲିୟଟ ଓ ପାଉଣ୍ଡମାନଙ୍କର ଏସବୁ କବିତାରେ, ବାମପନ୍ଥୀମାନଙ୍କର ଭୂ-ସ୍ବର୍ଗ ସ୍ବପ୍ନ ନାହିଁ କି 'ଉଦ୍‌ସ୍ତଲେଷ୍ଟ' ର ବ୍ୟର୍ଥତାମୟ ଯୁଗଯନ୍ତ୍ରଣା ନାହିଁ; ନାହିଁ ମଧ୍ୟ ଏବ୍ରା ପାଉଣ୍ଡଙ୍କର 'କାଣ୍ଡୋ' ମାନଙ୍କ ତଳେ ଥିବା ବିସ୍ମୟକର ପାଣ୍ଡିତ୍ୟ ।" (p. 361)

Eliot never intended *The Waste Land* to be an easy reading experience even for the English reader of the poem. The writing of the poem appears to have been a very self-conscious and labored act just as much as the act of reading the poem is, or would be, not

only for a scholarly critical appreciation by the sophisticated reader, but even for an ordinary reader for a basic understanding of its meaning. A reading of the poem undoubtedly requires an intellectual preconditioning and was obviously meant for an elite readership. If as Ian Hamilton (1972) remarks “Eliot wanted the poem to be difficult and no doubt conceived of its difficulty as an important aspect of its total meaning” (p. 102) it can hardly be possible to conceive of a translation of the poem without its inherent “difficulties.” As much as it is necessary to have a basic knowledge of the Upanishads in order to recognize the ironical use of the final “shantih” at the end of the poem, as pointed out by K Narayana Chandran (1989) it is equally necessary, as the poet himself suggests in his notes to *The Waste Land*, to have read, or else to have some prior knowledge of Jessie L. Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance* and James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* for a complete understanding of the poem:

Not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston’s book on the Grail legend: *From Ritual to Romance*. Indeed, so deeply am I indebted, Miss Weston’s book will elucidate the difficulties of the poem much better than my notes can do; and I recommend it... to any who think such elucidation of the poem worth the trouble. To another work of anthropology I am indebted in general, one which has influenced our generation profoundly; I mean *The Golden Bough*; I have used especially the two volumes *Adonis*, *Attis*, *Osiris*. Anyone who is acquainted with these works will immediately recognise in the poem certain references to vegetation ceremonies. (p. 91)

We might cite as example a line from Gyanindra Verma about the risk that even a scholar like him runs into when they attempt to read the poem with only partial understanding of the allusions in *The Waste Land*: “ତାହାଲେ ଇଲି ଡ଼ମର ଉପଯୁକ୍ତ ହେବ କାହିଁକି । / ଡ଼କ୍ଟରୀ ହୀରୋନିମୋ ରଷିର ସାଧନା ମିଥ୍ୟା ହେବ ପୁଣି ।” (p. 48). Not only does Verma fail to identify the source, or if not the source then certainly the irony in Eliot’s citation of Hieronymo’s statement, “Why then Ile fit you” (p. 90). And yet, what matters in reading a poem like *The Waste Land*, like any other modernist text, is not exactly the “meaning,” rather, the very struggle for meaning.

It is remarkable that despite the difficulties of comprehension and the ambiguities, *The Waste Land* could find popular readership throughout the world and could make a place for itself as a phenomenal work. In his Preface to the 1987 Oxford University Press edition of *The Waste Land*, editor Vasant A. Shahane refers to Allen Tate who told him in 1965 that when he first read the poem *The Waste Land* he did not understand a word of it but knew that it was a great poem. Suppose the author can allow for ambiguities and consider the readers intelligent enough, and capable of acquiring esoteric knowledge. In that case, there is apparently no reason why a translated text should not retain the ambiguities, instead of resolving them for the regional reader. It may be argued that it is always easier for an English reader than for the Indian reader to relate to the references to various literature, specific incidents, and culture of different European states because of the cultural and linguistic affinities. But, I do not think such an argument can sustain when the poem cites Asia in making references to Buddhism, and the three “Da Da Da,” or the Middle East (Syria) and Egypt. Not all English readers of *The Waste Land*, I suppose, always go on to read the Upanishads and learn to identify with the Indian culture before they read to interpret “Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.” Often the casual as

well as the serious readers manage with notes provided by the author/poet. I believe it is necessary, and more so for students of literature in colleges and universities where pedagogical practices demand intellectual interaction with various cultures and ideas, and it is also equally desirable that the regional reader of the translated text is made aware of the author's deliberate incorporation of ambiguities, to be given an opportunity of visiting and being exposed to an alien culture through a reading of their literature. A translator, after all, translates to "bring into another language" the literary writings of another culture. In the words of Peter Bush "It is a mark of their openness to other literary cultures" (p. 3). We would go with the assumptions of Eliot that the reader will enjoy a literary work even with its apparent difficulties, and in spite of it. Just as reading the English translation of a Kafka novel, although the original text is twice removed from the Indian reader, can make us experience the predicament of a Jew in Nazi Germany, *The Waste Land*, which validates different interpretations among different readers, can also inspire a reader of its translation to observe in its varying images their own predicament. After all, the theme of the poem encompasses simultaneously several levels of experience arising out of various waste lands, of religion, of spirit, of morality, and instinct for fertility, experiences common to most people all over the world. "[A] piece of rhythmical grumbling" as described by the poet, (Quoted as epigraph to the Valerie Eliot, 1971 edited, *The Waste Land*) justice to the experiments of multidimensional allusiveness, "its profundity, perplexity and density of poetic allusions, myths and meaning" (Quoted in Shahne, 1987, p. 55) that Eliot has made to gain his ends can be done only by being loyal to the original writing. Translation is certainly not "a fall from the origin" as Ganesh Devy had argued. Rather, a manipulation of the original text, as Guruprasad Mohanty does, would agree with J. Hillis Miller's notion of translation as "the wandering existence of a text in perpetual exile" (Devy, 1998, p. 182).

It is also amusing to note the blasphemies that are committed in a plea to address the local reader. Not to overlook the insightful introduction to the poet by the translator, consider the preface that precedes it, by the publisher, Prafulla Chandra Das (1956) to Gyanindra Verma's collection of Eliot's translated poems. It is as if a translation of a Western text also involved addressing the cultural ideologies of the target readers. So as not to offend the "moral" sentiments of the Odia reader, the first details given in a small introduction of less than four pages, and less than 500 words about Eliot as a Western writer, apart from his date of birth, and that he was an exile from America in England, are the establishment of the Utilitarian Church and Washington University by his father. Next, this very short introduction informs the reader that Eliot and all his family members were teetotalers and never even smoked (p. 1). Undeniably, such information is meant only to address the Odia market, but how otherwise does it affect a reading of the work? The semantic relevance of the author's work then, apparently becomes secondary, and is sacrificed at the altar of the social and cultural ideologies of the regional reader. Of course, the Preface does also acknowledge the difficulties faced by Gyanindra Verma in translating *The Waste Land*.

Not to deny the difficulties of cultural translation, it is also not easy to accept Priyadarshi Patnaik's (2016) argument in his essay "*Kalapurusa* of Guruprasad Mohanty and Eliot's *The Waste Land*": "translate *The Waste Land* into Odiya, and the effect is lost" (p. 3). Pattnaik is of the view that "a literary parallel [of *The Waste Land*] has to be created born of its own culture, rooted in it, like a seed which is taken from its parent climate and which sprouts and grows in its new way in its new environment" (p. 2-3). This idea of "transcreation" does not sound convincing enough, particularly for an Odia translation of *The Waste Land*. A more acceptable form could only possibly be an

“adaptation,” as is being done in the case of Shakespeare in other regional languages, or other classical writers whose works have been translated many times before so that a transcreation only enriches and adds new meaning to their work.

Of the many tasks of the translator, it is also to bridge the cultural divide between two dissimilar cultures. But not indeed in the manner that Pattnaik argues. If poet Ramakanta Rath believes that “[a]fter the publication of *Kalapurusha* we realized that a sense of alienation is the main ingredient of modern [Odia] poetry,” (Qtd in *World Heritage Encyclopedia*) Pattnaik notices “emotive evocations” (p. 4) in the poem/s. In arguing against both the opinions, respectively, can we say that in the past when these translations were first published, or even afterwards, Odisha has experienced the kind of modernity that Eliot and his contemporary writers from the Western countries went through? Or that the objective of a serious poem like *The Waste Land* or its translation/creation is the sentimental evocation of specific “emotions”? Pattnaik compares *Kalapurusha* to *The Waste Land* and argues that “it is where *Kalapurusha* departs that a certain echo or similarity of sensibility can be discerned” (p. 3), that in spite of different sets of imageries “the emotive evocations turn out to be similar” (p. 4). It is not the sentimental evocation but the very act of experiencing the futility and the failure to glean meaning in a morally devastated universe that becomes important to a poem like *The Waste Land*. Although his translation may not exactly be illustrative of the fact, even Verma, in his introduction points to the importance for Eliot, of experience over meaning (p. 6). The translator’s desire to communicate meaning to their reader ironically defeats the very ‘meaning’ of the poem. What emotion can we hope to be roused or regenerated in a wasteland—whether in Europe or India? The lines that Pattnaik cites from both Eliot and Mohanty hardly exemplify his point. From Eliot’s

poem Pattnaik cites: “Winter kept us warm, covering/ Earth in forgetful snow, feeding/ A little life with dried tubers,” and from Mohanty:

The blazing sun of May and June—
When under the tin roof of the sky
All was faint dizzy hurt, when all was
Without intensity
No desire in the bones, the vitality
within arteries and veins. (Pattnaik’s translation).

These lines from Mohanty are only illustrative of the passing off as one’s own, the ideas of another! Not to blame Pattnaik, because he perhaps borrows the idea from the editorial of *Prajna*, the journal where it was first published. Sitakant Mahapatra (1979) cites the Editorial which claimed that Guru Prasad “tried to experiment on the limits of the power of Oriya language with certain emotional situations akin to those of ‘The Wasteland’” (p. 15). Pattnaik further, claims that a translation of Eliot’s poem would make it incomprehensible to the Odia reader: “It is still alright to read Eliot in English. But translate him into Odiya. What sense will the lines make?” (p. 5) Such presupposition about the regional reader serves only to remind one of the early Orientalists’ bias against Indian intelligence and scholarship, and deprives the regional reader of an insight into a foreign culture. Knowledge of the foreign language can no doubt be helpful, but it would certainly be incorrect to set it as a precondition to understand the alien literature and culture. Although the comparison might sound hyperbolic, and yet, such presuppositions of the Odia reader’s lack of aptitude would be as illogical and erroneous as to imagine that a novel of social realism like that of Charles

Dickens can make sense to the Odia reader only when the translator transforms England to Odisha, London to Cuttack, industrial child labour to the hotel boy, and the industrial working-class environment to the claustrophobic lanes. As referred to earlier, eminent poet and critic, Sitakant Mahapatra also points to the “deliberate” similarity that is contrived between *Kalapurusha* and *The Waste Land* (p. 15) calling it a “Cuttack edition of ‘The Wasteland’” (p. 16). In a world that is growing smaller each day the translator of English canonical literary texts must allow the regional reader a minimum knowledge of world history, geography, and that beyond India are cultures different from our own. The translator’s job should be to expand the horizons of the readers’ knowledge and experience, not to limit it to a specific region.

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Time and Timelessness in Sitakant Mahapatra's Early Poetry

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Abstract

The article gives a detailed analysis of the early poetry of Sitakant Mahapatra, an eminent poet and critic from Odisha, and one of the most notable poets in Indian literature today. The article is an assessment of Sitakanta Mahapatra's first three poetry books, entitled *Dipti O Dyuti* (*The Glow and the Radiance*) (1963), *Astapadi* (*Eight Steps*) (1967) and *Sabdara Akasa* (*The Sky of Words*) (1971). Poetry for Mahapatra originates as a 'trauma deep within his being' created by events and thoughts that immediately connect to the 'sub-conscious and a multitude of 'parallel memories.' They 'act and react on each other' and give birth to poetry. His early poetry is a startling revelation of a young man's control of emotions, command over linguistic structures, inherent attitudes towards life, and philosophic vision. Based on the mythical traditions of the *Puranas* on the one hand and the angst of urban existence on the other, Mahapatra provides a pervasive and penetrating understanding of life and existence around him that is succinctly reflected in his poetry.

Key words: Odia, poetry, time, timelessness, life, existence, myth

Introduction

Sitakant Mahapatra (born 1937) is an eminent poet from Odisha, one of the states from eastern part of India, and one of the most important poets of India today. Educated at the Universities of Utkal, Allahabad, and Cambridge he holds a doctorate in Social Anthropology. He was a Senior Fellow at Cambridge University and a Ford Foundation Fellow at Harvard University. He writes poetry in Odia, essays both in Odia and English, and has extensively translated Odisha's tribal poetry into Odia and English. Beginning from 1963, he has twenty-one collections of poetry, six collections of essays in Odia and twenty-two collections of essays in English, and twelve collections of tribal poetry in translation. His poems have been translated widely in major languages like French, German, Swedish, Czech, Danish, Russian, Greek, Macedonian, Romanian and Ukrainian, including eleven translations in English. He is also a fellow of the International Academy of Poets, Cambridge, UK. His poetry is known for its "blend of folk culture, traditional mythology, colloquial language, lyrical grace and rural polish" (Rath 2001, 7). Rath adds that Mahapatra's poetry focuses on two philosophical themes: the archetypes in the *Puranic*(mythic) tradition, which he interprets in a new context, and the angst of the modern existence.

The innumerable awards and citations he has received from all over India, includes the Sahitya Akademi (India's National Akademi of Letters) Award (1974), India's highest literary award, Bharatiya Jnanapith Award (1993), and Padma Bhushan (2002), India's third highest civilian award, awarded by the President of India. This article is an assessment of Sitakant Mahapatra's first three poetry-books, entitled *Dipti O Dyuti (The Glow and the Radiance)* (1963), *Astapadi (Eight Steps)* (1967) and *Sabdara Akasa (The Sky of Words)* (1971). The last book fetched him the Sahitya Akademi

Award, the youngest Odia writer to get the award. Mahapatra's poetic awareness and sensibility generates deep within his being created by an event or thought that immediately connects to the "sub-conscious" and to a multitude of "parallel memories." Poetry for him is a confluence of time, the "now", and the "timelessness." A good poem "smoothly sails from the present to eternity, just as it becomes universal by becoming intensely local" (*Muse India* 2008).

According to Mahapatra (2001), a poem is created for readers who have to "read, recreate and relive the poem's experiential context as much as its verbal portfolio" and the poem has to be located in a "land of familiar usages and commonalities, consistent with multiple readers and their individual perceptions of reality." Through his poetry Mahapatra speaks the "voice of his people," or as David Holbrook (1972) notes, his poetry "makes an immediate connection with one's life."

Analysing *Dipti O Dyuti* (The Glow and the Radiance)

Mahapatra's first ever collection of poetry, entitled *Dipti O Dyuti* (*The Glow and the Radiance*) was published in 1963, when he was twenty-six. He had already been in the Indian Administrative Service, which he joined in 1961, before which he had a stint as teacher of Political Science in Utkal University, Odisha. The book contained forty-seven poems, and included almost all the poems that he had been writing during the earlier four to five years. The poems provoked immediate response – response of appreciation and excitement, and poetry-lovers could recognize a new talent in the emerging new poetry movement in Odisha.

In fact, the new poetry movement was itself a new factor in Odia literature at that time – a product of changed living conditions and attitudes and sensibility after the Independence. The first indications of change were seen in the poems of Sachi Routray

(1913-2004), whose poetic career though begun in the thirties, yet the poems that he wrote in the fifties onwards, testified a new personality, a new understanding of the problems of life, of the surrounding desolation and devastation, and a new use of language, which was both poetic and rugged, both flexible and sharply featured. Routray brought an “unorthodox fusion of symbolist vision and socialist concern, a brand of creativity new to the scene” (Das 2001). But the poet who put the change firmly in perspective, both in time and space, was Guruprasad Mohanty, (1924-2004), whose poems appearing after 1948, gave occasions for heated discussions about poetry, and reassessed the poetry’s role in giving a meaningful shape to that immense futility called life (Mohanty 2006). Guruprasad Mohanty effected a clean break with the past, used language in its pristine and primitive form, a form akin to conversation and idiomatic warmth, changed linear story-sequence narrative poems into one of intense introspection and inscape and projected a poetic personality away from sentimental, moralistic, progressive, and nationalistic dimensions towards an uncertain, unstable, alienated self. His longest poem “Kalapurusa” (“The Hunter”) published in 1960, in its attempt to mirror the contemporary life provided phases of perception and explored the corridors of psyche and the mental movements away from the self and again back to the self (Mohanty 2006). Mohanty established the new sensibility and new taste in Odia poetry, and a trend was set for a new generation of poets – a trend of strength and newness. Mohanty introduced the poetic idioms and sensibilities of T. S. Eliot into the landscape of Odia poetry’ (Das, 2001).

Sitakant Mahapatra was a product of this new trend, and his first poetry book, *Dipti O Dyuti* was hailed as a significant document of a young, sensitive soul to the factors of life (Mohanty, 2006). He conceived time as a unit which goes through a movement and yet has no movement, and where all time becomes one time... (Mohanty,

2003). The forty-seven poems contained in the book had different motivations. Thus, there was a poem on Puri temple, the famous temple of Lord Jagannath at Puri with references to the Lord Himself. Then there were poems on historical personalities, such as Radhanath Ray, the famous poet of Odisha, and Gopabandhu Das, the famous freedom-fighter and leader of Odisha, and Rimbaud, the famous French poet; a poem on Africa; a poem on Hirakud, Odisha's largest river dam; a poem on Apu, the well-known character from Satyajit Ray's film *Pather Panchali* and three poems related to the *Mahabharata* (one of the two major Sanskrit epics of ancient India), two on the two epic characters, Yudhishtira and Duryodhana, and the third a soliloquy of Jara, the hunter who was instrumental in killing Sri Krishna (the Hindu God).

There were other variations too. Thus there were poems on Jobra and Gorakabar, two landmarks of Cuttack city where Mahapatra had spent his young days, as well as a few poems with references to the city in general. His own village is not forgotten, and one can see poems describing the river delta near his village as also paddy-fields and flowering trees of his village. As expected, the young poetic imagination ranged in an almost abundance of emotion. But it is not an expression of emotion which amazes the reader. On the other hand, particularly in a first book and in such a young poet, what is surprising is the control of emotion, the command over linguistic structure, the inherent attitudes towards life and the philosophic vision. A few examples may be taken. The second poem in the book is entitled 'Basara Darpanare Surayasta' ('The Sunset in the Mirror of the Bus').

The poem deals with a moment in a moving bus, at a time when the sun is setting, and the setting-sun is reflected in the side-view mirror of the bus. The colour and the spread of the western sky at the time of the sun-set, along with such stray pictures on the road-side, such as cyclists moving, pedestrians walking, labourers carrying faggots on

heads as well as herds of cows, and trees, creepers, flowers, all together, are framed in the mirror in a whirlpool of movement and speed:

The herd of cows
The cow- herd
Labourers carrying firewood on their heads
The cycle-rider
The pedestrians
The mile posts
The trees, creepers, flowers, fruits

These are different pieces of reality seen directly from a moving-bus. But when their reflections merge with the overpowering reflection of the setting-sun inside the mirror, in continuity of a movement at par with the movement of the bus, the whole picture attains a sinister connotation:

All rush to drown
In a fiery, flaming existence
All vanish, annihilated –

But annihilation is not the end. A different dimension immediately emerges where annihilation turns into a different perception – the perception of a grand vision, the ultimate source of life, where all facets of life are taken in one grand unity - the ‘Universal Being’ of the ‘Bhagavad Gita’ (‘Song of God’ is a Sanskrit text from the chapter ‘Bhishma Parva’ of the Mahabharata epic, comprising 700 verses], and what is communicated is a great fear and awe, like that which Arjuna, the great hero, had, when he saw the ‘Universal Being’ on the battle field of Kuruskhetra, a figure of complete annihilation and destruction on the one hand, and a continuous renewal of life on the other :

All vanished, drowned
Innumerable universes fled, lost
All soaked by the Primordial Being
Burnt in the last rays of the sun
The fiery ball on the mirror of the bus –
Is it the land of divinity?
Or beyond divinity?

Thus what the poem achieves is an attempt to understand the source of life, to move beyond - from casual, known and formal, and to perceive that annihilation is not the end, it is life. Das (2001) in relation to this says that ‘a sense of wonder for the illuminated world unfolding before them bond the readers with the poet in a ritualistic communion.

This perception of life and the life’s moorings are also seen in ‘Jarasabarar Sangita’ (‘The Song of Jara, the Hunter’). But the context is different. It is the recreation of a *Mahabharata* event, a poetic preoccupation which provided an important dimension to Mahapatra’s poetry later - the event when an arrow hit Lord Krishna in the forest where he was resting. It was done by Jara, the tribal hunter, who mistook Krishna’s soft foot for the ear of a deer, and the end was fatal. The poem deals with Jara’s anguish when the mistake was discovered - a painful anguish for committing an unpardonable crime. But Jara is only an alter-ego. The poem narrates a perception of divinity and how one can achieve the truth of living beyond life’s pretenses.

The poem has a number of aspects. First Jara is shocked that instead of killing a deer he has killed Lord Krishna himself. Second, it is the realization that it is not just a crime, but a sin, and he would perpetually be branded as the killer of Krishna. But

thirdly, he doubts whether he is not just an agent, and the Lord himself wills the whole thing. At this point, what may be called, the perception begins. Memories pile on Jara. He remembers his earlier birth when as Bali he was killed by the Lord himself. He recollects what he had heard about the Lord - his life at Gopa, on the banks of Yamuna, his migration from Mathura to Dwaraka, and how he showed his Universal Appearance to Arjuna in the battlefield at Kuruskhetra and how he provoked his own kinsmen to kill themselves. Jara's doubts deepen. He feels convinced that it is all the pretenses of the Lord who exists both in time and beyond time, and who understands and wills everything.

You see all
The present the past the future,
You know all
The life the death
All mystery
For us only forgetfulness
The unknown darkness
All the illusions of pretenses

Then how would he be knowledgeable about the Lord, or how his memories, recollections, or even the hope that the Lord would come once again in the future, will help him or give him the desired relief from the confines of life. He is reduced to a state of humility and asks not for knowledge and deliverance, but the permission to continue as the killer of the Lord, and the consequent anguish:

I don't ask for your knowledge
Nor for your innumerable memories,
Oh, arch pretender
Who pretends Universal Appearance?
Only this much
This much I pray,

Let my arrow deliver you
From your body
From your pretenses,
Eternally,
And let me cry eternally
In anguish
Putting on my hard breast
Your soft feet
Soft as new leaf
And coloured with the colours of new black-berry.

It is an act of faith and love, a state of great compassion where the human soul merges with the divine. The meanings of life and the mysteries of existence resolve at a point of illumination and understanding. Thus the incident taken from the *Mahabharata* provides the necessary metaphorical structure and the distance for expressing the highly subjective deliberations of the poet on the essences of life. 'Images of daily life are transformed in his poems into archetypes and symbols which nobody has ever seen before but which everybody recognizes' (Stietencron, 2001).

