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Editorial

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It gives me great pleasure to bring out the December issue of Litinfinite, concentrating upon folk studies as a multidisciplinary initiative. If we scrutinize the historical background, we found how the term folklore as a careful combination of folk and lore was coined in the year 1846 by an Englishman called William Thoms. As a part of any cultural discourse, folk studies can be considered as an integral part of communication and in underlining the well-integrated pattern of any community as such. Folklorists always claim a wider disciplinary aspect with the help of history, linguistics, literary productions of an age, economics, artistic and communicative approaches to highlight the main constituents of folklore. Through inventions, collections, documentations and combined knowledge, the work of the folklorists always give birth to some or the other form of contested space: these can be traditional, modern, popular, mainstream and academic and of different other varieties in nature.

Dr. Chandramani discusses how this folkloric structure, myths, the usage of different paradigmatic shifts in the form of cultural and Feminist studies can be included in re-reading GithaHariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night*. The study of Indian mythology, storytelling as a cathartic process and the entire narrative of women's studies interwoven with the societal and familial repercussion that a reliance on myths can have. Dr. Surapriya Chakraborty's folk angle is slightly different, verging on the study of Femininity in Tantric Buddhism, taking a magnanimous work like *NastikPanditerBhita* and discussing the psycho-sexual, social, mythic and religious dimensions that the thought-provoking realms of the novel proposes to investigate. She highlights the several elements present in some of the American Feminist schools, and some of the Buddhist and the Oriental mystic conceptualization of Femininity in occupying and reinstating power, balance and newer forms of esoteric practices.

Folk culture itself is densely multilayered. With the cultural developments, additions and the vantage point that critics create, the area of folk studies has increased manifold in the past few decades. Dr. Imchasenla's paper on Re-imagining the Morung culture and translation of the Ao-Naga folksongs is an innovative study on how these varied cultural parameters are responsible for sustaining the vitality of any culture, across time. The oldest and the strongest controlling doctrines that are part of the Morung culture and cementing community development through songs and other cultural narratives illumine an alternative non-Western discourse on studying indigeneity and nativity. Dr. ResenmenlaLongchar, on the other hand, discusses the various aspects of the Ao-Naga culture, with special reference to their puberty rites. The finer and subtle passages of transition from boyhood/girlhood to youth and the induction as part of the Ao-Naga culture are well-depicted by the researcher. Beliefs, rituals, tales, tattoos, marriage, cultural communication, all are invited on a common platform for diverse social, cultural, political and cross-disciplinary criticisms, to enhance the knowledge about the cumulative identity of a community.

In folk literature, cultural studies, folk theatres, performance and lores, we find often dissident voices that contest for recognition. There are tensions created as per ethnology, geo-political circumventions, expressions and specific attitudes from communities across cultures. There are different portions of the same work, or in other cases, significant binaries existing as part of a single work that is published within the variations of a time. How do we study oral literature in terms of the immediate social context? Where do we find the nature of hybridization existing? How does the compass of folk culture and interdisciplinary study regulate community behavior, or does it endanger any social community to a large extent? As folklorists, as researchers dealing with multidisciplinary studies, then how do we place the fantastic elements, recurring features, archetypes and the study of folk culture from an inherently historical perspective? Are myths and folktales related somewhere? All these and many other questions do arise when we study the concept of folk and indigeneity from an interdisciplinary perspective.

The paper by SoumyadeepNeogi is a fine tapestry in understanding the Kashmiri Pandit narratives in Rahul Pandita's work*Our Moon has Blood Clots: Memoir of a Lost Home in Kashmir.* Neogi has tried to unearth the poetics of indigenous representation through this memoir. Exile, rootlessness, homeland, indigenous identity and the functioning of hegemony, power-play and distinct cultural groups in forming identity and socio-political discourse. Studying indigeneity and through some common concerns like 'political neglect, economic marginalization and social vulnerability with regards to the protection of their cultural rights', as Neogi mentions in his paper, find out a distinct voice of the Pandit narratives through the text. The location of the Kashmiri Pandits as the significant 'other', the more marginalized segment of a dominant Muslim culture in Kashmir, thus finds a suitable voice through Neogi's research-oriented lens.

There are several segments and voices of dissent and experimentation that also arise while we study nativity, folk and cultural performativity across a given time. Language plays a special role in that, and in their paper titled Animating Folktales: An Analysis of Animation movies based on folk tales of three different languages, the authors Maya Bhowmick and Dr. Ankuran Dutta have enlarged the resources on how to study multiple layers of culture through storytelling modes, manners and mechanisms. Bengali, Assamese, Hindi, these three languages and popular folktales disseminated through these reflect the glorious integrity of semantics, culture, social equations and even community approach toward customs and vulnerability. Oral and visual performances, voicing opinions and regionalized mechanisms in re-reading folktales-this is what the paper tries to communicate as some of the broader aspects.

It should be noteworthy how fairy tales and riddles have always played a vital role in attenuating the different dimensions of a certain culture, across borders. A specific cultural production and inheritance over a passage of time requires diverse investigations, social and literary researches and reviews and integration of dialogues across spaces. SewanouLanmadousselo interrogates these varied ideas that are deeply embedded into the reconstruction and structuring of myths, folktales, lores and community connectivity in Beninese Fairy Tales and Riddles. Orders, solutions, learning capability, reasoning and heterogeneity, this is what takes the best solution in understanding the work of Lanmadousselo. This is the constant deconstruction of myths, a method to understand polyphony in Indian literature, that finds an appropriate voice in Samaresh Mondal's paper titled *Indian Literature: The Polyphonic Nature of Deconstructing Myths*. A comparative analysis of folk tales and mythical constituents that are well-integrated in works of Eliot, in Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay who writes about rustic myths and multilayered collectives in his novel, form the area of Mondal's study. And finally, we have a special contribution by Naruhiko Mikado in understanding drama in terms of speculative materialism.

With an urgency toward reinstating specific community and cultural development across borders and nations, we thus present a volume on folk studies as a multidisciplinary exercise. Navigating through the primitive discourses on folk literature and performance and highlighting the current, the more recent and contemporary ones, we have tried to present research papers that provide multifaceted contextual paradigms in advanced research.

Extending my heartfelt thanks to all our respected advisors and editors, for their support and constant encouragement.

I express my gratitude, warmth and thanks to our publisher Mr. Supriyo Chakraborty and Penprints Publication for their unflinching support in this academic endeavour.

Wishing a great year ahead to all our readers.

Masked Women and Myths in "*The Thousand Faces of Night*"

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Abstract

The term '*Myth*' has a series of controversies associated with its meaning and interpretation. Myth is believed to be an intellectual creation of ancient man. They are culture specific ideas, beliefs, narratives etc. which are created to enlighten humans of morality, ethics, responsibility, obligations etc. The main focus of the paper would be to employ mythology from feministic perspective. Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night[1]* highlights the domination and subjugation of women (i.e. victimhood) in male-centered set-up. The writer opts for mythological stories (*Mahabharata* and *Folktales*) as patriarchal discourse to lend voice to the silenced females. It is interesting to note that even in mythological works women are illustrated as subjects/objects of sheer violence. Hariharan claims that woman characters like Mayamma and Devi silently accept all the discrimination, suppression, and protest assertively against the forces of patriarchy are representative of transitional women. More significantly, Hariharan urges for a progressive society where women can exercise their personal space. Through a careful depiction of various myths and folktales, Hariharan wants to project the self-realization and psychological consciousness.

Keywords: Myths, Folklore, Feminist, Patriarchal, Oppression

Introduction

The term '*Myth*' has a series of controversies associated with its meaning and interpretation. Many have labelled it as having disparaged connotations (something false, untrue and unrealistic). Myth is believed to be an intellectual creation of ancient man. In Indian folktales and oral narratives, myths have gained special significance/position. Myths are independently employed across cultures since time immemorial. In simple terms, they are culture specific ideas, beliefs, narratives etc which are created to enlighten humans of morality, ethics, responsibility, obligations etc. They are utilized in conjunction with symbols which have varied deep meanings attached to it:

> Myths are universal because they operate through symbols. In effect, myths are not simple narratives, but rather explanations of reality (or rather the reality that a given culture feels is theirs) that change over time. (Arzu 29)[1]

Besides, George Thomson describes his viewpoint of Mythology thus, "Mythology operates in and through the imagination" (Thomson 65).

Myths and conventional stories consist of actions that are clearly ancient (eerie and idealistic). Myths are usually asserted as overstated or concocted stories from the legends. A myth is regarded as a story connecting symbols that can draw various implications with ethics. They are constructed as accounts as they uphold spiritual or divine essence. Myths propagate the worth of culture and codes of life. Myths are eternal narratives for establishing a progressive society. A colossal change of significance can be viewed between the myths depicted in literature and true myths, but literary myths are no less capable of emphasizing a legendary status to the work. Githa Hariharan endeavours to incorporate sense to her arguments about women position in the society by referring/utilizing the mythical elements.

Women in Hariharan's novels are beautifully infused with dexterity to highlight the critical issues concerning them. They are multi-faceted, hardworking, selfless, sacrificing and caring. In today's technological world, the positions of women are getting better in almost every field of work. We can see that women are becoming economically sound. Their fight for their basic rights is the result of the self-realization and psychological consciousness. Contemporary woman writers such as Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Shashi Deshpande, Jhumpa Lahiri, Nayantara Sahgal, Kamala Das, Mahasweta Devi, Githa Hariharan, Amrita Pritam, Baby Halder and several others have been role models for every woman who is fighting for self-identity in their respective domain. One of the best things is that woman writers (who were also victims of injustice and discrimination) are writing for women. Even in mythological works, women are illustrated as subjects/objects of violence. Women' position (status) in myths and legends were also not secured. Their patience and fighting spirit were also tasted by their critical situations. Suffering and violence experienced by the mythical women figures served several divine purposes. The Almighty sought to situate some examples for the entire humanity with the sufferings of mythological women characters who chaste, righteous possessing godly traits. Some of the

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[1] **Canivell María Odette Arzú and Richard Barber** in their book *Literary Narratives and the Cultural Imagination: King Arthur and Don Quixote as National Heroes* studies traditional Arthurian legend (Arthur and Quixote as national heroes). It briefly underlines the hyped heroes that are rare in these ultra-modern days. It challenges orthodox and fashionable views. The writers thoroughly discussed the implication of myth.

mythological women figures, for instance, **Draupadi, Gandhari, Sita, Mandodari**[2] and several others suffered immensely at the hands of the patriarchal system.

The Indian woman writers lent voice and action to the mute woman suffers who were indecisive of their role in the family and society. These woman writers depicted every silent emotion and reaction of the woman to elevate consciousness of the self. Like other well-known Indian woman writers of English, Githa Hariharan has a sound knowledge of people and the world she lives in. In one of her recent published interviews, she declares that "The business of the writer . . . is to break down all man-made walls, probe and expose all forms of oppression and celebrate all forms of resistance" (Mitra)[3]. She wishes to channelize her efforts towards woman upliftment. In this context, she considers the self-awareness and emancipation from the rigid social construction as utmost priority. She feels that women before liberation are fragile, indecisive, unsure and most importantly ignorant of their rights. They continue to sacrifice, endure and live their life with the same intensity in the family/society. They prefer taking risky decisions to overcome their daily obstacles but it hardly changes their hostile life and they feel more trapped with it. This paper portrays the mythical elements from ancient myths introduced by Gita Hariharan to justify and upgrade her women's position in the progressive society.

Githa Hariharan felt that her novel would be purposeful with symbolic meanings if she makes use of myths to highlight her viewpoint to narrate a feministic story. For this noble motive, she chooses mythological stories to give life to her women characters. More than societal customs/traditions laid for women, she believes that women should be given ample privilege and space to express themselves. Though at the inception of writing the novel, she felt weird and puzzled she backs and places her women characters. Similarly, the same puzzled mindset of Hariharan is recorded in her essay entitled "The Unknown Corner – A Writer's Bank of Myths":

> When I was writing my first novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*, I was genuinely puzzled by the apparent thinness of my main characters' lives. Then I realised that if I was to do their individual voices justice, I would have to fill in the background with a thousand voices of all the real and mythical heroines whose life stories tell these three women how to live, in both normative and subversive ways . . . I have been influenced by the timeless and sophisticated Indian story-telling traditions – these include classical texts

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[2] In Rabb's *Staging Resistance Critical Study of Plays by Women in English Translation* (a published Ph.D. Dissertation), **Draupadi, Gandhari, Sita, Mandodari** have been represented as mythical figures performing wifely obligations. They are portrayed mythological heroines who adhere to traditional values and norms with raising their voices. In Hindu mythology, these women' voices were silenced so as to establish social and traditional norms. *Refer page no. 95.

[3] Ipshita Mitra in her online article 'Voices of Dalit Women More Marginal Than Men – That's Why Their Resistance Hits Hard,' points out the real status of contemporary writers like Githa Hariharan. The article focuses on the enlightening opinions and excerpts of Hariharan shared with *The Wire*.

such as *Kathasaritsagara* and the buddhit *Jataka* tales; and the written and oral versions of the *Panchtantra* and the epic *Mahabharata*. (qtd in "The Unknown Corner – A Writer's Bank of Myths," 1+)

The Thousand Faces of Night is mainly based on three key women characters – Devi, the central character; Sita, her mother and Mayamma, the caretaker cum cook. These women characters of Hariharan narrate traumatic stories conditioned by the society's patriarchal pattern. They also portray the societal prospects and the unthinkable customs laid by the institution of patriarchy. Hariharan in the novel is quite selective and prefers to use the narrative technique i.e. 'Story within a story'. She demonstrates her stories using mythological references (myths) from the great epics of India like *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. By considering the popular myths (*The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*), she wants to infuse a sense of responsibility and adherence in her female characters. As the mythical women figures emerge victorious after exercising their intellectuality and hardship, she states that her women can also achieve the same feat with the timely actions. She employs myths in her novel to symbolise the endless struggle of womanhood.

It is interesting to observe that her female characters such as Devi, Sita, Shahrzad, Dunyazad, Meena, Mala, and Sara experience severe disgust and revolt. They instigated a war against this gross discrimination and brutality as they realize that it is a common situation. Hariharan's woman characters seek to free themselves from this human bondage and escape to somewhere faraway. They with all their inner strength rebel against this sadistic approach of confinement. Her women are intellectual, honest and laborious.

The Thousand Faces of Night is a universal story representing married women who are not given their personal space to rejuvenate themselves. The writer makes use of myths to express her estimation of the turmoil and hardship of the portrayed three woman characters, who seeks to establish their self-assertion. Githa Hariharan highlights the stories from the Indian mythology *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* to analyze them from feministic perspective. The novel showcases how women's different roles as a daughter, wife and daughter-in-law are minimized. Devi, Sita and Mayamma perform justifiable roles of the Indian women. Hariharan's story depicts the women who have a thousand faces in their short journey to establish their real socio-identity.

Mayamma faces much subjugation and misery from the institution of patriarchy compared to all the women characters described in *The Thousand Faces of Night*. When she could not withstand the gross injustice inflicted upon her by her husband, mother-in-law and son she compromises her ideologies with to the institution of patriarchy. Like her alcoholic husband, her son also beats her regularly for trifle matters. Her suffering and hardships stretches for many years and after the death of her only son (a wastrel having fever), she releases all her suppressed pains and mental ennui by weeping to her heart's content:

The day her son dies, Mayamma wept as she had not done for years. She wept for her youth, her husband, the culmination of a life's handiwork: now all these had been snatched from her . . . she found the horoscopes with all the signs of luck on it, whole and intact. She burnt it along with body of her son, and left the village by the first bus, next morning. (Hariharan 82)

Mayamma works as an elderly caretaker and cook of Devi's in-law's house. At a very tender age of twelve she marries a drunkard and gambler. Her husband does not care for her but only seeks regular sexual gratification from her. She could not enjoy her conjugal life. Mayamma resists herself from worldly desires and moulds herself as a dutiful wife, ideal daughter-in-law and responsible mother. Her mother-in-law could not read Mayamma's true feelings (inner mind) and pleases herself with the astrologer's prediction/assurance that Mayamma would bear her many strong grandsons. Her mother-in-law was watchful in anticipation of Mayamma getting pregnant soon, 'She watches Mayamma's slim waist intently for the first year and second year, she breaks into complaints' (Hariharan 80). Her mother-in-law never ceases to mentally torture her. She taunts Mayamma for her lack of interest in family activities/affairs. She compels Mayamma to acknowledge that women should endure pain and suffering:

> I can see that you are still a child, she said. When I lost my first baby, conceived after ten years of longing and fear, I screamed, for the only time in my life, why? The oily, pockmarked village doctor, his hand still dripping with my blood, looked shitty. A woman must learn to bear pain, he mumbled. What can I do about the sins of your previous birth? But my mother-in-law was far more sure of herself. She slapped my checks hard, first this then the other. Her fists pummelled my breasts and still swollen stomach till they had to pull her off my cowering, bleeding body. She shouted, in a rage mixed with fear, do you need any more proof that this is not a woman? The barren witch has killed my grandson, and she lies there asking us why! Mayamma smiled toothless at me, as if the memory had lost someone of its bite". (Hariharan, Prelude)

Mayamma's mother-in-law even compels her to observe fast every alternate day and to truthfully pray to alter the '*dashas*' in her birth chart. Mayamma performed her difficult prayer and left nothing to complain. She regularly wakes early in the morning and completes all her spiritual activity with full devotion to satisfy the goddess. After much hardship and prayers she conceives a son:

> Then the blood came soon and soon. No expense was spared, my husband wanted the new village doctor, not the midwife. He shoved his greasy hand into my swelling, palpitating womb. I could feel the pull, the excruciating pain of the thrust, his hand, my

blood, my dying son. She is strong, she will bear many more children, he said. But after Raja was born two years later, I still groaned with pain. (Hariharan 122)

Mayamma is a sympathetic and sensitive who lets Devi to decide her own life in accordance to her personal decisions. When Devi decides to walk away from her husband Mahesh's life, she acknowledges it as a good step by her. Mayamma gave her blessing and was positive for her escape, "Go for my sake, for Parvatiamma who waited till only Kashi could be her escape" (Hariharan 118). Devi through her escape from her torturous husband's life seeks her identity that would give her a reputation in the society: "To stay and fight, to make sense of it all, she would have to start from the very beginning" (Hariharan 139).

Hariharan's feministic analysis of the stories entwined with mythic elements can be projected as way of emphasizing women's individuality. The grandmother's generation (a generation symbolized by silence) is shown as a generation of Indian women who were supposed to be silent and dutiful. The grandmother vents out her suffocation by way of narrating the stories from a woman's point of view. She chooses stories to her preference where she can highlight feministic elements. In a roundabout way, she contradicts Baba's stories that are centered on the ideal conduct of women determined by patriarchy. Hence, Hariharan with ease showers her novel with mythical elements to justify and upgrade women's position in the progressive society.

Women in *The Thousand Faces of Night* feel suffocated by adhering to patriarchal norms and maxims. They deeply regret their decision of being compromising in every step. They even overlooked their inner soul for making their new family happy. These conscious/rebellious attitudes of the women are illustrated by V. Bhavani rightly:

> All of them each in her own way have been both a victim and a survivor – their lives scarred by suffering, sacrifice, injustice and disappointment meted out by the patriarchal society. Yet in the end they emerged undefeated and strong by using their own survival strategies. (Bhavani 32)

Indian novels are primarily governed by patriarchal rules and regulations, but Hariharan introduces two versions of stories (feministic and patriarchal version) in the novel. The first version, i.e. the feministic version, is highlighted by Devi's grandmother's stories, and the second version, i.e. the patriarchal version, is depicted by Baba, Devi's father-in-law. Both grandmother and Baba are remarkable story-tellers. These two characters projects the common issues related to women through their own viewpoints and experiences. Grandmother acknowledges aggression and rebellious women, whereas, Baba believes in women sober and dutiful image:

His stories are never flabby with ambiguity, or even fantasy; a little magic perhaps, but nothing beyond the strictly functional. They always have for their center-point an exacting touchstone for a woman, a wife. (Hariharan 51)

In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Hariharan draws a thin line between the grandmother's stories and Baba's stories which are quite debatable for their implication. Baba's narrates stories that involve uncorrupted, righteous, self-sacrificing and submissive women characters. He shares Muthuswamy Dikshitar's story that shows a submissive woman (forsaking her own urges/desires for her husband's happiness). Hariharan's stories are stories crafted bigger than life canvas that speaks of women's dream and longing. The story of Jayadeva's wife Padmavati also depicts selfless women. Hariharan's stories are of women who are always prepared to make a difference/contribution in their husband's family.

The mythical tales are constructive in shaping the psyche of women. These mythical stories are remarkable for educating people about ethics and ideologies of life. It is seen in the novel that the grandmother tells stories for Devi's every question. But, the grandmother averts from revealing any personal experience or story from her own experience. Devi could clearly recollect the mythical stories told to her in childhood. The grandmother is knowledgeable who tells the story of Gandhari with a definite purpose. As she articulates: "Listen, listen and you will learn what it is to be a real woman" (Hariharan 28). The grandmother's stories have brought about a sense of protest/indifference in Devi: "Her stories were a prelude to my womanhood, an initiation into its subterranean possibilities" (Hariharan 81). Right from her very childhood, Devi bundles rage and rebellious mindset: "I lived a secret life of my own: I became a woman warrior, a heroine. I was Devi. I rode a tiger, and cut off evil, magical demons' heads" (Hariharan 41).

After a thorough understanding of Grandmother's mythological stories, Devi's faith in Gods increases. She was innocent enough to believe that the fate of individuals can change easily if they are devoted to Gods. Hariharan symbolically depicts that the word 'Gods' can have two different meaning, i.e. one related to real heavenly Gods, and the other suggests the physical Gods (on earth) represented by male elders in the family. Devi elucidates her irritated mental picture of youth: "I listened to my grandmother's interpretation of Gandhari's choice, but the lesson I learn was different. The lesson brought me five steps closer to adulthood. I saw, for the first time, that my parents too were afflicted by a kind of blindness. In their blinkered world, they would always be one, one leading the other, one hand always in the grasp of another" (Hariharan 29). Similarly, the Indian society is influenced strongly by mythological values and education. In fact, their values and morals are forcefully introduced by the patriarchal society for their fellow women section.

Sita, another interesting woman character in the novel, leaves her passion to establish her priorities as a wife and a daughter-in-law. She leaves playing veena forever because she realized that she is disliked by her in-law family for devoting her leisure time at playing the veena. She feels enraged because she has performed all her household chores and was playing veena to revive herself. When her father-in-law yelled at her questioning, "Put the veena away. Are you a wife, a daughter-in-law"? (Hariharan 30). She retorts, "Yes, I am a wife and daughter-in-law" (Hariharan 30). Sita's rude response to her father-in-law is as a consequence of constantly reminding her of her family priorities. She feels fed up with the monotonous lifestyle at her in-law family.

The Thousand Faces of Night can be considered as a reflection that indicates the thousand ways women are demoralized and exploited for serving man's ego. The night can be taken as a symbol of darkness supposed to be beautiful but it is projected in a negative shade in the novel. Women are exploited/subjugated for trivial issues since ages. In the novel, Hariharan (through women of different generations) displays how a woman is reduced in her domestic life. Sita is shown as confined to her domestic life. Mayamma and Devi's personality are negated. In fact, they are perceived as objects of reproduction. Uma's suffering also advocates the means as to how women can be dominated targeting their modesty.

The Thousand Faces of Night depicts the trials and problems of the three women who belong to different generations. Thus, the novel tries to arrest the reader's attention to these inexplicable injustice and exploitations of women who are subjected to their private sphere of life. It aptly discloses the tyranny and brutality that women experiences in her in-law's home. The writer is also concerned about the institution of marriage that resists women's liberty and growth. Sita's shabby treatment and hostility demonstrates how women are caged in their husband's house. Thus, Hariharan's is exemplary for her effort in bringing back the women' lost image and status.

The novel raises questions regarding the patriarchal attitude of reducing women's worth in their ability to reproduce. Mayamma and Devi's suffering clearly demonstrates how women are made to feel worthless because of their inability to reproduce. In the novel, there is also a reference to the sexual assault women are subjected to within their own homes. The writer tries to expose that women are viewed as commodities in the traditional society (to some extent prevalent even in modern society). This commodification of women is highlighted by Hariharan in a lucid manner: "Devi had again been packed and dispatched, this time to a more permanent destination" (Hariharan 107). Hariharan perceives life as a complicated sojourn and society as ever "evil, sorrowful and inequitable" (Campbell 104).

The stories of mythological heroines have influenced Hariharan so deeply that she has instilled her novel with their significance and experiences. Their stories involving mythological heroines' deeds and experiences are included by Hariharan basically for two purposes – (i) to

showcase the traditional/mythological women' adherence and obligation in an ideal society, (ii) and to portray that contemporary/modern women need to revolt against such practices and stand for themselves. She pictured Ganga and Gandhari as firm and livid in *The Thousand Faces of Night*. Hariharan perceives Gandhari's role as a blindfolded mythological woman figure in different light. She believes that Gandhari wants to vent out her inner emotions/rage that she has suppressed since long. Hariharan highlights Ganga as an aggressive woman who disagrees with the traditional belief that the ultimate purpose of every woman is to perform the role of a good mother.

Conclusion

Githa Hariharan emphasizes upon the role of mythology in the creation of women. She portrayed her characters that are from the sophisticated segment of society. Thus, their miseries have distinctly resulted from their subjugated gender position. They are subjugated in all fields of their life. Women characters such as Sita and Devi confront discrimination mainly due to their chained condition in gender hierarchy. Similarly, Mayamma who is a lower class woman is also exploited in the name of patriarchical discourse of motherhood. Hence, the writer points out that her women characters are not exploited because of their class but because of gender discrimination. Hariharan's women locate themselves amid customs and modernity and are reduced to sympathetic objects of gender prejudice of the society. Though, Devi is constantly educated to be a loyal wife through different means such as grandmother's mythical stories, stories shared by her father-in-law, Sita, Uma, Gauri and Mayamma, yet she rebels and chooses her own way brushing aside all the personal risks she may confront later. She, being willful, establishes the idea that women can also hunt for escape if they are bonded by patriarchal models. Hariharan through her novel claims that the contemporary time tests our endurance for hope and for sanguinity. She also feels that humans have to enrich their mental growth and resist cynical attitude towards life. Lastly, the novel persuades the readers to consider many critical questions especially related to women, whose answers/solutions are highlighted by the writer in the novel itself.

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Femininity in Tantric Buddhism: A Study of Sanmatrananda's *Nastik Panditer Bhita*

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Abstract

Femininity is a part and parcel of various religious practices since time immemorial. Tantric Buddhism is one such religion that gives equal importance to its male and female practitioners. The honour and respect that women enjoyed in this religious sphere has been reflected in the content of the Bengali novel *NastikPanditerBhita* (2017) by Sanmatrananda. Apparently speaking, the book deals with the life of Atisa Dipankara , an eminent Buddhist scholar of eleventh century . In reality, this piece of indigenous literature sings the glory of female divinity in Tantric Buddhism. This book also celebrates the multifaceted role of a woman as a daughter, lover as well as a mother. The pivotal role of a woman as a mentor is also a part of this writing. This paper will try to dissect the novel historically. It will try to make an effort to discover the feminine essence of Tantric Buddhism. The paper will also find out the glory enjoyed by the female deities and the role of women in Tantric Buddhism. The study will be made from both historical and socio-religious points of views. This study is significant and relevant in today's context to express a woman's potentiality to shape a society and to make it free from all promiscuities.

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Keywords: Divinity, Femininity, Socio-Religious, Mentor, Esoteric Practices

Introduction

Gender-religion is a recent genre of study. It deals with the woman's position in a particular religious doctrine. It often tries to explore the role of women, the significance of female divinity in a particular religious domain. The mystical and the esoteric practice in Tantric Buddhism gives importance to the male and female consorts equally. The term Tantric Buddhism reveals the fact that it was formed by the amalgamation of two religious doctrines viz. Tantrism and Buddhism. Tantrism developed as a religious dogma in the remote past. The mystical yogic practice of Tantrism depicted the importance of a woman as a Supreme divine power. The yogic practice in

Tantrism remains incomplete in the absence of the female body and soul. Bhaskar Bhattacharya in The Path of the Mystic Lover (1993) has explained how robust the Cult of Goddess in Tantrism. Shakti, the feminine principle is worshiped in all her forms: a virgin, a seductress, a whore, a benevolent mother and a terrifying destroyer (Bhattacharya 20). Buddhism on the other hand emerged in 6th century as a religious doctrine, the fundamental aim of which is the pursuit and eventual attainment of a state of ultimate bliss. It came to be divided into two forms: Hinayana (Lesser Vehicle) and Mahayana (Greater Vehicle). In 7th century there was a shift in the religious flow of Buddhism. The gradual institutionalization of the religion paved the way for Tantrism to get merged up with the doctrines of Mahayana Buddhism. This led to the birth of Vajrayana Buddhism or Tantrayana. Vajrayana Buddhism (Diamond Vehicle) developed in Northern India and reached Bengal with the progress of time. The primordial practice of sexuality and yoga gradually crept into Buddhism. This contributed to the development of different feminine ideas in Tantric Buddhism. Tantric Buddhist doctrines became very popular in China, Nepal and Tibet. The deep philosophical content of Tantric Buddhism started to talk about attainment of the ultimate salvation through the mystical esoteric practice. Hence the female deities and the divinities came to garner significant presence in Tantric Buddhism.

Time-frame

NastikPanditerBhita (2017) by Sanmatrananda is a piece of Bengali novel that deals with the world of Atisa Dipankara, the eminent Buddhist monk of 11th century. This Bengali scholar carried Mahayana Buddhism beyond the boundary of India and preached it in Tibet. The book gives a clear sketch of femininity in Tantric Buddhist practice of the contemporary time. Through a deconstructive reading of the text, this paper will try to understand the role and significance of femininity in the religion in 11th century.

It was the time when Bengal was under the rule of Pala dynasty .The dynasty patronised Buddhism. Beside this the various universities of India had already started to nurture the Tantric doctrines in Buddhism. The universities like Sarnath, Odantapuri, Vikramshila and even Nalanda[1] practiced the cult of Tantric Buddhism.Based on this context, the paper has chosen 11th century.It was the time when Tantric Buddhism had flourished in a full-fledged manner in India and reached Tibet. The paper will make an attempt to find out the spirituality in women. It will also deal with the Supreme female divinity in Tantric Buddhism. It will try to search out the dominant part of a woman as a mentor from socio-religious point of view. To be very specific, the pivotal role of a woman in Tantric Buddhism of 11th century is the cynosure of this paper.

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[1] The names of ancient universities in India

Source

NastikPanditerBhita by Sanmatrananda is a very recent work that has dealt with the Buddhist ideals and philosophy. It has come to be feted as one of the most important books to study the religious life and practices of 11th century Bengal. In this 21st century the book is valuable enough because it revisited the remote past and for the first time has given an outline about the world around Atisa Dipankara. The book is important for this paper because it has reflected the eternal feminine, submerged in collective unconscious that prompts mankind to hold and to let go, to embrace and to renounce. From literary perspective, the author has composed other imaginative characters dated to 13th century like Chag Lochaba. He had arrived from Tibet to Bengal in search of gaining knowledge about famous and renowned scholar, Atisa Dipankara. The author is skilled enough to contemporize this historical novel by sketching the character of Amitayudh who is an archaeologist of 21st century. He has received a box of garland and a statue of Goddess Tara and a scripture which was actually a possession of Atisa Dipankara. He has also the zeal to explore the history of Atisa Dipankara and has visited Bikrampur, Bangladesh. This has been assumed as the birthplace of Atisa Dipankara. All of them are deeply motivated by the female characters in the novel as well as the feminine conscience. Atisa Dipankara was from Bengal and in childhood, he had a deep affection towards Kuntala, his childhood friend. This feeling of love and pang of separation had been borne in his mind throughout his life. He learned about Tantric Buddhism from his family mentor. Mythically, it is said that he was guided in his path of Buddhism by Goddess Tara, the female divinity in Tantric Buddhism. ChagLochaba when came to Bengal was also deeply motivated by a woman named Swayangbida, who secretly practiced Buddhist Tantrism. Lastly Amitayudh of 21st century had an affair with Jahnabi, an ordinary woman from Bikrampur, Bangladesh. In this novel she is an epitome of all the delicate feelings of love, pang of separation and a woman with responsibility towards her family. Atisa Dipankara's journey from Vikramshila University to Tibet as a Buddhist scholar has been presented vividly. In every aspect all the vital characters in the novel are deeply influenced by the feminine ideals. All the characters are in nexus to each other by the narrator of the novel, Sayon. The author has intricately linked the Tantric practices with the various characters of the novel. Thus the novel is more fictional than it is historical. However one can easily draw out the historical and religious contents by dissecting the novel thoroughly.

Different Views

A search for womanhood in Buddhism, specifically, Tantric Buddhism is not at all a very old aspect of study. There are very few works on femininity and Buddhism until now. A number of books have been written on esoteric practices and philosophy of Tantric Buddhism. A shift in this

study arrived in the last phase of 20th century. Rita M. Gross, an American feminist Buddhist scholar wrote an article Buddhism & Feminism in the year of 1981.She made a comparative study of Buddhist Sanghas[2] (monasteries) of India and Tibet with the American monasteries. She had viewed both qualitative and quantitative differences between the Eastern and the Western institutions. She had discovered a number of similarities between feminism and Buddhism. She claimed that women had to be more serious and active in religious practices. She wanted more sophisticated attitude towards the female members of the American monasteries. This would help to increase the number of female Buddhist practitioners. Following the Tibetan lineage of Buddhism, this eminent scholar had praised the equal status given to men and women in Buddhist philosophy. However there is very little mention of Vajrayana Buddhism in her writing.

A milestone has been created in this field of study by Miranda Shaw in the year of 1994. She wrote a book named Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism. The book gives us a holistic knowledge about the spiritual role of women in Vajrayana Buddhism. The role of different divine images in Tantric Buddhism like Dakini,Tara, Vajrayogini[3] etc have been described in details. She has tried to interpret the whole spirituality of Tantric Buddhism that originated in India and spread to Tibet, from Western viewpoints. She has claimed about the primary and pivotal role of women practitioners in India based on Tantrism in medieval time. With the shift to Tibet the empowerment shifted to the male practitioners. Thus she has tried to establish the fact that reality is far away from philosophical outlook.

