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Lokaratna is the e-journal of the Folklore Foundation, Bhubaneswar. It 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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From the Desk of the Chief Editor

Narratives whether written or oral, visual or performative, contains the character, events, place and time. The transformation is manifold, involving the customs, costumes, beliefs, and expressive words for the purpose. The narrative bears tradition and also individual talent. An oral tradition is a community act. The singer-audience interaction stimulates the listeners, and the presence of the audience encourages the singer to frame mental text while singing. Every performance is unique since it is recreated; therefore, the oral and performative acts always have variations. The action in the literature is visible in the mirror of the mind when it is read out since it is an individual act and has an indirect relationship between the writer and readers. Visual narrative art is also an individual act in modern times, but in traditional societies, it is a small group activity. The narratives painted on the walls of the house or sacred centers contain the themes of divine and human relationships in the background of nature. This constitute of nature-culture relationship.

This volume focuses on performance. The articles present in this volume, one way or the other, represent performance based on their cultural context. An ethnographer's study is also a performance act in which space and time are manifested through its situated symbols. Meaning is embedded in the symbols and also in the narration.

Bringing out *Lokaratna* is a selfless, dedicated editorial team work through which there is a spirit of promoting the new scholars and highlighting senior scholars for knowledge sharing. *Lokaratna*, in the last fifteen years, has had no policy of price contribution with the hope that the writers of *Lokaratna* would contribute their knowledge for posterity. Their intellectual contribution will be perpetuated through a selfless act, not just to get it published and add value to their professional career. We wish that the scholars connect and suggest the improvisation of *Lokaratna*.

Since 2021, *Lokaratna* has been a biannual journal, accommodating as many as articles in the journal. It is a matter of pleasure that young scholars contribute qualitative articles. We don't need a tree which would bear fruit, but we plant a tree which will bear fruit. The scholars should be provided with an opportunity to flourish. The world has witnessed the academics and believes that the people who engage in the act of intellectual activity also have a stage of development and will to grow.

I am thankful to the editorial board for their hard work and thankful to the contributors who have enriched this volume with their valuable fieldwork and desk work.

Ratha Yatra

Dated the 1st July,2022

Mahendra Kumar Mishra
Editor in Chief, Lokaratna
Folklore Foundation, India

From the Executive Editor



Cultural Performances, Memory, and Identity

The theme for this issue of *Lokaratna* is cultural performances. Cultural performances are executed not for artificial occasions, but are generally part of rituals related to faith, social ceremonies, and life cycle celebrations. Inherited from the earlier generations through memories and imitation, they have social and cultural functions. They are related to identity of people in the world and perceptions of subjects that transcend the world. They have impact on the body, psyche and the soul. There might be some performances that are well-known but there also exist certain performances which are lesser known, but they are not insignificant as far as their social and cultural importance is concerned. They are required to be taken seriously as subjects of exploration.

It is heartening to note that we have a few articles in this issue that attempt to explore the lesser-known traditions of folklore. One of the pieces, for instance, is SuramaBera's article titled "Retracing Memory: An Inquiry into the Lesser-known Folk Performance Narratives of Purulia." Here, the author highlights some lesser-known oral traditions that are prevalent in the Purulia region as part of the folk performances. With the emergence of digital media, these forms are thriving and proliferating a great deal. She studies their significance as mode of communication in the context of a digitized circulation and market economy in a global world. In his article "The Narrativized History of the *Gosani Mangal* Epic: Orality, Indigeneity and Mnemonics in a Folk Metatext," Meeraz Hoque describes the *Gosani Mangal Kavya* and its significance as a traditional oral narrative. Among its features it also has the performative aspects of storytelling that are prevalent in Kamtapura regions of Bengal. The article "Megalithic Tradition among the Karbis of Kamrup District, Assam" by Garima Thakuria represents the tradition and performance of erecting megalithic monuments by the Karbis in the Kamrup district of Assam.

The article “Evoking Lord Krishna: Practice of Kirtan in North Bengal” by Manojit Chanda introduces another popular form of performance called *Kirtan*. He provides a historical overview of this folk form, its philosophy, types and its practice in the northern part of Bengal. Arnapurna Rath and Adyasha Behera in their article “Lost Letters of Odisha’s Bhakti Poetry: A Critical Study of Select Poetic Compositions of Bhima Bhoi” attempts to outline and analyse the forgotten traditions of Odisha’s Bhakti movement by exploring the poetic compositions of Bhima Bhoi, the great and popular saint poet of Odisha. As we know, the orality and lyrical aspects of Bhima Bhoi’s poems contribute to the musical features that make them endearing, memorable, pleasant, and popular. The authors also look at the reception of these compositions among the masses. The article titled “Blessings of Basdevas at our doorstep: Cultural Sustainability Concerns Regarding a Fading Nomadic community” by Nidhi Tiwari and Neha Purohit studies the cultural and spiritual practices of a nomadic community called Basdeva in Madhya Pradesh. Pradyumna Bag’s article “Cultural Construction of Kalahandi’s Droughts” studies people’s perceptions of draughts in Kalahandi. It also studies their perceptions of its causes and measures they adopt to stop it and to cope with the resultant hardships. Jyoti Biswas in her article “Anthropological Documentation of Cultural Heritage in British Period: Dr. James Wise, Sir Herbert Hope Risley on Namasudra Community” gives a profile of the Namasudra community as depicted in British ethnography. She stresses on the song and music tradition of this community.

In the Language and pedagogy section we have articles on different aspects of Language and language teaching and learning. Padmini Shankar’s article “Role and efficacy of tasks in developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge-base” is a study on the role of tasks in developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge base. Ankita Swetaparna in her article “A Critical Look into the Social Impact of Language: A Comparative Study of two National Dailies” discusses the role of language and its impact in conveying meaning. She also discusses how language can play a determining factor in conveying meaning. SrirupaPodddar in her article “Challenges of English as a medium of instruction: Teachers’ Perspective of teaching English at higher secondary level classrooms in Tripura” discusses teachers’ perspectives on teaching of English. Purna Bahadur Kadel in his article “Challenges of Promoting Professional Identities of Women English Teachers through Professional Organizations” studies the challenges faced by women English teachers in the promotion of professional identities.

The Interview Section has a Conversation between Professor D. Venkat Rao and Dr K. Lavanya. Professor Rao, who has a pioneering role in bringing performative studies into

the syllabus of PG courses at EFL University, Hyderabad shares his ideas on issues related to culture, memory, and identity. Thus, the volume becomes an interesting carnival of readings on the subject—cultural performances. We thank the contributors for their wonderful pieces. We also thank the Editorial Board members for reviewing the articles. We are thankful to Dr Monali Sahu Pathange for designing such a beautiful cover for this volume too! Thank you, Dr Mahendra K. Mishra, for your encouragement and guidance. So to our readers, we offer this beautiful gift of *Lokaratna*!

Anand Mahanand

Executive Editor

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Call for Papers

We invite original and unpublished research articles in Folklore, Literature, Culture, and Pedagogy, including English Language Teaching, for the 15th volume of *Lokaratna*, a peer-reviewed International online journal with ISSN: 2347-6427. Contributors are requested to adopt the following guidelines of (APA manual -7th edition) to write their papers:

- Font - Times New Roman with 12 font size
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- The paper should have an abstract of 150 -200 words.
- About 5 key words should follow the abstract.
- For in-text citation and references, please follow the APA style (7th Edition).

Articles can be submitted through an attachment. It is necessary for the authors to attach plagiarism Check Reports/Certificates of their papers along with their papers.

Deadline for the submission of the article is **31.10.2022** and could be mailed to:

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FOLKLORE

Retracing Memory: An Inquiry into the Lesser-known Folk Performance Narratives of Purulia

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Abstract

Human history can be mapped based on dominant modes of communication via cultural forms in a certain epoch of human civilisation. These cultural forms are essentially cultures of memory where the articulation of generationally imparted memories happens through foregrounding the body; various types of performances are articulation of memories of generations as they disseminate memories through the media of speech, gestural and performative or oral compositions. Purulia, a district of West Bengal, is the microcosmic representation of India with several rituals and folk performative traditions of the millennium. The region is famous for Chhou dance as well as *Jhumur*, *Tusu* and *Bhadu* songs. Apart from these popular folk song traditions, there are several oral and performing traditions in Purulia, which are unheard of, but continue to evolve even in this era of digital media. The performing traditions of Purulia belong to the fundamental communication system of speech and gesture through which people express themselves even today. This paper aims to explore how these lesser-known performing traditions of Purulia are thriving even in this epoch of digital revolution and argues that the ineluctable force of memory plays a crucial role in the survival of these performance narratives.

Keywords: performative traditions, folk song traditions, memory, rituals, speech and gesture

I. Introduction

Purulia reverberates with the enchanting melodies of multitudinous song cultures which are a lifeline to the inhabitants of the district. Purulia is often known as ‘*ChhouJhumurerDesh*’ or the land of *Chhou* and *Jhumur*. *Chhou* dance and *Jhumur* songs are indeed the most famous performing traditions of the region. But many of us remain unaware that this region is home to a vast array of performative traditions besides the famous *Chhou* dance and *Jhumur* songs. There are almost nine song genres besides the famous genre of *Jhumur* which are still thriving here in this age of digital advancement. Most of these song-cultures are an inextricable part of some festivals and are sung during the time of those particular festivals. As the people of rural Bengal live in an agrarian society, most of their festivals are related to the agricultural work which are celebrated in different seasons. These cultural forms or performances belong to the most primordial system of communication, i.e. speech, and gesture.

Human history can be mapped in terms of different communication systems that evolved through different historic ages from oral to scribal, print to audiovisual and to the contemporary digital media. Each communication practice has its uniqueness and limitations, but they never replaced the previous communication systems. The most primordial communication system still used by us is that of speech and gesture, and the elemental force exerted by this system can never be replaced by any other communicational technologies. Walter. J. Ong (2013) has emphasized this ineluctable force of speech and the orality of language when he says, “Oral expression can exist and mostly has existed without any writing at all, writing never without orality” and “the basic orality of language is permanent.” (pp. 6-8)

II. Memory

The vast range of performing traditions and song-cultures of Purulia belong to this fundamental communication system of speech and gesture through which people articulate their emotions and thoughts even today. These performing traditions are actually “immemorial articulations of life” (Rao, 2016, p. 39) which emerge through “the embodied forms of acoustic, gestural rhythms, visual and verbal performatives of the being: they are the monstrations of existence.” (Rao, 2016, p. 39) These cultural forms, therefore, can be termed as cultures of memory where the generationally imparted memories are articulated through foregrounding the living body of human beings. The diverse range of Indian cultural forms is primarily a-lithic in nature. Cultures can be broadly bifurcated into the lithic culture and a-lithic culture. The word lithic comes from the Greek word *lithos* which means stone. Thus,

lithic culture accommodates all the scribal communicational technologies which accumulate memories externally, outside the organic body of human beings, “in material substrates and structure”. (Rao, 2016, p. 34) On the other hand, a-lithic cultures do not depend on this external “archivation of memory” (Rao, 2016, p. 34) and preserve the memory within the organic body of the performers and transmit them from generation to generation through speech and gesture. As D. Venkat Rao (2016) expounds:

Memories are intangible. Two distinct kinds of memories bind and unbind, continue and discontinue the phenomenal and non-phenomenal relations and existences in the world. One set contains externalized and objectified memories, which are created by the work of hand and face. The other set figures the enacted and embodied memories that circulate across all sorts of materialities and whose relays are intractable and indeterminable. Lithic or glyphic technologies make possible the objectification and archivation of the memory. In contrast to that, the a-lithic “technologies” (of gesture and speech) articulate the work of the face and the body. The lithic mode preserves memory externally, outside the body in material substrates and structure. The a-lithic mode does not quantify and objectually externalize memories; it brings forth memories through embodied articulations. Here the body is the most decisive and articulate substrate. (p. 34)

From immemorial times, human beings had been using song-cultures to express their emotions, feelings, anguish, anger, despair and desolation. This can be observed in the song-cultures of Purulia as well. The people of this region express their pain, pleasure, agony, excitement through these performing traditions and festivals which are lifeline to them. Most of these song-cultures are surviving without lithic dependency. The performers do not refer to any external storage of cultural memories. They learn these songs from a very tender age, they grow up listening to these songs which are an essential part of their life. Therefore, when they perform these songs with their bodily engagements, they bring forth the transgenerational memory of their culture which they have inherited from their past generations and they become the guardians of these a-lithic memories.

Therefore, the song lyrics or song-texts become the “mnemo-texts” which are basically enacted and embodied compositions which “are open ended in the sense that they proliferate with augmentations and varies repetitions...are organized on the epistemic figure of memory—memory as singular and incalculable occurrence or emergence.” (Rao, 2016, pp. 82-83) For instance, when the inhabitants of Purulia receive a narrative from the Ramayana or Mahabharata, they transform it into numerous cultural forms. They compose different types of *Jhumur* songs on that particular episode. They can also compose *Bihar geet* out of the same narrative. They can compose *Chhoupalas* on that episode as well. Most of the composers of Purulia lack formal education. Despite that, they can create songs spontaneously without any dependency on scribal technologies. This is known as responsive reception which is the predominant nature of Indian culture. What helps these people to compose several cultural forms is *shruti*¹ and *smriti*². They listen to some narratives and then transform and transmit the received narrative into multifarious cultures of memory.

Purulia, a district in Eastern India, is the microcosmic representation of India with several rituals and folk performative traditions of the millennium. The region is famous for *Jhumur*, *Tusu* and *Bhadu* songs. Apart from these popular folk song traditions, there are other oral traditions which continue to thrive in this epoch of digital revolution. Some of these lesser-known performance narratives of Purulia which will be discussed in this paper are: 1. *Manasamangal* and *Jaanth* 2. *BihaarGeet* 3. *PaitkarerGeet*.

III. Cultures of Memory

I. *Manasamangal* and *Jaanth*

Purulia is reverberated with the songs of *Manasamangal* throughout the Bengali month of *Shravan*. These songs are locally known as *Jaanth*. There are quite a few teams in Purulia who perform *Jaanth* songs. The teams generally consist of 10-15 members which include 1 harmonium player, 1 or 2 people who play kettle drum, 1 who plays flute, 1 who plays a musical instrument *kartal*, 4-7 people who act as *dohari*(chorus). The communities which participate actively in performing these songs are

¹*Shruti* in Sanskrit refers to the body of religious texts which were heard and the transmitted orally from generation to generation.

²

Smriti comes from the word *Smara* which means remembrance or memory.

Kudmi-Mahatos, Kumbhakar, Sardar, Karmakar, Paramanik, Singh, Kalindi, Rajowar, Dheebar. These performative traditions are the lifeline of the local people. They do not earn much by performing these cultural forms. A team of fifteen members can earn three thousand to five thousand rupees from one performance which includes transportation charge and food. But these performing traditions are still surviving as these soothe the soul of the performers who perform these songs as it brings solace in their life. They perform these *Jaanthgeet* not for the meagre earnings, but for their own pleasure. After a toilsome day, these songs help them to forget their physical pain and transcends them to another world.

Manasa Devi is considered to be the goddess of snakes and is immensely popular in the works of Bengali literature. *Manasa* is worshipped to bring prosperity, fertility as well as to prevent and cure snakebites. She is also known as the destroyer of poison or *Vishahara*. Another name of *Manasa* is *Janguli* or *Janguli Tara*. Besides Hindu scriptures such as *Padma Puran, Brahma VaibartaPuran, Bhagvat*; *Manasa* has also been mentioned in the scriptures of Jainism. According to mythology, she was rejected by her father Lord Shiva, as well as her husband Sage Jaratkaru. According to Puranas, *Manasa* was born to sage Kashyapa and the queen of the serpent kingdom. But the *Mangalkavyas*³ of Bengal has referred her as the daughter of Lord Shiva. According to *Mangalkavya*, Lord Shiva touched a statue built by serpent Vasuki's mother which gave birth to *Manasa*. But Lord Shiva did not accept her as his daughter. She was also abused by Chandni, wife of Lord Shiva. Deserted by her family, *Manasa* descended on earth and tried to gather human devotees. But she was denied the stature of God because of her mixed parentage. After that, she tried to bring calamities to those who rejected and managed to create a group of her devotees. But she failed to convert Chand Sadagar who is an ardent devotee of Lord Shiva. *Manasa* killed all his sons in order to get him converted. The only son who was alive was his youngest son Lakhinder. He was killed as well on his wedding night. Lakhinder's wife Behula finally convinced Chand Sadagar to worship *Manasa* with his left hand. *Manasa* was finally happy as a result she resurrected all his sons. According to *Mangalkavya*, this made *Manasa* a popular goddess among the people of Bengal.

3

Devotional *kavya* which praises folk or local deities.

Manasa Puja is very popular in Purulia. The people of Manbhum region start the preparation for this performative tradition from the thirteenth day of Bengali month Jaisthya. This day is locally known as *Rohoin or Rohini*. In most of the villages, the songs of *Manasamangal* start from the *Rohoin* and continues for the whole month of *Shravan*. In some villages, it continues till *Bhadra Sankranti*. In some areas, people create an idol of Manasa Devi and worship it. One can also observe the use of an earthen pot known as *ghotorbari* instead of the idol. In some parts, people also use the branches of a particular tree known as *SijManasa*. The branches are planted near the *tulsimanacha*⁴ of household on the first *nagpanchami*⁵ of Shravan. In some houses, the branches are also planted on the *nagpanchami* of the month of *Ashar*. These branches are kept in the household till the last day of Durga Puja. On the last day of Durga Puja, the branches are immersed in a nearby river or lake. The local people believe that this branch protects them from natural calamities. They believe that lightning and thunder do not strike the nearby locality for the Bengali months of *Ashar*, *Shravan*, *Bhadra* and *Ashwin* as they have the branches implanted in their household.

It is quite impossible to trace back the exact date of composing *Jaanthgeet* or songs of *Manasa Mangal*. But as it has a link with the verse of *ManasaMangalKavya*, there might be a chance that *Jaanthgeet* are being composed since late 14th Century. As Dr.Shubhash Roy informs, the earliest poet of *Manasa Mangal Kavya* is Hari Dutta who belonged to the late 14th Century(p. 65). So he speculated that these songs were probably first composed during that time. But he also says that there is a chance that the rural women have been composing these songs even before the 14th Century and have been transmitting them orally from generation to generation.

The most popular theme of *Jaanthgeet* revolves around Chand Sadagar's acceptance of Manasa as a goddess. It narrates the story of the deification of Manasa among human beings. Dr. Roy (2015) has collected one such song —

EkdinBholanath Shiv

4

Most of the Hindu house in rural Bengal has *tulsimanacha* in courtyard. Tulsi is planted in the courtyard and a small podium is made surrounding the plant. It is worshipped daily as it considered to be auspicious.

5

Nag Panchami is a day to worship the nagas or snakes which is generally offered on the fifth day of bright half of lunar month of Shravan.

Brishearohan kore gelokaidoherkulemago
GaamarjonakorenBholanathe
Seidintotatikhela kore dekhebindukhoshe pore
Tule dilokomolerpaate
Komolchedonkoriprobeshilopatalpurimaago
JonmoniloBasukirghore. (p. 65)

These songs narrate the story of Manasa's birth. It tells us that Bholanath (Lord Shiva) went to a place called Kalidaha to take shower. During the shower, Lord Shiva notices that a pair of parrots are busy in lovemaking. That creates a sexual desire and as a result, He ejaculates. Lord Shiva carefully collects his reproductive fluid on a lotus leaf which finally enters the underground region which is home to the serpent king Vasuki or Basuki Naag. Finally, Manasa takes birth from that reproductive fluid. As she was born on a lotus leaf, she is also known as Padmavati.

Manasa wants to attain the status of a goddess among common people. Lord Shiva informs her that she must convince Chand Sadagar to worship her as he is the most influential man on earth. But Chand Sadagar is an ardent devotee of Bholanath and he does not worship any other god or goddess. Chand's wife Sanaka secretly starts worshipping Manasa Devi. But as soon as Chand receives this information, he destroys the earthen pot which was being worshipped by his wife. Manasa gets enraged. This wrath of Manasa is aptly represented in the following *Jaanthgeet* of Purulia—

O bad sajili re tuidebirsona

DeikhboBenyatuibanchiskemone. (Roy, 2015, p. 74)

(Manasa here expresses her wrath and vows to take revenge as Chand sadagar has destroyed the event which was organized to worship her.)

Manasa starts destroying the peace of Sadagar's family thereafter. She kills his six sons but remains unable to convince him to accept her as Devi/Goddess. At this point of time, two neighbours (Jhalu and Malu) of Sadagar family go fishing. After many failed attempts they finally manage to catch an earthen pot with their net. This is beautifully rendered in the following *Jaanthgeet*—

JhaluMalu dui bhai machhdhoirtecholo jai

Chherajailemachhuthenakorikiupai

(Roy, 2015, p. 66)

(They talk about their failed attempts in this song. They say that they are unable to catch fish as the fishing net is torn.)

When they found the *ghot or bari* instead of fish, they sing—

Oma podedhorikorinibedan

Kisherbariuthilojaailekohobiboron

(Roy, 2015, p. 73)

(They wonder what to do with the earthen pot and waits for some heavenly command.)

At this point of time, they hear a voice that orders them to take the pot and worship it. Therefore, they take that pot with them, install it in their courtyard and start worshipping Manasa. This narrateme is expressed in the following Jaanthgeet—

Chol Ma keniyejaboamaderighore

Bhoktibhabejopbo Makepremoashrujole

(Roy, 2015, p. 73)

(After receiving the heavenly command, Jhalu and Malu realize the earthen pot should be considered as Manasa Devi. Here they say, “Let’s take Mother with us/ We will worship her with utmost devotion.”)

As a result, they are showered with Manasa’s blessings which fetch them wealth and prosperity. Sanaka receives this news and secretly attends the Manasa Puja. Manasa becomes happy by Sanaka’s conduct and blesses her with a male child. But Sanaka is also informed that if she fails to convince her husband to worship Manasa Devi, this child will get killed by snakebite on his wedding night. But Chand Sadagar remains staunch about his decision to worship one and only Lord Shiva. He abuses Manasa by using verbal slurs in the following song of *Manasa Mangal*—

Jeihostepujimui Dev Shulapani

Seihostenapujibochengmudikaani

(Roy, 2015, p. 67)

(He refuses to worship someone of mixed parentage with the same hand with which he worships Shulapani⁶) The pain of Behula is vividly narrated in the following *Jaanthgeet* when husband Lakhinder dies due to snakebite—

OgoPranonathkidoshechharoamare he

Ekakinibirohinibainchbokyamone

Prantyaajiboamitumarbihone

Uthouthopranonathfaiye jay buk

Tomabina e dashirbanchekiba such

Bidhobajontronaamisohitenaribo

Nishchoitumarshokeprantyaajibo

(Roy 75)

(Behula bemoans the death of her newly-wed husband through this *Jaanthgeet*. She blames her fortune for this untimely death of her husband. She says it is impossible for her to live without him and vows to take her own life as she is unable to endure the pain of living her life as a widow.)

Every culture receives something and responds to it in myriad ways which finally gives birth to multitudinous performative traditions and cultural forms. Especially, in case of India, the receivers are very much active. They do not remain merely passive receivers, they respond to the received cultural forms in their own ways which have created innumerable cultural forms that are inextricable parts of our culture. The relation between *shruti* (heard) and *smriti* (remembered) reflects the culture of responsive reception in case of performative traditions of India. For instance, the people of Purulia quite often listen to the *panchali*⁷ of *Manasa Mangal Kavya*. But they do not limit their roles to the passive listeners. They receive the performative tradition of *panchali* and then transform it to different *palas*⁸ of *Mangal Kavya*. The following conversation is a part of a popular

⁶ Another name of Lord Shiva.

⁷

Kind of narrative folk song

⁸

A type of folk drama which is generally an amalgamation of dance drama and music.

Manasa Mangal pala of Purulia. The main *pala* is dominated by Karuna rasa⁹. But this small act of an otherwise grim *pala* provides comic relief to the audience.

Nera: Thakur shunotobeboli, Thakur shunotobeboli

Lokhindorerbiyehobecholotaritari

Thakur: are kishunaili, ore Nera kishunaili

Ghoretearmonboshenaichol re tarahura

Nera: Dadacheydekh, cheydekh, Bamundadar Thenga

Holhoilasaaper para idikudikbyanka

Thakur: Nera choiltenarechoiltenarehanshathore

TempugarikinediboPurulyarMaanbajare

Tai Neraycholtaritari, Neraicholtaritari

Rastarmaijhedukanpailekhawabo cha pokodi.

(Roy 69-70)

(This is a conversation between two minor characters Nera and Thakur. They are going to search for a suitable wife for Chand Sadagar's son Lakhinder. This conversation is predominated by Hasya Rasa which evokes laughter. The first dialogue is told by Nera who asks Thakur to accompany him to find a suitable woman for Lakhinder as Chand Sadagar has decided his son to get married. Nera also makes fun of the wooden stick which is being carried by Thakur. He says that the wooden stick resembles a snake. In reply to this, Thakur lightheartedly mocks the way Nera walks. He says jokingly that he will buy a mini truck for Nera in order to reach their destination on time. He also adds that they can stop by a small tea stall along the highway to have tea and snacks.)

The *pala* ends on a happy note when Behula successfully convinces her father-in-law to worship Manasa Devi. Chand Sadagar worships her with his left hand which contents Her.

⁹ Karuna Rasa evokes pain. According to Rasa Theory of Indian Aesthetics, as outlined by Bharat Muni in his *Natyashastra*, there are eight Rasas that an aesthetic piece of work like dance form or literary piece, tries to invoke. These can be thought of as eight different kinds of aesthetic experiences which evoke different emotions in us. These are – **Bhayanak** Rasa which evokes fear (colour-black), **Hasya Rasa** (colour- white) which evokes Laughter, **Adbhuta Rasa** (yellow) which evokes wonder, **Rudra Rasa** (red) which evokes anger, **Bibhatsa Rasa**(blue) which evokes disgust, **Shringara Rasa**(green) which evokes love, **Veer rasa**(orange) which evokes valour and **Karuna Rasa** (grey) which evokes pain.

As a result, she resuscitates all seven sons of Sadagar including Behula's husband Lakhinder. This is aptly expressed through a song—

Lokhaibanchilo re Behulahashilo re

Moneranondebanshibajilo re

(Roy, 2015, p. 76)

These *palas* are often developed by the rural people of Purulia who do not have the scope to take recourse to literacy. Indian traditions of shruti (that which is heard) and smriti (that which is remembered) help them to compose such *palas*. They receive the narrative of *Manasa Mangal* by hearing the verses of *Manasa Mangal Kavya* (shruti) and they transform it into a new cultural form by remembering the received narrative (smriti). The performers do not depend on the exteriorization of the memory. They do not use any surrogate receptacles to store the memory. They receive the narrative, store it within their living body and reproduce the narratives through performances by using their bodily gestures and speech. Thus, we can see that Indian culture has vastly proliferated numerous cultural forms through this responsive reception by transforming and transmitting the narratives from one cultural form to another.

Bihar Geet

The word *Biha* means *Biye* (marriage) in the *Rarhi* dialect of Bengal which is considered to be the standard Bengali language. *Bihar geet* means the songs which are performed during a wedding ceremony in Purulia. In this age of digitization, *Bihar geet* is gradually losing its popularity. Earlier, whenever a wedding ceremony used to take place in a village, all the women used to gather around and sing *Bihar geet*. There are numerous rituals (locally known as *leg*) like *ashirvad*¹⁰, *gayeholud*¹¹, *jamai boron*¹², *sindurdaan*¹³, *vidaai*¹⁴ which

¹⁰

Ashirvad is a ritual which is performed before the marriage which marks the confirmation of marriage alliance. The groom's family visits the bride's family and showers her with blessings.

¹¹

Gaye holud is a ritual observed on the day of marriage. During this ritual, turmeric paste and oil is applied on the bride's body.

¹²

The bride's family welcomes the groom as he reaches the venue of marriage, by applying a *bindi* of sandalwood paste on the groom's forehead and sprinkling flowers on him. This ritual is known as *jamai boron*.

¹³

Sindurdaan is the ritual of applying *sindur* or vermilion on bride's forehead.

¹⁴

After the successful completion of marriage, the bride's family bids her goodbye as she leaves for her in-laws' place. This is known as *vidaai*.

are followed during a marriage ceremony. All these rituals are performed with *Bihar Geet* which are generally sung by the elderly women of the villages. These women have hardly taken recourse to literacy. They just gather information about the marriage and compose the songs spontaneously according to the occasions. They don't depend on lithic dependency while composing these songs as they depend on their memory. And this creative force of memory surges out the folk songs which inform the villagers about the families of prospective bride and groom, the name of the person who has fixed the marriage, the venue of the wedding ceremony and the rituals which take place at the places of the bride as well as groom. The following song depicts the ritual of *gayeholud*—

Shonaranchirshonarpracheer

Shonarbasorghor go

Basorghorekopatdiye

Munujaabeshoshurghor go

(Shantikari, 2018, p. 78)

The pain of family members is also expressed beautifully when the bride leaves her parental house—

Bitibidaai kore baba

Chokhye pore raw

Aan baba gayer gamchha

Muchhaidibo raw

(Shantikari, 2018, p. 79)

(The harrowing melody of this song reverberates with the pain of a father who is bidding goodbye to his daughter whom he had brought up with immense love and care for all these years. The word *raw* in the dialectal Manbhumi Bangla means tears. As tears come streaming down the father's face, the daughter asks him to bring a towel to wipe it off.)

The women get so engrossed while singing the songs of *vidaai*, they often start identifying themselves with the bride which makes them sorrowful. This effect is known as a teleo-cultural effect when the performer gets immensely absorbed in his/her own performance and start developing affection for the characters of the performance narratives (Kumar, 2018). This teleo-cultural effect plays a pivotal role in the folk performances. Another wonderful instance of this teleo-cultural effect can be seen when Dr. Kumar (2018) writes about this teleo-cultural effect on Daibaki Kumar, when she sings *Bihar geet* which narrates the excruciating episode of *Vrishketu*'s death from *Mahabharata*, "The painful

story of the butchering of *Vrishketu* by his father Karna is depicted more painfully with an amazingly haunting and melodious wedding song by Daibaki Kumar (a living composer and performer) of Fosko, Purulia. After Daibaki Kumar performs this song, she breaks down in tears.” (p. 21)

PaitkarerGeet

Paitkarergeet is the songs of *Patua* which narrate the mythological stories by using scroll paintings which are known as *Patachitra*. The word *pata* means ‘cloth’ and *chitra* means ‘painting’. *Patachitra* is the art of painting on cloth which is mostly famous in the villages of Midnapore district. *Patachitra* is a visual narrative through which the performers (*Patuas*) depicts the mythological narratives while singing songs. Like all other mnemo-cultural performances, this cultural form too displays the creative dimensions and dexterous expertise of Indian performers and artists. There are three types of *Pat* that are available in Purulia. These are *charkona pat*, *dheeghal pat* and *chokkhudan pot*. *Charkona pat* is drawn on a rectangular cloth, *dheeghal pat* is drawn on several pieces of small clothes which are then joined together to create a bigger scroll. *Chokkhudan pat* is a specialized cultural form of Manbhum which is usually unavailable in the other districts of Bengal. When someone dies, the *patuas* or *paitkars* (the painters who are singers as well) draw the face of the recently demised person and visit his/her family. Then the artisans draw the eyes of the demised person on the *pat*. This ritual is known as *chokkhudan*. Then they compose songs spontaneously and sing about the achievement of the demised person and informs how he will lead his afterlife. Here again, we can see these artisans depend on their non-inscriptional memory, when they gather information about the deceased person, store them within their biological body and produce the “mnemocultural” song-texts of *paitkarergeet* then and there, adapting to the situation. The artisans then give the *pat* to the family members which is then worshipped with various offerings and is finally immersed in local rivers. There is a common belief that this ritual of *chokkhudan* offers a better afterlife to the deceased person.

The themes of the other two *pats* i.e. *charkona pat* and *dheeghal pat* are drawn from mythologies and *Ramayana* as well as *Mahabharata*. One such song is –

BihahoiloRamchandrerhoiloadibash

Pitrishotyopalone Ram gelobonobash

Aage chole Shri Ram pechhute Laxman bhai

Majhkhanete Sita Ma taadersonge jay

(Maji, 2017, p. 57)

(This *paitkarergeet* describes the episode of Lord Ram leaving his kingdom and going to the forest for fourteen years with his brother Laxman and wife Sita.)

Roland Barthes in *Image-Music-Text* observes that texts should be open to multifaceted interpretations through divergent readings. Similarly, these cultural traditions or performance narratives are open to diverse interpretations. These performance texts or the “mnemotexts” use several symbols of body paintings and gestures and facial expressions which express the narratives in diverse ways through the bodily engagement and enable the performers to convey a wider range of feelings and emotions, to interpret, transform and transmit a theme in numerous ways and, by doing so, they attempt to evoke the suppressed feelings of the audience (Acharyya, 2011). One thing that needs to be mentioned here is that the memory in these cultural forms is creative memory. Ruth Finnegan in her *Oral poetry: Its nature, significance and social context* speaks of two types of memories— creative and non-creative. When a song is performed by memorizing the lyrics composed by someone else, it can be said that the songs are subject to non-creative memorization as it lacks originality and creativity. But the folk songs of Purulia are composed spontaneously, and therefore, the memory of these oral traditions is creative. The performative traditions mostly depend on creative memory as every rendition is different from another. Whenever the singers transmit the generational memory through gestural rhythms and speech, they add their own flavours and leave their own marks to these inherited traditions. That is why India in general and Purulia in particular, have proliferated and continue to produce a diverse range of cultural forms even in this onslaught of digital revolution. The reason behind this is:

Orthotic literacy cannot said to have exhausted the forces of gesture and speech of mnemocultures. Their articulations are not always under the shadow of writing cultures. Speech and gesture can disseminate themselves outside and in the archives of literacy even after centuries of exposure to literacy. What is involved here appears to be not so much a scribal literacy but a reiterative learning through gesture and speech...mnemocultures circulate and disseminate themselves performatively, acoustically through embodied enactments.

(Rao, 2016, pp. 72-73)

Thus, we see, the mnemocultural song-texts or song-cultures unravel the spiritual and psychic self of the performers and “non-linearly explore the most primordial modes (speech and gesture) of symbolization.” (Rao, 2016, p. 83) Therefore, we can see that through these song-texts, “Memories can come forth as residual sonic marks or acoustic remainders of interminable events...they emerge cocooned from the pores of the material biological body.” (Rao, 2016, p.

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**The Narrativized History of the *Gosani Mangal* Epic: Orality,
Indigeneity and Mnemonics in a Folk Metatext.**

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Abstract

The proud tradition of the *Mangal-Kavya* (Long-form verse poetry extolling the virtues of Scriptural Deities, written under the influence of Vaishnavite philosophy) in Bengal means that each region has its own particular epics that correspond to the overarching criteria of the genre. The *Gosani Mangal* epic, composed by Radhakrishna Das Bairagi is one such instance of a regional and localized version of the *Mangal Kavya* poetry. This paper aims to treat Bairagi's *Gosani Mangal* as a literary expression containing within itself an account of the historical and material progression of the erstwhile Kamtapur Region (covering the post independent districts of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri of West Bengal and some parts of Lower Assam). The ideas of indigeneity and orality are inextricably connected with this text as it delves into what it means to be a citizen living under the rule of the princely state of Cooch Behar. Bairagi treat the Koch dynasty as an

extension of the divine justice and a logical progression devotion and piety that began with the dream-intervention from Goddess Chandi. Bairagi's acknowledgement of the patronage of Maharaja Harendra Narayana in the composition of his epic (1825), that too under the full might of the Colonial Rule, makes this epic an instance of identitarian writing. This paper also aims to study this epic as an example of a Metatext that functions as a kernel of future literary thought, suggesting the possibility of the germination of a distinct literary expression, one that is informed with an acute sense of indigeneity, while also banking on the concurrent oral narratives that were prevalent during the time of its composition (1825). Theories of self-reflexivity and metafictionality will be employed to unearth the composite blend between indigeneity and orality. This paper also seeks to evaluate the techniques of the classic dream-narrative in the composition of this epic and how it fits into the whole framework of Folk Cultural Sensibility of the historical Kamtapur region.

Keywords: *Orality, Indigeneity, Metafiction, Material History, Divinity, Cultural Progression.*

Introduction: If there is one thing that the Bengali *Mangal Kavyas* have gotten right over the ages, it is their utmost regard of and dedication toward an authentic portrayal of community life and respective territorial vibrancy (both geographical and spatial) of the regions that they have originated from. Staying true to that proud literary heritage, Radhakrishna Das Bairagi's seminal folk-literary epic *Gosani Mangal* has charted its creative inspiration from the local milieu and setting of the historical region of Kamtapur. Bairagi does not shy away from acknowledging that his magnum opus would not have been possible without the patronage of the then monarch Maharaja Harendra Narayana, who ruled from 1783 to 1836; thereby suggesting the existence of a rich tradition of literary patronage on the part of the Koch dynasty rulers. It also brings out the materiality of literary production, one that is rooted in the deeply spiritual bent of the creator's mindset and the patron's equally transactional support for the literary craft. One almost gets the feeling that had it not been for the scripturally divine aspect of R. Das. Bairagi's work, the patronage would have almost certainly been non-existent. The erudite reader would be able to situate this text within the great Vaishnavite literary tradition that had emanated in Cooch Behar during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, of which Jaidev Munsii's *Rajupakhyan*, a work extolling the heroic exploits of the Koch

dynasty is a notable example. Maharaja Harendra Narayan's reign also saw the translation of many Sanskrit texts into Bengali. It is no surprise that such an age of high literary output would invariably lead to the emergence of a gifted writer such as Radha Krishna Bairagi.

Informed readers might ask themselves - to what extent was the epic *Gosani Mangal* concerned with the questions of authorship? Bairagi is undoubtedly the sole author of this text, but the vision that he imbibes in his portrayal Raja Kanteshwar, the royal figure after whom the whole historical region of Kamtapur is named, is truly indicative of the larger Vaishnavite literary tradition of Bairagi's contemporary day and age.

The anthropocentric details that are in play in the epic are largely reminiscent of the kinds of description that are usually found in the oral narratives of stories and ballads such as *Kathasaritsagar* and *Panchtantra*. Bairagi liberally blends the imaginary with the spiritual, thereby producing a composite hyperrealist picture, which constantly calls into question the core beliefs of the reader. The classically dream-narrative inception of the poem sets the stage up for an artistic intervention that seems tailor-made for narrating the tale of Raja Kanteshwar's coronation, his childhood of humble means and his subsequent establishment of the Koch dynasty, aided by the divine blessings of Goddess Chandi, who is also known as *Gosani* in the local parlance of Cooch Behar district, the goddess from whom the epic derives its name.

The legend of King Kanteshwar is such that one can trace the growth of the Rajbanshi secessionist movements in the northern plains and Terai region of West Bengal to it. Time and again, the myth of Kanteshwar's masculine ambition and the chutzpah to follow the oneiric instructions of Goddess Chandi/Gosani have been trotted out in the popular discourse of the day to highlight Rajbanshi pride and stake claims to separate statehood; so it is fairly easy to assume that issues pertaining to indigeneity and political belonging have often drawn their inspiration from this particular myth to entice the young and the uninitiated into the fold of political activism and secessionist insurgency. The results have till now been mostly effective as the calls for separate statehood have not died down. Bairagi's magnum opus encourages the reader to suspend his disbelief, especially in the introductory phases that frequently make use of the occult and the supernatural. In a way Bairagi, is engaging with the literary technique now known as metafictionality, where the author foregrounds the fictional qualities of his text and

invites the reader to have his cognitive biases checked. The method works because throughout the text, Bairagi indulges in self-reflexive passages.

Research Methodology:

Unlike most folk artifacts and cultural outputs in the district of Cooch Behar, the epic *Gosani Mangal* by Radha Krishna Das Bairagi is already available in a documented, transcribed format, mostly because of the royal patronage that it received and the authentic authorship of the text. Solely because of this factor, the questions that are being asked in this paper would yield answers if we conduct a close reading of Bairagi's epic, accompanied by a detailed study of the late poet's biography; which would enable us to get a hold of the authorial vision and the kind of reception that it had following its publication.

For all its glory and literary fame, Bairagi's text is deceptively simple and precisely thought-out, blurring the lines between truth and literary imagination. A lot of Bairagi's style is imitative in the sense that he begins his poem with what literary historians of Bengali Vaishnavite Literature call, a *bhanita* (an allusion to the source and inspiration behind the poet taking up the daunting task of composing an epic; a literary invocation of sorts). A close study of all these facets should yield a pretty satisfactory result about the desired result and authorial intention of R.Das.Bairagi.

Theoretical Framework:

For the purpose of understanding the true relevance and importance of the *Gosani Mangal* epic on the cultural sensibilities of this region, this paper will try to appraise the text from an ethnocentric point of view, while also treating it as a Metatext. Ideas of self-reflexivity and metafictionality will be helpful in unearthing the authorial intention behind the work. No text from the court of the Koch dynasty has had as much impact as this work by Radhakrishna Das Bairagi, and it is incumbent upon the researcher to find its intrinsic value.

Society, Spirituality & Metatextuality in *Gosani Mangal*:

Radhakrishna Das Bairagi's deity Chandi or Gosani is known by various names; some of which are – Adya Bhavani, Bhagwati, Abhaya, and Mangalchandi. The non-restrictive usage of the different names of such deities has posited them within the same spiritual

corporeality and has made it possible for future generations of devotional poets to not only seek divine providence and inspiration from them, but also produce remarkable literary works that are bearing the names of such deities. One such instance is the verse anthology *Abhaya Mangal* by poet Manik Dutt; that directly seeks inspiration and literary guidance from Bairagi's work. Dutt's work can be posited in the same spiritual framework as that of Bairagi's, a reason why to the informed reader *Gosani Mangal* might come across as a Metatext, one that inspires successive strands of literary production. The very nature of *Gosani Mangal* enables this, creating a literary prototype for future enthusiasts to follow. Metatextuality operates mostly on two different levels in this epic : first inside Bairagi's depiction of his contemporary society, a depiction that provokes the reader to have his understanding of the political economy of North Bengal shaken; and secondly through the self-referential texture of spirituality, one that recognizes the dual status of Radhakrishna Das Bairagi as both the poet and devotee simultaneously.

Bairagi's epic gets the social milieu of the contemporary times of King Kanteshwar right. The possible threat of Muslim Rulers from the south of Bengal, coupled with a panic and hysteria regarding the empty throne, forced the newly installed, oneiric instructions-laden king to boost the economy by minting coins with his name on it. The picture of the society that emerges from it is one that is at once fractious and teeming with possibilities for hardworking, enterprising men.

The epic is divided into 24 *lahorys* (chapter or segments in the local parlance of the poet's time), each of them delving deep into the many challenges, trials and tribulations that confront King Kanteshwar. They range from petty but salacious domestic trifles to monumental sweeps of historic events such as the aggression of Muslim invaders from the south of Bengal, whom Kanteshwar successfully fends off. We get the account of a society that is constantly on the flux and is searching for stability, often favouring mutual adversaries of King Kanteshwar. Out of this mess emerges a heroic portrait of the newly ordained king. Bairagi manages to do this by showing the threats and challenges that Kanteshwar faces to be truly dangerous and as something that only Kanteshwar could mitigate. The glorification of Kanteshwar serves two purposes: it shows that with the right divine blessing, i.e., of Goddess Chandi, a mere mortal like Kanteshwar can maximize his potential, outsmart his opponents and beat the odds. It

also shows the reader the ingenuous might of the local Rajbanshi man, lending currency to the secessionist movements and demands for statehood. The mythos of Kanteshwar has held sway on the dissident masses of the Cooch Behar district and shows no signs of petering out.

Just the sheer variety of the challenges that Kanteshwar finds himself up against is sure to boggle the mind of the reader. Neither the *bhanita*, nor the exposition, or the introductory passages prepare us to tackle the diverse sets of representative characters and their machinations that jeopardize the prospects of King Kanteshwar. It is fascinating to watch the many modes of ideological shifts and turns at play here, providing biting satire and terrific social commentary all at once.

Historical accounts of the middle ages of power and politics of Bengal will inform us that the ruler of Gour (present day Maldah district), Hussein Shah had desecrated the idol of Goddess Gosani in 1493 and made it impossible for worshippers to pay their respects to the deity. So the rise and reign of Kanteshwar under the divine blessings of Goddess Gosani is seen by future believers as righting a terrible wrong and erasing the heinous stains of a historical injustice. Hussein Shah had indeed taken the Koch kingdom under his rule but could not hold on to it; mostly because of the huge geographical distance from Gour, the seat of his rule. So the coronation of Kanteshwar is symbolically meaningful for glorifying the Rajbanshi pride.