In a way, an awareness of one's own distress, along with a contemplation of a benign situation away from that, permeate almost all the poems of this first volume. For example, once again, two different poems, focusing on a similar perception can be cited. The first is 'Dhusara Bilare Krushnachuda' ('A Gulmohar Tree in a Dry Landmass'). The poem has a certain singularity, particularly in its rhythm, which is taken from a folk-tune, and simulates the movement and song of palanquin-bearers, carrying a person across a dry countryside.

The poem begins with references to the mid-day sun's immense heat, which burns like fierce fire, under which the palanquin moves. The dry stretch of land has no trees that may provide shelter, and the continuous physical exertion of the bearers coupled

with the sweltering heat creates a situation of untold suffering, almost as if the souls are being fried in oil. But slowly, a mental situation overtakes as compensation for the reality of physical suffering.

First, it arises from the musical rhythm of the song of the bearers, which provides an incentive to them to move. Secondly, it is seen in the longing for the rains and the green, cool day of the first rains after the summer (“The green dreams the blue day/ the first rain”). Thirdly, the dreams emerge of a rural setting, where the cows graze under the mango trees, the cowherds play on their flutes in the shady bank of a river, and the girls dance and sing in the moon-light – a sweet tranquility, almost reminiscent of young Krishna playing his flute on the banks of Yamuna:

Where is the flute
In the sun
Who plays
In which herd
Under which grove
On the banks of Yamuna
Under the *kadamba*(a flowering tree)tree

Fourthly, and finally, the sight of a lone, flowering gulmohar tree on the wayside, whose glowing red flowers conjure up the purple glow of the first love, and provide a throw-back to the excitement of the youthful days and the flowering of youthful love (“Through the chinks of years/in the branches of the body’s tree/at the time of flowering/when the bees call”). At the end, the journey ends and the palanquin reaches its destination. Thus structurally the poem simulates a movement, which is both physical and mental, and goes through suffering and despair initially, to move towards joy,

happiness and tranquility at the end. In many of Mahapatra's poems Lord Jagannath manifests himself in the persona of Krishna, suggests Namwar Singh (2001).

Another poem in this collection, entitled 'Dayada' ('The Inheritors') has apparently a different area of discourse. It deals with two generations and explores the link between the two. But it is one perception typified in two conditions of living. The one belongs to the present, where the condition of living is like a condition of death. The other to future, the "inheritors", that has, in contrast, life's joy and vitality. The call is to the inheritors, proclaim themselves in time, and create that condition of benignity that has been denied to the people. The poem begins with a statement:

Many years hence
When all of us would be lost
In the darkness of time
You who will come to this earth
To sweet fragrance of flower
To green grass
To moving drops of dew
To soft sun,
Don't be like us
whirling in the circumference of time
searching for the still-point of life
and your mind and heart
and the condition of your soul
don't banish them
as we have done.

Slowly the poet finds his 'thirst' for 'earth' and 'dew' taking shape in the 'lips' and 'tears' of those who would come, and his desires streaming like 'fountains' in their hearts. The joys that take shape in the songs of the birds, in the call of love of the sun to the earth, and in every seed of life, are denied to the poet. But not to them, the inheritors,

who would emerge as the butterflies from the dead womb, in strangeness and beauty. The poet waits for that moment and time:

We all wait for that
That auspicious time,
From womb of death,
And as you sacrifice your life
Oh! Oncoming;
These millions of lives
Would be achieved, redeemed.

Analysing *Astapadi* (Eight Steps)

Dipti o Dyuti was Mahapatra's first poetry-collection, published when he was twenty-six, and it shows distinct powers of perception and imagination. The next volume *Astapadi* (*Eight Steps*) was published in 1967, four years later. Where the former volume collected a group of short poems, the present one contained only eight long poems. They combined together to present one theme, a theme related to the perception and understanding of the complexities of the present-day life – an almost innovative experiment in Odia poetry, where the narration grew out of being sequential to a psychological exposition of the creative insight (Mohanty, 2006).

Astapadi contained eight long poems, and the length of the poems varied from about 140 lines to about 400 lines each. The first poem 'Mrutyunacha' ('The Dance of Death') provided a picture of hell, where a fierce, expansive fire burns all, both the man and his created world:

In that fire-pan all were fried,
Contracted
Sizzled
All trees, forest, land, earth,

And the man and the mind of man.

How can one escape from this, the poet does wonders, and hopes that it may be through, observation of traditional rituals, like giving away one's own wealth. But that is only a hope, and the conclusion is a continuation of the dance of fierce hell-fire and a burning of all:

All burns
The mind the senses
All thoughts all feelings
All possibilities and dreams and hopes,
The fire glows jump to the sky
The red-blood tongue moves,
And the sky the earth everywhere
The sticks of fire and smoke

The next poem 'Stanandhyar Upakatha' ('The Tale of Man') also continues the same sequence, a similar death-dance of fire, where the human-soul is shocked, afraid, and victimized in his own despair. The difference is, instead of expressing oneself directly, the poet takes recourse to an ancient myth, the story of the final destruction of Krishna's own Yadav clan at the end of the 'Mahabharata' war. The suggestion is clear, that is, what happened long ago, at the 'Mahabharata' time, can also take place once again now - the same civil feud, the same sin, the same holocaust and destruction:

All burnt all on a sudden
The blue sky the clouds
And all game, smiles, dreams
All died suddenly
And the whirlpool of fire
Burst open in the sky

And the detail references at the beginning of the poem where the locations overlap across time and space - ‘Nuakhali? Hiroshima? Pindarak? Dwaraka? Pravas?’ and in a similar vein, by way of confirmation, at the end:

What road is this?
Of which town?
Of which village?
Nuakhali? Hiroshima? Pindarak? Dwaraka? Pravas?

The references to Krishna-myth are more explicit in the next poem ‘Mati O Manisha’ (‘The Man and the Soil’), providing the structural frame. The references are to the immense suffering of Vasudeb and Devki, Krishna’s parents, in Kansa’s prison, with a distant hope that their suffering may end sometime with the birth of Krishna, but the suffering continues and the hope remains a chimera. It is an atmosphere of suspicion, despair, agony and death:

This great procession
This crowd of shadows
The heart has thorny bushes
Shifting sands
And cactus, desert, and no drop of water,
The bier of clouds in the sky
The sky sick and pale. . . .

And Vasudeb, torn, tortured, sees no hope and finds no desire to live. His dreams turn into nightmare where the sense of death dominates:

I see dreams
Night after night
Only dreams
Seven nights

And horrible dreams,
And horrible procession of ghosts,
I shiver in fright
In great fear
And my dreams turn into nightmares

The fourth poem 'Trisankura Madhyaswarga' ('The Mid-heaven of Trisanku') provides the first reference to Trisanku, the mythological king who could neither stay in earth nor could go to heaven but remained suspended in the mid-way getting benefits of none. The protagonist is like Trisanku, existing at a point where he never gets fruition in any way, and is tortured as in other poems, by death and fear of death on the one hand and by life's uncertainties and degeneration of man's personality and human values on the other. The already-destroyed mythical Yadav clan has become a part of his psyche and he himself suffers from a sense of loneliness and annihilation, with a throw-back to the drowning of Dwaraka, the Yadav city, in the sea:

The strange tidal waves,
And drowning of Dwaraka,
All the quarrel in the Erakka forest
All brothers and sons
Mothers and uncles, loss and death,
The Lonely earths
Companionless, tortured,
And the coming of fearful dark night...

The protagonist becomes a prisoner in doubts, despair and ugliness, and hope for him is a misnomer:

Around me, everywhere
The Ugly, monstrous figures

And the sea of nameless matters,
And the whirlwind,
Where end all beginning, life and memory

The next poem 'Marupathar Swaralipi' ('The Notations of a Desert-Path') has pictures of a personal life, which to some extent may be called autobiographical. Yet, here too, as before, the feelings of loneliness and despair and a knowing nearness to death are present. The protagonist's journey is through suffering and loss of hope to a condition of continuing unhappiness.

Alas, the sea has receded,
Around me, everywhere
Only sands and sands,
And dense fog, darkness and thorny bushes,
All journeys end in me
All ways merge in that still-point
My own loneliness.

In 'Raktanadi Santaranar Pare' ('After Crossing the River of Blood'), we once again go back to the structure of mythology. But instead of Vasudeb, the father of Krishna, the protagonist is Duryodhana, the *Mahabharata* King, who was defeated in the great battle. As in the case of Vasudeb, so also here, the poet's experiences merge with that of Duryodhana. For Duryodhana the past is dead, the present scattered, and the future is full of despair. He is the prisoner in the contemporary hell, and around him, surrounding him, are the guardians of hell "wearing coloured-clothes/Garlands of skulls and bones round the neck/Fierce jaws moving noisily/ The cheeks besmeared with blood," and an environment of an apocalyptic destruction.

The Sun, the moon, the stars, the milky ways

All destroyed,
The great dark night
Covered all directions.

This is a situation of death-in-life, a total situation. If at all, the only possibility of escape is through the physical death, when Duryodhana gets killed by his rival Bhima. Notable in these poems is Mahapatra's singular use of the poetic device of resurrecting ancient Indian myths to articulate the voices of the twentieth century (J.M. Mohanty, 2001).

The climate moves towards a change in the seventh poem, 'Kubuja Pain Gotie Sangita' ('A Song for Kubuja'), where the emphasis is on the transformation of Kubuja, from a misshapen, deformed person to a full-grown, handsome woman, at the touch of Krishna. The first and most important experience is of death and death like situation:

This Mathura,
This hell
Of putrid stench...
All cursed
All revelling in the cold touch of death,
Dead bodies smeared with sandal-paste.

But this goes through a transformation when Kubuja changes physically, and there is a dawn of new hope:

You pressed my feet
Raised my chin,
Hope rose
Dreams returned
And my life's pond brightened.

And the new feelings have been expressed in a prayer for release from the confinement of cursed Mathura:

Let there be an end of gray death
An end of deformed time,
End of obscene ugliness of royal favour,
Let the clouds gather in the dry sky –
The dark, thundering clouds.

The change came in the last, the eighth poem of the book - the change from a death-like situation where the soul suffers from horror and dryness towards realizing life's fullness, beauty and joy. The poem entitled 'Solon' is about a man called George Solon, the caretaker of a dark bungalow in a lonely island with a lighthouse, in the east coast of Odisha. The poet's encounter with Solon, who had spent about fifty-two years in the loneliness of the island in the sea, gave rise to the poem. The poem has two directions, one to the sea, and the other to Solon. The sea is the symbol of life, life's expansiveness and depth. Additionally the sea is also the medium of liberty and freedom. Therefore the soul's liaison with the sea has brought to fruition, the souls' search for a liberated, enriched life. Also, because of Solon's long association with the sea, he can be in a way, considered as the soul of the sea, and his intimacy has enriched his loneliness with a particular grace and beauty, and one can sense the deep and complex noise of the life at the back of this loneliness:

Therefore it is better
To consider oneself as the integral part of the sea...
The sea never measures distance
It never discriminates in quality,
Both the blue and gray

Both stillness and noise
Are its own,
And it is every where
In its own glory...
Solon sees the sea
It is nearer than his own body
More distant than the distant nebula and milky-way,
The sea is its own colour
Brush, canvas and painter,
It is in form
And without form,
It builds its own house
And destroys it...
The crowded silence
And quiet tranquility.

The movement from the suffering putridity of ‘The Dance of Death’ to a sense of life’s fullness and lonely richness, from a dry sterile life to a realization of grace and beauty may be considered as the basic theme of *Astapadi*. In its innovative and new form, where the poet’s intimate understanding got merged with the universality of myth and archetype, and in its exploration of the complex relationship between the feelings of life and feelings of death, *Astapadi*, Mahapatra’s second volume of poetry, became a landmark in Odia poetry.

Analysing *Sabdara Akasa* (The Sky of Words)

The next volume, entitled *Sabdara Akasa* (*The Sky of Words*), was published in 1971 and contained thirty-five poems. The book got the Sahitya Akademi Award for Mahapatra (1974) and established him as one of the most powerful new voices in Odia poetry. The first poem of the volume entitled ‘Erodrum’ (‘Aerodrome’), a place where planes land and take off, becomes a symbol of movement – movement from immediate

to remote, and vice versa, from remote to immediate, and finally becomes an abstract symbol of quest:

Unending restless quest
Not here not there
Not in fathomless sleep
Not in fierce consciousness
Quest through life and death
Though dream and awakening...

In fact, sense of movement and feelings of quest, in one form or other, dominate the poems of *Sabdara Akasa*. This may be a movement from childhood to grown-up age, from limited areas of home and village to wider areas of operation, from one state of mind to another, from the present to the past and from the past to the present, and in general, from self to beyond self and from conditions of death to conditions of life. But the 'movement' is not smooth. It involves among others; waiting, uncertainty as well as agony. Similarly quest, which also implies movement, has its own share of uncertainty, and it is projected in the poet's search for his own roots, in the roots of his creativity as well as for a benign and tranquil understanding of life.

In 'Ghara' ('Home') the protagonist is a traveller who returns to his own village, but is uncertain where it is:

All roads here are roads of return
So many ridges, cremation grounds, remote lonely fields
In the crossings only
Of the consciousness and unconscious,
It's only to ask the whereabouts to anybody

“It’s evening now –
Would you please tell me, my brother?
Where is my village, my home,
I was here one day
May be some nearby village
There is earth, sands, sun and stars
And rains fall
And dews drop.

In ‘Bagicha’ (‘Garden’) the central character sits in his garden and waits for the guest who never comes:

You never come
The time ends in waiting
The evening ends,
Your absence
Softer than water, lighter than light
Scatters everywhere
Like bright moonlit night
And I drown
And I measure my tears
With dry leaves and fallen flowers...

In ‘Jatra O Samaya’ (‘The Journey and Time’) the movement is visualized as a journey by train where the scenes swiftly change from immediate reality to distant, unfamiliar situations:

That is one moment
(Or many moments)
When within this evening’s circumference

The scenes change,
And the train carries this inert body and mind
From one river's bank
To the distant shores of unknown,
Where the quiet twilight sky
Breaks like a smile
And innumerable acres of dancing exciting paddy fields
Emerge,

Differently in 'Avimanyu', the mythical character Avimanyu reminisces on time
before he is caught in the final trap of death:

I have not asked for a moment
Which is my own, my only own,
The roads are different names of time
All days and nights, mornings and evenings,
Different milestones on the road,
Turnings and diversions...
All these different roads
Echo my footstep, my voice,
Like humming voices of life
Many worlds, many seas...

But in final reckoning the mind veers to benignity and tranquility, to a confidence
in life, and to an awareness of grace and beauty as against initial restlessness and agony.
Thus in 'Annya Samaya' ('Other Time'):

What do rains mean?
The unending love story of earth and sky

Not in secret letters and promises
Not in flaming burning existence
Nor in a lamp burning alone in a still solitary house,
It breaks in storms of affection
In naked emptiness of silent, blue sky,
And the million hands of dark clouds
Extend in affection
To touch the hot body of the earth...
And its language
The language of harvest,
The language of grass,
The language of sacred altar-fire
The worships in the morning and evenings
And the hymns of devotion....

This is contact and communication, of love and understanding which is not only instinctive, but goes to natural sources of life, and where the transformation is in natural terms 'Barsha', the 'Rains':

Make me only
Rains, wind and shadow
The endless river of communication,
And the gold of mustard flowers
The green leafy branches of tender trees
The dance of young calf in the village path
And the swans in the silent, still lake...
Crush me
Scatter me
All my knowledge,
Only then

May be
I can see all trees, crops
And sky and stars
In this murmuring singing rains.

Conclusion

Mahapatra was thirty-four when his third poetry book *Sabdara Akasa* was published. He is now more than seventy, and throughout this long period he has continued to write unabatedly and has gone on adding new and newer dimensions to his poetry. Time for Mahapatra is both a ‘physical experience’ and a ‘psychological construct’ and where these two find their confluence in the poetic quest (P. K. Mohanty, 2001). But his basic search for his own identity on the face of immense corroding forces of the present-day world remains, and to that extent his early poems provide a pervasive, penetrating understanding of life and existence around him. In the mould of an Eliot who also portrayed a ‘sterile world of panicky fears and barren lusts, and of human beings waiting for some sign or promise of redemption’ (Luebering, 2010), Mahapatra’s poetry, written in Odia reveals the same need for a release from time’s forces, instead, it transcends time, entering existence in timelessness.

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The Narrative of a writer as a female with Alice Munro

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Abstract

Alice Munro, the Nobel laureate, who has a forte in exploring the human complexities and presenting them in an uncomplicated prose style, has brought forth many issues from a woman's point of view in her short stories. This essay will discuss the journey of such women characters who try to cope with both the life of a tradition-bound woman and a dedicated writer while trying to establish their identity in a patriarchal society. Their struggle is also against those women who have imbibed the patriarchal norms, live with those beliefs and try to impose it on those who think and act differently. I have taken the character of Del Jordan of the *Lives of Girls and women*, who seems to be the mouthpiece of Alice Munro herself and the female narrator of "The Office" wishing for 'a room of one's own' as a writer; a space of one's own without any intervention of 'a house'.

Keywords: identity, narrator, tradition, experience, patriarchy

Introduction

Alice Munro was born in rural Ontario, Wingham of Canada. Her simple prose style reveals her deep understanding of human complexities, which she expresses very effectively, particularly the plight of women. Magdelene Redekop aptly remarks that

although Munro has “no overt feminist agenda,” she dismantles very effectively “the operations of our patriarchal structures” (Redekop, 1992, p.xii). Her stories speak of women's life in early twentieth-century Canada, extending towards a universal appeal of the issues. This paper will discuss the journey of two such female characters aspiring to establish themselves as writers; a traditionally privileged profession for men. Munro intelligibly represents the issues of women in volumes of short stories. She herself had struggled hard in her writing endeavours. Her female characters seem to reflect her thoughts about the gender norms governing women's lives. Munro herself was obsessed with writing from the age of fourteen, but she felt the need to hide and protect her interest in the art because of the social norms. Even when she was married she would “lie and claim to be sewing sitting-room curtains rather than say she had stayed home to work on a story” (Ross, 1992, p. 65). She told one interviewer in 1973 that she “can't write if there is another adult in the house” and adds, “it must be that I'm still embarrassed about it somehow” (Ross, 1992, p. 67). Munro had to maintain this duplicity posing as a tradition-bound woman carrying out the unending household chores and, on the other hand, trying to find space to pen down her brewing ideas. She understands the need for solitude to arrange, create and recreate thoughts. In “The Office”, the female narrator, who after much introspection demands an office to fulfil her dream, finally succumbs to her male owner's interventions and leaves the office, but is hopeful of a better situation. However, In *Lives of Girls and Women*, Munro presents the story of an adolescent who resists every factor in her maturing up to be a writer and finally fulfils her dream.

“Lives of Girls and Women” (1971) is the story of a girl named Del Jordan living in a rural area Jubilee of Ontario. In the process of her growing up she learns, understands and expresses through experiences of the world. As an adolescent she

wished to be adored by men like any other girl of Jubilee. But the more she understands the world, the more she is determined not to be subdued by patriarchal norms. She neither intends to marry nor to have children. She falls in love tragically at a crucial stage of her career. This disrupts her mother's and her academic ambitions. She realizes this "I knew I had done badly in those exams. I had been sabotaged by love, and it was not likely I would get the scholarship which for years I and everybody else had been counting on to carry me away from Jubilee. (Munro, 2001, pp. 271). In the process of forming her identity, she observes the lives of women around her, which finally makes her determined to get to her 'real life' (Munro, 2001, p. 264). Del, the protagonist of her own story, finds herself getting trapped in the tradition, where a woman is always secondary. Del was as intelligent as Jerry Storey. They had healthy competition in their academics. But here again the gender difference categorizes her "almost no capacity for abstract thoughts" (Munro, 2001, p.193) like Jerry. Munro foregrounds the lives of girls and women, the marginalized in the male-dominated society. Further, she focuses on the difference in the point of view of writing in those of Uncle Craig and of Del. The art of storytelling was considered as the art of women in Jubilee and that of men was that of exacting. While Del had earlier discarded the manuscripts of Uncle Craig as 'dead, heavy and useless', she herself becomes a writer of local history with her maturing up as a writer. Her approach, like that of Munro, is that of a woman speaking of women; the lives of Aunt Elspeth and Auntie Grace, completely dedicated to their prescribed role of keeping house for their brother Uncle Craig or of her mother, with her ultra-modern thoughts and with an inclination towards education but an unfit to the small rural town. Del even recognizes herself as different from other youngsters in Jubilee. She does not want to be like Naomi, who used to be her closest friend and who grows up 'adopting all conventional aspirations of 1950's 'femininity' where marriage and homemaking are a

girl's only ambitions. (Howells,1998,p.42) .The short story "The Office" by Alice Munro deals with a woman who has to preserve her traditional role as a woman and also desires to establish her profession as an independent writer. She reveals her dissatisfaction at home, where she feels constricted by being just a mother and a housewife and so wishes for independence towards establishing her identity. For Munro, her own writing is a symptom of the raging battle within herself, between her desire to write and her desire to be a mother. Munro attempted to fulfill her traditional roles, while simultaneously pursuing, in isolation, her creative endeavors. She comments: "All through the fifties I was living in a dormitory suburb, having babies, and writing wasn't part of the accepted thing for a girl or woman to do at that time ... but it never occurred to me that I should stop" (Horwood 127). Munro continued her passion amidst all hardship and finally became successful. Further she says, "All the heterosexual female writers that I know who decided to marry and have children have the same problem. You don't go into it without this baggage and you don't continue it without this guilt. Every choice you make would deprive you of something."(unpublished interview[Ross,]quoted in Ross 55) Alice also speaks about a female writer's fear of being considered unwomanly because of her ambitions .We find these contradictory thoughts getting reflected in the female narrator of "The Office"; a mother and wife, who could not become strong enough with her hidden maternal instinct, to oppose Mr. Malley. She feels sheltered and warmed with her attachment to her house but on the other hand she feels restricted and bound. She understands that a woman cannot be separated from her identity with the house. 'She is the house. There is no separation possible' (Munro,1971, p.60). Any deviation means negligence of duties by the woman. Besides, people do not appreciate her ambition as a female to be a writer. She feels humiliated by their questions about her writing. For a

woman writing is assumed more of a hobby than a profession. Therefore it does not justify the requirement of an office. She finds it difficult to define herself.

[...] here comes the disclosure which is not easy for me: I am a writer. That does not sound right. Too presumptuous; phony, or at least unconvincing. Try again. I write. Is that better? I try to write. That makes it worse. Hypocritical humility. Well then?

(Munro,1971,p. 59)

A woman in her traditional image is expected to ask for a 'mink coat' or a 'diamond necklace' .(Munro,1971,p.61) but asking for an office room was not expected and viewed with suspicion, unconcern and even sympathy for such a woman. For her, the Office is associated with 'dignity and peace. And purposefulness and importance'. However, "I was at once aware that it sounded like a finicky requirement, a piece of rare self-indulgence" (p. 60). A woman with such a passion is considered self-centred and wasting her time on unnecessary things. This female narrator has to fight hard to be with her art. Here again, the lady feels that achieving independence from patriarchal dominance is difficult. There are fixed gender roles (from a female narrator's point of view) which, if violated, raises suspicion.