Meeting the Great Bliss Queen: Buddhists, Feminists, and the Art of the Self (1995) by Anne Carolyn Klein is another important book related to intricate relationship between Buddhism and feminism. Unfortunately, this book is also about the Western concept of feminism .She has applied the Buddhist philosophy to tackle selfhood. There is very little mention about the origination of Buddhism in India. There is also no mention about the Indian women's role in the practice of Tantric Buddhism. Another writing on Vajrayana Buddhism is Women in Vajrayana Buddhism: the Embodiment of Wisdom and Enlightenment in Traditionally Male-oriented Buddhism (2012). It has been written by Eneli Coakley. She has vehemently criticized the practical application of Buddhism in which female exploitation is always a part. She has made an effort to find the status of women in Tantric Buddhism. She has mentioned that women are treated as 'second class citizens' in the world of male-oriented Buddhism. However she is optimistic about the philosophical doctrines of Buddhism which give equal status to both men and women. Thus there is no indigenous writing on Indian origin of Tantric Buddhism as well as women's role in it. All these writings are rational enough but they lack the essence and the critical viewpoints of a third world country. They are more about the women empowerment in the era of post-modernism than

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[2] Association for the Buddhist Practitioners.
[3] Female divinities in Tantric Buddhism.

about spiritual, socio-religious status of women. The femininity in these writings is defined from modern and Western outlook. Even some of them are sceptical about the egalitarian aspect in Tantric Buddhism.

One recent writing on femininity in Tantric Buddhism isShakti Rupa: A comparative Study of Female Deities in Hinduism, Buddhism and Bon Tantra by Urmi Chanda-Vaz .It is a dissertation on Comparative Mythology in the year of 2013-14 at University of Mumbai. She has studied Tantra in details and has made an effort to narrate about different deities related to Tantra vividly. However this comparative study lacks description of the deities associated with the Indian Vajrayana cult. The descriptions are flat enough and valuable from iconographical and mythological perspectives. The dissertation lacks the deep philosophical outlook of various indigenous religions. Dr.Sonia Gomes, another female scholar, has written an article named Female in Tantric Buddhism. The article mentions Tantra texts to be 'gynocentric' in nature. Thus the female views are given equal importance beside the views of the men. This leads Tantric Buddhism to be more aligned to women as the active participants in esoteric practices. To be very specific, she has wielded the deep equalitarian philosophy of Tantric Buddhism to enrich the women empowerment. In this post-modern patriarchal realm, she has depicted the deep ideologies of this religion as an aspiration for women to nurture their potentialities and qualities.

All of the above writings are written by erudite scholars. Most of the scholars are somehow related to the practice and the 'cult' of Vajrayana Buddhism. The scholars are more concerned about the Tibetan lineage of Buddhism rather than Indian Tantricideologies. However it should be kept in mind that the origin of primordial form of Tantra was in India. Even Buddhism spread from India to the northern countries of Nepal, China and Tibet. Most of these modern writings lack the information related to Indian Tantric Buddhism. The book by Miranda Shaw is however an exception. It has contributed one of its chapters to narrate the background of Indian Tantric Buddhist origin. The dissertation by Urmi Chanda is totally dedicated to the comparative study of woman's spiritual power or Shakti in different Tantric scriptures and icons. It should be kept in mind that the sole concern of the writing is not Tantric Buddhism, rather it has discussed about the status of women in Tantra and other religious dogmas related to Tantra. Tantric Buddhism is a mere inclusion in this regard. Thus the books and the writings on feminine aspect of Tantric Buddhism are not beyond criticism.

Tara, Prajnaparamita and Vajrayogini: the Mother Images in Tantric Buddhism

The attainment of ecstatic bliss is the ultimate aim of Tantric Buddhism. This path is guided by the Supreme divinity. The female supreme divinity in Tantric Buddhism is Goddess Tara. In Nastik Panditer Bhita, she had been worshipped by Atisa Dipankara in his childhood. Mythically speaking, she had guided Atisa Dipankara in his path of salvation and journey to Tibet. In 21st

century Amitayudh, the archaeologist in the novel received a bronze idol of the goddess that was once possessed by Atisa Dipankara. The description of Tara in this novel is mystical and vibrant. The idol was sculpted neatly. It was not more than six inches in height. The idol stood over a lotus which is considered holy in nature. One foot was folded and another projected forward. The right hand was kept on knee and the left hand displayed gyanmudra[4] (gesture of knowledge). The figure is thin and beautiful. The whole body was adored with different jewelleries. The crown had motifs of leaves. The eyes were big and she had a third eye on the forehead. The appeal of serenity was throughout the body. This was actually the image of White Tara (Sanmatrananda 25). The novel has also mentioned about other two idols of Goddess Tara. One was made of stone and another of wood.

History has claimed the presence of such idols in Bengal, particularly in South Eastern region. Suchandra Ghosh in an article dated 2013, Locating South Eastern Bengal in the Buddhist Network of Bay of Bengal (C.7TH Century CE-13TH Century CE) has mentioned about the presence of innumerable bronze sculptures related to Vajrayana and Mahayana Buddhism in South Eastern Bengal in 9th century. She has also added the presence of the idols of Tara in Post-Gupta era. The idols of Buddhist female deity Tara had been found from South Eastern Bengal were of different colours, viz. green and white. Philosophically, she is the Divine Mother who guides her disciples in the path of attainment of the ultimate bliss. She is the icon of love and compassion and of course motherhood. The significant role of this mythological character is immense in Tantric Buddhism. According to the practitioners of this school of Buddhism, this Goddess belongs to the Lotus family. Lotus is considered auspicious and is related to Tantric Buddhism. Mother Goddess Tara belongs to Amitabha family. She is always worshipped in two forms: Green Tara and White Tara.The manifestation of motherhood is also noticed in another Goddess. She is popularly known as Prajnaparamita. The concept of Goddess Tara and Prajnaparamita are nothing but the same. In the novel Nastik Panditer Bhita, an erudite scholar Dharmakirti narrated about her to Atisa Dipankar in Suvarnadweep (present Sumatra). In Mahayana Buddhism and Vajrayana Buddhism Prajnaparamita is the embodiment of compassion and wisdom. She is depicted as 'Mother of all mothers'. She has conceived all the Buddhas in her womb (Sanmatrananda 118). Her all feminine essences have been embodied by all Buddhas in their heart. She belongs to Tathagata family (Gyatso 44). From historical point of view, she was worshipped from 9th century onward and it is obvious that the ideologies related to this deity spread in different countries of Asia in no time.

Vajrayogini is the most popular Goddess in Tantric Buddhism. This can be assumed from the name of the village of Bangladesh which is said to be the birthplace of Atisa Dipankara. Nastik

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[4] The divine gesture of knowledge.

Panditer Bhita did not mention about the role of the goddess anyhow. Vajrayogini is the sexual or the female consort of Heruka[5] in Tantric Buddhism. Miranda Shaw in her book Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism mentioned about this female divinity. She is the female divine essence in each and every woman. She is also an icon of female sexuality and should receive immense respect from the male devotees or practitioners. The sharp difference between Tara and Vajrayogini is that: the former is the symbol of motherhood whereas latter is the image of sexual consort in this cult. Both of them are given equal status and honour in Buddhism. Both of them guide a practitioner in one way or other to achieve the ultimate ecstasy.

Obscure Practice of Mysticism: Body and Soul

The yogic practices like Pranayam and meditations are part and parcel of Buddhist ideologies and implications. Sexuality is intimately related to Tantra and is regarded as an age-old practice. The secrecy and the obscurity is always maintained in this religious practice and hence it is often known as Guhya-sadhana (secret practice). The concept of Ardhanarishwar[6] or residing of masculinity and femininity in the same body is a part of Tantra in India. The ultimate salvation through bodily esoteric procedure is also a part of Tantric Buddhism. It requires equal participation of a male practitioner and a female practitioner for the attainment of the enlightenment. In this regard the woman plays a dominant and important role. She is the master who demonstrates the secrecy and the philosophy of Tantrism to her male practitioner. These female practitioners are often named as yogini (one who practises yoga), sadhansangini (female practitioner),yogtantrasiddha (one who is skilled in tantric yogic practice).

 In the novel NastikPanditerBhita, there is mention of BajradakiniTantra. The male practitioner has been regared as Abadhuta (the minstrel) and the female practitioner is known as Abadhutasangini(the female partner of the minstrel). They took Kuntala, the childhood friend of Atisa Dipankara in their sexo-yogic practice. Atisa Dipankara though in his childhood practised Tantric Buddhism but later he led a life of Shramana (theseeker of spiritual freedom). However Chag Lochaba, Tibetan monk was guided by Swayangbida in Tantric path (Sanmatrananda 127). She discussed about the basic erotic implementation in Tantrism that is prevalent centuries after centuries. The awakening of Kulakundalini[7] (the serpent power) in one's self is the ultimate goal. Kulakundalini is the female divine energy inside human body. There are two nerve currents in the spinal column called Pingala and Ida. The left is Ida and the right is Pingala. A hollow canal called Sushumnaruns through the spinal cord. At the lower end of the hollow canal is situated Kulakundalini in a coiled up manner. The energy is forced to rise up to the brain and ultimately

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[5] Male divine consort in Tantric Buddhism.

[6] A divine image in which masculinity and femininity reside together.

[7] The Ultimate divine power.

leads to enlightenment. This is attained by sexual practice in which the female practitioner is the mentor.

Geshe Kelsang Gyatso in his Tantric Grounds and Paths (2000) has written about the need of a male consort for a female and a female consort for a male. Heruka, the male divinity embraces Vajrayogini to attain the bliss and Vajrayogini has to embrace the male divinity to attain the same bliss (Gyatso 22). Tantric Buddhism talks about the enlightenment of body and soul for man as well as for woman. In every man there is manifestation of Heruka and in every woman there is manifestation of Vajrayogini. Even in one's self, one has to raise all of the divine and feminine moods to become Bodhichitta[8] (the enlightened soul). The implementation of yogic practice is eternal and traditional. Ideologically, Tantric Buddhism sings the glory of femininity denying the hegemonic masculinity of Indian society of the contemporary time.

Different Identities of a Woman in Tantric Buddhism: The Socio-Religious Status

Buddhism is a discourse of following the middle path. The religion is applicable in our day-to-day life. Hence the religious ideologies reflect the society and status of a woman in her private domain. In this patriarchal society a woman plays the role of a daughter, a wife, a lover and a mother. Nastik Panditer Bhitaclearly demonstrates how a woman who was involved in Tantrism, suffered from pang of separation for her lover. On the other hand she performed her role as a Guru (mentor) with efficacy. In Sadhana (the divine practice) she took her male consort from the darkness to the rays of light. From the novel it is noticed that, the female practitioners are mostly from lower classes. Historically, it may be assumed that the social status of these women belong to the lowest rung. As for example Kuntala in Nastik Panditer Bhita was from lower class of Bengal and was involved in Tantrism by the minstrels.

In Tantric Buddhism, women are also engaged in different social relations. This is estimated from the status she enjoys in this religious domain. The Guru is the highest status that is enjoyed by a woman .Beside this female disciple is considered as 'daughter' by her mentor. Two female disciples of same religious mentor consider themselves as the sisters of each other. An autonomous social relationship prevails in the religious discourse of Buddhism. The female consort or the sexual consort is worshiped and given a higher status in Tantric Buddhism. Social history can cite innumerable examples in this regard. The lower class women who were exploited in the so-called patriarchal society, got engaged themselves in the esoteric practice of Tantrism and lifted to higher status in the sphere of Tantric Buddhism. Practically, women wanted to enjoy this higher status. Deeply motivated by the ideologies of Supreme divinity, women included themselves in the realm of this cult.

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[8] Enlightened soul in Buddhism.

Conclusion: Far Away From Philosophy

Hinayana Buddhism when was motivating for living a life of celibacy, chastity and abstinence, Tantric Buddhism was talking about the mystical sexuality. This cult tried to give equal opportunity for men and women to nurture the divine exemplification. Developing as a part of the protest movement, 7th century onward, it gave shelter to a number of women. This was a rational aspect of the cult. As it has been mentioned that these women were mostly from the lowest rung of the social ladder, they were given respect only in this autonomous domain of the cult. The religion never gave any provision for a woman to claim for her dignity in this male dominated society. It is to be kept in mind that women are the sexual partners of the male devotees. They act as the 'givers' of compassion, love, soul, and body. Hence the ultimate extract of Tantric Buddhism is more aligned to the male devotees. Women are idealized to get motivated and devote as an ardent sexual consorts. The scriptural and the high ideals may be regarded as 'deceiving' from this point of view. Women have often been used and exploited in the name of divinity but their status and divinity is still a matter of debate. Hence the Western scholars of today's world are in frantic search for the location of femininity in this religious genre.

The institutionalization of Tantric Buddhism started from India and spread to different parts of Asia. Gradually its popularity spread to different parts of the world and the cult got an international identity. Unfortunately, Tantric Buddhism shrank to the mountainous part in India with a number of foreign invasions. The legacy of Lama (Buddhist monks) started to prevail. In contemporary India, the place where this cult is most popular is Dharamsala (Himachal Pradesh). The age-old sexo-yogic practices of Tantric Buddhism are more theoretical than implemental now-a-days. The Lamas are living the life of celibacy. They are more inclined to Pranayam (breathing exercise) and meditation as the religious practice for the attainment of enlightenment. Hence the necessity for women devotees gradually dropped. The female divinities are only worshipped as idols rather than nurturing the ideologies of motherhood or sexual consorts. Tantric Buddhism is a discourse to learn for these Lamas or Buddhist monks. It is very rare to hear that the legacy of this cult is being carried out by the women. Though in Tibet and other parts of the world, there are monasteries of female devotees but in India (where the cult originated) we hardly find the monasteries for women. The narrations related to women are now found only in the Tantra Sutras (texts) rather than in reality.

Nastik Panditer Bhita by Sanmatrananda is a fictional work that has drawn our attention to the philosophical aspect of Tantric Buddhism. It cannot be denied that the philosophy is highly enriched and nurtures feminine essences. The philosophy though was originated in remote past, but it is rational enough to apply in today's life. The undue respect for women in the doctrines is praiseworthy. Religion has always set a moral guideline for the society. In this context, the revival

of the Tantric Buddhist philosophy is relevant enough. It will help to establish the concept of 'gender-equality' and respect for women. It will help the women to gain the confidence to channelize a society to a proper direction. The monasteries are the place to free the mind, body and soul. Naturally, it will be more convincing for this 'cult' to set a dogma for a new world free from promiscuities.

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Making Sense: Re-imagining *Morung*Culture and Translation of Ao-Naga Folksongs

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Abstract

Various factors represented by theinvasion of the British, the influence of American Missionaries, and the liberal education of the Western model have adversely impacted the corpus of the Nagas' rich customs, beliefs, practices, institutions and oral traditions. One such occurrence is the disintegration of the *Morung*, aunique traditional institution of learning that served as the important foundation of the Naga society.Hence, an attempt to re-imagine or re-write the culture of the *Morung,* which was hijacked by the Colonial power, becomes crucial to critique the colonial anthropological translation and provide a different reading drawing lessons from the translation ofAo-Naga folksongs.Here, the folksongs are translated to analyse the Ao-Naga folksongs, trace the historical trajectory and understand the nuances of the songs.It is an attempt to recapture the social-cultural values,history, polity, philosophy, religion and other practices pertaining to this traditional institution. The paper delves into the past lived experience and realities of the *Morung* Culture and present for the receiving audience the uniqueness and the significance of the institution of the Ao-Naga community, its world and the worldview.

Keywords: Oral traditions, Folksongs, Translation, Morung, Ao-Nagas

Introduction

The study of literature, society and cultures of various linguistic communities of North-East India could be fascinating for their richness and cultural diversity. Several languages of this area have a rich tradition of folk literature and the trajectory of literature culture of North-East India is unique and distinct from rest of the country. Hence, it is necessary to translate, interpret and publish literatures of languages of this region for a border audience. However, as we know oral literatures of various communities in North-East India are being often translated by others resulting in the construction of the community identity in ways not desired by their members. The anthropological translations generally render these communities as tribal and their practices as barbaric. These terms deployed by the colonial government are strongly problematized and

challenged by the social scientists these days. The Nagas[1] for one are commonly documented through the perspective of anthropological paradigms and consistently judged in scientific circles to the most barbarous races in existence. They were seen as not capable of abstract thinking, their art and artefacts as all primitive and devoid of any aesthetic quality. Hence, a sense of obligation drove the British to morally and materially uplift the Nagas and catch up with the European civilization which was guaranteed and was widely accepted as the 'silent referent.'[2]

Besides, various factors represented by British invasion, Christian proselytization, and the liberal education of the Western model have adversely impacted the corpus of the Nagas' rich customs, beliefs, practices and oral tradition. One such occurrence is the disintegration of the *Morung*, a unique traditional Educational Institution that served as the important foundation of the society. *Morung* was the cornerstone of the Naga cultural heritage that stood as one of the oldest and strongest means of social control and served as an agency for all round socialization through which the individual acquired knowledge, social skills and values and conformed to the norms and roles required for the integration into a group or community. It was an institution where the system of principles governing morality and acceptable were taught to the community drawn from the rich tradition of oral literatures. It also enforced strict training and discipline like that of a military academy and strict rules and regulation were maintained and severe punishments were given to the lawbreaker. For the Colonial administrator-ethnographers, this indigenous institution executed as a Public School. However, the activities and functions of the *Morung* were quite the opposite. The villagemen would go to the field during the day time and the life and activities inside the institution starts from the evening. This institution provided many a coaching process which covered the entire aspects of a man's life and aimed at producing responsible citizens in Naga society where a man was taught history, science, political science, economics, philosophy, religion and military arts of war and techniques of fighting.

But to the British Raj, this institution was a hindrance to their political interest and perceived condescendingly as nothing more than a refuge or asylums for mentally incompetent primitives (Butler 595).The attitudes of the early American Missionaries were no better than the British administrators. They came with a pessimistic attitude to the Naga Hills and saw the *Morung* and its practices asheathenish and deemed the period as Dark Age. So, in order to bring the

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[1]The history of Naga anthropology is a history of intimate relationship between anthropology and colonial administration. Colonial administrator-ethnographers and American missionaries were central to the emergence and professionalization of ethnology and anthropology in the Naga Hills and in the way Britain envisaged its role in the colony.

[2]Dipesh Chakrabarty, in his influential work, 'Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for "Indian" Pasts?' argues that the Europe claimed to be the universal model of progress, modernity and civilization and thus became the silent referent in the 19th century. In a form of asymmetric ignorance, he argues that colonial subjects were compelled to know Europe while the Europeans were free to ignore Asia, Africa and other parts of the non-western nations.

enlightenment of the civilized world to the forgotten world they abolished the *Morung* practices and several others which they considered as evil and primitive. In this way, it led to the gradual depletion of the *Morung* culture. Perhaps, they did not appreciate the ancient institution because they failed to notice the beautiful and systematic life and order of the *Morung* system. In short, they failed to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy beliefs and practices and as a consequence, destroyed and erased a number of valuable ancient Naga traditions and customs.

Unscripted: Oral Traditions and the Nagas

Nagas' oral tradition[3] in its entirety has shaped and nurtured the Naga people for so many generations; it is an intrinsic aspect of the community's literature, history, religion and custom. Their oral societies transmitted their traditional history, origin and migration of the people (tribe, clan, individual, etc.), formation of the village, events of war, peace, festivals and so forth orally through songs, poetry, ballads, prayers, sayings, stories and tales or as public oration when the situation demands. So oral traditions are one way through which the community makes sense of the world in which they live. It is taken as the main source of information to explain how things came to be the way they are in the world, or in some cases, explain how things are supposed to be. The traditions also help to teach the young generations the things they need to know to fit in within their society. Because these traditions developed over generations within the boundaries of a society, they are often unique to that society, and help to define who they are and what they believe in as a people. Thus, the oral traditions of the Nagas differ from those of any other people in the world, and help to keep their identity and practices unique.

For the Ao-Nagas,[4] their folksongs are an important medium that has preserved and transmitted their culture for generations. There are immense traditional knowledge and wisdom veiled in their folksongs and all notable events of the past are enshrined in the folksongs. Ao-Naga folksongs pregnant with deep meaning reveal the historical, cultural norms and values, rituals, social, religious, political and philosophical aspects of their lives. Thus, without folksongs, the explanation of the Ao-Naga culture and their historical details is unimaginable. As no genre of folklore is devoid of functional values, Ao-Naga Folksongs, of all varieties, have been used by the people in all the crucial moments of life cycle from birth to death. Lullabies, grinding and pounding songs, war songs, devotional songs, wedding songs and festive songs have specific

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[3]Historically, when the first American Missionaries came in contact with the Nagas in the 1870s, the Nagas had no written script. Their sole means of communication was in oral form and they preserved their culture through oral tradition and artefacts. They relied on oral traditions to transmit their history and accumulated experience for generations. The missionaries along with active evangelical works not only introduced Naga languages in the Roman Script but started working towards documenting and producing the oral narratives and other material of the Nagas in the form of writing. Hence, literary historians argue that the impetus for change in Naga society first came from the church, because the history of Christianity in Nagaland is the genesis of literature by the then American missionaries in the 1870s.

[4] Among the 14 recognised Naga tribes in Nagaland, the Ao-Naga is considered as one of the major tribes.

purposes. Thus, the themes of the Ao-Naga folksongs are all-encompassing. The songs express Ao people's sociocultural values, religious beliefs and experiences.

Ao-Naga tradition also prescribes certain rhythmic songs to suit different occasions. For instance, the song and work go together. The rhythm makes the worker more enthusiastic and generates energy in him/her. Thus, work and entertainment are not alienated in folklore. They are blended together and support each other. Any public lecture, speech, story-telling or casual discussion was supported, at intervals, by songs. A function without song was considered incomplete. Ao cultural songs are short but the whole story is enshrined in the song which can be sung with eight to nine different tunes which are beautiful and rich. Even in a simple song of a few lines, one can find a whole piece of history. Today, there are still sizeable number of middle-aged people, who are the repository of the rich folk culture, still live in remote rural areas. They immensely contribute to the collection of folklores. The stories, folksongs, customs, norms and values, personal experiences of the past are still narrated and expressed through their memories, which is how the past is still kept alive today. Besides, oral tradition still remains an abiding force for the Naga communities which much is still vibrantly alive.

Translation and Cultural Significance of Ao-Naga Folksongs

Translation is not merely a linguistic activity but it is also a cultural one. The act of translation always involves both language and culture simply because the two cannot really be separated. Juliane House emphasises on the importance of culture in translation studies who states that:

> Language is culturally embedded: it both expresses and shapes cultural reality, and the meanings of linguistics items, be they words or larger segments of text, can only be understood when considered together with the cultural context in which these linguistics items are used. (House 11)

As Frantz Fanon puts it '…to speak language is to take on a world, a culture' (Fanon 38),language cannot be isolated from the world or culture within which it is rooted, and so, translation is not simply as a matter of matching sentences in abstract nor restricted to transporting words, sentences and texts from one language to another alone. Rather, the translator must attend to the contexts (Language: a world, a culture) from which these words arise and which they, necessarily, evoke and express (Dingwaney and Maier 3).Since translation and culture are so interrelated, the translator cannot ignore the cultural elements in a text which adds to the role of the translator as a transcultural mediator. Also, as the concept of culture is fundamental to any approach to translation, understanding its implications in the study of translation is important. Here, the concept of culture is not discussed in depth but the most conventional definition of culture is understood as:

> …..not only in the narrower sense of man's advanced intellectual development as reflected in the arts, but also in the broader anthropological sense of all socially conditioned aspects of human life, as a totality of knowledge, proficiency and perception. Culture has thus to do with common factual knowledge, usually including political institutions, education, history and current affairs as well as religion and customs. (Ginter 27)

Translation is also recognized as an act of culture-specific communication. As language and culture are inextricably intertwined, the most difficult challenge for a translator is to translate or render concepts and words rooted in culture in a way that ensures the conveyance of proper meaning. In the complexity of translating cultures, the items which proved particularly untranslatable in translation, are known as 'culture-specific items.' According to S. Tobias, such items are the 'linguistic items that cause problems for translation due to differences in cultural understanding…proper nouns, objects, institutions, customs, expressions and concepts embodied in the ST that do not exist in the culture of the TL readership or would be perceived differently' (Tobias 27). Since culture-specific terms are deeply rooted in culture translator are required to have both communicative language and cross-cultural competencies. A translator is also required to work towards capturing the socio-cultural meaning in cross-cultural encounters and contribute to the transfer of knowledge across cultures and to cultural development as well (Calvo and Gomez 2-3).

In this paper, I attempted to present the working translations of Ao-Naga folksongs and discuss in brief the problems of cultural aspects and cultural differences that pose a great challenge to a translator in cross-cultural communication between two worlds and world views constituted in two languages, in this case the Ao-Naga[5] and the English. In the process of the translation, Ao-Naga folksongs presented many untranslatable culture-specific terms that presented the geographic, historic and socio-cultural values and experience of the community. Hence, the translator has to do the translation with sensitivity to the community values at a given point in time in history.

The meanings in the folksongs are indirectly implied rather than lucidly expressed and contain lots of expressions with undeniable stylistic values and devices. The technical features of the Ao-Naga folksongs include oral composition using formulaic or poetic words and phrases, figures of sound and figures of speech. These compositions are enshrined with deep meanings and connotations representing rich culture, symbolic world and serves as a medium through which

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[5] The Aos are composed of four linguistic groups representing *Mongsen, Chungli, Changki and Sangpur*. However, the major Ao-Naga languages are *Mongsen* and *Chungli*. Mongsen was the accepted literary language and original of which *Chungli* is the by product. Though *Mongsen* was the main and poetic language in the past, today Chungli is used as the common written language because when American Missionaries came to the Ao area, they first stopped at *Molungyimsen* village where *Chungli* was spoken. Thus, they picked up *Chungli* for communication purpose and introduced writings in this dialect. However, all the text of the folksongs used for this study is transliterated in *Mongsen* but provided only the English translated version.

individuals or groups express their otherwise suppressed feelings and views. The Ao-Naga folksongs often start by a way of ululating although it has no contribution in the contents of the lyrical construction *per se.* But it acts as a form of communication to express certain emotions such as grief, misery, happiness and so forth. Other technical devices such as instrumental music, dancing, dramatization and work accompany the singing. Specific application of these technical elements make Ao-Naga folksongs unique, but in many respects, transliterating and translating texts of folksongs strip them of some of these technical features associated with live oral performance, especially the sounds of music, musical instruments, dances and the dramas. Thus, Ao-Nagas folksongs are more intended for a listening audience than for a reading audience.

All these aspects imply not only a major responsibility for the translator but make translation exceptionally challenging in producing the English version that would do justice to the original meaning. Thus, responding to the acute awareness of the futility of the notion of equivalence, the translator concedes that a full translation is a myth. While Eugene Nida notably proposed that the usage of footnotes illuminates the cultural differences when closest approximation cannot be found, his method also fulfils at least two functions i.e., it provides supplementary information and calls attention to the original's discrepancies. Thus, to retain the socio-cultural ethos of the source text in the translated text, this paper delivers an elaborate and additional information, by way of footnote in the translation. Here, the usage of footnotes is indispensable in re-presenting the cultural insightsof the *Morung* that are incorporated tightly in the language of the Ao-Naga folksongs.It also explain for the target audience many of the important contents of the source text.

Tejaswini Niranjana in *Siting Translation* (1995) took up the formidable task of inquiry into the theory and the practice of translation in the context of Western imperialism and colonialism. According to her, translation is no longer used to indicate an inter-lingual practice but to name an entire problematic. Situating translation in the postcolonial context, she criticizes Orientalist texts for being imperialist and ethnocentric and situated the violence of translation as a strategic means for representing the 'otherness' to the European reading audiences. Thus, Niranjana attempted to break new ground by locating the problematic of translation as a 'significant site for raising questions of representation, power and historicity' (Niranjana 84-85). She calls for a mission to turn translation into something that Europe's erstwhile colonized peoples can use effectively to decolonize their cultures. She argues for translations which can be termed as acts of resistance when practiced by natives that results in doing their own ethnography, a kind of citation and re-writing (Niranjana 172).

Hence, an attempt to re-imagine or re-write the culture of the *Morung,* which was hijacked by the Colonial power, becomes crucial to critique the colonial anthropological translation and provide a different reading from the community. As the Ao-Nagas believe that the soul of the community is expressed in their folklore, the paper centers on re-writing the *Morung* and recapture the social-cultural values, history, polity, philosophy, religion and other practices pertaining to this

institution. The paper delves into the past lived experience and realities of the *Morung* Culture drawing lessons from the translation and reading of the Ao-Naga folksongs and juxtaposed them against the Colonial narratives. Here, the folksongs are translated to analyze the Ao-Naga folksongs, trace the historical trajectory and understand the nuances of the songs. It is also an attempt to present for the receiving audience the uniqueness and the significance of the *Morung* of Ao-Naga community, its world and the worldview. Thus, translation problems are not merely solving the structural problems of the two languages involved but it is rather political. Here, the central issue is related to ways in which translators engage with the community while representing their cultural forms.

Morung: An Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Ao-Nagas

In Ao language, *Morung* is the other name for *ariju*. The word *morung* contributed by the outsiders was derived from the Assamese word meaning a big tree drum. In the ancient period, it was mandatory for the Ao-Nagas to keep a huge drum craved out of trunks of big trees called *sungkong*[6] near the *ariju* or bachelor's dormitory and accordingly the Assamese named the institution as *morung*. E.W. Clark (120-121) and Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf (34) also stated in their works that the term *morung* was of Assamese origin. However, the generally accepted Assamese word *morung* fails to convey the full meaning and scope of the term *ariju*. Since it was a unique traditional institution of learning and the foundation of Ao-Naga culture, a single equivalent word is not available in English to explain the concept and philosophy behind the word *ariju*. Therefore, it would be best to refrain from using the Assamese word to avoid distorting the authentic meaning and functions of *ariju*. Similar institutions, like Ao-Naga*ariju*, were also established among the neighboring Naga tribes such as Lotha, Konyak, Phom, Chang and Yimchunger.

The first established historical village of the Ao-Nagas was *Chungliyimti* wherein the first phase of socio-cultural refinement took place. After this village was founded, the ancestors built an *ariju* which was called the *Senden Ariju*. According to the oral tradition, the Ao-Nagas lived in this village for many years approximately from A.D. 100-1025 before abandoning it. During the settlement, sizeable population and households increased. It is still situated in the beautiful eastern side of *Mokokchung*[7]town which the Sangtam-Nagas presently occupy. Here is a folksong sung by the men folks honoring and exalting the *ariju* when it was established in the Village:

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[6]*Sungkong*means log drum which is a huge wooden gong. It is hollowed from a great forest tree with a *dao* with the help of fire.

[7]*Mokokchung* is a district in the State of Nagaland which is both the headquarters and the homes of the Aos.

Oh! My *Unger*[8]*riju*

    Where the first sunrise of the eastern valley shines upon

    Standing strong and magnificent.

Oh! The majestic platform where verdicts are passed

My *riju* has been erected like the king's statue

Oh! *Imbosemra-janger*[9]

Here the *mango*[10] of enemies are gathered

the judgment place

No one can surpass this *riju*.

    Context: The men folk of the village describe their *ariju* as the centre where all the reputed leaders of the village gathered. They compare their *ariju* to a King's statue who is all powerful and mighty. They extol the importance of their *ariju's* majestic platform where all the important discussions and decisions were made and due judgments were also given to the lawbreakers. They also proudly sing of their enemies' head that was hung and displayed in the *ariju*.

The membership of the *ariju* was extended to all the male members irrespective of their status and all the young men were entitled to become bonafide members of the institution only after attaining the age of 12 to 14 years. The age of entry into this prestigious institution earns the status of a man. The history and role of the *ariju* as an institution was important for the Ao-Nagas because the overall function of the *ariju* was closely interlinked to the cultural, social, moral, economic and religious life of the Naga community. The overall activities of the *ariju* were directly

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[8]*Unger* meaning the leaders in the village.

[9]*Imbosemra-janger*is a term referring to men from all walks of lives. It is often used to address men in the village especially when gathered for important events.

[10]The term describes the head of the enemy that has been decapitated and preserved the skulls for various reasons. Decapitation was practiced in the Naga Hills which has given them a widespread notoriety in the colonial documentary records and in the neighboring valleys. In fact no tribe has a more established reputation for headhunting than the Nagas. Among the Nagas in the ancient period, the practice of decapitation has extensively been established as a custom in the process of history and those that have the highest number of heads often had extremely fierce reputations. It was an aspect of their life, intrinsically linked to cosmology, agriculture, human fertility and religious power. It was for defense and proofs of manhood and spirituality. In many headhunting societies; skulls represented the most powerful magic in the world and vital transfusions of energy. Thus, it was commonly believed that the soul lives in the head and taking an enemy's head would take its skills, strength, and power and therefore weakens the enemy's entire community. This practice has a long history as a supremely effective weapon and the more one could procure the heads, the more the status of the tribe as a whole increased because of the added bonus of helping to threaten existing or future enemies.

or indirectly related to the welfare of the Ao-Naga community where occupational works were executed as well as matters concerning their livelihood were discussed; a cradle of the social and cultural life of the Nagas. It functioned as a village guard house and a centre where strategy, planning and discussions of taking *mangko* affairs occupied an important place. Most importantly the policy to establish diplomatic relations or friendship with neighboring villages was discussed here. Its etymology, *Ar* meaning enemy and *ju* meaning to talk or to watch, clearly articulates its meaning (Ao 12). *Ariju* also literally mean a watch place of enemy and it served as a nerve centre and a secure place to discuss the dates, locations and strategy of a raid and thereby gain *mangko*. Thus, an institution like this was very important for the security of the village state where young people by turns stayed alert and vigilant especially throughout the night, guarding the village against any invader or in readiness for battle.