The sheer variety of the avatars of Goddess Chandi in Bairagi's *Gosani Mangal* epic is astonishing for the diverse sets of spiritual idioms that it hints at, providing a blueprint for the reader to follow in order to get a true sense of the magnanimity and benevolence of Goddess Chandi, a glimpse of which we find in Kanteshwar's ascension to the throne. His coronation manifests itself as a form of divine justice that seems to have ordained itself through the dream narrative. Thereby, Bairagi blends reality with the Supernatural and creates a composite mnemonic blend for the reader to follow and appreciate, one that is informed by a deep localized spiritual sensibility.

This efficient localization of scriptural deities and consecrated spiritual frameworks is mostly due to a very robust history and a proud tradition of oral narratives; one that is informed by an indigenous consciousness and a need to stay true to one's roots and the storied past. Bairagi understood that in order for his epic to have mass appeal, royal

patronage and universal acceptance, he needed to present his protagonist as a man of the people, somebody who defies the odds to chart his path and make his mark; reasons why he accentuated the details on the humble origins of Kanteshwar. This design of crafty storytelling and purpose-driven penmanship is what breathes life into the narrative of *Gosani Mangal*.

The Lofty Dream Narrative at Work in Bairagi's *Gosani Mangal*:

The epic begins with Bairagi zooming in on Angana and Bhaktishwar, a poor, rural couple eking out a miserly living. Goddess Chandi manifests herself in the dream and lets Angana know that their firstborn male child would eventually become the king of a new dynasty and in time, prove himself to be a benevolent and courageous ruler. True to this divine prediction, Angana gives birth to male child and that kid is named Kanteshwar. He begins working as cowherd for a Brahmin family. On an eventful night, he has a dream instructing him to bathe in the village stream early next morning. There he has to outsmart a vicious crocodile and a venomous snake. Kanteshwar successfully rises to the occasion and Goddess Chandi reappears in his dream; Bairagi writes:

Shuno Bapu Kanteshwar Amar Uttor (Listen to me carefully, Kanteshwar, my progeny)

Provate hoiba tumi rajyer ishwar (You will be ordained king the next dawn)

Kantanath naam tor, hole rajyeshwar (You who were named Kantanath, will now become the monarch)

Aaji hote naam tor, holo Kanteshwar (From this day, you will be known as Kanteshwar)

What follows next is an engrossing tale involving supernatural tale in a rural setting. Kanteshwar ventures out into the wild in his annual hunt, and during his sojourn in the forest, has dreams of various deities such as Koteswar, Baneshwar Shidheshwari and Jalpeshwar who prod him to build temples dedicated to their devotion and worship. Bairagi writes –

Diba Obosane Raja Parobas bone (At the end of the day, in the forest)

Shidheswari Thakur kahen swapone (Shidheshwari instructs the king in his dream)

Shun shun Kanteshwar amar bachon (Listen to me carefully, Kanteshwar)

Bhagdutta stapito amar duijon (The two of us are bound in a devotional bond)

So, it is clear to us that Kanteshwar is shown as the man responsible for upholding the spiritual sensibilities of his day and age and plays a pivotal role in spreading the devotional aspects of a ritualized faith. In some ways, he can be seen as doing “god’s work”; which goes very well with the benevolent ruler trope. Albeit he is inspired and guided by dream narratives and instructions, but that does not take anything away from his richly deserved glory and credit.

To the unaccustomed reader these passages might seem a bit juvenile in the sense that they perpetuate the element of surprise and unadulterated astonishment; especially when we take into account the proficiency and devotion with which Kanteshwar goes about building the temples; but to the keen observer these passages are emblematic of the spiritual sensibility and indigenous forms of scriptural faith that Kanteshwar imbibes. His arc of character comes out brilliantly throughout the poem and deservedly bestows the status of the epic on it. So the strains of indigeneity and orality are significantly present in the poem and Kanteshwar typifies a certain kind of a hero, one who is deeply rooted in the local milieu.

The epic also features accounts of outside aggression from the Nawabs of Gour, who after being shown the bountiful state of Kamtapur, decide to invade. Kanteshwar is put to the test and his advisors well-wishers instruct him to plan his moves thwart the Nawab strategically, instead of retaliating with outright military aggression, given the fact that the Nawab’s army was much larger than that of Kanteshwar’s. Kanteshwar decides to build moats all around his fort to make it inaccessible to the invading army. Bairagi also gives us an account of Banmala’s infidelity, the wife of Kanteshwar. After getting infatuated with the Manohar, the son of Kanteshwar’s chief secretary Shashidhar, Banmala starts living in sin with Manohar. After hearing of such treachery, Kanteshwar orders the accosting and subsequent execution of Manohar. This greatly upsets Banmla. In order to prevent such indiscretions and mishaps in the future, Kanteshwar orders for the construction of the moat and a high wall around the peripheries of his palace compound; mechanisms which prove fruitful and invaluable while staving off the attack of the Gour Nawabs, who despite capturing Kanteshwar, could not hold on to the palatial riches, the queens and concubines. Kanteshwar escaped in a large brass vessel to relative safety and evades execution by the invading party. This shows that right till the end of

reign, the blessings and divine guidance of Goddess Gosani were on Kanteshwar, which is why he was spared the ignominy of defeat and brutal execution.

Kanteshwar's dependence on divine instructions channeled to him via dream narratives is indicative of his huge trust on the idea and promise of Providence. Throughout *Gosani Mangal*, he comes across as a man who can do no wrong, somebody who is chosen by the gods to make his mark on a lawless piece of land, which he almost manages to do despite the fact that he loses his kingdom to the invading Nawabs. His defeat at the hands of Nawabs do not nullify the power of the dreams that he has throughout the epic, as most of his heroic exploits seem pre-ordained and divinely orchestrated. His escape from the invaders is recounted with gory details at the end of the epic; which only heightens his stature and intelligence to the reader, as it was a daring act involving cunning, courage and charisma.

The Metatextual Facets of *Gosani Mangal*:

This epic is one of the earliest examples of a poet treating a legend as true and worthy of literary representation. Bairagi does not shy away from adding his own sweeping imaginary narratives, especially in the passages dealing with the supernatural and the occult. To his credit, these passages came out shining bright as they were meant to heighten the aura and stature of Kanteshwar. Moreover they enthrall the reader to keep on reading. As an inadvertent result of such a powerful literary rendition, the epic has come to inherit some Metatextual facets that have ensured the perennial popularity of the text; especially in the community based rural belief systems that are found all across North Bengal.

Metatextuality can be defined as the properties that allow a certain text to transcend its own boundaries and attain the status of a definitive text that tries to provide a literary roadmap and prototypical example of representation for other texts within the same literary tradition, working within a similar cultural set up. In many ways these Metatexts also work as the documents around which reception of future literary works revolve around; creating a space for cultural negotiation. In most cultures across the world, Metatexts are often found dealing with themes and issues pertaining to religious and spiritual activities of the masses as these topics often have the most social currency and easily find acceptance. In the case of *Gosani Mangal*, these Metatextual facets have

manifested themselves in the way Kanteshwar is portrayed as hero worthy of being emulated by future generations, in the way the dream narratives have worked in tandem with the progression of the text, thereby creating a model and formula for future texts to follow. A detailed analysis of such features would only point to the underlying structure of Bairagi's work which is as follows:

1. *Gosani Mangal* delves deep into the broken psyche of the beleaguered masses of the dusty old plains of North Bengal by showing the region ripe for literary intervention. Prior to Bairagi's magnum opus, no poet or chronicler had attempted for an artistic evaluation of the life and times of Kanteshwar. Bairagi changed all of that by not only championing the valor of the mythical king, but by also treating him as a literary hero worthy of being appreciated by future generations of creators, connoisseurs, readers and enthusiasts.
2. The literary invention of the region of Kamtapur as a chronotope is surely one of Bairagi's enduring achievements. He finds the rich mnemonic history of this region as teeming with possibilities and sees it as a field for literary experimentation. He mostly succeeds, primarily because of the fact that no writer before him had thought about treating the micro-narratives of Kamtapur region as fodder for literary writing. This novelty factor had boosted the popularity of the book.
3. Moreover the royal patronage that he had received from Maharaja Harendra Narayan had ensured the voluntary acceptance from the general reading public of the age, wiping out any sort of doubt regarding the quality and richness of the text. In doing so he had created a culture of literary patronage and promotion. A feat that had not gone unnoticed by the contemporary writers. Bairagi's success and rapport with the incumbent Koch ruler meant that they too could approach the king for well-deserved patronage. So the Metatextual facets of this epic went beyond the domains of ink and paper, paving the way for a robust pipeline of future cultural artifacts. This not only helped put the region of Kamtapur on the literary map but also gave the writers and harbingers of mnemocultures a sustainable way to practice and propagate their craft.
4. The position of Bairagi's epic is forever secure in the galaxy of Bengali Mangal Kavya by dint of its meticulous handling of mnemonic materials and oral narratives. In doing so, Bairagi creates a viable mode of communication between

himself and the reader. Throughout the text the reader gets the impression that the deeds and exploits of Kanteshwar are not just fictitious narratives but are also beating with pulse. The ruins and remains of Kanteshwar's fort, moat and the high wall are still scattered across the Gosanimari area of Cooch Behar district and this helps the readers to locate and situate the *Gosani Mangal* epic in real-life context.

5. Bairagi's *Gosani Mangal* had spawned a whole lot of verse anthologies and poetry collections as most writers of his age were heavily influenced by the literary idiom that he had created. He had made it possible for writers such as Krishna Jivan Das who wrote *Ambika Mangal*; Muktaram Sen who wrote *Sarada Mangal*; Dwij Shivcharan who wrote *Gauri Mangal* and Harishchandra Basu who wrote *Chandi Vijay* or *Devi Mangal*. All these were either influenced by or directly sought their inspiration from the epic of *Gosani Mangal*. This goes on to show the immense impact that *Gosani Mangal* has had on future literary practitioners. In fact when read in conjunction with each other, Bairagi's text shines bright as the definitive instance, whereas verse anthologies written by the aforementioned poets sound and read like derivative texts, lacking warmth, grace and literary candor.
6. The political economy of the *Gosani Mangal* epic is mired with fractious rivalry, bitter family feuds, court intrigues and violent military aggression. It is a testament to Bairagi's sheer literary prowess that he was able to successfully infuse a tale that begins with divine instruction with a one that ends with military conquests. This blending comes across as organic and harmonious, ensuring that the reader gets a full account of the many dimensions of Kanteshwar's life. Metatextuality in this aspect comes out in the efficient handling of historical facts involving the military conquests and the initial spiritual framework of the poem that begins with the dream narrative. Future authors have derived heavily from Bairagi's deft techniques and have sought to replicate it in their works, thereby perpetuating the respect that Bairagi's work commands.

The Oral properties of a Folk Metatext: Irony and Dichotomy:

Even though Bairagi could write his magnum opus only after he had secured the cushy royal patronage of the then Koch monarch, Maharaja Harendra Narayan, we would be

remiss if we fail to consider the libidinal impulse and oral heritage that informed the bedrock of Bairagi's creation. The oral metalinguistic traits of the legend of King Kanteshwar shaped the way Bairagi had not only manifested his literary sensibilities but also dictated the eventual planning and execution of the written text; containing within itself a microcosmic representation of the social milieu that he was trying to inscribe in his epic.

The exposition or the *bhanita* part that sets off Bairagi's rendition is a direct inheritance of Vaishnavite poetic compositions, something that Bengal literary masters have always indulged in; the pace in this exposition part is languid, tone conversational and the theme is more or less supplicatory. Bairagi stays true to his roots, creating a literary prototype for his successors to follow. This informal expository style is a direct legacy of the oral past of notional belonging in North Bengal. As result, *Gosani Mangal* echoes the oral nature of the concurrent myths and adjacent implications surrounding the legend of King Kanteshwar.

The way Kanteshwar gets initiated into taking up the divine inspiration and following on his instincts is straight out of the storytelling archetypes that are found in oral narratives; especially his quick-witted response to the Brahmin's questions regarding his lineage and prospects in life, once he identifies Kanteshwar to be destined to become a king and forever change the course of history. As a result of this, Kanteshwar is able to successfully transform himself from the limitations of a mythic hero and onto someone more substantial and real; someone truly capable of utilizing his divine inspirations. This way, he defies his oral origins.

In a scenario such as this, it becomes the poet's cardinal duty to not just situate his primary subject material within the larger socio-cultural backdrop but also ensure the historical contiguity between the two; thereby channeling organic unity between the intended results and originating source. Bairagi achieves this feat by showing his hero as truly capable of defying the sweep of history, which he does by first becoming the monarch of his region despite being born in a family of humble means and then by following the divine instructions that were sent to him via the storied dream narratives. Eventually his downfall at the hands of the invading army seems to be a bit too anti-climactic; but the larger scheme of the epic, which was to show Kanteshwar do justice to his true potential regardless of the final outcome, had been fulfilled. Bairagi's meticulous

adherence to the pre-existing oral narrative structures of the region helps him attain this, and the effect is overall palatable. It does not seem forced or jaded and by the end of the epic, the reader is able to situate the protagonist in a long tradition of folk heroes in the Koch region.

Myths are essentially pseudo-historical events that try to provide fundamental answers to the existential questions that occupy the popular imagination of a particular community. The myths surrounding King Kanteshwar are endless. It is said that at the height of his rule, his empire stretched from the foothills of Bhutan to the lower plains of Assam, bringing a vast number of people under his liege. The master eye of Bairagi did not fail to take this entire enormity surrounding Kanteshwar into account, one of the many reasons why his tale has managed to hold sway over the people of Cooch Behar.

The many avatars of Goddess Chandi that is found in the *Gosani Mangal* epic is a direct inheritance of the kind of divine portrayal that Chandi finds in Manik Dutta's *Chandi Mangal*. Bairagi makes one significant change though; his deity comes across as a member of the beleaguered populace, rather than as someone descended from the high heavens. Such an egalitarian and rooted depiction of the chief goddess is instrumental in lending a mass appeal to the text, creating a literary prototype for future writers to follow. One has to concede the fact that this egalitarianism and mass based appeal of the text can only be achieved if and when Bairagi incorporates the oral elements surrounding the cult of Goddess Chandi and King Kanteshwar into account. The folk imagination of Goddess Chandi that has always been prevalent in Cooch Behar finds a proper place of mention in the epic. Bairagi refers to her as Gosani, as Chandi is called in the local parlance of the district. Such attention to detail and thorough following of the libidinal impulse behind the devotion towards Gosani endows Bairagi's magnum opus with a local hue that is unmistakably mass appealing.

The language that has been used and the cultural sensibility which is followed in Bairagi's epic are undoubtedly characteristic of the dialect spoken in North Bengal. Orality has been a defining feature of the folk renditions and cultural artifacts of the district of Cooch Behar and Bairagi's text makes generous use of that, traversing the boundaries between reality and fiction. A composite picture of the socio-political scenario of early 14th century Cooch Behar is presented, through the representative tale of King Kanteshwar, something that is at once dichotomous and ironical, partially because

of the sway that the story has held over the masses and partially because the whole epic seems to be a thing of the distant past, containing within itself a world that cannot be reached but only felt through the words of the successive generations of poets that followed Radhakrishna Das Bairagi.

Indigeneity as an insistent refrain in *Gosani Mangal* :

To somebody who is not a cultural insider to the histories of belonging and spatial attachment in the context of North Bengal, the epic *Gosani Mangal* might come across as any other poetic rendition of a popular legend surrounding a beloved folk hero; but to the informed reader, the text assumes a political character, one that has become important in the context of the separatist movement and calls for statehood from the locally powerful Rajbanshi community of the district, providing them with the political ammunition needed for sustaining the end goal of a different statehood.

The historical accounts regarding the vast expanse of King Kanteshwar's empire have only been made more popular and mainstream by the mellifluous rendering of the mythical king's tale by Bairagi. This has been appropriated by the vocal demands for a different statehood by Rajbanshi pressure groups, who see in the Narrativized History of Bairagi's epic a precursor to their political ambitions. Such vociferous claims of a different statehood spanning from the foothills of Bhutan to the plains of lower Assam are directly reminiscent of the kingdom established by Kanteshwar.

The political currency that Bairagi's text lends to present day 21st century claims for renewed Rajbanshi claims of representation is one of the reasons why it still pulsates through the veins of the people of Cooch Behar. Indigeneity in Bairagi's text is not an exclusionary marker, rather a badge of honour, proof of belonging and the tether that binds people together. No wonder it is being celebrated and incorporated into the larger socio-political claims of the day.

Conclusion:

The standard of literary practice and performative gestures surrounding existing legends and myths were certainly raised by Bairagi's text. Creative liberty may have been taken by the poet but they were directed towards a benign end and at the end of the text Bairagi brings all the strands to a harmonious end. By showing the final decimation of political

might of Kanteswar, the poet seems to advocate the limits of divine instructions, a lacuna that is apparently filled the epic's Metatextual facets and dependence on the oral background of the source material; as a result the Narrativized History comes out in a dynamic way, jolting the reader out of his pre-conceived notions regarding faith, rural belief systems and divinity that gets passed down the generations as legacy; wherein lies the credit of the poet.

References

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Megalithic Tradition among the Karbis of Kamrup District, Assam

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Abstract

Megaliths, either standing singly or in rows or in clusters forming definite structures or monuments, are found globally. Although, the term ‘megalith’ refers to big stones, yet, it is argued that megaliths could even denote smaller stones based on cultural and religious contexts. These stones are of varied shapes and sizes, and are categorised on the basis of morphology and their functions. The stone structures viz., menhirs, dolmens, cromlechs, cairns, alignments, cists, burial chambers etc. provide insights into the various socio-political, economic and ideological attributes of life of prehistoric people. Funerary, commemorative, religious and ceremonial meanings are carried on by the megaliths across the globe. The tradition of constructing megalithic structures has been associated with the Neolithic period. It is observed in different corners of the world today including the subcontinent of India as a living or a non-living tradition. In the northeastern region of India, the Karbis of Assam, the Garos of Meghalaya, the Hrusos and Noctes of Arunachal Pradesh, the Mizos, and some Naga communities have kept on with this age-old tradition till date. This paper makes an attempt to highlight the continuity of tradition associated with the construction of megaliths by the Karbi population of Kamrup district and also the changes that have taken place in the process of their erection taking the case study of Pamohi.

Keywords: megaliths, menhirs, memorial stones

Introduction

Megaliths, referring to large stones, either stand singly or in rows or are found in clusters forming definite structures or monuments. The word ‘megalith’ has been derived from two ancient Greek words, *megas* meaning big or large or great, and *lithos* meaning stones. These huge undressed stones, and termed in Celtic dolmens, cromlechs, and menhirs were introduced by antiquaries for the first time to describe a fairly easily definable class of monuments in Western and Northern Europe (Childe, 1948: 5). Even, the large roughly dressed slabs of stones are referred to as megaliths (Daniel, 1962). Further, van der Hoop in 1938 has recommended that megaliths sometimes refer to the smaller stones also (Yondri, 2006: 295-302). In Neolithic Europe, as revealed by Chapman in 1981, the megalithic structures functioned as territorial markers which were under control of kinship-based corporate groups. Megaliths provide insights into the socio-political, economic and ideological attributes of life of prehistoric people and thus showcase varied meanings, viz., funerary, commemorative, religious and ceremonial (Marak, 2015: 31). These stones are collected from river beds or from hills and put up in memory of the deceased, or to commemorate important places or institutions like markets or youth dormitories, clubs etc. The distribution of huge stone graves among the Neolithic population in Western and Northern Europe has been most plausibly explained by repercussions of the beliefs then formulated in the Ancient East (Childe, 1936: 99). Construction of megaliths as memorial stones and burial chambers has been a prehistoric tradition in the Mediterranean nations and in Western Europe dating to the New Stone Age and the Bronze Age.

Megaliths found across the globe from the prehistoric times exhibit varied distinctive characteristics, viz., representation of an elite class of individuals or groups (Flemming, 1973; Sherrat, 1990; Nelson, 1999; Haimendorf, 1946), focus on inherent symbolism (Hodder, 1990; Bradley, 1998), used for astronomical observations (Thom, 1966; MacKie, 1997), enhancement of fertility cult in a magical way (Haimendorf, 1946; Bloch, 1906-07) and to depict commonness, some form of leadership and authoritative power (Marak, 2015: 31-41). Moreover, the structures from different places worldwide show similarity as well as dissimilarity. Numerous classifications are provided by scholars for these megaliths occurring universally. Based on morphology, megaliths have been classified into menhirs, dolmens, cists, cairns, stone henges, alignments, passage

graves, stone seats, stone circles, etc. These also reflect functionalities like funerary and non-funerary.

Tradition of megalith erection in India

Megaliths were reported for the first time in India by Babington in the year 1823. The practice of erecting megalithic monuments has been found from several European and Asian countries including India. The oldest megaliths in India were discovered from the westernmost part of the country in the form of stone circles and dated to about 3000 BC. These large stone structures are now in Afghanistan in the upper Indus Valley. The Deccan megaliths differ from those of the other Indian regions including central, southern and eastern India where they are a part of continuing traditions. These stone structures show definite characters and are found to belong to the Iron Age that is between 1000 BC and 1000 AD. A broad time evolution with the megaliths of central India dated to be in-between 1000 BC and 500 BC is found while those in the east are much later and are dated till 900 AD (Vahia et al., 2010).

The tradition of constructing megalithic structures has been a prehistoric as well as a recent phenomenon in the eastern, central and north-eastern region of India, viz., Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Chota Nagpur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur and Assam (Sharma, 1998: 30). Taking into consideration the complexity of Indian megaliths, Prof. Haimendorf (1945) combined both the archaeological and ethnographical data, and classified megalithic cultures in India into two distinct parts –

- a) a living tradition in Eastern and Central India, and
- b) a tradition in South India documented using the archaeological remains. These two were independent of each other (Marak, 2015: 31). Thus, megaliths are significant stone structures which can provide a great deal of information about the ways of life of the people who constructed these, and also reveal details about their faiths, beliefs and traditions. Some of these huge stones were supposed to be astronomical observatories as well as objects that spread over space and were constructed in order to keep track of time! Thus, megaliths were regarded as the most curious of objects of the past in that these connect concrete experiences of movement of time and space, its periodicity and its relation to nature and environment (Vahia et al., 2010).

While in some areas across the Indian sub-continent, these megalithic monuments are found as archaic structures only, yet in some other regions these stone structures are traditionally a living phenomenon. The practice of erecting megaliths in South India has become obsolete in the recent times. However, it is observed that the construction of megaliths is still an ongoing culture among some of the tribal communities in Northeast India, and is passed down from one generation to the next. Haimendorf had observed that the megalithic tradition of the several tribal groups of Northeast India has close parallels with the Godabas and the Bondos of Orissa and Southeast Asia (Sharma, 1998: 32).

Megaliths and its erection in Northeast India

The North-eastern region of India is a pocket in the whole world where the megalithic culture has been found to survive till date. Godwin Austen (1871-72) for the first time found uniqueness in the Khasi megaliths during his geographical surveys across undivided Assam. J.P. Mills (1933) regarded the megalithic remains as one of the archaeological wealth present in the world and also observed the living tradition of erecting megaliths in this region. Dalton also provided accounts of megaliths, specifically monoliths, erected by diverse tribal communities of Northeast India.

P.R.T. Gurdon quoted on the megalithic monuments of Khasi and Jaintia Hills as, “probably one of the first objects which strikes the eyes of a visitor to the Khasi hills is the very large number of monoliths and table-stones, and cromlechs that are to be met with almost everywhere in that country” (Gurdon, 1914: 13-45) (*cf.* Sharma, 1998: 30). He recorded the megaliths or the monoliths as Khasi memorial stones and classified these into menhirs or vertical stones; dolmens or table stones; and cairns or stone cromlechs. Gurdon further compared the Khasi monuments, the stones erected by the Mikirs (or Karbis) and the monoliths erected by the Nagas of Manipur, and those of the Ho-Mundas. He even surmised that the prehistoric people of the north-eastern region were represented by a common cultural development as observed from the megalithic tradition. Lyall reported about the prevalence of the system of erection of monoliths by the hill Karbis. McCalls provided information about the erection of megaliths by the Lushai (presently known as Mizo) (Saikia, 2007: 432-433).

In Meghalaya, the raising of lithic structures was a living tradition till the recent times. Godwin Austen (1872) reported megaliths to be concentrated at Cherrapunji,

Maoflong, Lailong, Kote, Laitkhor, Jowai and Nartiang. Typologically, dolmens, cists, table-top stones, menhirs, stone slabs or capstones from Nartiang, Umstow, Laitkar and Laitlyngkot in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills are found abundantly, which exhibit different socio-religious functions. Moreover, among the Indian megaliths, the menhirs erected at Nartiang are peculiar such that these are as tall as 27 feet and 2.5 feet thick and basically to commemorate the deceased ancestors. Gurdon (1975) has classified these megaliths of various dimensions into menhirs or vertical stones, table-stones or dolmens, and stone cromlechs or chamber tombs or cairns that have been unevenly clustered wherein after cremation, the collected ashes and the uncalcined bones were deposited in the clan chamber tombs or cromlechs (Rao, 1977: 194). Moreover, to understand the significance of the megaliths, S.N. Rao classified these stone structures into two groups, viz., funerary stone (which is directly associated with post-cremation ritual including disposal of the mortal remains of the deceased) and memorial stone (erected by clansmen or any other to commemorate any event of public interest – social, political, ideological etc.) based on function, structure and socio-ideological meaning attached to the megaliths (Rao, 1991: 109-115).

Furthermore, C.A. Mawlong (1996) categorised the megalithic monuments of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills into -

i) five groups, on the basis of morphology, viz.,

Group A - Menhirs, Alignments, Avenues

Group B - Dolmens

Group C - Cists, Cairns and Cairn-cists

Group D - Stone circles

Group E - Stone Cremation Platforms; and,

ii) into two groups based on functions, viz.,

Group A - Funerary stones or Mawbyinna Niam

Group B - Memorial stones or Mawbyinna Nam, which are further subdivided into few more groups. All these megalithic monuments signify important aspects of ways of life such as linking concepts of unity of maternal ancestry and social continuity; concepts of fertility and social merit; rank and status of dominant groups in societies over others etc. (Mitri, 2009: 9-10). Mawlong (2005) noted

about the association of megalithic structures with the establishment of markets at important centres like Nongskseh, Laitlmgkot, Cherrapunji, Sutnga, Nangbah, Nartiang, Jowai; at intra-tribal boundaries such as Shillong and Jowai; and at ecological boundaries, viz., Mawsmat, Cherrapunji, Jaintiapur etc. (Marak, 2015:41). H.L. Deb Roy recorded about the tradition of erecting megaliths behind a deceased among the Jaintias which has become obsolete and at times erection of small tombs or tomb stones have also been observed (Saikia, 2007: 434). But Milan Meitei and Queenbala Marak (2013) through their studies found that Jaintias practice the tradition of megalithic erection since times immemorial and continues till date (Meitei and Marak, 2013:159). Works on megaliths of the Khasis were also undertaken by David Roy (1963), Shadap Sen (1981), Angeline Bareh (1981), Hamlet Bareh (1967), H. Lyngdoh (1937) among others (Rao, 1991: 107-108).

Besides stone, monuments of wood and bamboo have also been found to be raised occasionally in memory of the deceased by their kin in the north-eastern region. The Khasis, Nagas, Karbis and other tribes who erect megalithic monuments have distinct ethno-lingual terms for the large stones or wooden and bamboo structures. Playfair (1909) has recorded about these posts or *kima* raised by the Garos in memory of the deceased in his monograph *The Garos*. Basically these were decorated bamboo posts. *Asong* was another type of monolith used for the purpose of sacrificing animals; decorated on the day of sacrifice and erected at the entrance of every village. *Kosi* was yet another type of stone used by the Garos to mark a spot where a man is killed in war or for the sake of revenge.

Besides, the practice of raising of megaliths from time immemorial by numerous tribes of Manipur, Nagaland and Assam have been depicted from different sites across the states and also from various ethnographic studies conducted on them by several scholars. For instance, Mate in his book *A Mate Tribe of Manipur (A Case Study on Twisomjang)* provided an account of the presence of megalithic practice among the Mates, who erect a post carved with varied pictures on the centre of a grave (Saikia, 2007: 435). Among others, Prof. Haimendorf (1946) has observed that megalithic monuments scattered over the areas inhabited by the Angami population described about the 'Feast of Merit' or the 'Stone-dragging Feast' and regarded these stones as 'a living

and vital part of Naga culture'. Studies also reveal that the megalithic tradition has been prevalent among few communities in Arunachal Pradesh (Gogoi and Baruah, 2021: pp) and Sikkim (Molommu, 2018: 15-18; Lepcha, 2019: 77-90).

Megaliths of Assam and the associated tradition

One of the significant archaeological attributes of the region, besides stone tools and pottery, is the presence of megaliths and its associated tradition that is still in continuity. J.P. Mills and J.H. Hutton (1929) found several megalithic sites in Ndunglo, Bolasan, Derebora, Kobak and Kartong of North Cachar Hills, located in the hill tracts joining Nagaland with the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The structures ranged from stone cists, some at Derebora containing human remains and referred to as megalithic burial cists (Mills and Hutton, 1929: 285-300).

In Assam, these huge stones are erected by the Karbi population living in the hills as well as in the plains, and the erection of these structures is one of their ongoing cultural practices. These megaliths are erected only in the specified areas, generally located by the side of the paths leading to the paddy fields from the village or at the fringe of the villages, allotted for the process after the death of an individual. The corpse is either buried or burnt by the Karbi community. Baruah has carried out extensive studies on the megalithic tradition of the plain Karbis and on megalithism. The Lalungs or Tiwas were also used to erecting megaliths in the past. Gohain (1993) has found engraving of an image of Mohan Pator, an ancestor of the Hill Lalungs, on the upper part of the tall upright megalith (Saikia, 2007: 434-435).

Megaliths of varied structures such as menhirs, stone seats, dolmens, stone jars, and cists are widely dispersed in the North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong districts (Mills and Hutton, 1929; Bezbaruah, 2003; D.K. Medhi, 1999, 2002; Sarma, 2014; Thakuria, 2014: 243-249.) and also found from Kamrup district (Choudhury, 2004; Thakuria, 2017) of Assam. Basically, these stone structures have been a common sight in the Karbi dominated pockets of the state. Bezbaruah in 2005 has recorded megalithic remains from Kamarpha, Rongali, Nongjrong, Mukhrow, Umcherra, Bowlagog, Habang, Umteli, Ophernala, Jorshala, Locrew and Mauslai in Karbi Anglong (Bezbaruah, 2012: 307).

B.K. Medhi and K. Choudhury have classified the megaliths of Dimoria into menhir, table stone, dolmen, stone seat, and stone pillar on the basis of morphology and function. Nevertheless, the Karbis of Dimoria categorised the erected stones into three types, viz.,

- a) *Long-e*, which includes menhir and stone pillar,
- b) *Cheng-e*, including dolmen and table stone, and
- c) *Along-kangni-anglong*, which includes stone seat.

Further, the Karbis have pertinently categorised the megaliths as male (represented by megaliths with more or less pointed tip) and female (the top of the menhirs are invariably broken down) menhirs based on the structure. They erect megaliths in the memory of dead persons who die of natural death only and not due to unnatural deaths or deaths caused by accidents, suicide, attack of animals and whatsoever, which is considered a taboo for them (Medhi and Choudhury, 2009: 218). Furthermore, the megalithic structures of the Karbis have been classified into two broad divisions based on their significance (Medhi and Choudhury, 2009: 222-225; Choudhury, 2012: 314), which are -

1. Memorial or Commemorative: This type of megalith is generally erected to commemorate the demise of an individual or the members of a clan; or at times commemorate events of public interest - social, political or ideological. This commemoration signifies status, prestige or social eminence of an individual. Typologically, this type of memorial stone has been identified as menhir or *long-e*, in local dialect and may remain erected near village path(s) leading to *jhum* fields or habitation areas.
2. Funerary and Ritualistic: These are megaliths erected in series and related to funerary and ritualistic purposes. These may be menhir (*long-e*) or dolmen (*cheng-e*).

For the construction of these megalithic monuments, hard, consistent, harmonious and durable rocks, viz., igneous, sandstone, granite and their metamorphic varieties are preferred. The Karbis living in the different villages of Dimoria area construct menhirs to commemorate the dead and also, as monuments of social achievements of the living population. They erect series of stone related to funerary and ritualistic purposes. Along

with the *long-e* or menhirs, *cheng-e* or a flat stone is also put up in front of each menhir to offer food to the dead. A feast of merit is arranged by relatives to honour the dead individual (Medhi and Choudhury, 2009: 222-225). The Lalungs or Tiwas were also used to erecting megaliths in the past.

The Karbis

Previously known as the Mikirs by the Assamese and other communities, the Karbis, constitute an important ethnic group of the hilly Karbi Anglong district of Assam and the North Cachar Hills besides the plain areas like Dimoria, Marakdola, Garchuk etc. of Kamrup district and the districts of Jorhat, Marigaon, Nagaon, Golaghat, Karimganj, Lakhimpur and Sonitpur of Assam, and the Khasi hills district of Meghalaya (Sarma, 1993:20-21; Sahu, 2002: 86). The word Mikir is believed to have been derived from the word *Mengkiri* meaning 'in search of a cat'. Whereas, the term Karbi has been derived from *Me Aakar Bi* (*Me Aakar* = to light a fire; *Bi* = to leave) with *Me* and *Aa* being given up in due course of time (Sahu, 2002: 86).

Racially, these people belong to the Mongoloid group. The Karbi, an interesting tribe, inhabiting the Karbi Anglong district of Assam belong to the Assam-Burma group of linguistic family but the people can neither be put under Bodo nor any other linguistic group (Kar, 1986: 135). On the basis of language, Grierson (1904) classified this population as an intermediate group between the Bodo and the Western Naga. Again, other scholars want to suggest that Karbi language shows mixture of Austric and Bodo languages, though the group undoubtedly belong to the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family. However, Lyall (1881) maintained that the Karbis are more akin to the Bodo than the Khasis. The Karbis are believed to arrive from the north (Kar, 1986:135), especially Central Asia (Bordoloi *et al.* 1987:57), in one of the waves of migration. Ethnically, the Karbis belong to the great Mongoloid group and linguistically they belong to the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan group of Southeast Asia. The ballad prevalent among the Karbis reveals that the community is closely related to the Kuki-Chins and the Karbi language belongs to the Kuki-Chin sub-group (Thakuria and Singh, 2019: 99).

The Karbis, constituting the third largest tribal community in Assam after the Bodos and the Mishings, sometimes call themselves *Arleng* which literally means ‘a man’ (Lyall, 1908:4; Bordoloi et al., 1987: 57) though actually *Manit* or *Munet* is the proper term used by the Karbis to denote a person. Gogoi (1962) and Medhi (1988) pointed out that the term *Arleng* means ‘slanting place near a hill’ and thus it denotes the people living in the slopes of the hills. Because of lack of their own script and hence absence of written records, nowadays the people identify themselves as Karbi, though the origin of the term is uncertain (Medhi, 1988:8). Karbi folklore, mythological tales, and recent anthropological and linguistic findings by scholars have assisted in knowing about their origin, migration and development (Choudhury, 2012: 32-33). Being one among the earliest inhabitants of Assam tracing their origin and existence in China and South-East Asia, Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha called the Mikirs as the ‘Discoverer of Assam’.

In the hills, the Karbis live in huts made on bamboo platforms using timber posts for super structure, whereas the plain Karbis live in plinth houses. The prime occupation of the community is agriculture and they mainly cultivate paddy. The hill Karbis practise shifting cultivation where they cultivate other crops and vegetables as mixed crops besides paddy. They practice *jhum* cultivation in the hills in a traditional way (Das, 2011: 16-19). The Karbi residents of Marakdola, Sarutaru and Pamohi near Garchuk in Kamrup district practice wet paddy cultivation. Since their villages are at the foothills, the people grow paddy and other vegetables in the *jhum* fields too, in a limited quantity. Rice is their staple food. Besides, they consume variety of vegetables like brinjals, cabbage, chillies, fern etc.; fishes and meat of cock, hen, pig and goat. They also prepare local rice beer or *Horlang*. All Karbi women are expert in weaving and spinning. *Rikong*, *choilok* and *ponggho* (headgear) are male attires whereas women tie *pinicamflak* around their waist, *jar-ek* over their upper body, *ringkok* (a long cloth or *chadar*) and *wankok* (waistband) (Kathar, 2014: 16).

The Karbis living in the hills are divided into Chinthong, Ronghang and Amri groups, on the other hand, the Karbis living in the plain districts of the state are called Dumrali or Dumurali or Thalua. Basically, the Dumurali Karbis are found to inhabit the plains of Kamrup district (Kathar, 2014: 9). They have five clans or *Kur*, i.e. Terang, Teron, Enghee, Ingti and Timung and each clan is again subdivided into several sub-clans. The clans are considered equal in status. Clan exogamy is strictly maintained and

monogamy is the prevailing practice among the people. Cross-cousin marriage is highly preferred. Divorce and remarriage is permissible. The Karbis are a patrilocal, patrilineal and patripotestal tribe (Sahu, 2002: 91). Their traditional institutions are *Me* (the village council), *Jirkedam* or *Farla* (the bachelor's dormitory) and *KerungAmei* (the grain bank). The settlement pattern of the Karbis is in the form of a village and the headman or *Gaonbura* or *Sarthe* or *Sarbura* is appointed by the authority of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (Das, 2011: 16-19; Bordoloi et al., 1987:60).

The Karbis worship numerous local deities known as *Arnam-atum*. Ancestor worship has also been observed commonly (Sahu, 2002: 91). *Chojun* or *Swarag* is the most important religious festival of the Karbis at household level. Another significant occasion is *Birkilut* but the most expensive religious ceremony prevalent among them is the *Chomangkan* i.e. Shraddha ceremony. *JambeliAthon*, a designed and decorated wooden pole, carved by artisans is required during *Chomangkan* and other important ceremonies. The Karbis cremate the dead bodies in the specific site allotted to each clan in the crematorium (*Thiri* or *Tipit*) (Bordoloi et al., 1987:62; Das, 2000: 42-45). The people also practice the tradition of erecting megaliths and they believe in rebirth as human beings (Das, 2011: 16-19; Bordoloi et al., 1987:60).

Megalithic tradition among the Karbi population of Kamrup district

The practice of erecting megaliths is observed only in a few isolated pockets among the tribal communities of Northeast India (Jamir, 2014: 333), particularly in Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh in the same pristine way or in a modified form (Choudhury, 2012: 311; Gogoi and Baruah, 2021: 36-47). Among the tribes of Assam, the Karbis living in the hills and plains are continuing this practise since time immemorial. These large stones are usually memorial stones erected in specific site allotted for the erection after the death of an individual. The tradition of erecting megaliths is still found among the Karbi villagers of Pamohi, Datalpara and Maghoapara near Garchuk in Kamrup district. The people of these villages are referred to as the Dumurali Karbis.

The 'feast of merit' exists as the common feature integral to both the hill and the plain Karbi communities although there are some differences observed in the practice of erection of megaliths (Choudhury, 2012: 311). One among the existing differences is that

the plain Karbis perform this ritual after the natural death of each and every individual whereas the hill Karbis hold the same ritual collectively, usually after the death of 10-15 persons (Sarma, 2014: 353-354). The power, property and position of the deceased in the society are decided by the nature of the feast and this is held by the dead person's kith and kin to entertain the villagers at the time of erecting the megalith. Unnatural death caused by accidents, suicide, attack of animals etc. is considered inauspicious and hence the community does not erect any megalith in such cases.



Fig. 1: Megaliths erected by the Karbi population of Assam (source: author)

The process of erecting megaliths

The Karbis of Dimoria construct megalithic structures in their own names while the performer is still alive or after death or in loving memory of their parents or any other dead member of the family. Performances of sacrifices accompanied by grand feast of merit with their pristine beliefs are held by the community. The feast requires a lot of wealth in the form of pigs, fowls, rice-beer and rice (Choudhury, 2012: 315-316).

Numerous steps are involved with the erection of megaliths. The steps followed by the Dumurali Karbis of Kamrup district are discussed below (Thakuria, 2017; Thakuria and Singh, 2019: 101-102):

1. Selection of stone: The selection of a stone to erect as megalith or monolith depends on the availability of the specific rocks or boulders as well as their proximity to the village. After the death of an individual, few villagers go to the nearby hill headed by the local

priest or *karkun* in search of a boulder that may be erected as a megalith in the memory of the deceased. This group of villagers carry some of the necessities along with them such as a pair of betel nut, a pair of betel leaf, a handful of rice, a pot full of rice beer (*Harlong*), a few matches and a hammer. The Karbis use only the 'living stone' as megalith, which is neither eroded nor weathered, and is fresh. The group of villagers and the priest test the required rock or boulder by striking it with the hammer and the selected huge stone is carried back subsequently to the site meant for the erection. At times, if the rock or boulder is too big, the people break it as per requirement and carry it to the specified spot.

2. Transportation of the selected stone: After selection of the desired boulder, it is purified by the priest sprinkling holy water (water to which basil leaves are added) on it. Then the accompanied Karbis tie the stone to bamboo poles which are carried on the shoulders. This method of carrying is called *arjankibi*. Thus the desired stone is transported to the specified site from the hill with the help of the poles. Another method called *kithikarhi* involving wooden trolley to carry the selected stone from up the hills to the site of erection of the megalith is very rarely used.
3. Performance of ritual during erecting the megalith: The villagers with the help of the *karkun* purify both the selected stone (again) and the designated site where the megalith would be erected by sprinkling holy water (water to which basil leaves are added) amidst chanting. The stone is thus washed and purified as well as the site after which the erection takes place amidst incantations by the priest addressing the stone. A flat stone or *cheng-e* is placed just in front of the menhir or *long-e* on the same day for offering food to the deceased. The burial ground and the site for erecting the megaliths for this community are not the same.
4. Performance of ritual after erection of megalith: The erection of megalith is followed by sacrifice of pigs and hens after which the stone is smeared with blood of the sacrificed animals. During this

performance, chanting of hymns continues throughout. Then the erected megalith is wrapped by a *fali* (a loin cloth) or *gamocha* (hand woven towel) if it represents a dead male person. Whereas for a dead female, the erected stone is wrapped by a cotton thread that is not hardened with starch. Sometimes, the cloth used for wrapping the erected megalith, is taken away on the last day of the funeral. This process is followed by a feast of boiled rice and curries made from sacrificed pigs and fowls served to all the villagers. The deceased is given his/her share of the feast on the flat stone or *cheng-e* laid nearby the *long-e* and meant for such purposes. The people present during the feast are then entertained with songs and dances followed by their visit to the house of the deceased individual in order to console the bereaved family members. After people sing and dance the whole night to console the grieved family, they move out of the dead person's house without uttering a parting word as it is regarded inauspicious by the Karbis. The bereaved family members are not allowed to consume any bitter food or prepare rice beer from the first day of an individual's death to the last day of the individual.

Continuity and changes in the tradition of erecting megaliths

The megalithic site of Pamohi is strewn with menhirs in front of which lies a horizontally laid flat slab of stone. The monoliths found from Pamohi have been erected in the memory of the dead Dumurali Karbi population residing in that village. These megaliths belong to the contemporary period and are small in size. These are erected with traditional fervour as memorial stones in fond memory of the dead individuals of the family or clan, the death being natural in occurrence such as death due to old age or suffering from sickness.



Fig.2: Showing monoliths of Pamohi location in the courtyard of prayer hall (source-author)

Megaliths are not raised by the Karbi residents of Pamohi for unnatural deaths as they consider it as inauspicious. Similarities are observed in the cultural practice among the Karbi community i.e. to commemorate the dead and also in the selection of the ground for raising these stones to be different from the burial ground, yet there exists some changes that have occurred in the present day practice at Pamohi in Kamrup district. These are underlined as (Thakuria, 2017: 203-204; Thakuria and Singh, 2019: 103-104) -

1. Generally, two types of stones are erected by the villagers of Pamohi. One big stone (small when compared to the huge megaliths of the prehistoric time) acts as the menhir and another flat stone put up on two smaller stones like that of a table in order to offer food and other ritualistic offerings to the dead. But at present, the flat stone laid in front of the upright menhir is to offer betel nut and leaf to the deceased person.
2. Out of the two stones put up, the upright menhir is in the memory of the dead individual and the other one is in the name of the maternal uncle of the deceased.
3. In the early days, the size of the monoliths or menhirs was big but nowadays the ritual is performed using comparatively small to medium

sized stones, with the Karbis believing that the stone will grow with time depending on whatever good deeds the dead individual made during his/ her lifetime. Thus the tradition is maintained by these Dumurali Karbis of Pamohi.