That's not a standard way for a person to behave. Not if they got nothing to hide. No more than it's normal for a young woman, says she has a husband and kids, to spend her time rattling away on a typewriter. (Munro,1971, p.70)

Mr Malley burdens her with responsibilities that she wants to escape from and has shed at home. "I brooded with satisfaction on the bareness of my walls, the cheap dignity of my essential furnishings, the remarkable lack of things to dust, wash or polish"

(Munro, 1971, p.64). The household duties bind her with cleaning, dusting, watering the plants, decorating the house and many such works, diverting her time and focus from her ambition. Again, she is gifted with a carpet, curtains, a house plant, a teapot, and many such things demanding her care and attention. The narrator could take revenge on Mr. Malley only through her writing and is content with that “While I arrange words, and think it is my right to be rid of him” (Munro, 1971, p.74). Magdalene Redekop interprets ‘The Office’ as “The story ... is about the failure of a story. There is too much leftover” (Redekop,1992,p.50). The author-narrator is, however, satisfied by ignoring him. “Never mind the Malleys” (Munro,1971, pp.63).

The narrator’s experience in “The Office” is Munro’s own experience when she had rented a place for writing. The only piece she could write there were the narrator’s frustrations and, therefore, her break in writing because of the landlord's disturbances. We know that Munro had, with time, developed the habit of writing with all her household chores. Solitude did not help her in creative ventures. Similarly, the author-narrator of “The Office” finally gives in to the stubbornness of the dominant one. She did not want to give up her office, her dream place, for fulfilling her ambition. She is disturbed at the end but seems to be optimistic. ‘I think that I will try again someday, but not yet’ (73): Del also concludes with her feminine experience “men were supposed to be able to go out and take on all kinds of experiences and shuck off what they didn’t want and come back proud.....I had decided to do the same.”(Munro,2001,p. 194). Here we find the women aspiring writers have an indomitable spirit to rise above their situation like their creator, Munro herself.

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Mulk Raj Anand's Early Novels: A Panorama of Exploitation

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Abstract

Mulk Raj Anand's clarion call for worldwide attention to mitigate the plights of the downtrodden as an advocate of human rights immortalizes him as a celebrity and a voice of the people as worthy as a divine voice. He is popularly the Admirable Crichton to probe into the depth of inhuman existence not shared by the crafty, facilitated and opulent lot. An untouchable tolerates insensitivity from the surrounding despite working and harassing his whole life; a coolie never enjoys the belongingness of people around even though he dies for them and a plantation worker hopes and seeks a human existence though he is denied ever the same. The marginalized and the socially vitiated are counted as down-to-earth creatures, and their aspirations fall flat before the demonic society underrating them by distance, discord of belongingness and difference imposed by traditions. The novels are documentaries of the negative thrust of society upon the underdogs; they never provide a panacea to all such humiliations and tortures continuing down the ages. This paper aims to foreground the theme of exploitation by closely analyzing the novels of Mulk Raj Anand.

Key-words- Underdeveloped, Untouchables, Coolies, Workers, Exploitations

Introduction

The main theme in the early novels of Anand is plight of the underdeveloped, the dregs of the society, i.e. the sweepers, the coolies and others. Anand wants to expose the

indifference and hostility of the society towards the egoless and unaggressive individuals who suffer and die in course of serving the society. Their weak economic background and low social status compel them to endure endless exploitation. Both natives and foreigners take advantage of their helplessness and brutally exploit them.

A constant tension persists between the two groups of characters, the exploiters and the exploited. A wide-open hiatus perpetually exists between the haves and the have-nots. The exploited remain throughout sentimental and subdued; they are forced to accept all the inhuman inflictions of bodily and mental suffering passively. They endure everything with a resigned outlook. Possessed with a superiority complex of their race, culture, status and wealth, the haves remain impervious to the predicament of the have-nots. Besides, the forced super-imposition of the self-created prejudices of the higher castes and classes upon the lower ones gives rise to discontent in the latter. Thus in the novels, we come across unpleasant characters and situations. Walter Allen rightly says, “..... the reader, if he asks that a novel should give, in George Eliot’s words, a faithful account of man and things as they have mirrored themselves in his mind, cannot expect all the time to have pleasant books and pleasant characters.”¹

A character is either an exploiter or an exploited. The members of one party are arranged in a series being ready to spill blood and the members of the other to sweat blood. Anand generally keeps them in water-tight compartments. The exploiters are both Indians and English having both similarities and differences in the manners of exploitation. However, we find a very few exceptional characters like de la Havre in *Two Leaves and a Bud*, Havildar Charat Singh in *Untouchable*, Chota Babu in *coolie* who belong to the group of exploiters but sympathise with the exploited. Meenakshi

Mukherjee finds out that the characters of Anand “fall neatly into three types: the sufferers, the oppressors and the good men. Usually the protagonist is the sufferer in chief. All money lenders, priests and landlords, i.e. people with a vested interest in resisting change or progress come under the second category. The Sahukar, Mahant Nandgir and Hardit Singh in trilogy are examples of this triple figure of evil which appears in every Anand novel under different names.”²

Bakha, Munoo and Gangu are representative figures representing the exploited mass in each novel. They have typical characters whose personal and psychological developments are less important to Anand than their socio-political situations. They do not grow in stature organically but are principally made to develop the theme of exploitation. As each novel proceeds, the theme of exploitation is elaborated in various forms.

The setting, style and plot also are shaped and designed to project the central theme in each novel. A look into the short accounts of the novels presented herewith would reflect Anand’s treatment of the various aspects of exploitation and the novels’ development.

Untouchable presents a day’s action of Bakha, a sweeper-boy confined to the town of Bulandshahr. The stream of thoughts within Bakha’s mind and the events that occur in a single day give an account of the humiliation the untouchables receive daily despite their devotion to duty.

The novel opens with a description of the outcastes’ colony and the novelist calls it “an uncongenial place to live in”.³ It is situated at the outskirts of the town and the place gives out an offensive smell.

Bakha likes the English for they are not abhorrent towards the untouchables and they are not affected by caste prejudices. He along with his friends likes the appearances of English Sahibs and the English dresses with clear-cut styles impress them. The novelist points at the gradation of castes even among the outcastes. Gulabo, a washerman is higher in the hierarchy of lower castes. She is jealous and cruel towards the sweeper-girl, Sohini belonging to the lowest grade among the outcastes.

The difference is not observed among the male youngsters from the outcastes. Ram Charan, the washerman's son; Chota, the leatherworker's son and Bakha often eat and play together. Public tanks, wells and temples were not accessible to the outcastes. The upper castes considered both animate and inanimate objects polluted when touched by the outcastes. They depended on the mercy of the upper caste people to get water from the wells. Education was considered a far-fetched activity for the outcastes and it was totally denied to them for their entrance into the Schools would contaminate all the children of the upper castes. Still we find Bakha's desire to learn as he is ready to pay money to young children to teach him unnoticed by others.

The novelist places a series of incidents to make Bakha aware of his social position and acknowledge him of others' impression of him. He expresses the inner indignation piling up within Bakha against society. Finally, he shows Bakha accepting his abject state hesitatingly in the society in the same way as his elders have compromised down the ages. Regarding this, he could not whole-heartedly come to terms with his father, Lakha. Finally, the novelist incorporates three solutions in the novel to purge of the evil of untouchability. The first striking incident occurs when Bakha touches

a Lalla, a Hindu merchant, while walking on the road, and he is slapped and abused by the Lalla amidst a crowd of people for defiling him. Since then, the very word “untouchable” hurts him, and he begins to announce his approach wherever he goes. He utters out of grovelling humiliation, “Posh, posh, sweeper coming!”⁴

In the next incident, Pundit Kali Nath, the village temple priest, agrees to draw water from the well for the outcastes assembled there. He does it with a hope to cure his constipation rather than out of generosity. There he is attracted by the beauty of Sohini, Bakha’s sister. He draws water for her first and suggests her to come to clean the courtyard of his house. When she goes, he attempts to seduce her. Sohini screams and the Pundit shouts, “polluted! polluted! polluted!”⁵ Bakha appears on the scene. When he wants to retaliate forwarding his giant stride, the crowd of people gathered there falls back. Still, the spirit of retaliation could not reach its consummation. Bakha retraces his steps subdued by the unconscious weakness of servility within him.

Bakha complains about the incident later on to his father, Lakha. Lakha convinces him to accept the law of untouchability set by the society and mentions incidents of generosity of the upper castes towards them. He refers to Bhagawan Das, the Hakim, and a man from the upper caste Hindus who once had come to their house and cured Bakha of a serious ailment.

In between these, when he goes to collect his food, a Hindu woman offers hot vegetable curry and a pot full of rice to a Sadhu standing nearby Bakha. But she abuses Bakha for defiling her house by sitting on the wooden platform outside her house. Then

she flung a paper like pan-cake from the top of her house which flew like a kite and fell on the brick pavement of the gully.

The short-lasting incidents that occur in the afternoon such as a wedding, a country walk and a hockey match give him momentary happiness. Havildar Charat Singh forgets the caste differences and treats Bakha affectionately. Bakha sends a goal in the hockey match playing against 31st Punjabis. Then, there occurs a free fight. A little boy is injured and the boy's mother abuses Bakha for polluting him as Bakha lifted the little boy and took him to the hall of her house. After Bakha returns home, his father scolds him for wasting away all afternoon and drives him out.

The three solutions suggested by Anand are as such: Bakha's conversion to Christianity, Gandhian principles to eradicate untouchability and modern technical way to replace the work of the untouchables. Bakha cannot accept the first one as Colonel Hutchinson cannot explain him who Christ was. Gandhi's words go straight into Bakha's heart and he is trying to understand the third one, the views of the modern poet about the flush system.

In the whole novel, in a short paragraph, Anand exemplifies Rakha, the brother of Bakha as the typical untouchable. He wears a pair of old ammunition boots too big to fit his feet and a ragged flannel shirt. His nose runs forever and flies surround his lips to taste the saliva coming out from his mouth. Anand says, he comes from "the world where the day is dark as the night and the night pitch dark."⁶ Rakha appears as the real inhabitant of the untouchables' colony surrounded by filth and dirt. Comparing Bakha

with Rakha, Saroj cowasjee in his essay “Mulk Raj Anand’s Untouchable, An appraisal” comments, “Rakha is a living death as opposed to his brother who is life in death.”⁷

In Coolie, Munoo acts as the archetypal figure representing the exploited mass. He, as the hill boy moves from place to place in search of livelihood. His life-long journey across the country leads him to a tragic finale. He remains unsettled and insecure throughout his whole life, sleeps in city streets, dwells in slums, and suffers from starvation. In both body and spirit, he breaks down and achieves real freedom only in death. The five tragic episodes as five acts in a tragic play make up the vastness of space and time in coolie and construct his complete life in the novel. He spends his life grazing the cattle in his village, as a servant in a Bank Clerk’s household in Shamnagar, a worker in pickle factory in Daulatpur, a factory- worker in Bombay and finally a servant in Simla. In Shamnagar, Daya Ram’s words of warning prepare Munoo to accept the humiliated life of servitude in Babu Nathoo Ram’s house uncomplaining. He says, “You are their servant and they are big people.”⁸ He loses there his Rajput pride and is forbidden to join the merrymaking of the social superiors. He is treated as a savage for being a new comer to the town. On the morning of the day of arrival, he cannot find the place where the people of the town relieve themselves and empties his bowels in a hurry near the outside walls of the house. Then the wife of Babu Nathoo Ram showers abuses on him. She raved in the same manner at the falling of the tea-tray from Munoo’s hands during Mr. England’s visit to their home. He is charged with attacking their child's honour, Sheila, after he bites Sheila’s chick in fun while displaying monkey dance. He is whipped like a dog and he escapes from that place.

In this episode, Munoo becomes aware of the demarcating line existing between the masters and the servants. Besides, he realizes the division of the human society into

two distinct groups- the rich and the poor. On his journey to Daulatur by train, he is picked up by Prabha, a Good Samaritan and an owner of a pickle factory. Prabha and his wife, Parbati care him like their own son. But after some days, the pickle factory falls into a ruined state; Prabha goes bankrupt due to the treachery of Ganpat, the co-partner of Prabha and the willful insanity of the family of Todar Mal. Ganpat, born and bred in the lap of luxury is indifferent to the predicament of the poor. Prabha who has tasted poverty in life lends a helping hand to afflicted Munoo. Besides, he can accept his life when he is turned down to his former state, a coolie.

After the pickle factory is closed, he worked as a coolie in the vegetable market in Daulatpur and happened to meet another kind-hearted person, an elephant-driver of a circus party, who willingly takes Munoo to Bombay. He forecasts Munoo's life in Bombay by his words, "The bigger a city is, the crueler it is to the sons of Adam You have to pay even for the breath that you breathe".⁹ In Bombay, Munoo works as a coolie along with Hari and his family in Sir George White Cotton Mills.

In this episode, the inhumanity of the capitalist system and the money-based relationship among individuals has been portrayed. The novel, here, presents a first-hand picture of the unsecured life and shelter of the coolies, the ramshackle nature of their dwellings collapsing under heavy rain, the indifferent and brutal treatment of the factory owners, eg. Jimmie Thomas, the foreman, the cruelty upon child labour, the fragility of the trade union and the disruptions caused by communal riots. Munoo is knocked down by the car of Mrs. Mainwaring, an Anglo-Indian lady in Bombay and he is taken by her to Simla. There, he worked both as a servant boy and as a rickshaw coolie under Mrs. Mainwaring. The coquettish movements of Mrs. Mainwaring, her hypocritical smile, the

fine weather of Simla and the usual bowing down before the whites led Munoo to overwork for the Anglo-Indian lady. Finally, he dies of tuberculosis. Munoo dies young and could not complete the full circle of his life. Though the novel reveals the pathos and suffering of the coolies, yet it generates human hope and potential to fight against exploitation through the characters, Ratan and Mohan.

The third novel, *Two Leaves and a Bud* opens with a journey as it happens in coolie. Gangu, though matured, grown up and experienced of the frustrations of life, still is ready to avail of the ways and means available in Assam Tea plantation to derive his livelihood. Buta functions as the agent of the British owners of the plantation. He cheats the coolies from far-off-places into the plantation i.e., Macpherson Tea Estate. Gangu is able to sense the falsity in Buta's words. But his land and home have been confiscated. So he has to move into the strange land along with his wife, Sajni and his children, Leila and Buddhu.

The doubt that creeps into Gangu's mind about the untruth in Buta's promises of good fortune, i.e. alluring prospects offered by the Britishers is revealed inside the plantation. On the one hand, the technological superiority and advancement of the Britishers creates a sense of awe and amazement in Gangu. But on the other hand, he is treated as a savage along with the other coolies. The inhuman treatment takes away the pleasure of amazement. He loses his innate sense of self-dignity. There, the Britishers make the coolies forcibly work and for long hours in hot and humid atmosphere. The wages are very low. The coolies are often flogged and also get themselves severely injured while working. Besides, they are unable to move out of the plantation. The

forceful confinement to the same place is rightly illustrated in Narain's words, "This prison has no bars, but it is nevertheless an unbreakable jail".¹⁰

The coolies are made to live in unhygienic conditions. Hook worms breed in coolies' lane. Besides, they die of epidemics such as cholera. Sajni, Gangu's wife passes away suffering from cholera. The coolies' huts are almost worn out whereas the plantation manager; Croft-Cooke and other Britishers live in mansions. The exploiters feel that the coolies do not feel the exploitation. They think the coolies can sustain even in the wretched sheds and in the uncongenial places. Even proper drinking water is denied to them.

The plantation managers to win the favour of the higher British officials visiting the plantation organize a hunting expedition. A tiger tears away the flesh from a coolie's face and dislocates his shoulder. But the hunt goes as usual, the sahiba remain busy taking photographs in valiant poses with the dead tiger and remain apathetic towards the injured coolie writhing in pain.

Gangu feels the tragic loss of everything valuable in life after going through the dehumanising process of exploitation. The desire to escape one disaster puts him into another. The idea to regain the sense of house and land inside the plantation turns him into an unidentifiable mechanical being. It caused the charm of his life to perish. He becomes empty and hollow. He loses his wife, the honour of his daughter and his protesting instinct. He turns to be self-conscious and brooding. Only his myth-making habits give him momentary relief at times from the world of struggle and hardship. At the later stage of his life, the bold and sturdy peasant from Punjab turns to be a passive

creature giving utterances to serious philosophy through maxims, proverbs, and catch-phrases. The fatalism within him dominates him.

All the coolies habitually are forced to submit before the wrath of the Britisher. To cite one incident, a quarrel broke out between Chambeli, a coolie woman and the wife of Niogi Sardar once concerning Reggie's lecherous relations with the latter. The whole crowd of the coolies gathered there was taken before Reggie. One of the coolies standing behind could bravely complain about the women's insecurity among them from the lascivious attempts of the owners. But they in return, were charged violently. It is said in the novel, "..... the Britishers had exaggerated the worst instinct in their own character and called out the worst in the Indian."¹¹ Even Gangu who has almost accepted the ruthless exploitation gives place within him to a homicidal fury at least for a moment. But the spirit of retaliation subsides within him.

De la Harve could feel the idiocy of the system. But he could not be in tune with the coolies as he could not turn himself out of the way from the British socio-political limitations. Finally, he was considered a misfit in the plantation and was driven out for sympathizing with the wrong people, i.e. the coolies. He had also to lose his lady love, Barbara. The other English characters like Ralph, Macara, Hitchcock and Croftcooke are parties to Reggie Hunt. At the end, Reggie follows Leila to satisfy his lust in her and happens to shoot Gangu dead. But the English jury found him not guilty of murder.

In the novel, we also find the creation of a parasite class formed by Indian characters such as Butaram, Shasi Bhusan and the merchants who mediate in the exploitation process. They are obsequious to their British boss and follow dishonest ways

of cheating the coolies. They are in an advantageous position by virtue of knowing the Britishers' tendencies and the sentiments of the coolies. As observed from the novels, like all human beings, the underdogs too are seized with dreams and longings, but through the routine struggles of a lowly existence, recurrent frustrations and insults, their innate romantic enthusiasm dies an untimely, painful death. The young adolescent Bakha's romantic illusions are shattered when he is smacked for touching Munoo in spite of his excitement and alacrity to work in the town meets with emotional setbacks from the very beginning. The ill-treatment in the house of Babu Nathoo Ram in Shamnagar makes him aware of the cruelties of the urban world which is so different from the festive and vitalizing world of his mountains. In Two Leaves and a Bud, Gangu's sense of wonder, his feelings of personal dignity and hopes for a better life are all destroyed in the exploitative set-up of the Macpherson Tea Estate.

The sparks of rebellion in the protagonists of the novels can never grow into a leaping flame. The underdogs have to bow down before the long-established hegemony of the evil controllers of the social order. Bakha's resolution to avenge the molestation of his sister could not turn into actual action. Munoo's spirit of rebellion perished after he lost Ratan in the communal riot. Gangu and the other coolies receive violent reprisal action after they collectively attempt to put forth their minor grievances before the plantation owners.

As Anand deals with casteism in untouchable and condemns the callousness of the Hindu community towards the scavengers, Anand's Bakha, here serves as a "prototype of millions of untouchables in India, because he represents the agony and anguish, the misery and frustration of the innumerable low caste people".¹² The novelist

presents the undue advantage gained over one caste by the others distorting the social system. The disparity created among the castes serves as the basis of exploitation. The social evil of untouchability arises out of the 'pollution complex' in the Hindu society. The orthodox Hindus consider themselves defiled or polluted if they happen to be touched by a scavenger who engages himself in cleaning dirt in the latrines and in the streets.

The upper castes inherit the tendency to look down upon the lowly and the degraded ones from their ancestors. According to the Indian sacred scriptures, castes were created to divide the shares of labour among all for the smooth functioning of the society, but not to create inequality. As centuries passed, the sweepers, the washermen, the cobblers and many others were marginalized as outcastes. Others developed feelings of abhorrence towards them. The tradition of cutting them off from the mainstream of the society continued down the ages. We have witnessed the ghastly activities that happened in villages few years back. The untouchables were being shot dead for daring to grow their mustaches upwards. As per the local tradition demanded that they must grow their moustaches downwards because of belonging to the low status in the caste hierarchy.¹³

However, Anand in his novels does not throw light on history to discover the present plight of the outcastes having its root in the past. He is only interested in discussing the problem as it is. A probe into history, he appears to think, would not bring for the outcastes an iota of panacea. By laying bare the problem before the readers, the novelist suggests and asks for solutions. Untouchability remains unknown in the west. It seems strange to the occidentals, as Forster for instance, says, to treat those as unclean who clean the dirt from the public dwellings.

The two other novels, *Coolie* and *Two leaves and a Bud*, indicate the social, political, economic, colonial and cultural factors that cause faction and create classes among the people. The plight of Bakha makes the Indian system of casteism responsible for it but not the Britishers. But the suffering of Munoo and other such coolies results out of the Britishers' introduction of the capitalistic system without giving due attention to social reforms. Saros Cowasjee says, "Munoo's position in life raises the question of freedom in a capitalistic society".¹⁴ Both Munoo and Sauda vent their painfully considered opinions about the division in the society in *Coolie*. "There are only two kinds of people in the world – the rich and the poor".¹⁵ Class consciousnesses among people, here, proves to be even more devastating than casteism. Gangu and Munoo belong to the higher castes, they are Kshatriyas by birth but they suffer due to lack of economic support. The colonial exploiters in *Two Leaves and a Bud* also follow the ways of the capitalists and de la Havre desires for a communist-type revolution to challenge the colonial system. H. M. Williams rightly says, "Imperialism as an egregious form of capitalist exploitation".¹⁶

As new corruptions of a technological civilization pervade the society, the rich grow richer and the poor poorer. The advanced technology, the sophistication of social manners, capitalistic control of industries and farms, colonial subjugation of Indian workers and participation of Indian agents with the colonial exploiters make the plight of the bottom dogs worse.

With the advent of technology, the relationship of cash-nexus predominates in the society. It breeds mechanical and calculating tendencies that mar the healthy relationship

among individuals. Human sentiments and fellow-feeling are overtaken by greed for money, wealth, status and power. But it is not merely the materialistic west which shows this crass cupidity and inhuman urge for exploitation. Even the exploiters from the middle and upper strata of the Indian society follow the English colonizers and variously imitate their method of exploitation. For example, we can locate the second level of exploitation next to that of the Britishers in coolie and Two leaves and a Bud. The Indian shopkeepers such as Sardarji in Bombay episode in coolie and the Seth in Two Leaves and a Bud cheat the coolies, charge unfair prices, falsely accuse them of stealing and even strike them physically at times.

The utilitarians' attitude to the working class is that labourers must be given specified wages to keep them able and fit for labour but not more, for it may increase their rebellious tendencies and hamper the productive output in industries, plantations and farms. The heart-breaking effort of the coolies does not earn for them adequate wages to make both ends meet. Western and native exploiters behave like inhuman parasites and take the coolies as animals meant only for menial labour. The workers turn into mechanical beings. Thus the whole process involving industry, work and profit puts an end to the wholesome emotional growth of the coolies. They lose their sense of identity and origin. After Munoo reaches Bombay, he becomes just a coolie among the other coolies. He forgets the pride of his Kshatriya race and becomes a faceless creature. So happens with Gangu, who finds it almost impossible to preserve his innate sense of dignity and feels him lost in the Macpherson Tea Estate.