Observing the *ariju* system as the nerve centre of discussing the practice of taking heads, the British government prohibited the Nagas from going to the *ariju* in order to eliminate the headhunting custom (Sema 70). The British government introduced new changes in the Naga traditional village council system by appointing *Gaonburas* (village elders) and *Dobashis* (interpreters) who acted as the British agents in helping the government in the implication and application of their indirect political rule over the Nagas. Since the government has introduced a new system of political structure, the government began to demolish the *ariju* system in order to maintain their political stability among the savages. As a result, the prohibition of headhunting and the dismantling of the *ariju* tremendously impacted the social, political and religious practices of the Ao-Naga community. The decay of such old institutions, involves for any tribal group, is a loss of pride for their past tradition. The suppression or neglect of such traditional institutions has done irreparable damage to the tribal culture. It has led to the disintegration of their cultural values and heritage (Pongener 85).

Life in *ariju* was not only confined to strict military trainings and punishment but folklore, folksongs, family management, matrimonial relations, rituals, ceremony, skills related to artefacts, art of speech and so forth were taught. It was a centre filled with merrymaking, recreation and the experience of *Tsuki* and their love stories were narrated with great excitement and interest. *Tsuki* was a separate female socio-cultural institution. *Tsuki* means garden and the members of this institution were called *Tsukir* referring to the members of a small garden of beautiful flowers. In Ao tradition, *naro* which means flower denotes young girl, therefore, whenever one talks about *Tsuki*, it refers to the young girls/flowers protected in the well-fenced garden/*tsuki* where socialization and education took place under a qualified matron, *Tsükibutsüla* (Lanunungsang and Talitemjen 101).

Only an elderly female can be the *Tsükibutsüla* of the *Tsüki*. The matrons could be the wife of a well-known rich man or a *nokinketer*[11] who is regarded highly in the village by virtue of his contribution to the society. The position of *Tsükibutsüla* was also taken up by an ordinary widow having good command in her control and moral discipline. She played multiple important roles as a guardian and protector of the unmarried women. She also acts as an advisor and a consultant. It was under the direct control and decision of the matron as to who would become a member of the institution in terms of age, clan affiliation and so forth. The main function of the *Tsükibutsüla* was to train the members and shaping them into real womanhood by educating them on the dignity of labor such as weaving, spinning and the art of cultivation. They were strictly taught to maintain the dignity of woman in terms of family norms, socio-cultural activities to find proper placement in the society. It was also the job of the matron to initiate the process of courtship between partners and to act as a go by to bridge the gap between daughters and their parents.

The *Tsüki* was the meeting place of the unmarried boys and girls after their tiresome works in the field. It was their joyous moment where they exchanged their views and expressed their love particularly through songs. This is a love song sung by a young man who has a deep affection for the woman he loves. He praises her beautiful looks and wishing her to be his soul mate forever:

Lovely maiden, arise from the bed and sit magnificently
Your legs add beauty to the legs of the wooden cot
You and I walking together
      is beautiful.
After a bath in the river,
Your silky hair gathered on one side
Looks finest on you.
Your mouth is red
as though you have chewed a *kio*[12] of the *tsümatsünger*[13]

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[11]In the Ao-Naga society, the most prominent people were the warriors, and among the warriors, the *Nokinketer* were considered a cut above the rest. They were defined as good warriors, distinguished in war for success in procuring enemy heads. *Nok* meaning *dao* (hatchet with a long blade carved in wooden handle) and *keter* meaning possessor that culturally meant a warrior using a *dao* with much power and valor. Thus, *Nokinketer* with the power of the *nok* as the vanguard brought security, prestige, honor and prosperity to the society.

[12]*Kio* is the equivalent term of *Paan* in Hindi. It is a preparation combining betel leaf with areca nut and sometimes also with tobacco. It is believed to help in digestion of curried foods and also act as mouth fresheners. When *Paan* is chewed, a red food dye inside it makes the mouth red.

[13]*Tsümatsünger* is a term used by the Aos to refer to the non Nagas in India.

You look beautiful going about the village.
    When I see you,
My pomegranate!
I cannot leave
But only wish for us to get married.

There is another responsive love song where the man sings the first paragraph praising the beauty of the woman he loves that she was the most beautiful flower in the eyes of the *yarang*.[14]He compares her to the Rhododendron of *tsungliyimti*.[15] The second paragraph is sung by the woman who equally reciprocates his affections, singing that his *kubangjang*[16] looks the best on him and he captures her heart for eternity:
You may not be beautiful in the villagers' eyes

Yet in my eyes,
You are the most beautiful orchid blooming in the sunshine
A beautiful orchid on the pathway,
The Rhododendron of *tsungliyimti*.
The villagers may say that *kubangjang*does not suit you
How can it not suit you?
Young winner!
You, who wear the *changsen,*[17]
 is the handsomest of all!
Yes, right from my childhood,
in my eyes,
You are the only one.

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[14]*Yarang* refers to a smart young man.

[15]*Yimti*means a village and*Tsungli*is a local name of a colony *in LongkhumYimti* .The girl who is addressed in the song is from this locality.

[16]*Kubangjang* was the ancient Ao man's hairstyle. *Kubang* was the hair on a man's head cut off square right around the head at base of skulls as is the Ao man's custom. *Kunangjang*was the thick lower edge of hair on an Ao man's head. *Kubangjang*literally means eaves of *Kubang*.

[17]*Changsen*is an Ao-Naga traditional leg gloves worn by males on special occasion of festivity. It is worn between the ankles and knees.

However, the activities in the *ariju* and *tsuki* are characterized derogatorily in the colonial narratives. W.C. Smith misconstrued the sexual morality of the members of the *tsuki* in his writings:

> Adult marriage only is in vogue, but, prior to wedlock, the girls are allowed to great freedom. It is said that Naga brides who are entitled to wear the "orange blossom of virginity" on the wedding day are very rare. The girls sleep by twos or threes in separate houses or in the houses of widows, where they are visited nightly by their lovers. (Smith 57)

Smith distorted the sanctity of the *tsuki*. The girls sleeping platform in the *tsuki* was situated in the attic and to reach it they had to climb up a log ladder. This was done mainly to discourage the opposite sex to court them in the dormitory. Even married women were prohibited from climbing the ladder and for the men folks to do so were considered as an absolute taboo. The *tsuki* sleeping platforms were strict sanctuaries for chastity. Even rice pounding table kept below were consecrated to avoid any sexual acts or immoral behavior committing upon it because to do so would cause failure in food supply during harvest. The visits to the *tsuki* were strictly for social interaction and the men were strictly prohibited from entering into it in the absence of the matron. No *ariju* men would sleep in *tsuki* because it was considered to be a great shame (Lanunungsang and Talitemjen 108).

Since folklore encompassed the everyday life of the Aos, *Ariju* and *tsuki* served as the musical hub where they learned folktales, folksongs, and dances and also learned to make varieties of musical instruments like bamboo flutes, stringed instruments made of hair and so forth. *Ariju* was the main centre for hosting ceremonies and festivals especially when *mangko* was procured. This is a song eulogizing the remarkable *Ariju* standing tall in the village:

The first rays of the valley's sunrise
Shine through the *Atsung[18]riju's* six doors.
Imbosemra-janger, who filled the *suapotitsüngjen[19]*
with thousands of enemies heads
are honoring and celebrating.

> **Context**: A song sung by the men folk in honour of their *Atsungariju*. They sing that the first sunray shines through the six doors of the *ariju*. They declare with gusto that the

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[18]*Atsung* is the name of the Ao-Naga clan of *Longkhum* Village.
[19]A place inside the *Ariju* where the *mangko* were offered/kept.

suapotitsüngjen was filled with thousands of *mangko*. And they were celebrating their bravery and accomplishment.

The leading traditional institutions of learning and the foundations of Naga culture were a really microcosm of the village and its people. It could be best explained in terms of a modern University or military headquarters because of its function, nature of training and propagation of ideas. It can be argued that Naga Society had no formal learning institution before the advent of modern schools and colleges. However, it occupies a unique place as a learning centre in Naga society that was operative at all stages of human life and very much in the interest of the cohesion of village communities. It served as an agent and centre of socialization and a perfect learning institution. The learning institutions, the beautiful songs and literatures of Nagas are the signs of maturity of their civilization and culture. They may not and need not pertain in accordance with the standards of the West. They are different and that difference has to be respected. Hence, it would be erroneous to say that the Nagas were just a mass of incompetent savage tribes who had no idea about law and order and received no education prior to the British occupation and contact with the missionaries or before the introduction of modern education.

As discussed the soul of the people lives in their poetry and by soul it means identity. Nagas always believed that the corpus of their rich customs, beliefs, practices, institutions and oral tradition are the primary roots of the tree of their racial identity. They express the soul of their people and represent an integrated and holistic approach to the culture of the people who for generations have lived in the morality of a verbal dimension. And without their ancestral identity, all political slogans of identity would be like a tall golden statue with feet of clay. Hence, the process of exchanging the treasures of culture and folklore should not be a mere age-old tradition of the oral form. But a sense of urgency and a feeling of sincerity should be revived among the Nagas to learn more of their ancient ways of life and practices like the *Ariju* culture, before time caused any more diffusion and loss of the lore. In the recent time, research scholars and government funded projects have been supporting the revitalization process, supplemented by writing, recording, translating, filming and with all possible methods of available documentation. As a result, preserving the folk culture is ensured and able tore-articulate and re-represent their identity drawing from the rich oral traditions of the community. As Naga folksongs are still understudied, it is therefore important that more studies in folk music applying multi-disciplinary approaches such as anthropology, sociology, history, religion and literature in the study of Naga folksongs would be invaluable.

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Rites of Passage: Special Reference to Ao-Naga Puberty Rites as Markers of Identity

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Abstract

Like in any other human society, in traditional Ao-Naga life, puberty is an important phase to be celebrated it as a rite. Ao-Nagas visualize puberty as an indicator to get married and ability to beget children through legitimate marriage. The celebration of puberty rites of the girls differ from person to person depending upon their respective physical appearances. The Ao-Naga society validates maturity more as a cultural construct than exclusively as a biological indicator. The process in Ao-Naga puberty rite includes several aspects to delineate the transit of the girl/boy from childhood to youth. Each aspect is unique and determines the identities of the individuals in their new thresholds as well as a member of the community. The process in Ao-Naga puberty rite includes several aspects to delineate the transit of the girl/boy from childhood to youth. Each aspect is unique and determines the identities of the individuals in their new thresholds as well as a member of the community. So this paper attempts to study the process of the puberty rites of the Ao-Naga boys and girls separately. And also, Van Gennep's theoretical approach to 'rites of passage' is applied in my case study to analyze how Ao-Nagas construct their own self and also as a member of the community.

Keywords: Puberty, Rites of Passage, Identity, Threshold

Introduction

Like in any other human society, attainment of the age of puberty is the state wherein the girl/boy shifts their status and roles from childhood to youth. Likewise, even in the traditional Ao Naga life puberty is an important phase to be celebrated as a rite and visualize puberty as an indicator to get married and ability to beget children through legitimate marriage and so forth. The ritual practices with regard to puberty are not time-bound as in other communities. The entire process continues till the girl or boy biologically, psychologically, and culturally becomes fit to get married and beget children and establish a healthy family. In the Ao Naga community, the puberty rites of

the boys are not as elaborate as that of girls. For boy's attainment of puberty indicate a state at which they can launch for the activities meant for men like war tactics, construction of the house, art and craft, and so forth. Unlike other tribal societies in India[1], Ao-Nagas give less or no ritual importance to the first menstrual blood as a marker of identity for puberty and often hide the matter from publicity but begins from the time once the girl develops her secondary sexual characters. Among the Ao-Nagas, rites of puberty are communally celebrated which means that the girls of the village who are more or less of the same age group or who appear to be reaching puberty stage are grouped and begin the communal celebration of the ritual. The Ao-Naga society validates maturity more as a cultural construct than exclusively as a biological indicator.

The process in Ao-Naga puberty rite includes several aspects to delineate the transit of the girl/boy from childhood to youth. Each aspect is unique and determines the identities of the individuals in their new thresholds as well as a member of the community. So this paper attempts to study the process of the puberty rites of the Ao-Naga boys and girls separately. And also, Van Gennep's theoretical approach to 'rites of passage' is applied in my case study to analyze how Ao-Nagas construct their own self and also as a member of the community.

Arnold Van Gennep (1960) holds that the rite of passage rituals mark significant transitions in human lives, such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death. To him, the *rite of passage* means any ritual that escorts the passage from one status to another and from one world, whether cosmic/social, to another. The idea of significant passage rituals was first introduced by Gennep, who saw rebirth as the law of life and described rites of passage as a threefold process: *rites of separation; rites of transition (liminality* from the Latin, *limen,* meaning threshold); and *rites of incorporation.* The individual would first be ritually removed from the society as a whole, then he would be isolated for a period, and finally, he would be incorporated back into the tribe in his new status.

Puberty rites of girls

Incorporating Gennep's threefold process of rites of passage i.e., *rites of separation; rites of transition* and *rites of incorporation* we will first discuss the process of the Puberty rites of girls. There are five steps that complete the process of puberty ritual.

1. **The phase of tattooing** *(teptsü atep)*

Tattooing is the major determinant of identity for the Ao girls for it symbolizes the beginning of

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[1] Gonds and Todas tribal girl undergo rites during her onset of menstrual cycle (Singh and K.S. B.V.Bhanu._People of India: Maharashtra_ Part 1. Mumbai, Popular Prakashan, 2004, p.687).
"Life Cycle rituals." http://ietd.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/814/12/12_chapter%205.pdf. Accessed 27 March 2011.

the process of puberty, the stage at which they can claim for membership in their community. Tattooing rite is a long process. Basing on the tattooing ritual the rest of the puberty rites are followed and preformed accordingly. As cited above, the puberty rite of the girls doesn't begin with the starting of the menstruation. But onset of puberty is indicated through ritual act, *teptsü atep* (tattooing)[2] done on different parts of the body in regular intervals over a period of five years, every year during the months of December and January which roughly correspond to the post-harvest[3] period. In these times the villagers enjoy leisure to relax by engaging themselves in pro-ritual activities like tattooing the young girls and preparing them to the next phase of life. Further, the Ao-Nagas feel that since the environment during the season is so pleasant that it would heal up the wounds on the skin due to tattooing. The community thus maintains harmony with the nature to construct their cultural identities.

Each act of tattooing is followed by a period of rest that is, freeing from other domestic activities. The entire process of tattooing has five times tattooing and five times rest. Tattooing is an important practice in the community since these marks on body of the girls denotes not only their membership in the community but distinguishes them from the 'slaves' who according to the customary law are banished from undergoing the process. The people are scared that the evil spirits and animals like tiger would kill the girls who are not protected by tattooing. The community believes that those who are not tattooed would have less chances of getting good matches. For the girls to remain unmarried brings disgrace to them in the society. Such beliefs with regard to tattooing are very much deep-rooted in their worldview.

The general age to begin the ritual of tattooing is between years of 10 to 14 depending on the physique. Every year all the girls of the same age in the village are tattooed in the same season. The girls are separated from the society and are excluded from attending any community feast and family sacrifices, domestic and agricultural works during the occasion of tattooing because it is a cautious and sanctified period for those who are undergoing the rite of tattooing. Till the sores were healed she is allowed to have only rice, bamboo pickle and water. During tattooing all food prohibited to her like any animal meat were avoided. Till her wounds are healed she remains in the process period. Once a girl undergoes her first year's tattoo she is regarded as a full-fledged member of the community.

1.1 Art of tattooing

Tattooing is a specialized craft and art designed and executed by specialists from the community. In Ao-Naga society, only old women who have expertise chose the profession of tattooing. It is a

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[2] Sangtem Naga girls are tattooed on the arms, calf, forehead and chin but the boy were not tattooed (Ganguli, Milada. *A Pilgrimage to the Nagas*. New Delhi, Oxford & IBH Publishing Co., 1984, pic.22). The Phoms tattoo their women only on the legs, but an Ao woman could be tattooed anywhere from face downward to the legs.
[3] The people were active in art and craft works like basket making, weaving etc for them to use for the next year.

hereditary profession following in the female line. The expert mother trains their daughters, who in turn train their successors. In the past, it was more or less mandatory for a daughter of a tattooist to follow her mother's profession. It is because they believed that if the profession is not practiced by the successors, the art would soon disappear and make them poor and disgraceful.

Tattooing is executed in a jungle adjacent to the village. Before initiating tattooing upon a girl, a fowl has to be sacrificed to appease any evil spirit that might cause pain during the process of tattooing. Since the tattooing rite is gender-specific activity for woman, the entry of men is strictly prohibited. Nagas believe that the presence of men on the spot would not only increase the pain but also affects the design of the tattooing. People apprehend that the breath (*amu*) of the men will affect the health of the girl. Even though the girls know that tattooing causes much pain and suffering, and sometimes even death. However, it was compulsory for all the girls to get tattooed on their bodies (Smith 22).

1.2 **Tattooing instruments: Colour**

In the traditional Ao-Naga society, the colours used for tattooing were made from the juice of the bark of a tree, *Ngupti or 'Naptti'*. The technology was primitive. The bark of the tree is rubbed back and forth against a flat stone slab with rough surface. Then the juice of the bark is collected by hand into a pot boiled on firewood. Rice beer was added to the juice after it was half-boiled. Sharp cane thorns fixed to a wooden holder was used to apply the colour to the design on the skin. The pattern to be tattooed was marked by an old woman on the girl's skin with a piece of wood dipped in the colouring liquid. The piercing was done by gentle hammering on the implement into the skin. Root of *kamri* tree was used as a needle to pierce. After the first round of piercing is done, the colour (*Nap*) is then applied once more after the blood has been washed off.

1.3 **Designs of the tattoo**

Different designs of tattooing were placed on different parts of the body of the girls.

In the first year, the legs up to the calves were tattooed because, generally, the girls were not allowed to tattoo on their bodies before they attain puberty. In the second year, chest, chin, shoulder were tattooed. In the third year, the patterns of the calves were finished and lastly, in the fifth year, the tattooing completes with wrists and stomach.

The pattern varied slightly from *Mongsen* and *Chungli* group[4] of the Ao-Naga. But generally, there are four vertical lines on the chin, a chain of lozenges from the throat to the bottom of the breast bone, inverted letter 'V' shape on the front of the shoulders and stomach, lozenges and sides squares on the wrests, lozenges on the lower part of the leg, and a sign of arrow pattern on the knee (Mills 30). After the wounds of the tattooing were healed and dry skin

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[4] Mongsen and Chungli are two distinctive dialectic groups.

was peeled off, the grace of the designs appear.

2. The phase of hair growth on the head

The girls in pre-puberty stage in traditional societies do not maintain big hairs on the head. The head was frequently shaven indicating their childhood. The girls were allowed to grow hair permanently on the head till they can tuft it in a form. This process accompanies tattooing. The Naga women dress their hair in the form of a bun, *Lemlangvi/Kapok*. The girls from *Mongsen* and *Chungli* sects of Ao-Naga had different hair dressing styles. The *Mongsen* wears white in colour while the *Chungli* wears black in colour which was made of fallen hair that had been collected. The community believes that the *Mongsen* first invented the use of yarn, so they use the hair bun round with string made of white thread. The traditional Ao-Naga society emphasizes much care on hair care of girls. It is held that Ao-Naga boys adore the long shiny hair of the girls. Because the society believes that, the girls with such hair would have graceful married life.

3. *Sobusolemtsu*, ritual clothing

Once the girl underwent first tattooing, the next mark of her entry into youth is tying of a cloth, often-dark blue or white in colour. The cloth is tied on the waist of the body covering breasts and lower pelvis. The cloth used to tie is called *tokojentsü*. Then *süpiti/teperemsü*, skirt which is wrapped around the waist is started to wear once she enters into *Tsüki*, girls' dormitory. All the clan is visibly distinguished by their varied clothes and ornaments. The dress of married and unmarried girls differs. The young girls wore bodice which is just a piece of shawl to cover her breast. Until she becomes a mother, her breasts were not exposed. As women's clothing is concern; wife and daughter were depended on the husband/father richness. Whose father/husband had done *Mithun*[5] sacrifice wears a different pattern on her skirt and besides clothing; they wear crystals earrings, brass rings, hornbill feathers, brass bracelets which clearly indicate that they belong to the rich and wealthy family. Poor and ordinary women were not entitled to wear such ceremonial clothes even during festivals.

4. Piercing of upper earlobes (*Narongto*)

Piercing of holes in the upper earlobes, *narongto* and insertion of ear ornaments *Yongmen* in them is another sign that symbolizes the process of puberty rite. *Yongmen* is a brass ear ornament. It is like a thrice coiled of ring of about nearly four inches diameter and half inch thickness. An old woman with a sharp pointed bamboo stick or a red-heated iron does the piercing. Once the wound was heal, one end of the coiled rod was press in both the upper hole of the earlobe and it is turn slowly and slowly until the whole ring is put in the ear holes. These two big brass rings are tied together across the head by a bunch of black threads to keep the hair intact. It is done during

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[5]The Mithun (Bos Frontails) exist both in wild and semi-domesticated form. This animal has religious significance and intimate relation with socio-cultural life of the people.

the first year of tattooing. During this process, the parents strictly make the girls to observe the rules of purity and pollution like eating animal's meat, avoiding any community feast and family sacrifices, domestic and agricultural works till the wounds of the ears are completely healed. Among the Ao-Nagas some clans' like *Pongen, Jamir* are not entitled to wear this ear ornament *Yongmen*. Hence they need not pierce the upper earlobes. It shows that the girl has attained marriageable age and is capable of bearing children.

5. Entering into the girls' dormitory (*Tsüki)*

Tsüki can be defined as girls' dormitory wherein the young unmarried girls were kept under the guardianship of an old woman called *Tsükibutsüla/matron.* Usually the home of the oldest women of the clan (*Tsükibutsüla/matron*) is chosen as a residence for the five to seven young girls in the village. There were several dormitories in every location (*mepu/khel*) because every clan has their own respective *Tsüki* as the Ao practice clan exogamy*.*

The young girl is allowed to sleep in the corner of the house. As a neophyte, new entrant she must do minor domestic works that furnishes her the knowledge of housekeeping and management. The girl should reach the dormitory earlier than her senior members and should take care of the domestic needs like collecting of firewood, igniting up of fire, fetching of water, pounding of paddy, cooking, sweeping, feeding of pigs and chicks and finally arranging the beds. She should even visit her parent's home to attend to the needs of her younger siblings and household chores. The dormitory training furnishes the requirements that a typical Naga maiden should possess in her real life. The girls are enlightened with the norms and values of the society and the duties of the people towards the family and society, customary law, etc. There are several folktales wherein the girls in the dormitory were imparted with such a knowledge system. Since the *Ariju*, boys' dormitory was organized separately on these lines there was a scope for the girls to choose their life partners in this context. The boys visit the girls' dormitory, but the girls cannot visit the boys' dormitory. In the same way, the young boys searching for partners respect the *Tsükibutsüla* and help her in manual works because she acts as the consultant or advisor. Till the girl gets married, she remains with her inmates in the dormitory under the supervision of *Tsükibutsüla.*

Only the eligible girls were entitled to become a member of this institution, once the girl goes through all the rites that are fixed by the community. After attaining puberty, the mother request and take permission from the *Tsükibutsüla* to allow her daughter to sleep in her house. After she attains her puberty if the parents continue to let the daughter sleep at their home it was a shameful part on them, so the custom made it compulsory for all the girls to sleep in the dormitory. After the request was granted, the girl's father prepares a bed (*yipten*) and sends it to the house of the *Tsükibutsüla.* The girl remains in the dormitory till she gets married. The ritual course of the Puberty rite is diagrammatically represented.

Puberty Ritual

A. Phases in ritual

B. Structure of the ritual

First year of tattooing

1. In the first year of tattooing the girl also pierced her upper earlobes, grows her hair on the head and covers her breasts

2. First year of tattooing is first done on the calves of the leg

3. During the first year of tattooing she is detached from the

From 1 to 4

(Separation

Second year of tattooing

5.In the second year chest, chin, shoulder are tattooed

From 5 to 6 (Separation period)

7 is Liminal period

Third year of tattooing

8.In the third year patterns of the calves are finished

From 8 to 9 (Separation period)

(3rd separation)

Fourth year of tattooing

11. In the fourth year knees are tattooed

From 11 to 12 (Separation period)

Fifth year of tattooing

14.In the fifth year the tattooing completes with wrists and stomach

15.She is detached from the community and prohibited from all food

From 14 to 15 (Separation period) (5th Separation)16 is Liminal period (5th

17.After tattooing process is over the girl enters in the *Tsüki*, girl's dormitory
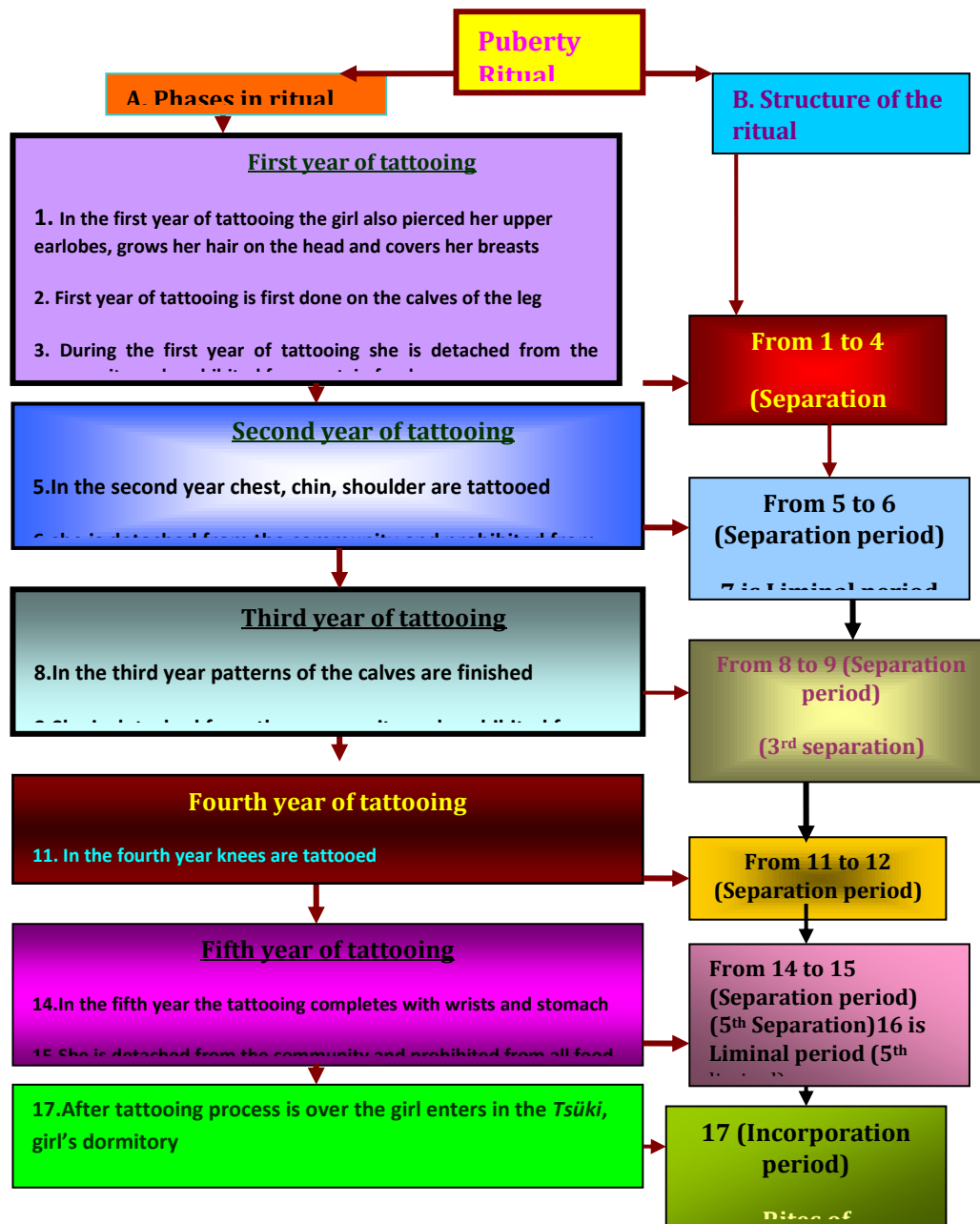
17 (Incorporation period)

Rites of

DIAGRAM NO.1: PUBERTY RITUAL OF THE GIRLS

6. Puberty rites of the boys

In Ao-Naga society, the puberty rite for the boys is not as elaborate as that of the girls. For them, tattooing is not a marker of identity. Tattooing of men was closely associated with the practices of headhunting. It is a politico-religious rituals act that proves the prowess and masculinity of males. But every headhunter was not tattooed. A headhunter who brings the head of the enemy to home was tattooed.

In due course tattooing of men on this occasion was stopped. It is because the ritual process involved in tattooing done after head hunt required stringent practices, especially with regard to food to be observed by the ritual passenger. Sometime those observances became fatal for their lives. Hence keeping in view, the need of men to the society as sustainer these practices was discontinued.[6] The puberty rites of the boys are divided into two stages, firstly ear-piercing rite and secondly rite of entering into *Ariju*. Under the *Ariju* system the boys complete the stages with three age group which the boys have to stay in each group for three years till they are promoted to the new age group.

7. Piercing of upper earlobes (*Narangto*)

Just like the girls, the boys also pierced their upper earlobes (*narangto*). The ear piercing was done just before the boy enters into the *Ariju*, boy's dormitory/*Morung*. It is performed by a male, either his relative or a friend. The ear is pierced using red-hot iron. When the iron is pushed through the earlobe, the *dao* blade is keep behind the ear to avoid injury to the head. This shows that he is ready to enter into adulthood.

8. Entering of boys into the dormitory (*Ariju*)

The boy enters into the *Ariju* (boys' or bachelors' dormitory). This institution was not just a simple place to sleep or for social gatherings, but it was a centre for socialization and an ideal learning institution. The *Ariju* serves the needs of society such as social security, promotion of culture and training centre of master artisanship. The man called *tir* who is also a religious head takes care of the male members. The entire life of *Ariju* was based on the age group system, *züngaren.* After joining the *Ariju* the boys become a member and responsible citizen to perform all sorts of community work enlisted to him or as group. Each age group has to remain in the same status for three years. The membership is extended to all the male members irrespective of their status as they are entitled into its system. The puberty phase of boys begins when they attain the age of 12 to 14 years and continue up to they get married. The phase completed with three stages. The

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[6] Other Naga tribes in Nagaland like *Chang, Khiamniungan* and *Konyak* also practiced tattooing. See "Nagaland revisited-From Tuensang to Peren."http://www.pbase.com/neuenhofer/nagaland_revisited_peren_tuensang. Accessed 27 March 2011;

"India: Land of eternal Ink."http://www.vanishingtattoo.com/india_tattoo_history_4.htm. Accessed 27 March 2011.

züngaren, age group is composed of three stages namely- *Süngpur/tzüir* age group, *Tenapang* age group and *Chuzen* age group.

8.1 Süngpur/tzüir, first age group

Süngpur/tzüir is the first and the junior most age group in the *Ariju*. The boys enter into *Ariju* at the age of 12 to 14. He is separated from his parents partially and enter into *Ariju* to become *Süngpur/tzüir*. *Süngpur* means wood carrier and *tzüir* means water. Though the boys eat with their parents in their respective houses, but they sleep, learn and work in the *Ariju*. Every boy is accompanied by his father who brings an egg and keeps it on the ground to offer it as sacrifice. On entering the dormitory, he puts down the egg on the ground and prays to make his son to be strong, wise and flourish in all things as he stays in the dormitory. Some families sacrifice hen, rich families a pig or even a buffalo which is then used for the feasting of the *Arijusanger* (dormitory members). The parents invite relatives and friends and treat them with food and rice beer to mark the memorable occasions. Once the boy is inducted into the *Ariju* he is regarded as a full-fledged member of the village. They serve their seniors by doing menial works like collecting firewood, fetching water, sharpening of *daos*, massaging etc. The boys do all sorts of duties assigned to them by the seniors at anytime because they are under service training for three years. Failing to do their duties and test leads to severe punishment. Three years period is a time of vigorous training in order to discipline him and to prove that he is a worthy citizen to the society. The age of entry into *Ariju* earns their social status of man. The boy wears a shawl for one whole year and on the next year he wears *langtem* (apron) to show that he is eligible for marriage. A young Ao boy was given a *dao* holder and belt to wear at the age of five or six, before he gets hold of an actual *dao*, or other clothing. When the boy reached the age of fourteen or fifteen, cover his phallus with a small-netted carrier suspended from a string round the waist. Then he is permitted to carry the *dao* in his holder. This illustrates that the *dao* was the most basic masculine symbol within Ao society, as was also the case with most other Naga groups.

8.2 Tenapang, second age group

After three years of service and training as *Süngpur/tzüir,* the boys are promoted to the next age group called *Tenapang,* which means blooming period. This is a period where most of boys are ready to get married because they are entitled to marry. Most of the members marry and settled down at this period. Those who do not marry remain as *Chuzen*(the last age group) in the Ariju. *Tenapang* age group members do not so much menial duties like the younger age group but they abide by the rules and regulations of the Ariju. They continue to perform other works and duties under the supervision of Chuzen for upkeep and welfare of the Ariju. The *Tenapang* members' main duty is to teach the boys of the *Süngpur/tzüir*.