4. Gender plays its part in the erection of the megaliths or monoliths. In case of menhir being raised for a dead male Karbi, a piece of white loin cloth is tied to the upper part of the stone, which depicts the head gear used by men folk. Whereas, in case the menhir is erected for a deceased woman, the loin white cloth is tied towards the lower part of the monolith depicting a traditional wrapper worn by the female folk. Previously, these clothes used to be of the specific colour that the male and the female cloth generally were.



Fig.3: Monoliths where the upper part is tied with a loin white piece of cloth depicting male deceased individual (source – author)

5. Due to lack of time among the present generation of the community, some of the rituals observed during and after a death is shortened. Previously, a gap of fifteen days occurred between the ritual of calling the spirit of the dead (*jiuli mata*) and the erection of monolith or megalith. But this ritual is no more observed today (personal communication, Kathar, 2014-15).
6. Nowadays, the erection of the stones takes place for some important individual(s) of the Karbi community residing in the village or among their clan members. Megaliths are no longer raised for every dead individual of the community or the clan unlike during the ancient time.

7. Previously, the big stones required to be raised as monolith were brought from top of the hills or the river beds amidst hymns chanted by the priest or *karkun* as well as assisted by villagers. But now-a-days, due to several factors like unavailability of the source of raw material as well as lack of time among the population, the Karbi people bring in any rock or piece of a bigger rock from the vicinity to perform the ritual of erecting the monolith in the memory of the deceased. Moreover, the time period of performing the rituals associated with the dead and the erection of megalith is also reduced.

Discussion and conclusion

Megaliths in varied forms are prevalent in Assam as well as in the other Northeast states from the remote past. A distinct practice of erecting large stones has been found from time immemorial in Assam with evidence of these stones being erected at different locales of the Karbis and the Khasis. The Karbis living in both the hills and the plains maintain the megalithic tradition as a commemorative ritual for the deceased members of the family or the village or the clan. This practice of erecting megaliths has also been observed as a living tradition, i.e. a cultural practice which has taken the form of a tradition by getting transmitted from generation to generation till date since the prehistoric times among the Karbi community of Kamrup district with few changes taking place. Though the contemporary stone structures erected in Pamohi are not huge in size or structure yet the Dumurali Karbis living in this village have kept up with the age-old tradition in loving memory of the deceased members of the family or clan.

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Anthropological Documentation of Cultural Heritage in British Period: Dr. James Wise, Sir Herbert Hope Risley on Namasudra Community

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“Singing is a favourite amusement, and a Chandal crew is rarely without some musical instrument with which to enliven the evening after the toils of the day”

—Dr. James Wise, 1883, p. 260

Abstract

The methodological queries for gaining authentic knowledge about those Indian tribes and castes who could not contribute significantly and sufficiently in the formation of their respective cultural heritage rest on a binary of sources: native sources and foreign sources. Native sources include the printed texts on cultural aspects of different castes and tribes by researchers of their respective communities. For example, the status of authorship of Dr. Oneil Ranjan Biswas¹ on Namasudra community and of Dhirendranath Baske² on Santal community can be credited with ‘native sources’ because both of them were born in Namasudra and Santal community respectively and did authentic research about the cultural heritage and socio-political history of their respective communities. Foreign sources include the printed texts on different cultural aspects of the same by outsiders. It might cause confusion because, by the term ‘foreign’, the academic establishment in India usually raises finger to European and American intellectual establishment. But one of fundamental characteristics of Bahujan Studies is it does not recognize the contribution of Brahminical interpretation or its influences on Bahujan castes and tribes³ as native (Ilaiah, 1996, pp. 115-18; Ilaiah, 2010, pp. 87-93; Ilaiah, 2009, pp. 267-72). With Western interpretation, the Brahminical interpretation from India and outside is categorized as ‘foreign’ too (Moon, 1987, pp. 239-65;

Venkateshwarlu, 2011, pp. 529-37; Ingole, 2020, pp. 91-106)). To put it otherwise, the first category of sources for gaining authentic knowledge about the society and culture of Bahujan castes and tribes is Native Bahujan sources; and the second category is non-Bahujan foreign sources with Indian, Western, Arabic, and others. Having said that the present research paper studies the making of ritual documentation and of cultural heritage of Chandal or Namo or Namasudra community in some foreign sources, i.e. selected written records in the field of anthropology by some notable British administrators in the second half of nineteenth century in Bengal. With its theoretical orientation in Bahujan Studies and Anthropology, it evaluates the first-ever anthropological documentation on the cultural heritage of one of the ethnic communities of Bengal delta.⁴

Bahujan Studies and Cultural Heritage of the Bahujans

Bahujan Studies (BS), although not properly theorized and institutionalized till date across Indian Universities, incorporates discourses of religion, myths and legends, folklore, social and political history, language and literature, arts and sculptures, and all sorts of tangible and intangible cultural resources of those castes and tribes that have never been adequately represented through religious, social, and political empowerment in India and have always been the victims of various types of oppressive systems, such as caste exploitation, economic exploitation, cultural and religious exploitation, and last but not least, political victimization (Ilaiah. 1996, pp. 119-32; Roy, 2016, p. 120).

Historically speaking, those castes and tribes despite having their indigenous cultural heritage fell in the trap of a ruler/ruled power game in which they have always been imprisoned as ruled and have never been allowed to pursue their fundamental right to education. Who is to be held responsible for their social, cultural, and political marginalization in Indian subcontinent is always a matter of debate; but there is no denying the fact that Brahminical hegemony is the foremost among the perpetrators (Moon, 1987, pp. 95-148; Ilaiah, 2009, pp. 179-89; Ilaiah, 2019, pp. 59-63; Biswas, 20008, pp. 26-29; O'Hanlon, 1985, pp. 274-302). Despite all these exploitations and inequity they have been facing over the centuries, they have been partially or largely successful for preserving some of their indigenous cultural aspects, especially folk rituals and Nature Worship Cult⁵ in their respective habitat. Putting an umbrella term for accommodating all those castes and tribes as well as women in general, transgendered persons, and many nomadic and de-notified tribal and caste groups, the word Bahujan

(majority) is found quite appealing and fitting. With earliest known usage by the Buddha in the Anguttara Nikaya⁶ in the Pali Canon, its modern usage is thought to be applied for constitutionally recognized Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes. But the present writer does not recognize that sort of voluntary categorization of different castes and tribes of India as Bahujans with the simple reason that, Bahujan being a noble, inclusive, and holistic acronym for culturally and socially unrepresented communities (if not marginalized in all senses and occasions) in India should not solely crawl around any Constitutional terms, like a creeper around an electric post. Bahujan has both its ancient historical origin and modern social discourse. What if constitutionally approved terms, such as Scheduled Caste or Other Backward Classes become quite obsolete and then abolished one day? It seems quite a theoretical risk to attach the validity of the concept of Bahujan against those terms that very often expose the unreliability of their personal identification or hindrance of social inclusivity. There is no denying the fact that as a single word, Bahujan can not only make those separatist terms irrelevant, but also put more healthy social and cultural identity for those who are unrepresented in different walks of life, irrespective of their caste, gender, and faith in wider Indian social structure (Ranjan, 2016, pp. 10-11; Pankaj, 2016, p. 87; Bharti, 2016, p. 88). Having identified its subject Bahujan Studies pursues its theoretical foundation in the discourse of Buddhism and Ambedkarism, Structuralism and Post-Structuralism, Modernism and Post-Modernism, Marxism, Eco-Criticism, Reformation Theology, among others. In the present paper, with ritual documentation on Chandals or Namos or Namasudras who occupy an important place among Bahujan castes and tribes in West Bengal, Bahujan Studies finds in anthropological writings of British administrators-cum-ethnographers the very foundation of its cultural discourse and formation of its cultural heritage.

Ethnography

Since this paper primarily figures out anthropological writings in the British period as the basic source of documentation of cultural life of Chandals or Namasudras, it seems quite normative to properly historicize the genesis and development of anthropological documentation on Indian society and people by one section of foreign sources, i.e. Western. The very genesis of anthropological discourse is rooted in travelogues of ancient and medieval travellers, such as Herodotus, Democritus

(Cartledge, 2002, pp. 150-51; Metcalf, 2005, p. 7) and in the ethnographic field notes of modern anthropologists, such as Bronislaw Malinowski and Clifford Geertz who through their observations and ‘third person’ narrative offer us the glimpses of life and society of ‘others’ across the globe. Although seen from being an ‘outsider’, not all of their observations are biased or reflection of their ethnocentric ego. When Herodotus wrote, “Most of the Asia was discovered by Darius, who wished to know at what point the Indus river entered the sea” (Kuhrt, 2007, p. 188), he did not demean the autonomous status of Indus region, rather indicated the military power of Achaemenid rulers in 6th and 5th century BCE. When Bronislaw Malinowski (2014) observes on natives of Trobriand Islands, “Perhaps that queer-looking, intelligent native is a renowned sorcerer; perhaps between these two groups of men there exists some important rivalry or vendetta...” (p. 105), his keen observation throws light on the existence of sorcery in Tribal society and the sorcerer’s job as an intermediary in the rivalry between two or more number of tribes. Interaction of anthropologists with the native and their exchange of thoughts with them through communication via a translator or intermediary or informant focus our attention to what is called Ethnography.

Ethnography has proven to be the most valuable sources of gaining Anthropological knowledge about different cultures. Since the term is constituted with “ethnos”, meaning folk, people, nation, their preoccupation is with qualitative study of a particular cultural group. E.E. Evans-Pritchard’s research and writing on the Nilotic people who are indigenous to the Nile Valley is a great ethnographic achievement that introduces to the readers the individualistic cultural heritage, including the political institutions of the respective people. Herbert Hope Risley’s ethnographic work on different castes of Bengal is another classic example of how individualistic and collective study of different castes of Bengal always stands out as essential source of anthropological knowledge. Some of the seminal ethnographic works that always remain fundamental in Anthropology are: *League of the Iroquois* (1851) by Louis Henry Morgan; *Notes and Queries on Anthropology* (1874) by Edward B. Tylor; *Zuni Fetishes* (1883) by Frank Cushing; *Central Tribes of Native Australia* (1899) by Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen; *The Todas* (1906) by W. H. R. Rivers; *Manuel D’Ethnographie* (1967; English translation: *Manual of Ethnography*; 2009) by Marcel Mauss, among others. Ethnography in anthropological discourse is a research venture in which the researcher known as ethnographer gets immersed among the people of a particular culture group,

either a tribe or a caste, or any specific community for a long period of time and produces “through selective observation and theoretical introspection of what is seen, through asking particular question, and interpreting what is said in reply, through writing fieldnotes and transcribing audio-and-video-recording, as well as through writing research reports” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 16). Ethnographic fieldwork as it is widely adopted in this field lies within the anthropological triangle with other two being comparison and contextualization. The ethnographer has to fix the research into this triangle for the sake of comparing his fieldwork knowledge with the wider knowledge he received about other societies through anthropological discourse and reading of some important ethnographic documents. It also applies comparative theory in anthropology to critically study the fieldwork findings. This comparison helps him contextualize the cultural relativism or anthropological relativism, that each tribe or caste or community in general sense nourishes its own cultural values and patterns of living, that an attempt of homogenizing a common cultural narrative for all individualistic groups in anthropology is a methodological error. After comparison is done, the ethnographer fits his research into contextualization. It means relating the work within the cultural relativism in that social and political setting that might accommodate many other tribes or castes or communities. The comparative theories and contextual ethnographic materials provide the current research a discursive validity within anthropology. In other words, “Fieldnotes are filtered and interpreted against comparative theory and against contextual documentary material” in Ethnography (Sanjek, 2002, p. 295). Ethnography has two distinct usages: one, ethnography as products, such as writings i.e. research articles or books; and another, ethnography as process, such as participant observation and fieldwork (Sanjek, 2002, pp. 295-96). Ethnography as products comes after ethnography as process.

Ethnography as a distinct genre of anthropological knowledge emerged in nineteenth century in the writings of colonial administrators, missionaries, travellers, and social theorists. With the rise of distinct disciplines, such as Sociology, Anthropology, and others in the 19th century the growth of qualitative and quantitative forms of knowledge about human society and culture turned into a methodological contest. Since quantitative methodology provides knowledge after mathematical and statistical data and qualitative methodology after fieldwork report, documentation, photography, videography, verbal and other semiotic conversation, two philosophical approaches

almost bifurcate the social research: Positivism and Naturalism. Positivism as a philosophical theory follows: 1. Model of natural sciences; 2. Mathematical and statistical data to be tested and verified constantly; 3. Objective observation of external world and understanding of the same by rational, logical, and argumentative methods (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 6). On the other hand Naturalism follows: 1. Natural state or condition of things in natural setting; 2. Description of things as they appear in the observation without any rational or scientific interpretation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, pp. 6-7). Ethnography adheres to Naturalism and qualitative methodology. It is evident that “the value of ethnography as a social research method is founded upon the existence of ... cultural pattern across and within societies, and their significance for understanding social process” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 9).

Ethnography on India

Despite her long history since Indus Valley civilization, the quantitative and qualitative records of population and their diverse life style of India has never been maintained until the rise of British rule. India's statistical history is quite young and its rise was due to the result of the administrative control between the state and its inhabitants. Christophe Guilmoto (2011) rightly analyses that, “In the nineteenth century, Manuals and Gazetteers, for instance, produced long lists of quantitative and qualitative information, incorporating caste distribution, population figures, land areas and revenues, as well as cattle into the summary of colonial resources” (p. 26). Therefore, the foundation of British rule in India in 1757 can be seen as the germination of ethnography about Indian people and their cultures. It is quite evident that ethnographic writings too officially began in 19th century with statistical accounts and census operations on Indian people by the British government. The Court of Directors in 1807 declared its order to officials to initiate proper steps to prepare a Statistical Survey for India and its people; whereas in Bengal, “The first formulated effort ... dates from 1769 ... the latest orders of the Court of Directors on the subject were issued in 1855” (Hunter, 1875, pp. vi-vii). Although the first pan-Indian census operation was conducted in 1871-72, it is recorded in *Memorandum on the Census of British India of 1871-72* (1875) that similar initiative was undertaken prior to the first census in different provinces by respective provincial administrators, such as in North-West Provinces in 1853 and 1865, in Oudh in 1869, in Punjab in 1855 and 1868, in Hyderabad 1867, in Central Provinces in 1866, and in

Madras since 1851-52 (p. 5). In all these census operations the outcome was a vast-yet-unknown native population with their individual cultural pattern: linguistic, religious, and socio-economic (FULLER, 2016, pp. 217-58; FULLER, 2016, pp. 463-86). This discovery might have amazed the British administrators and we can guess, not all of them were 'colonial ruler-cum-exploiter'. In both halves of nineteenth century, a great number of ethnographic works had been authentically contributed by some notable administrator-cum-ethnographers, such as *Annals and Antiquities of Rajast'han or, the Central and Western Rajpoot States of India* (Vol. 1 in 1829; Vol. 2 in 1832) by James Tod; *Annals of Rural Bengal* (1868) by W. W. Hunter; *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (1872) by Edward Tuite Dulton; *Indian Caste* (Vols. 2, 1877) by John Wilson; *Hindu Tribes and Castes* (3 vols., 1871-81) and *The Tribes and Castes of the Madras Presidency: Together with an Account of the Tribes and Castes of Mysore, Nilgiri and Travancore* (1881; 1975) by Mathew Atmore Sherring; *Notes on the Races, Castes, and Trades of Eastern Bengal* (1883) by James Wise; *An Ethnographical Handbook for the N.-W. Provinces and Oudh* (1890) by William Crooke; *The Study of Ethnology in India* (1891) and *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal* (Vols. 2, 1892) by Herbert Hope Risley, among many others. Apart from individual work mentioned here, the extensive reports of early census, namely of 1872, 1881, 1891, and 1901 remained the core sources of anthropological knowledge about different castes and tribes. Although it is argued by some scholars that there has always been some loopholes in the racial classification of Indian people based on caste (Chakladar, 1936, pp. 511-12), the present writer considers the statistical survey and census operation as the most effective means to expose before others the racial reality of Indian society that was hidden behind the curtain. Consequently all these reports opened up not only the hidden polarized world, but introduced the impenetrable world of customs, rituals, beliefs, languages, social and cultural status, among others of hundreds of Bahujan castes and tribes. It is undoubtedly taken into account that W. W. Hunter or William Crooke relied mostly on census reports for preparing their mammoth ethnographic work on Indian people and their cultures.

With the aforementioned note on ethnographic works, it can certainly be said that some worthy British administrators while being appointed to their respective juridical provinces became quite attentive to the people they were supposed to serve and administer. Although communicative barrier between English-speaking administrators and the Vernacular-speaking native Indians was a major concern, but ICS officers in

19th India were trained in different vernaculars and were assisted by many native officers or attendants who used to play the role of interpreter or translator between them. Two of the finest of such works are *Annals of Rural Bengal* (1868) by William Wilson Hunter and *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (1872) by Edward Tuite Dulton. In both of their works, the representation of different castes and tribes of diverse regions of Bengal show the authenticity and merit of ethnographic documentation. These two early works might have influenced other administrators to indulge in similar sort of documentation of different castes and tribes around their convenient localities during their tenure.

Documentation of Cultural Heritage of the Namasudra Community

The present paper primarily considers the writings of only two representatives: a medical officer-cum-ethnographer and an administrator-cum-ethnographer, namely Dr. James Wise and Sir Herbert Hope Risley. Both of them served some provinces of erstwhile Bengal in the second half of nineteenth century and pioneered the anthropological writings that in many ways laid down the foundation of cultural studies of Bahun castes and tribes in Bengal, especially of Chandals or Namasudras in present context.

James Fawns Norton Wise, or Dr. James Wise (1835-1886) was appointed as a medical officer in Dacca in erstwhile East Bengal around 1860s. He served his duties for thirteen years. Besides medical science, he also earned reputation of being an encoder of some inscriptions that resulted in his meeting with Sir Alexander Cunningham who during his visit to Sonargaon and Vikrampur in 1871-72 got assistance of Dr. Wise. Three of his writings are available, namely *Notes on Races, Castes and Trades of Eastern Bengal* (1883), a major ethnographic work on different castes and their cultural aspects, including many sub-categorization of Bengali Muslims living in East Bengal, and two articles submitted in The Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1874: “Notes on Sonargaon” and “Notes on Bara Bhuiyans.” The text to be accessed and a section from which will be evaluated is *Notes on Races, Castes and Trades of Eastern Bengal*.

In the Introduction, Dr. Wise (1883) specifically locates the habitat around which he conducted his research fieldwork in the following words: “This tract, situated between the rivers Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna is an irregular triangle.... On the north is ... Mymensingh, on the east Tipperah, on the south Báqirganj, and on the west Farrídúr” (p. iii). His ethnographic research in that prescribed region follows certain

methodology and it has been well-expressed in a letter to Sir Risley around 1884. Sir Risley quotes Dr. Wise's ethnographic research in the preface of *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*. With assistance from Mr. H. M. Weathrall, district superintendent of police in Dacca in his time, who could speak native Bangla of that region, Dr. Wise carried out his ethnographic research as he mentioned it to Sir Risley (1892) in a personal letter, "Having ascertained where any caste predominated, we went there, and invited the Purohit and headmen to meet us. Having wrung from them every particular and written down the result at once, we did the same wherever another settlement of the caste was found" (p. xiv). With the reference of village priest and headmen as the proposed informant or translator, question regarding the validity of the information about those castes which were looked down upon and hated by Brahmins might sound doubtful. But since it is mentioned that each of the information was properly verified in two or more visits among same caste group the entire narrative that run through more than four hundred pages might claim trustworthy as well as pioneering in ethnography on Bengal. The following account on Chandal or Namasudra caste is a testimony of their ritual tradition that in many ways focuses on their community-oriented belief-system. Since knowledge about their rituals and religious beliefs were handed down to him by local representatives, Mr. H. M. Weathrall's expertise in native Bangla can be considered as a sieve to extract the gist of the following narrative.

Among Namasudras or Chandals, there were found varied yet contradictory commentaries in respect of the antiquity of their ethnic lineage. Some hold the view that they were formerly Brahmins, but degraded from the vantage position of social hierarchy; some hold the view that they were servants of Brahmins, and other likeminded opinions the base of which is of course the local Brahminical influence on native Namasudras who were denied the right to education and other fundamental rights. But as a learned person, Dr. Wise studied the people and their different community-oriented cultural aspects, including dress code, food habit, languages, and of course belief-systems and rituals. After studying them thoroughly through the lens of ethnography, he (1883) held the following view:

There can be no doubt, however, that they belong to a powerful aboriginal, or Dravidian, tribe, who driven before the Aryan invasion, or by later persecution, sought shelter in the marshy forests of Bengal. The fact that they alone among the

population of lower Bengal use the Kayathi Nagri, the common written language of Dinajpur, and that a Chandal Rajah ruled from the fort whose ruins are still shown in the Bhowal jungle, prove that they were in early times a strongly organized commonwealth driven from their homes in the north in search of freedom, and security of religious worship. (p. 257)

The aforementioned commentary is stuffed with scholarly research that in many respects prove its objectivity as well as critical acumen, rather than imperial partiality. Even if one raises doubt to the hypothesis that Namasudras or Chandals originally bore a Dravidian lineage, one cannot argue that many of their religious practices and rituals closely adhere to what can be called Nature Worship Cult, rather than Brahminical idolatry with Vedic authority that very often found in Bengal. The reference of Kayathi Nagri which requires a separate research for further exploration is the evidence of Namasudras' individualistic cultural resource that despite being restricted in Dinajpur orients our interest to a distinct language other than Bangla. James Wise was the first researcher who traced this language and did a great favor to successive researchers that include Dr. Oneil Ranjan Biswas and Dr. Upendra Nath Biswas,⁷ two finest researchers of this community.

Having reflected on the ethnic antiquity of Chandal-turned-Namasudra of East Bengal Dr. Wise then documented some of the professions they were engaged with. He (1883) observed that:

Although subdivided according to trades Chandáls actually work at anything. They are the only Hindus employed in the boats (Bajrá) hired by Europeans, they form a large population of peasantry, and they are shopkeepers, goldsmiths, blacksmiths, oilmen, as well as a successful traders. (p. 258)

Although he (1883) mentioned them as Hindus, in the 1872 census report, they were included in "semi-Hinduized aborigines" group with seventy-five percent population distribution in "Baqirganj (326,755); Jessore (271,325); Dacca (191,162); Farridpur (156,223); Mymensingh (123,262); and Silhet (122,457)" (pp. 258-59). After a systematic analysis of their ethnicity, professions, and demographic distribution, Dr. Wise then focused on social hierarchy and status of Namasudras as it was dictated by local Brahmins. He (1883) writes, "... vile as he is according to Hindu notion, the Chandál is polluted if he touches the stool on which a Súnrí is sitting" (p. 259). Over the

years they also developed certain caste prejudice as well as it was evident in their behavior towards Europeans (Wise, 1883, p. 259). After the ethnographic study of their ethnicity, professions, demographic distribution, and social status, Dr. Wise focused on a careful and systematic study of some of their ritualistic practices. Given the context that gradual inclination of many Namasudras either towards Islam or Hinduism was quite evident, some of their rituals did adhere close to non-Islamic or non-Hindu faiths. There might have a dearth of proper nomenclature of what they used to believe and celebrate; but one description will suffice and infer the claim of their primitive ritualistic practice and the belief, “Although he has adopted many Hindu idea, the Chaṇḍál still retains his partiality for spirits and swine’s flesh” (Wise, 1883, p. 259).

Some of the rituals Dr. Wise recorded are: *Shashthí Pújah*, an initiation ritual celebrated on the sixth day after the boy child is born; *Vástu Pújah*, a ritual celebration performed on the last day of Bangla month Poush⁸ and dedicated to the earth that they personified as their protector and benevolent force for their survival; worship of Snake Goddess or *Manasa* throughout the month of Srávan⁹; *Chaṇḍál Kúndí* or “*Náo-Ka-Pújah*”, a ritual known as boat worship celebrated on the thirtieth day of Srávan (Wise, 1883, pp. 259-60). In the conclusion of his entry on Chandal or Namasudra community, Dr. Wise (1883) did not forget to mention that despite their low status as attributed by Brahmins and their primitive non-Vedic belief system, “... since their dispersion the Chaṇḍál has become a peaceable and exemplary subject of the English Government” (p. 261).

Sir Herbert Hope Risley (1851-1911), unlike Dr. James Wise was an illustrious ICS and a great ethnographer. Despite the limitations of some of his ethnographic hypothesis on Indian people, especially on Bengali people, his *Tribes and Castes of Bengal* is still the most authentic ethnographic work on the subject and despite inferring different and contradictory opinions the successive anthropologists consider this work as the most valuable one till date. This text, like Dr. Wise’s text was quite valuable to study the rituals of Namasudra community. *The Tribes and Castes* is dedicated to Dr. James Wise, especially for commemorating his thirteen years’ of ethnographic research among different castes in Eastern Bengal. In the detailed introduction at the beginning of his *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, Sir Risley not only eulogizes Dr. Wise’s pioneering research initiative, but also critically evaluated some of his findings as well. In his compendium, Sir Risley studied hundred of castes and brought out ethnic identity,

lifestyle, profession, social status, religious beliefs and customs, and demographic status in 1872 and 1881 census reports of all of them.



Sir Herbert Hope Risley (1851-1911), KCIE, CSI, FRAI. Courtesy: Wikipedia.

Among the castes that were studied in details, Chandal or Namasudra is one and this account is stuffed with some scholarly observations. Risley's account of Chandal or Namasudra runs through more than six pages and got divided into the following headings: traditions of origins; internal structure; marriage; birth customs; religion; occupation; social status; and demographic evidence in 1872 and 1881 census reports.

The account is quite thought-provoking. It starts with a cluster of nomenclatures associated with this particular community of lower Gangetic delta: *Chandál*, *Chánral*, *Chang*, *Nama-Sudra*, *Nama*, *Nishad*. It reflects upon the extensive names or nomenclatures used to identify one particular community. It raises a set of serious questions: What was the reason that a group of people or a community was identified with so many names? Who invented all these names and attributed on them? What do all these names etymologically and semantically mean in wider social hierarchy in Bengal? These questions lie open on the desk of young Bahujan scholars and thinkers. Risley's research on the origin of Namasudra community stands apart from other experts. Being an ethnographer and census commissioner in 1901 census, his knowledge about people of Bengal and their ethnic antiquity was well grounded in the study of ethnology and ethnography. Despite the fact that he was held responsible for introducing racial anthropology in India through census operation by many modern scholars (Trautmann,

1997, p. 203; Walsh, 2011, p. 171; Bayly, 1999, pp. 126-28), the present writer credits him for digging up the social reality of Brahminical caste system and its vicious ‘divide and rule’ policy lying hidden in Bengal and other provinces in India, thus paving the way for an authentic representation of unrepresented and marginalized castes and tribes in India. Based on his study of ethnic identity of different races his formation of ethnic antiquity of Namasudra is quite unique. He (1892) writes that Chandals or Namasudras are:

... a non-Aryan caste of Eastern Bengal, engaged for the most part in boating and cultivation. The derivation of the name Chandál is uncertain, and it is a plausible conjecture that it may have been, like Sudra, the tribal name of one of the aboriginal races whom the Aryans found in possession of the soil” (183).

Considering their social status, he observed, “Unlike the Sudra, however, the Chandáls were debarred from entering even the outer circles of the Aryan system, and from the earliest times they are depicted by Sanskrit writers as outcaste and helot people. (p. 183)

A new phenomenon was also recorded that, “The Chandals of Bengal invariably call themselves Nama-Sudra” (Risley, 1892, p. 184). In this respect, two words need to be separated: Chandal and Nama-Sudra. If the Chandals of Bengal sought to change their former identity and appealed fellow community members to acknowledge Nama-Sudra, a new identity, it then is a strong indication that Chandal was a common slang or abominable expression used by Brahmins to insult someone or to identify someone who does not acknowledge their social hierarchy as pagan or rustic across India. But it raises another question as well: What does the word ‘Chandal’ etymologically mean to Sanskrit grammarians and philologists? Who coined this word and from which sort of sources it was derived? Who were these Chandals originally against who the whole range of Brahminical literature and mythology look down upon and attribute them as outcaste or Untouchable? If Chandal was abusive expression, the concerned group of people in Bengal sought to isolate themselves from this ‘politics of naming.’ It raises another set of questions: Why was this abominable nomenclature attributed to Namasudra community only in Bengal? Who attributed it and when it was done? All these questions and their possible answers shape up a ‘discourse of identity politics’ in which Namasudra

community has been trapped. Risley (1892) opened up this discussion in his ethnographic documentation on Namasudra community and provided his hypothesis:

It may perhaps be inferred from the present geographical position of the Chandáls that they came into contact with Aryans at a comparatively late period, when the caste system had already been fully developed and alien races were regarded with peculiar detestation. (p. 185).

It is plainly visible that the result of this detestation is the attribution of Chandal name by Brahmins upon an indigenous ethnic community in Bengal.

It is quite conceivable that a community that has been marginalized wants to uplift their social status through upward mobility. Their orientation to disown Chandal identity and to embrace Namasudra identity is evidence of such attempt of upward mobility. This psychological preparation was accompanied with a series of newly-invented mythical narratives related to the presumed glory of their early history. Risley (1892) writes, “The legends of the Chandals give no clue to their early history, and appear to have been invented in recent times with the object of glorifying the caste and establishing its claim to a recognized position in the Hindu system” (p. 184). This myth-making ability and having a willingness to be within Hindu system can be seen as a triumph of Brahminism. It is met with an influence of Vedic authority on their primitive beliefs and customs. But despite Brahminical influence found in some of their rituals, such as marriage, child birth, the Namasudras retained many of their non-Vedic rituals through which their primitive belief system is understood. Risley (1892) writes:

Although majority of the caste profess the tenets of the Vaishnava sect of Hindus, they still retain many peculiar religious customs, survivals of an earlier animistic cult. At the Bāstu Púja on the Pous Sankránt, when the earth Goddess is worshipped, the Chandals celebrate an immemorial rite, at which, the caste Brahman does not officiate. They pound rice, work it up into a thin paste, and, colouring it red or yellow, dip a reversed cup into the mess, and stamp a circular marks with it on the ground in front of their house and on the flanks of the village cattle. (p. 187)

According to Dr. James Wise and Risley, this particular ritual which can be categorized as folk ritual of Namasudra was not found among other castes; and the sole function of

this ritual was “preservation of the village and its properties from the enmity of malignant spirit” (Risley, 1892, p. 187). Some of the ritualistic practices of Chandals or Namasudras as documented by Risley are: marriage ritual; birth ritual; *Bastu* ritual; worship of Bansura, a river god; worship of *Manasa*, or the snake goddess; *Chaṇḍāl Kúndí* or “*Náo-Ka-Pújah*”, a ritual known as boat worship.

Evaluation and hypothesis

The entire ritual documentation so far explored brings into limelight many-sided discursive practice that is potential enough to represent one marginalized community through the realm of their community-oriented culture. Despite the limitations and shortcomings of data collection and methodology, i.e. reliance on non-Community informant or translator and the biased interpretation of their community culture by local headman and Brahmin priest or pundit, we cannot miss the most essential characteristics of their cultural heritage that can be categorized in the following way: 1. Ritualistic practices associated to non-Vedic religious cults, better known as Nature Worship Cult celebrated in different calendrical occasions, such as *Bastu* ritual in last day of Bangla month Poush, and worship of *Manasa* or the snake goddess; 2. Brahminized ritual celebration maintaining a good deal of priestly dominance and scriptural norms, such as their marriage ceremony and customs related to child birth, Sasthi puja or initiation ritual ceremony for a boy child, and the ritual of cleanliness or purity a mother goes through for the next couple of days after the child birth. Multiple readings of their documentation reveals the objectivity and authenticity of their ethnographic research based on the anthropological advancement in 19th century Europe. The significance of the entire study lies in many crucial factors: 1. their documentation on Namasudra and many other marginalized castes and tribes of Bengal was done when they did not have any respect and dignity in Brahmin-dominated society; 2. it was done when British government started conducting census operation in all parts of India, thus bringing afresh and raw details about different castes and their social and cultural affairs; 3. it was accomplished when those marginalized castes and tribes were denied any right and access to education by Brahmins the result of which was those people could not write anything significant about history, ethnicity, rituals and customs, social norms and taboos, religious beliefs related to their respective community by themselves.

Bahujan Studies, as explained at the beginning considers the anthropological writings accomplished in the British period as the earliest-known printed records to work on developing a social and cultural discourse that takes us deeper into the multi-colored, yet unexplored world of many Bahujan castes and tribes. From demographic statistics to different types of livelihoods, from various kinds of ritual celebrations to their social status, the ethnographic documentation in census reports as well as individual works, such as *Notes on the Races, Castes, and Trades of Eastern Bengal* and *Tribes and Castes of Bengal* (in two volumes) in the second half of nineteenth century offer contemporary scholars of Bahujan castes and tribes to courageously get into a thorough study of their cultural ancestry. It makes them familiar with what their respective community looked like in 19th century when Brahminical caste hierarchy and religious superstitions captivated their ancestors' life. Simultaneously it informs them about some of the primitive ritualistic practices and religious beliefs existing among them in 19th century or before. Consequently a comparative study can be initiated with the present tradition of ritual celebration and prevailing religious beliefs. This comparative study of rituals and religious beliefs provides a framework for critically evaluating the progress of their respective society. Some of the indices, such as rate of literacy, gender gap, social status, number of primary or secondary schools, professional variations, number of hospitals, among others provide useful clue to draw a developmental framework. Bahujan Studies, therefore, considers the whole range of British census reports, ethnographical writings, administrative reports, judicial reports on the one hand, and personal memoirs, personal letters, diaries of British officers and administrators on the other as the most valuable primary texts to develop a Bahujan social, political, and cultural discourse.

Conclusion

The present paper focuses only on two texts written after the model of great 19th century ethnographic documents, such as *League of the Iroquois* (1851) by Louis Henry Morgan, *Annals of Rural Bengal* (1868) by W. W. Hunter and *An Ethnographical Handbook for the N.-W. Provinces and Oudh* (1890) by William Crooke. Based on the firsthand information provided by village headmen and local informants as well as their own observations and knowledge, Dr. James Wise and Sir Herbert Hope Risley not only did a great academic favor to modern Bahujan scholars of Namasudra community and others with an objective portrayal of native life style and cultural pattern of Namasudra

community, but also preserved 19th century life and culture of the same. Talking about rituals and religious beliefs, their presentation is stuffed with imperishable characteristics that in other ways could not have been recorded any more. The reference of *Bastu* ritual celebration in the 19th century meets with contemporary time when it is still celebrated by Namasudras without altering anything. In this sense, the anthropological writings of British administrators on different castes and tribes laid down the foundation of the most trustworthy sources of our knowledge about the cultural heritage of many Bahunjan castes and tribes, in this case Namasudra community of Bengal in particular.

End Notes

1. Dr. Oneil Ranjan Biswas (1916-2005), born in Namasudra community was an eminent intellectual person of Bahunjan society of Bengal. Having Ph.D degree in Law and Literature, he authored some of the best books on his community as well as on Indian history and society. Some of his seminal works are: *From Justice to Welfare* (1985); *History of India's Freedom Struggle, 1757-1947* (1990); *Shakespeare at Home and Abroad* (1999); *The Supreme Court on Reservation* (2001); *The Namah-Shudras: Origin and Development* (2004).
2. Dhirendranath Baske (1930-2014), born in Santali community is a prolific scholar and historian of the Bahunjan society of Bengal. He writes in Bangla and Santali simultaneously. Some of his seminal works are: *Saontal Gonosongramer Itihas* (History of Santali Mass Movement) (1960); *Poschimbonger Adibasi Somaj* (The Tribal Society of West Bengal), (1987); *Bongo Sonskritite Prak-Boidik Probbhab* (Pre-Vedic Influence in Bengali Culture) (1992); *Saontali Bhasha O Sahityer Itihas* (History of Santali Language and Literature) (1999).
3. Bahunjan Castes and Tribes literally and thematically mean those Indian castes and tribes whose demographic statistics is greater but intellectual and cultural representation is inadequate or unacknowledged or neglected. Namasudra, Rajbanshi, Pundro, Mahishyo, Bagdi, Santali are some of the Bahunjan castes and tribes in West Bengal.
4. Namasudra community has been recognized as one of the ethnic communities of Bengal delta by eminent anthropologists and cultural historians, such as Dr. James Wise, Sir Herbert Hope Risley, Dinesh Chandra Sen, Biraja Sankar Guha, Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, Atul Sur, Dr. Oneil Ranjan Biswas, Dr. Upendranath Biswas, among others. Apart from Wise and Risley, see the following texts: Majumdar, R. C. 1971. *History of Ancient Bengal*. Calcutta, G. Bharadwaj & Co., 17; Guha, B. S. 1931. *Racial Affinities of the People of India*. Census of India, 1931, Ethnographic Report, Part A, Simla, Government of India Press, xxxix-xlii; Sur, Atul. 1977. *Bangalir Nritattik Porichoy* (Ethnic Identity of Bengali People). Kolkata, Jiggasa, 24-37; 38-54. Chanda, Ramaprasad. 1916. *A Study of the Origin of Indo-Aryan People and their Institutions*. Rajshahi, Varendra Research Society, 60; Biswas, Oneil. 2004. *The Namah-Shudra: Origin and Development*. Kolkata, 165-69.
5. By the phrase Nature Worship Cult, the present writer suggests cult or an organized belief system on magnificent manifestations of the Natural world with its different aspects, such as benevolent forces (rain, crops, water body, wind,

sun, soil, greenery, and others), and frightening forces (storm, thunder, flood, earthquake, drought, and others). Those communities that live close to natural world are the witness of both benevolent and frightening forces of Nature. This witness results in veneration and submission to Nature through many ritualistic practices dedicated to her. Namasudra being an agrarian community therefore follows certain beliefs and ritualistic practices solely dedicated to Nature. All these ritualistic practices can be called Nature Worship Cult. Such as *Bastu* ritual.

6. In Pali language based on Devanagari script, Anguttara Nikaya records the following:

“एकपुगलोभिक्षवेलोकेउपपज्जमानोउपपज्जतिबहुजनहितयबहुअनसुखायलोकानुकंपायअ
त्थायहितायसुखायदेवमनुस्सन्(1.xiii.i) See Kashyapa, Bhikkhu. 1950. *The Anguttara Nikaya*. Vol. 1, Patna, Pali Publication Board, 22. In Pali language based on Roman script, Anguttara Nikaya records the following: “*Ekapuggalo bhikkhave loke uppajjamāno uppajjati bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya atthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussānam.*” search Dhamma portal or metta.lk. See <http://metta.lk/tipitaka/2Sutta-Pitaka/4Anguttara-Nikaya/Anguttara1/1-ekaniyata/013-Ekapuggalavaggo-p.html>

7. Upendranath Biswas (b. 1942) was a prolific scholar with Social Anthropology as his disciplinary expertise. He was a former IPS Officer. His most well-known book is *Bango: A Group of Indigenous People* (2004). This anthropological research work has been translated into Bangla by Dr. Gyanprakash Mondal with the title *Bango: Ekti Mulnibasi Jonogosthi* (2014). In this book, he proposed his theory of the ethnicity of Namasudra people. In a nutshell, Dr. Biswas's theory is: *Namasudra people are the successor of their ancestors known as Bango. Bango people were autochthonous people of Bengal, hence Namasudra people inherited this autochthonous lineage from their ancestral Bango people.*
8. Bangla month Poush falls in between January-February in Gregorian calendar.
9. Bangla month Sravan falls in between July-August in Gregorian calendar.

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Evoking Lord Krishna: Practice of Kirtan in North Bengal

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Introduction

Kirtan is the most important element of Hindu religion and culture. This religious form of music is intimately associated with Vaishnavism (Chakravarty and Biswas 223). The spread of kirtan in rural Bengal can be said to have been initiated by the spread of vaishnavism. The term "kirtan" is Sanskrit in origin meaning "narration" or "recitation". But it is used in a different way. The word "kirtan" has derived from "krit" "dhatu" (the root of a word) which means praising. If we remember and eulogize someone who is sublime in terms of beauty, virtue, knowledge and strength, then it becomes an act of kirtan. God is omnipotent, supremely virtuous. His greatness is unparalleled. Hence, kirtan is an act of chanting the name of Lord Krishna and glorifying His majesty (Sanyal 16). Kirtan is sung and performed with the combination of several instruments together, and "khol" being the most important one. "Khol" is the heart and soul of Kirtan music and we can see the blend of it with karatalas, harmonium, and tablas (Lalitha and Nandini). Kirtan has some unique qualities which distinguish it from the other folk songs and musical styles of Bengal. The tune of Kirtan is the combination of various ragas e.g., Kamod, Bhimpalosi, Dhanasri, Mayuri. Similarly, Tala is also an important part of Kirtan music and Kirtanagiya Tala Paddhati is the name of Tala system in Bengal. These Talas are played by Khol. Daspayari, Lofa, Ektali, Dothuki, Som, Sashisekhar and Madandol are the names of some talas prevalent in Bengal (Bhattacharya).

Historical Background

The origin of Kirtan in Bengal can be traced back to the 12th century A.D during the regime of Lakshmana Sena. A few scholars believe that Jayadeva was a poet in the court of the then king of Bengal Lakshmana Sen. Though Jayadev's most famous work "Gitagovindam" was written in Sanskrit, later it became a seminal text for "vaishnavpadabali". The love affair between Radha and Krishna and the narration of those

sagas are called "vaishnavpadabali"(Bangla Bhasha O Shilpa Sahitya SanskritirItihaas 3).The Kirtan songs are based on vaisnavpadabali.Jayadev was also a great musician.He instructed all the ragas and talas almost in every song of "Gitagovindam" and his style is still followed in Bangla kirtan(Mukhopadhyay 1).After "Gitagovindam" the most important work which expanded the tradition of Vaishnav padabali in Bengal is "ShreekrishnaKirtana" by BoruChandidas.It is the only testimonial instance of Bengali literature in the early medieval period.This is a verse drama consists of 418 padas(Bangla Bhasha O Shilpa Sahitya SanskritirItihaas 2).Poets like Dina Chandidas ,DviyaChandidas ,Vidyapati also contributed to kirtan in the pre-chaitanya era of Bengal.Inspite of all these previous instances, Sri Chaitanya is the father of kirtan in Bengal.He was born in Nabadwip on the auspicious day of "falgunipurnima" in later half of the 15th century.He popularized Sankirtan among the common people as he found it an effective medium to attract the masses.Chaitanya believed that the easiest way to worship God is kirtan(Banglapedia).His kirtan songs were highly influenced by his predecessors.He himself used to practice kirtan daily and it is only because of him today kirtan is one of the most widely practiced folk songs in Bengal.What is so great about Sri Chaitanya that he tried to use kirtan as a weapon for eliminating all sorts of prejudices of the society. He fought against casteism, untouchability, and every kind of discrimination which were prevalent in the society.Chaitanya became an ascetic after spreading his ideology of vaishnavism in his own province Nabadwip.In his life of monkhood,Swarup Damodar was his favourite companion.Swarup Damodar interpreted five theories of Shree Krishna among the close associates of Chaitanya-Nityananda,Adaita Acharya,Shribash and Gadadhar Pandit.Nityananda was the biggest propagator of kirtan and Bhakti movement among the followers of Chatanya.After Chaitanya's return to Nilachal from Vrindaban,Nityananda started spreading the essence of vaishnavism in various parts of Bengal(Sanyal 80-92).

Philosophy

In the present world where people lack high spirituality in their life Kirtan is something which can provide them peace of mind. It is a prodigious experience which can be sensed by anyone even if he doesn't know the language. It does not have any religious boundary. The feeling people get from chanting Hare Krishna is divine. They feel connected to the Lord while singing kirtan songs. It creates a powerful energy which is capable of letting

them forget all of their sadness and anxiety. They never feel tired of praising the Almighty. But how much relevant Kirtan is in today's modern times? And why it has got immensely popular in rural places? It is because Kirtan has some magic that easily invites people in doing "Harinam", and that magic is nothing but a sense of devotion towards Lord Krishna. People strongly believe that merely uttering God's name can help them in obtaining emancipation and it was Sri Chaitanya who embedded this idea (Saha).