The exploiters change from novel to novel and from episode to episode, changing their exploitation methods, but a coolie's fate remains the same all over. In Untouchable,

Bakha is forced to clean the dirt for those upper caste Hindus who ill-treat him and have ostracized him from the social mainstream. Here, the exploitation is on the basis of caste taboo. In coolie, the wife of Babu Nathoo Ram ill-treats Munoo taking him to be a rustic ignorant of the urban ways of life. The treachery of Ganpat and the boastfulness and hostility of the family of Todar Mal towards Prabha make Munoo lose the tender-minded and kind-hearted Prabha forever. In Bombay, he no more remains himself and suffers along with other coolies because of the tyrannical control of the British owners of Sir Gerge White cotton Mills. Capitalistic control inflicts pain and suffering on the workers. Finally, the over-indulgence of Munoo in serving the hypocritical woman, Mrs. Mainwaring makes him suffer from tuberculosis and meet death. Gangu in Two Leaves and a Bud suffers in the Assam Tea plantation in the hands of the colonial British exploiters as prisoners suffer in the concentration camps. Exploitation takes different forms at different periods and different places to strangle the underprivileged.

The exploited lose their finer sensibilities in course of exploitation. The excessive engagement in mutual labour keeps them away from the warmth and joy of nature. The inevitable compulsion to dwell in slums devoid of fresh air and bright sunshine aggravates the depression in their minds. Inadequate food and shelter, scarcity of drinking water and unhygienic living, and the constant nagging and brutal behavior of the exploiters hamper their fuller physical, mental, moral, and spiritual growth. Bakha's home is situated amid drains and deposits of dirt giving out a pungent smell. Munoo along with Hari and his family live in low and unsecured straw huts. Unhealthy conditions of living spread contagious diseases among the coolies in Assam Tea Plantation. The sight of the mountains, forests, green herbs and trees, the open sky and

sunshine if available at times does not seem to alleviate their sorrow. The coolies can no more feel the touch of nature that they used to experience in their native land.

Anand maintains a contrast between the joyful and hilarious life of the childhood days and the harsh and rough life of the latter days of the protagonists. They develop a nostalgic longing for the past life. Bakha remembers his game with Rakha, Chota and Ram Charan's sister. Munoo remembers the cares of his mother who is now dead. Gangu's daughter, Leila remembers Jaswant, with whom she used to exchange her feelings. Munoo enjoyed spending his leisure hours reading storybooks in his village. Gangu used to experience a sort of exaltation while working in his own land in Hoshiarpur. But in the later stages of life, each day becomes a day of resistance and struggle for the exploited.

At places in the novels, we can locate the faith in Indians that helps even the poorest of the poor to sustain and challenge the exploitative activities corrupting the society. The logic of reason and argument cannot establish the faith in the supernatural. But the belief in providence and morality leads one to react sensibly against unjustified proceedings to uphold the balance and stability of the society. However, Anand being a realist and a leftist does not allow humanist values to be realized in spiritual terms. His motive is to sharpen the cause of the dispossessed in the face of society's indifference and to shame the society into developing kindness, sympathy and fellow-feeling towards the marginalized. The novelist simply cites certain incidents where the coolies express their subjective awareness of divinity but does not elaborate upon them. Bakha never quits the Hindu religion in spite of the torments inflicted by the upper caste Hindus. He refuses to accept Christianity by abandoning the Hindu fold. He worships Rama, the God of his

ancestors, but not Christ. The coolies sleeping under the open sky in Bombay utter the name of Rama when in suffering. Gangu's fatalistic acceptance of the law of *Karma* helps him to survive in the face of stark and brutal exploitation.

Anand's early novels draw our attention to alienated labour. Labour is, at the same time, an individual, social and natural activity. But the protagonists of Anand are forced to perform labour that is uncreative by being an alienated activity. Thus they suffer from a sense of spiritual and emotional loss as well. This is equally painful as the alienation caused by social ostracism. Talking about Anand's protagonists, Dieter Riemenschneider says, "Alienated labour is as much the fate of this social class as their inalterable economic and social position."¹⁷

Labour on the part of a single human being can be the means to self-realization. It can be karma-yoga; an individual enjoys fulfilment in life through his labour. Every act of labour is specified for a purpose and the labouring individual acquires satisfaction in achieving his desired purpose. It helps on to find out his religious identity. On the other hand, labour is also a social activity. Man is a social being. Man, unlike animals, does not crave for immediate physical satisfaction alone. Rather every individual act of production is directed towards a social well-being. In human society, the individual's needs and social needs are inseparable. The individual has his identity shaped through social activities and relations. But when competition enters the scene of labour, man becomes a kind of mechanized gadget. Labour, otherwise is a natural and organic activity involving both mind and body to recreate nature. Even when one takes a mere materialistic position, one would seem like Marx that labour is an essential creative activity of man that distinguished him from animals, enabled him to control nature and helped him to

produce useful articles for his own use. None of these spiritual or humanist concepts retains its relevance in the context of exploitative capitalist use of labour.

A form of labour becomes alienated when the means of production and the products are alienated from the laboring individual. In a capitalist system and in a colonial situation, the workers lose control over the produced goods and the machines producing the goods. So, this labour no longer remains a means to self-realisation or social participation as others determine the products. It simply remains as a means of survival. Munoo and Hari in coolie and Gangu in Two Leaves and a Bud sell their labour for subsistence wages. They come from the peasant families who happen to lose their agricultural land and are forced to work in foreign places simply to derive livelihood. Anand dramatizes the resultant psychological tension memorably.

Munoo in Shamnagar episode is not yet able to distinguish between work and play. Babu Nathoo Ram's house demands his alienated labour, i.e. work from a servant. But he was not yet able to distinguish between duties and the activities involving his own interest and initiative. He is, at present, not aware of his position as a servant. The works that he does here were often performed by him voluntarily at home to help his aunt. In the novel, the novelist mentions, "he remembered that he often volunteered in a rush of sympathy to sweep the floor, to treat with anti-septic cow-dung and to run errands for her."¹⁸ Another character in the same novel, the wife of Babu Nathoo Ram has grown too much irritable in nature because of the overload of work which cuts short the time of her chit-chat with her friends. She is not wholly devoted to the house-hold works and it creates an unconscious alienation within her. To prevent his feeling of alienation, Munoo always longs for the friendship of Tulsi and the parental affection of Prabha in Daulatpur.

In Bombay, he develops togetherness with Hari, his family and Ratan. But this does not adequately compensate for the emotional and psychological loss sustained by him through alienated work.

Bakha in *Untouchable* is seen trying to suppress his inner disgust for the revolting tasks. He has already developed a tough skin to remain unaffected by awful sensations. He has learned to be insensitive while at work in the streets and in the latrines. Thus alienated labour is forced upon him by the caste-based society.

Alienation through forced labour is more conspicuous in a colonial situation where slavery is imposed by violent means, as upon the coolies in the Assam Tea Plantation. The coolies toil hard to produce for the foreign exploiters in a far-off land. The exploiters also suffer from psychological alienation and insecurity because they too cannot identify themselves with the system of production. They remain there solely with a profit motive. Thus spiritual deprivation prevails in the whole system.

Anand suggests certain methods for the redemption of the untouchables and the coolies out of their shockingly sordid conditions. As observed from his novels, exploitation based on class distinction proves more atrocious than that of the castes. The indifference of the upper caste Hindus towards the lower ones arises mainly from superstitious prejudices. For example; the *Brahmin Pundit*, who is hypocritically reluctant to touch the outcastes, attempts to seduce Sohini, an untouchable. The Hindu merchant who takes himself as polluted by the unknowing touch of Bakha knowingly slaps Bakha. Hakim Bhagawan Das after serving prayers and persuasions of Lakha comes to attend Bakha to cure him of his serious ailment. But class distinction affects the

economic and political infrastructure of the society. Anand presents different solutions to wipe out the rigidity of casteism and the complexity of class divisions.

In *Untouchable*, Anand discards the first solution proposing Bakha's conversion from Hinduism to Christianity out of the three solutions stated. Bakha rejects the offer in spite of having a feeling of intense longing to be like the Tommies. Christianity fails here. The novelist is not in favour of it as it is a form of colonization that is attempted through missionary activities. It could not eradicate untouchability from the Hindu community in the past; rather it tried to subvert the native beliefs and traditions in the name of communicating the words of God.

The second solution concerns Gandhi speaking in favour of the untouchables. Gandhi wanted to get rid of social iniquity through moral and spiritual means. Gandhi was being treated as an avatar, i.e. incarnation of God himself. The outcastes easily assimilated his words. Gandhi preached for regeneration of spiritual outlook in all to view all duties as sacred and to develop an attitude of sympathy towards the lowly and the lost. He upheld the dignity of labour, condemned discrimination against caste, colour and race, fought for the establishment of equality and declared the untouchables worthy for they clean the Hindu society. He gave the untouchables physical and spiritual freedom by making them accessible to public wells and temples.

The third solution considers the technological method of abolishing untouchability, namely, the introduction of the flush system what would facilitate mechanical cleaning of the dung. This is an exciting thing to Bakha, but clearly, it is not a real solution to his psychological and emotional problems.

In *coolie* (1936), written in the pre-independent era, Anand indirectly hints at the steps to establish social and economic democracy. Domestic slavery can be rooted out when the exploited rigidly stick to their sense of individual dignity, purge themselves of obsequious tendencies towards the masters, inculcate tough-mindedness and try to occupy themselves in deriving livelihood from the local resources in native villages. Munoo's migration to town puts him into life-long servitude. Prabha's tender mindedness made him lose his factory.

Economic democracy calls for equal sharing of wealth by the proletariat, the working class, the bourgeoisie, and the capitalists. In other words, it aims at the establishment of a classless society. Anand portrays the distortions of economic inequality in the industrial sectors, eg. George White Cotton Mills in *coolie*. The Trade Union meant to organize the workers to fight against capitalistic injustice fails to challenge the colonial exploiters. The President is paid under the table by the exploiters and he never voices the true feelings of the workers. The exploiters take advantage of the main weakness of the Indians, i.e. communal hostility. The communal riot caused by the villainous activity of the factory owners destroys the unity of coolies. Socialistic ideals succeed in a country where the workers are strong and informed enough to resist the elements causing faction and the bureaucratic interference in the workers' union. Above all, the workers need to be aware of the right to economic equality, adequate wages, limited working hours, proper facilities for children's education, health, hygiene and housing.

The colonizers remain free from the threat of strikes and mass revolution when the workers are transported to a far-off place. Thus in *Two Leaves and a Bud*, the workers lose the hope of coming into the purview of the nationalist leaders and the workers' unions. The needs and aspirations of the coolies in Macpherson Tea Estate remain unexpressed before the world. Anand expresses the necessity of a socio-political revolution through the characters of de la Havre to emancipate the coolies from colonial suppression. The recurrent shocks given by the violent treatment of the exploiters and the abject misery of existence make them "docile, gutless, spineless coolies"¹⁹. De la Havre always repents for the supine and life less appearance of the coolies. He says that the coolies "went about the plantation with masks of crass stupidity on their faces, whose habitual submission was never disturbed by any outrage of man or beast, by hunger, pestilence or slow disease"²⁰. Anand, thus, desires the working-class people to shake off their fatalistic tendencies and exhibit the revolutionary ones. While seeking a way out for emancipation, it reminds us of the revolution in America led by Abraham Lincoln to abolish slavery and imperial hegemony.

Radhakrishnan talked of a world community bringing together the citizens from all the countries regarding eradicating colonialism, racial hatred, slavery, poverty and selfish nationalism. Radhakrishnan warned, "Either there will be one society or no society". Similarly, Anand preaches the creation of only one society, namely, the human society through love, compassion and mutual co-operation after uprooting all caste and class divisions among men.

Anand's Bakha instinctively responds to life and vitality as against rigidity and orthodoxy of the social customs. He can locate simplicity, love and kindness in Havildar Charat Singh and experiences joy in cleaning the latrines for him. Bakha expresses his

humility before him though, before others, he would rather wish to maintain a posture of pride and will. He hates the hypocrisy and empty ritualism of all the religions such as Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. Superficialities of religions create barriers between man and man and denature humanity. Bakha rejects proselytisation by not paying heed to the words of the Christian missionary. He could more readily respond to Gandhi's ideal of social equality and the rational-industrial view of the modern poet. Thus Bakha understands the essence of human religion, as called by Anand in his coolie, "a religion without religion" that unites all men by means of benevolent imagination and empathizing sensibility. Communal riot between Hindus and Muslims initiated by evil agents to keep the country divided has been condemned in coolie.

In *Two Leaves and a Bud*, the coolies from the different parts of the country share common problems in the plantation and develop a keen sense of fraternity. For example, the closest friend of Gangu, a Punjabi is Narain, a Rajasthani. Anand repeatedly foregrounds this fraternal feeling to suggest a possibility of universal brotherhood through the exercise of human sympathy.

Anand reflects a Renaissance outlook in his novels. He believes in man, i.e. in human values and human potential. He expresses his doubt in traditional values based on dogmatic social customs and order. His protagonists are victims of unhealthy tradition. They are always in search of a way out. In addition to that, they are instinctively fascinated towards scientific machines and engines, new and foreign language, i.e. English and finally new tastes in life. Anand expresses his love for science and technology and intentionally preaches rational thoughts through the modern poet towards the end in *untouchable*. Bakha wears English dresses, likes the life-style of the Tommies

and wants to learn. Munoo tries to utter English words and Gangu is taken aback by the way nature is being controlled through machines. Munoo's approach to machinery is positive and he emotionally expresses "I want to live, I want know, I want to know, I want to work, to work this machine..... I shall grow up and be a man, a strong man like that wrestler"²¹. On the other hand the novelist also highlights the negative effects of modern advancement in economy, commerce and politics by condemning capitalism and class-division. But his humanistic vision is like that of the Renaissance thinkers, placing rational, material, and revolutionary aspects of man at a greater level than faith, religious values, and other-worldliness. He develops confidence in man to face new challenges such as to counter-attack contemporary socio-economic and political imbroglio. IN HIS WRITINGS, G. S. Balaram Gupta rightly points out the protegorean concept of man as the measure of all things²².

Anand's direct and analytical method of writing is very much suitable for his artistic purpose of social correction. G. B. Shaw preaches through an indirect and dramatic method, i.e. through the characters' dialogues in his plays. On the other hand, Anand directly presents the passions, feelings, and states of mind of the characters and often explains comments and pronounces authoritative judgments without appearing to be a propagandist. Prose fiction offers greater scope than drama for the authorial expression of a personal philosophy. Anand moulds his characters according to his chosen purpose and in the process; the protagonists often appear to be 'flat' characters. But Anand's social passion is so strong and deep that even these 'flat' characters are charged with a tremendous fictional power. In the manner of George Orwell, the political novelist, Anand reflects the contemporary social, Political and economic picture through his characters and their actions. But he maintains a fine distinction between literature and

propaganda by virtue of possessing “the writer’s ability to distinguish between his social conscience and his obligation to art”²³.

The novelist avoids the grandiloquent style. But for all his forthright, direct style, his writings are often charged with lyric intensity. There are also a number of places where Anand makes room for lyric touches, describing nature with its green vegetation, landscape and hills, the keen sentiments and susceptibilities of his characters. Hence he does not seem to be merely engaged in intellectual dissection; rather his style builds up a powerful empathizing mood while he presents the inner feelings, thoughts, the pain, agony, hopes and longings of his protagonists. In order to impart intimacy and immediacy to his portrayal, he includes a number of literally translated Indian words into English and at times directly puts in Hindi words. In a paper titled ‘Pigeon-Indian; some Notes on Indian-English writing’, Anand expresses the inevitability of literal translation of local dialects and national language into English in order to add veracity to his expression of native feelings. He cannot help “brooding some of the prose narrative in Punjabi, or in Hindusthani, and transforming it into the English language”²⁴. Thus the style, as par with the argument, is handled as an instrument of persuasion.

Anand has keen sense of particulars. Even though he is dealing with more or less a common theme, one always finds such character to his descriptive skill. Sometimes, he emphasizes similarities in the manners of the exploiters from the same culture and presents contrasts among those of diverse cultures. The vociferation, flinging of hands and showering of curses of Lady Todar Mal are similar to the ways of the wife of Babu Nathoo Ram pouncing upon Munoo taking him to be a stupid hill boy. Both Babu Nathoo Ram and Sir Todar Mal are hen-pecked husbands. The lady throwing a pancake

to Bakha in *Untouchable* is not different in attitude from the two exploiting ladies in coolie. But Mrs. Mainwaring differs from her Indian counterparts by being hypocritical, polite, refined, polished and good-tempered. Jimmie Thomas, the foreman of Sir George White Cotton Mills in coolie and Reggie Hunt, the assistant manager of the Macpherson Tea Estate in *Two Leaves and a Bud* stand on the same plane though the scope of exploitation varies as the novels differ. They both are crude, aggressive and brutal in behaviour towards the Indian coolies.

The novels have an existentialistic character, too. The protagonists take the universe to be a hostile one. Their inner thoughts reveal the uncertainty of their existence. Others treat them as sub-human creatures and they lose the sense of belongingness with the universe. The everyday struggle merely to exist devitalizes their life. Thus, the organic development of the characters without vitality becomes meaningless, and the novelist abandons colouring the protagonists' inner lives. Rather, the protagonists are denied their privacy and their misery of existence is always made public. Anand does not attempt to build an imaginative past of his protagonists, though he furnishes certain brief nostalgic keys every now and then to intensify the feeling of human suffering. Nor does he take recourse to history to establish the cause of the marginalized. In *The Guide*, R. K. Narayan mingles the past and the present of Raju inviting the readers to examine him from two perspectives. Contrastingly, Anand wants the readers to have a direct look at the downtrodden as they are right in the front.

The presentation of the novelist, therefore, appears to be one-sided, and some criticize him for his over-statement of the distress of the exploited. Anand simply describes the struggle of the lowly and the lost for their existence and survival. The

marginalized never feel at home and never get a chance to have a heart-to-heart talk with the centralized. A coolie or an untouchable takes his birth in the world as a curse on him. The novelist questions the ways of the world. He says in *Two Leaves and a Bud* that God “has created land enough to maintain all men, and yet many die of hunger, and most live under a heavy burden of poverty all their lives, as if the earth were made for a few and not for all men”.²⁵ As in a tragedy, the spectators are made to experience pity and fear and finally, cure themselves of impure emotions, so does Anand to move the readers and purge themselves from the feeling of indifference towards the neglected. He defends himself against the critics in his preface to *Two Leaves and a Bud* and explains, “the catharsis of a book lies ultimately in the pity, the compassion and undertaking of an artist and not in his partiality”.²⁶ Thus a noble intention backs Anand’s exaggeration of the suffering of the downtrodden.

The uncertain life of an underdog is without a good beginning and with an accidental end. Munoo was not aware of his suffering from tuberculosis and he dies a few days after he recognizes the disease in him. Gangu begins his life in the novel by marching to an unknown land. So, the novel starts with uncertainty. Gangu says, at the beginning of the novel, “Life is like a journey”. Again he adds ‘A journey into the unknown’. His death is also accidental. He is accidentally shot dead by Reggie Hunt. Bakha’s day begins and ends in filth and dirt. He never happens to sustain a sense of the benign aspects of life. Life for him is stale and insipid. The one day’s existence of Bakha represents “the existentialistic structure of the untouchable’s predicament”.²⁷

Referring to Anand’s ideal, Saros Cowasjee says, “International socialism seemed to him, as it did to every progressive writer of the time, the only solution to the world’s problems”. Thus the three early novels, namely, *untouchable*, *coolie* and *Two Leaves and a Bud*, that are being discussed here, serve as several mouthpieces for the socialist

message upheld by Anand. He wants to draw the readers' attention to the fact that all must share social, economic and political rights equally and must develop moral obligations to contribute to the uplift of the down-trodden mass. That is why the critics point out that art in Anand's novels takes a subordinate place in comparison to social commitment. R.K. Nrayan is more artistic than Anand by making his characters psychologically more convincing. Nor do we find the mythic touch of Raja Rao in Anand. Rather Anand's novels serve as social documents highlighting the precarious condition of the crushed humanity and expressing his wrath against casteism, economic slavery, capitalistic domination and colonial exploitation. Writing about the worth and ability of a writer, he says that it "may lie in the transformations of words into prophecy. Because, what is a writer if he is not the fiery voice of the people, who, through his own torments, urges and exaltations, by realizing the pains, frustrations and aspirations of others, and by cultivating his incipient powers of expression transmutes in art all feeling, all thought, all experience-thus becoming the seer of a new vision in any given situation".³⁰

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Nature Studies - A Walk Across Kanthapura

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Abstract

Ecocriticism's objective is to study the dynamics of relations between man and environment that includes dependence, interdependence, goodwill, animosity, hegemony and allegiance between the two. Ecocriticism challenges anthropocentrism. The structuralist theory of binary opposition is also rejected. Rather, it supports either reversal or equalization in the binary opposition. The animism of Veda largely inspires ecocriticism. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* writes on Gandhi's non-violent movement in a South Indian village. It also tells of the people of soil, a caring environment, and a culture nourished by that environment. *Kanthapura* is not a mere geographical location but a living entity. Man and environment are interrelated one urging and the other offering. Raja Rao hints at sustainable development in his novel. *Kanthapura* does not profit the villagers; she only serves them. Whatever they obtain from her is enough to meet their requirement. *Kanthapura* shows an inherent affinity between man, nature and culture. Human values and environmental ethics are also an area of study in the novel. The villagers set fire to the village as they cannot bear her to be commodified, auctioned and sold. Finally, *Kanthapura* celebrates the theme of place attachment.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Anthropocentrism, *Kanthapura*, Culture and Regionalism

Introduction

While love for nature has been the most common theme in literature, concern for it woke up the writers in the Pre-Romantic age with William Blake's pointing out at satanic mills defiling the grace of English landscapes. Such concerns, growing over the years, finally made way for Ecocriticism. With the explicit purpose of addressing the environmental-related issues, it fell into the limelight in the 90s, first as a theory and then as a movement. Ecocriticism, defined by M.H.Abrams and G. G. Harpam, "designates the critical writings exploring the relationship between literature and physical environment, conducted with acute awareness of the devastation being wrought on that environment human activities" ⁽¹⁾. Michael P.Cohen is of the opinion that -"Ecocriticism focuses on literary [and artistic] expression of human experience primarily in a naturally and consequently in a culturally shaped world: the joys of abundance, sorrows of deprivation, hopes for harmonious existence, and fears of loss and disaster" ⁽²⁾. One can clearly understand the theory's traits and motives with the dos and don'ts strictly followed by it.