8.3 *Chuzen,* **third age group**

The third age group is called *Chuzen*. This is the senior most group in the *Ariju*. They are considered as commanders of the *Ariju* and the most matured age group. They are the overall incharge of the activities of *Ariju*. The main duties of this group are building and repairing the *Ariju*, maintenance of the *Ariju* system and its organization, making decisions in the affairs of the *Ariju* administration and assigned duties to the respective *Zünga* (age group). They are the real bachelors of the village, almost free from all rules and disciplines but command respect and honour. The *Ariju* life retires at this age. Most of the men get married and settled independently. Any other member of outgoing *Chuzen* group who wish to remain as a member of *Ariju* remains as a member who is called *sangremer*, confirmed bachelor. But he cannot exercise his power as his group (*Chuzen*) is already succeeded by the younger group. The members who left *Ariju* after marriage and whose sons have not yet entered *Ariju* are called *Arijusanger/arijununger*. They always contribute their service and labour for common welfare of their *Ariju*. They no longer consider themselves as *Arijusanger/arijununger* after their sons enter the *Ariju* and ceased from all contribution to the *Ariju*. From this organization they are inducted into *PutuMenden*, village government.
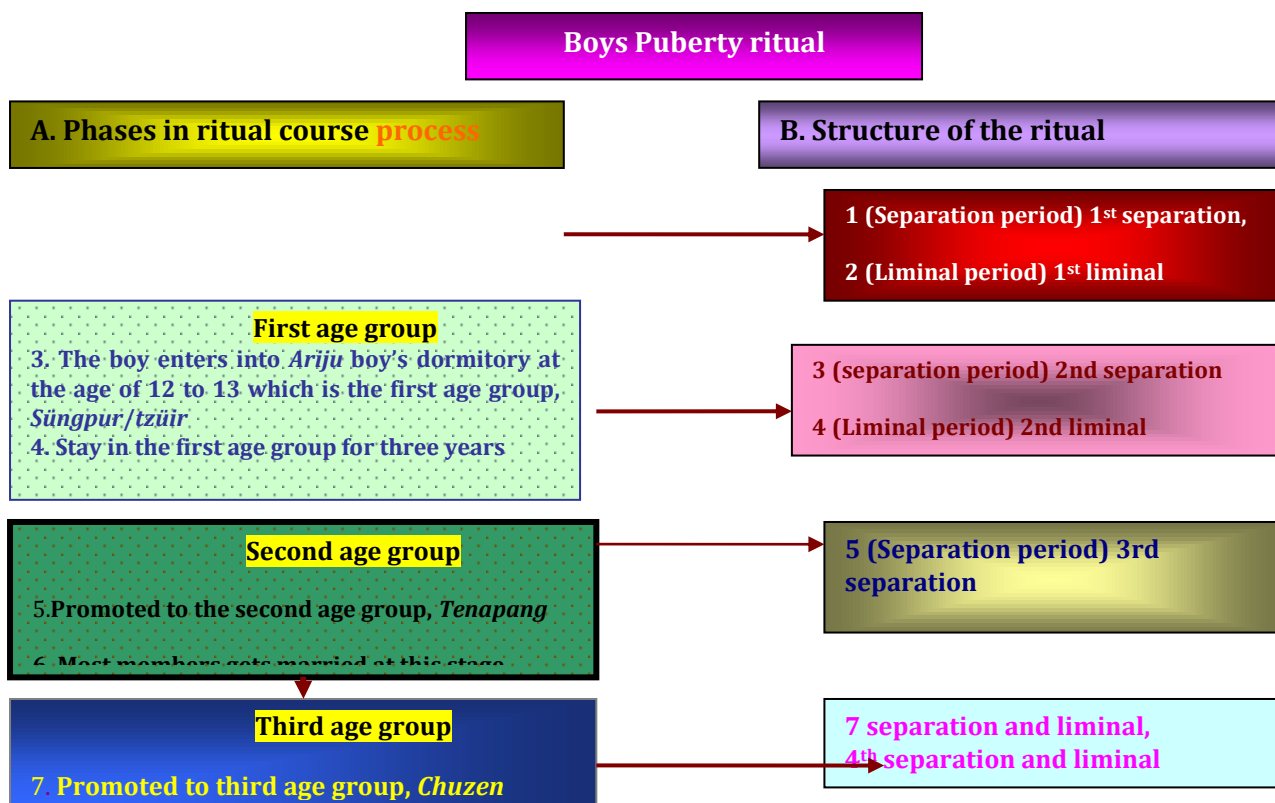
Boys Puberty ritual	
A. Phases in ritual course process	**B. Structure of the ritual**

A. Phases in ritual course process

B. Structure of the ritual

→ **1 (Separation period) 1st separation,**
2 (Liminal period) 1st liminal

First age group
3. The boy enters into *Ariju* boy's dormitory at the age of 12 to 13 which is the first age group, *Süngpur/tzüir*
4. Stay in the first age group for three years

→ **3 (separation period) 2nd separation**
4 (Liminal period) 2nd liminal

Second age group
5. Promoted to the second age group, *Tenapang*
6. Most members gets married at this stage

→ **5 (Separation period) 3rd separation**

Third age group
7. Promoted to third age group, *Chuzen*

→ **7 separation and liminal,**
4th separation and liminal

DIAGRAM NO. 2: BOYS PUBERTY RITUAL

9. Analysis

The puberty ritual of the Ao-Nagas is represented (**Diagram No. 1 & 2**) in the ____**(A) Phases in ritual course** and **(B) Structure of the ritual**. The above diagram shows different steps of transition period of the girl and the boy from child to adulthood. The diagram also shows that the puberty stage is a very significant period where the boy and girl perform their fixed rites to construct their own self and also as a member of the community.

The boy's dormitory played an important role in bringing up great warrior among the Ao men. All the war tactics and special training and testing were given to the boys in the Ariju. The young men were energized by the pressure of rivalry among peers and hence they had to prove their worth by taking heads in succession. Regarded as a prelude to marriage, each Ao young man usually hoped to take one head at least. A man who had taken a head has more advantages. For marriage, it enhances his status and adorn with war medals, a means to enhance his personality, and to avoid the scorn of others. Ao young men were supposed to be competent in the game of feuding and raiding but the 'quick one' with the ability to lead his warriors and track down enemies was celebrated in ritual, story, songs and oratory. He was the '*sushir*' or commander of the contingent. The *sushir* was selected for one battle but a good *sushir* was appointed again if he proved his worth and if he was willing to retain the title. Selection was done by the village rulers on behalf of the whole village community. The *sushir* gets sandwiched between two pressures, to lead his contingent towards success and to retain his position as commander.

The puberty stage is a very significant period where the boy and girl perform their fixed rites to construct their own self and also as a member of the community. Puberty rites of the Ao-Naga boys and girls are different. The girls' puberty rites are more elaborate than the boys. The tattooing rite of the girl is the symbol for constructing identity because it is the major rite performed for a longer period during puberty ritual. The girl pierced her upper earlobes (*narangto*), starts to grow her hair on the head, and covers her chest once the tattooing starts. The onset of the menstrual blood of the girl is not celebrated among the Ao-Naga because it is not inbuilt in the culture rather it becomes an individual thing or personal matter.

Unlike the other tribes of India[7], the separation and the liminality are continuous, and they merged together. In puberty rites of the girls, separation and liminality occurs five times **(B) Structure of the ritual**. In the first year of tattooing (1 to 4), the girl is separated from the societal activities like community feast and family sacrifices, domestic and agricultural works and abstains from all food prohibited to her. Till her wounds of the tattooing are healed she is in liminal period.

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[7] Among the Kolams tribe, the girl/boy who go through the puberty rituals are considered as adults during incorporation period. See Rao,K.Mohan. *The Kolams a primitive tribe in Transition*. Hyderabad, Booklinks Corporation, 1990, pp. 119-128.

Again, in the second, third, fourth and fifth year of tattooing (5 to 16) again separation and liminality continued. Separation alongside is followed by liminality because she is in process of entering into another stage called adulthood from childhood. The tattooing procedure is same all these years, but the girls are tattooed in different part of the body every year. Unlike the theoretical model of liminality put forward by Victor Turner[8], in the Ao-Naga puberty ritual the boy and the girl is not in the state of betwixt or between and neither here nor there because the boy and the girl gets his/her status/identity during the liminal period itself. Before she even enters into the puberty (adulthood) stage, the rites of *teptsü atep* (tattooing) on the first year itself made her a full-fledged member of the community and shows that she has reached the marriageable age. Even the boy obtains his identity through the piercing of earlobes before entering into the dormitory **(B) Structural of the ritual**, rites of separation (1). He also becomes a full-fledged member of the village once he enters into the dormitory.

Tattooing was very significant because tattooing gives one's identity in the Ao society regarding to which clan and group she belongs. Tattooing was fairly common among the Naga tribes. Tattooing was the preparatory rites to enter into the puberty stage. Once the tattooing starts, the remaining puberty ritual follows one after the other. Irrespective of the fact that tattoos were used to differentiate status or for purposes of identity, it was compulsory for all Ao women and the fact that there was universal admiration among the Ao for such a practice shows that it was a rite of passage.[9] The role of tattoos was not only part of the identity but more importantly it contributed to the self-image of the Ao-Naga women. The *Chungli* and *Mongsen* women have their own distinctive tattoo pattern which was significant for identification. It differentiates their group by their tattoo. Most importantly it helps the boys to identify the girls to which group she belong especially when the time comes to look for a partner. The *Chungli* women bear's three parallel black lines vertically on the chin, crisscross lines on the chest, on the leg below the knee but three lines horizontally at the calves. But the *Mongsen* women differ by a crisscross line at the backside of the leg. The traditional practices of tattooing are now taboo due to the influence of Christianity.

Once the girl undergoes or completes all the puberty rites, she then incorporated into the *Tsüki*, girls' dormitory. She is legitimized by incorporating into the dormitory (B) Structural model (17). This signifies that she is capable for marriage. Unlike the girls, the boys enter into the *Ariju*/dormitory very early because they have the age group system (rites of incorporation (3 to 5). It is a very strict affair. The *Tsükibutsüla/matron* did not just simply permit a girl to enter the dormitory.

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[8]Turner coined the term *liminoid* to refer to experiences that have characteristics of liminal experiences but are optional and do not involve a resolution of a personal crisis. According to him, the liminal/ *liminoid* entities are neither here nor there; they are 'betwixt and between' the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial rite (Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, pp. 53-92, 95)

[9]M.Godden, Gertrude."Naga and Other Frontier Tribes of North-East India." *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 26, 1897, pp. 161-201.

Among the puberty rites of the boy's separation and liminality (1 to 5, 7) takes place for four times. When the ritual passenger enters into the dormitory for the first time, he is in separation period. He is separated from his house, bed and parents to another. For three years he is in liminal period because the passenger is in the process of entering into a new status. After three years is over, he is separated again from his old status to another one i.e., from his old age group to another new age group. During this period many boys marry and leave physically the dormitory. The one who gets married is incorporated into the society (6). After that he is again separated from the dormitory but promoted to the last age group. Those remains unmarried is again separated and remains in liminal period when he is in the last age group.

Conclusion

To conclude, from the diagrams we can see that in the puberty rituals, the rites of separation and incorporation are simple and less time-consuming whereas the rites of liminality are more and elaborate. It may be because the community finds the liminality as a period of relaxation from routine than a period of confusion. They perceive the period of liminality as a site of preparation and training for proceeding to the next stage. In general, in the Ao Naga rites of passage, the separation and incorporation rites are simple whereas the liminal period is long. The traditional puberty rites of the Ao-Nagas seem to be simple but the rituals from transition to maturity take years. The puberty rites are significant for the Ao-Nagas because it sends signals that the child has reached the age of responsibility, fertility and, community productivity. Before reaching maturity, the rites allow them to go through defacement such as tattooing, piercing of earlobes and they also go through tests of endurance such as pains, seclusion from family and society. The puberty rites help them to be a responsible member of society and clearly defining the social responsibility and obligations between adults and non-adults. In contemporary time, the traditional practices of puberty rites are no longer observed because of the influence of Christianity. The only way to keep the identity of the puberty rite is through the narratives of the community, photographs, and through attires.

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Our Moon has Blood Clots and the Poetics of Indigenous Representation: Kashmiri Pandit Narratives as Indigenous Literature

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Abstract

As the literature of marginalized communities, Indigenous Literature contests mainstream discourses through self-representation and depictions of critical indigenous issues. No matter where it is produced, Indigenous Literature is connected by certain universal characteristics and thematic similarities that display indigenous people's resistance to socio-cultural hegemony. Thus, it is a literary response to contexts of oppression and discrimination and engenders a collective legacy of social suffering by expressing historically suppressed truths. It disputes political dominance with themes that articulate the indigenous fight for personal, social, political and cultural identity. The relationship between people and place, and the experience of losing one's homeland and severing ties from one's traditions is a crucial part of Indigenous Literature. Kashmiri Pandits are not generally considered an 'indigenous community,' but recent Pandit narratives reflect similar concerns regarding their experiences of facing targeted violence, losing their homeland and being forced into exile after the insurgency started in Kashmir. This paper seeks to situate Pandits as an indigenous community, and by analysing Rahul Pandita's representation of the Pandit experience in Our Moon has Blood Clots, the paper extends the scope of Indigenous Literature in contemporary Indian English Literature to include recent Anglophone Kashmiri Pandit narratives.

Keywords: Indigenous Literature, Autochthony, Kashmiri Pandit, Kashmir Conflict, Indian English Literature

Introduction

Positioning Kashmiri Pandits as an Indigenous Community

As a generic term, 'indigenous people' is used in different countries to refer to the First Nations, Native American, Maori, Aboriginal and Adivasi communities; and till date, no international consensus has been achieved on the specific definition of 'indigenous people.' While

social-science scholars use the term to describe people who follow a 'traditional' lifestyle that is different from modern Western living standards (Gosart 89), most international organizations agree that indigenous people are ethnic communities who are descendants of the historically native inhabitants of a specific region but do not constitute the dominant demography there presently (WHO; UN; UNPFII), and who have a distinct culture which is intrinsically linked with the natural environment of the region; indigenous communities lead lives that are socially, culturally, politically, linguistically and economically different from the dominant group (Coates 8). The World Health Organization (WHO) specifies that indigenous people may live "within, or are attached to" these regions, which means that even if they presently stay away from the region, they still qualify as an indigenous community for that region – thus, present physical location is not a factor in determining the indigenous identity of an individual or community. The WHO and the United Nations (UN) also stress on the principle of self-identification and assert that indigenous people "identify themselves as being part of a distinct cultural group, descended from groups present in the area before modern states were created and current borders defined" (WHO; UN). The United Nations Commission on Human Rights and the United Nations Economic and Social Council add that marginal groups of a society/region should also be grouped under 'indigenous people' if the dominant social and cultural structures of their native land are alien to their traditional culture (Coates 7), even if they did not suffer conquest or colonization as long as they are descendants of communities who inhabited the region when the dominant groups arrived. Indigenous people have a "special relation" with their traditional/ancestral land which is of "fundamental importance for their collective physical and cultural survival" and they are determined to "maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities" (UN). According to Ken Coates, indigenous people have "historical societies with a strong understanding of the past, often passed on through oral testimony, ceremonies and cultural activities," he adds:

> They view their experience from a very long perspective … devoting a great deal of community time to the remembrance of ancestors and important events and processes. The sense of rootedness in the past is highlighted by the attachment of stories and legends to traditional lands and to the richness and texture of indigenous languages, both of which play a vital role in preserving the indigenous understanding of history. (Coates 14)

The criterion of having a historical continuity with their territories is crucial to indigenous people who consider themselves different from the other communities who prevail in those territories now as the dominant group; hence, they are determined to preserve their cultural systems and transmit it to their future generations (Coates 6). Indigenous people, all over the world, share certain common concerns like political neglect, economic marginalization and social vulnerability with regards to the protection of their cultural rights, recognition of their distinctive identities and rights to traditional resources and lands" (UNPFII). The strict adherence to traditional social

systems ensured their exclusion from the dominant political system; hence, indigenous people "lack political power and autonomy" and are dominated by other groups (Coates 2). Following these internationally recognized characteristics, this paper would first situate the Kashmiri Pandit community of India within the category of 'indigenous people' then by analyzing Rahul Pandita's *Our Moon has Blood Clots*, argue that Kashmiri Pandit Narratives fall under the scope of Indigenous Literature.

In India, there is no official recognition of the concept 'indigenous people' (IWGIA), although the terms '*Adivasis*' (original inhabitants) and '*Vanavasis*' (forest dwellers) have been popularly used to refer to indigenous populations, and the government categorizes these ethnic communities as Scheduled Tribes. The Kashmiri Pandits make up the Hindu religious minority community of the predominantly Muslim Kashmir valley and are historically the original inhabitants of the region (Tripathi 1, Baig). The community satisfies the criteria mentioned above and can be categorized as 'indigenous people' because Kashmiri Pandits are the ethnic descendants of the original Shaivite Saraswat Brahmin inhabitants of Kashmir going back hundreds of years (Kaw 183). They have a unique socio-cultural tradition and prominent Pandits from antiquity like Kalhana, author of *Rajatarangini*, and Abhinavagupta, author of *Abhinavabharati*, have contributed immensely to Indian scholarship. Despite facing significant oppression from foreign invaders in the last seven hundred years during which their population reduced drastically, the minuscule Pandit community have tried maintaining strong cultural ties with the Kashmir valley (Essa). As a community, the Pandits have suffered from external conquests (Kaw 91) and have faced political and social marginalization by the dominant Kashmiri Muslim community. The marginalization reached its zenith during the late 1980s when militancy erupted in Kashmir and Pandits were selectively threatened, targeted, raped and brutally killed (EFSAS).[1]The lack of security forced most from the anguished community into exile in the early 1990s, as they moved to neighbouring Jammu and other Indian states (Bamzai 254). The Pandit population in the Valley was 5 percent in 1950, but presently only about three thousand Pandit families (less than 1 percent) remain there (Zutshi 318). However, the community has maintained a historical continuity with Kashmir. Recent Pandit narratives reflect the importance of this traditional land for their cultural survival and hence, their insistence on following traditional cultural practices even if they are no longer in Kashmir because they still proudly assert their identities as Kashmiri Pandits. Thus, the Kashmiri Pandit community demonstrates all the internationally recognized parameters to be categorized as 'indigenous people.' Their exodus from the Valley is mired in political blame-game but most scholars agree that the community suffered an ethnic cleansing; consequently, becoming the "invisible and inaudible" victims of the conflict (Nandy 171). One plausible reason for their targeting was the Pandits' political affiliation; their ultimate loyalty was with India and they "could not identify" with the "anti-India uprising" of the

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[1]For more information on the socio-political conditions leading to the Kashmiri Pandit exodus during the start of the insurgency, read the EFSAS report.

dominant Muslim community (Bose 136). Hence, they were seen as Indian agents and spies who needed to be eliminated. But, Kashmiri Separatist leaders, like Syed Ali Shah Geelani, have always denied that any such ethnic cleansing took place, and insisted that the Pandits left Kashmir on their own after the government promised them financial benefits (Hakeem 68, 72).

The Pandits have been in exile for thirty years now. In the last decade, many Pandit authors have expressed through Anglophone literature their anguish at the loss of their homeland, culture and identity. Authors like Rahul Pandita, Arvind Gigoo, Varad Sharma and Siddhartha Gigoo have articulated the angst of the Pandit community and laid bare the tale of their suffering to a global audience. Their texts are critical for a holistic understanding of the Kashmir conflict. The narratives display the characteristic features of 'Indigenous Literature' and hence, should be regarded as a distinct genre of Indigenous Literature within the Indian English literary canon. Rahul Pandita's memoir *Our Moon has Blood Clots* is particularly important, in this regard, as it demonstrates several key concerns that plague the Pandit community and a textual analysis shall reveal how Pandit narratives qualify as 'Indigenous Literature.' However, before commencing with the analysis it is imperative to first outline the distinctive features of Indigenous Literature.

Poetics of Indigenous Literature

Indigenous Literature, hereafter referred to as I.L., is not fully explored to its diverse potencies because of its vacillating position in literary history (Abt 171). However, no matter which indigenous community produces it and where it is produced I.L. has certain common features. Broadly speaking, I.L. refers to a "special group of literary writing based on the ethnic identity of the writers" and for an author to be regarded as an indigenous writer, he or she needs to demonstrate strong "cultural competence" and highlight the "indigenous otherness" to counter "mainstream culture" (Chiu 1074). The notion of "indigeneity" signifies "cultural otherness" and I.L. positions itself as the "other" by reflecting the collective consciousness of a community to challenge hegemony and reconstruct identity (Chiu 1074- 1084). Teresa Podemska Abt observes that I.L. provides "language to ... political oppression" and expresses "historical truths" by self-representing "crucial Indigenous issues" in English and situating them within "sociocultural political systems." These texts have themes that depict socio-historical experiences of suffering and "dispute political dominance" by highlighting the "Indigenous fight for a personal, cultural, social and political identity." She adds that I.L. produces a "collective legacy of social suffering" and articulates historical trauma; hence, it also serves as a literature of "resistance and protest" that is devoid of any other "literary, aesthetic … or imaginative functions" (Abt 171). Michele Lacombe agrees that I.L. can be regarded as resistance writing as it presents "aspects of cultural continuity and … new methods of cultural revitalization" (Lacombe 256). Joshua B. Nelson asserts that I.L. reflects the "abiding relationship between people and place … a home cherished, longed for, or irrecoverable," and explores whether traditional relationships with a place can be maintained "in the aftermath of removal [from the land]" (Nelson 29, 30). He observes that I.L.

emerges from a sense of political responsibility and articulates the indigenous community's "struggles against systematic marginalization by the dominant social structures" (Nelson 32). Similarly, Armand Garnet Ruffo notes that I.L. is a "call for liberation" as it portrays racism, marginalization and the "realities of what it means to be a people under siege," it functions as their "collective voice" and strives to bring change in a society that does not "share their values and concerns" (Ruffo 663-64, 670). Like Abt, Ruffo also argues that indigenous writers serve as the "identity and voice" of their indigenous community and "break" their silence (Ruffo 669-70). Thus, I.L. shapes "its own sociocultural and aesthetic values" and assuredly delivers it to both the mainstream and the global audience, which makes this genre fall within the scope of world literature rather than be the literature of one country or region (Abt 171).

These are the essential characteristics of Indigenous Literature and in the following section, a textual analysis of Rahul Pandita's memoir is undertaken to show how it emerges as an indigenous literary text.

Locating *Our Moon has Blood Clots* as Indigenous Literature

Several indigenous activists have argued that to recover their identities, indigenous people had to reestablish their connection with their indigenous cultures. In answering this call, many Kashmiri Pandit writers have started to write about the concerns of their community from their own experience, and have sought to pass down this knowledge to other members of their community and their descendants. Rahul Pandita's memoir *Our Moon has Blood Clots: The Exodus of Kashmiri Pandits* (2013) is a seminal text that deals with the ordeals of the Pandit community, where the author has narrated his own experience of being forced to leave his own homeland and consequently, live in exile. The text depicts the delicate position of the minority Pandit community after India's independence and portrays the atmosphere of terror that had engulfed their lives in 1989-90 when militancy broke out in Kashmir and demanded secession from India. Pandita declared in an interview that the text "sets the record straight for the first time" and presents the Pandit viewpoint vis-à-vis the Kashmir conflict because the "liberal discourse … and the media" had "bypassed" their story and "relegated [it] to the margins" (Griffin). The text also counters the claims made by the Kashmiri Muslim authors like Basharat Peer, and Mirza Waheed who sought to highlight the perspectives of the Kashmir's majority Muslim community in their texts *Curfewed Night* and *The Collaborator* where the lack of an indigenous Pandit voice is apparent. Pandita brings the suppressed, silenced voices of Pandits into mainstream literature; he is bold and uncompromising in his portrayal of the violence and the trauma which the Pandit community went through during their ethnic cleansing. The narrative is emotionally charged, full of pain and anger as it reflects the Pandit community's hopelessness, rootlessness and homelessness. The following sections present three crucial aspects of Pandita's portrayal which qualify the text as an indigenous literary text.

Prevalent Conditions of Marginalization and Violence leading to the Exodus

Portraying oppression suffered at the hands of the dominant community is one of the prime concerns of Indigenous Literature. Through the narrator's personal experiences which he cannot repress, the text highlights the precarious social position that Pandits were in before the militancy began in the 1980s. The memories of these experiences envelope Pandita's whole existence and traumatize him. Scenes from Pandita's family life in Srinagar – the month-long Hindu religious festival of Shivratri, the trips to the Shankaracharya and Kheer Bhawani temple, their big house and the vegetable garden around it – form his most fond memories. They reflect not only the importance of Kashmir in the Pandit consciousness, but also signify the cherished qualities of a home which are now lost to them – familiarity, comfort, security, tradition and rootedness. But, the narrative reveals that all these happy memories were overshadowed by incidents that made Pandita aware of his position as an unwanted religious minority and the socially marginalized 'other;' for instance, being teased by friends at school for singing the Indian national anthem or being threatened for supporting the Indian cricket team (Pandita11, 41). Pandita describes a "thumb rule" that guided their lives, a parable handed down through generations of Pandits like a cultural memory, which claimed that a Pandit can never win and was always supposed to lose to a Muslim (Pandita25). The effect of these cultural memories is significant in the young child's psyche, it shattered his self-esteem and he refused to wear the sacred thread of Brahmins because it would identify him as a Hindu and then his friends would always be able to overpower him (Pandita26).

The murder of a Pandit political activist Tika Lal Taploo in 1989 scared the Pandits who were afraid to go out of their houses alone. Children were barred from playing outside as random killings and kidnappings of Pandits started (Pandita51). The situation was getting increasingly tense, leading to the night of 19th January 1990 when loudspeakers from every mosque in Kashmir, blared out warnings for the Pandits to leave the valley amidst loud cheers (Pandita58). Three options were historically given to them – "*Raliv, Chaliv, yaGaliv*" – to abandon their religion and stay or to leave Kashmir or get killed (Pandita18). Pandita observes that often neighbours and friends collaborated with the militants, believing that Pandits would flee out of terror if a few of them were killed. Pandita reflects upon how his family believed that the violence would soon subside and that it was a passing phase (Pandita 55), but the night of 19th January changed everything when fear gripped their entire community – "All is not well. Everything is going to change…" (Pandita 58). The narrative details how terrified Pandits shut themselves up and huddled together during the night as calls for secession and threats to the Pandits were issued by mobs outside – "They rushed towards us like poison darts … The crowd wanted to turn Kashmir into Pakistan, without the Pandit men, but with their women." The Pandits were convinced that it was just a matter of minutes before the crowd would barge into their homes and kill them,

Pandita's mother took a long kitchen knife and planned to kill her daughter first and then herself to the utter disbelief of his father. The young boy could not comprehend what was happening as his entire life flashed before his eyes – "We are very scared …Where would we run away to? Would Ma have to kill herself? What about my sister?" (Pandita 59). The narrative informs that often Pandits were forced to take part and even lead such processions to ensure that if paramilitary forces fired then the Pandits would die first. Militants also issued hit-lists in neighbourhoods and advertisements in newspapers ordering Pandits to leave or get killed and numerous such targeted killings did take place (Pandita 86). It was one such hit-list that was pasted outside the author's home which convinced the Pandita family to finally leave their home and leave Kashmir altogether (Pandita70). Thus, the narrative articulates the prevalent condition of marginalization, insecurity and violence which had forced thousands of Pandit families to leave their traditional homeland in the early months of 1990 after the militancy intensified in Kashmir.

Loss of Home and Life in Exile

Indigenous literary works always articulate the effects of losing their traditional homeland on the indigenous community. Pandita's text does this by depicting the physical and psychological ordeals of the Pandits during their life in exile. ni egufer thguos dah stidnaP eht fo tsoM retfa ummaJ their exodus and the text reveals how their lives were drastically transformed there. In Jammu, Pandita saw thousands of terror-stricken Pandits who had a certain void and blankness in their eyes. Families that had rivers flowing through their fields now had no access to freshwater – "It took us a while to understand that the water that came out of taps in Jammu and elsewhere was not fresh water" (Pandita74). Pandits were huddled into makeshift camps and forced into poverty; they had to depend on government doles to sustain themselves. The narrator's family lived in refugee camps and cheap hotels before finally moving to a one-room flat on rent. Despite the difficulties in Jammu, Pandita maintains that it was safer, unlike Kashmir where survival was their only concern amidst communal slogans, threats, hit-lists, and murders (Pandita75). He conveys the sense of loss pervaded the Pandit consciousness in Jammu – "We had lost everything – home, heath … which had taken generations to build" (Pandita76). In spite of their best efforts, the lives of Pandits never got any better within the refugee camps at Jammu where up to five people had to share one small room (Dabla 78). Many elderly people could not cope with their new alien surroundings and the overwhelming memories of their former homeland and developed Alzheimer's disease which eventually killed them. The Kashmiri sociologist Bashir Ahmad Dabla observes that older and disabled people suffered most in exile as they could tolerate the extreme heat of Jammu and many collapsed or died from dehydration, heat-strokes, neurological ailments and cardiac attacks (Dabla 81). Pandita describes the situation as:

> It was a pathetic existence. Many fell ill with diseases that were hitherto unknown to the community … elderly people died of sunstroke … and scorpion bites. Children became infected with fungal diseases, and scabies became rampant in the unhygienic

camps. Doctors reported hundreds of cases of stress-induced diabetes. Heart disease and hypertension made their way in our lives. Many fell into depression ... Medical surveys … said that the Kashmiri Pandits in exile had aged by ten to fifteen year. (Pandita 97)

His own mother would injure herself from lifting countless buckets of water each day, and had to take two months of bed rest before resuming her work. Privacy was a big issue for Pandits in Jammu as families had to live together in small rooms or refugee camps. Pandita would hang a sheet in their room to create a separate space for himself and imagine that he was in his "first-floor room back home in Srinagar, in the room with the wooden bookshelf" (Pandita 100).

Pandita mentions that their immovable properties in Kashmir were also usurped by the state government under various pretexts, and several Pandit homes, farms and temples were either demolished or erased from government records. Middlemen from Kashmir made rounds of the refugee camps in Jammu trying to coax the Pandits to sell their homes at dirt-cheap rates and given the acute financial crisis that they were in, several Pandits consented to sell their houses which they had so lovingly built (Pandita 104). His family also had to sell off their family home in order to meet the medical expenses of his mother's treatment in Ludhiana. Although he regards this as a sign of permanent exile for the Pandits from Kashmir, Pandita admits that the community had no other choice because they had medical and other expenses to cover and most of their houses had already been vandalized or burnt down (Pandita 105).

The real tragedy of losing his homeland and being in exile affects Pandita when he moves to Delhi and observes that, like him, thousands of migrants arrive there every day to begin a new life. However, what makes him different is that while the rest had a home to return to with their loved ones waiting, he was a "permanent exile" and could never return to his home in "the Kashmir Valley where my family came from" (Pandita 10). The narrative explicates how for Pandits, their home could only be in Kashmir where their roots lay. The text reveals the hopelessness, despair and agony of the Pandit community in exile where they suffered from both an existential and an identity crisis. The thought of being homeless haunts them forever, as Pandita observes how his old mother acquired the habit of telling everyone she met, "Our home in Kashmir had twenty-two rooms" (Pandita 13). Much to his irritation, the old lady would narrate their tales of persecution to everyone she met but Pandita realizes that this was for her to channelize her trauma and it was "the only thing that reminded her of who she was" (Pandita 12). Living in exile hurt their pride because these people were quite affluent in Kashmir, but now they were destitute and forced to live in small one-room flats. Pandita's father was also affected and even after years of being in exile, he would get excited whenever he saw Kashmir on television and imagine that they still had access to their lost homeland (Pandita 27). He fondly referred to Srinagar as "*Shahar* – the city that is home;" and if Pandita reminded him that they were in Delhi, the old man would just give an "embarrassed smile" before going silent for several days

(Pandita29). The "mere mention" of the word "*Shahar*" evokes in the old man images of his homeland, his beautiful house and his old life, so silence was the only way for him to deal with the present situation and accept the reality that everything was now lost.

Pandita describes exile as a "dull throbbing pain" (Pandita 38), he confesses that he is grateful that barring his parents, none of the other older members of his family had "lived to experience the pain and difficulties of living in exile" (Pandita 47). Thus, the narrative highlights the love that Pandits feel for Kashmir even after years of staying away and the psychological trauma that continues to affect them. An entire generation was forced to rebuild their lives elsewhere, yet *Shahar* was still their "jugular vein" (Pandita 29). Teng and Gadoo observe that Pandits loved Kashmir with a "greater spiritual commitment" than the Muslims because they were the indigenous people of the region who followed its indigenous culture for generations over "thousands of years" (Teng and Gadoo82). Pandits had a strong sense of belonging in Kashmir where their roots firmly lay because they were not conquerors but children of the soil (Teng and Gadoo 82).

Loss of Culture

One of the prime concerns of all Indigenous Literature is to emphasize the loss of the traditional culture of the indigenous community like, in this text, Pandita laments the loss of the unique Kashmiri Pandit culture during their life in exile. The title of the text – *Our Moon has Blood Clots* – reflects this sense of loss; their memories, customs and traditions are now stained with blood and sadness. For the Pandits, the memories of their rituals and traditions do not signify joy but evoke trauma and serve as a reminder of their sufferings. The image of the moon, in the title, alludes to one of the most important religious rituals of the Pandit community – the celebration of Saraswati Puja on a full moon night. However, their historical circumstance has tarnished this sacred memory, causing the moon to appear bloodstained as a symbolic sign of all the violence they had endured as a community. The image of the "clot" signifies that their wounds have not yet healed and are still very much open. The image of the moon is also, traditionally, a symbol of pristine beauty; but for the Pandit community, this eternal image of beauty is stained with memories of violence which cannot be washed away. The narrative depicts the impact of the loss of cultural heritage by suggesting that the use of the native Kashmiri language was gradually reducing within the Pandit community in exile. Pandita realizes that the true significance of his traditional homeland is that it is the only region where he could speak in his mother tongue. He notes that speaking in one's mother tongue fills "one with contentment and an undefinable happiness," and it was a liberating experience for him to speak in Kashmiri when he later travelled to Srinagar on journalistic assignments (Pandita 36).