Different Types of Kirtan

We, as common people, whenever listen to the chanting of "Hare Krishna" and the sounds of khol and karatala, tend to consider it as kirtan. But in terms of its practice, kirtan can predominantly be categorized into two types-1) nama kirtan or sankirtan, 2) lilakirtan or rasakirtan. Nama Kirtan is an act of chanting the names of gods and goddesses repeatedly. Here the worshipped God is Lord Krishna who is known for his innumerable names. The Hare Krishnamahamantra of Nama kirtan is like this: "Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare". Nama Kirtan is performed for one day (AstamPrahar-one prahar is equal to three hours), and also for three days which consists of 24 prahars (Bangla Bhasha O Shilpa Sahitya SanskritirItihaas 3).

The word "Lila" has a connotation of divine play, the play of Lord Krishna, the stories of his childhood, his love affair with Radha. The stories related to gopis or milkmaids of Radha are also part of Lilakirtan. The stories of Sri Chaitanya were also added in Lilakirtan by the devotees of him (Banglapedia). Lila kirtan includes padavalis of radha-krishnalila, such as Nauka Bilas, Nimai Sannyas, Gostha Lila, Ballolia, Jhulan, Mathur, etc. Kirtan has five elements: Katha, Doha, Akhar, Tuk, and Chhut (Bangla Bhasha O Shilpa Sahitya SanskritirItihas). Lila kirtan is also referred to as rasakirtan. There are 64 rasas in kirtan. An acclaimed practitioner of Kirtan, Hare Krishna Babaji of Cooch Behar explained-"It was Swarup Damodar who popularized Lilakirtan or Rasakirtan in Bengal. Swarup Damodar learnt Lilakirtan by heart while remaining in close contact with Chaitanya." After Chaitanya's death, Lilakirtan divided into five gharanas or schools:

1) Garanhat, introduced by Narottam Das who was an exponent of Dhrupad.

- 2)Manoharshahi,introduced and propagated by Jnandas Manohar.
- 3)Reneti, introduced by Acharya Srinivas subsequently popularised by Vaishnavadas and Uddhavadas.
- 4)Mandarini,originated in the Mandaran area Midnapur district.
- 5)Jharkhandioriginated in the Jharkhand area (Sivananda;"Banglapedia").

Apart from two major types,some other types of kirtan which can be seen in Bengal are Bandana kirtan,Parthona kirtan,Aroti kirtan,Adhibaskirtan, Parabgaan,etc(Chakraborty 15).There is another style of Kirtan called Dhap Kirtan.Dhap Kirtan is so popular in the present times which is sung by women(Sivananda).

Practice of Kirtan in North Bengal

From the fifteenth to the seventeenth century there was an eminent trend of Bhakti Dharma that swayed over the whole country and brought peace in the hard times. There are four major denominations in the hindu religion circulated during this Bhakti joyar(flow) which are as follows:-Vaishnavism,Shaktism,Shaivism and Smartism.Due to the Bhakti movement Bhajan(devotional song) and Kirtan became immensely popular. People started getting a lot of interest in these songs. But Bhakti movement was not only about devotion towards different gods and goddesses, it was initially a must-needed social reformation that pushed people to come over their mental narrowness and brought equality to society.As it was not possible for a single Guru to propagate the Bhakti Dharma in the widespread parts of the country, spiritual leaders tried disseminating the Bhakti Dharma in their own regions.Assamese saint Sankardev(1449-1568) played a key role in propagating Bhakti movement in Assam and the adjacent Cooch Behar region(modern day North Bengal).Kirtan was an integral part of Sankardev's Bhagavat and Mahapurushi dharma. He also wrote a number of songs and dramas(Sanyal 18). "Kirtan Ghosa" is one of his poetical works consists of thirty one kirtans. But the most significant role played by Sri Chaitanya(1486-1534) as far as Bengal is concerned.His 'vishnu bhakti' created a revolution first in Rarh Bengal and later in North Bengal as well.

Kirtan in North Bengal is like a regular household practice. The elders of the village always keep themselves engrossed in "Harinam" all along. The reason why Kirtan has

taken place in the hearts of rural folks is because of Vaishnavism. According to Wikipedia, it is the largest Hindu denomination as 67.6% Hindus belong to Vaishnavism. With the acceptance of Vaishnavite religion people came closer towards this devotional chanting known as kirtan. They regard Sri Chaitanya as Lord Krishna. It's their strong feeling that Sri Chaitanya is none other than Lord Krishna. And that's why different names of Sri Chaitanya are also taken while performing Kirtan. His devotees call him Nimai.

Vaishnav Seva is one of the most common practices among the people of Vaishnavite religion. For offering their love and devotion towards Lord Vishnu(Krishna), the devotees organise congregations dedicated to the vaishnavs. This religious congregation is known as Vaishnav Seva in rural Bengal. The beginning of this congregation is characterized by Bhagwat Path which is a beautiful narration of Krishna's life story. Bhagwat path is an act of reminiscing Krishna's life story. After narrating Krishna's life story the vaishnavs dedicate a hymn towards their Guru Sri Chaitanya which is known as Guru Bandana.



Fig.1 Vaishnav Seva

The most striking feature of vaishnav Seva is performance of Naam Kirtan where everybody present there cordially participates. In the end, the ladies of the house serve Prasad to all the vaishnavs. Generally, there are two types of congregation popular among the rural folks: familial and universal. In familial Congregation, they invite their Vaishnav Guru and some local kirtan practitioners who are Vaishnavs as well. In universal congregation, everybody in the village takes part into the programme and hence it's done collectively.

Besides Vaishnav Seva Kirtan is also performed on several occasions by the vaishnavs in rural villages. It is a part of their existence in the world. When good things happen to them, they celebrate by calling kirtan party in their house. Be it a rice ceremony of newborn baby or a marriage ceremony kirtan is always performed. Naam Kirtan is mainly performed on such occasions. In each morning of the Karthik month according to the Bengali Calender vaishnav's perform Nama Kirtan through the streets of the village. They pass from door to door and collect rice and coins for maintaining their livelihood. These kirtan parties are often known as Hari Bol kirtan parties (TROBE-BURTON 159-

160).Even "every ritualistic funeral ends with a kirtan party coming and performing kirtan for an hour or two"("Funeral Kirtan~")

Kirtan is almost performed the whole year in the rural villages. But regular performance or practice of Kirtan is seen especially in the season of winter. This is the time when the performance of Kirtan can be seen in every para(village) in the districts of Cooch Behar, Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri and Uttar Dinajpur. Every local club formed by some senior citizens organize various Kirtan programmes.



Fig.2 Mahanam Kirtan

Prominent Kirtankars across the state are invited to perform at the local Kirtan festivals. In this time, the kirtankars get financially boosted as compared to any other season. Nama kirtan, Lila kirtan, Pala Kirtan, padabali, Mahanam kirtan are mostly sung or performed in these rural Kirtan festivals. In North Bengal, performance of Kirtan can be observed in popular festivals-

Rash Mela

Rashmela is the most celebrated festival of Cooch Behar district. Every year in the month of November on the auspicious occasion of Raash Purnima Rash Mela begins. This grand festival is celebrated in honour of Madanmohan or Lord Krishna. The inauguration of this sacred ceremony is marked by the rotation of Rash Chakra or The Holy Wheel. This festival is characterized by a grand fair for fifteen days or more. Inside the Madan Mohan temple every night eminent Kirtanias perform Bhagwat Katha, Naam Kirtan, Padabali, Lilakirtan, etc. A lot of people gather inside the Madan Mohan temple for enjoying Kirtan songs and performances.

Gaura Purnima

Every year the birthday of Sri Chaitanya is celebrated everywhere by the devotees of him. This day is very special for the Vaishnavs all around the world. The bhakts celebrate this occasion all day long by fasting and performing Chaitanya sankirtana.

Dol Jatra

Dol Jatra or Dol Purnima is another festival dedicated to Lord Krishna and Radha. On this day, the whole country celebrates Holi. Kirtan is performed in different places of North Bengal. These are AstamPrahar Kirtan, AstakalinLilakirtan, etc. Every year on this day at Puratan Post office Para of Cooch Behar city Naam Kirtan and Leelakirtan are performed for seven days continuously. A seven day long kirtan festival is termed as Chhappannoprahar in Bengali language. 'Chhappanno' denotes to fifty-six in English and 'Prahara' is a period of three hours.

Ratha Yatra

Ratha Yatra is the second most celebrated festival of Cooch Behar district. Much like Sri Sri Jagannath Rath Yatra at Puri (Orissa), Madan Mohan (Krishna) of Cooch Behar rides in a chariot from main temple to his maternal aunt's house at Gunjabari. This is a huge festival in Cooch Behar city and on this day at various places people could hear the chanting of Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Rama Rama Hare Hare Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare.

Janmashtami

The birthday of Lord Krishna is celebrated as Janmashtami or Gokulashtami across the globe. All the Krishna bhakts celebrate this day more than any other festival. On this auspicious day kirtans are sung or performed in every Vaishnav temple. Even people celebrate this day by organizing Lilakirtan and Padabali kirtan programme in their own houses for remembering Lord Krishna and his miracles. Moreover, at Bakshirhat (Cooch Behar district) Leela kirtan is performed for nine days. As this traditional kirtan festival lasts for nine days, it is known as Bahattor Prahar kirtan. Bahattor denotes seventy-two in English, and prahar is basically a time period which equals to three hours. People from different places of Cooch Behar and Alipurduar districts gather there on this kirtan festival. This festival usually happens in the month of Magh according to the Bengali Calender.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, it may be concluded that Bengal has an extremely rich heritage of folk music and Kirtan is one of them. There is no doubt that Kirtan has been adopted by the western audiences as a Bhakti Yoga to a large extent and that has only become possible because of the establishment of ISKCONs around the world. Nevertheless, Kirtan has not lost its distinct identity in rural Bengal. As the birthplace of Sri Chaitanya, the pioneer of Kirtan, Bengal has really been able to protect their traditional style. And it is amazing to see such variations of its practice in northern parts of the state. The practice of Kirtan among the multilingual and multicultural population of North Bengal region and its performances in different festivals of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar districts certainly attract tourists and researchers around the world. Hence, it is indisputable to say that the practices, representations, instruments, popularity and uniqueness of Bangla kirtan make it an intangible heritage. Promoting such heritage is extremely important and that will only become possible through cultural tourism.

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Lost Letters of Odisha's Bhakti Poetry: A Critical Study of Select Poetic Compositions of Bhima Bhoi

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Abstract

This paper attempts to trace the lost traditions of Odisha's Bhakti movement through a study of the poetic lineage that culminated in the verses of Saint Poet Bhima Bhoi. The article is based on musical renderings of the verses of Bhima Bhoi by well-known singers of Odisha. The literature and language of Odisha that developed over the centuries render a certain distinctiveness to its musical identity. Narrativity is latent in the musical practices of Odisha that has a blend of its own unique Raaga and Bhāva. In Odisha, the early systems of education were mostly informal in nature, with home education and oral learning as the methods practiced in households. The poetry and narrative structure in the compositions of the classical poets like Adi Kavi Sarala Das, the Panchasakhāmandala, Jayadeva, Salabega, Upendra Bhanja, Bhima Bhoi and several other Odia poets are based in the everydayness of Odisha's cultural and rural landscape. Their poetic compositions provide a unique identity to Odissi

music and storytelling is deeply embedded in the musical compositions. The poetic tradition of Odisha that has strong connection to Jagannath culture and specifically to Shree Mandira in Puri, has language and rhythm as its core. This paper explores narrativity and musicality in select compositions of Bhima Bhoi, the nineteenth-century classical poet of Odisha. The study employs translation into English of select verses of Bhima Bhoi as part of the analytical tool.

Keywords: *Stuticintāmaṇi*, Panchasakhā, Earth-songs, *Bhajanamālā*, Odissi music, Odia Bhagabata

The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.

(Ludwig Wittgenstein *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 5.6)

ରୂପରେଖନାହିଁ ସୂନ୍ୟାଦେହୀଚହାଉଦେହୀ

Rupa-rekhanahin hey, sunyaadehiachhaudde hoi

(Transl. That which is nameless, that which is formless

in the expansivelustrous body of that void --You have risen. You shine.

From the Bhajans of Bhima Bhoi)

Earth songs of Bhima Bhoi

In his seminal work entitled *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921), the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein asserted that our perception of reality (sometimes multiple realities) and its expression in language are deeply interconnected, stating: “We make to ourselves pictures of facts” (statement 2.1). The boundaries of what is “real” in some ways get defined by the limitations of the ability to express the experience (Bhava) of “real” in our language constructs. There is a certain dialogical relationship between the self, creative expressions, and larger cultural constructs. Wittgenstein’s worldview has been summarized by Bertrand Russell in the Introduction to *Tractatus*: “...that it is impossible to say anything about the world as a whole, and that whatever can be said has to be about bounded portions of the world (*Tractatus* xxiii). In a lecture at the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur entitled “How to succeed in spiritual life?”, Swami Sarvapriyananda appropriates Wittgenstein’s thoughts to the concepts in Hinduism of dualism and non-dualism and to the power of

language (he calls it “Mantra-Shakti”) and to the lack of an interconnectedness of essence and form in creative expressions. Sarvapriyananda discusses the interplay of Form (rupa) and Name (nama) and states that “the entirety of language is generated by letters. The universe and our language are co-existent” (Sarvapriyananda “How to Succeed in Spiritual Life”). Therefore, the experience of the polyphonic nature of reality gets limited because of the lack of depth in language to express that reality/-ies. The problem of choosing classical Odia Bhakti poets for a critical study is basically connected to this problem of a limitation in the understanding of the form as well as the essence of their poetry. In the apparent “simplicity” of their verses, deep layers of philosophical, social, political, and cultural contexts are located.

The lack of available popular translation from Odia to English and other Indian languages, remain a challenge for readers beyond the region of Odisha. These verses come from the heartland of Odia cultural traditions, and therefore the untranslatable nature of some of the verses are but obvious. While this study was first undertaken, the authors were unaware of available translations of Bhima Bhoi’s compositions in English language. The present study mostly relies on the words as heard from the musical CDs and cassette (particularly the SAREGAMA version) of popular singers rendering Bhima Bhoi’s bhajans in Odissi style. The authors of the present research recently came across a lucid, scholarly volume entitled *Bhima Bhoi: Verses from the Void* (2010), edited by Bettina Bäumer and Johannes Beltz, comprising serious, engaging translations of the compositions in Bhima Bhoi’s *Stuticintāmaṇi* and *Bhajanamālā*, with biographical notes, as well as historical and hagiographical discussions of Bhima Bhoi’s compositions. In the Chapter Two of this book, Baumer et al. have discussed their source manuscripts and have discussed the entire journey of locating, photographing, copying, and translating the texts (*Bhima Bhoi* 76-78). They have relied on the compositions that were published by Dharmagrantha Store of Cuttack rendered by Karunakar Sahu (published 2000), and on the colophons copied by one of the first disciples of Bhima Bhoi, Hari Panda in 1924. These manuscripts, the editors state, are preserved in Khaliapali, Sonapur since 2000 (76). For their research and translation, the scholars have relied on several important sources that are available in the form of handwritten text in the Odia script. Their source of translation of *Stuticintāmaṇi* and *Bhajanamālā*, is from these published manuscripts from the Dharmagrantha store. They argue that the reason to choose this particular version of text is based on popularity of the published work from Dharmagrantha Store.

There are several translations of Bhima Bhoi's verses such as Sitakanta Mahapatra, RamakantaRatha, and G.C. Mahapatra (*Bhima Bhoi*80). However, in spite of a publication of a series of these texts, the popularity of Bhima Bhoi outside Odisha has been limited to translation scholars or to researchers in Odia language and literature. His presence in the literary circles of Western Odisha is undeniable, even in the twenty first century. However, there are still very limited audience/readers outside the region who have been able to understand or appreciate his literary corpus. Popularizing these works of Bhima Bhoi beyond literary circles, is a daunting task in itself. The Bhakti tradition of Odisha is a rich, but extremely complex tradition due to; (a) language, and (b) the symbolism associated with each expression. Therefore, creating popular discourse around these works may also lead to dilution or gross simplification of the efforts that must have been put into the discovery/translation of these works by previous scholars.

The classical poetic traditions of Odisha display a rich blend of dualistic and non-dualistic play of name and form in the compositions of the Bhakti poets of the region. It is a challenge for any scholar to translate the seemingly "simple" Odia poetic language, mostly practiced in the *Lokabhasha* or rural vernacular landscapes into standard English vocabulary. These limitations of expression, lack of availability of standard grammar and semantic equivalence in the English language become deterrents when attempts are made to bring these rich compositions into popular discourse. Therefore, the nature of research into these poetic traditions have been limited to Odia language studies and to disjointed amateur efforts of individual scholars from Odisha and some earnest efforts in the part of western thinkers relying on Sanskrit diacritical standards. The question of including these texts in Postgraduate or doctoral level curriculum in literary and language studies in India has been largely underexplored, primarily because these verses appear to be relegated to "religious writings" or to oral tradition, thus facing a deprivation of popular attention. In the recent years, with televised performances by well-known singers of Odisha in *Prarthana* channel or in the digital formats of YouTube videos, a kind of revivalism can be perceived in the rich poetic narratives of Odisha in popular discourses. However, these are still limited to Odisha's cultural landscape and the larger part of India are mostly naïve of existence of any such text.

In the above context, the present study makes a humble effort to bring select compositions of Santha Kavi (Saint Poet) Bhima Bhoi(born probably around 1847) to light through listening to the musical recordings in popular CD cover (1976 version, digitized by RP Sanjeev Goenka Group and by SAREGAMA). Therefore, the research does not follow the

standardized transliteration/diacritical marks that have been used in the other brilliant volume of translations. The texts follow plain Roman script in italics, based on copies made from listening to the audio versions of the selected compositions. The aim of this paper is to bring Bhima Bhoi's rich literary oeuvre into popular focus, through a discussion of musicality and storytelling latent in these verses.

In this study, the attempt is to first trace the tradition of Odisha's music and Bhakti poetic heritage to the fifteenth century with the climactic arrival of Adi Kavi Shudramuni Sarala Das in the literary firmament of the times, strengthening Odisha's language and poetic heritage with his magnum opus *Mahabharata*, and the *Chandi Purana* and *Bilanka Ramayana*. Sarala's *Mahabharata* has the unique possibility of being an experiment in modern Odia language as a prose-poetry. The language heritage of Odisha is deeply connected to the pioneering efforts of Sarala Das on the one hand, who defines the beginnings of the Bhakti tradition in Odisha in the Sixteenth Century, while the climax of this movement can be witnessed in the short couplets of Bhima Bhoi almost 400 years later towards the end of nineteenth century.

Bhima Bhoi appeared in the literary and devotional scene of Odisha when the world was reaching a culmination of mechanized industrialization and extreme depersonalization in the nineteenth century, which also became the trademark of the twentieth century -- becoming catalysts to the two world wars. The movement in Odia language that Sarala had started with rich poetic compositions that opened a new perspective into the classical *Mahabharata* in fifteenth century based on *lokamata*, almost finds its artistic finesse in the elegant simplicity of Bhima Bhoi's brief poetic compositions dedicated to the non-dual Advaita Brahma. While Adi Kavi Sarala Das gave the Odia Letter its primordial shape taking the story carved by Vyasa Deva, with larger than life characters of Shree Krishna, Pandavas and Kauravas, Bhima Bhoi on the other hand took the local everyday life of an unknown tribal individual in the quest of the non-dual *self-other* as the basis of his poetic imagination. His compositions are unadorned and clear of ornamental language. The ornament for Bhoi is the metaphorical and allegorical characteristics of simple Odia words in the verses. In *The History of Oriya Literature* (2006) J.M. Mohanty pays a tribute to Bhima Bhoi's contribution stating; "Bhima Bhoi contributed remarkably to this benignity, as Sarala Das did the same about 400 years ago – two pinnacles, one at the beginning, the other at the end, in the total growth of ancient (and medieval) Oriya literature" (Mohanty 245).

Bhima Bhoi's style is in the stark simplicity of his language, a craft devoid of embellishments or ornamental poetic diction, unlike that of his glorious predecessorssuch as Upendra Bhanja or Salabega. However, it is in this simplicity of form and expression that Bhoi interweaves the deep complexities of life, replete with dense symbolism defining complex layers of society, caste, class, the spiritual, as well as human values. The closest similarity of Bhima Bhoi's poetic craft is with the sixteenth century Vaishnava saint poet Achyutananda Das. His poetic craft is full of metaphors and expressions that allude to both the spiritual and the social.

Bhoi can be studied by narrative experts as well as byOdissi music proponents for the musicality of his verses. However, his verses also tell stories. These compositions have a clear earthy texture and are experiential in nature. They are based on real-life struggles, the challenges, poverty and inequality faced by the tribes in Odisha in the nineteenth century, and the efforts of an individual to overcome the socio-economic challenges to achieve the non-dual state of existence, escaping into the highest philosophical and poetic imagination. In this paper, in a later section the attempt is to analyse two storytelling tropes in two verses fromBhoi's poetic oeuvre: (a) *Sunyaa*; (b) *the Naanka-Durbhikhya* (the Great Famine in Odisha in 1866). The tropes have been selected to highlight the organic intermixture of the spiritual, the individual and the social in Bhoi's verse style.

The translations of these verses for the purpose of this study into English language maybe limited due to the difficulties in comprehending the words that have been used by Bhoi. For example, the opening quote used in this articlefromBhoi'sbhajans,reads "*Ruparekhanahin hey, sunyaadehiachhaudde hoi*" (reproduced from *Bhajanamālā*of Bhima Bhoi). A listener may get confused between the tonality/ pronunciation of the word "ude" or "odde". The word "ude" would mean "rising" (just as "sun rises") and the word "odde" would mean "getting wet". For listeners, it may be a confusion between the two words and both can be considered appropriate in the rhyme scheme and in the meaning making process of the poem. The super-soul can rise (୭୬୭) in Śūnya and the super-soul can also bathe (୭୬୭) in Śūnya. It is a challenge for the modern readers/ listeners to understand the philosophical underpinnings of these words. Since these words are based on folk traditions and on oral renderings transferred from one singer to another in rural Odisha, from one note-keeper to another, it is difficult to understand what the "original" Bhima Bhoi was thinking when he composed these songs. In Illustration 1, we reproduce the couplet of *RuparekhaNahin Hey...* with diacritical marks byBäumer and Beltz (340), to illustrate the way in which the editors

have carefully followed the international standard of transliteration marks, as used in Sanskrit. On the other hand, we have deliberately made these verses without standards, to make them accessible to lay readers and students who have an interest in such cultural texts.

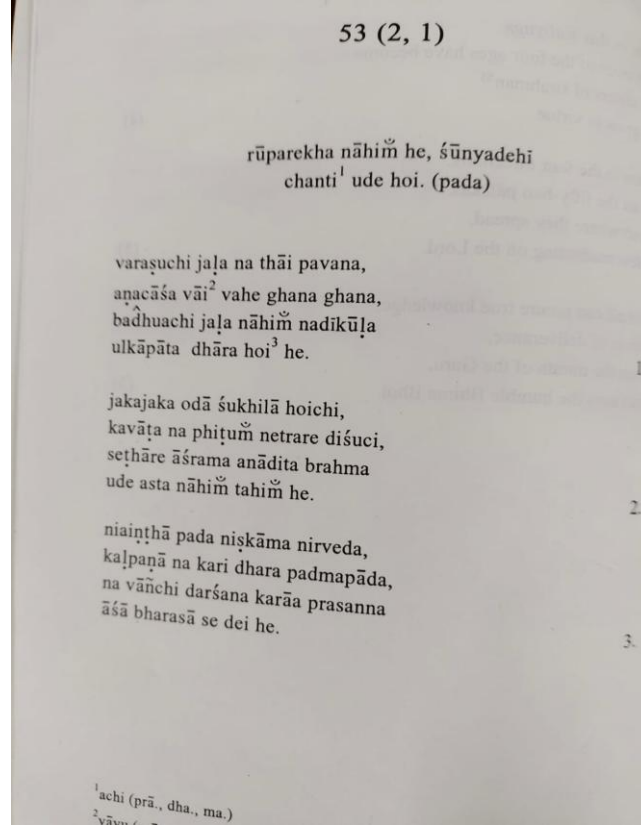


Illustration 1. A scanned snap-shot of the song *RuparekhaNahin Hey...* with the standard transliteration marks from Bäumer and Beltz's translation, p.340.

The title of the English translation of *Ruparekhanahin hey...* in *Bhima Bhoi: Verses from the Void*, is "There is no Rising and Setting". The first stanza reads:

Having neither form nor feature,

The One whose body is the Void

has risen. (341)

For the sake of accessibility and relatability for Indian readers, in this research, we have chosen the words based on listening to the renderings of Pandit Raghunath Panigrahi in the album *Bhajans of Bhima Bhoi* (1976), composed by the legendary composer Balakrishna Das. The translation of *Ruparekhanahin hey*, that was attempted for this research reads:

That which is nameless, that which is formless

in the expansive lustrous body of that void -- You have risen. You shine.

(*Translation ours*)

The above translation is not based on literal word-to-word translation of the composition. We follow an essence-based translation, meant to convey the meaning(s). At this juncture, a brief review of the predecessors of Bhoi may be helpful in locating his art in the cultural tradition of Odisha, narrativity, and musical notes.

Interplay of Poetry, Storytelling and Music in Odisha's Bhakti Tradition

The musical traditions in Odisha date back to the rock edicts of emperor Kharavelá in the second century. These music-poetic-storytelling traditions developed and evolved over the years under the patronage of the successive dynasties. By the onset of the sixteenth century, the traditional Indian musical system was divided into Hindustani and Carnatic music. The musical tradition of Odisha strikes a balancing note between Hindustani and Carnatic style of music. The influence on the traditional music of Odisha bears the effect of both the musical styles (Mohanty 110). However, Odisha's music also has its distinctive identity beyond the *Ragas* and *Taalas* of Hindustani and Carnatic styles. Some of the instruments used in Odisha such as *Jhanjha*, *Khanjani*, *Ghanta*, *Mardala*, *Ginni* (cymbals) owing to its interactions with narratives and the rich poetic diction of Odia Bhakti poets result in a completely unique space of Odia poetry and music. As a result, Odissi music can deliver a balance of *Bhāva* or the *Raga* with its expression of sentiment, the language, and the lyrical value. In addition, the lyricism of the compositions has a storytelling element within themselves. These compositions have a dense narrative structure and tell stories with rhythm, emotions, and performative essence. In the book *Classical Odia* (2013) Debi Prasanna Pattanayak writes, "Odissi music is a mixture of Aryan and Dravidian traditions that led to the evolution and development of the various integral elements that constitute the musical style of Odissi-ragas, *chhanda*, *vrutta* and *tala*" (83). The combination of the cultural and musical practices, in a way, resulted in the formation of Odia *talas* that were more intricate, complex, and uniquely rendered.

Sarala Das (15th century AD) is considered as the first significant poet of Odisha, responsible for developing the autonomy of Odia literature with his notable work like the *Sārālā Mahabharata*. His compositions in *Sarala Mahabharata* drew a parallel with that of

Sanskrit Mahabharata yet retained a completely unique Odia identity. As mentioned by Narayan Panda in *Odia Literature and Sarala Das* (2015),

Although the characters in Sanskrit Mahabharat are endowed with divine connotations, Sarala Das has portrayed them more and more adorned with humanistic characteristics. (84)

Sarala Das interweaves the folktales, the customs and traditions of Odisha into the literature, so much so that it helped in the in the creation of a sense of belongingness among the people (Das 27). BN Patnaik in a manuscript entitled “Ruminating Sarala Mahabharata”, writes about the uniqueness of Sarala’s *Mahabharata*:

Sarala’s Mahabharata is not a purana in the classical mould, satisfying the requirements of a purana. By describing this text as purana, he was saying that it was basically a celebration of the doings (sometimes called lilaa (“divine play”)) of Vishnu in the avataar (“form” or “incarnation”) of Krishna. Thus for him telling the story of the Kauravas and the Pandavas was little more than a pretext for the poet to expatiate on the lilaa of Krishna. If Arjuna won the archery contest in Draupadi’s swayambara and won the hand of Draupadi, it was because of Krishna’s secretive intervention and if Yudhishtira successfully performed the raajasuya yagna it was because of Krishna again. In Karna Parva of his Mahabharata wrote Sarala: para kainsirideinaamatorasiribatschi (“For giving glory to others you bear the name Sribatschi”) (131: 104). And when in the end, his own clan was destroyed, it was merely a realization of Krishna’s own intent. (Patnaik, *Ruminating Sarala Mahabharata*, 5)

In 1509AD Shree Chaitanya came to Odisha from Bengal and spread the message of Gaudiya Vaishnavism in His songs and discourses. The subsequent poets who followed started building upon the foundational poetic style of Rasaleela (the love-play of Radha-Krishna). After Sarala Das, the Panchasakhā -- Balarama Das (1474-1522), Jagannatha Das (1491-1550), Sishu Ananta Das (born 1475 AD), Jasobanta Das (born 1487 AD) and Achyutananda Das (16th century AD), who were known to be the 'pioneers of Utkaliya version of Vaishnavism' were deeply musical in their literary compositions. They were contemporaries of Shree Chaitnya Mahaprabhu. Specifically, Ati Badi Jagannath Das, is known for the magnificent lyricism of the Odia Bhagabata (rendered from Sanskrit Bhagavatam based on the life of Shri Krishna). Ati Badi wrote his couplets in a style known as

Nabakshyari (nine letters), specifically meant to be sung in rhythm. These couplets have inherent musical quality latent in themselves. There are twelve chapters, and each chapter has narrative stanzas telling the story of Krishna, ranging from 50-300 stanzas. (Pattnaik 11).

JagannathaDasa created a revolution in Odia literature and poetry, where his couplets were sung in the deepest of rural Odisha's landscape and the BhagabataTungi (Bhagabatahamlet) was set up in every village. The readings of the Odia *Bhagaabata* in villages of Odisha in the *BhagabataTungi* reflects a deep appreciation of literary texts and the Letter in the so-called "uneducated" masses of the region. Peasants and farmers would gather at the BhagabataTungi in the evenings and listen to the compositions, which was a part of the recreational and knowledge-seeking activities of the villages. Das revolutionized Odia poetry with the *Nabakshyari* meter. The major poetic inspiration can be traced to the influence of Vaishnavism through Jagannatha Dasa's *Bhagabata* and the proliferation of the Chaitanya cult. (Mansingh 124). JagannathaDasa and Shree Chaitanya's Bhakti compositions marked a playful intersection of faith and poetic language. Kailash Chandra Dash in his article "A Discourse on Odia Cultural Spaces" (2020) discusses the concept of "BhagabataTungis" in rural Odisha. These "BhagabataTungis" proliferated in rural Odisha which catered to the storytelling spaces of farmers, women, and the downtrodden classes of the villages. "Storytelling was a defined part of the communitarian activities of these villages" (Sharma & Rath "In the Semiosis of Characters and Colours", Endnote 11). The *Tungi* created generations of storytellers who could cater to an eager audience that flourish on tales from the *Bhagabata*.

The Panchasakhās believed in Lord Jagannatha being *Purnabrahma* (absolute super-soul) and viewed the society beyond the walls of casteism (Chaini 6). They believed in a casteless society. Among the Panchasakhās, Achyutananda Das was more concerned with the issues of the society which can be very distinctly observed in his compositions like the book of prophetic writings known as *Malikaas*. In *Sunya Samhita*, considered to be his last work, Achyutananda knit his spiritual ideas and the consciousness of a responsible social human being wherein he focussed on explanation of his religious philosophies in the form of *Kavya* (poetry). (Chaini 57). His prophesies had some dystopic visions of the upcoming social order in the world beyond sixteenth centuries. Some of the visionary statements of Achyuta's *Malika* form the foundation of Bhima Bhoi's poetic worldview.

AchyutanandaDas's compositions and literary repertoire, thus, held a deep impact on Bhima Bhoi, who was also concerned with society. Bhoi's compositions were a blend of spiritual philosophies of Mahima Dharma that believed in *Sunya*(zero-ness) and equally narrated the agony of his sufferings in the society.

Music, storytelling and lyricism are deeply connected in Odia Bhakti poetic tradition. The foundation of this tradition was established by poets such as Jayadēva through his *Gita-Gōvinda*. Later poets followed this tradition established by Jayadēva and Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in the syncretism of Odisha's ecological and cultural consciousness.

Mansingh identifies in his book "who found songs to be the most suitable vehicle for the deliverance of their lyrical moods"- Kavisurya Baladeva Ratha, Gopalakrushna Pattanayaka (1784-1862) and Banamali Dasa (1720-1793)(134).

The Panchasakhās had established a tradition of strong Bhakti compositions by the end of the sixteenth century. This tradition followed with a symbiotic relationship across religions and communities in the compositions of Salabega (early 17th century). Salabega's devotional poems were among the finest compositions of Padyavali literature were comprehensible and simple, and meant to be sung. Salabega arrived in the literary firmament of Odisha as part of the Islamic invaders of the seventeenth century. However, he was struck by the charm of Shree Jagannath and felt deeply unhappy about the invasions and destruction of Shree Mandira. The well-known Odia bhakti song *Ahe Nila Saila Prabala Matta Barana* narrating the glory of Shree Jagannath remains a landmark contribution of Salabega to this day. Poets such as Salabega contributed to the classical tradition of Odissi music and vocal renderings.

The surge in the compositions and practice of songs can be traced to the latter half of the eighteenth century. While the Cautisā-makers belonged to the northern part of Odisha, the Vaishnava song-makers who composed songs revolving around the romance of Radha-Krishna hailed mostly from the southern Odisha. Kavi Samrat Upendra Bhanja (1670-1740 AD) is known to be the archetype of ornate poetry in Odisha, whose compositions swept the readers and the audience off their feet with a profound and subtle rhythmic line, great metrical success and the 'enchanted' world of love, beauty, and youth (Mansingh 118).

Upendra Bhanja, with his ornate poetic style in his *Vaidesha Bilasa*, gave a complete turning point to the Odia poetic tradition. Today the corpus of his work is known as *Bhanja Sahitya* and *Bhanja Sangita*. Upendra Bhanja had a knack for dense poetic imagery, combined with a penetrating insight of musical notes. He was called "Kalidasa" of Odisha, considering his rich

sensuous poetry based on the epics and Puranic tales, and his grip over musical and instrumental notes of pure Odissi music and the *bhava* latent in those notes. Several *chhandas* or musical couplets are sung in Odisha based on Bhanja's poetic compositions. He was a poet with a keen eye for musical notes and grammar. In Bhanja's poetic compositions, the story of Radha-Krishna get musical reverberations. Later poet such as Radhanatha Ray (1848- 1908), was known to be successor of Upendra Bhanja. His work on the *kavya*'s followed the similar path that Upendra Bhanja and his followers chose, but he took significant departures from Bhanja's composition style.

The influence that Upendra Bhanja had on the fellow aspiring poets and Odia poetry can indubitably be explained through the words of Pandit Gopabandhu Dasa (1877-1928) that Mayadhar Mansingh quotes in his classic *History of Odia literature* (1960) states,

Oh, Upendra,

The Pandits recite your lines at the court,

Gay travellers on the road,

The peasants in the fields and the ladies in the harems,

And the courtesans too, while they dance (Mansingh 118)

Bhanja's contribution to the musical traditions of Odisha is still indelible through his bewitching and enchanting pieces of poetry. The ornate poetry compositions that emerged with Upendra Bhanja were a direct and immediate descendant of Jayadēva's *Gita-gōvinda* that rose to become ornamental *Cautisās*, which evolved further developed to take the shape of *Kavyas*.

The early poets were followed by poets who were deeply into musical compositions, such as Abhimanyu Samanta Simhara (1760- 1806), Kavisurya Baladeva Ratha (1789- 1854) and Bhima Bhoi (1850- 1895). Kavisurya Baladeva Ratha composed *Kishorachandrananda*, a book known to be the only genuine book of *Champu*. Kavisurya's magnum opus is a slender book with 34 lyrics, a *Cautisā*, representing the 34 letters of the alphabet from 'ka' to 'Ksha'. Each song is written with the initial of a particular letter in each line and lines arranged consecutively one after another. The compositions of Kavisurya, as illustrated by Mansingh, metamorphose into a kind of word-painting that is 'exquisite' and 'extremely well planned' that are a result of the grammatical restrictions. The restrictions, on the contrary, seem to

have given added zest to this genius and turned each song into an exquisite miniature painting. The whole, though small, seems to be excellently planned and worked out under the spell of one unbroken poetic frenzy, the mother of all great works in art and literature. (136)

Thus, the musical space of Odisha, was predominantly focused around Bhakti traditions and classical Odissi music with poets like Salabega, KavisuryaBaladevaRatha, Gopalakrushna, Bhima Bhoi, whose contributions to the literary as well as musical space of Odisha helped hold the 'uniqueness' and 'distinctiveness' through various generations.

Life and Times of Bhima Bhoi

Bhima Bhoi was born into the Khond tribe of Odisha, around 1847. He is known to be the greatest Adivasi poet that Odisha has ever produced (Pani 2). He was a child prodigy and perhaps was castaway at childbirth, lost his foster father at a very early age, and was brought up by an uncle until his fifteenth year (Mohanty 233). There is a legend associated with Bhima Bhoi that he had lost his eyesight due to smallpox early in his childhood. Bhima Bhoi's contribution to the literary space of Odisha is significant. Bäumer and Beltz, in the "Introduction" to Bhima Bhoi's life, have stated that: "Though we do not compare Bhima Bhoi to the great saint-poets Kabir, Tukaram or Namdev, who all lived and worked much before him, we claim for him a place of honour within this canon of saints. His compositions are worthy to be admired and read, both within Orissa [Odisha] and abroad (18)."

His compositions reflected his comprehension of the world from the soul's vision. He sang of the Truth, an understanding he acquired from his master (Mansingh 150). At the age of fifteen, Bhima Bhoi suddenly met his spiritual mentor *Mahima Gosain* who was responsible for the popularization of *Advaita-vaad* or non-dualism in the villages of Odisha in the nineteenth century. Bhima Bhoi's difficult childhood experiences as an orphaned child born in a tribal community, his intense personal journey through physical disabilities and financial challenges, and the fast depleting ethical-moral landscape of Odisha, made him choose the path of spiritual *Advaitavaad* as a "house-holder sanyasi".

Bhoi's poetic compositions were lucid and simple, the emphasis being on notes and colloquial expressions that could be easily understood by the lowest rung of the social order in the villages of Odisha. His compositions could be easily followed by the folk singers in the village with an accompaniment of Gini or cymbals, *Khanjani* and *jhanjha*. Following the tradition of *Sunya* and *Advaita*, Bhoi's poetry and his lyrics are stripped of any ornamental

expressions. The images are stark and close to the realities of everyday life in Odisha. The symbolism of his poetry is hidden in the simplicity of words and expressions. The dense folk nature of the songs and their connection to the peculiar rural landscape of Odisha is evident in the minimalism of the compositions. Bhima Bhoi's songs are devoid of any ornamental style, improvisation of techniques, or superfluous music. The simplicity of Bhoi's compositions has a paradox in terms of great symbolism in words. The lyrical compositions hold modesty in craft and thoughts. His well-known compositions include *Stuticintāmaṇi*, *Bhajanamālā*, *Brahma Nirupanagita*, *Cautisāmadhuchakra*, *Adi Anta gita*, *Astaka Behar agita*, *Nirbeda Sadhana*, *Banga's Atha Bhajan*, *Cautisā Granthamala* and *Stuti Nisedhagita* (Senapati 16). *Stuticintāmaṇi*, *Bhajanamālā*, because of the lucid exposition of his thoughts and belief in Mahima Gosain (Supreme Lord of the universe), are considered to be Bhoi's exceptional compositions. The whereabouts of his Teacher *Mahima Gosain* is a mystery in several ways and there is little evidence regarding the life of Bhoi's mentor.

Among his many compositions, 'Brahma Chalak' and 'Cautisā Madhu Chakra' or the 'beehive of Cautisā' retain a unique identity due to a dissociation from his established style and bhakti genre. The latter is known to have 34 stanzas, as the name suggests, and both the compositions explore the love play between Radha and Krishna. As mentioned by Sitakant Mahapatra in the book *Bhima Bhoi* (1983), the compositions 'Cautisā Madhuchakra' and 'Cautisā Rasara Keli' seem to be composed with 'racy folk-idiom' and embody a narrative style about physical enjoyment that is 'uninhibited' and 'unfettered' (Mahapatra 9). The two compositions lay synonymous with Upendra Bhanja's ornate style of compositions.

The lyrics of "Samarpi Deli" are translated into prose in the following paragraphs highlight the poetic substance of Bhoi's poetry. These verses were captured in minimalist style by singers such as Akshaya Mohanty, Raghunath Panigrahi and others. With the use of just Jhanjha, Dholas (double-sided barrel drum), and Kholas (two-sided terracotta drum usually used in devotional songs), these songs recreate a picture of Odisha's villages and rural hamlets where the evenings were spent in listening to and singing these songs in the village squares. The following is an essence-based translation of *Samarpi Deli*.

Chintā arthā badibrutis wābhaba

Karma dharma satya wikrutamarga

Pinda prana banapaani je bhoga

Lalata pate jahalekhajoga

Samarpi deli, pailisarba

(Prose Translation:

Anxieties of fame, money, profession, and passion

Or the path of action, duty, truth, and righteousness

The body that understands this difference between the soul and the self,

Knows that destiny will lead to the path written on the lines of the forehead.

I know the dualisms of the body and the soul.

Thus, giving my all to this nothingness, I got everything I was searching for.

The vision of money and greed possesses you

in the degraded path of life.

The right path is through the attributes of unconditional, selfless surrender for the welfare of all.)

Stitibastujahadeichathaba

Dhana darasuta samsara bhaba

Aya alankarasobhasulabha

Dana deli munniyagurudeba

Samarpi deli, pailasarba

(Translation: The circumstances, the possessions

And all that you have provided me with,

all these materialistic riches, children, and earnings

are just a simple threads of attachment

Whatever I earn in this materialistic world,

I surrender all of it to you my Lord, my Teacher.

I have received the fulfilment and contentment in life by giving all of it away.)

Guru swami jebe Krupa nahoiba

Etharusarbabibhutisariba

Jagatareapakhyatisubhiba

Bhane Bhima Bhoibanabudiba

Samarpi deli, pailasarba

(Translation: If I do not have your grace, my Teacher,

All this stature and accomplishments would end.

My name will be defamed in the world.

Says Bhima Bhoi, that the flag will sink without your grace.

All I know is I surrender my everything to you, my Teacher) (*Translation Original.*)

Bhima Bhoi's musical compositions have touched the chords of his humble audience, comprised by rural listeners of "folk" Odisha. The above composition is sang in a slow tempo, wherein the singer steadily articulates the words and slowly develops the composition. This composition is so powerful that, when rendered, it leaves a lingering impression in the ears of the audience. The composition seems to depict what may be imagined as the musical style of Bhima Bhoi, with the simplicity and innocence replete with the instruments that do not adorn but compliment the soulful recital.

Therefore, Bhima Bhoi's literary repertoire embraces the warm devotional notes of Bhakti music, propagating the *Adwaita* traditions of Mahima Dharma. The lyrics have resonances with the teachings of the Mahayana tradition of Buddhism. The excellent interweaving of words and emotions, accompanied with equal emphasis on the narrativity showcases the poetic genius in the compositions of Bhima Bhoi -- otherwise accounted to be "illiterate" and "blind" by the society of his time.

The composition has a flow, almost as if dancing through the poetic word play adorned with the equal notes of Raaga and Bhāva, each word bearing the weight of the emotions that Bhima Bhoi wished to narrate. It is in these compositions of classical poets like Bhima Bhoi that Odissi music sustained and developed an even more distinguished identity.