Ecocriticism challenges an anthropocentric sense of hegemony of humans over non-human. Aristotle had already held up the primeval instinct of domination. The great ancient master used to encourage the man-centric attitude of the people by telling that God had created man as the supreme species on the earth. He too had created nature for the benevolence of man. The drive of ecocritics in this regard is not only to pull down the age-old citadel of thought on nature but also to shift the Western interest towards ecocentricism. It seeks to restructure man-nature relation on a different plane to lead man back to the company of nature impelling him to be a part of nature, not her master, nor even an opponent.

Following the track of Ecocriticism, Ecofeminism rules out the Judeo-Christian concept of dualism on the ground that it constructs the world in polar opposite terms, such as male/female, masculinity/femininity, culture/nature etc. It assumes the first half of each binary to be superior whereas the second half, inferior. The rationale of domination is established on the foundation that those conferred superiority are morally empowered to dominate, exploit, and manipulate those pushed to inferior positions. In the natural order operating in the universe, man is considered supreme. Nature is an easy victim to his unreasoned egotism. In his 'The Environmental Imagination', Lawrence Buell finds fault with Eurocentricism and 'emphasizes the ecocritics' return to realism which was central to American literature and stood in opposition to the hierarchical existence of things as held by European literature ⁽³⁾.

In no less way is the theory of nature-culture divide rejected by ecocriticism. It runs counter to the Levis-Strussian theorization of superior-inferior by bringing about symmetry between nature- a biological product-and culture- a social construct. Nature possesses given universals- the properties beyond change. It keeps on feeding the cultural varieties that pervade humans. Culture, though a set of made norms and codes, adapts to and transforms the natural environment for man's sake.

Harmony instead of dichotomy in binary is in the fitness of things in Ecocriticism. Man and nature co-exist rather than precede or follow. Man belongs to place and place identifies man. They are not to be viewed as one being superior to the other but as two interrelated constitutive elements of the universe. They do not exist one by one; rather they exist side by side.

Deconstruction, as propounded by Struss, has given Ecocriticism a new direction in interpreting man-nature relation. Opposition in binary is a reversible truth, often made

upside down. We have to get out of conventional anthropocentrism for ecocentrism. Nature is not always ousted; it often ousts man. History has instances galore to bear witness that human hegemony crumbles down in the face of nature's ferocity. Her demoniac appearance in the form of storm, cyclone, flood or earthquake wipes out masses of population and portions of habitat, rendering him helpless. Nature, while in her awe, can only be defended, not stopped. To an ecocritic, therefore, there is possibility of reversal in the binary.

Growing materialism has brought about a change in human attitude to natural environment. Forest, tree, water and hill-each element divinely prepared to meet his needs- is assigned value in term of a commodity. Nature's enchanting property has ceased restoring in man the pristine adoration for nature that made him a part of the environment, not its rival. But man's propensity towards excessive materialism has brought him the feeling of disenchantment which depreciates environmental ethics and hastens environmental spoliation. Ecocriticism takes on the ideals of new animism to replenish human outlook with re-enchantment so that nature can be accorded its deserving place.

Environmentally awareness is not a regional concern; it has, over the years, come up to be a global issue. It is not surprising that the way Vedantic Philosophy has developed an animistic outlook for the non-human world provides the environmentalists a great source of inspiration to go on with the noble cause. Of the traits that make Vedantic school outstanding worldwide, one is its humanistic approach to the natural surroundings.

The Eastern philosophy bears that every non-human element is enlivened with a soul of its own. All-natural phenomena like the existence of a range of mountains,

flowing stream of water, blooming of a bunch of flower etc take place by a divine arrangement-invisible but realizable. Living entity as it is, a non-human element can react to human behaviour conducted towards it. Veda prohibits disgrace on nature let alone causing any harm to her. It is religiously presumed that misfortune falls on those transgressing the Law of Nature. Veda has held the surrounding world of the human in high adoration so that it can be protected from the evil motive of man. We are often enjoined to not pluck fruits, flowers or leaves of plants at night. Our religious scripture has never granted us the right to pluck leaves from Tulsi plant before we get purified through bath. Some mountains of the Great Himalayan Range are still treated godly by the Sherpa who forbid any venture on them.

Raja Rao, along with Mulkraj Anand and R.K.Narayan, is an all-time-ideal for Indo-Anglian fiction writers. He gave the genre a shape, alien to the forerunners and iconic for the followers. Being rooted in Indian culture, Indianness comes out dominant in him. Rao has picked up a life-time seeker of the Absolute to theme the metaphysical mystery of human life. Consequently, an undertone – more ambiguous- always runs beneath the surface of his fictions. His style is marked with a non-linear, subjective narrative. Episodes and digressions flow into his narration. This indeed gives an epical edge to his style. However, the present paper has hardly to do with the interior complexities of Rao's work. It zeroes in on exploring the relationship between the natural environment and the characters that feature his novel.

Kanthapura, Rao's first novel, writes on how an obscure South Indian village rises to action at the call of Gandhi's non-violent movement and in the long run finds her completely destroyed. Along the theme of freedom struggle there lays another crucial aspect calling for our attention. The story stands on the backdrop of South India. It speaks of the people rooted to soil, an environment that bears and cares the people, and

of a culture that is formed and nourished by that environment. We are led to detect the relationship between the three vital elements-man, nature and culture.

To make it clear, the theme of ecocriticism was nowhere in his vision when Raja Rao set out for the novel in 1938. Nor did he then foresee the emergence of a literary theory that would develop a trend as this. Therefore, ecocriticism does not make a major theme in *Kanthapura*. However, it fulfills the readers' expectation in their search for harmony between animate and inanimate world conditioned by sharing and caring.

Kanthapura, the village, on a general plane, is like million villages with patches of corn fields, green carpet spreading to the horizons, a sky-touching hill in her readiness to serve and a beautiful stream of water playfully running and drinking both living and the non-living. Morning breaks here with the promise of a sunny day or warning of a cloudy one. Silver shine accompanied with countless twinkles remains peeping at it all the night when the village is lost in deep slumber, all its lives laying snug in its lap. This is all about *Kanthapura* that we see, but what an ecocritic feels still evades our attention.

Raja Rao projects the village on a different plane. He sets her free from the abiotic sphere and places her in the biotic one where *Kanthapura* ceases to be a mere geographic location; she evolves into a living entity. Man and environment are bonded to each other through a natural reciprocation, one urging for and the other offering for. Existence of man is never self-sustaining. It gets reinforced through various influences, the crucial one being the physical environment. His access to environmental dynamics is so open that they get deep into his consciousness making him a part, not one exclusive. *Kanthapura* becomes a part of the system of living of the people. This is what we get a clear glimpse of when Achakka introduces us to *Kanthapura* in the beginning of the novel;

“Our village-I do not think you have ever heard of it- Kanthapura is its name, and it is in the province of Kara. High on the Ghats is it, high up the steep mountains that face the cool Arabian seas, up the Malabar Coast is it, up Mangalore and Puttur and many a centre of cardamom and coffee, rice and sugarcane.... “⁽⁴⁾.

Ecocriticism always sides with sustainable development and invigorates its drive against Capitalistic stance on environmental resources. Redefining development may run contrary to Marxian critics who read development as an outcome of environmental destruction. But Raja Rao seems to go along with the Ecocritical sense of development as hinted in his novel. Kanthapura does not profit the villagers in any way. She only serves them. Whatever they obtain from her throughout the year is enough to tide over their small difficulties of day to day life.. With all her riches- fabulous, cultivable lands, milking cows, tilling buffaloes, the green Kenchamma and the sweet Himavathy- the village has cared for the people since time immemorial. She yields in cardamom, coffee, rice, sugar cane and other produces in large quantity to feed her denizens.

The intrinsic human values-the ones holding a key position in the modern economic profile- always precede environmental values. Material prosperity at any cost is the sole motive all over the world. This global madness is fortified partly by the primitive instinct of ego and greed resulting in economic competition and partly by the cause of scarcity which results in the mobilization of resources. The pressure of development falls heavily or lightly on the environment, thereby causing ripple or propulsion in environmental stability. Raja Rao does not fail to refer to this as he says-

“ There, on the blue waters, they say our carted cardamoms and coffee get into the ships the Red-men bring, and, so they say, they go across the seven oceans into the countries where our rulers live” ⁽⁵⁾ .

Ecocriticism speaks of culture in term of environment. It is important to note that cultural practices get diversified in keeping with the social patterns which are built up by religion and economy. Whatever may be the pattern, sect-based or class-based, the cultural dynamics are regulated by natural environment. Thus, there always exists an inherent affinity between man, nature and culture. Establishment of this rapport is another primary concern of this literary theory. Our study of Kanthapura is led to the environmental implication on culture popular among the villagers. Celebrations on various occasions go on in the village all the year. Myriad forms of rites and rituals are manifested in the festivities and all of them bear some imprints of nature in them. While communicating the villagers about the ascent of Kartika, Achhaka makes the man-nature-culture relation clear-

“Kartik has come to Kanthapura, sisters-Kartik has come with the glow of lights and the unpressed footsteps of the wandering gods; with lights from clay trays and red lights from copper stands, and diamond lights that glow from the bowers of entrance-leaves; lights that glow from banana trunks and mango twigs, yellow lights and yellow light behind white leaves, and green lights behind yellow leaves, and white lights behind green leaves...”⁽⁶⁾.

Depletion in natural environment has already started telling on the survival of humanity. Anthropocentric as is man to the core, he gives priority to human ethics over environmental ethics. Too much of Aristotelianism drapes man's consciousness as he takes environment to be a plaything, solely designed to gratify his material lust. Ranges of mountains, patches of fields, streams of water and countless other abiotic substances are reduced to commodity and measured in term of commercial value. Concern for human values and overlooking of environmental ethics has come up as a sensible area of

study in ecocriticism. Raja Rao does not let it go unopposed. The remarkable twist the novel offers the readers at its end is a case in point. The villagers set fire to the village at night before they set out for an unknown destination. What drives them to do such is their inability to bear their dear village to be auctioned and sold to the rich Europeans only to be commodified.

Kenchamma the Hill also contributes to our attempt for an Ecocritical study of the novel. As recounted by the novelist, her legendary existence evokes obeisance of the villagers who often share their feelings with her. Brushing aside the primordial ego of superiority, human relation steps forward in sheer modesty to establish a rapport with the hill. Achakka, in her narration, gives an inkling of the pristine value of being together with nature. As she says:

“Thank heaven not only did she slay the demon, but she even settled down among us, and this much I shall say, never has she failed us in our grief. If rains come not, you fall at her feet and say ‘Kenchamma, Goddess, you are not kind to us. Our fields are full of younglings and you have not given us water.’ ...and she smiles on you, a smile as you have never before beheld. You know what that means. That very night, when the doors are closed and the lights are put out, pat-pat-pat, the rain patters on the tiles, and many a peasant is heard to go into the fields, squelching through the gutter and mire .She has never failed us...” (7)

Ecocritics urge us to rationalize our notion of the nonhuman world. However absurd it may sound to assign human quality to our surroundings that foster us unconditioned, there lays some inspiration for us to do our best to save her from the mouth of destruction. Kenchamma, in her physical form, is a hill formed of rock and soil, and a resource naturally designed for the people residing in its vicinity to manipulate it

for a living. The hill causes rainfall; the stretches at its foot feed the animals. Sometimes, it may yet restrict the motion of fast wind turning it to a breeze. These are not the acts of benevolence we are supposed to extend our gratitude for. Rather, the cause-effect theory of the natural world organizes these phenomena as a part of the process of the universe. Man, the superlative creature, applies his brain and makes use of them for his gain-bigger or smaller.

Under the spell of such a matter of fact notion, we fail to give a humanitarian edge to our feeling for the sustaining environment. This is what Raja Rao disapproves when he makes his humble villagers go near Kenchamma with deep sense of obligation to accord and humble grievances to say.

Himavathy, the river is the daughter of Goddess Kenchamma. She flows down the Western Ghats and runs along the outskirts of Kanthapura. As sacred as the Yamuna and the Godavari, the river has been looking after the religious and spiritual fulfillment of the Brahmins of the village. Apart from washing and bathing, the whole of Kanthapura drinks from her. Narasamma, Moorthy's mother, after receiving banishment from the Brahmin community meted out due to the latter's attempt for liquidation of caste system, makes straight for the river to pour out her anger by crashing her head on the rock of the river. She dies on the river bank next time, unable to receive the jolt thrust on her. The dead body of Ramakrishnayya is washed in the water of Himavathy before cremation. She swells herself and wipes away the ashes of the burnt. Towards the end of the novel, when the agitated villagers set fire to the village and take dips in the river's water, she absolves their sin and purifies them.

These events obviously go against the current of time we are living in. Above all, a river does not offer its service. It is people who benefit from it. Besides, everything gets

drained towards man: may it be a river or a hill and, for that matter, any substance containing resources. However, Raja Rao causes no ripple on this placidity. The thing he intends to drive our attention to is the cultural bond man establishes with nature. It is a fact that we cannot read culture in isolation of nature. Our ritual-based institutions like holy dip, worship on the river bank, offering ablution at waterside, that we are impelled to carry out from time to time require us to be at a water-body granted by nature, not at a swimming pool constructed by recreation-loving man. Himavathy, a crucial element of natural environment, partially fulfills the cultural need of the villagers. The miraculous way of cremation of Ramakrishnayya's dead body shows how closely man is entwined with nature. After his dead body had been washed in the river water and burnt on the bank, Rangamma took a vow to carry the burnt ass to Kashi where she could consign it to mother Ganga. But to her great astonishment, a huge swell of Himavathy's water swept away the ass and the remnants into her current.

Ecocriticism attaches importance to regionalism in literature. In this context, it is critical of mobility- a commercially propelled human activity giving rise to rehabilitation, accommodation and territorial expansion. All this, as a whole, falls heavily on the environment. Opposed to mobility is place attachment, a regional colour which ecocritics makes much of in their critique. Ethnocentric dynamics transcends its local dimension for transregional colour and grows into a global bearing. Surveying American literature and the works of Thomas Hardy, Mark Twain and Jane Austen on ecocritical perspective, critics like Boell and Zapf focus on the edge of localness. As Hubert Zapf says-

“In a parallel evolution of ethical theory in twentieth century, a local, ethnocentric ethics has been expanded toward a transnational, global ethics.”⁽⁸⁾

Kanthapura, in keeping with regional-global paradigm, celebrates place attachment, though in a small way, but puts forward environmental issues as a global concern. The people he speaks of are emotionally stuck to the place with a deep sense of belongingness which ties them tightly with their socio-cultural and religious ethos. Rao's book mirrors Southern India. It sincerely reflects its society, people, culture, religion and, above all, man's affiliation to the surrounding world. An ethics-based human society in which the judgment of good and evil is fully enshrined in the people's consciousness keeps flourishing in harmony with nature. Human ethics grounded in the anthropocentric interpretation of intrinsic value find its way without clashing with environmental ethics. The people of Kanthapura eke out a living from nature in a sustainable way. They believe in and respect the productive and regenerative power of nature. Whatever in the wilderness is lost gets regenerated through a natural process. To them, the land of Kanthapura is not something to be commodified.

Ecocriticism looks forward a secured planet. Its struggle- yet to fire up the multitudes- will surely continue for a long period, probably, till it ensures a danger-free world in the hands of posterity. Nature has been suffering the outrage of mankind since he started looking upon her as a place or a territory or a resource. While breaking the long-standing anthropocentric dualism between man and nature, ecocriticism tries to unmask the covered up reality. There is only harmony, perpetually built up among all the elements- both biotic and abiotic. The onerous task of evoking a global awareness will seem lessened only when the people of all walks of life all over the world go together with a genuine concern for the planet they inhabit. Glen A Love sounds very pertinent as he comments, "The most important function of literature today is to redirect human consciousness to a full consideration of its place in a threatened natural world".⁽¹²⁾ Indo-Anglian literature does not lag behind in its contribution to this philanthropic cause.

Though in a small way, Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* focuses on the dynamics of interrelationship permeating through man, nature and culture. The fiery nationalism on the eve of independence is not all the book is about; It tries an anti-Eurocentric study to the natural environment and stands out most pragmatic in it.

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Role of ICT in Determining the Vocabulary Coverage of the English Coursebooks

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Abstract

A rich vocabulary makes the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing easier to perform as it is crucial in learning a second or new language (Nation, 1994: viii). It is necessary to learn a language and use it successfully in literacy activities (Cummins, 2001). This study analyses vocabulary in young learners' English coursebooks, which are currently being taught in CBSE and ICSE affiliated schools. The purpose of the study is to determine whether the lexical content of these textbooks is appropriate for the young ESL learners' cognitive and L2 proficiency levels and to do a comparative study between International publishers' coursebooks and NCERT English coursebooks with special reference to vocabulary (lexical content). The study includes qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze vocabulary. It examines the degree to which the vocabulary overlaps with the first two thousand most frequent words from the General Service List (GSL) and the British National Corpus High-Frequency Word Lists (BNCHFWL). The RANGE software compares a text against certain base word lists to find lexical coverage of the coursebooks. For analyzing the lexical coverage, the coursebooks are scrutinized at various levels.

Keywords: English as Second Language (ESL), Young Learners, Corpus, Coursebooks, General Service List (GSL), British National Corpus High-Frequency Wordlist (BNCHFWL),

Introduction

Nowadays, ICT (Information and Communication Technology) is used in all disciplines of education. The integration of information and communications technology in teaching and learning English is considered a medium in which a variety of approaches and pedagogical philosophies are implemented. As Hartoyo (2008) emphasized in his book, a computer is a tool and medium that facilitates people in learning a language, although the effectiveness of learning depends totally on the users.

Technology stimulates real-life situations and helps learners control the learning process (O’Leary, 1998). CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) provides new opportunities for learners to engage in active communication that facilitates the development of second language competence (Peterson, 2005). Multimedia-assisted language learning and internet- based instruction contribute to EFL students’ cross cultural competence (Kim, 2005). Besides, teaching and learning ICT is also used in testing, evaluating and developing instructional materials etc. A corpus is one such computer application and database that is used in various academic disciplines.

Corpora in Language Classroom

Corpus refers to a database of language stored in a computer, which can be used for language and lexical analysis by linguists and other researchers. Computer corpora have been available since the 1960s in various forms, but in the last two decades, advanced storage capacity and software brought out their potential more effectively

(Kennedy 1998:23). Corpora have made their presence uniquely in many fields of applied linguistics like, lexicography, translation studies, forensic linguistics and even critical literary appreciation (Hunston and Laviosa 2000). Krishnamurthy (2002:4) asserts that corpora have brought about a “revolution” in the field of EFL lexicography such that “all of the current EFL dictionaries make some claim to the use of corpora in their compilation.”

Corpus is not a theory of language learning or a teaching methodology. Still, it does influence our way of thinking about language and the kinds of texts and examples used in language teaching. Corpora can be used as an effective tool in developing word lists and evaluating textbook vocabulary items. O’Dell (1997) mentions two important applications of corpora to materials design: compilation of better word frequency lists which allow more confident decisions on which frequent vocabulary to include and, data on concordances, that is, how words are used in context.

Role of Coursebook in Language Classroom

Most of the language coursebooks are inflexible and generally reflect their authors' pedagogic, psychological, and linguistic preferences and biases. Williams (1983: 251) “In situations where there is a shortage of trained teachers, language teaching is closely tied to the textbook. The textbook can be a tyrant to the teacher who, in their preoccupation with covering the syllabus, feels constrained.” Hutchinson and Torres argue that “the textbook has a very important and a positive part to play in teaching and learning of English” (1994). They state that textbooks provide the necessary input into classroom lessons through different activities, readings and explanations. McGrath states that a textbook is important because it sets the direction, content, and to a certain extent how the lesson is to be taught (2002).

Coursebooks determine and control the methods, processes and procedures of language teaching and learning. Littlejohn (1998:190) stated that published teaching materials have become significantly more pervasive and more complex. Tomlinson (1998:265) says they are often regarded as suspect in their language models and methodology. Sheldon (1988:239) notes that teachers often regard them as “the contaminated end-product of an author’s or a publisher’s desire for a quick profit.” Like Allwright (1982), critics have pointed out the risks of imposing a one-size-fits-all solution, as coursebooks attempt to do, on problems that are by nature very local and very complex.

Vocabulary in Young Learners’ ESL Coursebooks

The most important point in teaching vocabulary is the selection of words the language teachers want to teach. It is quite easy to teach concrete words at lower level and then become more abstract. Word formation using prefixes and suffixes, using hyphenated words etc., are too difficult for young learners. Young learners often put words together with what they can see, hear or with what they can experience.

Many coursebooks include listing the principal vocabulary items that help determine the vocabulary's suitability for a given set of learners. However, the contents of such lists still require analysis for the useful intuitions of difficulty arising from simply perusing the lists are insufficient. An analysis of all the words present in the textbook, not just those in the vocabulary lists, provides a complete picture of the vocabulary load of the textbook. Lexical analysis helps in selecting appropriate and level specified vocabulary for teaching young ESL learners based on the first or second thousand most frequent words of English, or low-frequency word lists.

The Study

In the study three well-known publishers' grade-III main English coursebooks are selected for the lexical analysis. They are: i) New Oxford Modern English Coursebook-3, published by Oxford University Press (2013), ii) Gul Mohar, Seventh Edition (2013), Language for Life, Reader-3, published by Orient Black Swan, iii) Marigold, book three, published by NCERT (National Council of Educational Research Training) (2012).

Creating a Corpus of Textbooks Using the RANGE Computer Program

A corpus of three coursebooks is created for the lexical comparison. The corpus consists of principal units, structures, functions, and vocabulary. All texts from the selected materials including unit titles, section headings, and instructions are entered into the corpus. The material included in the corpus comprised what would typically be thought of as the coursebook's essential teaching material, which most teachers could reasonably be expected to cover when using the textbook during the academic year.

The corpus of each coursebook is analyzed using the vocabulary analysis program RANGE (Heatley, Nation, & Coxhead, n.d.), freeware available at <http://www.vuw.ac.nz/lals>. As described in the instructions included in the program, RANGE "provides a range or distribution figure (how many texts the word occurs in); a headword frequency figure (the total number of times the actual headword type appears in all the texts), a family frequency figure (the total number of times the word and its family members occur in all the texts), and a frequency figure for each of the texts the word occurs in."

Wordlists

The RANGE program consists of three base word lists. Lists one and two contain, the first and second 1000 most frequent words of English from A General Service List of English Words by Michael West (1953); list three is the Academic Word List (Coxhead, 2000) and contains words that are not in the first 2000 words but are frequently found in academic texts. The lists are used to check the vocabulary of the coursebooks for lexical comparison. All three lists contain the base form as well as their family. Using this program we can also make our own customized word lists.

The word lists that are used in this study are theGSL which comprises the 2,000 most frequent words in English based on frequency counts from a corpus of 10 million written words. The BNC (British National Corpus) is “a 400 million word collection of written and spoken language samples from a wide range of sources, designed to represent a wide cross-section of British English from the later part of the 20th century, both spoken and written.” Nation (2006) developed 14 frequency lists of 1,000 words each from the BNC. In the present study, only the first two lists are used, i.e. the first 2,000 words, to be consistent with the GSL which also consists of 2,000 word families.

Measuring Vocabulary

By measuring vocabulary levels of each coursebook shown in the following Table-1 by comparing each coursebook with the GSL and AWL lists. The coursebooks are compared for lexical coverage in terms of percentage using wordlists.