The real fear that Pandita has is that, after decades of being in exile, for the younger generation of Kashmiri Pandits, Kashmir is getting reduced to just a "memory" and an "overdose

of nostalgia" because they had to move on. Now, their traditional homeland is just a "calendar" hanging in the room, a traditional dish cooked during religious festivals, or a marriage ceremony "that the elders insist must be solemnized in Jammu." When Pandita meets his Pandit friends who are all well-settled now, they still sing Kashmiri songs but a lot of them were "too young to remember anything of Kashmir." However, a "rush of memory" would often affect them and they would call him from faraway places for no other reason but just to "talk to someone in Kashmiri." Language here functions both as a way of retaining the lost heritage and also to channel out traumatic memories. For the new generation of Pandits who grew up outside Kashmir, their "homes" were elsewhere; hence, Pandita is skeptical whether their identity and the "story" of their community would eventually be lost in the next few decades. He admits that the previous generation was responsible for keeping alive their indigenous customs and traditions and "created mini Kashmirs wherever they settled," but "after them, there will be nobody left to remember" (Pandita 153). Pandita laments:

> We are losing our tradition, our links to the place where we came from. This is evident during weddings, or when someone dies. Tradition is like an embarrassing grandparent who needs to be fed and put back to bed in a back room. (Pandita153-4)

He gives an instance from his own life to highlight this cultural setback, he describes how helpless he felt when his uncle had died and they could not locate a priest who knew the proper Pandit funerary rituals and so they settled for a local priest and recited whatever prayers they could: "At least the dead merit dignity; their farewell ought to be performed in the same manner as that of their forefathers" (Pandita154). Thus, the narrative portrays the loss of indigenous culture in the Pandit community. Pandita makes a case for cultural revivalism within the Pandit community when he states that during his numerous journalistic trips to Kashmir, he felt "connected" to his ancestors there and realized that it was "important to be in touch with one's roots" (Pandita 155).

Qualifying the Text as Indigenous Literature

Rahul Pandita foregrounds some of the most pressing issues that affect the Kashmiri Pandit community, from the loss of their homeland to the loss of their cultural identity in the future. Thus, the text demonstrates thematic and expressional qualities which connect it to the larger body of Indigenous Literature (I.L.) from all over the world. Teresa Abt observes that though I.L. is positioned as minority literature and given an "inferior … and secondary status," yet it portrays important topics like "oppression and discrimination." For Abt, I.L is a literary response that counters mainstream misrepresentations and deconstructs "cultural and social stereotypes" (Abt173). Ruffo adds that discourse shapes historical truth; and hence, "misrepresentation and appropriation" of the indigenous voice should be contested or else alternative narratives will not emerge (Ruffo 666). Pandita's narrative does precisely this and functions as an alternative narrative to counter the privilege given to political discourses and narratives of the dominant community. Within the sphere of modern

Anglophone Kashmiri literature, narratives by authors belonging to the dominant community, like Basharat Peer and Mirza Waheed, enjoy greater privilege and this marginalizes the Kashmiri Pandit perspective on the conflict but Pandita counters these mainstream portrayals. The text bridges a critical gap within the mainstream academic discourse on the Kashmir issue by voicing the standpoint of the indigenous Pandit community. It addresses the global audience and brings to their attention the exact circumstances of the Pandits after they were forced to leave their traditional homeland. The text also serves as a testament for future generations of Pandits, to inform them about the legacy and history of their community. Pandita highlights the universal resistance to hegemony and cultural dominance which I.L. seeks to accomplish and hence, the text qualifies as an indigenous literary text.

Some of the key features of I.L. found in the text are the depictions of the annihilation of the Pandit community's culture in their homeland, the systematic oppression that they suffered at the hands of the dominant community there, the transmission of intergenerational trauma within the community, the psychological trauma of losing their homeland, the new diseases that affect them because of this dislocation from the homeland, and the gradual erosion of their distinct identity both within and outside Kashmir. The text tries to reclaim this lost identity and restructure it for future generations so that their story is not forgotten by the world.

Conclusion: Kashmiri Pandit Narratives as Indigenous Literature

Narratives by other Kashmiri Pandit authors like Siddhartha Gigoo, Varad Sharma, Sudha Kaul, et cetera also demonstrate these themes of rootlessness and oppression. These narratives have emerged as a literary response to the misery that was imposed on the community after their lives had been turned upside down. The very survival of the Pandit community was at peril during the late 1980s and now, it is their cultural identity that faces an existential threat after years of drudgery and poverty. The media and the mainstream discourse on Kashmir are still largely based on national and local political ideologies which ignore the Pandits (Raina), so the only avenue left to them was to write their own stories and provide the world an insight into their concerns. These authors bring the indigenous Pandit voice in academic discourse and counter the traditional misrepresentation that their community had suffered. Their texts serve to preserve the cultural heritage of the Pandit community and ensure that traditional practices and customs continue to survive in the future. By articulating the wrongs done to them, these authors not only resist hegemony but also keep alive the memory of their traditional homeland for posterity. Thus, the scope of Indigenous Literature within contemporary Indian English literature extends to include recent Anglophone Kashmiri Pandit narratives. Armand Garnet Ruffo suggests that to facilitate the healing process of a suffering indigenous community, it is important to understand their "need for expression" (Ruffo 672). Pandit authors are instrumental in initiating the healing process for their community by addressing and articulating their historical trauma; their "need for expression" arises from the silence and marginalization that they had endured for so many years. As indigenous literary works, the Pandit narratives also serve to advance the cause for social

justice and advocate the community's right to return to their native homeland. Ken Coates observes that linking contemporary struggles with the global indigenous peoples' movement can help in catching the media's attention; and hence, he argues, "labels and definitions" are important (Coates 10). Hence, by positioning the Pandit narratives within the scope of the global body of Indigenous Literature, this paper aims to offer new and alternative ways to understand and perceive the Kashmiri Pandit community and their history.

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Animating Folktales: An Analysis of Animation Movies based on Folktales of three different Indian Languages

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Abstract

Folktales are the oldest and traditional means of communication having remained a powerful means of communication over the years. Since its inception this method of storytelling and communicating has changed its medium of transmission but not its manner of storytelling. For ages, oral tradition has been a medium of transmission of these stories and culture but with modernization, the medium changed to print, electronic, and now digital media. These folktales do not represent mere stories; but communicate the varied culture, tradition, rituals, history and much other vital information reflecting the timeline of various communities. Serving as an active agent of both information and entertainment at the community level for so many years today, there arises an immediate need to preserve this form of storytelling - Folktales, especially in the context of its presentation has witnessed a change in recent times. Animation being the latest medium of entertainment, folktales can also be narrated in the form of animation that will also help preserve the stories in animated form for future generations. By doing so, folktales can be pushed beyond the boundaries of the community level and can be prevailed in the global platform to benefit the entire human race. Several communities across the globe have converted their folktales into animated movies to acquire the wider reach of audiences globally. This also helps to popularize the old traditions of these communities so that the newer generations can understand its significance in the present-day context of digital platforms. Moreover, extinguishing the line of the geographical divide, it ties people living across the world together through its common thread of lesson learning folktales.

Keywords: Folktales, Animation Movies, Animated Folktales, Hindi, Bengali, Assamese, Digital Media, YouTube

Introduction

Dan Ben Amos a folklorist, defines folklore as, "Artistic communication in small groups". At the beginning of the 19th century 'Folklore' got a proper recognition, prior to which it was just a household culture or tradition. The Germans Jacob Grimm and Williams Grimm were the first to look into the study of folklore, it is from there that the idea spread to different nations but the term 'folklore' was first used by William John Thomas (an English scholar) in 1846. Thus, this new term was used in the new field of study, with the term many folklorists went into studying different areas of the subject. According to Dorson (1972)[1], folklore is classified into the following 4 broad categories namely oral literature, material culture, folk custom, and folk performing art. The oral literature consists of all forms of oral traditions like hymns, stories, songs, phrases, poetry, rhymes, proverbs, riddles. Though it is not necessary for all the oral folk traditions to be verbal some may be in form of hollers, cries, laments, chants, or other sounds.

In the communication studies, all these folklore forms are popularly known as folk media or traditional folk media (Dutta, 2004). The folk media in India is further classified into 8 broad categories, by Parmar (1975) as traditional folk theatre forms (example: Bhaona, Jatra, Bhari-gaan), puppetry (example: Putul Nach or Putala Nas, Kath Putli), folk dances (example: Chau, Bihu, Bhangra, Garba, Ghumar), festivals (example: Junbeel Mela, Pushkar Mela, Kumbh Mela), traditional youth clubs (example: Yo, Morang, Deka), traditional designs (example: Swastika, Lakshmi footprints, Zig Zag patterns of Nagas), sounds, signals, and speeches (example: Drum Beats, Uludhwani) and oral literature cum musical forms (example: Baul, Bhatiali, Powada, Lavani)[2] .

Review of literature

Every dynasty has its culture and habits beautifully narrated through these stories. It states clearly that the oral culture was initiated to create a relation between the humans and nature (which was then considered to be super powerful) than gradually with the advancement of time, the storyline changed from nature to gods and myths delivering stories with values to the people. The instances

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[1] Richard M. Dorson in his book Folklore and Folklife an Introduction, discusses in detail about the branches of folklore and its uses in day to day life.

[2] Baul is a form of folk song in Bengal comprising both parts of present Bangladesh and West Bengal; Bhatiali is also a form of folk song in Bengal, which was mostly sung by the boatman's of Bengal; Lavani is also a form of folk song and dance of Maharashtra; Powada is a form of folk poetry in Maharashtra.

of Greek mythology and Chinese mythology explains how nature was part of a plot in stories (the stories of the union of earth and sky). The art of storytelling dates back to the Neolithic times, earlier the people used to gather around the fire in the evening and eat, dance, and share their stories, as one would end their story the other would start their story and the rest would listen. While initially, the topics were narrow but with the advent of time the topics covered a large area and became vast (Huang, 2018).

According to Penjore (2005), Bhutanese folktales has clear indication of contribution in different aspects of the society especially children related matters. Underprivileged children got their knowledge from these folktales as they could not afford to get the schools unlike those from the royal families. It also explains the importance of sharing folktales with the children as only sending them to school was not enough for their all-round development as educational institutions with give them curriculum based knowledge and impart them theoretical knowledge while the moral values, local history, and learnings from the experiences can be imparted only through folktales. It also indicates that the primary learning of every child starts from home where the members impart them through folktales. Their folktales have a wide range of stories from dynasties, monks, rich people, kings, working people, and poor. These stories have a long history as they have stories of age-long kingdoms and dynasties and the tales of their bravery and wars. Such stories have a life lesson for the children facing different challenges. The policy recommendations of Bhutan in regard to folktales transmission through various media are also described.

Another study looks into the *Patachitra* art of Bengal[3], the famous art culture which captured the oral literature through its images and paintings. During those days the oral literature was not documented through writings, thus the *patachitra* art became an essential part of archiving the oral tales. The tales of migration, socio-cultural evolution, and the trading stories are depicted through this art. The reprinted version of *patachitra* helps in the documentation of cultures and society in an archaeological and anthropological survey. Thus, *patachitra* first marked the preservation of oral culture in the eastern parts of India (Bajpai, 2015).

In a project titled "A Model for Animation of Yorùbá Folktale Narratives" a group of scholars have been working on the Yorùbá folktale narratives and trying to design a model for animation. A paper based on the project argues that animation as a multimedia element has drawn the

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[3] Patachitra is a form of folk art in Bengal, where the evolution over years of the community has taken the form of art. The folk art recites the various stories of the community.

attention of both young and old, and has shown to be a veritable tool for both formal and informal education used in making sense of place, culture and heritage serving as a medium for fostering the spirit of reading among children and younger adults, promoting socio-cultural norms, and values, preserving and conserving our cultural heritage and revitalization of our indigenous languages (Aládé, et al. 113). Another important work is based on how to develop cartoons of local folktales that will be of huge benefits to Nigerians. The activities were divided into 5 stages; analysis, design, development, implementation and evaluation which involved various processes and use of various specialized software and hardware (Ibrahim, et al. 19). Another similar kind of study, whose objective is to develop a digital animation film using Yoruba folktale narrative as a case study with a view to providing a framework to enhance the production of animated folktales as well as supporting Africa's rich cultural heritage, using relevant technology resources (Mayowa, 47). But all these three studies are conducted from the computer science background with technical perspective, not from the viewpoint of animation storytelling narrative of folktales.

From the literature studied during this research, we got to know about the developments and history of folktales of various countries, their purposes, and the roadmap of taking their respective traditional folktales to the present-day generation. But there seems to be a lack of study in the folktales-based animation moves as a whole and also an Indian perspective. The deeper study on Indian folktales and its outreach will give a detailed insight into our traditional folktales, how far have they developed in comparison with the different regions of India.

Methodology

To conduct the research, literature related to the history of folktales and animations, the importance of animations in popularizing and preserving the folktales are studied. Content analysis was applied in this study to analyze each animation individually. A qualitative approach was undertaken to analyze the stories based on the five analyzing parameters such as- a) the Quality of Animation, b) Dialogues, c) Music, d) Characters And e) Storyline.

Selection procedure:

Since the list of Hindi animation movies was more in quantity than the other two languages, the most viewed animations from each collection were selected for the research from a YouTube analytic. Each of these animations is analyzed based on the five mentioned criteria, so that findings remain impartial for each language. A total of 30 animation movies were selected based on the number of views, of which was 10 movies of each of three languages.

Types of sources:

The data used for this research both literature and video are taken from secondary sources, each data is taken from the public domain with copy left policies and there is no license issue in these sources. The literature and videos are used by fair means. Due to the current prevalent situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, outdoor survey or personal interviews to assess the impact of these videos were not feasible, so the research is carried out with all the help taken from secondary sources.

Conceptual Framework

The culture and history of a particular group of people or society, which are transmitted orally throughout the generations, are folklore. Folklores are passed on through two important agents – firstly the active narrator and secondly the passive listener, wherewith time the passive listener turns into the narrator after a certain point. Every society has its own history of kings, unsung heroes, dynasties, in a manner that the history is passed on from one generation to another. Folklore has various categories of folktales, songs, dance, riddles, etc. Folktale is a category of oral literature or verbal art under folklores; different countries across the globe have their different outlook on folklores. Folklores were meant for all people in the society before the division of society into castes, after the division, the folklores became a part of the lower or labour class people of the society. As described by many western folklorists the folklore is of peasants, the poor, labour and so on. But we find the evidence of the existence of folklore since the primitive ages, when men started to settle down and habitation started, we find the traces from the stone age. These cultures are long ages old; it holds its vast history folklore has in it the transition of the group from its very beginning; the stories are interpreted and reinterpreted in various ways throughout the years (Propp, 1984).

Folktales and animation both are vital for the society; here animations help the folktales get popular through its medium, since animation attracts the children a lot. Digital animations comparatively being a new media can be reached to many at the same time. When the children watch any animation, they learn a lot from their multimedia experiences, especially when they watch animations of other more popular cultures they tend to follow and get ignorant of their own culture. So, when the animation movies based on folktales are made of their own regional folk stories and depict their culture, the children get to know more about the culture and inculcate those cultures within them. Many regions despite having rich folk culture but due to lack of technological advancements fail to match up with the present-day world and lack behind in

putting up their stories to their children. Here the primary reason for regional folktale animation is to pass on the stories to the children and then secondarily, to put up for the global audiences (Ibrahim, 2013).

Discussion and findings:

Throughout the analysis, a vast difference can be seen in the animated folktales in the selected languages.

The Hindi animated folktales

Hindi animated folktales are huge in number, most of the folktales are found in the animated form. Their stories are well structured and presented, we can find a variety of options for Hindi folktales, we can find proper series of each folktale which are well preserved in the digital platform. The very first thing that attracts the audiences in Hindi animated folktales is the quality of the animation, which is of very high resolution, technically perfect and professionally made. Each and every story is easily found in different digital content sharing platforms, the stories range from epic Ramayana, Mahabharata to Tenali Rama, Akbar Birbal and so on. The languages used are easily understandable, the music and sound effects, visual effects everything adds on to the quality of the animation. There are various channels where we can find the same folktales, so it gives an option to the audiences to select the better ones in terms of quality and presentation; it also creates a scope of healthy competition among the creators to create quality content for the audiences. A great level of expertise and professionalism is used to make these animations, which results in a standardized content. Based on the quality of the animations, it is also clearly visible the huge popularity of the Hindi animated folktales compared to the other animation movies of the regional languages. The animations have the right tone and amount of narration and dialogues of the characters, which helps the audiences in a better understanding of the plots. The movement of the characters and the transition of the scenes are smooth and spontaneous making the animation worth watching.

The Assamese animated folktales

Assamese animated folktales have a very limited number of folktales in the digital platform rather than a handful of them. The quality of the animations is very meagre as it is just an amalgamation of images inserted into a video, there are very few which can be considered as a proper video. Except, the animated movies like 'Latkan', the image quality of many of them is very poor due to a lack of professional skills and techniques. The plots are not well structured and presented in a

modest form, which fails to attract more audiences and thus fail to gain popularity. While searching the animation movies based on folktales in the Assamese, the results were very limited, there was no such dedicated YouTube channel for Assamese folktales animation. The videos were from random channels where they cover folktales in occasional times. The stories are mostly narrated rather than smooth dialogue delivery between the characters. One of the major drawbacks is the picture quality, the images get blurred most of the time also the movement of the characters is not smooth. The transition of scenes breaks down which causes hindrances while watching the animation. The very famous folktales are hard to find in animated form. The tone of the narration is very monotonous, which makes it all the harder to concentrate throughout the story. The scenes are plotted and presented in some stories, while in others it is confusing. The Assamese animated folktales fail to create a target audience through their animations due to a lack of involvement and techniques. However, there are many video films made on the folktales of Assam, most particularly the folktales of 'Burhi Air Xadhu' are filmed with the real characters but not in animated form.

Bengali animated folktales:

The Bengali animated folktales somewhat stand in a better position if compared to the other regional lingual animations. A long list of results come out when searched for Bengali animated folktales, there are various stories covered but not all stories are covered through animations some important stories are definitely missing. There are very few dedicated channels for folktales, the professional and skill level is moderate in some stories, higher in some, and poor in some selected stories. The quality of the video is decent, it does not get blurred and images do not get glitches. There are proper distinct narrations and dialogue delivery throughout the stories. The music, sound effects and visual effects are found in most of the stories, but some stories are left behind in terms of quality and presentation. The animations are popular enough while some have a very high number of views, rest of the stories have a moderate number of views in comparison to the Hindi animation but higher popularity if compared to Assamese animated folktales. A variety of the same story is not available, there are single results for every folktale mostly unlike the Hindi folktales where we can find the same story in different channels presented and enunciated differently. Stories are available in series form. The stories are well sequenced; the quality of images is comparatively satisfactory but that of much higher resolution. The story runs smoothly and spontaneously, the lively characters also add to the attractions of the audiences.

Findings:

After the thorough content analysis of the animations on folktales of three different languages (Hindi, Bengali, Assamese), we can say that there is a huge difference in the making of animations in each language. The quality makes a huge difference in each animation. While the story can match at certain points, as folktales in different places can have same stories with little variations based on the regions. Through folktales we can understand the people and their history, the stories reflect the society. The stories impart moral lessons to the children or the audiences in the form of entertainment. The same story interpreted in different languages differs from one another in some way or the other. As we all know the children these days mostly watch Hindi animations rather than their own regional animations, through the observations of this study we can state the reasons or drawbacks of the regional animations due to which they fail to compete with the popularity of the animations in Hindi.

Drawbacks:

Some of the major drawbacks that are necessary to be highlighted. There is a wide gap in the views of the animations in different languages, due to the various factors. The quality of the video deteriorates when it goes to regional videos due to a lack of technological advancements and software and also a lack of professional expertise and skills. The technologies used in the Hindi animated folktales are much advanced that can meet the global standard while the regional animations fail to achieve that despite having great stories. The animations in Hindi are well created; every story is almost created through animations and is well maintained and preserved, whereas the regional animations are neither well maintained nor created that often if compared to the Hindi animations. The Hindi animations are easily available with lots of options for the same story, which is a major missing in the regional animations, as most of them are not available and people are left with no options but as to watch what is available. Both the regional languages animation has misleading titles and gives out the wrong information which directly shows the interest level of the people in preserving the stories. There is a dedicated channel or source to find Hindi animations, while the regional animations fail in doing so. There is no such dedicated channel for animations; hence the wonderful stories are left out.

Considering only the views and of the analyzed stories, we can see a major difference, firstly in the number of views and secondly the stories. While there are folktales from various collections in Hindi, there are stories from only one collection in Bengali while in Assamese the stories are also mostly from one collection. The folktales in Hindi have views in crores, lakhs, and thousands based on the popularity of the series, the Bengali folktales have views in crores while the

Assamese folktales have comparatively much fewer views than the other two languages. It is of course, because of the population of West Bengal, Tripura, and Barak Valley of Assam along with Bangladesh, Bengali stories are seen most. But they are still less in number in comparison to the animated folktales in Hindi.

Conclusion

Unlike other countries, India has a huge collection of folktales that interlinks with the main classical stories, with the vast geographical expansion and each region has its own stories or different versions of stories in different states. As the traditional way of knowing the story was through oral means but in the present scenario, it has shifted to digital forms like animation due to various circumstances. To cope up with the present time of technological advancements and change in taste of audiences, the age-old stories can be preserved and made popular again through the use of animations. This audiovisual way attracts the present-day audiences and gives them the knowledge and information in a more interesting way.

The study shows the comparison between the animations of three different languages (Hindi, Bengali, and Assamese), while Bengali and Assamese being the regional folktales lack behind in all aspects of the Hindi animations. The regional stories are not transformed into animation form. As the children watch the other folktales they learn about the cultures of other region, but they fail to know their own society and its culture. One becomes ignorant to one's own culture and history and follows the other, so when the present generation becomes ignorant towards their own culture, the culture is set to be extinct.

The two most essential reasons to remake the regional folktales in digital form like animation are – to prevent the culture and history of the region from getting extinct and to preserve the stories for a longer time. These regions despite having rich folk culture are hard to find in the digital form, there are very few in fact very limited tales made in digital form on the other hand the Hindi animations are huge in number and popular too. Every collection of Hindi folktales is almost available in digital form, while the ratio of regional folktales falls down to less than half. Due to lack of availability, the great stories are also dying, which shows us the importance of making the animations from the folktales, to reach more audiences and keep the culture alive.

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Integrative Dialogue among Oral Genres Using the Example of Beninese Fairy Tales and Riddles

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Abstract

The term "Räthsel-Märchen" (Eng.: "Riddle fairy tale") was first used by the Brothers Grimm in the first edition of "Kinder- und Hausmärchen" (Eng.: "Children's and Household Tales"). With it, they titled the fairy tale 69, which was published in the later editions, namely, in the ones of 1837 and 1840 under the title Rätsel (Eng.: "riddle"). After them, riddles collectors and researchers used this term in their respective works to designate a category of riddles and fairy tales. This article focusses on the latter, using the Beninese fairy tales, especially those of the Fon, as a starting point to show how, through its narrative function in the fairy tale, the riddle contributes to an integrative dialogue between the two oral genres.

Keywords: Fon Fairy Tales, Riddle, Riddle Tales, Narrative Function, Integrative Dialogue

1. Introduction

Literature can be defined in the broadest sense as the totality of written and oral expressions of a people or of a period. For many African peoples, the fairy tale was the only form of literature that existed, as it was not written. The most popular genres of oral literature include fairy tales, proverbs, folk songs and riddles. It has already been proven that the various oral genres have several distinguishing features which enable them to be clearly categorised among themselves (for example in *EinfacheFormen* and in *Formen der Volkspoesie*). Despite this categorisation, the boundaries among many of these genres are still fluid. If one considers the Beninese oral genres, one finds that the fairy tale, for example, to a certain extent maintains a relationship with other oral genres. To be more precise: other genres of oral literature are used in Beninese fairy tales. For example, the relationship between Beninese fairy tales and songs and between Beninese fairy tales and proverbs has already be proven (for example in *Deutsch-beninische* and in *Hàn*). However, scientific work on the relationship between Beninese fairy tales and the riddles is still to be done. The question of the riddles in the fairy tales was raised with the first publication of the *Children's and Household Tales* of the Brothers Grimm, in which they used

the term "Räthsel-Märchen" for fairy tale 69 of the German version in 1812 (Neumann, n. p.). After them, riddle collectors and researchersfor example Wossidlo (*Mecklenburgische*) and Aarne (*Vergleichende*) as well as fairy tale researchers and folkloristsfor example Röhrich (*Wer*) adopted the term in their respective publications and explained the connection between the fairy tales and the riddles. Using the fairy tales of the Fon from Benin, the present contribution examines the problem of the riddle fairy tales in the Beninese collection, focussing on the narrative functions of the riddle in these fairy tales. The aim of the article is to work out the integrative dialogue between the two oral genres.

2. From the riddle to the riddle fairy tale

The riddle – the folk riddle – can be defined as a question that requires an answer (Jolles 119). A question that is not conditioned by knowledge is not a riddle. There were several forms of riddles: e.g. the factual riddles, the word riddles (anchored in the word, language game) and the arithmetic or number riddles. Jolles explains of a riddle game as follows:

> Bei dem Rätsel besteht kein Verhältnis von Mensch zu Welt. Hier stellt ein Mensch, der weiß, einem anderen Menschen eine Frage - aber er stellt jene Frage so, daß sie den anderen zum Wissen zwingt. Einer ist im Besitze des Wissens, er ist als Person der Wissende, der Weise; ihm steht ein zweiter gegenüber, den er durch die Frage veranlasst, seine Kraft […] daranzusetzen, gleichfalls in den Besitz des Wissens zu kommen und sich ihm als Weiser zu zeigen (129-130).[1]

A riddle is determined by two sides: a poser and a guesser or guessing person. In the narrative tradition of the Fon, fairy tale evenings are opened with riddle games. Children often have this role to play. These riddles take up various themes that reflect the Fon's everyday life. For example, they can refer to their farming activities, as the following Fon riddle prove: "One of God's creations always go out into the field unclothed, but always comes back home clothed. Who is it?" After the riddle question, the children should think and find the answer. In the case of the given riddle, the answer is the corn. The guesser of the riddle can stick to this short and concise but correct answer. He can also explain his solution if the other children have not understood it. In the example given, the solution is as follows: the maize germ is planted, germinates, becomes a plant and produces maize cobs. Then, the corn cob is harvested and brought home with its husk that envelopes and protects him. To sum up, the corn grain brought and planted in the field represents

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[1] Eng.: "In the riddle, there is no relationship between man and the world. Here, a person who knows, asks another person a question – but he asks that question in such a way that it forces the other person to know. One is in possession of knowledge, he is the knower, the wise man; opposite him, stands a second, whom he induces through the question to use his power […] to also come into possession of knowledge and to show himself as a wise man."

God's creation, which always goes out into the field unclothed; the second part of the riddle, in turn, represents the corn cob left in its wrapped husk after harvesting, which is brought home.

There should be a certain order in the solution of the riddle, especially if many applicants want to solve the same riddle. In this case, the person giving the riddle has the task of designate a candidate. If the candidate does not find the correct answer, the poser will designate another candidate until one of the candidates finds the correct answer. If no child can find the riddle, the riddle poser takes the floor again and announces the solution. The purpose of this riddle is twofold: firstly, it enables the children to develop their power of reasoning, and secondly, it aims to familiarise the children with the Fon's culture, worldview and way of life, as the riddle deal with their different areas of life. In the riddle game, the best riddle solvers are usually congratulated by compliments or applause. After the congratulations, the storytelling begins in the true sense of the world.

In addition, the riddle has also found its way into the fairy tale and even becomes the main motif in some Beninese fairy tales. Riddles and enigmatic questions appear which influence the core of the tales or the fate of main characters:

> Auch mancherlei Märchen leben heute noch im Volke fort, bei denen das Räthsel oder eine aufgegebene dreifache Frage […] den Kern der Erzählung auszumachen hat (qtd. in Neumann, n. p.).[2]

The riddle thus offers the fairy tale a narrative context. While Rußwurm places the riddle at the centre in his statement and gives it a high priority in riddle fairy tales, Neumann, on the second hand, focusses on solving the riddle: "Man versteht unter Rätselmärchen allgemein märchenhafte Erzählungen, in denen die Lösung oder Nichtlösung eines Rätsels oder einer rätselhaften Umschreibung eine zentrale Rolle spielen (n. p.)."[3]

The definition of the riddle fairy tale is not limited to what is mentioned, because the narrative material assigned to the term is very heterogeneous (qtd. in Neumann, n. p.).In the Beninese collection, there are several fairy tales with enigmatic endings which should also be regarded as riddle tales.

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[2] Eng.: "Even some fairy tales live on among the people today, where the riddle or an asked threefold question […] has to make up the core of the tale."

[3]Eng.: "Riddle fairy tale are generally understood to be fairy tale stories in which the solution or non-solution of a riddle or a riddle-like paraphrase plays a central role."

3. Fon riddle fairy tales and Fon fairy tales with riddle tasks

In the Fon fairy tales in which riddles are included, the motif associated with them varies from one fairy tale to another. In *Der unehrlicheBräutigam*[4](Lanmadousselo98 -102), for example, the main motif is the name guessing of three king's daughters. The fairy tale can be summarize as follows: A king has three beautiful daughters, whose real names nobody in the kingdom knew. Since he wants to give them to marry, he organises a competition in which the applicant, who succeeds in guessing the names of the king's daughters within seven days, would get the daughters to become wives. Humans and animals are among the applicants. Yogbo, a ghostly figure, is also among them. He knows that the daughters fetch water far from the royal court in a village and pass under a fruit tree and devices a ruse to find out their names. The day after the opening of the application, he hides of the fruit tree, picks a fruit from it and is on the lookout for the daughters. As soon as he has seen them, he lets the fruit in his hand fall down, thinking they would call each other in astonishment. But one of the daughters silently fetches the fruit and they continue on their way. On another day, Yogbo hides again on the fruit tree and picks several fruits. When the daughters pass under the tree again, Yogbo lets the fruit fall down, the daughters begin to fetch it by calling each other. In this way, Yogbo manages to remember the respective names of the daughters. Unfortunately, he falls ill the evening before the competition and cannot take part in it. He calls his trusted friend Asiansian (big stinking ant) to him and asks him to take part in the competition in his place and tells him the names of the daughters. He makes the following condition: After the competition, Asiansian should give him the king's daughters as wives. Asiansian agrees to this condition. But after he has successfully participated in the competition and the king has given him the daughters to wives, he decides to keep them. But Yogbo doesn't let up. He resorts to a ruse, contacts the daughters and tells them everything that has happened. This is how he manages to marry the king's daughters.

At the centre of this fairy tale is guessing the names of the king's daughters. The poser is the king and the guessers are humans, animals and ghosts. This is not just a game, because the solver gets the king's daughters to be wives. Since the poser assumes that none of the applicants knows the names of the daughters, it is up to the applicants to do their utmost to find them out. It is not a question of the applicants suggesting all the names they knew and hoping that this would enable them to find the names of the daughters. They have to ask for them or use trickery to find them out. This task of guessing names is therefore different from a real riddle game in which the answer is not necessarily given on the spot. Yogbo succeeds in eavesdropping on the names of the daughters though this cunning approach. The rehearsal of name guessing and the search of answer, which takes on a riddle-like game form, are two important components of the narrative

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[4]Eng.: "the dishonest groom".

structure of this fairy tale. There are the ingredients that spice up the plot. Furthermore, it is clear from the fairy tale that it is not enough to know the answer to the task. One should also be able to give it to the poser. It is understandable why the king gives Asiansian the daughters to wives instead of Yogbo, because he did not know that he is the true solver. So, the fact that latter resorts to a ruse to get the daughters back to wives restores justice in the fairy tale.

Apart from marriage, behind the name guessing in other Fon fairy tales is the love of a close relative or close relatives. There is no talk of a competition, as in the above-mentioned fairy tale, because such fairy tales are about only one guessing person, but about finding the names of pebble children. In these fairy tales, the name or names of the poser is the focus of the name guessing process. *The old woman and her pebble children*[5] tells of an old woman without children who comes across pebbles in the field. As they were beautiful and shiny, she wishes them as children. As soon as she has made this wish, the pebbles turn into human-like figures and become her children. But on one day, the pebble children ask the old woman to guess their names and threaten to change themselves back, if she doesn't find their names. The old woman manages to get their names with the help of a nightingale:

> The first is called HolokoHoloko,
> The second is called HolokoKpassa,
> The third is called HolokoTannyi,
> The fourth is called Atinmadobonume,
> The fifth is called Bonume,
> The sixth is called BonumeMinagan,
> The seventh is called Titigweti.

Thanks to the help the bird gives the woman, she manages to call the pebbles by their respective names and continue to keep them as children. It is not only in the Fon fairy tales that guessing name contributes to keeping a child or children. *Rumpelstiltskin* (*Children's and Household Tale 55*, German version) refers to an example case. The fairy tale is about a miller who, by boasting to a king, tells him that his daughter can spin straw into gold. According to this, the king has the daughter brought to his castle and puts her through several tests. He first takes her to a chamber full of straw and orders her to spin all the straw into gold by the early morning of the following day, threatening her with death, if she cannot do so. A little man helps the daughter after she has given him her collar and ring. When the king promises the daughter to marry her if she succeeds again in spinning the straw into gold, the little man refuses to help her and first asks her to have the first child she would have after marrying the king. The daughter accepts his proposal and he

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[5] Told by Moïse Kpangon, the 16. 07. 2016 in Bohicon/Benin and translated into English by me.

helps her to spin the straw into gold again. Thanks to the help of the little man to the daughter, the king marries her and they have a child. As agreed, the little man appears to fetch the child. But the queen did not want to keep her promise. So, the little man makes the fate of the child dependent on guessing his own name. Since the queen doesn't know the name of the little man and still wants to keep her child, she goes in search of it. In the end, it is her messenger who succeeds in eavesdropping on the name from the mouth of the little man himself:

> Heute back ich, morgen brau ich,
>
> übermorgen hol ich der Königin ihr Kind;
>
> ach, wie gut ist dass niemand weiß
>
> dass ich Rumpelstilzchen heiß! (Rölleke 275)[6]

With the help of the messenger, the queen gives the name of the little man and keeps her child. The little man was so angry that he kills himself. The latter distinguishes the above-mentioned Fon fairy tale from this Children's and Household Tale. What both fairy tales have in common, is that neither the old woman in the Fon fairy tale nor the queen in the Children and Household Tale has managed to guess the name of the posers themselves. They only manage to do so with the help of another character. This leads to the conclusion that the task of guessing the names they have been given, excludes the generally known. These are not riddles in the true sense of the word, but rather pseudo-riddles:

> Sie [Scheinrätsel] sind im Grunde unratbar. Sie verrätseln nicht etwas allgemein Bekanntes, sondern man kann sie gar nicht raten, wenn man nicht die näheren Umstände kennt, die mit der Bildung des Rätsels zusammenhängen (Röhrich 221).[7]

In the Fon fairy tale *L'enfant terrible* [8](WekenonTokponto 25 - 40), there is talk of a sequence of riddle tasks, some as difficult as other. The fairy tale tells of a poor married couple who, after long

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[6] Eng.: "Today I bake, tomorrow I brew,
The day after tomorrow, I will take the queen's child,
Oh, how good is it that nobody knows
That I am not Rumpelstiltskin!"

