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The Journal is published by the Department of English, Mizoram University which has been awarded Departmental Research Support under UGC Special Assistance Programme (DRS/UGC-SAP). The objective of the Journal is to provide an informed scholarly dialogue on topics that are pertinent to literature and culture studies. The focus is both theoretical and interdisciplinary and endeavours to explore new perspectives in order to create a discourse of learning.

The Journal welcomes well researched articles from Humanities and the Social Sciences. Articles should be sent directly as email attachments to the editors. Sections will be provided for input on creative writing as well as book reviews. Submitted manuscripts are considered for publication with the understanding that it has not been already published, or submitted for publication elsewhere. The final decision of selection of articles for publication rests with the editors.

FOREWORD

The Department of English, Mizoram University is happy to bring out the second issue of the MZU Journal of Literature and Cultural Studies ,published under the support of UGC DRS/SAP I.

The theme of the journal for this issue is "Orality and Oral Tradition". Like oral languages, oral traditions that precede the written form continue to remain inadequately unexplored. Thus the attempt to capture the wealth of oral traditions with its multifarious and dynamic characteristics, in the form of the written word, remains noteworthy and it is hoped that this journal shall make a significant contribution to the notion of emergent literatures, across cultures.

Lalrindiki T.Fanai
Co Coordinator UGC-DRS I SAP
Department of English
Mizoram University

EDITORIAL

It gives me immense pleasure to write the editorial for the second issue of MZU Journal of Literature and Cultural Studies.

This issue has been dedicated to the theme of 'Orality and Oral Tradition' and suffice it to say, there has been overwhelming response towards the same, in the form of articles for the journal. Oral cultures are living cultures in their own right and the journal bears witness to the same, in exhibiting the myriad perspectives that have been brought forth in terms of the critique from various academic paradigms from across the country.

The writings that are etched within the pages of this journal have further enriched our departmental project undertaken under DRS-SAP I   on emergent literatures. In this premise, the journal further validates the significance of the theme of the project while authenticating the importance of both oral tradition and the notion of emergent literatures and cultures ,by situating them in terms of varying concepts in literature.

As a department of English, it is our hope, that this journal will enrich and further locate the relevance of orality and oral tradition, and the timeless essence that they bear upon life, literature and thought.

Margaret L.Pachuau
Editor

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Telling the Whole Story: The Role of the Bhagavata in Karnad's Hayavadana

Angelie Multani

In most western critical theory, theatre conventionally is seen as mimetic and in Bakhtin's terms, 'monological' in that it does not "contain multiple worlds"[1]. The roles of narrators in this model of criticism is neatly laid out in – they are "objective, unmediated and devoid of subjectivity" (Richardson: 1988:204) In most western drama the narrators perform unproblematic roles – they frame the action in the Prologues and Epilogues, they introduce the characters and they communicate with the spectators, asking for applause, telling them what to think of the action and so on. There are of course, texts that transgress these boundaries, where the narrators 'step out' so to speak, of the carefully delineated border between 'reality' and 'illusion' and threaten the carefully constructed theatrical world of characters/spectators.

The other conventional understanding of theatre is that it is based on a paradox of being scripted, rehearsed and carefully timed to present an illusion of spontaneity and the ephemeral quality of a 'live' performance. Western theatre in particular, and those traditions of Asian theatre that have been influenced by Western theatre follow scripts, have learnt lines and are built upon hours and hours of rehearsals, fixed movements and cued entries and exits. The plays of Girish Karnad as an exponent of modern Indian theatre defy this paradigm and in a unique interplay of tradition and modernity

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[1] Brian Richardson, *Point of View in Drama: Diegetic Monologue, Unreliable Narrators, and the Author's Voice on Stage*, Comparative Drama, Vol. 22, No. 3 (Fall 1988), pp. 193-214. p 204.

bring on stage performances that transgress various boundaries and definitions of theatricality, performance, illusion and being.

Karnad's plays are certainly political and postcolonial in the ways they challenge western dominated notions of theatre and aesthetics, but more interestingly for the purposes of this paper, they combine contemporary and classical dramaturgical practices and rituals to challenge the very ideas of being and seeing in the theatre. This paper focuses on the role and character of the Bhagvata in Karnad's famous play *Hayavadana* and examines the ways in which the liminality of the Bhagvata, his multi-vocal and over-arching presence in the multiple worlds of the play comment on and illuminate the unique characteristics of hybridity and plurality that Karnad holds up as essential and desirable for the construction of a modern national identity.