The Concept of *Sunyaai* in Bhima Bhoi's Compositions

In Bhima Bhoi's compositions *Sunyaai* is a refrain that forms repeated patterns in the couplets. The concept of *Sunyaai* has its equivalent in the idea of the zero in English literal translation of the word. However, in Odia literature and particularly in the Advaita traditions of Mahima

dharma in Odisha, the word *Sunyaais* not a zero that has no value. In fact, the *Sunya* in Odia language and in the poetic worldview of Bhima Bhoi is loaded in value. The zero is the point where all beginnings and all endings happen. The *Sunya* in these compositions symbolizes a certain loaded emptiness that can be replete with the meanings that the self wants to add in its journey in the world or *Samsara* as mentioned in Bhoi's poetic worldview. It is a complex dialogical system that has emptiness as an appearance, but is full of time-stamps of *Brahman*, *Jeeva*, and the stark *Atomic realities* of the individual self that is in search of its own meaning/s. The *Sunya* in Bhima Bhoi's compositions is emptiness that is full of signs, signifiers, and signified – just that the difference between these are dissolved to nothingness in language, music, and the instrument.

The rhythm and tonality of Bhima Bhoi's verses can only be felt and heard in the silent untranslatability of Odisha's villages, their social systems, and the dense linguistic symbolism of his poetic universe. These are the last fragments of the memory traces of a fast-changing world-order that lives in mass amnesia. In the fragmented world of the twenty-first century driven by the extremes of a digitally triggered civilization, it is difficult to comprehend the Time that was inherent in the Timelessness of Bhoi's compositions and the trope of *Sunya* is a challenge for interpreters of both philosophical as well as literary systems.

The *Naanka-Durbhikya* and its Effects on Bhima Bhoi's Thoughts

When *Naanka-Durbhikya* (the Great Famine of 1866) hit Odisha, it took away the lives of an estimated eight percent of the total population. The famine brought with itself great sufferings and anguish for the people of Odisha that can be observed in some of the compositions of Bhima Bhoi. The misery, the trials and tribulations of the people have been etched in the public memory through his compositions like the following verses in *Stuti Chintamani*.

Praninkaarata dukkha apramitadekhudekhukebasahu,

Mojivanpachhenarkepadithau jagatauddharaheu.

(Translation: The agony and the suffering of my people, how can I bear oh Lord. My prayer is to liberate the world from this misery, Even though my life stand still in the anguish of the hell)

Bhoi's composition portrays the helplessness of the people during the famine, almost enacting the distress in a kind of poetic performance. It is difficult for the future generations to

understand the consequences of the famine for the society of the late nineteenth century. Bhoi's compositions captured and preserved the narratives of the struggle that common human beings went through and the relationship that the society of those times shared with Nature and the ecology. *Naanka-Durbhikya* had a significant impact on the literary repertoire of Bhima Bhoi, so much so that his compositions whisper the grief and despair, a sense of complete oneness with the misery of the listeners.

Bhima Bhoi is one of the rare Indian poets whose assertion:

"mo jeevanapachhe narkepadithau, jagata uddhara heu" ("Let my life remain in hell, but please may the world be salvaged") finds a place in the halls at the United Nations. However, if the poem is critically analysed, there is a possibility of observing the pain and extreme depravation of the tribal population during the Great Famine of Odisha, which had affected people from all castes and classes. However, the deprived sections of Odia society were the most affected by the pain of double colonization and a lack of an understanding of a fast-changing world order propelled by the European domination and by the cataclysms of Nature. The pain of starvation, lack of access to basic human rights, remain a recurring theme in Bhima Bhoi's compositions. These compositions when revisited tell the story of the human will to survive in the face of caste/class humiliation, disease, depravation, and changing socio-political orders that took away basic human rights from a generation of Odias.

Eco-consciousness

Bhakti poets like Bhima Bhoi and the Panchasakhās enriched the literature of India, and particularly that of Odisha with their compositions which were simple and eloquent, a symphony that bound the human emotions with a greater eco-consciousness, something that the contemporary life falls short to comprehend. At the same time, Bhima Bhoi had a clear insight into the existence of a greater Life Force in Nature that could perhaps help develop that will to survive in the face of challenges for human beings. The literary repertoire of these poets holds the potential to help the planet soothe and heal in times of agonizing wars and pandemics. It is, therefore, imperative that the compositions be further traced and analysed before it gets lost in the fast-moving course of time.

In addition to harmonizing the bridge between ecology and humans, the compositions of the classical poets shaped the music of Odisha in the form of present-day Odia music. The music was later sculpted under the patronage of several rulers, invaders, and inhabitants. While the traditional musical spaces of Odisha developed around the premises of Shree Mandira in Puri,

the folk music of Odisha was inspired by the ‘popular culture’ that prevailed in and around the *Lokamata*. A brief reading of the development of these texts over centuries of practice through the various oral sources, historical resources, thus, helps understand the rich lineage that Odissi music carried with itself. The traditional music in Odisha developed in the folds of the literature of Odisha through the work of various significant literary compositions. The oeuvre of classical poets and prose writers like Sarala das, Jayadēva, Salabega, Upendra Bhanja, Panchasakhās, and others whose compositions enriched the musical and literary legacy of Odisha’s cultural and literary space.

Bhima Bhoi’s songs are clearly Earth Songs that have at least one pragmatic impact; to help souls beaten by the harsh realities of everyday life, find a route to escape into the possibilities of non-dual existence, where the *Jeeva* and the *Jeeviare* in unison, not through any extreme transcendental philosophical discourse, but through the simplicity of plain surrender to a higher force that exists in its unquestionable essence. It is challenging for scholars and for students to work on the texts of Bhima Bhoi. However, it may be considered as a rewarding exercise for those who may have perseverance and interest to pursue these deep *humane* nodes of Literature and Culture of India, and particularly that of Odisha. The article hopes that research and classroom engagements in these fields of Comparative Literary and Cultural heritage of India are taken-up by scholars and students in the nation and elsewhere.

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Blessings of Basdevasat OurDoorstep:

Cultural Sustainability Concerns Regarding a Fading Nomadic Community

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Abstract

India is well-known for its numerous lifestyles and traditions. It is simplest in Indian culture that we get blessings in return for any product or commodity, no longer just from our elders, but additionally from beggars and transgenders. They are the flag bearers of this lovely tradition. Basdevas are one of the nomadic groups who owe their parentage to Vasudeva, Krishna's father, and take delivery of themselves to be relative of his line. This conviction shapes their honed style of reverential narration, wherein stories from the Bhagavat Purana prevail in their songs. They reveal spirituality, notions, and ethical values through such songs. This research paper specializes in the oral tradition of the Basdeva community and additionally gives an extensive review of their incredible artwork of making songs and conveying ethical and devotional values to the masses. The study is supposed to discover the demanding situations they confront and also attempt to discover the reasons for their degradation and fading lifestyle. Through studies and interplay with participants of those communities, we can say that in this revolutionary global scenario they're suffering for their survival and find difficulty in cultural sustainability. No doubt positive authorities' rules and schemes are carried out to sell and improve the condition of such fading communities. Indeed, cultural sustainability has become a prime issue for this fading community. Our National Education policy 2020 has also additionally furnished a few systems to foster people's artwork and lifestyles and to deliver local artists within the important stream so that they can also contribute a role in promoting and preserving their culture.

Keywords: Basdevas, Nomadic community, Cultural sustainability, Moral values, NEP2020.

Introduction

We recall the time when we had an experience of the group of Basdeva at our doorstep during our childhood. They were singing the childhood stories of Lord Krishna and were also playing with their typical musical instruments and dance. Our elders asked us to give them flour as *Daan* and our family members stood there to listen to the melodious Krishna Gatha. The children of the family were also enjoying the music and their dance. Once the music and dance subsided we offered them flour & money to them. They smiled and gave blessings to our family. It was a great experience. Fortunately this experience continued for a considerable period of our life. However, life took a turn and we moved on to places where there was a discontinuity with the group of Basdevas. Then, after 2 decades we got the blessings of Basdevas again, when a workshop got organized in our Institute with the folk artist of Madhya Pradesh. We were delighted to see the Basdevas with their traditional attire and instruments. After seeing them again we got curious to know more about Basdeva community.

We researched a lot and collected some statistical data of Madhya Pradesh and found that the total population of Scheduled Castes in Madhya Pradesh is ~74.79 lacs and constitutes around 15.40% of the total population of Madhya Pradesh. 47 Scheduled Caste groups have been notified as Scheduled Tribes. Basdevas also known as Harbola in Madhya Pradesh is listed in this group (<http://scdevelopmentmp.nic.in/>). Under Ministry of social justice and empowerment status of commission for denotified and nomadic tribes, Madhya Pradesh has 51 Nomadic communities. (<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1796873>). VimuktGhummakkar Evam Ardhgummakkar Janjati Kalyan Vibhag of Madhya Pradesh also indicates that it has **51 castes** of denotified, nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes and Basdeva under the name of Harbola is listed as Nomadic community. (<http://vimuktghumakkad.mp.gov.in/nomadic-castes>). As Per National Commission for Backward classes of Madhya Pradesh also listed Basdevas under The Gazette of India. (<http://www.ncbc.nic.in/>)

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54 THE GAZETTE OF INDIA : EXTRAORDINARY [PART I—SEC. 1]				
1	2	3	4	5
69. Vishwan (In Malabar district as referred to in sub-section (2) of Section 5 of the States Reorganisation Act 1956).	240	245		
70. Kaimnara (excluding Malabar district as referred to in sub-section (2) of section 5 of the States Reorganisation Act 1956).	311	31		
71. Maheshwari (excluding Malabar district as referred to in sub-section (2) of section 5 of the States Reorganisation Act 1956).	373	116		
72. Todiya (Todiya) (excluding Malabar district as referred to in sub-section (2) of section 5 of the States Reorganisation Act 1956).	300	116		
73. Marai (including Kaimnara Thak of Malabar District)	471	124		
STATE : MADHYA PRADESH				
Sr. No.	Name of Caste/ community (including sub-caste/Synonym) in the composition of S.E.R.Cs.	Sr. No. in State List.	Sr. No. in Madad List.	Remarks
1	2	3	4	5
1. Ahir,	1	5		
Brijwasi,	1	88		
Gwari, Gwari, Lakshmi-	1	59		
Guchi				
Gwari, (Gwari),	1	8		
Gwari, Gwari, Gwari				
Jadav,	1	5		
Yadav	1	5		
Ram,	1	131		
Thakur	1	240		
Gopi/Gopal	1	34/113		
2. Asari,	2	1		
3. Bhatagi	3	19		
4. Banjara,	4	20		
Kachhwa/Banjara,				
Lamari Banjara,				
Lamari Banjara,				
Lamari/Lamari, Banjari	4	20		
Machari, Machari				
Lakhan,				
Machari Banjari, Navi				
Banjara, Baji Banjara,	4	20		
Nayak, Nayak	4	20		
Lamari/Lamari,	4	20		
Lamari/Lamari,	4	20		
Lamari, Lamari, Lamari,	4	20		
Dharia,				
5. Bani,	5	23		
Wani	5	23		
Wani (Chaurani)	5	23		
Tamoli	5	203		
Tamoli,	5	204		
Kamari, Kamari	5	203		
6. Baraji	6	28		
Sakar,	6	12, 28		
Sakar,	6	28		
Kamari	6	20		
Vishwanara	6	12		
7. Vardar	7	32		
Randava,	8	32		
Randava,	8	32		
Vardava	8	32		
Havali	8	35		
Kapli	8	39		
Kapli	8	39		
Gorali	8	111		
8. Bakhari	9	48		
Bakhari, Bakhari	9	48		
9. Bani	10	53		
Chauri (Chauri)	10	53		
Sati, Satiya	10	53		
Tav	10	248		
Jamari	10	53		
Mari Sati	10	53		
10. Chippa, Chippa	11	55		
Bhaur	11	55		
Nigar	11	55		
Angar	11	131		
Mari	11	55		
Ramari	11	235		
Ramari	11	235		
Ramari	11	235		
Ramari	11	235		
Ramari	11	235		
Ramari	11	235		
11. Dhirari/Dhirari	12	86		
Ilari	12	58		
Kakar,	12	143		
Davar	12	86		
Mallari	12	191		
Nandi, Nandi	12	200		
Tundi	12	271		
Kowli (Kachari)	12	86		
12. Rir	12	105		
(Including Bhopal, Ratan and Ratan District)				
Dhirari/Wilga	12	86		
Sankari	12	253		
13. Pawan	13	239		
Pawan/Bhoyar	13	80		
13. Bauriya	14	62		
Bauriya	14	63		
14. Vastiyar	16	54		
15. Chauri	17	74		
Chauri/Chauri	17	74		
Rafandiya	17	173		
Rajir	17	223		

A National Commission for De-notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (NCDNT) was constituted by Government of India in February 2014, inter-alia, to prepare a state-wise list of castes belonging to De-notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes. As per the report, a total of 1262 communities have been identified as De-notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic communities across the country. (<https://static.pib.gov.in/>). Bibliography on Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Selected Marginal Communities of India: A-K from Census of India,

1961, describes that Basdevas/Harbola/Kaparia/Kapdi/Jaga/Wasudeo is listed as Nomadic Tribe in of Maharashtra.(India. Office of the Registrar General).

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KAPDI	
NOMADIC TRIBE IN MAHARASHTRA	
Enthoven, R. E.	Kapdis. Tribes and Castes of Bombay, Vol. II, Bombay, 1922, pp. 160-161.
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Kaul, H. K.	Kapri. Census of India, 1911, Vol. XIV, Punjab, Part I : Report, Lahore, 1912, p. 462.

We were surprised to know that such type of Nomadic Communities are struggling for their survival and the effects can be seen in their cultural sustainability. But before we enter into this intellectual reflection on cultural sustainability concerns regarding one of such type of fading community, let us first understand their origin, culture and tradition.

Who are Nomads?

Definition of Nomadic and Semi-nomadic Communities from the Cambridge International Dictionary of English(1995) is that the word nomad means ‘a member of a group or people who move from one place to another rather than living in one place all the time’ (p. 959). The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (1995: 786) defines nomad as ‘a member of a tribe or people that moves with its animals from place to place and has no permanent home.’

Basdeva is one of the nomadic community whose main occupation is singing sagas of interesting and inspiring incidents mostly stories of Krishna gatha, Karna ,Shrawan katha etc. Then people listen to their singing with reverence as well as appreciate them. They are folk singers who are originated and developed from many sources and directions. Their complete introduction cannot be given by binding them to some few words or to any one identity. But despite being extremely backward, they have been educating and cultivating the masses

through their singing for centuries. They have been nurturing and promoting the high and sublime values of life.

About Basdevas

Basdeva, Wasudeo, Harbola, Kaparia, Jaga, Kapdi and many more. They are wandering beggar caste of mixed origin who call themselves Sanadhya or Sanaurhia Brahmans. They call themselves Ahirs, because apart from singing songs and begging, they also do animal husbandry. They also trace their origin to Wasudeo, the father of Krishna and the term Basdeva is a corruption of Wasudeo or Wasdeva. Kaparia is the name they bear in the anterved who climb trees in the early morning and then vociferate praises of the diety in a loud voice..Kaparia has been derieved from Kapra, cloth ,owing to the custom of the Basdevas of having several dresses, which they change rapidly like Bahrupia, making themselves up in different characters which they show. Harbola is an occupational term applied to a class of Basedva. In some areas of Bundelkhand and Baghelkhand ,they are also known as BhatroBaban. The name Harbola derived from “Har” means God, and “bolna” means to speak. As the Harbolas wake people up in the morning they are also called Jaga or Awakener. The number of Basdevas in the Central provinces and Berar in 1911 was 2500 and they found principally in Northern District of Chattisgarh. The north eastern part of Chattisgarh has been also a favourite land of many nomadic, religious and folk legend singers of Basdeva community. In some parts of Maharastra ,they were seen wearing a plume of peacock’s feathers, which they say was given to them as a badge by Krishna, and thus they are devotees of lord Krishna. They have several territorial subcastes, as Gangaputri or those who dwell on the banks of the Ganges; Khaltia or Deswari, those who belong to the Central Provinces; Parauha, from Para, a male buffalo calf, being dealers in buffaloes; Harbola or those who climb trees and sing the praises of God. It may be concluded that Basdevas are a mixed occupational group recruited from high to low castes.

Main Occupation & other sources of livelihood

The main work of the Basadevas is singing and other partly business. In singing, they move out of their permanent residences for four months and travel to distant towns and villages. They do not forget their well-known jajmans and by reiterating the relationship of the unique tradition of charity, they also glorify their charity in exchange for the realization of that truth. The tradition of narration would repeatedly remind a person of those patterns of salvation in

life and lead him to that detachment when he realized the futility of wealth and wealth. The feeling generated would attract enthusiastically towards the work of religion and charity.

In other words we can say that the Basdevas group of nomadic people found all over the Central India and Berar region and were are basically beggars who climb the tree in the early morning and sing praises of God and shower their blessings to their jajmans. This kind of tradition can be seen only in India where we accept the blessings even from the beggars and also respect them for the same. Though in (Bombay Gazetteer,xvii.p.108) 2, it is mentioned that the Basdevas have a special connection with kumhars or potters ,whom they address by the term kaka. The Basdevas of northern districts are now commonly engaged in the trade of buying and selling buffaloes. They take young male calves from sangour and damoh district to Chattisgarh, and there they retail them at a profit for rice cultivation, driving them in large herds along the road. The Basdevas have special veneration for the buffalo as the animal from which they can make their livelihood. We can conclude that they cannot be called completely as beggars, because they certainly do not have to beg for alms. Behind their begging, the string of philosophy and principle of life is present but in a weak form.

Tradition of Singing Sagas in Basdevas

The Basdevas, like other oral storyteller communities such as the Devars, Jogis, and PardhanGonds, practised tale telling as part of their traditional occupation. Once upon a time,this nomadic choir community was not only the store custodian and propagator of oral tradition, but they also played the role of its conductor by passing it on to their future generations. They were the flag bearers of moral values and their propagator while walking in these areas spread the moral values through their songs. Basdevas who were settled in different areas of Chattisgarh or near bank of river Ganga, they remember river Ganga again and again and therefore at the end of every couplet they cry ‘ Jai Ganga ’ or ‘ Har Ganga,’ invoking the Ganges. Basdevas are itinerant singers. The ideals-sublime and moral character of Indian culture are the basis of Basdeva Today, even in the changed circumstances, they are engaged in their fixed traditional life activities with the cycle of seasons. They are going through a period of doubt and review about their only singing career, yet most of Basdeva are maintaining social norms due to their unwavering faith and deep devotion in their work.

The Basdevas have deep knowledge and ideas of their past experience, the ground experience gained from their own wandering lives, makes them very firm and thoughtful in

their principles. They come and live among the masses, they become rich and strong with their thoughts. According to them , local people enjoy their popular behavior of singing and displaying moral values through the stories of BhaktShrawan, Krishna's incarnations where Lord Krishna is ranging from his Uncle Kansa's constantly because of his evil behavior towards Krishna's mother Devaki, then the story of King Harishchandra for keeping his word till the last moment ,all these stories explains the value of morality and ideologies in our Indian culture. Harbole sings with full respect and fervor in couplets and religious mythological tales, especially in the favour of those who were benevolent and the brave kings who fought against evils. In these stories, the suffering of the people and people's aspirations and struggles are expressed aesthetically.

Culture, attire and musical instruments

Basdeva sings alone or in a troupe of two or three members. The lead singer is the same, others just repeat the lines sung by the lead singer as an instrumentalist. Basdevas in their childhood join their father or elder brother for ferry. It is a kind of training. It is very difficult to know when they become proficient in playing instruments along with singing. This is how Basdeva singers of the future are prepared. Identity from jajmans, village-village routes, traditional storylines, hymns, stories, singing and evocative presentation, all these are gradually learned. The oral traditions of different regions of the country are a great storehouse of local knowledge, philosophy and expression of those regions and this knowledge store has been reaching the people through these communities. A Basdeva singer playing the musical instruments (Chutki and Paijjan) and wearing Matuk idol on his head while singing.



Photograph by Mr.B.L. Purohit)

As, you can see in the above picture, Basdeva singers are easily recognizable because of their attire. No doubt the costume of these people slightly differs with their regions. In Madhya Pradesh the men wear dhoti kurta with ochre robes, and large yellow turban with large vaishnav tilak on their forehead and *matuk*, over their head and *chutki* in one hand and a *paijaanon* the other and sing while playing *chutki* in a rhythmic manner. Women do not play any musical instruments; they sing hymns in a normal manner.

Basdevas are artists who perform their art with full devotion, with a kind purpose of spreading moral values in the form of melodious songs by using certain musical instruments. With the use of “Sarangi” which is self made, kind of Sitar and “Chutki” which is made up of khair wood and “Paijaan” which is circular like bangles made entirely of brass, in which, iron pellets are put in the inner empty space and round iron chucks are put on the top. When they hold it in their hands and play it with proper rhythm and interval, it allows the singer to pause as the lines sung become tied to the music. These musical instruments are very simple to play but are very melodious and are very attractive in appearance. Then the ‘Matuk’ on their head is basically an idol of Lord Ram, Laxman and Seeta with Hanuman. They worship all these implements as well as their beggar’s wallet on the Janam-Ashtami or Krishna’s birthday, the Dasahra, and the full moon of Magh (January). They rise early and beg only in the morning from about four till eight, and sing songs in praise of Sarwan and Karan. With the usage of contraptions like a Matuk on the head and musical instruments Sarangi, Chutki and Paijaan, the story is sung in form of song which fascinates the people to listen.

The not unusual place topics of Basdeva songs are compositions from the Ramayana and the testimonies of Karna, Moradhwaj, Gopchand, Bhartrihari, Bhole baba. Birha and Bidesiya are critical varieties of making a song which might be sung within side the Baghelkhand. Bidesiya songs are related to the topic of love, separation, and reunion with the beloved. Sarwan was a son renowned for his filial piety; he maintained and did service to his old blind parents to the end of their lives, much against the will of his wife, and was proof against all her machinations to induce him to abandon them. Karan was a proverbially charitable king, and all his family had the same virtue. His wife gave away daily rice and pulse to those who required it, his daughter gave them clothes, and his son distributed cows as alms and his daughter-in-law coconuts. The king himself gave only gold and it is related of him that he was accustomed to expand a land and a quarter weight of gold in alms-giving before he washed himself and paid his morning devotions. Therefore the Basdevas sing that he who

gives early in the morning acquires the merit of Karan; and their presence at this time affords the requisite opportunity to anybody who may be desirous of emulating the king. Songs are accomplished with the aid of using a couple of singers.

Although Basdevas roam around from different villages for a living throughout the year, but after harvesting the paddy crop, especially for next four months from the month of Kartik, goes on *Mangteri*. The Basdevas, who enrich India's unique cultural heritage from generation to generation, live in a very limited space by making their hut like residence. During this period they leave their families where their ancestors have been visiting for years are called their *jajmans*. They make temporary camp on one side of the village they go to. Few lines of the song by Basdevas in Chhattisgarhi dialect when they are asking for *charity*:

“....*Pokhapokha semi la tore,*

Jai gangaan

Budwabaila la de dedaan

Jai gangaan

Jai ho gotiya jai ho tor

Bade bihiya le mang le aavo

Jai gangaan....” (Vasudeva part II)

Analysis

The Basdevas find the public psyche of the place so favourable, they feel that the significance of their song, singing and religion is also fulfilled. Due to the use of local language in their saga, the hosts do not take time to connect with them. *Jajmaan* considers Basdevas to be among them. They easily get ready to donate food grains and money with their hands. All this explains the effectiveness of their art and language to be transmitted through their folk tales with their ease.

Another beautiful example is *Shrawan Gatha* narrated by Basdeva:

.....*Arrharhar Ganga Bhagerathisakalvighan ka kakmati*

Jai Siyaram...Jai Siyaram

Koomvati Nar kePranPuje Ram Tulsi k Praan

...Jai Siyaraam

Main GauShrawankeBaarDekhPutna Jal me

..Jai Siyaram

AndhiKahe k Sarwan Laal Bara Baras ko Sarwan Laal

..Jai Siyaram

Andhi ka beta Sarwan Laal Bara Barasko Sarwan Laal

...Jai Siyaram(Harbole,139)

Analysis

Here,the singer is telling the story of Shrawankumar. He says Ganga river is brought down in this land by Bhagirathi with facing lots of struggle, Koomvati is also worshipping Lord Ram who is considered to be lifeline of Tulsidas ji.Now I will sing and tell you the story of an ideal boy named Shrawan, who was only 12 years of age. He takes care of his blind mother and father because he loves them a lot.

Cultural Sustainability

Social change is inevitable with time .Begging today is considered as inferior and criminal act. The livelihood of ancient sages and such communities are based on such alms .Due to changing scenario in our country where traditions are threatened by modernization and globalization, these nomadic communities are facing cultural crisis. It is difficult to say how many customs and beliefs of the past have lost their existence over time or have been able to maintain themselves in some way by changing their form according to the times. For last 3 decades ,there is a huge change in social conditions. The attitude towards these folk tales,bhajans,storytellers has changed drastically.

These people who ask for charity by singing mythological stories and playing their musical instruments standing at the doorstep of the people every morning, spreading morality ,no longer considered to be worthy of reverence and devotion but rather they are disrespected and ill-treated. These communities have also experienced this change in the eyes of the

common people, that's why their younger generation is abandoning this ancestral and community traditional business. Presently, this community is standing at a cross road from where it is a challenge for their new generation to choose their future. They have neither agricultural land nor any capital due to living on alms and donations for years. Formal education is acutely lacking in these communities. Due to unemployment and illiteracy, their youth are earning their living by working as laborers .No doubt there are certain policies for their upliftment ,but do these policies really help them to sustain and to preserve their culture or what if while educating them technology may take away their real talent may rise to cultural sustainability. Today this community has become so eroded in the public memory that even young generation is unaware of its name.

Institutes such as Madhya Pradesh Tribal Institute Bhopal, Indira Gandhi Manav Sangrahalaya, Bhopal and Tribal and Research development, Bhopal plays very important role in helping such communities and folk artist .They not only encourage and endure their culture but also provide a platform for their art presentation and documentation. We had a fruitful interaction with The Director Mr.Dharmendra Pare of Madhya Pradesh Tribal Museum, Bhopal about the promotion and protection of such communities and tribal art .He shared his experience about folk artist and also about Basdevas and said” It is very necessary to understand that the folk culture is not meant for mentioning in certain books or articles rather it's a practice, performance which can be enjoyed by the audience when they are amidst them. To know more about them one should meet them. We must become a part of them to understand their culture and beautiful art form.”He informed that apart from print documentation ,some amazing videos and presentations are uploaded in the website so that we can enjoy watching their performance.

This interaction amazed us and will definitely trigger the reader's interest that such a community which is so rich in its culture, which spread life affirmative lessons and valuable moral lessons through their singing and stories who are an asset for us is fading and struggling for cultural sustainability. We were fortunate to get the opportunity to meet Basdevas in 3 days workshop conducted by RIE Bhopal. We would like to appreciate RIE (Bhopal) NCERT for conducting such workshops where such local folk artist and talent are getting recognition, respect and also some financial help with a vision to get these folk cultures a place in the mainstream. Even the students of RIE enjoyed and learnt a lot during this workshop. Mutual respect and understanding generated between the artist, students and faculties. They were

appreciated for their artform. Definitely they must have generated a sense of respect for their work. We not only enjoyed their performances rather we spoke to them.

We would like to present our amazing and happy interaction with the two Basdevas from JhariJamuar village of SIDHI district of Madhya Pradesh who participated in 3 days workshop held in Regional Institute of Education Bhopal (NCERT). Some questions were asked to them to which they answered in Hindi (translated in English) and helped us to know more about them.

Q.1 Namaste!! Where are you from?

Answer: JhariJamuar , Sidhi District.

Q.2 May we know your names?

Answer: Ramprasad and Atul.

Q.3) Tell us something about your community?

Answer: We belong to Basdeva community who are known as descendent of Vasudeo (Father of lord Krishna) and therefore we praise lord Krishna in our songs. Bhrathari is our sub caste, follower of Raja Bhrathari (famous in Chhattisgarh), who later turned into yogi and was disciple of Gorakhnath. Therefore Basdevas are also followers of Gorakhnath baba.

Q.4) Please tell us about your occupation? What is your source of livelihood?

Answer: We are basically Nomads, who sing ballads of Krishna and ask for begging. After singing the stories in all the houses, after receiving proper donation, grains, we leave for another village. This is the reason why we make our place of origin as a strong or permanent dwelling and keep moving on travelling for the rest of the month.

Q.5) which language and instruments do you use while singing?

Answer: Madamji , mostly we use local and regional languages so that people can understand our stories and the message we are providing to them. Basdevas who live in northern part of Chhattisgarh state, who were mainly follower of Raja Bhrathari and disciple of Baba Gorakhnath use Chhattisgarhi language. Those who live in Baghelkhand region of Madhya

Pradesh, they use Bagheli or Bundelkhandi language. We use Sarangi, Chutki, Paijan are used as Musical Instruments. They are not purchased; rather we make them usingkhair wood, brass metal and strong thread.

Q.6).You were talking about some message in your stories. Can you tell us what type of message you forward to this society?

Answer: Stories of Krishna life, King Bhrathari,ShrawanKatha,Karna and many other historical and inspiring stories. The authenticity of history exists in these long stories. Apart from these, we sings Bidai, Shraadh and many more songs as per the function because these songs create emotions .The content of these songs are religion, philosophy, spirituality and morality.

Q.7) Can you sing something for us?

Answer: Sure. Since we trace our lineage back to Vasudeva, Krishna's father, and consider ourselves to be his descendants. This idea informs our religious storytelling, which mostly features stories from the Bhagavat Purana or Tulsidas Dohas.

One of the famous Doha of Tulsidas is:

“.... aa dayamool se moola rehigaye

praanmool reh gayeabhimaan

tulsidayanachode ram

jab takrahiye ghat main praan jai ganga

areytulsidayanachodeshyam

jab takrahiye ghat main praan jai ganga.....(Sung by Ramprasad)

Explanation:

Mercy is the root of religion; sin is the root of pride. Tulsidas is devotee of shri Ram and he never leaves him, Similarly we should not leave Mercy till we are alive. That is, religion

teaches us to be kind and at the root of pride grows sinful feelings. Therefore, we should not give up the feeling of kindness till the life is alive in our body.

Q.8) From where you have learnt this style of singing?

Answer: It's an oral tradition .We listen to our ancestors from our early childhood singing gathas and songs. We carry this legacy and try to carry forward this art for our future generation. We are not getting any kind of training for playing musical instruments. It's just we see and learn by our own. I guess we inherit this unique quality.

Q.9) Do you believe in nature worship?

Answer: Since we are from nomadic community and we are also known as awakeners, we live in the lap of nature. Our ancestors used to get up early morning before sunrise and climb up the tree and sing sagas. We worship Peepal tree as it is symbolic of Lord Vishnu i.e Shree Krishna.

Q.10) Are you all satisfied with what you are earning today?

Answer: Madamji, Our culture is struggling for its survival because of this modern lifestyle. Now a day's Basdeva youth have started wearing jeans and fancy clothes. The boys take least interest in listening and learning our tradition. After the policies of Globlization, the centers of entertainment and faith of the rural people have changed. People in our community don't want to continue this work. There are many reasons for this. Earlier our work was respected by our jajmans and other people but now people are looking with a doubt and treat us to be inferior to them.

Q.11) Government is taking so many steps for the upliftment of such communities. Are you aware of such initiatives?

Answer: Madamji ,we do agriculture or animal husbandry to earn livelihood apart from singing .We don't have any idea about such policies of government. But we really want to save our culture and tradition and seek help from government for the same.

Q.12) What do you expect from the government?

Answer: Now a day's no doubt government is working for our betterment but it would be better if we can get some agricultural land in our village, so that we can have some extra income. We have already requested to our village Sarpanch but nobody is taking this matter seriously. We really want to improve our condition.

Q.13)How are you feeling coming to RIE,Bhopal and performing in front of the students and other faculties?

Answer: Madamji, we are happy to that RIE,Bhopal acknowledged us and gave us this opportunity to attend this workshop. We enjoyed a lot.

Thank you for this wonderful interaction.

The Basdevas who took part in the above conversation were Atul Basdeva and Ramprasad. They are basically relatives and belong to same family. Ramprasad is about 55 years still following his traditional practices and keeping alive the hereditary hymn singing of Basdeva community. Atul who is very young about 22 years of age is a well trained singer and can efficiently play Sarangi. Both of them individually played their musical instruments and sang some songs. While listening to their songs I was mesmerized by their style and the message they were giving to me through their song. Few lines from the song are:

“... Ram ram ka le le naam

Jo levebhagawan ka naam ,jai ganga

Kaisan beta sharwarahey ,maibaap ka sewakarey

Tar sewaduniyama kahaiye jai ganga”.....(Sung by Ramprasad)

Moral: The song narrates the story of shrawankumar who sacrificed his life for the sake of his blind parents. Through his story we get a moral lesson that we should always respect our elders and take care of our parents till our last breathe.

Another song by Atul was about Goddess Durga. He sang the bhajan using Sarangi and sang in Chhattisgarhi dialect describing about the devotion people have for Goddess Durga, as she is considered to be mother of all.



(Photography by Mr.B.L. Purohit)

After this interview, we discovered that they are very simple in appearance but the roots of their culture is very deep, we discovered that they have tremendous energy, talent of singing and playing special instruments carrying unique feature of spreading morality and life affirmative lessons through songs which is still unnoticed by our youngsters. It was a wonderful experience listening to them live. We were in ecstasy while listening to their songs with the rhythmic sound of their musical instruments. This experience led to address their present and future concerns regarding the challenges and survival issues of this nomadic community.

Indeed, they are the flag bearer of moral values in our society .But the present scenario is does not support these artforms.Its our duty to preserve their culture, Some alternative source of income should be made available to them so that they survival easily. For their upliftment Government has made certain policies under National Education Policy2020.

As per National Education Policy (2020), tribal communities and children from Scheduled Tribes also face disadvantages at multiple levels due to various historical and geographical

factors. Children from tribal communities often find their school education irrelevant and foreign to their lives, both culturally and academically. While several programmatic interventions to uplift children from tribal communities are currently in place, and will continue to be pursued, special mechanisms need to be made to ensure that children belonging to tribal communities receive the benefits of these interventions.”(6.2.3)

All languages in India, and their associated arts and culture will be documented via a web-based platform/portal/wiki, in order to preserve endangered and all Indian languages and their associated rich local arts and culture. The platform will contain videos, dictionaries, recordings, and more, of people (especially elders) speaking the language, telling stories, reciting poetry, and performing plays, folk songs and dances, and more. People from across the country will be invited to and able to contribute to these efforts by adding relevant material onto these platforms/portals/wikis. Universities and their research teams will work with each other and with communities across the country towards attaining rich such platforms. These preservation efforts, and their associated research projects, e.g., in history, archaeology, linguistics, etc., will be funded by the NRF.(22.15.)

Constitutional mechanism for their upliftment

The deep concerns of the drafters of the Constitution for such backward classes are reflected in the elaborate constitutional mechanisms set up for their upheaval. Article 17 of Indian Constitution abolishes untouchables. Article 46 "promotes the educational and economic interests of the vulnerable population, especially registered castes and registered tribes, with special attention and removes them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation. The state is obliged to protect. Article 335 is consistent with the maintenance of efficient administration, the allegations of enlisted castes and members of enlisted tribes are of services and positions related to coalition or national operations. It provides that it must be considered in the appointment. Article 15 (4) refers to special provisions regarding carriage. Article 16 (4A) states "Reservations for promotion of Government Services to one or more Post classes for the benefit of SC / ST not properly represented by Government Services". Article 338 is set out in the National Commission of Caste and Tribes, which investigates and supervises all matters relating to the protection provided to caste and tribes, investigates specific complaints, and socio-economic development. You are obliged to participate in and advise on the planning process of. Articles 330 and 332 of the Constitution provide for the

reservation of seats in favor of the built-in caste and built-in tribes of the House of Representatives and the Legislature, respectively. Under Part IX which is related to Panchayati Raj and Part IXA of the Constitution related to the community, reservations for castes and tribes incorporated into local bodies were envisioned and provided. It aims to promote their educational and economic interests and eliminate social obstacles. The Department of Social Justice and Empowerment is the Ministry of Node, which oversees the interests of enlisted castes.

Other Government Policies for the development of such communities:

- 1.Saksham Scheme This is a special scheme under Term Loan for young professionals belonging to Backward Classes of the target group.
- 2.Education Loan Scheme NBCFDC provides Educational Loans to the students of Backward Classes living below double the poverty line for pursuing general/ professional/technical courses or trainings at graduate and/or higher levels.
- 3.Shilp Sampada Scheme The objective of this scheme is to upgrade the technical and entrepreneurial skill of Backward Classes by way of providing training and financial assistance under Term Loan for selfemployment in traditional craft etc.

Cultural Policies

By the Minister of State (I/c) of Culture and Tourism certain policies were made to preserve & promote various forms of folk art and culture of the tribals throughout the country .Some of them are:

- 1) Award to Young Talented Artists: This scheme is being implemented by Ministry of culture to promote the young talented artist in age group of 18-31 years in the field of various folk art forms which are rare and at the verge of extinct.
- 2)Guru Shishya Parampara:This scheme has provided security to a large number of old and retired artist to promote and nurture rare and vanishing art forms by teaching shishyas from rural areas .

3)National Cultural Exchange Programme (NCEP): It can be termed as the lifeline of the Zonal Cultural Centers. Under this scheme, various festivals of performing arts, exhibitions, yatras etc are organized in member States.

4)Research & Documentation: To preserve promote and propagate vanishing visual and performing art forms including folk, tribal and classical in the field of music, dance, theatre, literature, fine arts etc. in print/ audio – visual media. The art form is finalized in consultation with state Cultural Department.

Conclusion

Basdevas contribute significantly to the moral development of the people by singing the victory saga of high moral values in the society through hymns, folk tales and narratives. The way these nomadic singer community present written and unwritten stories in local dialects by making them easily receptive and unique. The important work done by these communities in keeping the original story of the plot intact and translating it into the local dialect and incorporating portions of hymns or songs in it to make it melodious is commendable.

It is now up to us to appreciate their art form and treat them with the utmost respect. We used to receive their blessings at our doorstep, but due to unforeseen circumstances, we are now summoning them to our educational institute to receive their blessings. They also have mutual respect and are compensated for their contributions. In the minds of their future generations, this will undoubtedly create a positive and proud image. We can assist them in maintaining their culture in this way. They've evolved into artists rather than beggars. They are gaining a special place in our society. Their blessings will help us to cherish and sustain our Indian culture. In this way, the tree of culture, with its fruits of spirituality, religion, valor, courage, morality, and respect, will blossom in our lives and will add to the beauty of the rich and diverse Indian culture.

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Cultural Construction of Kalahandi's Droughts

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Abstract

Droughts are unpredictable, and both society and the government have made efforts and investments to understand the causes and effects of droughts in order to predict and prepare for them. However, there exists a dichotomy between institutional understanding of drought and local perception of drought, and the differences are driven more by ideology than by accuracy of prediction and mitigation. Droughts and famines, the locals perceive, are the outcomes of human actions that the community provokes by violating moral codes or transgressing taboos. The mainstream drought discourse tends to overlook cultural construction of drought in favour of natural and objective variables. Kalahandi is infamous for poverty, hunger, and starvation due to weather-induced distress. With the ethnographic data from Kalahandi, this paper presents an empirical analysis of the indigenous weather prediction methods as well as the causes and consequences of droughts.

Keywords: goddesses, spirit, taboo, rain prediction, moral code, drought

Introduction

Kalahandi, a district in the western part of Odisha, has been synonymous with drought, poverty, and starvation deaths. Rain-fed agriculture across the country faces uncertainty as it is habitually threatened by scant, erratic, and unseasonal rain, causing distress and anxiety among the farming communities. From the technocratic perspective of the government, drought is defined using scientific data from meteorological sources such as wind, rain, and moisture content, and they are primarily concerned with the technical components of the drought. Likewise, the institutional approach to drought prediction, and preparation for any eventuality was based on a set of universal concepts that disregarded local socioeconomic practices.

However, defining drought in a technocratic and institutional approach is diametrically opposed to the indigenous method of perceiving and predicting droughts. Socio-cultural and environmental factors play important roles in comprehending the drought among the locals. Drought is perceived as a socially and morally produced condition in the local cultural context. The locals believe it is a divine retribution for deviations from social norms and transgressions of taboos. In order to make peace with the goddesses, deities, spirits, and ancestors, they perform various rituals and ceremonies.

The locals predict weather and rain by observing the vegetation, wildlife, the nature and direction of wind and cloud movements, as well as the appearance of various celestial bodies. To deal with this recurring, unpredictable monsoon rain, the inhabitants evolved their own strategies for predicting the weather events, reducing anxiety, and adapting to the existing and impending economic crisis as well as socio-cultural instability.

Why do the villagers believe in the indigenous weather forecast systems, despite their numerous flaws and inaccurate predictions? Does it consistent with local religious belief systems, in which believe and acknowledging indigenous rain rituals implies adherence to the moral, religious, and social order of the community? Since the devotees believe that deviations from norms and taboos are to blame for the lack of rain, which resulted in drought.

In terms of drought classification, there is a difference between institutional and local perceptions of drought. In the institutional classification, droughts were classified as meteorological, hydrological, and agricultural. Drought is referred to as *Makar* in the local

dialect, and makar is defined as a degree of crop loss due to a scant, erratic, unseasonal, or lack of precipitation. The severity of drought is assessed by the rate at which paddy (being the staple food crop which is widely cultivated in the region) production declines due to lack of precipitation. On the severity scale, droughts are classified into three broad types: *Saan Makar* (moderate drought), *Baad Makar* (acute drought), and *Cher Makar* (disaster). The inhabitants believe that drought is an outcome of violations of the moral code of conduct, desecration of sacred objects, and cultural taboos. Therefore, the locals perform various rituals and ceremonies to appease the deities of rain, crops, and other malevolent and beneficent spirits whom the locals might have displeased by treating them discourteously.

Both ancestors and goddesses are seen as protectors by the locals, but they also believe that they will punish them if they violate societal norms and moral codes. As a result, they use these beliefs to explain natural calamities and to underline the significance of adhering to cultural norms and moral codes in order to maintain societal order. Consequently, droughts were occasions for collectively addressing the social and moral order of society.

Institutional and local responses to drought perception, forecasting, and preparation differ significantly. Locals perceive droughts as the outcome of certain undesirable human behaviours, whereas the state characterises droughts using the paraphernalia of so-called scientific facts. Rather than seeing it as a natural occurrence, the locals see it as a social phenomenon since they believe it is a direct result of their actions. To appease the rain gods, various rain rituals were performed, and in the event of monsoon delay, multiple methods of rain prediction were employed, and the villagers intensified rain rituals before local deities, spirits, and ancestors. It is interesting to learn how religious and cultural beliefs influence perceptions of reality. How do the locals construct drought in their cultural context? This paper attempts to analyse how cultural beliefs shape local perceptions of drought and, in turn, influence the strategies employed to deal with the impending drought. It also intends to analyse how the cultural explanation has evolved, why these ideals are revered and held dear, and how they influence the inhabitants' attitudes and choices in response to drought.

The Harbingers of Rain

Monsoon rain is notoriously difficult to forecast, eluding meteorologists and local weathermen alike. People congregate around traditional weather foretellers, listening to person possessed by local deities as well as village elders who recite tales and stories to impart their own wisdom, forecasting rain between the months of May and July. The devotee

posed a series of questions to the deities, pleading with them to respond and show them some signs so that they could understand. Just before the onset of the monsoon, the *Pujari* (village priest), *Gunia* (witch doctor or traditional medicine man), fortune tellers, and astrologers foretell the pattern of rainfall and the percentage of crop yields. In order to predict rain, each foreteller uses his/her own sources and methods of gathering information, in addition to a few common criteria. In rainfed conditions, precipitation significantly determines the health and well-being of the community. The farming community is concerned about the rainfall that determines their existence, hence, rain uncertainty causes widespread anxiety. Local deities, ancestors, and sacred sites in the village appear to be saviours in alleviating the anxiety induced by monsoon uncertainty. As the arrival of the monsoon is delayed, these activities become more intense.