[7] Eng.: "They [pseudo-riddles] are basically unsolvable. They do not riddle something that is generally known, but you cannot guess them unless you know the circumstances surrounding the creation of the riddle."
[8] Eng.: "The terrible child".

wishing in vain for a child, ends up having a child. The son is called Unyonwihudada (Eng.: "I am wiser than the king"). In the village where Unyonwihudada and his parents live, no one is allowed to say the word "dada" (eng.: "king"). So it was clear to Unyonwihudada's parents that, with this name, the life of their son are in danger. While Unyonwihudada and other children are playing in a courtyard opposite the royal palace one day, they call him by his name. At this time, the king is near the playing field and has hears the boy's name. Without hesitation, he orders that the boy should be brought to him. He wants to punish him because of his name. So he orders him, although it is raining at that time, to collect wet millet spread out on the ground in the king's court. The boy takes off his shirt and collects the millet in a short time. Because of this achievement, the king becomes angrier, makes the boy his servant and from then on, subjected him to difficult tasks, because he wants to kill him. On another day, he calls the boy to him again and hands him a white buck. He is supposed to take care of the buck for a year so that he can have a young one. The boy doesn't feel affected by the king's difficult task. On the contrary, he accepts the buck. Then he thinks up a trick. He gets an axe and goes under a big baobab near the royal palace and starts to cut it down. Because this act is considered as a crime of lese-majesty, many people run up to witness the boy's act. When the king hears the news that he is about to cut down the sacred baobab, he immediately runs over and asks him the reason of his action. The boy replies that his father has just given birth to a son. He fetches brushwood. He wants to use it to make a fire to watch the baby. After this reply, the crowd breaks out in laughter. The king wonders about this answer and asks him if a man could give birth to a child. Then the boy also asks him if a buck could give birth. With this answer, the whole crowd is on the boy's side and proves the king wrong. The king feels humiliated, so he looks for other ways and means to kill the boy. After a short time, he calls the boy to him again and hand him two stones. From them he should make two things that are indispensable for all mankind. There was a swamp behind the boy's flat, where all kinds of birds sit down. He goes there and asks each of the birds for a feather. The birds grant it to him and he lies down in the swamp and covers his whole body with twist. The colourful feathers he gets from the birds, he then holds on to the body, flies and sits down on the baobab he wanted to cut down before. From there, he overhears a conversation between the king and one of his sons, in which he discovers that the two things indispensable to humanity that he should make from the two stones he handed him were the sun and the moon. Without hesitation, he finds a stonemason, gives him the two stones and instructs him to make an artificial sun and an artificial moon with the two stones. In fact, the stonemason creates two works of art, similar to the sun and the moon. When the king calls a great assembly and asks for the soon and the moon, the boy takes the two works of art out of his pocket and shows them to him. Ashamed of the boy's wisdom, the king collapses and dies. And Unyonwihudada is appointed king.

In the fairy tales, two riddles tasks stand out: the boy should know how to take care of a buck in such a way that it can give birth and make two things out of two stones that are indispensable for the humanity. Taking the first riddle task into consideration, one comes to the conclusion that this is an unsolvable task, which clearly shows the intention behind it. The boy didn't panic because of the insolvability of the task. He thinks up a similar answer to reject and paralyses the disgusting task by a senseless action (Uther 207). The boy's answer has made the seemingly unsolvable task of the king solvable; because it is conditioned by knowledge that no buck can give birth. Jolles emphasis that the latter is an essential characteristic of a riddle question (here a riddle task): "This is not a Socratic question, a question that would be posed in such a way that a world is created in the answer, but a question that is already conditioned by knowledge and knowledge a condition (131)". Interesting is the second riddle task that the king gives to the boy to perform, for two reasons: First, the boy should already guess the two things that are indispensable for all mankind; second, he should use the stones that the king has given him to make these things out of the stones. The riddle answer could have been: the water and the air. But can stones be used to make them? The negative answer to this question is evident. The fact that the answer to the riddle question is the moon and the sun, two things that can be sculptured with stones, leads to the claim that the hinge of the riddle question is located at the word "stones". Bausinger points out that such riddles can be solved

> If in the quoted riddle the soft spot – and thus the possibility of getting lost – lies in the centre of the sentence [here the sentences], in other cases, the enigma does not start with the verb or the subject, but the hinge is located in some inconspicuous place (123).[9]

The boy did not guess the riddle himself, but rather, as in the above-mentioned Fon fairy tale, he heard the answer from the mouth of the king. After he shows the king the artificially created stars, the king gives himself the death. Jolles emphasises that the death of the poser after solving the riddle places the commented fairy tale in the category of riddle stories:

> In den Rätselerzählungen kommt das [das Verhältnis des Aufgebenden und Ratenden] dadurch zum Ausdruck, dass hier das Leben des Aufgebenden auf dem Spiel steht. Sobald das Rätsel [des Königs] geratenist, stirbt [er] (144).[10]

Thanks to his victory over the king, the boy experiences social advancement, which confirms the role of the riddle in the fairy tale.

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[9] Original version: "Liegt bei dem zitierten Rätsel die Weiche – und damit die Möglichkeit des Sich-verirrens – im Zentrum des Satzes [hier der Sätze], so setzt die Verrätselung in anderen Fällen nicht beim Verb oder beim Subjekt an, sondern das Scharnier sitzt an irgendeiner unauffälligen Stelle."

[10] Eng.: "In the riddle stories, this [the relationship between the poser and the guesser] is expressed by the fact the life of the poser is at stake. As soon as the riddle [of the king] is solved, [he] dies."

In the group of the Fon, a fairy tale cycle ends with a riddle question. In such fairy tales, heroes and heroines in danger appear, whose salvation is based on the help of several characters. Because of the abundance of help, the heroes of these fairy tales find it difficult to make a choice among the helpers and are embarrassed. The Fon fairy tale *Qui peutdénouer la situation*[11] (Mama 83 - 88), for example, reports on this: A beautiful girl named Adononsi has three trusted friends who have magical powers. The first one can make his eyesight so sharp that he can see over the long distances through dark jungles and high mountains with three words. The second has a shoe that can turn a boat faster than a hawk trying to catch a chick. And the third one is so strong that he can lift a huge baobab with one finger. In one day, Adononsi decides to visit relatives in a remote village, whose access is dangerous due to the present of a huge snake in the area. Although her friends try to dissuade her, she turns a death ear to their advice. A few days after her trip, her father contacts her friends and informs them that their friend is missing and asks for help. The friend who can see over great distances, mumbles some magic words and sees that the snake has kidnapped Adononsi and is holding her hostage in a very distant jungle in a big hole. In the village of Adononsi, however, all the villagers know that no woman who has been abducted by the snake has escaped him yet. So the situation of Adononsi is all the more difficult. In a flash, the friends go to the village river. There, one of the friends throws his magic shoe into the river. The shoe turn into a boat and they get in and start rowing. After rowing for a whole day, they see a bright light with the colours of the rainbow. The friend, who has supernatural strength gest out of the boat and goes into the jungle. At about the front, he comes across the huge snake, an unusually large snake wrapped around a tree and with its head set on the entrance to the hole, where Adononsi is. Carefully he walks up to the snake, which has not noticed his presence, raises its head with a finger so that the snake mistakes him for an ant, and frees Adononsi. On her return, a banquet is organised to celebrate Adononsi's redemption. A quarrel ensues between the three friends, who all want her as their wife. Even Adononsi does not succeed in making up her mind. Even the village elders, who are called to help, were undecided. The fairy tale ends with its title.

The help that the friends of Adononsi have given to free her from the snake is closely interdependent. No help among the three is superfluous. The stringing together of the aid is justified by the difficult nature of the rescue. It is precisely in these interdependent efforts of the helpers that the heroine's difficulty lies at the end of the fairy tale to choose a groom from among the helpers. Even the narrator does not dare to speak about it and leaves it to the listeners or readers of the fairy tale. In another Fon fairy tale, the help that some characters give the hero revolves around his resurrection. The fairy tale entitled *The man and his three women*[12] can be summarised as follows: A polygamous man who has three wives wants to visit his trusted sick

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[11]Eng.: "Who can solve the situation?"
[12] Told by Lucien Ghézo, the 16. 07. 2016 in Bohicon/Benin and translated into English by me.

friend who lives in another village with his wives. The day they decide to set off, it rained a lot. So, the river, which is located between the two villages and which the man and his wives have to cross, flows with a strong current. When they arrive at the river and want to cross it, the man, out of the caution, asks his three wives to let him across the river first so that they can remember its shallow part. The man then looks for a large stick to help him cross the river. After he has managed to cross the river with difficulty, he limps exhausted under a tree near the river and dies unexpectedly. The three Women, in turn, quickly cross the river and hurry to help their husband. They notice that he has already died. All are inconsolable. Because of the unexpected death of her husband, the first woman decides to go into the forest to be eaten by the wild animals. The second woman decides to return to the village to ask her relatives for help in burying the deceased. The third woman, for her part, wants to watch over the body of the deceased man so that no wild animals eat it. The second woman manages to get some people to help with the burial of the body at the side of the incident, because, according to the customs of the village, the dead should not be transported by river. The first woman, who has decided to be eaten by wild animals in the forest, meets a hunter in the forest and tells him all her suffering. The hunter promises to raise her husband back to life, if she can get him a snuff box. Since the first woman knows that her husband was a tobacco snuffer and always carried a snuff box with him, she accepts the hunter's condition and both of them go to the scene of the accident together. The two other women and the relatives are about to attend the deceased, when the hunter and the first woman appear and break off the burial. The first woman goes to the body of the deceased man and successfully searches for the snuff box in the pockets of the robe the dead man is still wearing. She hands it to the hunter who prepares a magic potion with the tobacco it contains, which he spreads on the body. The deceased wakes up immediately afterwards. When the resurrected man is told the story of his resurrection, he wants to know which of the three women loves him most deeply. The fairy tale ended with this indirect question.

In comparison to the fairy tales commented on above, the both latter differ in that they have a certain technique of riddle. They deal with the difficult situation of the heroes, which, in the course of the story, makes the reward of the helpers more difficult, due to the abundance of help that the heroes receive. The riddle question is the punch line of these tales, which is why they should also be regarded as riddle tales.

4. Conclusion

The examination of the topic shows that the border between the fairy tales – especially those of the Fon – and the riddles are fluid, because riddle or riddle tasks play an important role in the commented fairy tales. These are the rehearsals that the heroes and heroines have to complete in order to achieve happiness. Certain Fon fairy tales in which several helpers contribute to the

heroes' salvation also end with a riddle like-question. In such fairy tales, these riddle questions show the heroes' hesitation to choose one of the helpers. In this respect, the riddle-like final questions play a narrative role. In this way, the narrators allow the listeners or readers of the Fon fairy tales to think about the answer. Riddle or riddle tasks thus characterise the Fon fairy tales not only in terms of content but also in terms of narrative style. Thus, the Fon fairy tales and riddles are complementary to each other and are in an integrative dialogue. This dialogue is reinforced by the term "riddle fairy tales".

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Indian Literature: The Polyphonic Nature of Deconstructing Myths

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Abstract

In this modernized world, scientific invention may breathe life into poetry and poetry, along with myth will recreate and redefine literature. Like the way, we collect myths; we create and intrude into myths as well. Language and the world consist of myths and finally it gives birth to life.

Etymologically myth came from the Greek word 'muthos' which was later adopted by Latin. Though nowadays the word may signify something else, originally it used to refer to the combination of poetry and music.

If we consider myth to be an amalgamation of poetry and music, we can easily state that myth is an imaginative creation of an entire community. This creation is also a process of knowledge production which is explained through the various sensuous colours and forms of different experiences one gathers in one's life. In this process, language as well as the colours and forms change simultaneously and with them, the experiences are re-explained. Thus, the function of myth is to turn experience into knowledge and knowledge into colours and forms. The poet uses myth to achieve a universal truth, which is a general purpose of using myth in any form of verbal arts. Because, it is myth through which the deeper truth can express itself easily and it can expand the horizon beyond the day-to-day notion of beauty. The noted journalist and author, Italo Calvino from Italy opined, Myth is the hidden part of every story, the buried part the region that is still unexplored because there are as yet no words to enable us to get them. Myth is nourished silence as well as by words.

The novel Hanshuli Banker Upakathaby Tara Shankar Bandyopadhyay, which is centred on Indian freedom movement, starts with a particular myth of a whistling sound of semi-divine origin that comes from the forest at night and frightens the kahars. The use of myth along with modernity makes the novel truly polyphonic. The author portrayed the ups and downs of the residents of an insignificant and remote village called 'banshbadi', whose lives revolved around the river kopai. He described how the local beliefs, local myths and folklores were gradually changing and giving way to the modern lores and tales and creating a space for heteroglossia and polyphony. In this context, I have cited few indigenous and foreign authors, not only to strengthen my points, but also to show how myth crosses the spatio-temporal boundaries.

Keywords: Folklore, Myth, Deconstruction, Imagination, Tradition, Modernity, Voices

ভারতীয় সাহিত্য: মিথ, ঘাত-প্রতিঘাতের বিনির্মাণের বহুস্বর

সারসংক্ষেপ (*Abstract in Bengali*)

আজকের এই অত্যাধুনিক বিশ্বে বিজ্ঞানের নিত্য-নতুন আবিষ্কার কবিতাকে সঞ্জীবনী শক্তি দান করে এবং কবিতা মিথের সহযোগিতায় সাহিত্যকে পুনর্নির্মাণ ও পুনঃসংজ্ঞায়িত করে। যেমনিভাবে আমরা মিথ সংগ্রহ করি আবার একইভাবে মিথ তৈরি করে আমরা অজান্তেই এর ভেতরে প্রবেশ করি। ভাষা এবং এই জগৎ সংসার মূলতঃ মিথ-সৃষ্ট এবং চূড়ান্তরূপে এদের মিথক্রিয়ায় আমরা জীবনকেই নির্মাণ করি।মিথনতুনভাবে কথাসাহিত্যকে তৈরি করে কেননা প্রত্যেকটি সৃষ্টি মিথ। আমরা যেমন মিথ সংগ্রহ করি তেমনি আবার মিথ তৈরি এবং মিথের মধ্যে অজ্ঞাতে কখনোবা প্রবেশ করি। ভাষা ও জগৎটা মিথের এবং এই দুইয়ে মিলনে জীবন।

মিথ গ্রিক শব্দ মুথোস (Muthos) থেকে এসেছে। সম্ভবত আমরা এর আদি অর্থ পরে লাতিন অনুষঙ্গ ' মিথুস (Mythus) শব্দে হারিয়ে ফেলেছি। কবিতা ও সংগীতের পরিপূর্ণ মিলনের এক রহস্য ও জাদু এর মধ্যে নিহিত।

আমরা যদি মিথকে কবিতা ও সংগীতের মিলন রূপে কল্পনা করি, তাহলে এ সত্য আমাদের স্বীকার করতে বাধা নেই, মিথ হচ্ছে একটি সমগ্র জাতির কল্পসৃষ্টি। এই কল্পসৃষ্টির মধ্যে মানুষের জ্ঞান কাজ করে, জ্ঞানকে সে ব্যাখ্যা করে সতেজ সজীবতায়, ছবির রূপে রঙে বেদনায় সংবেদনার অনুভূতিতে। অভিজ্ঞতায় যে জ্ঞান পেয়েছে, সেই জ্ঞানকে এমনিভাবে ব্যাখ্যা করে। এক্ষেত্রে ভাষা অনবরত পরিবর্তিত হয়, ভাষার পরিবর্তনের সঙ্গে ছবি ও রঙ পাল্টায়, ছবি ও রঙের সঙ্গে সুর ও ব্যাখ্যা কিছু নতুন রূপ পায়।অভিজ্ঞতাকে জ্ঞানে, জ্ঞানকে ছবির মধ্য দিয়ে আর এক অভিজ্ঞতায় ধাক্কা দেওয়াই মিথের কাজ । সুতরাং কবি যখন মিথ ব্যাবহার করেন, তখন এক সর্বজনীন সত্যকে লাভ করতে চান, এমনকি কথাসাহিত্যের মধ্যেও মিথ সর্বজনীনতা প্রকাশ পায়। কেননা মিথের মধ্যে গভীর সত্য প্রকাশিত হতে পারে সহজভাবে। এমনকি সৌন্দর্য ছাড়িয়ে একটা বিশাল উপলব্ধির আকুলতা এই মিথ তৈরি করে। এই কারণেই মিথ কাব্যিক দর্শন হয়ে ওঠে। ইতালির বিশিষ্ট সাংবাদিক, কথাসাহিত্যিক ইটালো ক্যালভিনো (১৫ অক্টো ১৯২৩ -- ১৯ সেপ্টেম্বর ১৯৮৪) মিথ সম্পর্কে একটি উক্তি করেছিলেন -- *Myth is the hidden part of every story, the buried part the region that is still unexplored because there are as yet no words to enable us to get them. Myth is nourished by silence as well as by words.*

তারাশঙ্করের ' হাঁসুলী বাঁকের উপকথা '(১৯৪৭) স্বাধীনতার প্রেক্ষাপট, শুরুতেই মিথের আবির্ভাব। রাতে ঘন জঙ্গলে শিস কার -- দেবতা, যক্ষ কি রক্ষ, কার, কাহারেরা সন্ত্রস্ত। মিথ ও আধুনিকতায় উপন্যাসটি হয়ে উঠেছে বহুকৌণিকের কণ্ঠস্বর। বীরভূমের একটি নগন্য গ্রাম ' বাঁশবাদি ' কে কেন্দ্র করে নিম্নবর্গ মানুষদের নিয়ে লেখক ভাঙা গড়ার চিত্র অঙ্কন করেছেন। উপন্যাসে দেখা যায়, কোপাই নদীকে কেন্দ্র করে যে সব সম্প্রদায়ের মানুষের বসবাস তাদের যে লোকবিশ্বাস, পুরাণ, মিথ ছিল সেখান থেকে বেরিয়ে এসে নতুন বিশ্বাস আঁকড়ে ধরছে এবং বহুকৌণিকের গমক সৃষ্টি হয়েছে। আলোচনার সুবিধার্থে দেশি ও বিদেশি সাহিত্যের প্রসঙ্গ এনেছি সেটা কেবলমাত্র আমার বক্তব্যকে জোরদার করার জন্য নয় বরং ভাঙা গড়ার বিনির্মাণের জগতের ভিন্ন সময়ের স্বর কীভাবে উঠে এসেছে সেই বিষয়ে আলোকপাত করার চেষ্টা করেছি।

সূচক শব্দ (*Keywords in Bengali*): লোকবিশ্বাস, মিথ, ভাঙা গড়া, কল্পনা, জগৎ, সংস্কার, আধুনিকতা, উপাদান, কণ্ঠস্বর।

ভূমিকা

আমরা যদি বিশ্বসাহিত্যের মহাকাব্য থেকে শুরু করে মহৎ যেসব সাহিত্য রয়েছে তার দিকে তাকাই, দেখব যে, মহৎ সাহিত্য থেকে নতুন নতুন বর্গের(Genre), নতুন নতুন ঘরানা, নতুন নতুন বাঁকের সৃষ্টি হয়েছে। ঠিক সেভাবেই ভারতের দুটি মহাকাব্য রামায়ণ ও মহাভারত থেকে মিথ ও বাস্তবের সঙ্গে সঙ্গে বর্গের (Genre) সূত্রপাত হয়েছে। আর এই বর্গ তো পরিবর্তনের দারমুখি কেননা এগুলি তো ইতিহাসগত আশ্রয়। রামায়ণ প্রসঙ্গে বলা যায়, রাম সীতার ক্ষেত্রে মূল মিথ হল লোক প্রচলিত বিষয় এবং আর্যভাষী জনতার বিস্তারের সঙ্গে সঙ্গে স্থানিক ও সামাজিক পরিস্থিতি অনুযায়ী কালক্রমে বিবরণগত ও ব্যাখ্যাগত পার্থক্য আরোপিত হতে থাকে। মনে করা যেতে পারে, বাল্মীকি সে সময় ব্রাহ্মণ্যবাদী আর্য এলাকা মধ্যদেশে প্রচলিত এমনই কোনো একটি রূপক কাহিনি আশ্রয় করে সংস্কৃত ভাষায় রামায়ণ রচনা। রাম সীতা মিথের বিভিন্ন আখ্যান নিশ্চয়ই অন্যান্য স্থানে সেই সময়ে প্রচলিত ছিল। যেমন দশরথ জাতক ও অন্য কোনো জাতকের পাঠভেদের ব্যাখ্যাই তাই। আবার দেখা যায়, অশ্বঘোষের রচনায় রাম সীতা মিথের যে উল্লেখ রয়েছে এবং পরবর্তীকালেও দেশান্তরে এই মিথের যে অন্য কাহিনি প্রচলিত তারও ব্যাখ্যা একই।

মহাভারতের ক্ষেত্রে ভারতযুদ্ধ বা কুরুক্ষেত্র যুদ্ধের মূল মিথটি আপেক্ষিক বিচারে অপরিবর্তিত বলা যায়। পরস্পর মৌলিক পার্থক্যযুক্ত বর্ণনাগতপাঠভেদএক্ষেত্রে বিরল,যেটুকু পার্থক্য আছে তাতে যুযুধান উপজাতিগুলির অথবা যুদ্ধক্ষেত্রের প্রধান কুশীলবদের ভূমিকায় বিশেষ পার্থক্য নেই। এবং পারস্পরিক অবস্থার বর্ণনাও প্রায় একই।অর্থাৎ এই বিষয়ে রামায়ণ আর মহাভারতের মূল মিথ দুটির গুণগত পার্থক্যও তাৎপর্যপূর্ণ। তবে একথাও সত্য যুগ ও স্থানের পরিবর্তনের সঙ্গে সঙ্গে ব্যাসগণের কাব্যপ্রয়াসে শেষের কাহিনিতে ব্যাপক এবং বিচিত্র সংযোজন ও সমাবেশ ঘটেছে। এগুলি মূলত পৃথক, যোগসূত্রহীন বা অতি শিথিল সংযোগ মিথ, উপকথা, আখ্যান, উপাখ্যান, কল্পনা, নীতিশিক্ষা এবং ধর্মের পাদদেশে কেন্দ্রীয় মিথ কুরুক্ষেত্র যুদ্ধকে ঘিরে রচিত।

তারাশঙ্করের 'হাঁসুলী বাঁকের উপকথা'(১৯৪৭) স্বাধীনতার প্রেক্ষাপট, শুরুতেই মিথের আনাগোনা, মিথ ও আধুনিকতায় উপন্যাসটি হয়ে উঠেছে অনন্য। দ্বিতীয় বিশ্বযুদ্ধের কিছু আগের সময়ে বীরভূমের একটি নগণ্য

গ্রাম বাঁশবাদি। তার পাশ দিয়ে বয়ে যায় কোপাই। তারাশঙ্করের লেখায় একটা স্বাভাবিক ও স্বত:স্ফূর্ত বিচরণ ক্ষেত্র হল রাঢ়ভূমি।এক্ষেত্রে প্রেমেন্দ্র মিত্রের উক্তি স্মরণ করা যেতে পারে -- 'বাংলাদেশের ভৌগোলিক মানচিত্রে রাঢ়দেশের স্থান আছে ও থাকবে। কিন্তু সাহিত্যে তাকে অবিনশ্বরতা দিয়ে গেছেন তারাশংকর'[১](তারাশঙ্কর সংখ্যা, কোরক সাহিত্য পত্রিকা, ৫৩)। এটি একটি আঞ্চলিক উপন্যাস। আঞ্চলিকতার পটে সর্বজনীনতার বৃহত্তর ব্যঞ্জনা যে তারাশঙ্করের সাহিত্যে মূল কথা, সেটাও প্রেমেন্দ্র মিত্র সুন্দরভাবে বলেছেন -- 'প্রতিমা নিখুঁত করে অনেকেই গড়তে পারে, কিন্তু তার চক্ষুদানই হল আসল। শিল্পীর সেইটাই সবচেয়ে বড় পরীক্ষা। চক্ষুদান যথার্থ যদি না হয় তাহলে প্রতিমা গড়ার সব বাহাদুরী বরবাদ হয়ে তা মাটির পিন্ডই হয়ে থাকে মাত্র। সেই' চক্ষুদান 'এর ক্ষমতা যদি না থাকত, তাহলে রাঢ় দেশ নিয়ে তারাশঙ্কর যত কিছু লিখে গেছেন তা একটি বিশেষ অঞ্চল আর সময়ের দলিলধর্মী বিবরণের বেশি মূল্য ভাবীকালে পেত না'[২] (তারাশঙ্করসংখ্যা,৫৩)।

এই ভৌগলিক পটভূমিতে লেখক দুটি সম্প্রদায়কে রাখছেন -- গাঁয়ের বাবুমশাইরা এবং গ্রামের চাষি, সদগোপ, নাপিত, কোল প্রভৃতি সভ্য সম্প্রদায়। আর কাহারপাড়া যাদের নিম্নবর্গ বলা যেতে পারে। উপন্যাসে অসংখ্য চরিত্র আছে যেমন - সূচাঁদ, বনওয়ারী, করালী, প্রহ্লাদ, গোপীচাঁদ, রতন, অমন, পরম, পরমের স্ত্রী কালোশশী ইত্যাদি -- এদের প্রত্যেকের কিছু না কিছু ভূমিকা আছে। বনওয়ারী ও করালী উপন্যাসে মুখ্য ভূমিকা পালন করেছে। এরা নানারকম কুসংস্কার মানে। সমাজে প্রচলিত রয়েছে যে, সংসারে লক্ষ্মী এলেই নাকি সব ঠিক হয়ে যায়, যদিও এটা কাহারেরা মানে। বাবাঠাকুরের বাহন অর্থাৎ চন্দ্রবোড়া সাপ উঠানে পড়ে আছে, করালী দেখেই বুক চাপড়ে কেঁদে ওঠে । তাই সে বলে --' ওগো বাবা ঠাকুর গো ! ওরে আমার বাহন রে ! ওরে কি হবে রে ! হায় মা রে !'[৩] (বন্দ্যো,৩৫)। উপন্যাসে লক্ষনীয়, মাইতো ঘোষকে চন্দনপুর কারখানা থেকে তাড়িয়ে দিয়েছে অথচ সেই কারখানা সঙ্গে তার মায়ের ইতিহাস জড়িয়ে রয়েছে। তিন বছর আগে করালীর বাবা যখন মারা যায় তখন করালী ছেলে মানুষ সেই তখন থেকে হাঁসুলী বাঁকের উপকথা এক টুকরো গল্প -- গোটা পাঁচালীর মধ্যে কয়েকটা ছড়া। এসব অনেক দিনের পুরনো গল্প ; এখনও চলে আসছে এবং চলছেও। সেই সব ছড়া বলতে বনওয়ারীর মতো মাতব্বরেরা লজ্জা পায়। তাই সূচাঁদ বলে --' আ: তায় আবার লাজ কিসের? বলে সেই বেগুনে কেন খাড়া? না বংশাবলীর ধারা'[৪] (বন্দ্যো:,৩৮)।

তারাশঙ্কর অভিজ্ঞতার শিল্পী। সেই অভিজ্ঞতা কাজে লাগিয়ে তিনি একেবারে প্রত্যন্ত 'রাঢ়' অঞ্চলকে বেছে নিয়েছিলেন। তিনি সেই অঞ্চলের মানুষ হওয়ায় নিজ ভূমিকে দেখেছেন, চিনেছেন, ভালোবেসেছেন। তাই

বীরভূমের 'রাঢ়' ভূখণ্ডটি উপন্যাসের কেন্দ্রবিন্দু -- তার আদিবাসী কাহার, বেদে, ডোম, বীরবংশী, বাউরী,বাগদী, সাঁওতাল, চন্ডাল, ডাইনী প্রভৃতি নিম্নবর্গের মানুষ গুলির জীবনচিত্র অঙ্কন করেছেন। উপন্যাসে যেসব মানুষের কথা বলা হয়েছে তারা সমাজে পিছিয়ে পড়া মানুষ, আধুনিক 'সাবলটার্ন' তত্ত্ব অনুযায়ী নিম্নবর্গের আওতায় চলে আসে। 'সাবলটার্ন'এর বাংলা প্রতিশব্দ 'নিম্নবর্গ'। ১৯৮০ দশকে ' সাবলটার্ন ' শব্দটি ভারতীয় ইতিহাস চিন্তায় একটি মুখ্য স্থান অধিকার করে নিয়েছে। নিম্নবর্গের বৈশিষ্ট্য হতে পারে --

১) সমাজে পিছিয়ে পড়া মানুষ।

২) যাদেরকে সবসময় কোনো ধনী বা প্রভাবশালী ব্যক্তি দমিয়ে রাখতে চায়।

৩) এদের কোনো প্রতিবাদের কণ্ঠস্বর থাকে না।

পঞ্চাশের দশকে ফরাসি চিন্তাবিদ রোলাঁ বার্ত তাঁর 'মিথোলজি' গ্রন্থটিতে মিথ তন্ত্রের সূক্ষ্ম বিচার বিশ্লেষণ করেছেন। তাঁর মতে, মিথ সমাজকে বেঁধে রেখে সামাজিক ঐক্য ও পরম্পরাকে ধরে রাখে।সেই সঙ্গে অতীতের পুরাণ, বিশ্বাস, সংস্কার ইত্যাদিকে স্বতন্ত্রভাবে এগিয়ে নিয়ে যায়। সমাজের মধ্যে মিথের ভাঙা গড়ার প্রক্রিয়া চলতে থাকে। মিথ সব সময় পরিবর্তনের কারণ মিথ কখনো নির্দিষ্ট জায়গায় থেমে থাকে না।

'হাঁসুলী বাঁকের উপকথা' উপন্যাসে ঔপন্যাসিক নিজেই লিখেছেন -- "হাঁসুলী বাঁকের দেশ কড়া ধাতের মাটির দেশ। এদেশের নদীর চেয়ে মাটির সঙ্গে মানুষের লড়াই বেশি। 'খরা' অর্থাৎ প্রখর গ্রীষ্ম উঠলে নদী শুকিয়ে মরুভূমি হয়ে যায়, ধূ ধূ করে বালি --একপাশে মাত্র একহাঁটু গভীর জল কোনো মতে বয়ে যায়।... মাটি তখন হয়ে ওঠে পাষাণ। ঘাস যায় শুকিয়ে,মাটি গরম হয়ে ওঠে আগুনে পোড়া লোহার মত; কোদাল কি টামনায় কাটে না, কোপ দিলে কোদাল টামনারই ধার বেঁকে যায়; গাঁইতির মত যে যন্ত্র সে দিয়ে কোপ দিলে তবে খানিকটা কাটে কিন্তু প্রতি কোপে আগুনের ফুলকি ছিটকে পড়ে। খাল বিল পুকুর দীঘি চৌচির হয়ে ফেটে যায়। বীরভূমের এই মাটির পরিচয় তারাশঙ্করের অভিজ্ঞতায় পাওয়া যায় পরবর্তীকালেও। 'আমার কালের কথা' য় নিজের সূতিকাগৃহ প্রসঙ্গে তারাশঙ্কর লিখেছেন, মাটির মেঝে, শক্ত পাথুরে রাঙামাটির দেওয়াল দিয়ে গড়া উত্তর দুয়ারী কোঠাঘর আজও অটুট আছে।... ঘরখানির সামান্য পরিবর্তনের জন্য বছর কয়েক আগে খানিকটা দেওয়াল ভাঙার প্রয়োজন হয়েছিল, কোদাল, টামনা, শাবল হার মানলে, শেষে গাঁইতি আনা হল;

দেওয়াল ভাঙল বটে কিন্তু সেদিন যে আগুনের ফুলকি ছড়িয়েছিল গাঁইতির আঘাতে, তা আজও আমার চোখে ভাসছে "[৫](মুখো:,৭৪)

মিথ তো বহুস্তরীয় ভাবনার সংমিশ্রণ। যদি আফ্রিকার সাহিত্যে মিথের কথা ভাবি দেখব যে, লেখ্যচর্চার আগে এই মহাদেশের সাংস্কৃতিক ঐতিহ্যের একমাত্র উপায় ছিল বংশানুক্রমে মৌখিকভাবে বয়ানকে ধরে রাখা। তাদের ইথিওনিয়া ও লাইবেনিয়া নামে দুটি জনগোষ্ঠীর ছিল। এই দুটি ছাড়া সাহারা উপান্তের আফ্রিকায় ইউরোপীয় আসার আগে লেখার ছিল না। সেজন্য তাদের পুরা আখ্যান একটি নির্দিষ্ট অঞ্চলে সীমাবদ্ধ থেকে যায়। সময়ের সঙ্গে সঙ্গে বদলে যায় তাদের আর্থ সামাজিক প্রেক্ষাপট। বংশানুক্রমিক মৌখিকভাবে যেটা প্রচলন ছিল সেখান থেকে সরে আসে। আসলে আফ্রিকায় অঞ্চল ভিত্তিক কতম বা গোষ্ঠীগুলির মধ্যে পারস্পরিক দূরত্ব থাকায় এবং বিজ্ঞানের প্রসার না থাকার ফলে আফ্রিকা ছিল পুরো আখ্যানের সম্ভাবনাপূর্ণ ভূমি।