The first coursebook (Marigold) contains 3994 tokens in which 863 are token types and 509 word families. From the first 1000 most frequent GSL word list, it comprises 3324 tokens including 574 token types and 387 families and 244 tokens

including 142 token types and 12 families are occurred in the second 1000 most frequent words of GSL word list. There are 415 tokens and 145 families are not in any lists such as GSL or AWL (Academic Word List). It covers only 11 tokens (2 types and 2 families) of AWL. Overall it encompasses 1970 functional and 1349 content words in the text.

The second coursebook (Gul Mohar) consists of 10099 tokens, including 1743 token types and 901 word families. This coursebook covers 8586 tokens including 606 word families and 981 token types from the first 1000 most frequent GSL word list and 692 tokens including 284 word families and 356 token types from the second 1000 most frequent GSL word list. It also covers 18 tokens out of which 12 types and 11 word families from AWL. There are 803 tokens and 394 token types in the coursebook which are not in any lists. It covers 51.08% (5159 tokens) functional words and 34.08% (3442 tokens) content words of the complete text coverage.

The third coursebook (New Oxford Modern English Coursebook) encompasses 9851 tokens, including 1562 token types and 839 word families. It covers 556 word families and 884 token types (8146 tokens) in the first 1000 most frequent GSL word list, and 264 families and 321 token types (743 tokens) in the second 1000 most GSL word list. It also covers 20 tokens which includes 9 word families and 10 token types from AWL. The coursebook comprises 947 tokens that includes 347 token types are not any of the lists. There are 4818 functional words (49.10%) and 3297 content words (33.60%) in the text.

Table-I (Measuring Vocabulary)

Title of the Coursebook	Number of Tokens	Token Types	Word Families	Word List-I 1-1000 GSL (%)	Word List-II 1001-2000 GSL (%)	Word List-III	Tokens Not in the Lists	Number of Words from A WL (%)	Function Words (%)	Content Words (%)
Marigold -III	399	63	59	3324 Tokens (83.22%) Types: 574 (66.51%) Families: 387	244 (6.11%) Type s: 142 (16.45%) Families: 120	1 (0.28%) Type s: 2 (0.23%) Families: 2	4 15 (10.39%) Types: 145 (16.80%)	11 Tokens (0.28%) Types 2-2-Families	197 (49.32%)	134 (33.78%)
Gul Mohar-III	100	743	901	8586 Tokens (85.02%) Types: 981 (56.28%) Families: 606	692 (6.85%) Type s: 356 (20.42%) Families: 284	1 (0.18%) Tokens (0.18%) Type s: 12 (0.69%) Families: 11	8 03 Tokens (7.95%) Types: 394 (22.60%)	18 Tokens (0.18%) Types: 12 Families: 11	515 (51.08%)	344 (34.08%)
Oxford Modern English-III	985	562	398	8146 Tokens (82.69%) Types: 884 (56.59%) Families: 321	743 (7.54%) Type s: 321 (20.5%)	2 (0.20%) Tokens (0.20%) Type s: 10 (0.64%)	9 42 Tokens (9.56%) Types: 347	20 Tokens (0.20%) Types: 10 Families: 9	481 (49.10%)	329 (33.60%)

				es:566	5%) Fami lies: 264	F amilies: 9	(22.22%)			
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Discussion

The Table-I (Measuring Vocabulary) above presents the vocabulary coverage in the target coursebooks. The data above reveals that the learners are exposed to nearly 50% of the functional words which are the most frequent words that covers half of the textbook, and 33% of content words which may occur less frequently in the coursebook and the repetition of such (low frequency) words in the coursebook are very less. 10% of words in the text are not present in any of the classic wordlists. It is noticed that some words in these coursebooks are overlapped in the GSL wordlists and they may be considered beyond the proficiency levels of young learners, which in turn may affect young learners' reading comprehension skills.

Indubitably, it is worth saying that not all of the words from the GSL wordlists may prove useful for the current generation learners and reflect the age of the list. Some words in the GSL have no immediate use in the present context, and they are not present in the English coursebooks as they are not considered the high-frequency words in most of the ESL/EFL context. If we look at some words like *bye*, *guys*, *kids*, *chat*, *OK* and *yeah*, they are not in GSL, but they are the most frequent words in English as a foreign/second language classroom context. Words such as *whiteboard*, *workbook*, *classroom*, *answer* and *homework*, may not be classed as high-frequency words in the GSL yet are useful for teachers and learners in the language classroom (O'Loughlin, 2012). The token types identified are beyond the GSL need special attention.

Conclusions

Based on the above data, some groups of token types and word families in these English coursebooks are away from the GSL or the AWL. It is assumed that the learners who are following these texts may find difficulty learning/acquiring them as there might be a burden to the young ESL learners' cognition levels. To conclude, many words used in the commercially published coursebooks appear to be challenging to young ESL learners. Principles do not guide the selections of many words within the coursebooks on the frequency of use. As a result, second language teachers and ESL young learners will inevitably spend class time on such (low frequency) words that are not repeated within the same coursebook or subsequent levels.

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Absence and Functioning of Developed Materials in Random Contexts: A Cognitive Challenge for ESP Learners, Trainers and Developers

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Abstract

The transfer of information through materials developed for specific purposes seem to function in several ways in random contexts. The learners may receive the information in one way; the trainers may transfer it in their own way, while the developers may have developed the material for it to be delivered in a specific way. A random context makes it all the more challenging when the material developed for specific purposes is used without understanding the purpose for which it is developed. In case it is used, the connectivity established should facilitate a raise in the comprehensive ability of the learners. However, this can become a possibility only if the cognizance in developers and the trainers is bent towards the modes in which the material needs to be developed and used. Based on the context, learners may prefer the traditional mode of paper print or digital audio-video clips. Failing to understand the preferences of the learners and their contexts, the functioning of even a well developed material would become a challenge for the trainers and developers. Differences in the language capacities of the learners may also add to the cognitive challenges in interpreting how developed materials function in random contexts. Hence, the need for material developers to study the contexts and know the level of the learners and their preferences before producing suitable, sustainable and required teaching and learning materials. The absence of these or any minimum essential material, limits the learning, to the learners' schema of prior knowledge and not beyond. Lack of information through instructions

or any material hampers the learning outcomes and as Tomlinson, B (2011) states, the intended and effective outcomes are possible through well developed materials, and not in their absence.

Keywords: Cognitive, ESP Learners, Material Developers, Random Contexts, Instruction

Introduction

There are notions that the absence of material will help the learners become more creative and thoughtful, and learning would be diversified and not directed towards any one particular outcome. This may be true in some contexts and may less likely be possible for language learning or even learning something creative. A learner can hardly write anything if there is little information about what he is supposed to write how creative he is. For example, writing a poem on any insect without having much knowledge on the insect might not help the learner write to his maximum potential without knowing the details of the insect. Even the inbuilt creative talent might hardly be of some use to disclose the facts of the insect, if there is insufficient information in the learners' schema. To test this case, the third year engineering students of Rajiv Gandhi University of Knowledge Technologies were given a task of writing an 'objective' for their desired posts that would fit into their 'Resumes'. No other instruction was given to them nor were they provided any material on how and what to write. The learners took some time to think and write an objective.

The Problem

The objectives written by the learners lacked specificity. They were very general and not directed towards any particular goal. The mechanics of writing an objective were also missing. They were informal and lengthy. They were non-academic and were unacceptable as their peers

could not guess the post from the objective the learners had written. The simple sentences, unorganized structure, semantic and grammatical errors hardly helped their cause.

The Need

There was clear need of the instructions and information, and a well developed material to assist the learners with the nuances of writing an objective for a desired post in their resumes. As the learners would be looking for promotions or a change in the job or a change in the designation throughout his career, writing an objective concerning their needs becomes a compulsion that requires the learner's autonomy. Lack of awareness on how and what to write would keep the learner dependent and low in confidence. A well-developed material suitable to the context or the specific instructions from the teacher would definitely solve the problems of the learners, provided the material developers, teachers and the learners think and work towards solving the specific objective of 'writing an objective' for a specific purpose.

Hypothesis

Absence and Functioning of Developed Material in Random Contexts is a Cognitive Challenge for ESP learners, Trainers and Material Developers.

Review of Literature

With heterogeneous learners and different contexts being presented to a teacher, any well developed material may be found redundant unless the context and needs of the learners are understood. The role of the teacher is therefore extremely important to use the material provided in a suitable manner. Richards, J.C. (2001) very positively states that '*the teachers adapt and transform the materials to suit the needs of a particular group of students*'. He says that '*these*

effective ways of using the materials must be documented to provide feedback on how these materials worked, along with the records of how the supplementary materials supported the original ones'. Deletion or addition of the materials in place, and bringing suitable supplementary materials to the class is in itself a cognitive challenge. Letting the material developers know these changes and getting them implemented is another challenging task, which in most cases may rarely be accomplished.

According to Hyland, K. (2019), *'the goal of writing instruction can never be just training explicitness and accuracy because written texts are always a response to a particular communicative setting. No feature can be a universal marker of good writing because good writing is always contextually variable. Writers always draw on their knowledge from their readers or texts (materials) to decide both what to say and how to say'*. This is real challenge both for the teachers and the material developers as they need to analyze the context without which the production of good writing would be less likely. Hence, a good text, contextually sophisticated, is expected to serve the purpose, for which the material developers need to compose material that directs the learners towards writing the needed.

To bridge the gap between the text and the context, understanding the ethnographic methods always added value. Paltridge, B (2013a, 2015a) specifies how reviewers learn to write peer reviews by drawing together inputs from the reviewers text and the context. This would specially strengthen the way of writing for ESP's.

All these are cognitive and are challenging for the learners, teachers, and material developers in ways related to the context and the differences in the backgrounds and how they practice.

Research Methodology

A class of sixty third year undergraduate students of RGUKT was given a task of writing an Objective for a desired post in their Resumes. Lack of providing any instructions made them write freely and in a manner they thought was acceptable. On correcting their responses, the learners were asked to write again without giving any instructions. The learners modified and re-wrote the same trying to avoid the errors they made earlier. It was more or less the same with different errors included in their writing without much change in the content.

The learners were asked to re-write the objective again by providing an example (to win a gold medal in archery in Olympics) of what an objective meant and how several objectives together may help attain a goal. Some learners' Objective turned out to be a very lengthy paragraph, while some wrote to a decent length. On evaluating again, further instructions were provided on the length and the nuances of writing like: avoiding repetitions, use of personal pronouns, negations, formality, beginning, etc. There was improvement seen in their writings after these instructions, but mere instructions did not allow them to produce a perfect Objective. There were still errors in their writing. It was realized that the learners did not have enough information needed on the desired post for them to write well. Lack of information restricted their writing to the background knowledge they possessed. The learners were then granted freedom to browse samples of those posts and the requirements of those designations for them to get an idea of what is being expected. Once they got the idea, they were asked to write again. Their scripts were evaluated and errors could still be found. The learners were then given samples of some 'Objectives' irrespective of the posts they desired for, so that they could try and replicate the best ones to their job designations. Though there were many impressive changes in

their writing from the way they began to ended, minor syntactic and semantic errors were still found in their writing.

Following a qualitative approach, the reduction in errors was noticed through continuous monitoring and evaluation of their scripts. To find the suitability of the context, a hardcopy of a sample resume was given to the learners when they were sitting in the ground, only to find that it was hardly taken into consideration, whereas, when it was showed over the phone, they had their eyes glued to it.

Analysis and Interpretation

From the first and second written records of the learners, it was evident that the absence of instructions led to too many errors being made. They took a long time to think and write from which it can be interpreted that they did not know how to write and what to write in it, and they were also waiting to get further instructions from the teacher. Their long idleness also reveals their limited ability in writing an ‘objective’.

From the learners' third and fourth written records, it was understood that the learners were willing to take the instructions provided by the teacher as they were struggling to write on something they never wrote earlier. They also showed their willingness to write the third and fourth time indicating that they wanted to learn and were eager to better their writing. It can be interpreted that lack of knowledge on writing and a task necessary for them and challenging enough to test them made them inclined towards writing and bettering their writing.

From the fifth and sixth written records, the improvement in the learners’ writing was apparent. It was a cognitively challenging task for the learners and the teacher to understand what inputs are needed for bettering their performances. Conclusions can also be drawn on how

the learners' needs would be met, when the context to which they write, the instructions provided are clear, and when sufficient information is provided in the form of some material, are understood and acknowledged.

Findings

The requisition for material in its absence and validity of it in different contexts proved to be challenging. Improvements could be found only when the context was understood and when instructions and information were available to the students when they wrote. Hence, the hypothetical statement that the 'absence and functioning of well-developed material in random contexts is a cognitive challenge for the ESP learners, trainers and the material developers' is accepted.

Implications

The learners will understand the importance of instructions and information from materials, and apply thought to draw particulars suitable to their context.

The teachers and trainers will learn to supplement fitting details along with the chosen necessary inputs from the material they have been given. They will also learn to record their plans for producing their own material or for assisting other teachers or material developers.

The material developers will develop many acceptable modes of material understanding the contexts, the level of the learners and the techniques in which the material can be accepted. The policy makers and educational institutions will have it challenging enough to make libraries function with all kinds of material readily available for the trainers and the learners to depend on.

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Medium of Instruction in changing contexts: a study of Kerala

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Abstract

In the multilingual and multi-dialect context of India, the medium of instruction is a much-debated topic. Most of the language theories talk about the importance of educating the child in the mother tongue. By and large, the language in education policies in India since independence propagates education through mother tongue and an acknowledgement of the importance of learning English. One cannot ignore the fact that, demand for English medium education is increasing day by day, and this is one of the major reasons for the decrease in enrollment of students in the regional medium government schools. However, the divide in English medium education is a reality in the Indian situation; the middle and upper middle class goes to private English medium schools, and the lower middle class goes to government regional medium schools. Considering the popular demand for English medium education from the society, especially from the lower middle class/ disadvantaged section, some of the State governments in India sanctioned permission to start English medium parallel divisions in the regional medium government schools even though it is not in tune with the existing language in education policies. In this context, the paper explores the reasons, impact, and implications of the State-sponsored shift in instruction from regional language/mother-tongue to the English language, in Kerala. By analyzing this shift in language in education policy, the paper focuses on the contradictions it creates at the policy level and the ground realities related to the medium of instruction. As a result of this shift in language policy, there is one more divide created in the name of the English language among the regional medium students; those in the English medium division and the

others in the regional medium division in the same school. The paper argues that since the teachers are not provided any special training to teach in the English language, the quality of English medium education provided through the government schools of Kerala is inadequate to attain its anticipated outcome of upward social mobility and thereby results in creating new forms of inequalities in the society.

Keywords: language policy, medium of instruction, mother tongue, English language, social mobility

Introduction

Proficiency in the English language today has become one of the important factors in deciding an individual's access to resources. Especially for the dis-advantaged masses, the English language is said to be decisive in making use of the limited available opportunities to get a better livelihood. With all kinds of debates and controversies related to it, ranging from the tool in the hands of the imperialist to impose power to establish economic as well as cultural invasion, to that of the only one apparatus available for the historically oppressed people all over the world for emancipation, the role of English language is always at the center of heated debates. India is not an exception in issues related to the role of English language where thousands of languages and language dialects are in active use. The policy to select Hindi as the national language of India, as it is presumably the language spoken by a larger number of people when compared to other languages, even led to language riots in the country. As a result, considering the opposition from the Southern non-Hindi speaking States against the imposition of Hindi, the then central government decided to grant co-official language status to both English and Hindi²².

²² The Official Languages Act, 1963. <http://www.rajbhasha.nic.in/en/official-languages-act-1963>

Like everywhere else in the world, the growing demand for the English language for the last two decades is a serious concern for the stakeholders of education in India too. There are studies which show that the preference given to the English language sometimes becomes a threat for other languages. Furthermore, there are more arguments concerning the dominant nature of English such as the damage it creates to the local cultures and distinct knowledge systems associated with each language and the divisive role it plays across the people from different social groups according to their ability to use English language. Vaidehi Ramanathan (2005) observes that “this issue of English-access to it, being fluent in it, ‘moving up’ in the world because of it- playing a divisive role in the post colonial ground has generally remained unarticulated” (P.7). In this context, the paper explores the reasons, impacts, and implications of the shift in the medium of instruction from regional language/mother tongue to the English language, in the context of Kerala. The paper focuses on the contradictions it creates at the policy level and the ground realities related to the issue of medium of instruction. The paper further argues that since the teachers are not provided any special training to teach in the English language, the quality of English medium education provided through the government schools of Kerala is inadequate to attain its anticipated goals of upward social mobility. Hence, this may result in creating new forms of inequalities in the society.

Increasing demand for English medium schools

In India, even though the policy makers always prefer mother tongue as the medium of instruction, the medium of instruction is English in the higher education institutions, which is a barrier for the students from the regional medium schools. As is well known, the affluent upper classes in India, as well as aspirational middle classes, do prefer to pay, heavily of required, fees

in private English medium schools whereas the vernacular medium government schools remain the only available option for the poor. This situation has become further aggravated, over the last two or three decades, due to a globalized market economy and liberalization that has made its presence felt over local economies. As a result, job opportunities in the private sector have increased even as they have decreased in the government sector. Concurrently, as the nook and corner of the world opened up to the global economy, English language capital became necessary, even crucial.

When the education policies and other related factors failed to equip the poor students in the regional medium schools according to the changing time, the demand for low-cost private English medium schools increased all over India. This resulted in the mushrooming of both authorized and unauthorized private English medium schools. The concept or idea of learning English language is interlinked with many aspects, especially in emerging economies such as India where economic and social mobility is intimately tied to competence in English, such as social imagination, parental attitude, governmental policies, cultural and linguistic hegemony, etc. As the demand for English is on a rise and the changing nature of the liberalized job market, language in education policies also reflects this requirement from the market economy and, de facto, from the parents. As E. Annamalai (2013) pointed out, “In the last decades of the 20th century, India’s pursuit of a free market economy led to changes in its language policies in education” (P.191).

The changed perspective of the State towards language policies is evident from recent language and education policies, which are in search of better approaches to improve the access and quality of English language education for all. From policy documents such as the National

Curriculum Framework – 2005 and the 2009 report of the National Knowledge Commission, it is evident that the authorities are concerned about the poor quality of education in the English language imparted through the regional medium schools. Significantly, the National Knowledge Commission of 2009 recommends multi-medium or bilingual schools to avoid the problems related to the medium of instruction, a suggestion that may be very relevant in the current language in education context of India

The quality of English language education accessible to the disadvantaged sections, given their (lack of) purchasing power, and the quality of education on offer through the government schools is a serious issue that continues to remain inadequately, if at all, addressed. It is widely known that any first generation English learner from a disadvantaged socio-economic background has to compete with an Indian middle-class learner, who enjoys the advantage of English language, in both institutions of higher education as well as the job market. The Right to Education Act (2008), in this regard, was a landmark legislation that introduced reservation of 25% seats in private schools for students from socially and economically disadvantaged sections. However, the necessary consecutive steps to spread awareness about this new rule, so that citizens can follow-up on its implementation, as well as the support programs for these students to adjust to the entirely new atmosphere, have not been enough. Peggy Mohan (2014) describes how children from the backward sections of the society who are admitted to a private school in Delhi feel alienated because of the medium of instruction as well as the entirely different social atmosphere of the school handicaps the students from participating in the learning process. Therefore, it is important to study the role of English in different social groups and across different regions. This will enable us to understand whether English language education

empowers or merely produces new forms of inequalities. It is evident from the massive demand for private English medium schools that the ground realities have far overshoot the visions of policies and policy-makers regarding mother tongue as the medium of instruction.

Education in Kerala

Kerala, as statistics demonstrate, has attained higher positions in the human development indexes in comparison to the other states of India (P.86, Human Development Report, Kerala-2005). Even though several aspects of the developmental annals of Kerala have been criticized, it is nonetheless acknowledged that the state's achievements are remarkable particularly in the area of social development. Education is a major factor that has played a major role in creating the so-called developed status of the state. According to various surveys, literacy rates, the numbers of schools, qualified and trained teachers, infrastructure facilities, transport services, etc. are in a much better position in Kerala than most other Indian states. The basic amenities such as drinking water, separate toilets for boys and girls, and other infrastructure facilities are available and functional in most Kerala schools. It is also important to note that the universalization of primary education in Kerala has been made possible through the equalized distribution of schools in both rural and urban areas (Human Development Report, Kerala-2005).

However, when we move from quantity regarding the number of schools and their facilities to the issue of quality in these schools, it becomes a less flattering picture. Some studies suggest that the levels of achievement of Kerala learners are very poor; a claim often made to substantiate this is the low achievement of Kerala learners in government jobs at the national level examinations. It is important to note that, notwithstanding the much-lauded educational

achievements through the subsidized public education system, the rate of enrolment in private English medium schools has increased and the rate of enrolment in government and aided schools has decreased over the last two decades or so in Kerala. Between 1990-91 and 2002-03, enrolment in Government schools fell by 25.6 per cent, whereas it increased by 79 per cent in private unaided schools. The number of private unaided schools, only 1.16 percent of the total number of schools in 1980-81, has gone up to 4 percent in 2002-03.²³ This enrolment pattern adds to the increasing number of “uneconomic” schools, a significant crisis in the Kerala education system today. A school that lacks sufficient student strength is officially termed as an uneconomic school. This established fact of decreasing enrollment rate in the public education system of Kerala can be addressed in light of two aspects; quality of education exists in the state's government schools and an increasing fascination with English medium education across all sections of all sections society.

Regarding the quality of education, let me quote from a government report;

Despite the high educational attainments in terms of literacy, enrolment, gender parity in educational indicators, school infrastructure, etc., the quality of education has been deteriorating in Kerala since recent years. (*Kerala Economic Review*, 2015).

It is often argued that the deteriorating quality of education in government and aided schools are a strong reason behind the trend towards private English medium education. Though the public education system is strong in Kerala, there is an increasing demand for private English medium schools. The implementation of the revised curriculum in Kerala in 2007 was a major step towards improving the quality of education in the government and aided schools in Kerala.

²³ See, for more information, *Human Development Report* (Kerala 2005), p. 2008). Also available at http://planningcommission.nic.in/plans/stateplan/sdr_pdf/shdr_kerala05.pdf.

The Kerala Curriculum Framework (KCF – 2007) was an attempt to overhaul and rejuvenate the public education sector of Kerala. The Report of the Impact Study (2009) on the achievement of learners in English conducted by RIESI, Mysore, provides a positive picture of the quality of English education at the government schools of Kerala. The renewed curriculum draws on theories of social constructivism, critical pedagogy, discourse-oriented pedagogy, etc. which demand a higher involvement of the teacher and the learner in the process of making sense of the knowledge being imparted in the textbooks. The creation of a generation that uses language for critical and creative purposes is the main aim of the new language curriculum (KCF 2007). Along with the implementation of the curriculum, some new schemes have also been introduced to improve the quality of English language education in the government and aided schools in Kerala.