It is entrenched in local belief that supernatural forces shape human destiny and that these forces intervene to increase or ease human suffering. Weather-related predicaments fall into the domain of uncertainty, since they are controlled by forces larger and stronger than human beings. Scant, erratic or lack of rains do damage to crops, but they are not just passing crises and threaten the very existence of the entire community. In order to make a prediction of forthcoming rainfall, the community has devised a series of rituals for forecasting impending weather conditions. When the monsoon plays truant, the locals perform a series of rituals to heal the community from weakness, immorality, and seek forgiveness from the *Deva-devi* (gods and goddesses) and *Eshtadevta* (ancestral spirit). The community seeks divine intervention and performs elaborate rituals to overcome the anxiety and apprehensions caused by the uncertainty of rain. The villagers assemble near the *dharnikhunti* (sacred trunk) and perform ritual appeasements- offering, *dhup*, *deepa*, *nadia*, and *kukra* (incense, oil lamp, coconuts, and chickens, respectively). The village deities foretell the impending rain crisis and their appropriate solutions. After every unsuccessful attempt, further rigorous rituals were performed by them, among which the *podmara* (sacrifice of a male buffalo) was the most prominent. The villagers identify a spotless male buffalo known as *Jani-pod*, and fed him all the grass and grains available, as well as treating him with reverence and affection. A month long preparation of fasting, praying, and community cleansing was carried out. A procession of the *Jani-pod* was carried out in the village, as each household in the village smeared *tel-haldi* (oil-turmeric mixed paste), put up garlands, and offered different food items to the *Jani-pod*. The ritual culminated with the sacrifice of *Jani-pod* at *Pat-ghar* (sacred grove) in the assembly of all the villagers, which was followed by a community feast.

Another well-known rain ritual in the region is the marriage of frogs, locally known as *BengBiha* or *Bengliosa*. It was performed to appease and bring rain in the event of an impending drought. On an auspicious day and time, the villagers assemble and hand over a pair of frogs to the *pujari*/priest, who smears them with *tel-haldi* and blesses them by slathering a few rice grains mixed with vermilion on their heads. While the *Pujari* administered the ritual, the traditional wedding music was played, and the assembled village women made ululation sounds to celebrate the marriage.

The frog is essentially an animal associated with rain, water, and other moist components. Just after the first spell of monsoon rain, the frogs begin to croak incessantly, and the locals believe it is the frogs calling for rain. The existence of the local frog is inextricably related to the monsoon rains, which they foresee, invite, and enjoy. Making a frog croak was believed to bring much-needed rain, especially during a dry spell caused by a lack of monsoon rain, which could explain why *Bengliosa* was performed.

Drought prediction with biotic and abiotic factors

The locals have an in-depth understanding of the natural environment and how to effectively use it to satisfy their various needs. Tella (2007) calls this indigenous knowledge, a coherent set of information obtained by local people via observation, informal experiments, and comprehension of their environment and how to apply it. All biotic and abiotic components provide important cues that the locals use to predict rain. By observing these behavioural changes of nature carefully, the locals predict the weather events, which can be classified as biotic and abiotic indicators. Biotic indicators are live organisms or biotic agents that change their behaviour in response to changes in the environment/weather. Changes in the appearance and characteristics of the abiotic indicators, the non-living phenomena or materials, also contribute to the local wisdom (Ravi Shankar et al. 2008). Observing the appearances and changes in the flora and fauna, taking inputs from earthworms, dragonflies, snakes, and rates, as well as the appearance of certain plants, weeds, or changes in the shape, size, and colour of plants and trees. Abiotic components, such as wind movement and direction, thunder and lightning, and the shape, size, and position of different astronomical bodies, all provide vital inputs to local rain prediction. Each of these unique events adds to the conventional wisdom to provide them with valuable cues in assessing the impending weather.

Native plants and animals provide useful insights about unfolding weather events. These plants have evolved over thousands of years to survive in harsh and constant environmental changes, so they have unique abilities to sense and signal weather changes. The size, shape, colour, and thickness of leaves and flowers of native plant species provide a valuable early warning of weather systems. As the village *Jani* of Paria, Kalahandi said, “Changes in weather impact everyone, and all living beings have the instinct to anticipate the change. Each animal and plant species has its own unique perspective on nature, although we all share the land. Fish swim upstream to hatch their eggs, and all birds have their own season and nesting sites. The trees shed their leaves in the summer, but when they regrow and turn lush green, you know it's time for rain. When dragonflies swarm in, the ants relocate their food, eggs, and nests, specific buds emerge, and grass appears on the surface, this all signals rain.” Expert foretellers go beyond common sense to predict rain types, volumes, and timing, as well as the nature, severity, and length of dry spells and droughts.

The appearance and disappearance of and changes in the behaviour of plants, grass, birds, and insects before the onset of the monsoon send out signals of upcoming rain. Of the various biotic components, the pattern with which the local birds consume the *KumbhPhal* (a wild fruit that matures between the months of June and July) is widely recognised as one of the most reliable indicators for forecasting rain. The locals forecast the monsoon pattern by closely observing the patterns with which the birds consume this fruit. A significant foreteller of rain is a bird, locally known as the *Panikuali* (messenger of rain/water). The altitude (as determined by sound) and the flight direction of the bird indicate whether the monsoon will arrive early or late, as well as whether the season will witness heavy or light rainfall. This lone nocturnal bird provides much-needed weather warnings, allowing locals to prepare for the impending storm.

Transgressing Taboos Leads to Drought

In the socio-cultural context, drought is not merely a decline in precipitation and its subsequent fallout on productivity, but also a deterioration of the moral and spiritual order of society. The locals attribute drought and famine to deep spiritual and metaphysical natures and causation (also see Omobola, 2013). It is believed that the universe is inhabited by various malevolent and benevolent spiritual entities that, when mistreated, cause terrible tragedies. Both natural and man-made disasters, the locals believe, are caused by these forces. The community incurs the wrath of the spiritual forces in proportion to the intensity of the

breach. To effectively maintain social and moral order, certain customs and taboos must be observed in the community. Honoring these customs and taboos appeases the supernatural forces, brings good fortune from the beneficent forces, and satiates the malicious spirits. Recognizing human frailty, the locals have established a series of appeasement rituals in order to please the deities and spirits, once transgressed. By performing various rituals, ceremonies, and sacrifices, the locals appeal to the indignant deities and spirits to be kind to them, forgive them, and restore normalcy. Even when the community identifies the act and the individual who has enraged the deities/spirit by transgressing the norms/taboo, spiritual cleansing of the community is undertaken in order to reconcile with the deities and restore social equilibrium. As an elderly farmer puts it, "rain, sun, and wind make no discrimination between sinners and the righteous. When there is a drought due to a lack of rainfall, it affects the entire community rather than just the family or the farm of the transgressor. So, while a norm violator may suffer personal losses, such as mortality and disease in livestock and humans, pest attack on their crops or rapid weed growth in their agriculture field, their transgression also has larger consequences. "

Droughts, floods, famines, diseases, and death are the retribution inflicted by deities/spirits when the community violates the norms and transgresses taboos. Taboos in the society are both the endeavor to socialise the community members and also the sacred duties to divinities (Thorpe 1972 cited in Omobola, 2013). There is broad consensus that taboos in any society tend to be associated with objects and activities that are important to the social order and that taboos are thus part of a larger system of social control. Taboos are common components of an imagined social order, intended to keep the community safe. Taboos are essential social principles closely aligned with norms and values that help to maintain societal harmony and order. There are various taboos, but all of them do not result in similar consequences if broken. Transgressions of certain norms/taboo, such as desecrating a sacred place or eating certain grains, fruits, or vegetables before due rituals are performed, killing and injuring animals, particularly totems, as well as, lately, monkeys, cows, and sexual immorality, are acts of sacrilege that inflict severe pain on the community. In the local belief system, droughts and famine are linked to social and moral order, and transgressions of taboo are an infringement of societal order. As it results in the emaciation and mortality of livestock and even humans, a fall in land infertility, and low output, the community suffers economic hardships and social distress. The local beliefs hold that droughts and human suffering are divine retribution for breaking taboos.

To restore such broken relationship with either man, or spiritual forces, man must retrace his steps and seek forgiveness from the spiritual beings. For instance, if a person kills a monkey or cow, the community prescribes ritual actions, like going to sacred places to donate alms, clothes, money, fruits, as divine command to heal the self and restore peace. These include taking a certain number of *Buds* (water dips) in the river, on specific days of the week, as well as feeding animals and birds for cleansing. To "return to a normal state or condition", these propitiation rituals involve the prevention of unseen influences of evil spiritual forces and the solicitation of support from benevolent spirit forces (Omoyajowo, 1982).

Again, the locals attributed different degrees of sacredness to numerous flora, fauna, sacred sites such as *Pidar* (sacred location in the house where *Estadevta* (ancestors) is placed), and supernatural beings both inside and outside the house, and treated them with reverence. These places, things, and animals acquire special significance in different seasons and times of the day. Community members must treat them with respect and care to preserve the symbiotic relationships. To avoid mishaps, locals must tread carefully while navigating these contested spaces to avoid stepping into the path or abode of the malevolent spirit, and they must treat the benevolent guardians with respect. The locals were forbidden to wander around certain territory, gaze at or come into contact with certain animals or sacred sites, or confront *Jugni* (a spirit one must avoid) at a specific time, day, and location. Traditionally, this farming community has attached great importance to taboos, believing that breaking them will result in suffering and pain.

For instance, menstruating women are forbidden to enter specific areas of the house, such as the *chuel* (hearth/kitchen), *guhal* (cowshed), *Pidar*, and such other places. In cases when a woman breaks the taboo and enters *Guhall*, the spiritual forces inflict pain and suffering on the woman and/or the animal, and/or the family. But it would be a public transgression, if she did not maintain a specific distance from the sacred grove, *Dharnikhunti*, especially on auspicious occasions. While the former deviation was considered a minor aberration, the latter was considered an offence against the community and an affront to public morals. This could bring misfortune, ill health, and crop loss.

Beyond science and the degree of accuracy, weather prediction, is driven by ideology, culture, and worldview. Traditional forecasts are accepted by the inhabitants for a variety of socio-cultural reasons, not merely for their accuracy. Drought, they believe, is retribution for

norm violations, and upholding the belief and social order restores the peaceful coexistence of all who live in the land. Aside from the degree of accuracy, the differences between these two systems are also based on ideology and culture. There exists a disjunction between meteorological prediction and local belief, and the indigenous system is entrenched in socio-cultural traditions, so it is widely accepted, even though it delivers inaccurate predictions.

Conclusion

The inhabitants have accumulated a plethora of information and coping skills through numerous methods as a result of living in such severe and changeable weather conditions. It has equipped the locals with the strategies to predict, prepare for, and face the variability in weather conditions. Even ordinary inhabitants make their own rain assessments by observing the flora and fauna as well as numerous abiotic factors in order to minimise vulnerabilities caused by climatic variability. Weather prediction and subsequent arrangements were made through observation and elementary reasoning.

Agriculturists in Kalahandi have a limited understanding of the scientific explanation of drought. Their cultural beliefs about the causes of drought are heavily influenced by indigenous belief systems that attribute drought to supernatural forces such as goddesses and ancestral spirits. Indigenous methods are popular among the locals because they are essentially practical, have immediate local-specific utility, and are accessible to everybody. It is reasonable to conclude that the scientific knowledge of drought is far removed from the cultural and operational implications of farmers. More socio-cultural and situational investigations into the culture and context-specific understanding are required before actions to assess drought and support farmers in responding to future drought dangers.

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Role and Efficacy of Tasks in Developing Pre-service Teachers' Knowledge-base

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Abstract

In the reflective paradigm (Schon 1983) that guides today's teacher preparation programmes, learning to teach is no longer perceived as training in a handful of tools and techniques. Teaching is problematized and pre-service teachers(PSTs) are encouraged to engage deeply with the content of the training to prepare themselves for real teaching in actual classrooms. In this context, it is argued that a set of tasks that push in-depth cognitive engagement and trigger reflection be used to train PSTs. The current study explores the role and efficacy of tasks to build the pre-service teachers' knowledge of classroom teaching – classroom management, classroom interaction, teaching large, mixed-ability classes and how to *prevent* learning. Twenty-one pre-service teachers enrolled in the M. A. ELT Programme participated in the study. The constructs of teacher reflection and learning and teacher expertise and knowledge are used as the theoretical framework in the study. Data are gathered through the leaning logs submitted by the PSTs and the reflective journal maintained by the tutor. Findings reveal that PSTs express confidence in facing challenges of everyday teaching as prospective teachers owing to the knowledge gained through the critical analysis of the tasks in the class and the subsequent reflection on these through the learning logs.

Key words: pre-service teachers, tasks for teacher learning, teacher knowledge-base, classroom management, classroom interaction

Introduction

“In the last few years, teachers – and their professional knowledge base – have received new-found and ever-increasing attention” (Sjoberg 2018:1). This is because our knowledge-driven societies make it imperative for future teachers to adopt problem-solving methodologies. It will therefore behoove well for prospective teachers to build both their subject matter knowledge as well as pedagogic content knowledge (PCK). Kourieos (2014) argues that both subject-matter knowledge (SMK, the ‘what’ of teaching) and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK, the ‘how’ of teaching) are necessary in order to avoid fragmented language teaching. She stresses the importance of teacher language awareness in forming the bridge between these two types of knowledge for future planning in the field of initial teacher education. Attributing a crucial role to pre-service teacher education, Sakhiyya et al. (2018) argue that teachers should be provided with a strong knowledge-base as well as contextual approach suited to each particular educational environment. The knowledge-base included awareness about teacher factors, learner factors and classroom factors. Classroom management knowledge is an important aspect of general pedagogical knowledge (Shulman, 1987). Effective classroom management refers to creating conditions where learning can occur. This paper focuses on tasks that can be used to build the pre-service teachers’ (PSTs) knowledge base regarding classroom management.

Review of literature

Knowledge building of pre-service teachers has always attracted research attention. A few studies conducted in the past decade are presented here. Triastuti, A. (2020) conducted a study to assess pre-service teachers’ knowledge base of teaching and the extent they perceive and reflect its implementation in a microteaching course. Findings showed that despite the overall good test score average of the pre-service teachers’ knowledge base of teaching and the generally positive self-rating perceptions, the pre-service teachers’ limited and descriptive reflections did not sufficiently depict their actual implementation of teacher knowledge base of teaching in their microteaching practices. Baier et al (2021) conducted a quasi-experimental on the effect of studying exactly the same theoretical content (related to classroom management) with and without text-based cases on scientific knowledge application in 101 pre-service teachers. Findings revealed only a small advantage for the case-based learning group demonstrating that scientific knowledge application may also be effectively fostered in a more traditional instructional course. Dockerty (2019) examines how a group of first-year undergraduate students developed their knowledge through co-construction using an online forum as a platform as part of a three-year Initial Teacher Training (ITT) programme. Professional dialogue at the online interface supported them to cope

with the challenges they faced during teaching practice. Findings revealed gains in student subject and pedagogical knowledge. Siegel (2014) explored how PSTs learned to use and develop equitable assessments (EA). Findings revealed that PSTs progressed from a simple view of EA as “fairness” to a more sophisticated view of EA, including: ways to increase fairness, the importance of challenging students, and using assessments for learning. changes were recorded in their views of learners and the purpose of assessment. Gegenfurtner A et al. (2020) examined how pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, and school principals differed in three interrelated knowledge reasoning processes of description, explanation and prediction. Analysis of verbal reports suggested that in-service teachers and school principals used significantly more episodic knowledge, content knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge in their reasoning than pre-service teachers did. Kabilan & Khan (2012) examined 55 PSTs engagement with e-portfolios in their learning and to determine if these practices lead to teaching competencies. Findings revealed that participants welcomed e-portfolios, since they helped them recognize their learning and identify their strengths and weaknesses. Six competencies emerge from the teachers’ practices of e-portfolios: developing understanding of an effective teacher’s role; developing teaching approaches/activities; improving linguistic abilities; comprehending content knowledge; gaining ICT skills and the realization of the need to change mindsets.

Theoretical framework

While expert experienced teachers possess the ability to integrate their teacher knowledge base of teaching to develop complex and coherent instruction (Tsui, 2003), PSTs are still developing their knowledge-base. Systematic and structured reflection coupled with supportive tutoring leads to knowledge-building. Instead of being offered the ‘right’ method on a platter, PSTs should be helped to develop critical reflectivity (Hoffman et al., 2015) that will contribute to sound pedagogical reasoning skills (Shulman’s (1986, 1987). (Hong H.-Y. et al. (2019) posit that reflection is critical for preparing creative teachers who can cater for learners with divergent needs in a knowledge-intensive society. Reflection can be learnt, practised and improved. Lee (2005) proposes three levels of the depth of reflective thinking: recall level – a description of events that is based on recalling one’s experiences without looking for alternative explanations, and attempts to imitate previously observed or taught models of action; rationalization level – an attempt to link different experiences; the situation is interpreted by looking for answers to the question ‘why’ and trying to generalize experiences, or coming up with guiding principles; reflectivity level – experience is looked at with an aim to change/improve the future; it is analyzed from different viewpoints. PSTs can be trained to engage in all three levels of reflection. Through critical reflection, PSTs can be helped to develop what is called teacher agency (i.e. the ability to take

intentional actions) contributing to teaching innovation and subsequent future professional development (White, 2018).

Aim of the study

The current study explores the role and efficacy of tasks in building the pre-service teachers' knowledge-base regarding four classroom factors: classroom management, classroom interaction, teaching large, mixed ability classes and how to *prevent* learning

Research questions

The following questions are addressed in the study:

- a) What kind of tasks can be used to build PSTs knowledge of classroom factors?
- b) What are some of the learning gains accrued to PSTs?
- c) What are PSTs' perceptions about the efficacy of the tasks?

Methodology

Twenty one pre-service teachers (eighteen female, three male, five of whom are foreign nationals) enrolled in a course, *The Second Language Classroom (SLC, ELE 131)* of the M. A. ELT Programme are the subjects of the study. The *SLC* course has three modules: teacher factors, learner factors, and classroom factors. Each of the modules consists of several themes. For the purpose of the present study, tasks used for the classroom factor are analyzed. These are – classroom management, classroom interaction, teaching large-mixed ability classes and how to *prevent* learning. A task-based, discussion-oriented approach is used to offer training. A number of tasks are used to deal with each of the sub-themes. Data are gathered through the learning logs submitted by the PSTs and the reflective journal maintained by the tutor.

A learning log is a diary maintained by the PSTs where they describe the content discussed in class regarding the themes and their pedagogic value of these for them as prospective teachers. This has not only triggered critical reflection but has helped consolidate the knowledge gained through the tasks used in class. A template for the learning log is designed by the tutor in such a way that it enabled the PSTs to narrate their classroom experience in a detailed and structured manner pushing them to engage with classroom content in an in-depth manner. A reflective journal is maintained by the tutor to record the insightful comments made by the PSTs during task completion in the class and the feedback session thereafter.

Data presentation and interpretation

The four themes: classroom management, classroom interaction, teaching large-mixed ability classes and how to *prevent* learning are transacted through several tasks. For the purpose of the study, for each of the three themes, three salient tasks are chosen and the data collected is presented and analyzed in terms of three aspects: a) the types of tasks used for the theme b) the teaching goal of the task and the learning accrued to the PSTs through the tasks and c) the perceptions of PSTs of the effectiveness of the tasks

Theme 1 classroom management

Task 1

Description of task: critical moments

What will you do if ...

- a. A student says “I don’t want to do this exercise.”
- b. You expected an activity to take five minutes. It has taken twenty so far, and the SS still seem to be very involved. There is something else you would like to do before the lesson ends in ten minutes.
- c. The next activity involves Ss working in groups of five. At the moment, all the desks (which take two people) are facing forward in rows. They are movable, but it takes a few minutes of chaos to do it.
- d. The students are working in groups of three. Two groups have finished the task you set them and are now sitting looking bored. The other groups still seem to have a long way to go before they finish.

(Source: Scrivener, 2005:80)

Teaching goal and learning accrued: the aim of this task is to enable PSTs to foresee some of the critical moments they might face in the future and prepare them accordingly. All the scenarios above are common in language classrooms. For the critical moments mentioned above, PSTs have suggested several alternative options. For instance, when some groups finish the task while the others are still working on it, teachers often face the dilemma of completing the task in the stipulated time or go with the flow of the class. According to the PSTs, under these circumstances, the teacher can think of the following options: for the groups who have finished, the teacher can: give extended tasks related to the main one; give new tasks; ask them to help the groups which are still working; think of what they liked about the task, etc. for the students who are still working, the teacher can: find out if they are any issues with the task and offer help ; ask them to join the group

that has finished and work together; give it as homework and move on with the lesson; stop the activity and give feedback, etc.

Learner perceptions: PSTs state that this task has demonstrated one of the most important aspects of classroom teaching that there are no one-size-fits- all solutions to issues that emerge.

Instead, several options are available and the decision to choose the best one depends on how well they know their learners and the learning context. One of the PSTs remarks: “As a prospective teacher of ESL/ EFL, through what I learned from the class today, I think effective classroom management is the most important and the most difficult skill teachers have to master since teachers have to use a wide range of skills and techniques at the same time to keep students focused on learning and achieve learning objectives while preventing disruption from slowing the learning process. I found the task very interesting as we had to consider solutions to deal with unpleasant situations which we will be possible to meet when we become teachers, especially the case that a student doesn’t want to do the exercise.”

Task 2

Description of task: giving instructions

Why did the class have problems with the following instructions?

‘OK, everybody, would you, Maria, sit down. Now what you have to do is, when you, you take this sheet of paper that I’m handing out now and keep it secret, and some of you are ‘A’, it’s written at the top, and some are labeled ‘B’. OK, can you see that? Don’t show your paper to anyone and then you have to describe to your partner; sit face to face. Could you move your chairs around and describe what’s on your paper so that your partner can find out what’s different, and you must agree; when you find something, draw it on your paper? OK. Do you understand?’

1. Identify the essential instructions the teacher wanted to give.
2. Delete unnecessary language.
3. Write out the instructions in the right order.

(Source: Scrivener, 2005: 90)

Teaching goal and the learning accrued: this task aimed at demonstrating the role and importance of instructions in successful task completion. PSTs realized that teachers often combine instructions with classroom management issues, (e.g. Maria, sit down; could you move your chairs around). Further, a lot of running commentary creeps in while teachers are delivering the

instructions because of which essential instructions are lost. PSTs learnt that instructions should be short, simple and be delivered one at a time. It is useful to demonstrate with the help of students if the instructions are complex involving several steps. In the example above, the teacher gives too many instructions without providing time for the students to follow them in a sequential manner. This leads to confusion and unsuccessful task completion resulting in frustration on the part of the learners and disappointment for the teacher.

Learner perceptions: PSTs comment that the task has clearly shown them how instructions are crucial in conducting tasks and activities in the classroom. Teachers need to spend time and effort in framing and delivering clear instructions. One of the PSTs remarks: “When in school, I did not know why at times we failed in doing what the teacher asked us to, now I know. Designing tasks for sure is a challenge, but conducting them in class smoothly and successfully, is of next level. Composing instructions, sequencing them, giving them out clearly in class, all require huge amount of planning and management skills from the teacher, but it comes through experience, I guess. I’m glad we did this task in class so I won’t blame my students when they fail to do a task in class!”

Task 3

Description of task: Your role in pair and group activities

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Monitor discreetlyb) Vanishc) Monitor activelyd) Participate |
|--|

(Source: Scrivener, 2005: 94)

Teaching goal and learning accrued: this task intends to present the options available to teachers after they have set up the task. While students are working on the task, what should teachers do? PSTs have gained knowledge about the roles a teacher can play here. They can decide on the amount of teacher involvement depending on the needs of the learners and the complexity of the task at hand. Four major options are available to teachers. Teachers can: monitor discreetly, offering help only when it is asked for; monitor actively offering help even when it is not asked for explicitly (but they sense a need for it); play the role of a participant contributing to the task along with the learners; or vanish i.e. be not involved at all but available in the eyeshot just in case. Thus teachers can choose a stance that entails least teacher presence and involvement (vanish and monitor discreetly) to most teacher presence and involvement (monitor actively and participate).

Learner perceptions: PSTs state that they recall incidents from their school days where teachers sometimes keep constantly goading them throughout the task. This is more of interference than of constructive contribution. Teachers should refrain from ‘over-helping/over-organizing’ (Scrivenr 2005:107). One of the PSTs comments: “Regarding tasks, I thought the teacher’s job is done once the task is set up. The learners do the task and the teacher offers feedback. It is simple! But it indeed is not! The teacher needs to be sensitive to student needs and offer help accordingly.” Another PST remarks, “I always wondered why teachers kept on talking while students were working on tasks. They do not probably know that it is okay for the teacher to be quiet at times. Silence, too, is an essential part of the language classroom. Teachers should avoid being garrulous and self-centric.”

Theme 2 classroom interaction

Task 1

Description of task: seating arrangement

Study the alternative seating possibilities in a standard classroom. What tasks are they suitable for?

The diagram illustrates nine alternative seating arrangements in a standard classroom, each with a label and a brief description of its suitability for tasks:

- pairs**: Students are arranged in small groups of two, scattered across the room.
- 'enemy corners'**: Students are arranged in two distinct clusters, one in the top-left and one in the bottom-right, facing away from each other.
- opposing teams**: Students are arranged in two long, parallel rows, one at the top and one at the bottom, facing each other.
- face to face (or back to back)**: Students are arranged in two long, parallel rows, one at the top and one at the bottom, facing each other.
- 'panel'**: Students are arranged in a semi-circle, facing a central rectangular area representing a panel.
- 'public meeting'**: Students are arranged in a large, loose circle, facing a central area.
- 'buzz groups'**: Students are arranged in a large circle, with arrows indicating movement between groups. (people change groups occasionally)
- 'wheels'**: Students are arranged in two concentric circles, with arrows indicating movement between the inner and outer circles. (the outer wheel can move round, changing pairings)

(Source: Scrivener, 2005: 89)

Teaching goal and learning accrued: this task presents the different seating arrangements that are possible in a language classroom (provided the furniture is movable). PSTs have suggested several tasks for each of the seating arrangements above. For instance, while ‘buzz groups’ can be

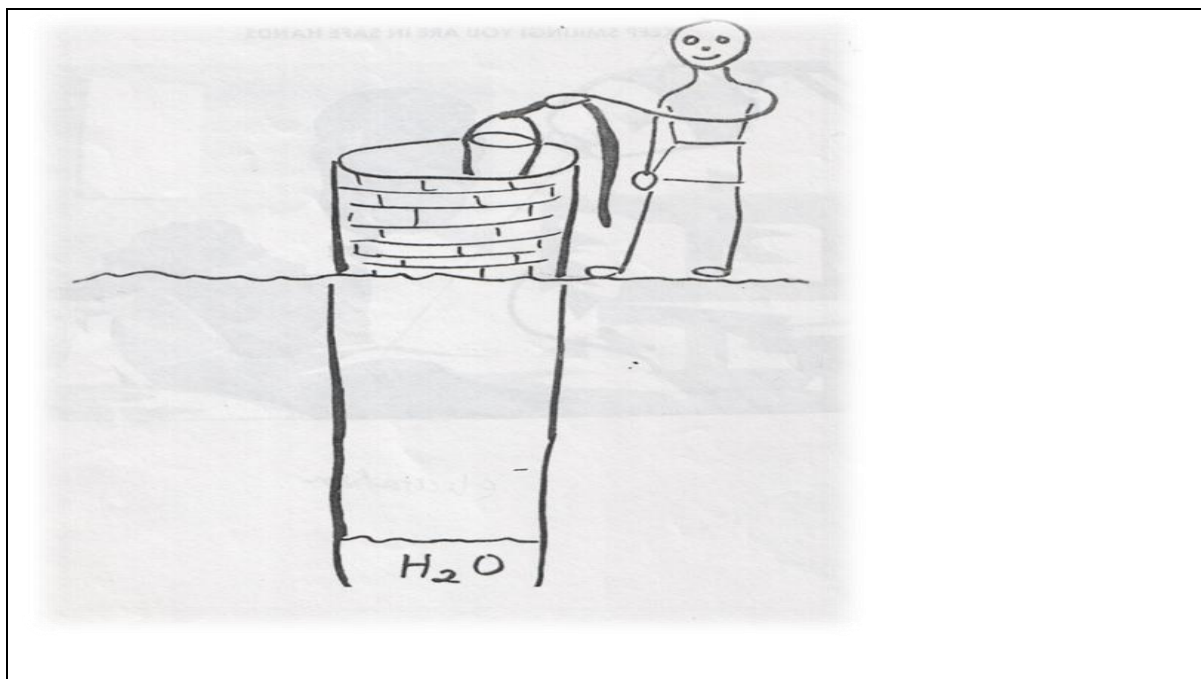
an excellent option for opinion gap activities designed to develop oral fluency, they can also be effectively used for jigsaw reading. Most PSTs state that ‘wheels’ is an excellent seating arrangement for information gap activities. They realized that task potential can be maximized if suitable grouping and seating arrangements are made.

Learner perceptions: PSTs found this task very engaging and a huge contributor to their understanding of the seating arrangement possibilities in the classroom, an area that usually is paid less attention to. They feel that seating arrangement has the potential to change classroom dynamics either in favour of or against learning. One of them remarks, “It’s worth taking time to consider the best ways to make use of classroom seating as appropriate seating arrangement can maximize instruction, create chances for social interactions and provide an organized and efficient learning environment. Through seating arrangement in the classroom, group work can be encouraged so that peer-to-peer learning can happen. Each seating arrangement in the class should be suitable for a specific task.” Another PST comments, “To be frank, in today’s class, in the beginning I felt we’ve spent too much time on each seating arrangement but later on when I’m are reflecting on the class, I found out how important is it to know the kind of activities one can do in a class. I would’ve definitely not listed out such wide range myself. Not only the activities, but the meaning behind the seating arrangement made it more clear and meaningful of why there should be a change in seating arrangement.”

Task 2

Description of task: the technique of elicitation

Interpret the picture.



(Source: contribution by PSTs)

Teaching goal and learning accrued: this picture is used to elicit learner understanding of the technique of elicitation. The analogy is that the teacher is drawing information from the students. This is different from the traditional transmission model of teaching where students gather information (the water) from the teacher (the well). In the constructivist paradigm, the premise is that students bring to class a wealth of information which can be tapped to make new learning accessible to them. This is done through the technique of elicitation. The teacher conveys a clear idea to the students, through pictures, gestures, questions, etc. and the students supply the appropriate language, information, ideas, etc. The teacher gives them feedback. Thus knowledge is co-constructed in the classroom with learners assuming ownership for their learning.

Learner perceptions: PSTs consider elicitation as a great technique to maximize learner participation and involvement in classroom transactions. They discussed the various benefits of elicitation: reduced teacher talk time (TTT) and increased student talk time (STT); easier comprehension, longer retention and faster recall of learning at a later point of time by the learners, and enhanced teacher-student and student-student rapport that creates a lively and conducive classroom environment. They also mentioned the importance of teacher questioning skills and wait-time. One of them remarks, "Elicitation is a wonderful technique but it requires teachers to frame questions in such a way that learners are able to bring their existing knowledge and skills to the fore in order to understand new information. Wait-time between the teacher's question and the student's response is very important because to answer the question, there are many processes happening within the mind of students. Teachers should give sufficient time to students to respond to the questions."

Task 3

Description of task: teacher's action zone

The following notes were written by a teacher after teaching a lesson:

Today I taught a lesson around a discussion on an environmental issue. The lesson went very well. First, I introduced the topic by talking about environmental problems in our city and got students to give examples of the major environmental problems we face. This got lots of comments from the class and everybody had an opportunity to say something and express an opinion. After ten minutes I divided the students into small groups and asked them to come up with a solution to one of the problems we talked about. During this time I moved around the class, monitoring the students' language use and giving feedback. After twenty minutes I got the group leaders to report their groups' recommendations and I wrote key points on the board.

The following comments on the same lesson were written by an observer:

When you were speaking to the whole class, the students in the middle front row seats answered most of your questions. When you moved around the class you spent much more time with some groups than with others.

What do these comments tell us?

(Source: Richards & Lockhart, 1996: 138-139)

Teaching goal and learning accrued: teacher's action zone (Richards 1996) is an important concept in classroom interaction. It refers to the unequal distribution of teacher attention in class. Teachers may look at the students sitting more to their right than to the left, call upon students whose names are easy, to answer questions, may give more opportunity to participate in interaction to the more vocal and articulate learners thereby ignoring the shy and reticent learners. All these issues are discussed through the task above. PSTs learnt that teacher's action zone might operate in terms of four possibilities: learners want to be in the action zone of the teacher and are actually a part of it and therefore are happy; learner don't want to be in the action zone of the teacher and are actually not a part of it and therefore are happy, too; learners want to be in the action zone of the teacher and are not actually a part of it and therefore are unhappy and finally, learners don't want to be in the action zone of the teacher but are actually a part of it and therefore are unhappy.

Learner perceptions: this task has a lot of take away value for the PSTs. They recalled their earlier experiences of teacher prejudice and partiality. They felt that the discussion helped them become aware of the many ways teacher bias can manifest in the class. It is perhaps not possible to not have an action zone, but at least we as teachers could consciously try to expand our action zone where

everyone feels included. One of the PSTs comments, “Teacher action zone has answered most of my questions regarding teacher bias. I used to wonder why x teacher always nominates or allocates responsibility to x students to carry out classroom chores. But it is unfair if teachers exclude a set of learners simply because they do not exhibit visible enthusiasm or are introverts. Everyone should be made to feel that they belong.”

Theme 3 teaching large, mixed ability classes

Task 1

Description of task: Teaching large classes: problems and solutions

Below are five vignettes from large-multilevel classrooms. Read them and

- a) identify the problem faced by the teacher
 - b) suggest solutions to the problem
1. Laura works in a village high school. She says, ‘I can’t use group work and pair work in my class because there are so many students and they can’t move from their seats because the seats are fixed to the floor’.
 2. Hassan has to handle a class of eighty students. He says, ‘My tasks are always either too easy or too difficult for my students. I don’t know what to do; I’m at a loss.’
 3. Anita voices her problem thus: ‘It’s mind boggling when you look at the huge piles of student assignments. Sometimes I wish I weren’t a teacher!’
 4. Fatima is frustrated. She says, ‘Despite my best efforts to involve everyone, my students seem to think that I’m biased and care only for the students who sit in the first few front rows and for those who volunteer to answer questions in class.’
 5. There are sixty students in Nina’s class and she says, “There are so many students and they make so much noise all the time. What on earth should I do?”

(Source: Adapted from Hess, 2001)

Teaching goal and learning accrued: this task aimed at preparing learners for teaching large classes. The PSTs had to examine each scenario, identify the specific problem and suggest possible solutions. The task generated a lot of discussion. The PSTs tried to relate the scenarios to their personal learning experiences as learners. Some of them remembered that their teachers were constrained by the fixed seating arrangement in the classrooms in the schools they studied while some others recalled how their teachers were bogged down by huge correction work. PSTs suggested feasible solutions to the problems.

Learner perceptions: PSTs felt that this task reflects the situation in many classrooms in the Indian context. Teachers face challenges owing to unwieldy class size. PSTs now empathize with their teachers. One of them comments, “It’s easy to complain but it’s better to accept the reality. It’s not that there are no solutions; we as teachers of large classes simply have to have the courage and the stamina to look for suitable solutions to our specific problems. We can seek help from friendly colleagues; we can reach out to teachers from other schools. Where there is a will, there is a way.”

Task 2

Description of task: teaching mixed-level classes: tiered tasks and bias tasks

No one wants to use three different course books with one class: one for strong students, one for weak students, and one for midlevel students. But when faced with mixed-level classes and an unhelpful course book, what do you do?

Tiered Tasks and Bias Tasks

Tiered Tasks

Example 1: The Wedding Cake

Imagine a two tier wedding cake.

Task A: Top Tier (For Weaker Students)

Match the questions in Column A with the answers in Column B.

(see appendix for details)

(Source: Bowler &Parminster 2002)

Teaching goal and learning accrued: this task shows how activities can be adapted to suit learners of different ability levels: strong, midlevel and low ability students. Tiered tasks are tasks designed using the same listening or reading text but offer different levels of challenge to suit learner abilities. They allow the possibility of whole class teacher feedback once the task is completed by learners of different ability levels. Bias tasks too address different ability levels but the tasks are totally different so much so whole class feedback is not possible (see appendix for examples of tiered and bias tasks).

Learner perceptions: PSTs expressed happiness on knowledge received regarding one of the most important aspect of classroom teaching – dealing with students of mixed-ability levels. However, they apprehensive about the feasible this idea is in reality. It is not possible to carry different tasks for different learners on a daily basis. Teachers need training and expertise to design tasks. These problems can be overcome if teachers create a bank of tasks that can be reused/ share resources with colleagues. One of the PSTs comments, “No class is homogeneous; all are mixed-ability

classes by default. The sooner we accept this fact, the better it is for our learners. If the end goal of all teaching is student learning, we have to find ways to make all students experience success as learners and this can be done only if we choose tasks and materials that address their needs.”

Task 3

Description of task: advantages of large classes

Geetha conducts language proficiency classes to intermediate level learners. She prefers to have a large class to a small class where there are very few students. Can you guess the reasons for Geetha’s preference for large classes?

(Source: Adapted from Hess, 2001)

Teaching goal and learning accrued: this task aimed to orient learners to the idea that large classes are not without advantages. Since the general perception is that large classes are difficult to handle, PSTs found it interesting to flip the argument and discuss the advantages of large classes.

Learner perceptions: PSTs found this task very useful although initially it was difficult for them to change their established beliefs and perceptions about large classes. They had never thought of the students as resources, for example. One of them remarks, “Come to think of it, large classes do have some advantages. There are always students who are eager to participate so the classes are never dull. Professional development happens for free!”

Theme 4 how to *prevent* learning

Task 1

Description of task: TTT (Teacher Talking Time)

Teacher: When nothing else is happening in the classroom, I open my mouth. I’ve no idea what I say most of the time. But it stops those horrible silences. It’s probably useful for them to listen to me speaking English. After all, I ...

(Source: Scrivener, 2005: 105)

Teaching goal and learning accrued: the purpose of this task is to sensitize the PSTs to the fact that in a language classroom, it is the learners who should be talking more than the teacher. Proficiency in the target language can be achieved through practice in language use and therefore opportunity should be provided to learners for pair, group and whole class interactions. Teachers are often uncomfortable about silence in the classroom and so they tend to take off in a tangent. Such running commentary/soliloquy does not contribute to student learning. PSTs learnt two important terms in language teaching – teacher talking time (TTT) and student talking time (STT). Two related terms are – teacher talking quality (TTQ) and student talking quality (STQ).

Learner perceptions: this task was an eye opener to many of the PSTs, especially to those who subscribe to the transmission model of teaching and who view language and content teaching in a similar manner. PSTs discussed ways in which classrooms can be made interactive and learner involvement can be enhanced. One of them remarks, “ I used to think that teachers should talk and learners should listen and learning will happen. But now I realize that appreciation of content and teacher expertise does not make learners proficient users of the language. They have to speak. For this to happen, teachers should be friendly and the peers should be cooperative. If students have fear of making mistakes and being ridiculed by their peers or the teacher, it is very unlikely that they will ever venture to speak.”

Task 2

Description of task: Echo

Student: I went to the cinema.

Teacher: You went to the cinema. Good. You went to the cinema.

(Source: Scrivener, 2005:105)

Teaching goal and learning accrued: this task demonstrate a common experience of most of the learners in a language classroom wherein teachers echo what learners say. What purpose does this serve? Who is getting more practice? Students are robbed of the opportunity for genuine communication with their peers. Teachers need to consciously control this habit so that learners understand in the classroom they should listen to their peers, too, not just to the teacher.

Learner perceptions: according to the PSTs this task effective in making them realize how teachers tend to ‘prevent’ learning instead of facilitating it, albeit unintentionally.

Task 3

Description of task: Flying with the fastest

Teacher: So – what’s the answer?

Student A : Only on Tuesdays unless it’s raining.

Teacher: Yes, very good – so, everyone got that? And why did he buy the elastic band?

Student: So he wouldn’t lose his letters.

Teacher: Good. Everyone understands then!

(Source: Scrivener, 2005: 107)

Teaching goal and learning accrued: this task offers a word of caution to teachers. If the teacher goes with the first students to respond to questions, then the stronger or more dominating ones will hijack class time and teacher attention. In the task above, as we can observe, the same student responds to the teacher’s questions. The teacher assumes that all the students in the class

have understood the text at hand and moves on with the lesson. This ‘flying with the fastest’ can be very demoralizing for the other students on whom the lesson is lost. Since they feel neglected they may eventually lose interest and motivation. PSTs felt that this ‘superfast express train attitude’ can damage the morale of the learners and the classroom dynamics on the whole.

Learner perceptions: This activity was accorded great value by the PSTs simply because this happens very often in the classroom. One of them remarks, “Teachers move from one activity to the other very fast; they have the pressure of syllabus completion; it is not always possible to give sufficient wait-time to the learners. But these factors cannot justify a very fast pace where only very few learners are involved in the classroom activities. I have learnt a great lesson and I shall remember to address the whole class and not ‘fly with the fastest’”.

Findings and implications

The findings are discussed in relation to the research questions.

a) What kind of tasks can build PSTs knowledge of classroom factors?

Problem-solving tasks that are open-ended in nature and can trigger reflection will contribute to the building of knowledge-base of PSTs. These tasks enhance the cognitive and critical thinking skills of the PSTs enabling them to explore the possibility of multiple solutions to a given classroom issue. These have implications for teacher educators in that the selection of tasks as well as exploiting their potential to the fullest extent is both crucial.

b) What are some of the learning gains accrued to PSTs?

PSTs are trained to make informed decisions regarding classroom teaching. They realize that instantaneous, ‘on-the-go’ decisions characterize everyday teaching; teachers have to ‘think on their feet’ as it were. The tasks offered them subject-matter knowledge, enhanced their pedagogic content knowledge and contributed to their readiness as confident prospective teachers. They have learnt how to create a wholesome environment for classroom learning. The implications for teacher educators therefore are that they should inculcate reflective practice in PSTs during the teacher education programme. Such practice will make the PSTs critically examine the content of the training programme as well as accord them satisfaction about the cumulative learning that is accrued to them.

c) What are PSTs’ perceptions about the efficacy of the tasks?

The tasks executed in the classroom are viewed as having significant take-away value by the PSTs. They felt that the tasks are carefully chosen and democratically conducted in class where everyone got a chance to share their views. The mutually respectful and trusting atmosphere in the class

resulted in successful task completion maximizing the task potential for knowledge-building. Since PSTs demonstrate the ability to perceive the inherent value of the tasks, teacher educators can involve them in task selection according to their shared responsibility and agency for their learning and competence building. This will further enhance their knowledge and confidence.

Limitations

The PSTs who participated in the study have high cognitive skills and perceptive abilities, a major contributor in the knowledge-building process. The tasks may not yield rich dividends if used with a different set of PSTs. Only two tools, learning logs written by the PSTs and the reflective journal maintained by the tutor are used to collect data. If more tools such as a questionnaire and informal interviews were used, the data could have been richer and more comprehensive.

Further research

Research can explore the prospect of preparing PSTs to face challenges involved in other aspects of classroom teaching such as the conflict between teacher beliefs and learner expectations, addressing individual differences, training learners towards achieving autonomy, etc. A longitudinal study that investigates how the learning accrued to the PSTs is translated in their real time teaching when they become teachers can throw light on the efficacy of the training in realistic terms.

Conclusion

Teacher education programmes are key contributors in the knowledge construction and competence building of pre-service teachers. Classroom teaching is a dynamic and complex process; a plethora of issues can crop up and no one can predict the whole gamut of problems. Further, the contexts in which teaching happens and the set of students one gets to teach can be varied and divergent. Hence no readymade solutions can be offered. Thus, the only way to prepare PSTs for their future careers is to build their knowledge and competence through meaningful tasks that *nearly* reflect classroom complexities so that they can fend for themselves when faced with challenges as prospective teachers.

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Appendix: Tiered tasks and bias tasks

Tiered Tasks

Example 1: The Wedding Cake

Imagine a two tier wedding cake.

Task A: Top Tier (For Weaker Students)

Match the questions in Column A with the answers in Column B.

Column A Questions	Column B Answers
1. How much of London's history does <i>The Spirit of London</i> show?	a. Lights, sound, music, and smells
2. How do we go around it?	b. Police, punks and tourists
3. What special effects does it have?	c. More than 400 years
4. What can you see in the modern-day section?	d. In a taxi

Task B: Middle Tier (For Midlevel Students)

Choose the best answer for the following questions.

- How much of London's history does *The Spirit of London* show?
 - 400 years
 - More than 400 years
 - 399 years
- How do we go around it?
 - In a taxi
 - In a train
 - On foot
- What special effects does it have?
 - Lights
 - sound and music
 - smells
- What can you see in the modern-day section?
 - Police
 - Punks
 - Tourists

Task C: Bottom Tier (For Stronger Students)

Answer the following questions.

1. How much of London's history does *The Spirit of London* show?
2. How do we go around it?
3. What special effects does it have?
4. What can you see in the modern-day section?