ঔপনিবেশিক শাসনে নিজেদের সংস্কৃতি কৃষ্টি প্রজাতিকে গৌরবান্বিত করার লক্ষ্যে উচ্চবর্ণ সম্প্রদায়ের সাদা চামড়ার মানুষেরা হাজারবার একথাই বলে এসেছে যে, পাশ্চাত্য সংস্পর্শের আগেই এই মহাদেশের কোনো সংস্কৃতি ছিল না। এই অবমাননাকর কথা স্বদেশবাসীর মনে তীব্র প্রতিক্রিয়া তৈরি করে, ফলস্বরূপ সাহিত্যিকরা প্রমাণ করেন যে, তাদের মাতৃ পিতৃভূমি কোনোদিনই সংস্কৃতিহীন ছিল না। সেজন্য চিনুয়া আচেবে প্রত্যুত্তরে জানালেন --" য়ুরোপীয়দের থেকেই কৃষ্টির কথা প্রথমবার জানছে আফ্রিকা তা নয়। অপরিচিতের হাতে দেশ মানুষের অপমান। অবমাননা থেকে মনুষ্যত্ব, মানবিকতাকে ফিরিয়ে আনলেন রচয়িতারা তাঁদের সৃষ্টি কৃতিতে। ঔপনিবেশিক শাসনে চাপা পড়ে যাওয়া স্বদেশের ইতিহাস উদঘাটনে দেশবাসীর সঙ্গে বৃত হলেন লেখক শিল্পীরা। স্ট্যানলেন সমকাঙ্গে ' অন ট্রায়াল ফর মাই কান্ট্রি ' উপন্যাসে সেসিল রোডেস এর ঔপনিবেশিকরনের ঐতিহাসিক আখ্যান শোনালেন আমাদের "[৬] (সেন ওসিংহ, ৮১)।

'হাঁসুলী বাঁকের উপকথা' উপন্যাস লেখক খুব সচেতন দৃষ্টিভঙ্গিতে শিল্পরূপ নির্মাণ করেছেন। উৎসর্গ পত্রে কবিশেখর কালিদাস রায়ের উদ্দেশ্যে লিখেছেন -- সেখানকার মাটি মানুষ তাদের অপভ্রংশ ভাষা - আপনার সুপরিচিত। রাঢ় অঞ্চলের রাঢ়ী উপভাষা উপন্যাসে অনেকাংশেই জুড়ে আছে। হাঁসুলী বাঁকের মানুষেরা বলে ক) 'রঙ' কে বলে 'অঙ', 'রাম' কে বলে 'আম', 'রজনী' কে বলে 'অজনী', 'রীতিকরণ' কে বলে 'ইতকরণ' খ) 'অ্যামোনিয়া' কে বলে 'আলুমিনি', 'অ্যালুমিনিয়াম' কে বলে 'এনামিলি'।কাহারেরা আবার ভীষণ রসিকতার

মানুষ। যখন কোনো মনিব বেশি জট পাকায় তখন তাকে ওরা Code নাম দেয় যেমন, পাকু মণ্ডল, মোটা হলে ' হেদো মন্ডল। এমনকি তারা যখন কোনো কিছুতে প্রশংসা করে তখন বলে 'বাহা বাহা'।

কাহারদের মধ্যে যখন ঝগড়া হয় তখন একদিনে থামে না দিনের পর দিন চলতে থাকে। তাদের মধ্যে গালিগালাজ, ঝগড়াঝাটি নিত্যদিনের ব্যাপার, এই সংস্কৃতি পুরুষানুক্রমে চলে আসছে। সূচাঁদ যেহেতু বয়সে সর্বশ্রেষ্ঠা তাই সে একটু মন্ত্র জপ জানে। নয়ান হাঁপানিতে ভুগছে, সূচাঁদ তাকে একটা মাদুলি দেবে যাতে তা থেকে মুক্ত হয়। এই বিশ্বাস বর্তমান সমাজ ব্যবস্থা রয়েছে কিন্তু আধুনিক সভ্যতার কাছাকাছি এসে মিথেৎ জগতের প্রতিরূপ তৈরি করার ক্ষমতা ক্রমশ হ্রাস পায়। হাঁসুলী বাঁকের দিন চলে গেলে রাত্রি নেমে আসে - এই রাত্রির সঙ্গে জাঙল চন্ননপুরের রাত্রি অনেক তফাৎ। হাঁসুলী বাঁকের কাহারেরা কেরোসিনের ডিবা জ্বেলে কর্তা ঠাকুরের নাম নিয়ে জটলা পাকিয়ে বসে। ছেলে ছোকরারা ঢোল বাজিয়ে কখনও ধর্মরাজের বোলান, কখনও গায় মনসার গান পাঁচালি, কার্তিক থেকে মাঘ ফাল্গুন পর্যন্ত শীত -- তখন গান বাজনার আসর ঝিমিয়ে আসে কেননা ধান কাটার ফসল তোলার সময়। চৈত্র মাসে নতুন করে ঘেঁটুগান, সংক্রান্তির শেষের দিকে বসে গাজন, বোলানের গানের পালা। কাহারদের কাছে অলৌকিক দেবদেবীর কথাই হয়ে উঠেছে একমাত্র সত্য -- এটা যুগ যুগ ধরে চলে আসায় মিথ বিশ্বাসে পরিণত হয়েছে। আটপৌরেদের লোকায়ত ঘেঁটুগানের জোর সত্যিই বেশি। সেজন্য বনওয়ারী দাঁড়িয়ে শোনে –

"হায় কলিকালে, কতই দেখালে
দেবতার বাহন পুড়ে ম' ল অকালে, তাও মারলে রাখালে।
ও তার বিচার হল না বাবা, তুমি বিচার কর।
অতি বড় বাড়িল যারা, তাদের ভেঙে পাড়ো" [৭] (বন্দ্যো:, ৮৯)

কাহারেরা এও বিশ্বাস করে যে, প্রথম প্রথম যখন উঠবে তার ভোগ দিতে হবে বাবাঠাকুরের থানে। যেখানে থাকবে মুগসিদ্ধ, বরবটি সিদ্ধ আর এক বোতল মদ। কোপাই নদী এবং হাঁসুলী বাঁকের প্রকৃতির সঙ্গে অত্যন্ত শ্রেণির এতটাই একাত্মতা। কাহারেরা তাদের প্রাচীন সংস্কার ও বিশ্বাস নিয়েই পড়ে আছে। এ জগৎ, আলাদা জগৎ। তাদের ঐতিহ্য, তাদের অন্ধবিশ্বাস, তাদের রীতিনীতি আদব কায়দা, তাদের সংস্কার নিয়ে গড়া এই জগৎ; যেখানে আধুনিক সভ্যতার আলো এসে পৌঁছায়নি। এই আদিম পদ্ধতিতে জীবন ধারণকারী অন্ত্যজ

কাহার জীবনেও একদিন সভ্যতার আলো এসে পৌঁছাল। আলো এনে দিল কাহারদের ছেলে তথা আধুনিকতার প্রতীক করালী।

হাঁসুলী বাঁকের উপকথা, কাহাদের জীবনকথা। সেই জীবন -- মানুষ, প্রকৃতি, বিধির বিধান, আচার-বিচার, ধর্মসংস্কার, মিথ দিয়ে গোড়া। এই উপন্যাস উপকথা, না ইতিহাস সেই নিয়ে দ্বন্দ্ব আছে ---"ইহা ইতিহাস নহে, উপকথা। ইহার জীবনযাত্রা অতিপ্রাকৃতের ঘন কুহেলিকামন্ডিত ; পৌরাণিক কল্পনা, অলৌকিক সংস্কার ও বিশ্বাস, প্রাচীন কিংবদন্তি ও আখ্যান, সদ্য অতীতের ঘটনা প্রতিফলিত জীবন দর্শন -- এ সমস্তই প্রাত্যহিক জীবনের রন্ধ্রেরন্ধ্রে, গভীরভাবে অনুপ্রবিষ্ট । হাঁসুলী বাঁকের কাহারদের জীবন দর্শন অপরিবর্তনীয় ভাবে স্থিরীকৃত -- কাহারদের জীবনের যাহা কিছু ব্যতিক্রম ও বিপর্যয়, যাহা কিছু আকস্মিক ও অসাধারণ সবই দেবলীলা, অদৃশ্য -- শক্তির দুর্বোধ্য অভিপ্রায় হইতে উৎক্ষিপ্ত. . . অশীতিপর বৃদ্ধা সূচাঁদ এই দৈবশক্তির অধিকারিণী ও ব্যাখ্যাত্রী; হাঁসুলী বাঁকের জন্ম বৃত্তান্ত, উহার অতীত কাহিনি, উহার কৈশোর ও প্রথম যৌবনের সমস্ত উড্ডট কল্পনাও অতিপ্রাকৃত অভিজ্ঞতা পারলৌকিক জগৎ হইতে অভ্যাগত প্রতিটি ধ্বনিও স্পর্শ, দেবতার রোষ ও প্রাসাদের প্রতিটি নিদর্শন তাহার স্মৃতির ঐতিহাসিক আঁধারে অখন্ড সমগ্রতায় ও প্রথম অনুভূতি গাঢ় বর্ণলোপ অবিস্মরণীয়ভাবে রক্ষিত। সেই এই সম্প্রদায়ের Prophet বা আধ্যাত্মলোকের সহিত যোগাযোগ রক্ষার সেতু "[৮] (সিংহ ও সেন, ১৫১)।

করালী, কাহারদের ধর্ম সংস্কারে আঘাত এনেছে, সংস্কৃতিতে এনেছে পরিবর্তন। শোষকের অন্যায়ের প্রতিবাদ করেছে সে। উপকথায়, ইতিহাসে যুগান্তকারী পরিবর্তন ঘটেছে। কাহার সংস্কৃতিতেও পরিবর্তন । করালী পাখির সঙ্গে 'সাঙা' এমনই পরিবর্তন সূচিত করল। কাহারপাড়া উপকথায় বরের সাজ সজ্জায় করালী কলিযুগে এনেছে। প্রবীনদের মতে, 'এতটা ভালো নয়'। সম্ভবত বনোওয়ারী এর কোনো বিহিত করেনি, কালোশশী ঘটিত দুর্বলতার জন্য বরং নয়ানের ঘর ভেঙে কোরালীর ঘর বসানোর জন্য, সে সমালোচিত হয়েছে। তবে সূচাঁদের আক্ষেপ নয়ানের মায়ের গালিগালাজ শুনে, তার মনে হয় - করালী কর্তার বাহনটিকে মেরে অন্যায় করেছে -- আর তখনই তার হয়ে কর্তার কাছে ক্ষমা প্রার্থনা করে কিন্তু শাস্তি দিতে পারে না। অদ্ভুত প্রক্রিয়ায় সে বুঝতে পারে, কর্তা তার উপর ক্রুদ্ধ হননি। নিশ্চিত মনে বিয়ের আসরে এসে দেখে, সেকালের বুড়ি সূচাঁদ, একালের বিয়ের আসর জমিয়েছে।

এই সংস্কার গ্রাম্য মানুষের মনে বাসা বেঁধেছিল। সুতরাং শিক্ষিত কাহারদের মধ্যে এই সংস্কার খুব স্বাভাবিকভাবেই প্রতিফলিত হতে দেখা যায়। সূচাঁদের মুখে শোনা যায় -- হাঁসুলী বাঁকের সেকালের ভৌতিক লোকের ইতিকথা।

কিন্তু যখন তারা সেকালকে অতিক্রম করে একাল অর্থাৎ আধুনিক যুগে আসার সঙ্গে সঙ্গে তাদের সব কিছুতেই পরিবর্তনের রূপ লক্ষ্য করা যায়। এই যুগ পরিবর্তনের ফলে অন্ত্যজ কাহার কুলের প্রাচীনা সূচাঁদও যেন সন্দিহান হয়ে ওঠে। তার বিশ্বাস কিছু কমেনি কিন্তু এ যুগের মানুষের মনে যে সন্দেহ ঘনীভূত -- তা সূচাঁদের বক্তব্যে প্রমাণিত -- মানুষের আধ্যাত্মিক জীবনের মতো এতেও যেন পরিবর্তন ঘটেছে। এখন ভূত হলে চন্ননপুরের ছোকরাবাবরা বন্দুক নিয়ে পাহারা দিয়ে পরীক্ষা করে দেখতে আসবে।

অন্ত্যজ শ্রেণির মানুষদের নিয়ে লেখা উপন্যাসগুলির মধ্যে 'তিতাস একটি নদীর নাম' উপন্যাসটি একটু স্বাতন্ত্র দাবি করে। বাংলা সাহিত্যে অন্ত্যজ ধীবর মালোদের নিয়ে যে সকল উপন্যাস লেখা হয়েছে তার মধ্যে 'তিতাস একটি নদীর নাম' উপন্যাসটি অন্যতম। হাঁসুলী বাঁকে যেমন, তিতাসেও একটি বিশেষ অঞ্চলের জীবন চিত্র ধরা পড়ে। মানুষের বিশ্বাস, আচার-ব্যবহার, ঐতিহ্য এগুলি তো একটা সময় মিথ বিশ্বাসে পরিণত হয়। সময়ের সঙ্গে সঙ্গে মিথ বিশ্বাসেরও পরিবর্তন ঘটে। মালোদের তিতাসকে নিয়ে যে বিশ্বাসে অটল বাঁধতো সেই বিশ্বাসেও ফাটল ধরে এবং তারা নতুন কোনো বিশ্বাসকে আঁকড়ে ধরতে চাইছে যেখানে গেলে তারা বেঁচে থাকার অধিকার পায়।

গ্রিক পুরাণে মেটিস নামে এক দেবীর উল্লেখ পাওয়া যায়। তার কাহিনি সংক্ষিপ্ত এবং করুণ। সে জিয়ুস এর প্রথম স্ত্রী এবং তার কাহিনী পরিসমাপ্তি ঘটে যখন জিয়ুস তাকে উদরস্থ করে। অন্যদিকে 'মেটিস' শব্দটি একটি সাধারণ বিশেষ্যপদও বটে, এবং তার ধর্ম বুদ্ধিমত্তা অথবা বৈষয়িক জ্ঞান। ব্যবহারিক জীবনে এর মূল্য অপরিসীম। জীবনের ভিন্নধর্মী ক্রিয়াকর্মে 'মেটিস' দরকার হয়। কোনো সময় নাবিকের বিদ্যায় কারিগরের শিল্পে অথবা যুদ্ধ চালনায় তার স্থান যেমন স্বীকৃত, তেমন ছলচাতুরিতেও। কিন্তু জিয়ুস দ্বারা উদরস্থ দেবীর সঙ্গে জীবনের অনিশ্চয়তার মধ্যে সাফল্য অর্জন করার প্রাজ্ঞতার এক নিবিড় যোগ আছে। যেহেতু জিয়ুস মেটিসকে হজম করে ফেলেছেন সেহেতু সে দেব এবং পশুদের মধ্যে সবচেয়ে বুদ্ধিমান এবং দূরদর্শী। প্রসঙ্গক্রমে বলা যায়, খুব সঙ্গত কারণেই বীরেন্দ্র চক্রবর্তী বলেছেন -- "একটি বই এক বা একাধিক ব্যক্তির কাছে ভিন্নপাঠ হয়ে ওঠে যে অর্থে; এবং ইতিহাসও তো আসলে his knowledge of history এমন নয় যেন

ইতিহাস নামক নির্দিষ্ট কোনো বিদ্যা চিরতরে নির্ধারিত হয়ে আছে কোথাও, মুখস্থ করে নিলেই তা স্বতই পরিণত হয়ে যাবে জ্ঞানে। . . . বিভিন্ন অবস্থান সম্ভব যা বিভিন্ন দিককে উন্মোচিত করে"[৯] (সিংহওসেন, ১৫)। স্বাভাবিকভাবেই প্রশ্ন ওঠে, মিথলজি কি ইতিহাসের মতোই মানববিদ্যা যা ব্যক্তি বিশেষে পরিবর্তনশীল? আমার মনে হয়, সমাজতত্ত্ব, রাজনীতি ইতিহাস ও মিথলজি এক ধরণের সাপির হ্বর্ফ এর (Sapir Whorf) 'ভাষিক আপেক্ষিকতা' তত্ত্বের (Theory of Linguistic relativity) মতো কোনো তত্ত্বের আওতায় পড়ে।

একটি শিশুর মধ্যে অনুভূতির বিস্ময়ে যে গল্প কাহিনি তৈরি হয় তার মধ্যে আদর্শ সত্যিই আছে; কাব্যিক সত্যিই দার্শনিক সত্যিই। যিনি মিথ তৈরি করেন কবিতায়, গল্প বা কাহিনিতেই, আর যে পড়ে, এই দুইয়ের মধ্যে একজন নান্দনিক অভিজ্ঞতাকে প্রকাশ করে, আর একজন অভিজ্ঞতাকে উপলব্ধি করে আনন্দ পায়। আদর্শ সত্য একমাত্র জ্ঞানের পক্ষেই পাওয়া সম্ভব। এই জ্ঞানে মনের সব কিছুই আছে একসঙ্গে জড়িত; ইনস্টিংক্ট স্বজ্ঞাবোধে মিলিত হয়ে এক হয়ে উপরে উঠতে থাকে, শুধু বুদ্ধি দিয়ে জ্ঞানের তত্ত্ব প্রতিষ্ঠা নয়।

কাব্যকে এই হিসেবে গণ্য করলে সব কাব্যই মিথ প্রাণিত, এবং মিথ প্রাণিত কবিতাই কাব্যিক দর্শনের স্থান পেতে পারে। তা সে আট পংক্তির রবীন্দ্রনাথের ক্ষুদ্র গানের রূপ হোক অথবা পাঁচশো পৃষ্ঠার কাহিনি হোক, প্রত্যেকের মধ্যেই মিথ গড়ে ওঠে। মিথের সঙ্গে জড়িয়ে থাকে রূপকথার স্বপ্ন এবং লেজেন্ডের কাহিনি ও ইতিহাসমুখিতা এই তিনটির উৎপত্তি ফ্যান্টাসি থেকে। ফ্যান্টাসি ব্যক্তিগত স্বপ্নের ছবি। স্বপ্নের ছবি বলেই বাস্তব জগৎ থেকে পালিয়ে যায়, কখনো হারিয়ে যায়। ফ্যান্টাসির স্বপ্ন যখন ধারণা পায়, ভাবনায় বসে, ধর্মীয় বোধের সঙ্গে একতা লাভ করতে থাকে ক্রমশ এবং প্রতীকের আলো দুলতে থাকে বস্তু ও কল্পনার চারধারে, তখনই সর্বজনীনতা ও ব্যাপ্তির দিকে এগোয়। মিথের মধ্য একেশ্বর জগতের বিভা পাওয়া যায়, এই কারণেই মিথ প্রাচীন মহাকাব্য, পুরাণ, উপনিষদ ধর্মীয় কাহিনি কিংবদন্তির মধ্যে লুকিয়ে থাকে। মিথের মধ্যে কাহিনি, কাহিনির সংকেত, ঘটনার তাৎপর্য এবং শব্দ ও ছবির প্রতীক মিশে আছে। মিথ পুরানো কাহিনি বলয়কে আমাদের চোখের সামনে স্মরণ করিয়ে দেয়। রামায়ণ, মহাভারত, ক্যান্টারবেরি টেলস, জাতক, আরব্য রজনী এবং কিংবদন্তি ইত্যাদির মধ্যে মিথের প্রভাব লক্ষ্য করা যায়। মানুষের কল্পনা যখন স্বর্গ মর্ত্য পাতাল একসঙ্গে ঘুরে বেড়ায়, সেক্ষেত্রে দৈবশক্তি ও বিশ্বজনীন ঘটনা মানুষকে বিশাল করে তোলে, মহাকাব্যের মধ্যে এই বিশ্বজাগতিক বোধের অস্তিত্বের জন্যই মিথ সেখানে সার্থক হয়ে ওঠে।

মধুসূদন যেমনভাবে মিথকে ব্যবহার করেছেন, রবীন্দ্রনাথ আবার সেই পদ্ধতি ব্যবহার করেননি। মধুসূদনের মিথের কাহিনি ও চরিত্রের প্রায় সব কিছু নিয়ে একটি পূর্ণ অবয়ব ছবি গড়ে তুলে গোপনে সংগীতের তাৎপর্য উপমার ছবিতে ফুটিয়ে তুলেছেন। মধুসূদন মেঘনাদের মতো বড়ো মহাকাব্য রচনায় পর শেষে একটি মাত্র বাক্যের পংক্তিতে একটি উৎপ্রেক্ষায় সমগ্র কাব্যের মূল বিষয়বস্তু ও রসানুভূতি চমকিয়ে দিয়েছেন' বিসর্জি প্রতিমা যেন দশমী দিবসে'[১০](রায়, ২৩)। প্রতিমা বিসর্জনের কাহিনীর ভেতরে সমগ্র জাতির বেদনা ও অশ্রু, ধর্মীয় ও অনুভূতির গূঢ়তা ও বিশ্বাস, ঈশ্বর ও মানুষের সঙ্গে সম্পর্ক, মানুষের মধ্যে দেবতাকে হারাবার কান্না, এই কান্নায় মানুষের অপরাজেয় শক্তি ও আকাঙ্খায় বিশ্ববোধ একসঙ্গে উদ্ভাসিত হয়ে ওঠে। রবীন্দ্রনাথ পুঙ্খানুপুঙ্খ বর্ণনায় যান না, পরিপার্শ্ব অনেক সময় অনুপস্থিত থাকে, একটি মাত্র শব্দের নির্দেশে অনুষঙ্গ জ্বালিয়ে মনোমতো মিথ তৈরি করতে থাকেন।

রবীন্দ্রনাথের পরে অনেকেই মিথের ব্যবহার করেছেন কাব্যে। কিন্তু এই সর্বগ্রাসী ব্যাপকতার ক্ষুধা কাব্যের মধ্যে নেই। রবীন্দ্রনাথ যখন জীবিত ছিলেন তখন দ্বিজেন্দ্রলাল ক্ষীরোদপ্রসাদ মিথ ব্যবহার করেছেন ঠিকই কিন্তু তাঁদের মিথ সর্বজনীনতা পায়নি, পুরাণের মতো প্রাচীন স্তুপ হয়ে আছে। মন্মথ রায় কংসের মধ্যে যুগোপযোগী ভাবনা মেশাতে চেষ্টা করেছেন, যেমন করেছেন যামিনী রায় তাঁর ছবির মধ্যে। সাহিত্যের থেকেও চিত্রে মিথকে তাঁর রোমান্টিকতার রহস্যে আরও পূর্ণ ও উন্নত করে তুলেছেন অবনীন্দ্রনাথ। অবনীন্দ্রনাথ ও নন্দলালের ছবি যদি আমরা অবনীন্দ্রনাথের ছবি যদি আমরা পাশাপাশি রাখি দেখব যে, দুজনের ক্ষেত্রে মিথের ব্যাবহার ভিন্নভাবেই। শিল্পী তুলির অংকন বোধের তীব্রতায় অবনীন্দ্রনাথ স্তুল বস্তুকে আগুনের গোপন মধুর আলোয় অদৃশ্য রহস্যে মুহূর্তে রূপান্তরিত করতে পারেন। কিন্তু নন্দলালের আঁকা চিত্রে ফর্মের শিক্ষক জনিত কৃতিত্ব আছে, ছবির স্পষ্টতা ছাড়িয়ে খুব ঊর্ধ্বে আনাবাস উঠতে পারে না। সাহিত্যের মিথকে দেখতে হলে নন্দলালের চিত্রের মত দেখা দরকার।

বন্ধ্যা ও উর্বরা এই মিথকে ভাঙিয়েই এলিয়ট 'পড়োজমি' রচনা করেছেন সমগ্র ইউরোপীয় সমাজ পটভূমিকায়। উর্বরা শক্তির প্রতীকরূপে তাই বৃষ্টি, জল, মাছ, সমুদ্র, নদী আসে; এর বিপরীত ছবিতে ফুটে ওঠে পাথর, মরুভূমি ও শহরের ভিড়। স্যাঁ - জন প্যার্স 'আনাবাস' কাব্যে অভিযানের মধ্য দিয়ে মানুষের অন্তরের অদম্য যাত্রাকেই বিশাল দেশকালেই মরুভূমির প্রান্তরে পাহাড়ে নদীর স্রোতের ওপর দিয়ে প্রতীকিত করতে চাইছেন। অশ্বশাবক আমাদের হৃদয়ের, গাছের সবুজ পাতার নিচে যে দাঁড়িয়ে আছে প্রাণের সবুজ

বেদনার মতো। এরই অন্যরূপ জয়েসের 'ইউলিসিস', পাউন্ডের 'কান্টোজে' এবং পল ভালেরির 'সাপে' অভিশাপে কবিতায়।

বুদ্ধদেব বসু 'তপস্বী ও তরঙ্গিনী' নাটকে ঋষ্যশৃঙ্গের মিথকে প্রেম ও অপ্রেমের মধ্যে নর-নারীর মিলনে ফার্টিলিটি কান্ট বা উর্বরা শক্তিকেই প্রকাশ করতে চেয়েছেন। অনাবৃষ্টি দেশে যে জল নেমে এল ঋষ্যশৃঙ্গের পদার্পণে, সেই জল পৃথিবীকে শস্যপূর্ণ করে তুলেছে জাদুশক্তির একাত্মতায়। আকাশের যে জল নেমে আসে মাটিতে করুণা ধারায়, সেই তৃষ্ণার জলই পতিতার হৃদয়ে প্রেমের মতো বর্ষিত হয়েছে ঋষ্যশৃঙ্গের মুগ্ধ দৃষ্টিতে জাদুর আলোতে। নারী ছাড়া পৃথিবীতে কোনো মানুষের মুক্তির সম্ভাবনা নেই, সংস্পর্শহীন ঋষি নারীর চোখের আলায় প্রেমের স্পর্শে পূর্ণ হল, এই পূর্ণতার মধ্যে তার সাধনা; যতদিন নারীর হৃদয়ের এই বেদনার গন্ধ পায়নি, ততদিন সে পূর্ণ হয়নি। আসলে, বুদ্ধদেব বসু বৃষ্টিকে এই দুই উপায়ে আলায় তাৎপর্যমণ্ডিত করেছেন। যদিও মিথের মধ্যে ফ্রয়েড, এলিয়ট, রবীন্দ্রনাথ ও লরেন্স ওতপ্রোতভাবে জড়িয়ে আছে, বিশেষ করে রবীন্দ্রনাথের 'প্রতিতা'র হুবহু ধ্বনি শোনা যায় পংক্তির মধ্যে, তবু বুদ্ধদেব বসু আধুনিকতার প্রেক্ষাপটকে সঙ্গে নিয়ে তিনি মহাভারতের কাহিনিকে অর্থের তাৎপর্য দিয়েছেন। বুদ্ধদেব বসু এলিয়টের অনুকরণে কোরাস এনে ধর্মীয় বোধের সঙ্গে মিথকে সংযোগ করতে চাইছেন।

আধুনিক বাংলা কবিতায় দেশি ও বিদেশি মিথের ব্যবহার প্রচুর। বিষ্ণু দে'র কবিতায় মিথের ব্যবহারও এদিকে শীর্ষস্থানীয় ও ঐশ্বর্যময়। এর পরেও মিথের ব্যবহার জীবন দর্শনের তাগিদে কোনো না কোনোভাবে ব্যবহার করেছেন। বাংলায় বহু প্রচলিত মিথ বেহুলা, ঠাকুরমার ঝুলি ইত্যাদি। আমি বিশ্বাস করি, একালের সব কবিই কোনো না কোনো প্রকারে বেহুলাকে মিথের সংকেতরূপে কাজে লাগিয়েছেন কবিতায়। জীবনানন্দ বেহুলাকে দেখেছেন বাংলা প্রকৃতির রূপসৌন্দর্যের স্নিগ্ধ রূপময়তায় বিভাগয় –

" . . . বেহুলাও একদিন গাঙুড়ের জলে ভেলা নিয়ে --
কৃষ্ণা দ্বাদশীর জোৎস্না যখন মরিয়া গেছে নদীর চরায় --
সোনালি ধানের পাশে অসংখ্য অশ্বথ বট দেখেছিল, হায়,
শ্যামার নরম গান শুনেছিল, -- একদিন অমরায় গিয়ে
ছিন্ন খঞ্জনার মতো যখন সে নেচেছিল ইন্দ্রের সভায়,
বাংলার নদী মাঠ ভাঁটফুল ঘুঙুরের মতো তার কেঁদেছিল পায় "[১১] (রায়, ২৬)।

জার্মান গীতিনাট্যকার হবাগনের তাঁর কাব্যনাট্য সংগীতের সুরের সাহায্যে সাংকেতিক ভাষায় একটি জাতির মিথের মধ্য দিয়ে একটি দেশের সমগ্র মানুষের আশা-আকাঙ্ক্ষাকে রূপায়িত করতে চেয়েছিলেন মঞ্চে। তিনি চেয়েছিলেন মিথের সঙ্গে জাতি বা ফোক এবং শিল্পকে একসঙ্গে সম্পর্কিত করতে। গ্রিক ট্র্যাজেডির ক্ষেত্রে দেখা যায়, গ্রিক মিথের বিষয় ও আত্মিক রূপ শিল্পময় প্রকাশে প্রত্যক্ষ। সেটা চিরকালের জন্য সত্য কেননা এই মিথ হচ্ছে কবির আদর্শ বস্তু। এই বস্তু স্বদেশীয়, একটা জাতির নামহীন কবিতা। উন্নত সংস্কৃতির বিশেষ যুগের মহৎ কবিরা যুগ যুগ ধরে এইসব মিথ নতুনভাবে ব্যবহার করেন। বিশ্বায়ন ও আধুনিকতা প্রেক্ষাপটে সময়ের সঙ্গে সঙ্গে সবকিছু নতুনভাবে ভাবনাচিন্তাকে ত্বরান্বিত করছে। সেগুলি নতুনভাবে আমরা সাহিত্যে ব্যবহার করছি। ইয়েটস যখন আইরিশ লোকসাহিত্যের মধ্যে জাতির প্রাণ স্পন্দন খুঁজতে চান, শুনতে পান, তাকে কাব্যে প্রকাশ করতে চেষ্টা করেন, তখন কবি এই আদিম চিত্রকল্পকেই মিথের মধ্যে এবং লোকসাহিত্যের গল্প কবিতায় ধরতে চেয়েছেন। তিনি তাঁর কবিতায় চিরন্তন সত্য দেখতে পান জাতিগত সত্তা প্রতিষ্ঠার মাধ্যমে।

মিথের ব্যবহারে একালের প্রায় সকলেই করেছেন কবিতায়, উপন্যাস এবং নাটকেও। কিন্তু এলিয়েটের মিথেরব্যবহার অন্যদের থেকে স্বতন্ত্র। সেখানে কাহিনি ঘটনা চরিত্রের ঐক্য বা সংলগ্নতা নেই। তিনি যে মিথ ব্যবহার করেন, তার সঙ্গে অনেক মিথ যুক্ত করেন, এতে মিথের কাহিনি আলাদা হয়, বৈচিত্র আসে কিন্তু সব মিথের অন্তর্নিহিত তাৎপর্যকে ঐক্যসূত্রে ইঙ্গিতবহ করে তোলেন। ফলত মনে হয় মিথগুলি ভাঙা, টুকরো, বিচ্ছিন্ন। কিন্তু তিনি ভাঙা বিচ্ছিন্ন চিত্রকল্পগুলিকে সাজিয়ে তার মধ্য থেকে মূল সত্যকে উদ্ধারিতে করতে চেয়েছেন। এলিয়েটের পড়োজমির মূল মিথ উদ্ভিদ জীবনের বন্ধ্যা ও উর্বরতার মিথ, যার সাথে অ্যাডোনিস, আত্তিস ও ওসিরিস মিশে গেছে। মৃত্যু ও পুনর্জন্ম মিশে গেছে একসঙ্গে এবং সমস্ত পৃথিবীর মিথ এর মধ্যে যুক্ত, ফলে বিশ্বে উদ্ভিদ জীবনের সর্বজনীনতা লক্ষনীয়। এই উদ্ভিদ জীবনের মিথের সঙ্গে টিরেসিয়াস ও হোলি গ্রেইলের মিথ জুড়ে দেওয়া হয়েছে। দান্তের 'ডিভাইন কমেডি' তে নরকের অন্ধকার থেকে পুনরুজ্জীবনের মধ্য দিয়ে স্বর্গীয় আলোর উত্তরণে কাহিনি। এখানে মৃতের ও পুনরুজ্জীবনের খৃষ্টীয় কাহিনির অনুষঙ্গ আছে। এই বিচিত্রতার জন্যই মিথের ব্যবহার সম্বন্ধে বিভ্রান্তি আমাদের চমকিত করে। বিচিত্র মিথের সঙ্গে তিনি সর্বদাই সক্ষম হয়েছেন একালের মানুষের জীবন ও কাহিনি, বাস্তব শহর ও পরিবেশ ঢুকিয়ে দিতে। এলিয়ট এতোটা জটিলভাবে তাঁর কাব্যে দেখিয়েছেন যা জয়েসও তাঁর 'ইউলিসিস' গ্রন্থে দেখাতে পারেনি কিন্তু

এলিয়টের কাছে 'ইউলিসিস' আদর্শ হিসেবে উদ্ভাসিত ছিল। যদিও শেলি তাঁর অ্যাডোনিস কাব্যে এতটা জটিলভাবে না হলেও বর্তমানের সঙ্গে গ্রিসের অতীত মিথ ও প্রাচীন কাব্য ইতিহাসকে একসঙ্গে যুক্ত করে বৈচিত্র্য ও বিস্তার আনতে পেরেছেন। এখানে এলিয়টের 'পড়োজমি' র সঙ্গে সাদৃশ্যও কম নয়।

এলিয়টের 'পড়োজমি' কাব্যের মিথ বৃষ্টি ও মেঘ। সমস্ত কাব্য গড়ে উঠেছে বৃষ্টি মিথের পরিকল্পনায়। সৃষ্টি ও পুনর্জন্ম ধ্বংসের পর প্রকৃতি ও জীবনে যেমন সত্য, তেমনি জীবন্ত মানব জীবনেও মানুষের হৃদয়ে। ঋতুচক্রের মতো প্রকৃতির ধ্বংস ও সৃষ্টির লীলা দিনরাত্রির মতো উঠছে নামছে। মানুষের বন্ধ্যা জীবনের সময় বৃষ্টির আবির্ভাব হয়ে পুনর্জন্ম হয় ও সৃষ্টির চিরন্তনতা নিয়ে আসে, সেজন্য পাথুরে পাহাড়ের বুকে জলের ধ্বনি, মরুভূমি বুকের উপর নাইটিংগেলের গান একসঙ্গে শোনাতে চেয়েছেন কবি। এলিয়ট তাঁর 'পড়োজমি' কাব্যে তারপরও সাধনার কথা বলেছেন। আমার পিছনে শুকনো পড়োজমি, কিন্তু আমি তীরে বসে মাছ ধরতে চাইছি, মাছের সঙ্গে উর্বরা সৃষ্টিকে মেলাতে চাইছি। এগুলির জন্য দরকার সাধনা ও মননশীল চিন্তা। এই কবিতার শুরুতেই মিথের আগমন, এই মিথের সঙ্গে ধর্মীয় পুনরুজ্জীবনও জড়িত –

April is the Cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, Stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.