It is a fact that Kerala state syllabus has a strong hold on the education system of Kerala. According to the Kerala Education Statistics (2010-11), around 43, 51,225 students are studying in the state syllabus. At the same time, the total number of students studying in the other types of schools, including CBSE, ICSE, KV and JNV are 7, 77,928. Clearly, the number of students following the state syllabus is far higher than students following the other types of syllabi. Nonetheless, there is a fast fall in the number of children who enroll in government schools over the years. According to a 2013 report in *The Hindu* regarding the enrollment trends in Kerala, “Enrollment to class one, only 2.9 lakh students have joined the State syllabus schools this year, against last year’s 3.02 lakh. The figure for 2011-12 was 3.3 lakh, a steady decline” (June 14, 2013). At the same time, enrollment in private English medium schools is increasing year by year. This attitude points to the aspiration for English medium schools although the revised

curriculum offers promising results in English language education. So, it could be argued that despite the supposed deteriorating quality of education in the State's government schools, there are some other factors related to this trend towards English medium education. Peggy Mohan identifies some of the practical realities related to this issue when she says ;

...to keep your child in the cozy world defined by Hindi-medium education is to limit his chances of employment when he grows up. It is not that good jobs intrinsically require English. It is just that English serves the purpose of a gatekeeper, as it were. It is a convenient job requirement that ensures that the best jobs in the country stay with the children of the elite. For parents, this consideration carries more weight than concerns about whether the child will benefit academically from his English-medium classes or whether he will lose self-esteem in all the time that he sits mutely in class.” (2014, P.22)

As the importance of learning English only increases every day, the materials and methodologies of the teaching of English acquire more importance. The private authorized English medium schools, where parents believe the quality of education to be the topmost, are highly expensive. So, most of the economically poorer sections of people send their children to government and aided schools as well as to unauthorized private schools. Education has been a symbol of status as well as a measurement of excellence in Kerala for years. A major impact of money earned through mostly blue-collar jobs in West Asia (“Gulf money,” as it is popularly referred to) on education in Kerala was the change in school preferences by migrant parents. A study conducted by Zachariah, Mathew and Rajan observes “preference for unaided private schools was the highest among emigrant households and the lowest among non-migrant

households” (P.38, 2000). The mass appeal for private education is also considered as an impact of higher prosperity levels gained through this overseas money which made the high-cost private education affordable for a larger majority. As observed by Jose Sebastian, “Proficiency in English is widely perceived as a sure bet for upward social mobility. This made the self-financing English medium schools popular even among the lower-income sections. It may be noted that in terms of educational qualifications, the teachers in many of these schools are far below those of government run or aided institutions” (2010, P.72).

Parents’ expectations regarding benefits of English language

It is important to understand the parents’ conceptualization about English language education. The data used for this section is collected from a fisheries village of northern Kerala, Chombala, to understand parents' attitude regarding the importance of English. The data for this preliminary study was collected from thirty parents, fifteen fathers, and fifteen mothers. Questionnaire data, informal conversations with the parents and field notes are used for the analysis. The fishing community belongs to a lower stratum of society; their socio-economic status lags behind the other sections. However, informal conversations with parents revealed that they are well aware of the role of education, especially English, for their upward mobility in society. The parents do not want their children to end up their life in fisheries-related jobs like them. They are eager to send their children to the private English medium or the government English-medium schools. As David Faust and Richa Nagar put it, “It is their keen familiarity with the benefits bestowed by an English- medium education and with the economic marginalization and social indignity suffered by those who cannot speak fluent English that compels middle class families to enroll their children in English- medium schools” (2001,

P.2880). Parents are ready to borrow money for this endeavor. In Kerala, parents' education level is comparatively higher²⁴, and the data from the parents' profile here reveals that mothers are more educated than fathers. The data shows that 93% of the parents attend the PTA meetings at least once in a school term and 66% the parents used to speak to the English teachers about their child's progress. Moreover, they strongly feel that those who design the curricula should also consider the views of parents. A revealing statistic is about the relative importance of English in comparison to the rest of the subjects: 93% parents believe their children should be better in English than in other subjects. The reasons for such an attitude are many. First, parents point out to the social, economic and educational importance—the symbolic capital—of English language. They believe that once children are proficient in English, they will get better jobs and enhance their social position, especially when they go out of the state. Parents think that proficiency in English is a necessity to get into the highly valued “IT sector” jobs. The parents firmly believe that there is a high difference in the social status of those who know English and those who do not. Several parents shared their experiences in contexts where they did not know English and suffered, even if only to fill ordinary application forms, and cited these as the need to learn English.

The demand for free English medium education through government and aided schools became very strong over the last few years. In their attempt to cater to this demand of parents for English medium education and as a measure to increase the strength of student enrolment, the government and aided schools of Kerala requested the government to grant permission for opening English medium parallel divisions in the state.

²⁴ Annual Status of Education Report- 2016, P 284-85.

English medium parallel divisions in the government and aided schools

The high cost of education in the authorized private schools and the apprehensions on the quality of education on offer at the private un-aided schools forced a section of parents to demand fee-less English medium education through the government schools in Kerala.

Considering the continuous appeal from the society, in 2003²⁵ the Kerala government decided to sanction permission to start English medium parallel divisions in the Government as well as aided schools. The order states that the government and aided schools can apply for approval of English medium parallel division when there are three divisions of a class, and at least thirty students and parents should request for conversion of one division into English medium. The order later amended in 2012²⁶, states that even schools with only two divisions of a class can convert one division into English medium:

“As the number of students in many schools is coming down, many schools are facing difficulty in maintaining the conditions stipulated in the government order regarding starting of English medium parallel division...this situation will adversely affect the aspirations of the students to study in the English medium. So the government revised the Guidelines. If there are not enough students to maintain two Malayalam medium divisions, the second division is allowed to be converted as English medium parallel division” (P.2).

The order makes it clear that English medium divisions will be sanctioned only when the school maintains at least one Malayalam medium division. The number of students required for

²⁵ Parallel English medium divisions in schools, The Hindu.

<http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/2003/06/05/stories/2003060504230400.htm>.

²⁶ (Go (MS) 156/12/ G.Edn. Dated, Thiruvananthapuram, 22 May, 2012.)

English Medium division is fixed as thirty, and it is important to note that by maintaining one Malayalam medium division, a school can convert all other existing divisions into any English medium parallel divisions according to the availability of students who want to study in English medium classes. However, how long the government can uphold this criterion of at least one Malayalam medium division. Because if all the students in a school want to study in English medium classes, nobody can deny their right to do so or it is not possible to tell some students that you should study in Malayalam medium division. At present, no official statistics are available regarding the exact number of schools with English medium parallel divisions in the State. However, according to some news reports²⁷, the number of English medium divisions in the government and aided schools in Kerala are increasing year by year at a very fast rate. The order prescribes no other criteria related to the conversion of Malayalam medium classes into English medium parallel divisions.

In a way, the decision of the Kerala government to start English medium classes in the Malayalam medium schools was a blessing to the people from the lower income section. Because in the government school there is no need to pay special fees for English medium and there is prescribed curriculum, teaching methodology, qualified teachers, and textbooks. This decision to start the English medium classes changed the entire picture. Now parents can send their children to English medium schools without affecting their family budget. This move on the part of government helped to decrease the flow of students towards private English medium schools, especially students from the socially and economically weaker section. It is interesting to note that after years of decline in the enrollment rate of students in the government and aided schools

²⁷ <http://english.mathrubhumi.com/news/kerala/english-taking-over-from-malayalam-in-govt-schools-kerala-mathrubhumi-1.1766239>

in Kerala, the report of the ASER states that there is a considerable increase in the student enrollment rate in these schools of Kerala. The ASER-2016 report states that “in Kerala, the proportion of children (age 11-14) enrolled in government school increased from 40.6% in 2014 to 49.9% in 2016 (P. 43). Even though the report says nothing about the relationship between increased enrollment rate and the English medium parallel divisions, many teachers the researcher interviewed said that the enrolment rate increased considerably after the implementation of English medium divisions. Moreover, the teachers are of the opinion that this decision of the government saved many schools from the danger of becoming uneconomic. It is a real loss for the private English medium schools since the students now are widely depending on the government or aided schools for English medium education. However, the socio-cultural/linguistic impacts of this phenomenon need in-depth research.

It is a fact that the decision to start English medium divisions is in total contradiction with the official language policies of the State. KCF 2007 made it very clear that:

“There is a general belief that English should be the medium of instruction at schools as higher education is in English. However, every democratic society recognizes the relevance of mother tongue as medium of instruction.... It is also the medium of thought. This realization forms the basis for recognizing mother tongue as medium of instruction.... Processes like concept attainment and construction of knowledge take place meaningfully and effortlessly through mother tongue” (P. 43-44).

KCF-2007 acknowledges the importance of English in today’s world and recommends analyzing the real issues related to the learning of English, and the importance is given to

ensuring the quality of English language learning process rather than switching over the medium to English. So it is evident from the policy document that the decision to start English medium parallel divisions in the schools contradictory to the existing language in education policies of the State of Kerala. There are other serious educational issues related to this decision to start English medium classes in the Government run Malayalam medium schools.

The order of English medium parallel divisions makes it clear that the government will not take any financial liabilities for this medium change. The paper further looks into the problems faced by teachers' who are not provided with any special training to enable them for the new development. In order to understand the problems faced by teachers who have no other options but to teach in both the mediums, the researcher collected data from the teachers of government and aided schools through semi-structured interviews as well as informal conversation with the teachers because most of the teachers were neither ready to be recorded nor their classes to be observed. Most of the teachers admitted that they are not at all satisfied with their teaching because they are forced to follow translation method in classes, which in turn is affecting their teaching abilities.

Analysis of the teacher data shows that no special training is provided to the teachers to take classes in the English medium division. The same teachers who are teaching for the Malayalam medium are taking classes for the English medium too. Except for the English language teachers, handling classes in English is tough for most of the subject teachers. The curriculum is based on discourse-oriented and activity-based pedagogy in which group activities and group discussions play the central role, so the teacher's interventions are crucial. The teacher

is the facilitator who helps the learners with necessary scaffolding. When the teacher is not fluent in the English language, it will affect even the experienced teachers who are otherwise excellent in handling the same classroom transactions and activities in Malayalam.

Some of the teachers said that, out of their commitment towards students and their profession they work hard to improve their English. Very few teachers attend English language training programs only because of their personal interest. The teachers believe that, in most of the schools the state of affairs in the English medium parallel divisions is very pathetic because of the reasons mentioned above. However, as mentioned by the teachers, these parallel English medium divisions are far better than that of the private unauthorized English medium schools. At the same time the teachers think that the government should take serious measures to train the teachers of the core subjects in English language; otherwise in future there will be no difference between the English medium parallel divisions in the government schools and the unauthorized private schools since the teachers are forced to use translation method in the English medium divisions. As suggested by Usree Bhattacharya (2013) this translation method of teaching will hinder the students' ability to engage with the educational content and development of critical thinking processes which otherwise happen naturally in a familiar language.

It is important to think about the future of these students in government or private run English medium schools. Some studies suggest that the English gained from these schools are not resulting in the perceived results but on the contrary, contributes to making students from these socio-economically backward students further incapacitated. According to Annamalai, "the English of students from socially disadvantaged castes has diverged from the Indian standard by

the end of their schooling. This variety of English prevents them from acquiring the social status and economic benefits English offers to others, thereby leading to social and political tension” (2005, 34). So it is important to study what exactly is the role played by English in different social groups and different regions; is the English language education empowering or is it producing new forms of inequalities, and how we can use the English language in a better way to fulfill the aspirations of the people. In the case of Kerala's present English medium parallel divisions, the paper argues that this masked English medium education fails the expectations of a large section of people regarding social and economic upliftment through the English language. Hence, the new State-sponsored English medium is creating new forms of inequalities even though many parents welcome it. Even though the decision to start English medium parallel divisions has some positive aspects in a broader context, there are a number of other serious issues than the teacher-related ones, which are beyond the scope of this paper.

Conclusion

Immediate practical interventions from the government and policy makers to provide quality English language education for the students of government and aided schools to enable them to make use of the opportunities available through the English language is crucial. The initiatives taken by the present Kerala government, such as allocating almost 10000 crores for an overall transformation of the government and aided schools of Kerala into international standards in the coming five years, is a promising one. The massive fund allotted is not only for the development of world class infrastructure in the government schools of Kerala but also for teacher training and vocational as well as skill training for the students. Since English language learning is always at the center of discussions related to improving the quality of government

schools, it might not be wrong to hope that the problems discussed in this paper related to English medium classes will be addressed properly. The education minister of Kerala recently made it clear in the State assembly that, “The government is of the view that the learning medium should be the mother tongue. However, we will make the children fluent in speaking and writing Malayalam, English and Hindi”²⁸. This approach of the government is promising in a time when English medium education is propagated as a panacea for different kinds of socio-economic-educational issues.

²⁸ <http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/2016/nov/05/language-proficiency-classes-planned-for-kerala-school-students-education-minister-1535100.html>

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The Teaching of English at DIET Colleges of Andhra Pradesh in India: Realities and Remedies

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Abstract

English in India symbolises people's aspirations, while education in English has been advocated as a unifying and modernizing force. It is a visible fact that the presence of English is demanded by everyone today at the very initial stage of schooling. This paper's focus is on developing communication skills among rural District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) trainees of Andhra Pradesh in India. In Andhra Pradesh about 70% of the DIET trainees are from rural areas and the majority of them are from regional medium backgrounds. No doubt that they have excellent academic knowledge but lag behind in communication skills. In this present context of globalization with internship teaching, English was introduced in 2010 for 3rd and 4th classes, and it was introduced in 2012 for 1st and 2nd classes in primary schools. For these regional medium back ground trainees, it is very difficult to teach in English medium. After trained in the DIETs the trainees have to go for internship teaching to primary schools. Most of the trainees are not able to communicate in English in primary schools. One of the challenges in DIET colleges in Andhra Pradesh is improving the communication skills of DIET trainees and preparing them for the workplace. The study uses mixed method to analyse the data collected through questionnaires, interviews and classroom observation.

Keywords: Primary Schools, DIET Trainees, Communication Skills

Introduction

English is the mother tongue of 300 million people globally (*“Language is the dress of thought” Dr. Samuel Johnson*). One out of 10 persons in the world knows English. 75% of world’s population 50% of the world’s news papers, over 60% of the world’s radio stations and more than 50% of the world’s scientific and technical periodicals use English as medium of expression. In India it is considered as library language. The Kothari education commission (1964-66) has rightly stressed that English would play a vital role in higher education as an important library language. English is also a link language in India. Different people can communicate with one another with the help of English. The spread of British Empire (Lord William Bentinck 1828-1835) introduced English in India, Africa, south Asia, Australia, New Zealand and America. It came to these countries as the language of business, travel and exploration and then become the sole medium of instruction. English is a language that has been accepted as an Associate Official language in India (Official Language Act 1963). It finds a place in the Eighth Schedule of our Constitution and has a major role in Indian society. To substantiate that English is a library language in India, we need to go back to Michael West, whose contribution to ELT in India is highly significant. Michael West as a school inspector had an obvious picture of the teaching of English. English as a second language for learners it’s four skills LSRW and its elements like grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation have to be practised to a great extent. For District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) trainees whose mother tongue is Telugu, English competence is more important for their academic life and future careers.

One of the exciting things in India is that usually the elite people will not send their children to the teaching profession as they want their children to become doctors, engineers, lawyers, and managers. Still, only the common middle class and poor people choose to teach as

an occupation for livelihood. Hence we cannot find better expertise and intellectuality among the teachers as many DIET trainees are from a poor and rural background where we do not find enough exposure to English. That is how teaching English is facing hardships and causing poor learning of a second language.

Moreover, the teacher educators at DIET colleges in Andhra Pradesh are not recruited regularly. For instance, DIET lecturers were recruited in 1998, and nobody has been appointed so far from the last 20 years. There are vacancies to be filled to strengthen the teacher education programme. Some of the DIET lecturers are those who have got promotions from school teachers' positions. So the quality in teacher training is affected since lack of expertise and experience in giving training to prospective teachers.

The English language curriculum at the school level includes materials production, teaching methods, learner roles, evaluation processes, assessment criteria etc. But the problem is that the curriculum cannot prepare the right teachers for second language teaching as there are a lot of pitfalls in the teacher education system in Andhra Pradesh. Besides that, most of the DIET trainees are from medium regional background and lack of proficiency in English; it is very difficult for them to teach in English. After they are trained in DIET colleges, the trainees should go for internship teaching to primary schools.

However, it is undeniable that English is a language and a mode of employment that gives bread and butter to its learners in Andhra Pradesh in India. Aware the this fact that English is mandatory in our life the government of Andhra Pradesh recently introduced English as a medium of instruction in primary schools right from 1st standard. Hence the people who want to become teachers must be able to learn English and communicate well enough. So it is the DIET trainees turn to learn, acquire communication skills in English so as to they will be able to teach

proper English. This study aimed at investigating the language needs of DIET trainees and to what extent they are competent to teach primary children after they have finished their training.

Lack of exposure

Majority of the trainees in DIETs are from rural areas have limited exposure towards language learning at intermediate level. The rural area trainees lack the exposure to the English communication in the family, society as well as in the colleges. As a result of this, even the top rankers fail to achieve success during personal interviews due to lack of communication skills and soft skills.

Remedies

English language trainees must be innovative, updated and resourceful with thorough knowledge of language skills and components. English can be taught through conversation, dialogues, group discussions, debates, speeches, vocabulary and fun-games in a conducive environment. So the trainees should be trained more focusing communicative skills in English

Review of Literature

➤ As the article published by Ms. Khan, A. (2015). ‘Using Films in the ESL Classroom to Improve Communication skills of Non-Native Learners’, aimed at presenting that audio-visual technologies, such as films, generally are a grand source for teaching spoken English and must be used more in non-native English language learning context. It supports the theme in the article and technology used of communicative and relates the main concept that the suitable communication skills according to the learners level.

➤ As this article published by Wen Chong, P. (2010). ‘Comparative Analysis of Special Education Teacher Training in France and Norway: How effective, areas taught and recommendation for improvement’, aimed at presenting that to understand the quality and areas of four component of administrative, teaching, student evaluation and inclusive tasks in everyday classroom. It supports the theme in the article and studying satisfaction of the teachers after training, whether knowledge and hands-on teaching tasks provided were successful to prepare them for real classroom teaching to children with special needs and relates the main concept that the suitable training programme and training model include special education student, teachers, teacher trainees and primary school.

➤ ‘Spoken Communication Skills taught at English language institutes as a second language’ published by Farhan Uddain Raja. (2013). It supports the theme in the article and methods used of oral communication competence in English language and relates the main concept that the suitable spoken communication skills taught according to the learners level. This study aimed to explore the various methods used to accomplish oral communication competence in English language institutes.

Research questions:

1. Are the DIET trainees from regional medium background able to teach the learners in primary schools in English medium?
2. Is it feasible to introduce English as a medium of instruction in government schools before making the teachers ready to teach in English?
3. Is it possible to excel the DIET trainees in communication skills without English teacher educators in maximum number of colleges?

Objectives

1. To bring out the status of DIET trainees in rural colleges to find out the reasons for their poor communication skills.
2. To suggest the measures for improving communication skills among rural trainees
3. To prepare DIET trainees for workplace so that they can teach English in primary schools.

Methodology

- The researcher went to the DIET colleges to enquire whether the trainees had any knowledge in English subject and communication skills.
- The researcher observed the classes and took data through questionnaire from the DIET teachers whether the existing course is helpful to the trainees.
- The researcher took interviews of government DIET teachers and trainees and researcher analysed the questionnaire to which they responded.

Data collection

The researcher used the tools and sample size 40.

1. Questionnaire
 2. Classroom observation
 3. Interviews
-
- The researcher prepared questionnaire for government DIET trainees. The questionnaires consisting 12 questions on The Teaching of English at DIET Colleges in Andhra Pradesh. The researcher went and collected data through questionnaires from all the districts.

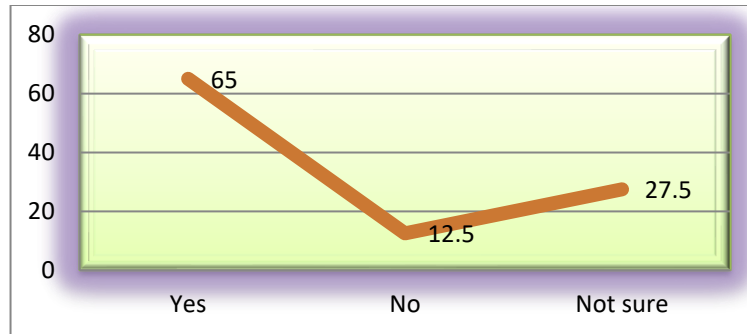
➤ The researcher observed the DIET classes, where the teacher educator taught the lesson in English and sometimes by using the mother tongue. But trainees do not respond in English. Four or five trainees only responded in English, remaining trainees responded in mother tongue so the researcher noticed that there is a need for English language and speaking skill. And the trainees went for the internship teaching to government primary schools. They are facing many problems in teaching of English because of pronunciation problems, speaking problem in English, trainees interact some children and remaining children did not interact in the class, children made the noise as some of the trainees could not handle the classes effectively. Some of the trainees classes okay.

➤ The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews from all district government DIET trainees, but all trainees chose to interview in Telugu (mother tongue) and did not prefer to use English. The researcher requested them to use English but they were not confident. Few trainees were interviewed in English, so the researcher understood how much they teach children in English and how to deal with teaching. In view of this situation, it is strongly recommended to train the trainees on how to teach the subject in a communicative method.

Analysis of Data:

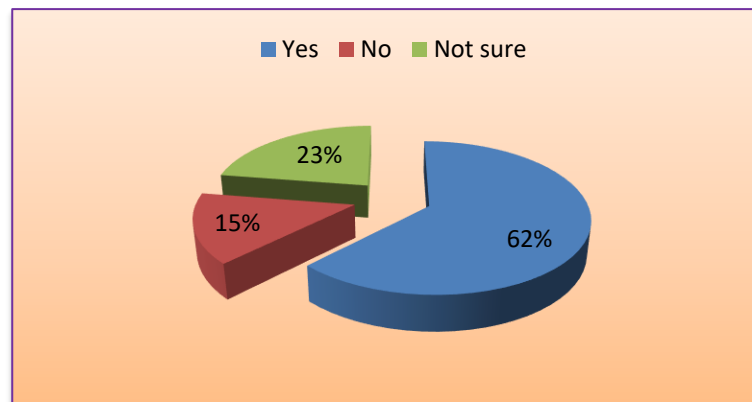
The researcher distributed the DIET trainees the questionnaires consisting of 8 questions on The Teaching of English at DIET Colleges. The following is the interpretation:

1. Are you struggling with lack of knowledge in English?



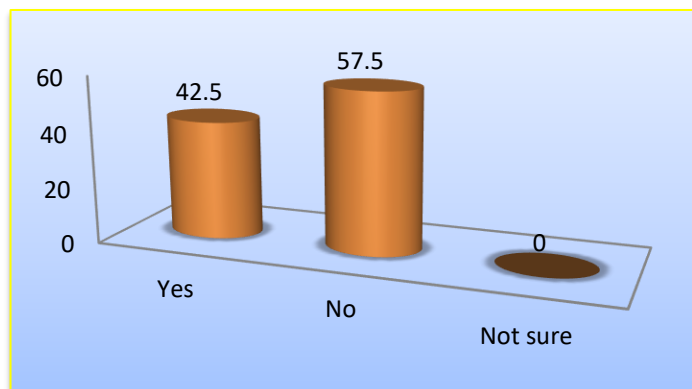
From the above figure-1 it can be interpreted that out of 40 respondents, 65% trainee teachers said yes, 12.5% teachers said that no and 22.5% teachers said that not sure. So maximum numbers of trainees around 65 to 80% are facing problems in understanding English.