Example 2: Dual-Choice Gap fills

Here the class is divided into two groups. Following is an example of a dual-choice gap fill that accompanies a rap: *The Dead Sad Animal Rap*

Listen to the rap. What are the missing words?

The rap	The missing words
a) Humansthe dear old dodo	killed/shot
b) It was It couldn't fly	easy/simple
c) Humans all the passenger pigeons	hunted/shot
d) From the American sky	South/North



Bias Tasks

Now let us look at bias tasks. Imagine a pie sliced into two unequal portions. The bigger slice of the pie is for those with bigger appetites and the smaller slice with smaller appetites.

The following two task sheets accompany a reading text based on a *Pen Pal* Ad page.

Example 1

Task A: For the Weaker Students

1. How many of the young people are 13 years old? (Three...)
2. How many boys are there?
3. Who doesn't eat meat?
4. Who likes football?
5. Who lives in the country?

Task B: For the Stronger Students

Write questions for these answers, based on the *Pen Pal* page.

1. How many of them are 13? *Three of them are.*
2.? *There are four.*

3.? *Anne doesn't*
4.? *James does*
5.? *Chris does*

Example 2

Another very simple form a bias task activity is a jig sawed gap fill. To prepare a jig sawed gap fill of a song,

- Photocopy the lyrics twice
- Label the photocopies 'A' and 'B'
- On copy 'A' blank out nine words and on copy B blank out eleven words (different places)
- Can add a third task sheet 'C' for the weakest students with six gaps

A Critical Look into The Social Impact of Language: A Comparative Study of Two National Dailies

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Abstract

Language is not a nomenclature, a list of names for things. Meaning happens by a process of signification and not naming. Language creates the reality that we perceive. This paper discusses how media has the power to influence thoughts and feelings about an event promoting a way of thinking and in this context ‘Newspaper’ is no exception. Therefore a critical approach to reading i.e. reading between the lines will provide a better understanding of the role they play in influencing public opinion. Journalistic discourse consists of specific textual characteristics, some very specific methods of text production and consumption, and is defined by a particular set of relationships between itself and the other agencies of symbolic and material power. It is here that Critical Discourse Analysis becomes an important tool for critical scholarship where it analyses the way that individuals and institutions use language. Dijkrightly points out that Critical Discourse Analysts focus on “social problems, and especially the role of discourse in the production and reproductions of power abuse or domination” (p. 357).

Keywords: language, newspaper, influence, power,Critical Discourse Analysis

Introduction

The social function of language can be broadly described as the relationship of language to human social life. This social view of language is different from the general notion of language where the main function of language is to express or communicate. Language is generally considered to be a vehicle for the expression and transmission of ideas. Although it is an irrefutable truth that language is used for communication it communicates more than what we generally assume it does other than for communication, expression of identity, imaginative expression and emotional release. One such function of language, i.e., the social function is studied in this paper where language is used to form ideas and beliefs in the minds of the reader reading a newspaper.

Language and the Newspaper Industry

It is not true that a journalist collects facts and reports them objectively. It is also not true that newspaper reports these facts fairly and without bias in a language which is designed to be unambiguous, undistorted and agreeable to readers. We assume that the news media are obliged to provide impartial and balanced coverage of important political and social events but it is not so, though this is the impression they certainly strive to create. The notion of impartiality has been challenged by students of media and sociologists who claim that ‘news is socially constructed’ (McQuail, 1994) in recent years. The events that are reported are not a reflection of intrinsic importance of those events, but rather they reveal the operation of a complex and artificial set of criteria for selection. McQuail argues that ‘news’ is a socially manufactured product because it is the end result of a selective process. Gatekeepers such as editors and journalists, and sometimes proprietors make choices and judgments about what events are important enough to cover and how to cover them. Then the news that has been thus selected in this process is subject to a process of transformation before it is encoded for publication. In fact, news is an industry with its own commercial self-interest. It is the institutional procedures and practices that define what becomes news more than the events themselves. It is because of the institutional and financial concerns that news media offer only a partial view of the world that fits with the interests of the socially and economically powerful. This sourcing and legitimization of news is therefore bound up with the actions, opinions and values of the dominant groups in the society. Thus, news is a practice: a discourse which, far from neutrally reflecting the social reality and the empirical facts, intervenes in what Berger and Luckmann call the “social construction of reality” (Fowler, 1991, p. 2).

Language and its Representation

News is a representation of the world in language where each particular form of linguistic expression in a text, whether it be the wordings or the syntactic options or for that matter anything, has its reason. There are always different ways of saying the same thing, and they are not random, accidental alternatives. For example if a political leader is referred to as 'Gorby' or 'Mr Gorbachev' it too has significance and has not been used randomly.

Hence the linguistic world not only conveys but also constructs the way we perceive that information. In other words it forces us to understand things the way they are articulated. Teun A. van Dijk (1993) in his paper 'Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis' discusses how elite groups and institutions are being enacted, legitimated or otherwise reproduced in text and talk by focusing on the role of discourse in the production and reproduction of dominance. As we recognize the power of language, almost all languages are rhetorical where rhetoric means any persuasive discourse - whether written or oral. In language, when we use a sign system to influence other people, it is termed as rhetoric.

It is an art of discourse in which a writer or speaker strives to inform, persuade or motivate particular audiences in specific situations. Almost anything a person says or writes, and the particular way in which it is said or written provides a particular perception of the world using a specific set of words, a particular approach, motivation or purpose that encapsulates those words, and together it helps us to understand 'reality'.

Real events do occur and are reported, but these real events are subject to conventional processes of selection. These are not intrinsically newsworthy but become 'news' when they are selected for inclusion in the news report (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). The events are selected for reporting by the news media according to a complex set of criteria of newsworthiness. The content and style of the newspapers are often dependent on the type of audience thought to be reading it.

Discursive approach to language owes a great deal to the work of Michel Foucault for his work *The Archaeology of knowledge* (1972) and Teun A. van Dijk's *Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis* (1993). Foucault's discursive approach focuses on the meaning of a discourse and power relationship in society as expressed by language and its practices. Teun Dijk focuses on dominance relations by elite groups and institutions as they are being enacted, legitimated or otherwise produced by text and talk.

Language and Control

It is seen that modern and often more effective power is mostly cognitive and is enacted bypersuasion, dissimulation, and manipulation to change the minds of others in one's owninterests. It is here that discourse and critical discourse analysis comes into picture: managing the mind of others is essentially a function of text and talk. Some members of the dominant groups and organizations have a special role in planning, decision making and control over the relations and processes of the enactment of power. These small groups are called the power elites. It is these elites who have a special access to discourse as they are literally the ones who have most to say.

3. Data and Data Analysis (*TheTimes of India* and *The Hindu*)

Let us look into a few news items as they appeared in two national dailies: *The Times of India* and *The Hindu*.

Nov 20, 2018, 101

'40% of kids from migrant families don't go to school'

✓ **Manash.Gohain**
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New Delhi: Eighty per cent of migrant children across seven Indian cities did not have access to education near worksites even as 40% of children from seasonal migrant households are likely to end up working rather than being in school, facing exploitation and abuse, according to the Unesco's 2019 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) report.

In the period between 2001 and 2011, inter-state migration rates doubled in India. Further, an estimated 9 million people migrated between states annually from 2011 to 2016. But many people are also moving for seasonal work. In 2013, 10.7 million children aged between 6 and 14 lived in rural households with a family member who was a seasonal worker.

This is particularly common within the construction industry. A survey of 3,000 brick kiln workers in Punjab found that 60% of kiln workers were interstate migrants.

The Unesco report while highlighting India's initiatives to combat effects of seasonal migration on education, also urges policy makers to strengthen public education for rural migrant children living in slums. The report shows that the scale of seasonal migration has a significant impact on education. Among youth aged 15 to 19 who have grown up in a rural household with a seasonal migrant, 28% identified as illiterate or had an incomplete primary education. India, along with China, is home to some of the world's largest internal population movements and the report highlights the steps India has taken to address it and the challenges that remain. The report will be released on Tuesday.

The Right to Education Act in 2009 made it mandatory for local authorities to admit migrant children. National-level guidelines were issued, allowing for flexible admission of children, providing transport and volunteers to support with mobile education, create seasonal hostels and aiming to improve coordination between sending and receiving districts and states. The GEM Report also notes how Indian states have responded to the issue. Gujarat introduced seasonal boarding schools to provide migrant children with education and collaborated with non-government organisations (NGOs) to begin online tracking of the children on the move.

In Maharashtra, village authorities called upon local volunteers to provide after-school psychosocial support to children who had been left behind by seasonally migrating parents. Tamil Nadu provides textbooks in other languages to migrant children. Odisha assumed responsibility of seasonal hostels run by NGOs and works with Andhra Pradesh to improve migrant well-being.

Case Study-1.A

The Headlines: **‘40% of kids from migrant families don’t go to school’** (*The Times of India*, 20 November, 2018)

Analysis: *The Times of India* starts with a catchy headline where it gives a statistical value of kids belonging to the migrants who do not go for formal education. The primary focus in the headline is the educational failure affecting migrant children.

The writer gives us the gist of the article: migrants and no education (don’t go to school). These two aspects are the significant information the whole narrative deals with. The newspaper at the surface level talks about ‘*migration*’ but at a deeper level the narrative does something more than telling; it legitimizes its own contents as factual and authoritative.

The first paragraph gives us the theme of the article. In this lead paragraph the writer once again proves his authority by giving a statistical data on migrant children not having access to education and by directly quoting UNESCO’s 2019 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) report:

“Eighty percent of migrant children across seven Indian cities did not have access to education near worksites even as 40% of children from seasonal migrant households are likely to end up working rather than being in school, facing exploitation and abuse, according to the Unesco’s 2019 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) report.”

The writer wants to convey the message that migrant children not only fail to get education but are also subjected to abuses and face exploitation as they end up working in households due to poverty. The first paragraph, thus, stresses lack of education and its subsequent outcome in forms of abuse and exploitation. The emphasis on the overwhelmingly large percentage of educationally deprived children is clear from the opening part of the sentence, which is the topic. Further, there is a shift of focus from the children of the migrant to seasonal migrant households with the use of ‘*even as*’ for introducing a coordinate clause that introduces the probability that forty percent of seasonal migrant children will be off school.

In the second paragraph, the topic sentence introduces to us the time period 2001 and 2011, between which inter-state migration rates doubled in India. There are two coordinate clauses, with cohesive markers, i.e., ‘*Further*’ and ‘*But*’ and they have additive and contrastive functions respectively: “Further, an estimated 9 million people migrated between

states annually from 2011 to 2016. But many people are also moving for seasonal work. In 2013, 10.7 million children aged between 6 and 14 lived in rural households with a family member who was a seasonal worker.”

The additive function of ‘*further*’ brings in the incidence of ‘*inter-state*’ migration which has started taking place in India and has doubled in a decade. ‘*Further*’ has also an intensifying effect on the writer’s argument, reinforcing the problem of migration by way of reiteration. The enormity of the problem is made evident with the deployment of statistical figures of migration as well as inter-state migration for seasonal work.

The third paragraph, for its part, states the purpose of migration, i.e., seasonal work, which is the ‘*construction industry*’. Then follows statistical evidence about migrant workers in a brick kiln factory in Punjab to enhance the authenticity of the truth claims of the statements. A survey ‘found’ asserts the proposition that most of the migrant workers come from other states within the country.

We observe a common discursive pattern of the three paragraphs. First a general topic statement is given, then a more specific aspect of the topic is highlighted, and lastly the truth value of statements is attested by statistical figures of the UNESCO. However, in the fourth paragraph cited below something new happens:

“The UNESCO report while highlighting India’s initiatives to combat effects of seasonal migration on education, also urges policy makers to strengthen public education for rural migrant children living in slums... Among youth aged 15 to 19 who have grown up in a rural household with a seasonal migrant, 28% identified as illiterate or had an incomplete primary education.”

Here the rhetorical device of quoting an authoritative source allows the speaker to appropriate an independent piece of knowledge as their own. While initially we understand that the scale of seasonal migration has a significant impact on education and it is primarily the report writer’s view. This view acquires authority of factualness and credibility as it is presented in the guise of a UNESCO report. In the world of knowledge discourse, UNESCO is already an agency of knowledge and information production. Its empirical indices, statistical analyses as well as projections and advisories shape the policies of education and social developments, and all these have been well documented in the discourses of public knowledge, including those of the media. Hence, the very mention of the UNESCO Global

Education Monitoring Report is the guarantee of factualness that underpins all the statistical information as to the percentage and age group of the illiterate.

The fifth paragraph starts with an Act of the Indian Parliament to further supplement the previous UNESCO report. This paragraph also uses the epistemic authority of The Right to Education Act (2009) and offers the opinion that it is mandatory for the local authorities to ‘*admit migrant children.*’ To ensure a supportive response from the readers, the writer emphasizes the legal authority of the opinion by mentioning how it is a law by the parliament at the ‘*National Level*’ – a clear pleonasm as anyone can find. Hence, whatever follows becomes a legitimate state of affairs: that the national-level guidelines are in place for flexible admission of children, mobile education and seasonal hostels and improvement of coordination between sending and receiving districts and states.

Lastly, we see examples of states like Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Odisha trying to extend educational facilities to the children of seasonal migrant workers in pursuance of the parliamentary act.

The overall analysis reveals that the writer, ostensibly insightful and authoritative, takes up the role of ‘revealing’ the weaknesses and failures of different states. By quoting the UNESCO report, not only does the writer give legitimacy to his report but also gives authority to the narration.

In the fourth paragraph, the writer cites the example of two countries where ‘*internal population movements*’ are seen in large numbers. Again, in the third paragraph, the report says, “A survey of 3,000 brick kiln workers in Punjab found that 60% of kiln workers were *interstate migrants.*” These two and all the statistical data given in the fourth paragraph, like, “Among youth aged 15 to 19 who have grown up in a rural household with a seasonal migrant, 28% identified as illiterate or had an incomplete primary education.”, suggests that the report has been prepared after much research. There is nothing vague or negative about the migrants described in this article. What is thematized is the lack of access to education for these migrant children which eventually leads to exploitation and abuse of these innocent children in the workplace they join.

The positive representation of the Indian Government is achieved by the strategic positioning descriptions as well as the positive lexical choices made available in phrases:

‘mandatory for local authorities’, ‘National level guidelines’, ‘flexible admission of children’, ‘mobile education’, ‘seasonal hostels ...’

Sources like UNESCO GEM (Global Education Monitoring) report are quoted three times in this brief article to persuade the readers to believe without any need for logical reasoning. It simply asserts the article to be true without leaving room for arguing for it in a logical manner. The reader is positioned here in the text to take a favorable view of the migrant children and sympathize with them. Though the word *‘migrant’* means a person who moves one place to another, especially in order to find work or better living conditions, this exclusive understanding of the definition is not used in this article. Rather, in the article here, the word *‘migrant’* refers to those who are poor and move out for work even for a season to have their ends meet. The desired meaning is inflected by the use of the phrase *‘seasonal migrant’*, which is used frequently. And in doing so the writer has included them into a category and has excluded them from other categories. This referential of the text strategy serves different psychological, social and political purposes for the writer.

Case Study 1.B

The same event was reported in *The Hindu* on 20th November, 2018 where the headline was:

The Headline: ‘Literacy levels in rural India suffer from migration of families’ (*The Hindu*, 20 November, 2018)

‘Literacy levels in rural India suffer from migration of families’

UNESCO report says that 80% of seasonal migrant children in seven cities lacked access to education and 40% were likely to end up in work

SEASIDE
Literacy levels in rural households of India dip with seasonal migration, the UNESCO global education monitoring report 2018 has observed, bringing out the educational challenges thrown up by migration.

“In India, 10.7 million children aged 5 to 14 lived in rural households with a seasonal migrant in 2013. About 8% of youth aged 15 to 19 in these households were illiterate or had not completed primary school, compared to 18% of the cohort overall,” says the report. “About 80% of seasonal migrant children in seven cities lacked access to education near work sites, and 40% are likely to end up in work rather than education, experiencing abuse and exploitation.”

Construction sector
The report says that the construction sector absorbs the majority of short-term migrants. A survey in Punjab State of 3,000 brick kiln workers in 2015-16 found that 60% were inter-State migrants. Between 60% and 80% of all children aged 5 to 14 living at the kilns worked there 7 to 9 hours per day. About 75% of kiln workers reported lack of access to early childhood or primary education for their children,” it says.

Inter-State migration rates have doubled between 2001 and 2011. “An estimated 9 million migrated between States annually from 2011 to 2016,” the report says.

It also warns of the negative impact on education for children who are left behind as their parents migrate. “Test scores were lower among left-behind children aged 5 to 8.”

Addressing the issue
The report, however, acknowledges that India has taken steps to address the issue. “The Right to Education Act in 2009 made it mandatory for local authorities to admit migrant children. National-level guidelines were issued, allowing for flexible admission of children, providing transport and volunteers to support with mobile education, create seasonal hostels and aiming to improve coordination between sending and receiving districts and states,” it says.

The report says some State governments have also taken steps for migrant children’s education. It, however, observes that most interventions are focused on keeping children in home communities instead of actively addressing the challenges faced by those who are already on the move.

It also talks of a failed initiative “to pilot programmes used on brick kiln sites from 2010-2011 in Rajasthan to track the progress of out-of-school children did not improve learning in any substantial way. Teachers on the sites cited culture, language, lifestyle, cleanliness and clothing as major barriers between them and the kiln labour community. Teacher and student absenteeism were rampant.”

The report sees the growth of slums and informal settlements – where schools are often scarce – due to migration as a challenge. “70% of the students displaced by a riverfront project in Ahmedabad dropped out and an additional 15% had lower attendance,” it says, citing an example.

The report shows there is only one urban planner for every 1,00,000 people in India, while there are 10 for every 1,00,000 in the United Kingdom.

ERUDITE HOSTS
Some States in India have begun initiatives for the welfare of children of migrant parents.

GUJARAT
It has introduced seasonal boarding schools to provide education to migrant children.
It has also collaborated with NGOs to single online teaching of the children on the move.

MAHARASHTRA
Authorities have enrolled volunteers to provide after-school psycho-social support to children left behind by migrating parents.

GOINDRA
The State has taken up the responsibility of seasonal hostels run by NGOs.
It also works with Andhra Pradesh to improve the well-being of migrants.

The headline talks about migration but only in the context of rural India which is said to suffer at *‘Literacy levels’*. The article has a secondary headline which uses the UNESCO report in terms of authenticity and gives additional information (compared to *The Times of India*) saying 80% of seasonal migrant children in seven cities lacked access to education and 40% were likely to end up in work.

In the second paragraph *The Hindu* focuses on the number of migrant children in India in the age group of 6 to 14 living with seasonal migrants in the rural households. It further talks about the percentage of youth aged between 15 and 19 who were illiterate or had not completed primary school – which gives a picture of how the youth suffered due to migration.

Like *The Times of India*, this report also focuses on the lack of education on the worksites which pushed the children to end up in work and thereby they experience abuse and exploitation. The highlight of the report was the statistical data: “*Between 65% to 80% of all children aged 5 to 14 living at the kilns worked there 7 to 9 hours per day.*” Similar statistical data are also given in the fourth paragraph: “*An estimated 9 million migrated between States annually from 2011 to 2016*”.

The fifth paragraph talks about the negative impact on education for children who are left behind as their parents migrate: “*Test scores were lower among left-behind children aged 5 to 8*”.

Under the sub-heading “*Addressing the issue*” the writer presents extracts from the UNESCO report and gives his own views, suggesting here and there how there have been failures and weaknesses in the implementation.

Under the banner of the sub-heading “*Addressing the issue*” the report apparently seems to offer a neutral view on the migrant issue. At the outset it talks about the initiatives taken by the Government by passing an Act in 2009. But what follows this initiative highlights the crux of the matter and brings out the attitude of the writer to the fore.

The writer presents his tacit agreement with the views of the report when he says, “*The report sees the growth of slums and informal settlements – where schools are often scarce – due to migration as a challenge.*” This is done to highlight the problems and failures of the govt. In fact, these two phrases: ‘*growth of slums*’ and ‘*where schools are often scarce*’ are the key elements in the discourse as they constitute the fulcrum of an antithesis where the writer compares a naive view of the problem with the enlightened view. The two hyphens – in fact, the two pauses – act as emphatic, voiced pauses serving as a rhetorical device in the discourse. To further accentuate his opinion the writer uses an example to prove his point: “*18% of the students displayed by a riverfront project in Ahmedabad dropped out and an additional 11% had lower attendance*”

The report highlights the inefficiency of the government in the concluding paragraph where the writer once again uses the findings of the UNESCO report to emphasize his own opinion about the failure in governance: “*The report shows there is only one urban planner for every 1,00,000 people in India, while there are 38 for every 1,00,000 in the United Kingdom.*”

The news report makes frequent uses of quotations throughout the article to provide criticism of the leadership in India. Though the report overtly seems to talk about the suffering of children belonging to migrant families in rural India, it actually criticizes the authorities for their inefficiency and failures.

The choice of words plays an important role in providing readers with necessary affective overtones for responding to events. Events in our day to day life affect us emotionally apart from making real difference to our material conditions. We experience events in our body in addition to registering them in the mind. Therefore, knowledge and cognition of events are as important as the experience of it. Events are not just to be heard or known, or to be simply interpreted. Whether directly encountered in real life or reported as in the newspapers, events are to be responded to with feelings, without which these will be reduced to brute facts. All newspapers make necessary effective investments in the events they report. Every event is shot through with sentiments of various kinds. An aura of sentiments around the event reported offers us the cue to respond to it with some sense of judgment, and it is built by carefully chosen words with affective and evocative power. To put the matter simply, the readers’ emotional response is manipulated in a certain way so that it endorses the intention of the writer as to how the event is to be judged.

Here, in this report, the lexical items are used as affective values to imply the writer’s negative evaluation of the event. Under the heading ‘*Addressing the Issue*’ the writer presents the expected steps that should have been taken, and he counters it immediately by putting the real picture, which is far below the expectation.

“The Right to Education Act in 2009 made it mandatory for local authorities to admit migrant children ... The report says some State governments have also taken steps for migrant children’s education. It, however, observes that most interventions are focused on keeping children in home communities instead of actively addressing the challenges faced by those who are already on the move. It also talks of a ‘failed initiative’:A

pilot programme used on brick kiln sites from 2010-2011 in Rajasthan to track the progress of out-of-school children did not improve learning in any substantial way ... Teacher and student absenteeism were rampant ... The report shows there is only one urban planner for every 1,00,000 people in India...”

Words and phrases such as “*failed initiative*” and “*rampant*” intensify negative emotional response to the event of improper planning as reported and its negative consequences. *The Hindu*, thus, positions the reader to view the government in a negative light. It does this by presenting the facts by quoting the information as ‘*the report says*’, citing the evidence to instantiate incompetence on the part of the government.

Conclusion

It can be safely concluded that the reports published in both the newspapers, try to justify themselves as authoritative. Since a news report concerning education and social development of a whole nation has great social value, its factuality has greater premium than an incident that involves a single individual. In fact the public importance of an event is correlational with factuality. The greater the public importance, the greater is the epistemic need of the report.

Both the newspapers pick up the same issue but present it from different perspectives. Whereas *The Times of India* tries to arouse the readers’ sympathy for the migrant children, *The Hindu* is critical of the steps taken by the government. It seems to suggest that the government is primarily responsible for the perpetuation of the problem and the suffering of the migrant children.

The comparison makes it clear that this journalistic event in both the reports reflects ideology through the discourse – primarily the ideological perspectives of source views filtered through the professional norms. A close look into the style of presentation makes it convincing to believe that a great deal of what is unsaid is recognized as part of what is communicated. Since it cannot be denied that language actively shapes our reality, newspapers reports make use of various rhetorical devices to urge the readers to accept what they want to convey. The headlines, the lead paragraph, the narration of the incident, and finally, the conclusion – everything is designed to manipulate public sentiment through the clever use of language that primarily hinges on rhetorical devices. Thus, under the garb of

presenting facts, these reports make language the vehicle for carrying their message. And the result is obvious – the public believes what they read since most people read uncritically.

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Challenges Of English as a Medium of Instruction: Teachers' Perspective of Teaching English at Higher Secondary Level Classrooms in Tripura

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Abstract

Globalization has led to the increasing number of institutions around the world to use English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in their classroom practices. However, with the conversion of school medium from regional medium instruction to EMI has its own advantages as well as disadvantages that are faced by the teachers and learners. In this context, this article investigated challenges faced by English teachers in teaching English in multilingual classrooms of Tripura. This article also attempted to explore and understand the strategies employed by teachers to deal with the challenges that they faced. The data for this study was collected through qualitative interviews with teachers who are teaching at higher secondary level. One of the findings of the study suggest that, the proficiency level of the students is a major concern. The shift of the medium of instruction from regional medium/mother tongue to EMI creates a gap at the understanding level of textbook content and concepts of the learners. The respondents reported that, to address this challenge of learner's proficiency teachers use bilingual teaching method to make the concepts easy for understanding of the learners. The research also indicated that the teachers use translation, code switching, bilingual teaching method, more reading materials and reference books as major strategies to copewith the difficulties of EMI.

Keywords: medium of instruction, mother tongue, English language, English medium instruction (EMI), challenges of EMI

Introduction

Proficiency in English language is considered as a deciding factor for an individual's access to resources and future prospects. With all the debates, policies and schemes to promote mother tongue or the vernacular medium, ultimately the role of English language is at the center. Be it globally or in India as a specific country, the rise in the popularity of English language is increasing day by day. The growing demand for the English language has

made stakeholders consider seriously to promote EMI based education. As a result of this increasing demand for English there are studies that state that other native languages of smaller communities are at risk. At the same time learners from these smaller communities or rural areas suddenly shift to EMI based learning and find it difficult to cope with the concepts and content thereby creating a learning gap. Vaidehi Ramanathan (2005) observes that “Indian English and the privileges associated with it remain inaccessible to those who have been schooled in the vernacular-medium” (P.52). In the context of Tripura, it was observed that teachers teaching in rural areas spoke about how they are not given proper trainings to deal with such situations. When asked during the interview about their views and experiences of teaching using EMI. The respondent said that as a teacher she felt a sense of pride and privilege to be a teacher in an English medium school, but at the same time she felt that students are not able to cope with the EMI.

I feel happy that I am teaching in an English medium school but my students feel disinterested as they don't understand completely EMI... they don't attend classes regularly and cannot perform well in the exams... As a teacher I try to explain in mother tongue sometimes so that learning becomes easier for my students... (Teacher 5 from the interview data)

The above data from the respondent show how the students from the rural background are not fully equipped to learn in an EMI based educational setup. As Vaidehi Ramanathan (2005) stated that “students schooled in vernacular languages remain in less empowered positions” (P.51). In the Indian scenario at the policy level even though the vernacular medium/mother tongue based education is promoted but in reality there is an increasing demand for EMI based schools. This becomes a barrier for learners from socially disadvantaged background and therefore they are forced to join vernacular medium schools. Recently, in Tripura the vernacular medium schools are getting converted to Englishmedium schools at rapid rate. As a result the students from economically weaker section are left with no option other than switching to EMI based schools.

Students earlier were helped by their parents with their home works but now they are not as it is EMI based learning...some students find it difficult to take notes and therefore at times feel disinterested... (Teacher 7 from the interview data)

The respondents reported that the parents are happy that their children are studying in English medium school which will help them with better future prospects. Parents see this as

a positive move as they are hopeful that their children will get better employment opportunities if their education is in English medium. The reality in the classroom is quite different from what parents of the children feel. Mohan (2014) stated that “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.” (P.22)

English medium instruction based education

The idea of learning English language is associated with many aspects. Especially, in a multilingual country like India competency in English language is considered as a key requirement for employment opportunities these days. This very idea of the state and the stakeholders are evident from the changing educational scenario. There is increasing demand for English medium instruction based schools. Parents and students are in the mindset that education in English medium will provide them access to better resources and livelihood. Learners in the Indian educational set up with regional medium background view English from the instrumental orientation viewpoint whereas learners from ICSE and CBSE background view the language from an integrative orientation angle. English teachers at school level tend to promote integrative motivation as they teach English language through English literature. They view English as a way to better life styles and the world of better career opportunities.

Scope of English Education in Tripura

The school education system of Tripura is divided into four stages: primary stage which comprises of classes I-V, the middle stage consisting of classes VI-VIII, secondary stage comprising of classes IX-X and classes XI and XII are the higher secondary stage of education. English and Bengali are the languages for medium of instruction. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Rajya Mission, Tripura has taken an initiative named Project-14 programme and selected 14 Govt. English Medium Schools from all districts for improving the standard of English education in Tripura. Though some schools have the label of English medium but they practically use Bengali to large extent. Therefore, the aim of this program is to promote English as the medium of instruction in true sense and spirit. The programme was launched in 2014. These initiatives are taken by the state and central government to enhance the knowledge of English and improve the quality of academic performance of students.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions:

- (a) What are the perceptions and experiences of teachers towards using EMI in higher secondary level classroom of a state board affiliated school in Tripura?
- (b) What are the challenges faced by teachers while using EMI in classroom?
- (c) What are the strategies that teachers have used to deal with the challenges while teaching using EMI?

Method

The data for this research paper is collected as a part of doctoral research by the same author from the Centre for English Language Studies, University of Hyderabad. The data from the participants were collected through interviews that included twenty questions. Only a small proportion of data that was collected for the doctoral research is used for this research paper. The data included in this paper come particularly from the participants' responses to three important interview questions asked in the context of EMI: firstly, what is your experience and view on the role of EMI, secondly, what are the advantages and disadvantages of using EMI in classroom and lastly, how do you deal with the challenges of EMI based teaching?

Participants

Participants for this study were teachers who teach English at higher secondary level in schools which are affiliated to the state board that is Tripura Board of Secondary Education (TBSE). Total twenty-five teachers were interviewed for this study which included fifteen female and ten male participants.

Procedure

Teachers were individually contacted over phone and email and informed about this research study. Teachers were invited to participate in the study and the participant information sheet and the consent form was shared through email with them before conducting the interview. Almost all the teachers who were approached agreed to be a part of the study but later some of them were unwilling mostly due to pandemic-induced uncertainty and unavailability of time. Finally, 28 interviews were conducted but only 25 of them were

transcribed and analysed thematically to identify the themes and then organised into sub-categories.

Analysis

The recorded interview was first transcribed and saved as a word document. The sentences, phrases, examples and references that were discussed in Bengali by the participants were translated into English. The responses of the participants were organized according to each interview question systematically. The responses were marked and highlighted according to different themes, patterns and different sub-categories identified after thorough analysis of all the interviews. Thematic Analysis (TA) was used to identify patterns and themes within the interview data. Data analysis was guided by Kuckartz's (2014) "thematic qualitative text analysis" and the six phases of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 87) (a) familiarize yourself with the data; (b) generate initial codes; (c) search for themes; (d) review themes; (e) define and name themes; and (f) produce the report .

Findings of the study

Analysis of teachers' interview transcripts offered rich insight into their views and perception towards EMI based teaching. Results reported in this section include themes and patterns, and representative examples from the recorded interview data.

Based on the responses by the teachers the data were organized and reduced into the following sub-categories:

Perception about EMI:

1. Necessary for higher education:

The results showed that 20 participants (or 80%) feel that EMI is essential for better higher education opportunities. They feel that education in English will help students in securing admission at a better institution for higher education. In order to go abroad one has to pass IELTS, TOEFL and fulfill other criteria... Competency in English is essential for students to obtain better career opportunity... (Teacher 11 from the interview data)

2. Better career opportunity:

Several teachers (almost 60%) reported that English is necessary for better career prospects. Whereas, remaining few reported that it is not mandatory but knowing the language will surely help candidates as an added skill in getting employment.

3. Access to reading materials:

Eight participants (36%) stated that English is the language for standard academic content. Participants felt that it is important to be proficient in English as it will help in accessing materials both online from the internet and offline as well.

4. English is the language of the Internet and technology therefore, EMI should be made compulsory:

Almost all the teachers felt and explicitly stated that EMI will help students to access academic content from the internet and other sources. Especially, during the pandemic when online learning is prioritized a student must be comfortable in accessing content in English to keep up with the pace of online education.

5. Progressive thinking:

Few teachers (around 16%) stated that EMI will help students to broaden their scope of thinking. Being proficient in English will help students to explore literary works and reading materials by foreign writers which will give them better exposure.

Teachers also highlighted reasons against the use of EMI along with their justifications. The following are the various challenges that participants reported from their classroom experiences. They reported that it was not academically justified to use EMI in various contexts because of the following reasons:

1. Students' poor English proficiency:

Only four participants (16%) highlighted that most of the students' English ability was insufficient to understand difficult content indicating possible frustration and demotivation. This reason is similar to other previous studies which stated that proficiency plays a key role in the efficiency of EMI courses because students with low English proficiency might experience serious comprehension problems (Joe & Lee, 2012; Räsänen, 2008; Vinke, Snippe, & Jochems, 1998).

2. Difficulty in mastering the technical terms during lectures:

Almost 70% of the participants reported that many students in their class were not able to understand technical terminologies during the lecture unless it is explained in easy words and phrases.

The textbook language is different from the language we use in communication...Learner's face difficulty in understanding the terms in their books and therefore don't complete their tasks and get demotivated... (Teacher 14 from the interview data)

3. Simultaneously listening and writing are difficult:

Few of the teachers stated that their students are still not so proficient in English that they can easily take notes from the classroom lectures. It becomes difficult for the teacher to complete the assigned portion and the syllabus as they need to repeat the content in EMI more often.

The participants have shared both the advantages and disadvantages of EMI from their classroom experiences and practices. They have also come up with few strategies to deal with the challenges that they face during their teaching. The teachers feel that these methods have worked well with their students to keep them motivated and help them to improve their English language proficiency.

1. Well planned and organised teacher trainings:

60% of the teachers felt that there should be regular trainings for teachers to meet their classroom requirements then students will also be benefitted. There are many instances where teachers felt the need to discuss their classroom experiences with trainers or other educators but didn't get that suitable chance.

2. Use bilingual teaching method at the initial stage to improve learner's language proficiency:

Around 80% of the participants felt that using mother tongue to explain concepts worked well with their students therefore it is advisable to use the native language in classrooms whenever required.

3. Aide in language learning:

According to Teacher 17, students need more assistance with speaking therefore they can be provided extra support from the authority for communication based courses. This will help them in improving their communication skill in English.

Discussion

There is an increasing trend of converting Bengali medium schools to English medium in Tripura. Since EMI is being introduced on a large scale, this study contributes with crucial information and is first of its kind taking experiences of important stakeholders like teachers. Teachers' attitude is central in teaching a second or foreign language in a multilingual context. This qualitative study investigated teachers' perception and experiences towards EMI and the challenges they face and the strategies they have opted in their classrooms. The perception of the teachers about EMI remains mixed. However, they remain more in the favor of EMI because of reasons such as better higher education opportunity, employment, access to study materials and better exposure. The teachers also feel that if their students are not proficient in English from now onwards they fear that they will be left out in this competitive world and will be lagging behind. Teachers feel that learners should improve their skill of speaking in English so that they feel confident in the classroom to ask questions and clear their doubts. This will make them more confident and keep them motivated in the class.

Conclusion

This qualitative study with teachers as participants have revealed some of the interesting findings. Almost all the teachers have positive attitude towards EMI. For most teachers, EMI is essential for higher secondary students as they will soon join colleges for their graduation. They believe that students need to be confident and should continue learning in EMI.

This study focused on a small number of teachers who teach English at higher secondary level in Tripura. Therefore, further research must be undertaken to investigate both teachers' and students' perspective by using methods such as classroom observation, questionnaires, and interviews to find whether similar findings can be produced. Further research can be conducted focusing on classroom interaction and how effective the delivery of content lessons is in EMI settings.

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Challenges of Promoting Professional Identities of Women English Teachers through Professional Organizations

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Abstract

This study focuses on the professional identities of women English teachers which adopted a narrative inquiry research design. It attempted to explore challenges that women English teachers face in course of promoting their professional identities through the professional organizations and to find out the factors that affect in promoting their professional identities. A sample of nine women English teachers was selected using purposive non-random sampling procedure to elicit the required data from Kathmandu district. The in-depth-interview was administered as a tool to collect required data to address the research questions for this study. The findings of study were the dominance of patriarchy in the secondary level education, the traditional social culture of superiority of men in the society, entangled with the household affairs and rearing and caring the children and elders. Moreover, the factors which affect in promoting their professional identities were gender discrimination, ideology of people, culture, politics, family support, workload, and time management.

Keywords: Professional identities, professional organizations, patriarchy, household affairs, and gender discrimination.

Introduction

Women English teachers in Nepal are facing various challenges in course of developing professional career. Teachers' professional identity can be constructed through the proactive participations in conferences, workshops, symposiums, seminars, webinars, habit of continuous reading, researching, teaching, reflecting in teaching, preplanning lesson and re-

teaching (Downie, 1990; Hargreaves, 2000 as cited in Chandran, 2018). Professional organizations have been rehearsing several strategies for enhancing professional identities of teachers; but development is resulted not only through taking part in conferences, seminars, webinar and workshop; but also acting out and reflecting experiences. Teachers' identity constructions are the essential phenomena to recognize them as professionals in the society. It can be attained through the processes of engagement, fancy, and arrangement (Wenger, 1998, as cited in Grier & Johnston, 2009). Strategies of professional organizations should function as a springboard to elevate professional identities of women English teachers.

Ingender disparity and inequality are still rampant in Nepalese society. Government of Nepal in inclusive manifesto has provisioned of minimum of 33% representation of women in all sectors including education to political decision making (Government of Nepal, 2015). To be specific in Nepalese education context, we can see the gender gap between women English teachers and men English teachers in community schools. According to the flash 1 report, 2019-2020 of DOE (2020), out of the total numbers of teachers in community schools, the shares for female teachers are 18.7%, 19.3%, and 18.9% at secondary level (G9-10), secondary level (G11-12), and secondary level (G9-12) respectively in community schools whereas population of female in Nepal is 51.44% as per 2011 census. Male dominated society has given them limited access, freedom and opportunity in every domain of life. Khadka (2020, p. 110) stated "socially constructed gender role hinders their professional live. Existing gender discrimination affects one's development ultimately influencing the social and professional identity of female English teachers"

Teachers' identity is a holistic concept. It comprises of personal experience, professional experience and external political environment which work in a dynamic shifting manner (Mockler, 2011). Teacher professional experiences and careers can be achieved through the involvement in professional association, unions and networks in small and large scales. Teacher identity is shaped through interactions within professional communities (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Teachers can be trained through different professional orientations and inductions of the network of professional organizations. They can learn how to treat and teach the learners through the academic discussion with the senior mentors and teacher educators in course of building professional identities. "Professional identity can be framed as being both dialogical and social constructivist in nature where the meaning in our lives, our sense of who we are is seen socially constructed in part by how we hold dialogue

with the institutional world around us" (Bakhtin&Holquist 1981, as cited in Runcieman, 2018, p.4). Teachers' professional identities are associated with the institutions in which they work professionally. There are symbiotic relationships between teachers' professional identities and the institutions in which they work. Professional Identities are to be developed in social practices in which individuals are actively involved in professional institutions (Holland et al., 1998). There are multiple identities of teachers from novice to expert. Basically, in our Nepalese context, teachers' identities are conceptualized from academic qualification, teaching level, teaching subject and entry in the profession and social perspectives. Nevertheless, academic and social dimension are the main entities for professional identities. Academically, teachers are known as pre-school teacher, primary teacher, basic level teacher, secondary level teacher, and high school teacher, lecturer, and professor who are either novice or experienced ones.

Teacher identity is dynamic and multifaceted entity (Sachs, 2005; Rodger & Scott, 2008; Lasky, 2005) which is not stable; but ongoing changing one. Professional identity is established through the unending professional journey. It is changeable, unstable and ultimately indefinable. Teachers' professional identity is presented as a fluctuating process through which different teachers' identities exchange and positions possess their own voices and rationale within a dialogic relationship (Mifsud, 2018). Professional identity is not only the ongoing process of teacher educators which continually relies on their self-understandings to make meanings out of present experiences. Teachers' identities are to be resulted out of dynamic products of knowledge, goals, and self-understandings which are enacted in everyday practice (Olsen & Buchanan, 2017). In this regard, Britzman (1991) argues "in the teacher identity, I could be as a pedagogue, as a didactical professional, as a subject expert, as a member of school, as a member of a society and so on" (p.8). In order to establish teachers' professional identities, they should become all-rounders in their professions. They are to be acknowledged by society as qualified teachers, subject experts, pedagogues, ideologues, and members of the school and society.

Teachers are to be aware of their professional accountabilities and cognitive knowledge in their professions. In this regard, Izadinia (2013) conceptualized professional identity as perceptions of the teachers' cognitive knowledge, senses of agency, self-awareness, voices, confidences and relationships with colleagues, learners and parents as shaped by their educational contexts, prior experiences and learning communities. Sachs

(2005) argued that teacher identity provides a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of how to be, how to act and how to understand their work and their places in the society. Teachers are responsible persons to create conducive opportunities for the exploration and developing teachers' identities. Professional identities result from the tight equilibrium between personal self-image and teachers' roles that one's feel obliged to play (Volkmann & Anderson, 1998, as cited in Mifsud, 2018). Teachers' personalities in their professions are essential to establish their professional identities. In this regard, Mockler (2011, p. 522) argued that "the articulation of one's identity is a first step towards theorizing professional practice through the explicit linking of 'what I do' with why I am here". Professional identities of the teachers are associated with their morale contribution, professional values to the students and the institutions. They should be fully accountable to uplift the academic standard of the students through their expertise and academic efforts. The teachers can be professionally ready to facilitate the learners if they have developed their professional identities. There are various components of teacher identity, such as teacher knowledge, teacher beliefs, professional development, and teacher emotions personality factors, knowledge of ICT, culture, content, context, communication, and collaboration (Mifsud, 2018).

Since teaching is a profession that creates all other profession, teachers are the most powerful and influential change agents to change the society. The behaviors and attitudes of the learners can be modified by the teachers' identities. Teachers' identities comprise of teacher knowledge, teacher beliefs, pedagogical content knowledge, and ICT knowledge (Kroger 2000, as cited in Poudel, 2017). Teacher identity is constructed through the cultural makers and social positioning (Wenger, 1998). Teacher identities particularly, woman English teachers can be affected by classroom management, teaching materials, attitudes towards teaching profession, status of woman in the society and cultural awareness, and professional ethics. Professional identity is understood in the light of broad cultural structures, such as race, class, gender, language, religious outlooks in the society.

To be better informed about teachers' practices, it is necessary to learn and incorporate both teachers and students' contexts in teaching (Barkhuizen, 2016). Socio-culturing language teacher identities can be constructed from social and personal perspective (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Sociocultural paradigm emphasizes the contextual influences and social relations on teacher and acknowledging personal experiences. Identities can be influenced by personal stories, gender, culture, social relationship, working condition, age,

schooling curriculum, and policies of academic institutions in which women teachers have been involved. Teacher identities can be constructed by agency, social values, beliefs, tradition, educational background, and self and others (Sanderson, 2019). "Teacher identity is not context free; but is crucially related to social, cultural, and political context-interlocutors, institutional settings, and so on"(Varghese, Morgan, Johnston,& Johnson, 2005, p. 23). Teacher professional identity is determined by the socio-cultural context in the society. Teachers' beliefs, personal histories, discourses as well as professional and institutional settings are mediators of their professional identities (Varghese, 2018). Prior and present experiences of teachers play a vital role to construct their professional identities. Teachers' background knowledge, experiences and histories of teachers are essential to shape the professional identities of teachers.

Generally, content knowledge, supportive networks, teacher beliefs, opportunity, society, reflective practices, and age, gender, class, and educational policies affect teachers' professional development. The study of working environment, leadership behavior, transparency of the organization, relation with colleagues, students' achievement, perception of equity and participation in planning and decision-making process are the major factors of teacher motivation. Zein (2016) asserted that inadequate in-service education, inadequate teacher educators, issues with training management, ambiguous selection of training participants are prime factors in affecting teachers' professional identities. According to Poudel (2019), knowledge and beliefs of profession, training and/or academic specialization, professional strengths and experience, adherence to professional code of conduct, meaning of teaching, belongingness in a professional association, professional goals and humility, contexts, incentives, and expectations, attitudinal aspects, and practical aspects are the leading factors affecting to the professional identities of teachers.