অনেকেরই মনে হবে, অ্যাডোনিসের মিথ গ্রীসীয়, তা নয়। এটি ফিনিসীয়। উদ্ভিদ দেবতা মাটির উর্বরা শক্তির সঙ্গে এর যোগ। অ্যাডোনিস তাঁর পূর্বের উদ্ভিদ দেবতা অ্যালেইন ও মোটসকে নির্বাসিত করে দিয়েছেন তাঁর ব্যাপকতায় ও প্রসারে। জানা যায়, গাছ থেকে তাঁর জন্ম এবং তাঁর মা নিজেকে গাছে রূপান্তরিত করে দিয়েছেন। এমনকি অ্যাডোনিস এতটাই সুন্দর যে, তাঁর সৌন্দর্যে আফ্রোদিতে মুগ্ধ। তাঁকে একটি বাক্সে বন্ধ করে রেখে মাটির নিচের দেবী পের্সেফোনের কাছে রেখে দেন, এও শর্ত ছিল পের্সেফোনে খুলে দেখবেনা না বাক্সের ভিতরে কী আছে, কিন্তু কৌতূহলবশত পের্সেফোনে বাক্সটি খুলে দেখে অ্যাডোনিসের সৌন্দর্য মুগ্ধ হয়ে যায়। এবং আফ্রোদিতেকে বাক্সটি দিতে অস্বীকার করেন। এটি শেষ পর্যন্ত দ্বন্দ্বে পৌঁছায়, সমাধানের জন্য দুই দেবী জিউসের কাছে আসেন। জিউসের নির্দেশে ছ- মাস অ্যাডোনিস মাটির উপরে এবং ছ- মাস নিচে থাকবেন। অ্যাডোনিসকে দেখে আফ্রোদিতেও এতটাই বিরহ হয়ে পড়েন যে, শেষ পর্যন্ত তার প্রেমে পড়ে

যান। অ্যাডোনিস সবথেকে বেশি শিকারে আনন্দ পেতেন,   সেজন্য আফ্রোদিতেকে শিকারে যেতে বারণ করেছিলেন কিন্তু শেষ পর্যন্ত শিকার করতে গিয়েই বন্য ভালুক তাঁকে মেরে ফেলে।

বিশ্বসাহিত্যে শ্রেষ্ঠ ট্রাজেডি এই মুহূর্তে বলা যেতে পারে 'ওইদিপৌস' কে। থিবসে ওইদিপৌসের রাজত্বে সারা দেশে মহামারী, মৃত্যু, শুষ্কতা, প্রাণহীন বন্ধ্যা জীবন, শস্য হয় না। নারী গর্ভধারণে ব্যর্থ, বৃষ্টি নেই, চারিদিকে শুধু মৃত্যু ছড়িয়ে আছে। ক্ষুব্ধ ঝড়, আন্দোলিত শহর। শহরকে শূন্য করে দেবার জন্য জ্বরের বিবর্ণ দেবতা সমস্ত মানুষের উপর মূর্ছার মতন ছড়ানো। যিনি অন্ধকার পাতালের দেবতা এই মহামারীর প্রাক্কালে তিনি যন্ত্রণায় হাহাকার করছেন এবং বিলাপ করে চারিদিকে ঘুরে বেড়াচ্ছেন। কিন্তু জীবনের ধাঁধার রহস্য কোথায় শেষ হবে, স্বর্গের গোপন পথ কোথায় ?   সমস্ত থিবস আজ মরুভূমি, কোথাও প্রাণের স্পর্শ নেই। এসবেরই কোনো সমাধান নেই, উত্তর নেই । মানুষের ভালোবাসা, স্নেহ কিছুই নেই, আছে শুধু অন্তহীন জিজ্ঞাসা।

ওইদিপৌস নিজের পাপেই থিবস প্রদেশকে মরুভূমি তৈরি করেছে, মায়ের সঙ্গে স্বামী হিসেবে সহবাসে, মাতার গর্ভে নিজের সন্তানের উৎপাদনে, নিজের পিতাকে হত্যা। ওইদিপৌস যে দেশে জন্মগ্রহণ করে সে দেশ থেকে নির্বাসিত, নিজের দেশে ফিরে এসেছে অজানা পরিচয় ও রহস্য অন্ধকার নিয়ে, পিতৃহত্যার পাপে নিজের হাতকে কলুষিত করেছে এবং নিজের শরীর ও আত্মা করেছে নিজের মায়ের সঙ্গে যৌনসঙ্গমে। নিজের ভাই ও ভগিনী হয়েছে পুত্রকন্যা। ওইদিপৌসে ঔদ্ধত্য ও অহংকার বিশ্বনিয়মের কাছ থেকে এসে দূরে সরিয়ে নিয়ে গেছে।

তাইরেসিয়াস এই দৃশ্য দেখেছেন, জেনেছেন, কিন্তু এই মৃত্যু ও পতন থেকে বাঁচাবার পথ তাঁর জানা ছিল না। তাই তাঁর জ্ঞান ভারি বোঝার মতো কেননা এই জ্ঞান কোনো কাজে আসে না। অথচ জোর করা হচ্ছে ওইদিপৌস এর জ্ঞানকে প্রকাশ করবার জন্য কারণ বিশ্বের আঁধার উন্মোচিত হয়ে ওঠে। তাতে মানুষ ও জগৎ অভিশপ্ত মনে হয়। এই অভিশাপ থেকে মুক্তির পথ নেই। এই অভিশাপ থেকে মুক্তির জন্য ঈশ্বরের কাছে প্রার্থনা করেছেন। গোটা থিবসবাসীকে ওইদিপৌস পাপ ও অপরাধেই দূষিত করেছে।

আন্তিগোনে নাটকেও তাইরেসিয়াস সেই একই কথা বলেছেন ক্রেওনকে। মানুষের ঔদ্ধত্য ও একগুঁয়েমি, অহংকার মানুষের বোধ ও ধারণাকে হত্যা করে। সেই পথ দিয়েই মানুষের ধ্বংস আছে, তাই মানুষকে বিনম্র

হতে হবে, শ্রদ্ধা করতে শিখতে হবে। এই কারণেই মানুষের ধারণা ও বোধকে প্রসারিত করা আবশ্যক বলে আমার মনে হয়। মানুষের ভুলের শাস্তি দেবার জন্য ভগবানের ধ্বংসকারী হাত দ্রুত নেমে আসে।সেজন্য ক্রেওন বলেন -- আমি মনে মনে ভয় পাই ; এটাই সবচেয়ে শ্রেষ্ঠ উপায় একজনের জীবনের মধ্য দিয়ে দেখা যে নিয়ম প্রতিষ্ঠিত আছে ; এই নিয়মকে লঙ্ঘন করতে পারে না; ওইদিপৌস ও ক্রেওন তাঁদের জীবনে এই নিয়ম লঙ্ঘন করেছিলেন বলেই, তাঁদের জীবন অভিশপ্ত, তাঁদের বেঁচে থাকার মধ্যেই ধ্বংস নেমে এসেছে। আন্তিগোনে নাটক কোরাসের মতোই, তাইরেসিয়াসের বাণীর মতোই, এলিয়টও 'পড়োজমি'- র মধ্যে মুক্তির পথের উপায় দেখেছেন মানুষের হৃদয়ের সংযম, দয়ারমধ্যে, উপনিষদের উক্তির মধ্যে। এখানেই গ্রিক ও ভারতীয় সভ্যতা ও সংস্কৃতির মিলন।

' আন্তিগোনে ' এবং ' রাজা ওইদিপাউস ' নাটকে তাইরেসিয়াস অন্ধ ভবিষ্যদ্বক্তা, তিনি অন্তরের আলো জ্বেলে সবকিছু দেখেন, জানেন, বোঝেন। তাঁর বোধে তিনকাল এক হয়ে গেছে। তিনি কোনো দেশের রাজার অধীন নয়, অ্যাপোলো ও জিউসের ভক্ত, স্বাধীন। আরেকটি কাহিনিতে আছে তাইরেসিয়াস একদিন দুটি সাপের সঙ্গম দেখতে পান এবং লাঠি দিয়ে তা প্রহার করার সঙ্গে সঙ্গে তিনি নারী হয়ে যান। এই বিশ্বাস তাদের ছিল এবং আস্তে আস্তে মিথ বিশ্বাসে পরিণত হয়। যদিও বর্তমান সময়ে কিছুটা হলেও হ্রাস পেয়েছে। তাইরেসিয়াস কিছুদিন পরে একই দৃশ্য দেখতে পান, তিনি এবার পুরুষে রূপান্তরিত হন। সুতরাং তাঁর দেহে একই সঙ্গে নারী ও পুরুষ বিরাজ করছে, তাদের দুজনেরই অভিজ্ঞতা তার শরীরে। শক্তি ও শক্তিমান একাত্ম। জিউজ ও হেরার মধ্য বিবাদ বাধে, যৌনসঙ্গমে নারী ও পুরুষের মধ্যে কে সবচেয়ে আনন্দ পায়, তাই রেসিয়াসকে মধ্যস্থতা করতে বললে তিনি বলেন, নারী যৌনসঙ্গমে বেশি আনন্দ পায়। এই কথা শুনে রাগে ও ক্রোধে হেরা তাঁকে অন্ধ করে দেন। ক্ষতিপূরণ স্বরূপ জিউস তাঁকে দীর্ঘ জীবন ও ভবিষ্যদ্বাণীর শক্তি সমর্পণ করেন।

মিথলজি এবং ফোক কোনো দেশের শিকড়কে বুঝতে সাহায্য করে। মানুষের মধ্যে লোকসংস্কার, লোকবিশ্বাস ইত্যাদি যখন অনেকদিন ধরে জন্মায় তা একটা সময় মিথ বিশ্বাসে পরিণত হয়। এই বিশ্বাস কখনো স্থায়ী নয়, পরিবর্তনশীল। বাংলার পাশাপাশি যদি প্রতিবেশি রাজ্যের দিকে তাকাই দেখবো যে, শিব বিহারের সর্বাধিক পূজিত দেবতা। বিহারে ছট পূজা প্রধান ও অত্যন্ত জনপ্রিয় লোক উৎসব। পৌরাণিক ও লোকতাত্ত্বিক ব্যাখ্যানুযায়ী ছট পরব বর্তমানে আধুনিকতার আচ্ছাদনে পালিত হয়। ছট পরব অর্থাৎ সূর্যপূজার ধারাও

সুপ্রাচীন। লোকবিশ্বাস হল যে, ছট পরবে সূর্য পূজার রবিবার উপবাসে থাকা, হোম করা এবং লবন ছাড়া খাদ্য গ্রহণ করলে পাপমুক্তি ঘটে। কিংবদন্তি অনুসারে ছট ব্রত দেবী পালন করেছিলেন, যার সাক্ষী ছিলেন সূর্যদীপ। তাই সূর্য পূজার অনুষঙ্গে দেবী ভগবতী বা ছঠী মাতার পূজাও প্রচলিত। ষষ্ঠী তিথিতে এই পরব অনুষ্ঠিত হয় বলে দেবী ভগবতীকে ষষ্ঠীমাতা বা ষষ্ঠীদেবী রূপে গণ্য করা হয়ে থাকে। কারণ পুত্র কামনা এই ব্রতের অন্যতম উদ্দেশ্য। ষষ্ঠী ব্রত বা সূর্য পূজা রাজস্থান, গুজরাট এবং মহারাষ্ট্রের 'মাঘ সপ্তমী', 'রথ সপ্তমী', 'অচলা সপ্তমী' এবং 'পুত্র সপ্তমী' নামে অভিহিত। পশ্চিমবঙ্গে এই সূর্যপূজা 'ইতুব্রত' নামে পরিচিত। রমনীরা এই ব্রতের আয়োজন করার উদ্দেশ্য হল, পুত্র সন্তানের মঙ্গল কামনা, পুত্র লাভ, ধনধান্য ও সুখ-সমৃদ্ধিলাভ। মূলত এটি বিহারের প্রধান উৎসব। এছাড়াও বিহারের শিব পূজা, শীতলা পূজা, মাঘ মন্ডলের ব্রত, জিওডিয়া, বারহমাসা ইত্যাদি উৎসব লক্ষ্য করা যায়।

হিমালয় ভারতীয় সংস্কৃতির প্রতিভূ। এই পর্বতমালার জনগোষ্ঠীর লোকসাহিত্য ও সংস্কৃতি নিঃসন্দেহে গরিমাময়। ভারতের অন্যতম পার্বত্য রাজ্য হল হিমাচল প্রদেশ। হিমালয়ে বহু জাতির সংমিশ্রণে এক সমুন্নত লোকসাহিত্য ও সংস্কৃতি গড়ে উঠেছে। তবে একথা সত্য যে, হিমালয় মূলত শিবেরই আলয়। সেজন্য এই রাজ্যের হিন্দুদের প্রধান উপাস্য হলেন শিব। এখানে বিভিন্ন লোকদেবদেবী দেখা যায় - মহাসু, মহিমহেশ, বুলডাং, বৈজনাথ প্রভৃতি। ওখানকার অধিবাসীরা শিবের পরেই শক্তিপূজা প্রাচীনকাল থেকে করে আসছে। শিবকে নিয়ে তাদের বিশ্বাস, সংস্কৃতি সবই গড়ে উঠেছে। এই বিশ্বাস তাদের জীবনে মিথে পরিণত হয়েছে। এছাড়াও এই রাজ্যে বিভিন্ন উপজাতির বসবাস এবং তাদের নিজস্ব দেবদেবী রয়েছে যেমন গদ্দী উপজাতিদের প্রধান দেবতা - কৈলংগ, কুল উপত্যকার মলানা গ্রামের একছত্র দেবতা হলেন - জামলু। পাঙ্গীর উপজাতিদের জাগ্রত দেবী হলেন - মিংঘল, মন্ডী জেলার চচ্চোট মহকুমা অধিবাসীদের পূজিত দেবতা হলেন - কামরু নাগ, কুলুর ভহয়াত অঞ্চলের প্রসিদ্ধ দেবতা হলেন নাগ মণঢোর।

' হাঁসুলী বাঁকের উপকথা ' র কাহারেরা মিথের মধ্যে বসবাস করে। তাদের দৈনন্দিন জীবনের প্রতিটি মুহূর্ত বাবা ঠাকুরের মিথ দ্বারা নিয়ন্ত্রিত। সেই মিথ ক্রমে ভেঙে পড়তে শুরু করে। উপন্যাসের শুরুতেই করালী বাবাঠাকুরের বাহন চন্দ্রবোড়া সাপটি মেরে ফেলার ঘটনার মধ্য দিয়ে মিথ ভাঙবের ধারা লক্ষ্য করা যায়। আলব্যের কাম্যুর বিখ্যাত উপন্যাস ' মিথ অফ দি সিসিফাস ' -এ দেবতারা সিসিফাসকে চিরকাল একটা পাথর পাহাড়ের চূড়ায় উঠানোর শাস্তি দেন, যেখান থেকে পাথরটা নিজের ভরেই আবার নিচে পড়ে যাবে। এখানে

গ্রিক পুরাণের গল্প দেখা যায়। হোমারের ওডিসিতে আছে, ওভিদে আছে। জিউসের চেয়ে নিজেকে বেশি চালাক ভেবে সিসিফাস চালাকি করতে গিয়েছিল। তাই তার জীবনে অভিশপ্তে পরিণত হয়। কাম্যু কী চমৎকারভাবে গ্রিক পুরাণ কাহিনি নিয়ে পুরানো এবং আধুনিকতার সঙ্গে নতুন কাহিনির ব্যাখ্যা করলেন। লেখক বলেছেন, সিসিফাস যখন পাথর ঠেলে তোলে, তখন সে হাসিমুখে সেই কাজটা করে, একটু আগে কী ঘটেছিল, একটু পরে কী ঘটবে, এটা তার ভাবনাতে নেই ।

পাঠক মাত্রেই বুঝতে পারেন সিসিফাস আমাদের অর্থহীন নায়ক। তার আশক্তি আর নির্যাতনের মধ্য দিয়ে তিনি নায়ক। দেবতাদের প্রতি তার অবজ্ঞা, তার মৃত্যুঘৃণা, তার জীবনের আসক্তি, তার অবর্ণনীয় অর্থহীন শাস্তির কারণ হয়েছিল। প্রবন্ধে আলোচনায় ' হাঁসুলী বাঁকের উপকথা ' তে যে প্রেক্ষাপট রচিত হয়েছে সেখানে একরকম ভাবে লোকজীবন ও মিথ চিত্রায়িত করেছেন। আবার পাশাপাশি দেশি ও বিদেশি সাহিত্যের আলোচনাতে আরএকরকম ভাবে মিথের ভাঙা গড়ার করার প্রক্রিয়া দেখা যায় সময়ের সঙ্গে সঙ্গে পরিবর্তন হতে। এখানেও নতুন নতুন বর্গের (Genre) সূত্রপাত ঘটছে কেননা ঔপন্যাসিক তারাশঙ্কর বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় একরকম ভাবে মিথের উপস্থাপনা ফুটিয়ে তুলেছেন সেখান থেকে আবার রবীন্দ্রনাথ, আরব্যরজনী, মাইকেল মধুসূদন, শেক্সপিয়র, মিল্টন, এলিয়ট ইত্যাদি এঁরা মিথকে নানারকম ভাবে বাস্তবায়িত করেছেন। এবং এঁরা প্রত্যেকেই নিজস্ব ঘটনায় স্বতন্ত্র। মিথের সঙ্গে তো মানুষের লোকসংস্কৃতি, বিশ্বাস, আচার-ব্যবহার সবই অন্তর্ভুক্ত। এঁদের মিথ থাকছে কিন্তু সময়ের প্রেক্ষাপট অনুযায়ী বদলে যাচ্ছে। আরব্যরজনী, ক্যান্টারবেরি টেলস, ডেকামেরনে বিভিন্ন কথক বিভিন্ন ভাবেই গল্প বলছে, আখ্যান কৌশল (Narrative Technic) তৈরি হচ্ছে। এখানেও রোলাঁ বার্তের ' অন্তরপাঠশৃঙ্খল ' (Intertextuality)এরকথা বলা যেতে পারে কেননা একটা পাঠ (Text) তৈরি হয় অগণিত পাঠের সহযোগে এবং বহু পাঠসংস্কৃতি থেকে। কোনো পাঠ নির্দিষ্ট এবং স্বয়ংসম্পূর্ণ নয়। পাঠে (Text) আধুনিকতার প্রভাব পড়ায় বিশ্বাস, সংস্কৃতি বদলে গিয়ে মিথের বহুকৌণিক কণ্ঠস্বরের সমাহার ঘটেছে। প্রাসঙ্গিকভাবে বাখতিনের ' ডায়ালজিক ইমাজিনেশন ' বা ' সাংলাপিক কল্পনার ' কথা। মানুষে মানুষে কীভাবে আদান-প্রদান হয়, একজন মানুষ বা মানুষগোষ্ঠী কীভাবে নিজেদের ভাবনা, বেদনা, আবেগ জানাতে পারে তারই তত্ত্ব এই সংলাপবাদ বা ডায়ালোজিজম। এই পৃথিবীতে মানুষের কোনো উচ্চারণ নি:সঙ্গ নয়, পূর্বাপরহীন নয়।

অভিজিৎ সেন তাঁর 'মিথ ও লোকাচার সম্ভাবনা' প্রবন্ধে তিনি বলেছেন -- 'সাধারণ ভাবে বলতে গেলে মিথ বা লোককথার বহুমাত্রিক ব্যবহার আমাদের সাহিত্যে এখনো খুবই নতুন। সত্তর দশকের 'গ্রামে চলো' ব্যাপারটা অন্য অনেক কিছুর মতো শিল্প-সাহিত্যেও একটা ওলট পালট করেছে মনে হয়।.   .   . ফলে অন্য মাধ্যমগুলোর মতো গল্প-উপন্যাসেও একটা অবলম্বন আমরা খুঁজতে দেখেছি যা ঠিক ইউরোপীয় নয়'। উপন্যাস, কবিতার ভিতর দিয়ে তৈরি হয় নতুন মিথ, যা গড়ে উঠতে সাহায্য করে তৃতীয় বিশ্বের ঔপনিবেশিক বাস্তবতা। লেখকে মিথকে তৈরি করেন অপর একটি মিথকে সূত্র হিসেবে ব্যবহার করে। আর এই দুটির মিথের মধ্যে যোগসেতু গড়ে তোলার জন্য লেখক জাদুবাস্তবতার প্রয়োগ ঘটান। যেমন দেখা যায়, লাতিন আমেরিকার নোবেল বিজয়ী মার্কেসের ' নিঃসঙ্গতার একশ বছর ' উপন্যাসে অলৌকিক বিশ্বাসের মাধ্যমে মিথের সামান্য প্রয়োগ ঘটান এবং জাদু বাস্তবতার নতুন দিগন্ত রেখা অঙ্কন করলেন। অভিজিৎ সেনের 'রহু চণ্ডালের হাড়' উপন্যাসের পুরো কাহিনিটিই এমনভাবে বর্ণিত হয়, যেন কোনো রূপকথা বা লোককথার গল্প। কাহিনিটি   শুরু হয় লুবিনির জবানিতে, তখন শ্রোতা ছিল তার নাতি শারিবা। লুবিনির কাহিনিতে ক্রমে কিংবদন্তি ও ইতিহাস মিশে যেতে থাকে। রহু আর দনুর সঙ্গে দেখা হয়ে যায় পীতেম ও জামিরের। কিংবদন্তি চরিত্রের সঙ্গে ইতিহাসের চরিত্রদের। নবজাত শিশুকে দেখে পীতেম যখন বলে ওঠে 'রহু রহু', তখন ইতিহাস কিংবদন্তি হয়ে উঠতে থাকে। এক্ষেত্রে বাখতিনের 'পলিফোনি' র রূপ লক্ষ্য করা যায়। 'পলি' অর্থাৎ 'বহু', 'ফোনি' র উৎসে আছে 'ফোন' অর্থাৎ 'ধ্বনি' বা 'স্বর'। অর্থাৎ উপন্যাস হল একটি বহু স্বরসঙ্গতিমূলক শিল্প -- যেখানে বহু স্বাধীন ও অমিশ্রিত কণ্ঠস্বরের সমাহার ঘটে এবং উপন্যাসে প্রান্তিক মানুষের কণ্ঠস্বরই এক একটি স্বয়ংসম্পূর্ণ অংশ।

মিথ অর্থাৎ ঘনীভূত অস্তিত্বের সন্ধান, জীবনের বিভিন্ন স্তরে উপনীত হওয়ার প্রয়াস, নানানা গ্রন্থিতে জনজীবনকে বাঁধা, দুই বিপরীতাত্মক তন্ত্রের মধ্যস্থতা করার প্রচেষ্টা। এভাবে হয়তো বিভিন্ন স্থানে বিভিন্ন কাজের মধ্যে নতুন এক শ্রেণির মিথ আবিষ্কৃত হবে যা জীবনকে পুনরুজ্জীবিত করবে। মিথ কী ব্যাপার, কোথায় অবস্থিত, মানব জীবনের মানচিত্রে মোটামুটি কোথায় তার স্থান। এইসব নিয়ে নানান লোক নানান ভঙ্গিতে আঁকতে ভালোবাসেন। এখানে যা আঁকা হল এটাও একটা ধরণ। যাঁদের পছন্দ হলো না তাঁরা নিশ্চয়ই অন্যভাবে এঁকে দেখাবেন । কিন্তু ভাবতে ভালো লাগে যে, তা সত্ত্বেও একই পৃথিবীর মানচিত্র আমরা নানান রীতিতে আঁকছি। এই যে, ভাবতে ভালো লাগে এর মানে কি এই যে আমি নিছকই 'পৃথিবীটা এর' এরকম একটা দুর্মর মিথের শিকার? প্রশ্ন উঠে, পৃথিবী কী তাহলে এক নয় ? নানা মুনির নানা মত হলেই কী জগৎ

টুকরো টুকরো হয়ে যায়?   এত বড় অযৌক্তিক কথা বলারও যুক্তি কেউ কেউ দেয় যা তা জানি। কিন্তু যাঁরা এসব বলেন তাঁরা কী কখনো ভেবে দেখেছেন , যুক্তি নিজেই একটা মিথ কিনা ?

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Toward a Dramatic World: The Latest Resurgence of Drama and Speculative Materialism

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Abstract

This essay has two aims: it tries, first, to demonstrate that there is an unignorable correlative relationship between the current resurgence in the popularity of stage plays and the meteoric rise of Speculative Materialism, a philosophical school led by Quentin Meillassoux, and, second, to elicit a useful insight for contemporary people who live in an era when the postmodern relativism has run into a snag. Concretely, the first part shows that any drama enjoins its audience to assent to the 'dramatic premise', which is a set of implicit presuppositions. The second part analyzes the fundamental tenets of Speculative Materialism, and points out that there is a curious similitude between the 'dramatic premise' and the perspective which the new philosophy urges us to adopt. The last part concludes the discussion by proposing a possible worldview that can be drawn from the investigation into the similarity between the outwardly irrelevant items.

Keywords: Drama, Philosophy, Speculative Materialism, Interdisciplinary Studies

Introduction

Insofar as one can judge by recent accounts in the media, it would not be amiss to presume that drama is still a powerful art form and has now been gaining more popularity in the four quarters of the globe. For example, one can adduce the fact that diverse Shakespearean plays are daily staged in countries well beyond their homeland, i.e. "all over the world" (Taylor and Bourus 3), while another may refer to "a remarkable resurgence of stage plays in China" (Cai 77), or point out that a fair number of drama festivals have been newly launched in Japan lately.

Meanwhile, if one ponders on the reality that there are many other formats which can render a fictional story in a more believable and impressive fashion, it seems a little, if not much, odd that the venerable medium of aesthetic expression has not been consigned to a mediocre position heretofore.

But, when taking a broader perspective, one would soon discover that the continuous demand in stage plays should not be assessed as an independent phenomenon unrelated to other cultural and intellectual trends. Actually, the resurgence of the theater is presumably relevant, or at least correlative to the revolutionary advent of Speculative Materialism, a philosophical school led by the contemporary French thinker Quentin Meillassoux.

Below this paper attempts, first, to demonstrate the reason why the two items that appear remote from one another could be considered mutually corollary, and second, to elicit contemporaneous insight from the similitude between the philosophy and the 'dramatic premise'.

1. Drama Grounded in the 'Dramatic Premise'

Drama is, as Lockert observed, "the most enduring of literary forms" (509), and there have been innumerable essays in which individuals propounded their theories about the art. For instance, one can cite Aristotle's *Poetics* as one of the classical texts that handled drama; Tertullian is another ancient figure who advanced an influential discussion thereof. Amongst such works, articles to which we ought to pay eager attention are the one that was written by Alladyce Nicole in 1935 and the thesis of Julia Eaton, because their arguments, produced in the times when visually recorded mediums were rapidly acquiring vogue, looks to have captured essential properties of drama as well as substantial differences between novel visual arts and the stage.

By comparing features constituting the cinema and drama, the essay of the former explains that, when watching a film, people "carry into the picture-house prejudices deeply ingrained in our beings" (Nicole 75); put differently, the spectators of a movie forget, or at least tend to forget that they are viewing a succession of 'fictional' incidents and assume the scenes unfolding before their eyes to be 'real'. Then, except for some metafictional productions, a work employing modern techniques like videography and cinematography usually seeks to efface the border between fiction and reality.

In contrast, a stage play ordinarily aims to present a series of events "in *bold theatric terms*" (Nicole 74; italics added). Fleshing out the case of Nicole, Eaton brings forward the argument that a theatrical piece categorically enjoins its audience to construe the occasions happening on the stage with "a set of implicit covenants which are not necessarily logical" (5). To express it more concretely, if one wants to appreciate a drama, he must agree to a number of presuppositions which are comparable to rituals—namely, conventions which are accepted "because they have been accepted" (Eaton 7).

True, people interpreting any work of art have to take a certain number of such preconditions for granted; nevertheless, they are commonly deemed as negative evidence of inability to represent

reality as it is. Considering that the era during which drama had been the sole form which could present a story with actions of humans ended long ago, that the limitations of other mediums have been overcome one after another, and that the mimetic competence of TV and cinema today is much greater than that of drama, one would estimate it to be curious that the age-old modus which has more restraints and requires its audience to comply with many tacit protocols is now recovering the status. One prominent contemporary dramatist even professed that his work is "a *ritual* enactment" (Akhtar 10; italics added).

So why do people continue to embrace such an art-form whose representational capacity seems severely bound by a network of 'ritual' codes, or, more simply, the 'dramatic premise'? If one examines only matters relevant to drama, he won't solve the question. This is, as the following sections will show, an issue that should be assessed with a more extensive outlook; philosophy is probably one of the valuable lenses to investigate it.

2. Speculative Materialism: The World is 'Factual'

Incidentally, philosophy is, in general, held to be a detached intellectual activity that has little relevance to practical affairs of the real world, and philosophers are often counted as weird fellows always pondering over speculative, esoteric conceptions. Certainly, these censures have some validity; yet, as long as it is conducted by 'live' humans, philosophical thoughts are essentially entwined with actual businesses of our societies, as Hegel once judiciously defined philosophy as "its own age apprehended in thought" (12; translation mine). In this sense, one can consider a predominant philosophical school to be reflective of the zeitgeist wherein it is produced. Additionally, philosophers are adept at abstracting and verbalizing what people vaguely intuit, as to which Merleau-Ponty once passed an incisive remark: "true philosophy consists in relearning to look at the world" (xxiii). Therefore, reviewing a leading philosophical thought enables one to gain a more accurate understanding of what people around him instinctively think and to analyze a cultural phenomenon from a bird's-eye standpoint.

Hence this section dissects Meillassoux's Speculative Materialism since its rise has largely paralleled the rejuvenation of the vogue of stage plays. Being one of the sects of the philosophical movement Speculative Realism, it has made a considerable impact upon miscellaneous fields other than philosophy since Meillassoux revealed it in his *After Finitude*. One of the most outstanding hallmarks of the book is that therein the philosopher quite persuasively disproves the 'principle of sufficient reason' which almost every modern person has taken as a given, nearly a-priori law, and, replacing the old principle with "the principle of unreason", which he pithily names "facticity", contends that we should posit that the world has neither reason nor purpose; in other words, the existence of the world is merely "contingent" and "factual", and thus has no absolute, God-like truth behind or underneath it (Meillassoux 50-81).

Deriving inspiration from the argument of Meillassoux and perceptively pointing out that Meillassoux didn't sufficiently discuss how one should see discrete things and specific phenomena in this contingent world defined by the principle of unreason, Masaya Chiba, a distinguished Japanese scholar, recently advanced a theory about how we should look upon them within the framework. First outlining his idea in figurative language, observing: "the unreason of the whole world, as it were, 'echoes' in every part of the world", Chiba, invoking Pierre Legendre's 'Dogmatic Anthropology', puts forth an interesting averment: "the world is fabricated as a *system of rituals* which assume their form just because as they do"; and the expression 'rituals' encompasses objects of any ontological level. (Chiba 58-60; italics added).

One should not overlook the intriguing parallel between the 'dramatic premise' to which the audience of a drama must assent and the perspective which Speculative Materialism urges us to adopt: both of them, like a ritual, prompt us to accept things and occurrences, whether they be on stage or in the tangible world, just as they are, i.e. as facts. Allowing for the fact that both drama and Speculative Materialism are seeing their rise concurrently right now, it would be improper of us to dismiss the correlation as a sheer nonsense; rather, we should regard this coincidence as reflecting an ongoing change in the reasoning framework of our contemporaries, who may begin noticing that poststructuralist 'relativism' has, though having disseminated the invaluable notion of 'diversity', struck a huge snag.

Conclusion: Toward a 'Dramatic' Worldview

Of course, one might deem it impetuous to link the two subjects only because they are becoming prominent simultaneously, and it isn't unlikely that the boom of one or both will soon wither; notwithstanding, it would be allowed to seek and experimentally tender a proposition to broaden our horizons from the view that existing things are 'factual', as opposed to necessary. It seems that the similar orientation between Speculative Materialism and the 'dramatic premise' can suggest a radical but effective way to coexist with other beings which is different from that which postmodernist relativism had hitherto proffered. Below is a sketchy proposal thereof.

Relativism still retained the shadow of the final, unfathomable 'truth' whence every interpretation is made; therefore, within the mindset, when one finds oneself at odds with someone over an issue, he would assume that either of their opinions/interpretations of the matter must be wrong. In lieu, the 'dramatic premise' and Speculative Materialism recommend us to postulate that what each of us experiences are never subjective constructions, but 'facts' by themselves, which means that each individual lives in one's own system of facts; to put it radically, every being lives in a different universe. Although one may denounce such an idea as hopeless nihilism, it is not. It makes us conscious that every one of us has no legitimate right to obtrude one's norms; instead, one ought to 'invite' another to visit one's world. It will capacitate us to embrace others despite

that they live in a discrete world, and to welcome the surprise which they may spring. Quotidian as this conclusion might sound, the author of this paper here wants to 'invite' you readers to reconsider the world and diverse things in it with the 'dramatic' worldview.

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