2. While you go for practice teaching, do you teach with teaching learning material (TLM) in class effectively?



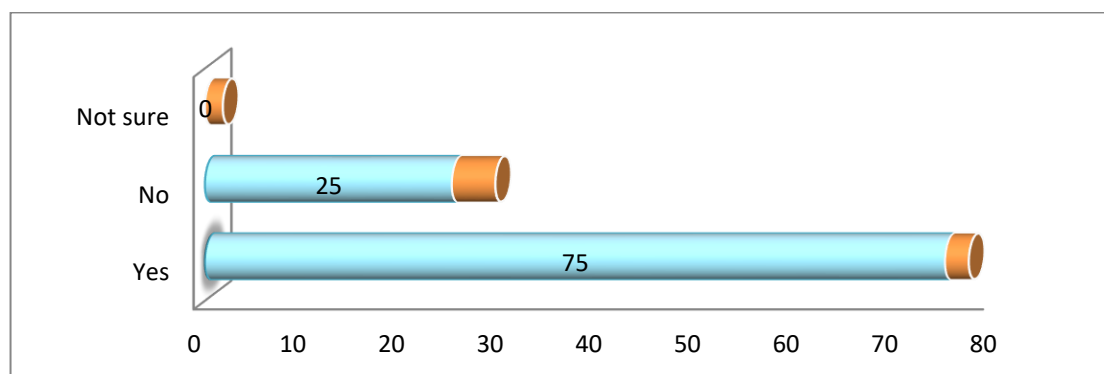
From the above figure-2 it can be interpreted that out of 40 respondents, 62% trainee teachers ticked yes, 15% trainees ticked that no and 22.5% trainees gave response as not sure. Though majority of seemed to use TLM around 35% trainees are still not engaged with TLM.

3. Do you have English lecturer in your college?



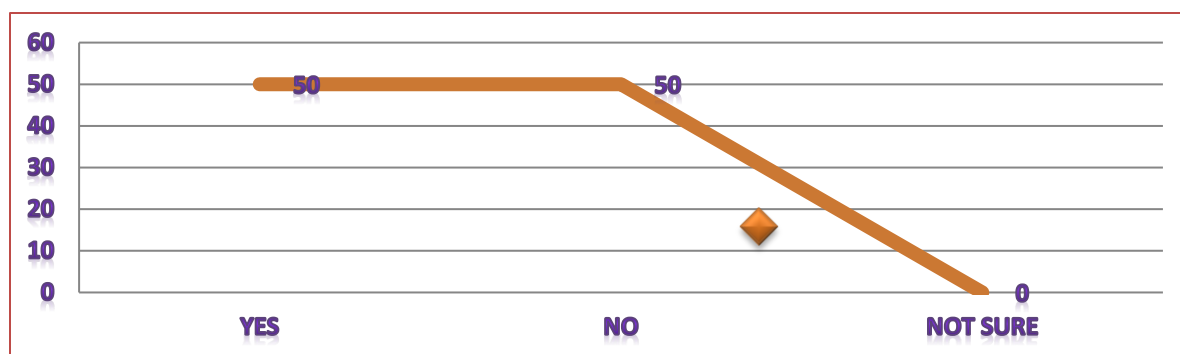
From the above **figure-3** it can be interpreted that out of 40 respondents, 42.5% trainee teachers said yes, 57.5%. However majority of the DIET colleges are suffering from short fall of English lecturers due to non recruitment of faculty by the state government.

4. Does your English lecturer follow the syllabus prescribed in your textbook?



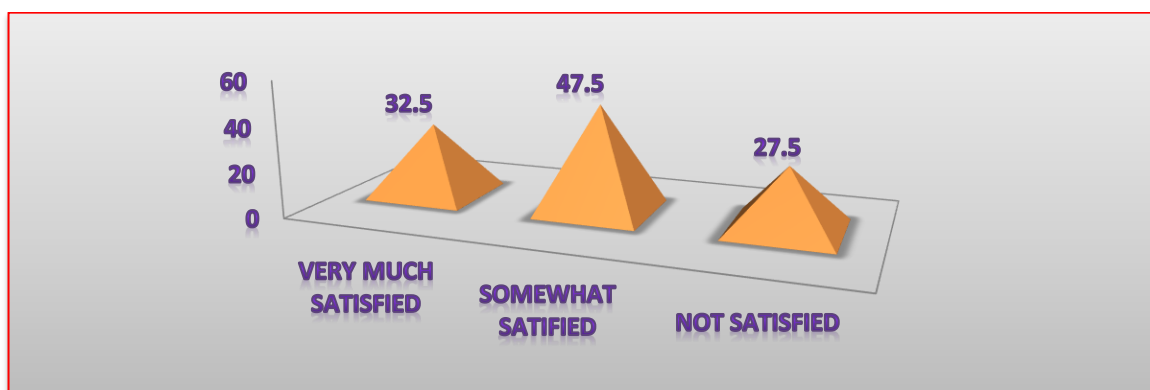
From the above **figure-4** it can be interpreted that out of 40 respondents, 75% trainee teachers said yes, 25% trainees said that no. Hence 25% of English lecturers are supposed that they are not following prescribed syllabus instated they might be teaching from other sources or neglecting teaching neither of the sources.

5. Even do you have a computer lab in your college?



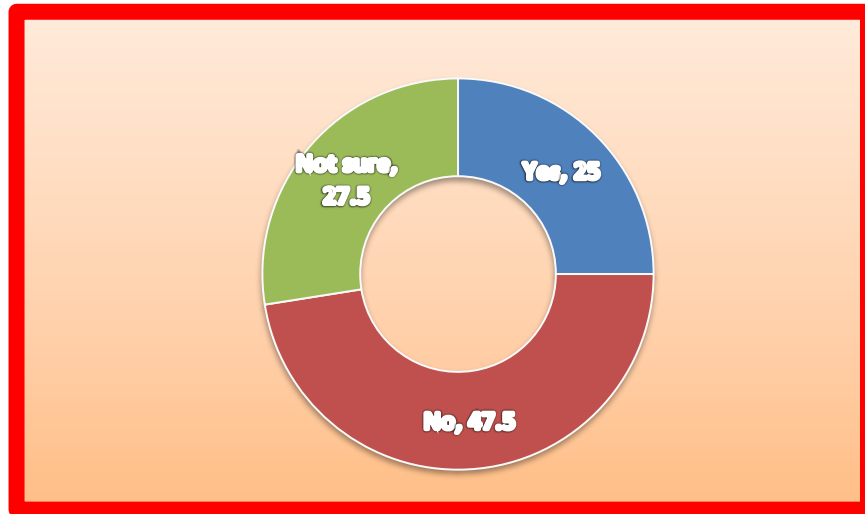
From the above **figure-5** it can be interpreted that out of 40 respondents, 50% trainee teachers said yes, 50% teachers said that no. So half of the DIET colleges are not equipped with technology in teaching and it is a question how can the trainee teachers adapt to digital world.

6. **How are you satisfied with the techniques and approaches taught to you and found in your Methods of Teaching English textbook?**



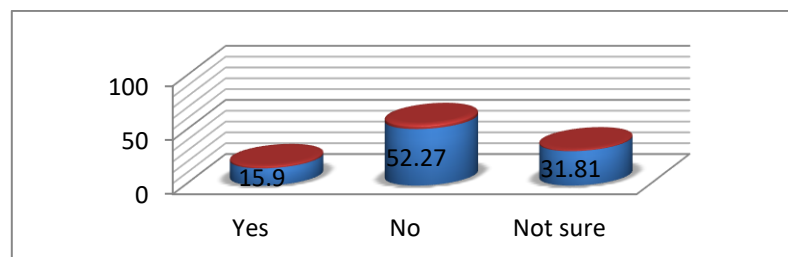
From the above **figure-6** it can be interpreted that out of 40 respondents, 32.5% trainee teachers said very much satisfied, 47.5% teachers said that somewhat satisfied and 27.5% teachers said that not satisfied. So around 65% trainees are not understood the advantages of different methods and techniques.

7. Do you feel that the DIET English textbook and the primary school English textbooks relate with each other?



From the above *figure-7* it can be interpreted that out of 40 respondents, 25% trainee teachers said yes, 47.5% teachers said that no and 27.5% teachers said that not sure. Hence 75% responses given a sign that there is no relationship between both the textbooks and the curriculum and syllabus for DIET trainees need to be modified so that it can be helpful to prospective teachers and it should establish proper relationship.

8. Are you able to cope up with the input given in your training and teaching in English medium at primary schools?



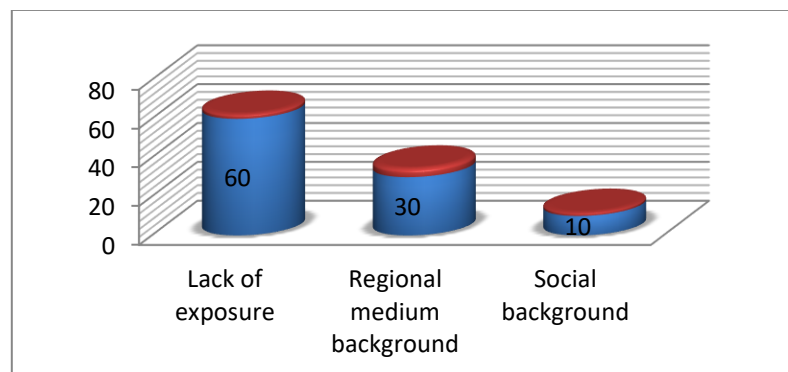
From the above **figure-8** it can be interpreted that out of 40 respondents, 15.90% trainee teachers said yes, 52.27% teachers said that no and 31.81% teachers said that not sure. Most of the trainees felt that they are unable to manage between the training they get at DIETs and the work they do in primary schools.

The researcher observed the classes and had informal discussions with the teacher educators (Lecturers) of their opinion on short fall of English teacher educators in DIET colleges and asked them as following.

A question to Teacher Educators

Why are the teacher trainees unable to handle primary classes in English medium?

Figure-1



From the above **figure-1** it is found that 60% respondents expressed that the problem is because of lack of language exposure, 30 % of the respondents felt that regional medium background and 10% said that it is social background. However it seemed to be a problem that the trainees do not have enough exposure to English language and only the training period cannot give them the competence.

Analysis and findings:

Based on the findings, the researcher suggested that a few measures and remedies

Results

- The researcher found from the study that there is no use at all by introducing English as a medium of instruction in primary schools before the government taking steps to strengthen teacher education and teacher training especially with regard to English as a medium of instruction.
- The state government needs to examine whether the aim and goal that introducing English from 1st standard onwards is achieved without making the primary teacher competent.
- However the teacher education should be strengthened in terms of enhancing communicative competence among the teacher trainees by recruiting enough staff (teacher educators) in language pedagogy and also the input that is given in training must be related and associated with the practical classroom transaction and the skills and exercises in textbooks.
- There is a need for special course in communicative English in DIET colleges in Andhra Pradesh.
- This communicative course can be aimed to enhance speaking skills through dialogues and debate, group discussion and conversation, role play in given situation through various functions of the language.
- However the syllabus for DIET trainees needs to be revised and enough faculty should be recruited to meet present challenges in information and communication technological world. And also adequate TLM to be developed digitally and they must be demonstrated by the teacher educators how, where, when and why is used each TLM in order to making understand learners

appropriately. As far as it is concerned, approaches, methods, and techniques are practically exercised in different situations in language learning.

Conclusion

Everybody accept that English is a language that should be learnt. Without learning the language, we cannot imagine the very important career to lead a life. Teacher trainees in government DIET colleges have no required communication skills and are not proficient. Trainees in those colleges are poor in English. Even though they complete their college education, they are unable to speak and write in English at the basic level. If the trainees take up internship teaching it is very difficult to teach and deal a class for them in primary schools. In order to improve the skills of the trainees, trainees should be taught by proficient DIET lecturers who have good command over the English language. English lecturer deals techniques, tasks, and way of pronunciation of words. But the researcher observed that English classes are being taught by other lecturers who teach maths, social and science in more government DIET colleges. English lecturers should be provided in all government DIET colleges in order to improve communicative skill of trainees in Andhra Pradesh. This research paper also highlights the trainees need for English language speaking skills at primary school level and DIET college level.

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Web Link:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305471635_Spoken_Communication_Skills_taught_at_English_Language_Institutes_as_a_second_language

Quality and Research in Higher Education

Gyan Books Pvt.Ltd New Delhi 2020 ISBN 978-93-5324-230-5 Rs: 1950

By Dr Kamalakar (edited book)

Book Reviewed by Dr Kandi Kamala, Asst Professor

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The book covers number of issues. It included estimation of enrolment rate in higher education at all India level and at State and district levels with alternative sources of data. It also includes the estimation of enrolment rate at disaggregate level by various groups (such as scheduled caste, scheduled tribe, other backward castes and higher castes, women, religious groups and economic groups like self-employed and wage labour, groups based on income level and poor –non-poor). Some papers deal with the issue of quality and excellence in higher education. The issues related to the teachers formed the main component of the studies on the quality of higher education. The other issues, the studies addressed, relate to academic reform, privatization of higher education and financing of higher education. The results of these studies have helped in developing the Approach and Strategy of the 12th Plan for higher education. Since these studies are based on serious research and examination of official data, the findings are new and insightful in many ways. These studies not only bring about the progress made so far but also point towards the emerging problems faced by the higher education system in the country. The findings of the study also suggest the possible way out.

The higher education in India has witnessed many fold increase in its institutional capacity since independence. The studies observed that notwithstanding this many fold increase

in the enrolment it is still relatively low by international comparison. Besides the studies bring to light the problem of regional imbalance as well as inter-social groups imbalances in enrolment rate in term of male female inter – caste inter-religion inter occupation and poor non poor disparities in the attainment in enrolment the book also highlighted the issue of quality above all the studies analyze the problem of under financing of higher education. The entire system of higher education – from under graduate colleges to central universities, including institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology, suffers from a severe shortage of quality teachers. Not only in quality, but also in terms of number of teachers, almost all institutions are facing a high degree of shortage. Second, a large number of institutions of higher education have very Higher Education in India Emerging Challenges poor quality infrastructure – classrooms, lecture halls, libraries, laboratories, playgrounds, and facilities for accommodation of students and teachers, and all are working in impoverished conditions. High technology based laboratories; smart classrooms etcare severely limited in number. Third, we do have a small number of high quality institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology, Indian Institutes of Management, Indian Institutes of Information Technology, central universities, central laboratories, etc., but all, working in isolation, have very little effect on the vast system, having no horizontal or vertical linkages. Fourth, the curriculum and the pedagogic methods that are currently in practice are found to be no more relevant for the country's transformation into a vibrant knowledge society of the 21st century associated with a new industrial revolution (industry 4.0), artificial intelligence, and an altogether new knowledge society. Fifth, the inefficient structures and mechanisms of governance that we have, their own adverse effects on the overall environment, which result in demotivated teaching faculty, dissuaded student community and lacklustre research output. The severe shortfall of funds that almost every institution faces is perhaps one of

the most important reasons for the crisis in higher education. While the small number of central institutions tend to focus on quality and standards, the large number of state-level higher education institutions aim to expand higher education, rather massification. The state level institutions, in their task, heavily depend upon private sector. As a result, today we have one of the largest private systems of higher education in the world, which depends exclusively on student fees. In fact, growth in private universities, private colleges and other institutions of private higher education which are based on pecuniary motives, has Foreword vii been alarming, unregulated and somewhat chaotic, producing devastating effects on the quality of and equitable access to higher education and on the values that education imparts among the youth.. While the union government and some states have taken important policy initiatives in the recent past towards reforming higher education, they are found to be not sufficient. The book edited by Dr G. Kamalakar, chapters were intensively discussed Addresses a wide variety of issues relating to higher education in India, I am sure, it will attract the wide attention of all those who are engaged in higher education development in the country. We hope that academic administrators, policy makers, education instructors and researchers will find the insights of these studies of use for various purposes.

Bio note of Author

Mr Madhabananda Panda was born on 25th November 1952 at Balarampur Talagarh, in Jajpur district of Odisha, India. He has served as a teaching faculty in the Department of English, SVM college Jagatsinghpur from 1980-96 and Kendrapada Autonomous college affiliated to Utkal University Odisha from 1996-2012. A keen observer of nature, a lover of literature, Panda has penned many short stories and poems to his credit including translated works. A prolific writer of children's literature in Odia, Mr Panda is truly a writer of great caliber. His writings have appeared in magazines like *Sansara*, *Suna Bhauni*, *Meenabazaar*, *Shishulekha*, *Prajatantra* etc. His poetry collections include *Kagaja Danga*, *Baguli Nani*, *Kuhuka Pedi*, *Palavuta*, *Kie Pariba Kahi* (quiz), *Nanabaya Gita*, *Nilakainn Pain Ketoti Kabita* etc. His story collections include *Nakua*, *Mamunka Pakhaku Chithi*, *Kathuria O Budha Saguna*. His translated works include *Mahufena* (story collection) and Milton's *Paradise Lost Book I*, Kalidasa's *Rutu Sanghara* into Odia which have received appreciation from the readers. He is also going to publish some other books in Odia and English for children.

Bio Note of Interviewer

Dr Pramod Kumar Das teaches at the School of Languages (English), KIIT Deemed University, Bhubaneswar. A Ph.D and MPhil both in English Literature (EFLU, Hyderabad); he has done his M.A. in the same subject from Utkal University, Bhubaneswar. He has completed PGCTE and PGDTE from EFLU and PGDCE from UoH, Hyderabad, India. He translates Odia literary pieces into English. He has contributed chapters to *Classroom Tasks in English: A Resource Book for Multilingual Teaching*. Eds. Anand Mahanand, Amit Kumar, Subhasis Nanda. New Delhi: Viva Books, (2019), *Contemporary Women's Writing in India*. Eds. Varun Gulati and Mythili Anoop. U.S.: Lexington Books, 2014, *Beeja-mantra and Other*

Stories by Pratibha Ray (Trans. Anand Mahanand and Pramod K Das; Ed. Jayashree Mohanraj. Delhi: Authors Press, (2014), *Sahitya Akademi Award Winning English Novels*. Ed. Vivekanand Jha & Dr Rajnish Mishra. Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 2013 etc. His book reviews, author interviews and research publications have appeared in various national and international journals. His areas of interest include Indian Writing in English, English Language Teaching, Indian Literatures and Translation Studies.



(Photo Credit: Madhabananda Panda)

1. PKD. Sir Namaskar. It is a pleasure to meet you. Could you please tell what motivated to enagage in writing and more specifically in childrens' literature.

MNP. When I was in school, I used to write poems and stories but all of these are lost. When I was a lecturer at SVM college, Jagatsinghpur, one student, Santosh Sahoo requested me to give an article to the children's magazine, *Sishufauja* published by him and his teacher. Once Sri Bijay Mohapatra, the editor of a children's magazine, *Sunabhauni* in Odia and *Loving Sister* in English, met me and encouraged me to write poems and stories for children. He made necessary corrections and published these poems and stories in his magazine. He also encouraged me to send articles to *Samsara* which was edited by an eminent editor, Sri Ramakrishna Nanda. Sri Mahapatra also encouraged me to publish books for children.

2.PKD.Were they any challenges while engaging with writing in the initial stage of your writing career ? If yes, how did you overcome those?

MNP.I had not read any books on childrens literature. Sri Bijay Mohapatra's *Sunabhauni* was a source of inspiration. In the initial stage, I had a fascination for Sanskritized books but Sri Mohapatra asked me to write simple and straight-forward words and to avoid using complex words as far as possible. Gradually, I developed a taste for simple words, alternative words etc.

3.PKD.What is your work schedule so far as writing is concerned?

MNP. During service period, there was little free time in the day. So I preferred to write at night. However, there can be no fixed time for writing. During holidays, I write in the morning hours but my preference was to write at night.

4. PKD. What was your first publication? How was your experience to see your publication?
MNP. In *Sishulekha* and *Sunabhauni*, some of my writings were published but I would refer to a poem 'Baichadhei' in *Sishulekha* which was a renowned children's magazine at that time. My first published book was *Kagaja Danga*, a book of poems for children. I was primarily writing for children who belonged to the age group of 9-15.

5. PKD. Where do you get raw materials to design your stories and poems?

MNP. Nature abounds in raw materials for any kind of writing. Besides, human society and lives of people also provide raw materials for writing.

6. PKD. Many of your stories and poems centres around the theme of bird and animals. What is the reason behind it?

MNP. Generally children love birds and animals. So, they are interested to read about birds and animals. *The Panchantra* is a famous example where birds and animals are in conversation. So, I chose to give importance to animals and birds in my writings.

7. PKD. Child psychology is one of the central foci of your writings. Your writings provide a strong and positive message to readers. Could you please elaborate on this.

MNP. Children are very curious by nature. So it is better to write about what attracts them. Modern children are exposed to mobile phones, computer, cinema like 'Chhota Bhim' etc. So articles with a scientific touch may be written.

8. PKD. Your poetry collections like *Kagaja Danga*, *Baguli Nani* and *Kuhaka Pedi* focuses on moral lessons, environmental awareness, aesthetics etc. What motivates you to highlight these in your writings?

MNP. I believe that entertainment and education or teaching should go hand in hand. Only entertainment may amuse them but may not impress them. Only teaching or advice may appear to be dry. Teaching with entertainment may be more effective.

9. PKD. In contrast to your other writings, the poetry collection titled *Nilakain Pain Ketoti Kabita* is an exception in its theme. It largely focusses on the feeling of love. Your thoughts on this.

MNP. This book is a poem of love. It was primarily meant to entertain some close friends. Some of them suggested to publish a book of these poems. Prof. Nanda Kishore Parida, former Principal of Kendrapara College read these poems and gave his green signal for publication of this book.

10. PKD. What challenges did you face while translation Milton's *Paradise Lost Book I* into Odia? How did you overcome those?

MNP. *Paradise Lost* Book I and II were prescribed for our PG course. I was deeply in love with these two portions of *Paradise Lost*. I found it very difficult to translate. However, I took help of one Indian edition of interpretation and had to labour very hard to translate.

11. PKD. How do you see the future of Odia childrens' literature?

MNP. There are many promising writers and poets for children in Odia. Many magazines are also being published. Very often I feel that researchers should take up children's literature for their research work.

12. PKD. How did folk literature influence you in writing stories for children?

MNP. In spite of computers and mobile phones, folk tales have also their influence and attraction. We listen to folktales from our grand parents. These folk tales may be given scientific touch through mobiles, computers etc.

13. PKD. What is your message to young writers of children's literature?

MNP. I have also miles to go. I am not qualified enough to advice young writers. However, I feel that scientific events, current affairs should be given importance to impress and influence

modern-age children. Children should be made aware of the protection of the environment, evil effects of use of plastic, bursting crackers etc.

PKD. Thank you Sir for those inputs.