Statement of problem

I have served as a central member of Nepal English Language Teachers' association (NELTA) as well as one of the editors of NELTA for a long time. During that period, I have come across with woman English teachers who have been struggling to be professionals in secondary English teachers as well as university teachers. My queries is that if woman English teachers involve professionally in the nexus of professional organizations, they can develop their professional identities which is essential for the development of the academic institutions in which they have been working professionally and it helps them to be

academically and professionally sound for their bright careers. Involvement in the professional networks is inevitable for woman English teachers for their professional identities to contribute in ELT scenario at secondary level as their male counterparts. My query is that whether the professional organizations help them for their professional identities.

Research Questions

- What are the challenges that they face in course of promoting their professional identities through the professional organizations?
- What are the factors that affect in promoting their professional identities?

Methodology

This study adopted narrative inquiry research design to accomplish this research. The interpretive research paradigm was used to analyze and interpret the data in this study. Nine women English teachers were selected using purposive non-random sampling procedure in this study from Kathmandu district. I employed in-depth-interview as a tool to collect required data to address the research questions of this study. The live stories of the participants were collected in relaxed manner with the help of guideline questions. In order to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity, respondents were given pseudonyms as T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8 and T9. I assured them that their confidentiality and privacy would be maintained ethically.

Results and Discussion

Challenges and opportunities for women ELT teachers for professional identities

There are both challenges and opportunities for women English teachers to make their careers as sound professional teachers in schools. However, there are more challenges than opportunities for them. Khadka (2020, p. 102) claims “it mainly focuses on the opportunities and challenges, multiple coping up strategies and the particular responsibilities determined due to gender on formal and informal sectors of their work”. They have to insist for getting opportunities as men counterparts in school in local, provincial, and federal government levels. They are being discriminated even for training opportunities by school administration. They have to fight for opportunities every time with school administration. In this juncture, one of the respondents, T1 argued that

I don't see opportunities for women teachers in school. There is the only opportunity i.e. reservation system provided by government. Apart from this, I don't think any opportunities in school. We must struggle and raise voices for opportunities in school. None provides us chances and opportunities here because of being women English teachers. Even in our school, in training, only male teachers are selected and sent and we know later.

It can be drawn from this verbatim that only male teachers are seemed to be selected for training organized by local, provincial and federal governments. Instead of taking training as golden opportunities for professional identities, it has been used as a means to get transportation allowance (TA) and day allowance DA as well as doing politics for men English teachers. In the similar vein, T7 admitted that “*man dominated school administration has made such training as a means of earning and having entertainment. The men English teachers who have good ICT knowledge have been selected for ICT training time and again by school administration*”. There is a dominance of patriarchy in the secondary level education which is incompatible with the changing context in Nepal. In this juncture, one of the participants, T6 asserted that

In my experience what I have realized is that men regard household as a minor task or no task; but this task consumes our all the time. I have obviously educated family and have not faced any direct oppression; but for e.g. my husband has never washed dishes and children's dresses. I also cannot tell him to do so. When we both are back from our duties at home, he rests on the sofa with tired face or sits near TV; however, I proceed for dinner.

Due to the traditional social culture of superiority of men in the society, women English teachers have been exploited, suppressed and oppressed in the society due to which, they cannot improve their professional identities in the secondary level in Nepal. In this regard, T5 strongly argued that

As being a woman English teacher, it is very challenging to teach in the school because of various reasons. As we know that our society is still under the male supremacy so people of our society don't accept female as an English teacher easily. They think that women couldn't teach effectively; they couldn't handle the classes and maintain good discipline to the students.

The predetermined gender biasness should be avoided to develop positive perspectives towards women English teachers in the society. In support of this concept, one of the respondents, T3 said that *“as a woman English teacher, I have not been provided opportunities such as getting scholarship in taking part in conference in national level training and conferences organized by secondary level curriculum development center”*.

There is no intelligently and intellectually differences between men and women English teachers; however, only opportunity, eagerness and environment play the prime roles to make them more intelligent and intellectual. However, T8 asserted strong encouragement that *“people regard women English teachers weaker and inferior to men English teachers so we need to prove ourselves by developing professional identity. We are capable and able to do the assigned ELT task”*.

There are a lot of opportunities for building career of women English teachers; however, they have to face several challenges to develop their professional identities. In this regard, Khadka (2020) argues that female English teachers should face various challenges which are related to high quality standardization in professionalism and personal accountabilities at home. There should be changes of social practices and attitudes towards women English teachers.

Affecting factors of professional identities

Several factors affect in constructing professional identity for women English teachers. Gender discrimination, ideology of people, culture, politics, family support, workload, and time management are the key factors to reduce the efficiencies of women English teachers to promote their professional identities. Teacher identities can be constructed by social agencies, social values, beliefs, traditions, educational backgrounds, and self and others (Sanderson, 2019). The social, educational, and political factors prevent the women English teachers from being competently professional teachers as their male counterparts. There is a lack of bridging between theory and practice in the context of Nepal. In this regard, one of the respondents T2 argued that *“bitter reality in our country is that Nepalese women have been empowered in paper but not in real practice”*. In the constitution, there is equal right for women as men; however, in practice there is gender discrimination and biasness particularly in the illiterate society in the rural areas of Nepal. The respondent, T5 also admitted that *“Yes, I think doing all these things hinder women English teachers to engage in*

professional activities. Women English teachers have to do all the household activities so they don't have time to participate in the workshops, conferences, seminars and webinars".

The school administration, school management committee (SMC), society, social ideology, family environment, social culture and our patriarchal society are the prime factors to create obstacles for women English teachers in promoting their professional identities. While talking about time, women English teachers with marital status and having children also hinder for promoting professional identities since women English teachers are not as free as men English teachers to read ELT materials and to go to training at local and national and international levels conferences, workshops and seminars. In this juncture T7 argued that

A professional women English teachers have to be engaged as busy mothers until her children are grown up to five or six years old. We have to be suffered with the lack of time at home. I have three years old daughter and I allocate my most of time for her, my husband and family. However, until and unless there is changing attitudes towards women English teachers, we cannot promote professional identities.

It can be inferred that there are various deep rooted social, political, norms and values, and ideological factors which prevent the women English teachers from uplifting as a qualified, and competent professional English teaches as their male counterparts in their schools. In this regard, T9 stated that

Teachers are not made by born; they have to do rigorous continuous practice. Additionally, they need to attend professional activities such as workshops, seminars, conferences etc. I think bearing and rearing children and being busy in household may hinder to involve actively participation in such activities.

There are several factors that affect in constructing professional identities of women English teachers, such as political ideology, social status, professional performance, social culture, and gender discriminative attitudes towards women English teachers. We, women teachers do not have enough free time to collect ELT materials from e-library due to the lack of ICT skills. They cannot collect hard copies of latest ELT teaching and learning materials even from physical libraries and the market due to the paucity of time.

More important open secret is that we are unable to manage the time to read those ELT materials owing to the double responsibilities at home and in workplace. There are still discriminative attitudes towards women English teachers by the patriarchal society which is one of the factors which prevent them from promoting professional identities. The numbers of male English teachers are more than women English teachers in secondary level so less numbers of women English teachers is another primary factor for affecting their professional identities. "Teacher identity is not context free but is crucially related to social, cultural, and political context-interlocutors, institutional settings, and so on"(Varghese, Morgan, & Johnston, 2005, p. 23). As a result, voices of marginalized women English teachers are not addressed while selecting for training, seminar, conferences and even promotion.

Obstacles for women ELT teachers in professional identities.

Women English teachers have been facing a lot of obstacles in their professional careers. In this context, Khadka (2020, p. 101) states “professional women are caught between a wide range of duties and responsibilities, such as caring for their children, engaging in household chores and fulfilling professional obligations in formal and informal settings”. They have double responsibilities as a loving mother, and devoted wife at home and professionally dedicated English teachers in school. In this regard, one of the respondents T1 admitted that

Usually I make my son sleep while taking online classes. During my college time, I have attended almost all the conferences organized by NELTA when I was single. However, there were very negligible female participants with their small kids. After having family our wings and dreams automatically get shortened.

The women English teachers should bear the double accountability at home and in school which is one of the serious obstacles to promote their professional identities. Most of the women teachers are entangled with the household affairs which demotivate them from their core professional identity. It is very challenging to promote as professional women English teachers in the backward society in Nepal. In the similar vein, another participant, T5 asserted that “Yes, I think doing all these things hinder women English teachers to engage in professional activities. Women English teachers have to do all the household activities so they don't have time to participate in the workshops, conferences, seminars and webinars”. Due to the social structure of Nepal, women should be more responsible for nurturing and

caring children and senior aged elders and rearing the children at home. In this juncture, one of the respondents, T6 said that

My little daughter didn't let me take my online classes during lockdown. In such a situation how can I manage time for my teacher professional development? She doesn't stay with others except me and even for household; I have to wait for her sleep to do my professional activities

The male members think household tasks as minor ones which consume time and energy of the women English teachers at home. In this regard, the respondent, T7 admitted that

We are disturbed not only in taking part in TPD programs; but even in my online classes. After doing household, we too feel like tired and unwell to read professional ELT materials so I always say to my girl students that they should take part in several programs and learn the things as much as possible while they are single, I mean bachelor because after marriage life makes women teachers very busy. During my college time, I was completely free and I used to do what I wanted. I attended almost all the conferences organized by NELTA and other ELT programmers held in Kathmandu valley. But now I can only remember that lovely moment.

In fact, the women English teachers are partially disturbed from the core household affairs, caring and rearing their children. Most of them were hindered from attending seminars, conferences, workshops and preparing their daily lesson as well due to the household affairs and being women. Khadka (2020) asserts that existing gender discrimination and gender roles of women English teachers hinderin developing their professional identities.

The women are the main responsible persons and backbone of the family in the social structure of Nepal. In this regard, T7 argued that “*we need to look after the children and whole family. We are expected to rear and care children from the society. We have very limited time; but a lot to do in that limited time. So, household work is also a barrier*”. There should be radical changes of the attitudes towards the women English teachers in the society in order to bring changes in the field of education in the society.

Conclusions

The answers of the question regarding what challenges and opportunities that they face in course of constructing their professional identities through the professional organizations are: the dominance of patriarchy in the secondary level education, the traditional social culture of superiority of men in the society, entangled with the household affairs and rearing and caring the children and elders. The answer of the third research question regarding what the factors those affect in constructing their professional identities are gender discrimination, ideology of people, culture, politics, family support, workload, and time management which are the key factors to reduce the efficiencies of women English teachers to promote their professional identities.

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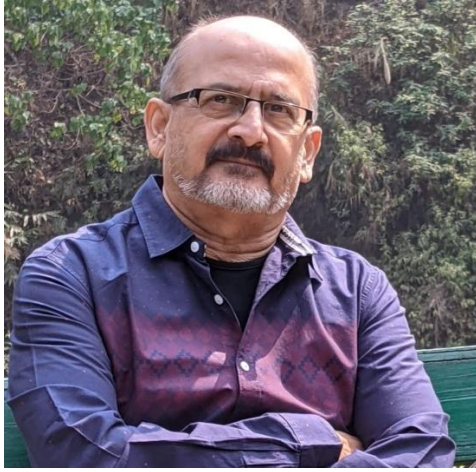
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RETHINKING THE HUMANITIES EDUCATION IN INDIA:**A CONVERSATION WITH D VENKAT RAO**

D Venkat Rao taught until recently as Senior Professor in the Department of English Literature at The English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU), Hyderabad. He joined the department with a PhD from the University of Kent at Canterbury, UK, and Postdoctoral research at the universities of Chicago, California (Berkeley), and Washington (Seattle). Over a career spanning 40 years, he pioneered unique courses and research projects interfacing literary and cultural studies with technology, pedagogy, and the Indian traditions. His academic scholarship of the last two decades explores crucial questions in critical humanities, cultural difference (Indian and European) and the Indian oral, performative and reflective traditions: *India, Europe and the Question of Cultural Difference* (Routledge, 2022); *Performative Reflections of Indian Traditions* (Springer, 2021); *Critical Humanities from India: Contexts, Issues, Futures* (Routledge, 2018); *Cultures of Memory in South Asia: Orality, Literacy and the Problem of Inheritance* (Springer, 2014). This work reflects his deep and profound engagement with the Sanskrit tradition and the mnemocultures of India.

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In this conversation with a junior colleague at EFLU, K Lavanya, who is an avid follower and admirer of his work, he shares his thoughts on the humanities, particularly literary-cultural studies, and insights from his academic pursuits.

KL: Looking back on your academic life in the field of literary studies in India, would you like to share some abiding memories and reflections from your journey? What are the sources and resources that nourished and sustained you?

DVR: As I was born and brought up in a small town, my ambitions (if they could be called so) were limited – to get a degree and get into a job. I drifted into English from Commerce quite recklessly. But quite unexpectedly, the MA degree from Kakatiya university got me a job soon after my master's. In a way I stumbled into teaching. Literally, one evening the principal of the university college came home on a scooter and took me to his college, pushed me into a classroom and asked me to teach! This was in the later part of 1980. It was an evening college which provides education to in-service employees and others who do odd

jobs to eke out their living. It was a strange experience. Fresh from the university, I tried to speak in English but that barely helped me to communicate with them. Many of them were older than I was. They thought I was not a Telugu-speaking person. As days passed, as I talked with them in Telugu outside the classroom, things began to change. Most of the students came from disadvantaged backgrounds and were the first-generation members to get into higher education (undergraduate studies).

As you know, Warangal was turning turbulent from the late 70s (post-Emergency period). I would say, it was a kind of transition period (especially for young people). It was changing from street-fight gangster groups to a more politically driven CPI-ML (Maoist) impacted town. The street-gangs were of course used by local political parties from time to time. But what was emerging was something more radical. If the former confined the young to the small streets of a small town, the latter seemed to expose them to certain ideas about the poor, society, some conception about the conditions of their living and the possibility of changing such conditions through organized effort. The latter, one may say, attracted the youth with a certain kind of ideas, books, a certain kind of language, and above all it appeared to provide access to means of changing their conditions. The means were quite violent but their promise and above all their apparently easy access and the ‘freedom’ to act seemed attractive to the youth. In a word, the changing scenario in the town exposed the young to a particular understanding of the world and the possibility for them to act in it. Well, it was a violent situation, and it yielded an immense amount of violence.

Most of my students came from the countryside which was rapidly getting exposed to such ideas of organized transformation of their conditions. Of course, Warangal carried other strands of memory (Arya Samaj, Razakar violence, and the suppressed Communist Movement of the 1940s and 50s). But the post-Emergency ultra-Left ideas that impinged on the youth were quite different. The university was more or less taken over by such a strident wind and almost all my classmates became part of that wind overnight. I must say, I remained aloof from such a wave throughout my postgraduate days at the university. I still had the residues of the waning, unorganized, local street-life (which was no less violent).

It was my exposure to teaching and through this opportunity to interact with students who came from a deeply disadvantaged background (whose sole ambition was, like mine, to get a job by getting a degree) that impelled me to reflect upon the change that was taking place –

even as we were caught in the change. Perhaps it was my memory of the street-life and the emerging invasive ideas that provided me a chance to reflect on the ('political') change that was taking place and the lasting memories of that lived (street) experience.

Regarding literary studies, teaching, as in any small-town college or university (now I can say the metropolitan universities too are no different) meant serving the prescribed menu or the syllabus. This mainly involved at the undergraduate level a random selection of prose and poetry pieces from the Romantic poets, Victorian prose writers, Shakespeare, and some plays. (At the MA level it was the routine of Beowulf or Chaucer to Eliot and Yeats or Frost and Stevens. The so-called post-structuralism was not yet part of the small-town syllabus at that time). It was more like an initiation rite for literature students to go through the chronology of the canonized writers. Since the rationale (if any – literature meant studying the prescribed authors) was internalized or institutionalized, questions about where and why and how we should study these authors had no place in teaching. The contexts from where these celebrated writers dominated the scene of teaching and the context where these works were imparted had no place in that scene of teaching/learning; I doubt whether the situation has changed much even to this day. Even when we study/studied the so-called Indian Writing in English, the established methods of teaching (the background of the writer, influences, comparisons, and in later years the ill-thought conceptions of 'caste', etc.,) dominated the scene. In a word, a certain understanding of the background of the prescribed writer became a part of the established teaching-learning scenario and it left hardly any place to reflect on the relation between such a background and its writer on the one hand and the learner at the receiving end. This relation remains un-reflected even to this day in our teaching-learning situation. Here it must be noted that the problem is not that of an individual teacher (we had good teachers in Warangal) or student. The problem is institutional. It has to do with the conceptions that went into the making of the modern university and the formation of disciplines or faculties. This problem is yet to receive attention beyond some historical accounts about these themes (of institution and the discipline). There is no study even to this day which engages with the backgrounds which produced the prescribed authors and the cultural reflective contexts in which they are imparted or received.

As I moved on in the vocation of teaching and learning, I began to realize the importance of my small-town background. I still remember vividly as a child I used to watch with awe and fear the many *yachaka*-singers who came every week, two of them in particular. One was a

protruding-gap-toothed old man with sunken cheeks holding a three-stringed instrument. He had a white headgear, would wear a white *lalchi* and soiled *dhoti*. With a wooden *kar-tal* in the right hand and the stringed instrument on the left shoulder, both played at the same time, he would sing loudly in his hoarse voice songs with the name of Hari (Vishnu). My job at home was to give him a fistful of rice when he sang the song. Then there was another who seemed more menacing in his looks – a squint-eyed, pock-marked face with a long, black moustache, wearing a colourful turban, a long, quilted overcoat and a soiled knee-length *dhoti*. He would carry a yoke on his left shoulder and the yoke carried two long rag-quilted bags hanging at either end. Even before he approached the house his medium-sized brass-bell could be heard ringing loudly. He held the bell in his right hand and played it non-stop. His song had a cascading rhythm as he enumerated the names of numerous gods and the mountains with which some of these gods were associated. In later years, I learnt that these mountains with their gods surrounded Warangal. His menacing look used to scare me, even as I held the fistful of rice (sometimes half of the measuring container – metal *sola*) in hand. The finale of his song was the blowing of the conch. Once rice was poured into one of the bags of the yoke, he would sing verses of *ashirvada* for a minute and then blow the conch for a few seconds. They never came together. They would visit us on different days of the week. Phrases, words, and tunes of the songs still ring in my ear. They remained with me as I learnt in later years that the first one came from *Hari-Dasari* (Mala) community, and the latter was a Shaivite *Jangama* (one who moves from place to place – could be from any of the myriad *jatis*). My street-life included the experience of these endearing song cultures.

As a student at the university and later as a teacher in Warangal in the late 70s and early 80s, I was exposed to the song cultures of the Maoist group – especially as they were spectacularly performed by the composer-singer-performer, Gaddar. The ingenuity of this cultural experiment was in garnering the wide variety of massive song-cultural base of rural Telangana and remediating it with the political imports of the (Maoist) Left. The tunes were immemorial, their mediated content was ‘novel’, often direct and hard-hitting with humour and distress, even when it simplified reality. These songs had tremendous appeal, cutting across various strata of society. This song-cultural movement of the Left sustained itself over two decades and impacted the youth in villages and towns.

But in the English classroom these throbbing song cultures and their background had no place at all. There was no question of reflecting on the divergent backgrounds of the canonized

writers whom we studied and taught on the one hand, and the surviving resources of the background from which both teachers and students came into the classroom, on the other hand. The disjuncture of the backgrounds remains an unexamined abyss even to this day.

As you can see, these enduring memories of small-town life and the students from various strata that composed the context of reception of English (literature) have had an impact on my own formation as an English teacher. When I left Warangal physically to pursue my studies, these memories and experiences remained with me.

KL: So your development as a teacher drew sustenance from the disconnect you perceived between the contexts of production and reception in English studies. Your work has in fact grappled with the ‘critical’ nature of the humanities in contemporary India - the unease with its institutionalized European legacy and the challenges circumscribing its engagement with the diverse Indian cultural forms (text, music, image, performance, ritual). What insights would you want to share from your reflections on working with this “double bind of heritages” as you call it (in *Cultures of Memory in South Asia*)?

DVR: As you can see from your earlier question, the background of the cultural context of the writers whom we learn about and teach, and the background from which the students and teachers come are not homogenous and continuous. Teaching and learning are yet to focus on the question of our activity from the contexts, backgrounds from which the recipients emerge. This is a huge task and any engagement with it will show that in our institutional contexts we have barely prepared ourselves to ask the question: what background do we come from? What are our inheritances? Who are we who are reading and ‘learning’ these authors and what are these ways in which we study them? How do we relate, if we can at all, these ‘methods’ and ‘materials’ to our contexts of reception? Such questions will expose us to the unexamined but somehow internalized ‘model’ of literary studies (I doubt that the scenario is any different in the contexts of other disciplines such as philosophy or art). The problem we are confronted by is fundamentally a problem of the institution (university) and its discourses/disciplines. We have not prepared ourselves, despite the long-standing legacy of such a model from our contexts, to unravel this model. This is the ‘unease’ that you refer

to in your question. Yet this situation should not turn one to rush ahead to reject the institution and its discourses; nor should it propel one to erect hastily some 'Indian' model of approaching the institution and its faculties and discourses. The danger of such indulgences is that they remain ill-thought and expedient ones. One has to be very cautious in projecting *Gurukula* as an alternative to the university today. Similarly, one must learn to see the limits of 'alternative' models which simply replicate the models which they wish to move away from. Nor should the situation be seen as paralyzing.

Any attempt to unravel the situation in which our higher educational system is so deeply quagmired must attempt to understand the background from which the institution and its discourses have emerged and the way they were implanted elsewhere. In other words, we need to know Europe/West as best as we can to understand why and how such institutional and discursive structures emerged from its provenance. This does not, however, mean that we abandon ourselves only to study Europe or the West. As you point out, our situation is that of a double bind. A double bind demands a double move from us: accept and suspend. We need to accept and work with the European provenance of the university and its faculties; yet mere acceptance of these will be detrimental to the recipients who emerge from a very different kind of background. For replication of the model effaces the inheritance that makes us; it compels us to configure ourselves on the basis of the invasive and effactive model. This is the problem we face today in most of the disciplines (the egregious disciplinary model called 'folklore', for example, is just one such effactive structure. It renders the living traditions and practices into archivable 'folk'; it creates an information-retrieval discourse and museumizes the lively traditions and cultures. This is the structural problem of the discipline itself. But 'folklore' is not an exception. Other disciplinary work [say in art history or philosophy] can also be seen functioning in a similar way). Therefore, the second aspect of the double bind must be sensed: *suspend*. Mere acceptance implies that the European model and its experience is universal and the heterogeneous cultures of the planet can be opened up with the European key (it is hasty to talk about Europe as developing just one model. There are significant differences within Europe. But we can't go into such detail on this occasion. From the receiving ends of cultures that faced colonialism there appeared to be just one Europe: a model for mankind, period). Therefore, we need to learn about Europe *not* in order to replicate it as a model of knowledge production but more fundamentally to *understand* Europe. Why does a particular culture generate and impose such mechanisms of explanation as Europe does? What is it in Europe which impels it to sublimate such

explanatory apparatuses? Thus we try to know Europe not to turn India (or Africa or Asia) into a version of Europe, but in order to see the cultural difference that makes Europe what it is and at the same time take the risk of figuring out what we call 'India' for us (that is, the inquirer-teacher-learner) is. We need to suspend Europe – let it float in front of our visage or in the rear-view – to undertake the latter kind of inquiry. It is too hasty and dangerous to erect some model of India and reject Europe. We need to remember that all the prevailing discourses about India (including the very name itself) have emerged from European accounts and explanations about the trans-formative phenomena called 'India'.

Therefore, given the situation in which we find ourselves today, it seems to me that we need to make a double move in the double bind: unravel Europe to understand it and risk configuring what has been called India. Such work will have to cut across the conceptions and structures of what are rigidly demarcated and established as institutions and disciplines. The effort here is to explore the possibility of going beyond what have been entrenched as 'India' and 'Europe'.

KL: The question of language is closely connected with this 'double move' you describe (of unravelling Europe and configuring India), isn't it? Language remains a fraught issue in the humanities in India, more so in literary studies. How have you negotiated the hurdles of studying Indian cultural forms through the linguistic and intellectual mediation of English?

DVR: You are right about the problem of language. But your question suggests that the problem is beyond the linguistic-lexical level. Your question points to a deeper issue: can thought or/and practice developed in one idiom or mode be rendered effectively in an entirely different mode or idiom. Here the question of cultural difference comes to the fore. Cultures differ from each other through their immemorial inheritances and articulate these inheritances in modes of being, ways of going about and forms of reflections. Here the relation between modes of being and forms of reflection need not be seen as opposed or sequential in relation. One can say that such differentiation could be the result of cultural difference. Undoubtedly, ways of being and forms of reflection are related, but how one values this relation is important. It seems to me that when their relation is made asymmetric, when forms of reflection are exclusively focused upon and developed in isolation from modes of being, such

a context or culture tends to privilege explanatory, conceptual models and privileges them. Whereas when the relation between modes and forms is seen as co-emergent and co-constitutive and when modes of being are seen as the preferred ways of reflection, then such a context or culture tends to focus on refining its practices and reflections in practice. Such a culture tends towards praxial modes of being where reflection is not exclusively sublimated into some conceptual or theoretical structure.

In my attempt to learn from the Sanskrit traditions, time and again I sensed that they emphasize praxial, performative reflective modes of being. Although it is possible to squeeze out and focus exclusively on the 'reflective' aspect of a practice, these traditions (be they that of *Sruti* or *Smriti* strands), by default as it were, are oriented toward performative modes of being. Such modes involve putting the body to work. Hence the enormous importance of ritual-performative modes of relating oneself to others and the 'world' (*lóka*) in which one finds oneself. It seems to me that Sanskrit language focuses on verbal, actional modes of going about in differentiated contexts of existence. Such a praxial-reflective idiom is not easy to render in another language which puts emphasis on the agent of action. When the agent gains prominence in a language, it seems to me that it begins to privilege conceptual categories like consciousness, decision, judgment, subjectivity, thesis or hypothesis and theorization. In other words, knowledge begins to be the result of linguistic formulations advanced by agentive determinations. Whereas when you look at, even superficially, Sanskrit terms like *dharma*, *karma*, *vidya*, *jnana*, *prakriti*, *para*, *apara* and a whole lot of them, one knows that they are can't be easily turned into agentive conceptions. It is not just a question of polysemy here, but that the significance of these terms is contextually effective. It is difficult to turn these terms into decisively technical coinages (coinages which prevent the drift of these terms) associated with some particular thinking agent. What is important about any of these terms (here once again it is not a terminological issue we are dealing with but that of reflective-practice specific to a culture) is that their efficacy is in action, putting to work the sense of the term in modes of being.

To be sure one can write explanatory treatises on each of these terms (as have been done in the European discipline of thought called Indology) but the nature of the expression or verbal formulation can be realized in persistent refinement of it in modes of being. Thus it is not the verbally formulated conceptual distinction of a term like *dharma* or *karma* that is accorded value, but refined realization of the import of them in modes of being. That is, the formation

called the body must put to work the sense of the term ‘persistently trans-formed ways of being’. That is, modes of being or ways of going about are not reducible to linguistic predications. In a word, formations must be put to work perpetually for transformative rearticulation of formations. Language or gesture happen to be just very specific formations among other infinite such formations. Literary inquiries of India (*Alamkarashastra*) and performative inquiries (*Natyashastra*) demonstrate in extraordinary detail how the work of refinement of language and gesture respectively can be put to work in practice.

As you can see, the problem we confront here is not that of a mere linguistic translation. It seems to me that it is the problem of rendering performative reflections of a tradition into a culture that privileges linguistic conceptual-theoretical structures. Here, ironically, my own attempt to formulate answers to your questions, seems to incline towards the latter. This is the double bind situation we referred to earlier. Yet, here the effort is not to develop a universally valid Indian model against that of Europe or the West. One must see if there is a possibility of finding resonances with each other in order to go beyond valorisation of any exclusive cultural difference.

KL: Let me probe further into this crucially significant relationship between forms of reflection and modes of being that you’ve explained. In your exploration of the reflections informing diverse Indian traditions (music, ayurveda, performative traditions of *Ramayana*, etc.,) you point out that while there is “some commonly shared throbbing impulse” relating the Samskruta traditions, their reflective coherence “has not become an object of any kind of theoretical inquiry under a commonly shared appellation (like ‘Europe’) as such (in *Performative Reflections of Indian Traditions*)”. In this regard, how then do you respond to the institutionalized theoretical and discursive frameworks within which Sanskrit, *bhasha* and folklore traditions and their relationships are located today?

DVR: Yes, what was said earlier about the translation issue is not peculiar to the Sanskrit language alone, but it is at work in the context of all the languages that were impacted by the Sanskrit language and its cultural forms (the issue goes beyond the Sanskrit language and is relevant in the context of mnemocultures in general). In my work I try to reflect on the interface and relation between Sanskrit and other languages that emerged in the first and

second millennia. This interface, beginning from the relation between *Sruthi* and *Smriti* cultural traditions, is what I describe as responsive reception. That is, the *Smriti* cultural forms (*purana*, *itihasa*, *kavya*, *shastra* and a myriad other such forms) receive the imports of the *Sruti* strand and respond to them in their own way. Consequently, new and unprecedented cultural forms come into existence through such a responsive interface. As is well known, a *kavya* (like Kalidasa's *Shakuntala*) receives an episode from the *Mahabharata* and responds (delineates, comments, supplements, elaborates) to it and from such reception emerges another composition called *kavya*. It is such responsive receptions that made possible the dissemination and transformative rendering of the imports of *Sruthi*. One can see such a responsive-receptive impulse dynamically at work in the interface between Sanskrit and other *bhashas* of India in various periods. No one considers the coming forth of Kannada, Telugu, Hindi, Tamil, Malayalam *Mahabharatas* in the second millennium (in the case of Kannada, in the first millennium) as mere verbal translations of the Vyasa 'original'. They all are unique responses to Vyasa's composition. For example, in his response to Vyasa, Tikkana leaves aside the entire *Bhagavad Gita* in his part of the *Mahabharata* composition in Telugu. Similarly, Vishnu Das of Gwalior reduced the *Gita* to just eight verses when he rendered it into Hindi (*Pandavcharit*) in the 15th century. The impulse of responsive reception is quite a dynamic one and its manifestations are unpredictable.

Responsive reception works in other significant ways which are yet to be explored in the Indian context. Many are aware that in the Indian context cultural forms are quite often *jati*-specific. The relation between cultural forms and cultural formations (*jatis*) is singular and it cannot be ignored in our context. What is called culture in India is mainly formed by the countless number of *jatis* that emerged and proliferated across time and space. Each of these *jatis* received and responded to what they received from their given context, that is, context of their formation. No wonder the dispersal of the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata* or even *puranas* are fundamentally *jati*-based mediations of what they received. It seems to me it is the impulse of responsive reception which animates the throb of the shared breath which gets differently articulated by varied *jatis*. This breath in most of the cases is touched and warmed by the Sanskrit language and its cultural forms. Yet what is shared in incalculable ways has little to do with the geo-political determinations of what is called India. The shared biocultural impulse provides coherence, without necessarily unifying or totalizing them, across the divergent cultural formations (*jatis*). We are yet to reflect on this shared impulse. It seems to me that the disruption of the relation between culture and *jati* prevents us from

examining the enduring coherence in our context. As we know, this disruption was the result of the stigmatization of *jati* in European accounts. We have barely begun to re-examine the nature of *jati* and its cultural significance after the European enframing of ‘caste’ as an oppressive institution: ‘the caste system’. A fundamental inquiry into the cultural forms and their *jati* relations is urgently needed in our context to reorient teaching and research in the humanities today.

The second part of your question was partially addressed earlier. There is barely any inquiry into the nature and the provenance of the disciplines that structure the university. Instead, under the very faculties (disciplinary divisions) institutionalized when the university was implanted, we continue to subsume the material labelled Indian. We need to remember that each of the faculties is also a disciplinary categorization of thought. At one point, certain faculties were divided into ‘high’ and ‘low’. Such a division itself, it seems to me, is a concerted effort to secularize what was sedimented as religious (in this context, Christian) thought. In this secularizing division, religious thought was put under ‘higher’ faculties and the thought emerging from human reason under the ‘lower’. In this reorganization of received thought, it is the lower faculties which were given prominence over the higher ones. The university was to be governed – that is, its rationale and orientation were to be determined by – the ‘lower’ faculty, that is, human thought (philosophy). It is such secularizing Christian thought that is at work in the formation of the disciplines. In our context, the basis of the modern university is barely engaged with in rendering the work of the disciplines. As pointed out earlier, the context of production (Europe) gains privilege over the context of reception (India). At a more superficial level, in the Indian context, universities have simply retained the disciplinary rubrics and filled them with Indian content, and thus project the national label (Indian philosophy, Indian folklore, Indian literature etc.,) on the implanted disciplinary formation. Today the departments of Sanskrit and other Indian languages simply project the Indian reflective cultural forms into the disciplinary apparatuses implanted from Europe. It seems to me that the disciplinary divisions occlude inquiries into the performative reflective currents of Indian cultural forms and their relation to cultural formations. The only departments which are quite familiar with the *jatis* and their cultural forms barely refer to the *jatis* when they deal with specific cultural forms. Apart from information retrieval work, their explanatory models often by default repeat the accounts about the ‘folk’ provided by European or western academics. This becomes most ironic when the actual practitioner of a cultural form is expected to discursivize his/her performative

inheritance as 'folk' culture. Cultural forms like *puranas* or *itihasa* or *katha* (*Jambapurana*, *Madelpurana* etc.,) needed no exclusive explanatory account of them outside the performative rendering of these cultural forms. *Purana* and *pravachana* of *purana* go together in the immersive rendering of it. The contrast between such praxial modes and the discursivized interpretations of these cultural forms remains immense, and it distances the practitioners who are impelled to take recourse to the latter. The violence of the institutional, discursive structures is profoundly disruptive and lasting. The practitioners get distanced from their performative traditions and they also cease (as performers) to be the addressees of the discourses they accumulate.

KL: The question of cultural difference resonates in all your responses thus far! And is indeed at the heart of all your inquiries. The exploration of cultural difference has become popular across disciplines and domains. Academic inquiries on this question have tended to be either comparative or political. In your work on the cultural difference between India and Europe, you attempt not so much to study the two cultures comparatively, but to show that cultures think differently. Could you elaborate upon this mode of inquiry and the insights it has revealed? And does such an inquiry flatten the diversity of Indian cultures - linguistic, regional, *jati*, etc? How does an exploration of cultural difference deal with this inherent diversity of Indian traditions?

DVR: Yes, the theme of cultural difference is fraught with problems. Focusing on this theme is seen as some kind of valorization of ethnic parochialisms, exclusivism, irrational sentimentalism, denial of commonality, and above all, assertions and consolidations of cultural identities. There is some truth in such apprehensions. I find such trajectories leading to dead-ends for, in their urge to preserve their uniqueness, they end up imposing closures. Inquiry into cultural difference need not lead to comparativism – for the basis of comparative inquiries requires presupposition of some common ground or telos. Quite often comparative inquiries reinforce the European heritage as providing such a common basis even when their effort is to project an alternative to Europe. Comparative literary or philosophical studies are yet to get out of this European determination of the conception of comparativity.

It seems to me that cultural difference is just one manifestation or ramification of a more general and foundational emergence of difference. Indian traditions are eloquent about this

general sense of difference. Without the primal breach of difference there can be no *srishti* – primal re-origination. *Srishti* is the unleashing of difference; *srishti* brings forth the entirety of the formational universe and this universe throbs with differences. If the differences cease, then the formational matrix disappears into a state of differencelessness called *laya*. It is only in the differentially throbbing formational ambience called *srishti* that the dynamic of the dualities of existence (life/death, pleasure/pain, animate/inanimate, night/day etc.,) manifests and operates. In such a conception of existence as you can see from the proliferation of performative reflections, both in compositions and practices you will see attention to minutest differentiation of countless number of formations. Bharata's digitization of the articulations of differentiated parts of the body (for evoking emotions and feelings), Vishnudharmottara's delineation of temple types and the precise measurements of sculptural forms, Ayurveda's expansive pharmacopeia, and, of course, the differentiation of templates that bring forth variegated cultural formations (*jatis*) and many such other compositions provide a glimpse of Indian reflection on the question of difference. This does not mean that these traditions are fixated on difference, and that they reduce existence only to difference and glorify it and thus are ignorant of any sense of generality. On the contrary, difference is seen as death in the Sanskrit traditions. In a word, the Sanskrit traditions offer the most intricate and complex reflections and practices pertaining to the question of difference. Here cultural difference happens to be just one manifestation in a scenario where the very word – culture – as a unifying, totalizing label for supremacy has no place.

As you can see, the question of difference, as it is reflected upon in enduring practices and reflections, need not evoke apprehensions about some threatening or dangerous homogeneity. Such fears are understandable, but they are largely based on the projection of European or Semitic experience, and I doubt whether they can be traced in the Sanskrit performative reflections. In this context, it is important to point out that this inquiry into (cultural) difference is not aimed at demonizing Europe or Semitic cultures and glorifying Sanskrit or 'Indian' culture. Such anxieties are the result of continuing colonial education and, no wonder, they are asserted mostly by those who value colonial education (even when they, 'good at heart', celebrate or champion Sanskrit texts). To be sure, such education can be deployed to sustain the currently prevailing conceptions of what is called (electoral) democracy. We are yet to begin thinking with/through the resources that the enduring traditions of our background offer.

Let's turn to the second part of your question – concerning the fear of erasing diversity. As you can see from what is said above, the Indian reflections on the theme of difference can be put in an irreducible *sutra*: *srishti* is/of difference and the task is to move through the difference. I began to learn of the Indian reflections concerning difference – reflections not derived from some theoretical conceptualization of canonized thought - I must say, when I began to recall my street-life and experience. The *Jangama* differed from the *Dasari*, and my own circle of friends was a heterogeneous bunch from varied *jatis*. In later years, in a striking way this sense of difference opened up the Indian classroom for me. One can easily see that the Indian classroom is an ensemble of internally and intricately differentiated *jatis*. No one can take such a classroom as composed of some homogeneous lump called 'Indians'. But neither the teacher nor the student is prepared to explore this extraordinary phenomenon that we encounter every day. Such everyday experiences get foreclosed when 'knowledge' and 'learning' privilege contexts of production and ignore the contexts of reception. As you can see, I am referring to the most tenacious and resilient but most maligned and barely re-examined phenomenon called cultural formations or *jatis*. Once the colonial template reduced *jati* to an oppressive *system* it seems to have foreclosed inquiry into this most enduring phenomenon. As pointed out earlier, something called 'culture' in the Indian context is entirely the work of the *jatis* over millennia. Each *jati* has carved out its own verbal, musical, visual and performative idioms in responding to what they received. Think of the *patachitrakars* of Raghurajpur of Odisha, or the *Nakashis* of Telangana, the *jati*-based song cultures of Kerala, Rajasthan, or the visual traditions of *Paharis* and the dance traditions of Andhra. The assemblage of students (and teachers) that frequent our classrooms form the inheritors of these diverse (*jati* or *jan-jati*-based) image, music, verbal, performative traditions. We are yet to reflect on this dynamic of complexity, but hanker after the barely understood models from elsewhere.

Jati and *jan-jati* assemblages open up insights into a human-formational experience in a habitat irreducible to the so-called human. The assemblages cannot be reduced to some homogeneous lump. They live the sense of their difference both with the human and other myriad formations that space themselves in a habitat. These assemblages are not necessarily harmonious and non-violent. Yet their differences have not consolidated some genocidal or *lōka*-cidal urge among them. That robust sense (not formalized thought) of cohabiting the *lōka* with what is unlike oneself is the most significant intimation one can sense from the *jati* and *jan-jati* formations of India. We are yet to work with this inheritance. If one is seriously

interested in reorienting the humanities (and not just this domain) - teaching and research and rethinking the institution called the university - it seems to me that the lively filament of the relation between *jati* and culture will have to be embraced for further exploration. Perhaps the 'Indian' experience of living with/in difference can be seen as a scalable source to reflect on the heterogeneous assemblages (human and non-human and myriad others) that compose the planetary existence. After all, the Sanskrit traditions opened up their performative reflections as *of* the *lōka*.

KL: We began this conversation with the humanities – your personal journey intertwined with the institutional. Let me end with a practical aspect. How do you locate and relate the study of the Indian traditions (and its attendant questions of memory, orality, literacy) within a discipline such as (English) literary studies, which is heavily textual and institutional? What challenges and rewards does it offer? And what advice would you like to share with other explorers on this path?

DVR: This is a difficult set of questions to answer for there are as yet no examples that can be offered in this regard. My work emerged from a sense of asymmetry that prevails in our institutional work of teaching, learning and research. As pointed out earlier, this asymmetry privileges the context from which the canonized writers and their work emerges and totally ignores the context in which they are deployed. We are barely prepared to undo this asymmetry. The difficulty of such a task has to do with our unpreparedness to see the context of reception also as a lively context of response. There is as yet no space or effort in the Indian university for such a preparation. Mere exposure to Sanskrit is of no use. We must recognize that the tradition is not a bank balance which can be recklessly drawn upon. Tradition, if there is any, is fundamentally a task. We need to figure out what this task involves. I tend to think that the double bind we are caught in can be faced with a double move: knowing Europe from its resources implanted elsewhere and risking the configuration of what we call the tradition ('Indian' in our context). As you can see from the earlier discussion, the context of reception is quite a complex one. We are yet to recognize this resource (the heterogeneous ensemble of inheritances) for performative reflections in our contexts. Here inquiry into cultural difference (within the broader exploration into the question of difference) is of help in configuring what is called Europe and differentiating it from what is called India. This should not plunge one into some comparatological study.

Such differentiation is a starting point for further inquiry. One can begin, then, to search for the most salient and enduring concerns that a culture foregrounds, formalizes, experiences, relates itself to and immerses itself in. Then one may be able to see that such a set of concerns and the modes of their articulation need not be common or universal. What impels a culture to conserve and reiterate certain conceptions and modes? What kind of constraints in such modes and conceptions enable such a culture to be creative and productive in its extended sustenance of itself? What are the preferred modes of overcoming such constraints in a culture? Such questions help in probing into cultural difference. As you point out, I tend to see Europe privileging the inscriptional (from scribal to digital communication systems) mode of articulating and preserving its memory. In contrast, the Indian experience prefers what I call the mnemocultural (embodied, enacted verbal-visual performative) modes. When one begins to think about this difference, one senses that such preferences suggest two very different takes on the question of death. Inscription yearns for longevity or immortality; whereas mnemoculturality lives with the limits of formationality and transmits this sense transgenerationally. It is possible to identify such salient concerns and conceptions of a culture and reflect on what kinds of cultural forms cultures bring forth. It is from the configuration of such backgrounds one can examine – if one wishes to – the cultural forms of a particular culture, say Europe or India. But this begs a question: (why) should one be reading English/European literature? Such a question can quickly lead us into a false exit (about domination and oppression). Instead one can say: if one wishes to study European or English literature, how should one do so? But such questions must be guided by our own sense of the purpose and the task of the university and higher education. Once again the question of the context of reception (as a responsive lever) comes to the fore. Today it is difficult to see any sustained discussion or reflection about these issues in circulation in the country.

As you know, all that I have said and written about has emerged from the classroom situation. We were able to spend semester-long periods of time grappling with specific issues (orality, inscriptionality, *jati*, performativity, the literary and many others). Each of the courses offered required students to produce projects emerging from classroom discussions. This experiment has been modestly rewarding. All the courses designed are scalable and contextually (depending on the location of the university) operable. In teaching and research, I found it of utmost importance to learn to be sensitive to the context of what we do. The context referred to here is formed by students and teachers and the inheritances they may

carry and what they are exposed to (that is, European/western cultural domains). In the given institutional set-up, such experimental teaching and research can take place from the MA level which will pave the way for individuated (or collective) research projects. Again such experimental work can be moved across departments, institutions and regions across India and beyond. Yes, the challenges are many. Universities in India continue to reproduce colonial education in cosmetic embellishments. Cynicism can be an alibi to avoid the risk of thinking. The task that we are talking about requires the involvement of teachers, students and of course the leaders of the universities. In the given situation, even if a university can spare about 10 or 15% of its resources and energies, it can begin to make a difference. But we are not yet there. There is an urgent need to train teachers even as we prepare students. But I am convinced that this experiment is worthwhile and eminently doable. If only there is a vision...

KL: Thank you for this wonderful conversation in which you have masterfully sketched the trajectory of the humanities in India, and the important task of re-orienting it to engage with the Indian experience of difference - *jati*.

DVR: Thank you for your probing questions; and thanks to Anand for providing this opportunity to share the work being done at the university.

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