Improvisation plays a crucial role in Indian performative traditions, from classical music to drama. Indian traditions privilege creative experimentation within the paradigms of a text or raga over established or 'set' authorities of compositions or texts. As Erin Mee says, texts are usually appreciated not just for their literary qualities but for their ability to enable elaboration and multiple ways of processing and experiencing the 'story'.[2]

When the Bhagvata in *Hayavadana* 'tells' the story of Padmini and her two husbands, he doesn't either narrate the plot, nor does he 'introduce' it and step aside to allow the actors to énact' it. He moves in and out of the action himself, traversing multiple realities and illusions, weaving in and out of different time zones and worlds. As Mee writes, Indian performative traditions incorporate gestures knows as mudras – these involve the entire body of the performer

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[2] Erin B. Mee in *Modern Asian Theatre and Performance:* 1900-2000 by Kevin J Wetmore Jr., Siyuan Liu, Erin B. Mee, Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, London & New York, 2014. p 197.

and embody language, thought and perception. Through the use of mudras a performer can convey multiple worlds at the same time, bypassing the linear limitations of verbal language. The performer can through mudras simultaneously show and be something, Mee uses the example of Panniker's famous *Ottayan* to illustrate the powerful and unique effect of mudras – "Parmeshwaran first enacts the hearing the elephant, then show us the elephant by using the mudra *for* elephant and the facial expression *of* the elephant. Because of the way the hand gesture and the facial expression work together, he is in fact simultaneously *showing* the elephant and *becoming* the elephant. [Mee: 202-3]

This is exactly the way in which a talented storyteller enthrals his/her audience while narrating a story – he enacts various parts and roles, including inanimate beings like storms, trees and landscape elements. The audience of the story teller are privy to multiple worlds at the same time – the 'real' world in which they listen to the story, the world/s created by the experience of the story and the commentary or values that they bring to the story created by the opinions/commentary expressed by the narrator. The spectators or audiences must also be creatively engaged with and invested in the performance. Erin Mee says about K.N. Pannikar: "by creating a multisensory theatre of the imagination, Pannikar engages spectators more thoroughly and, and offers them the means to more actively absorb information. When seen from this angle, thanathunatakavedi – which literally means "our own theatre" or theatre that reflects our culture and which, in practice is a total theatrical experience – is about rethinking representation to change the way spectators think." [Mee: 205]

This is also the function of the Bhagvata in *Hayavadana* – he is the director, the actor, a character, a commentator and audience, all rolled into one. In traditional yakshagana, from which Karnad

has borrowed the character and various other performative traditions, the Bhagavata is the 'director' of the action. He introduces the characters, interacts with them on stage, elicits their back-stories by asking questions and comments on the action. He leads the action of the play and forms the link between the audiences and the actors by linking their two worlds. [Mee: 220]

In *Hayavadana* of course, the Bhagavata does far more than link the worlds and introduce the characters. He transgresses or transcends the function of the narrator and even the Chorus by being a character and an interested party in the action of the play. It is the Bhagavata who raises the questions that the audience have to deal with about the borders between illusion and reality, the philosophical dilemma posed by Padmini's conundrum between the two men in her life and the problem of Hayavadana himself, torn between being a man and being a horse.

The opening of the play is itself double edged – not only is it a conventional invocation to Ganesha the elephant-headed god traditionally prayed to at the start of all Hindu endeavours, but it simultaneously celebrates the imperfections of Ganesha as ultimate symbols of perfection and completeness. The song alludes to this apparent contradiction – "O single-tusked destroyer of incompleteness" [Hayavadana Act One] Bhagavata takes this further in his prayer and underlines the importance of understanding the perfection of hybridity in the world:

Bhagavata: … How indeed can one hope to describe his glory in our poor disabled words? An elephant's head on a human body, a broken tusk and a cracked belly – whichever way you look at him he seems the embodiment of imperfection, of incompleteness. How indeed can one fathom the mystery that this very Vakrantunda-Mahakaya, with his crooked face and distorted body, is the Lord and Master of Success and Perfection? Could it be that this Image

of Purity and Holiness, this Mangalmoorty, intends to signify by his very appearance that the completeness of God is something no poor mortal can comprehend?

[Act One]

The rest of Bhagavata's opening speech follows the basic conventions of Sanskrit drama as he proceeds to introduce to us the play that he is about to direct on stage – the story of Padmini and her two lovers, Kapila and Devadutta in the city of Dharmapura. The two heroes of this play are best friends, an odd couple – one characterised by his brains and high caste, the other by his physical prowess and lower status. The two are inseparable best friends, and clearly, two halves of one whole. This introduction, a formal opening to many Sanskrit plays, is interrupted twice by a scream heard off-stage. The opening of the play is thus deferred as the story-teller, the narrator is interrupted by his Actor stumbling on stage in fright because he has just seen a talking horse.

This is the first deferment of the promised action as well as the first re-casting of roles – the Bhagavata is now simultaneously character as well as narrator-director. He admonishes the Actor (who is currently playing the role of an Actor who is going to play the role of Devadutta) and calls his attention to the musicians and to the audience. The audience (us) are gestured towards by the Bhagavata as 'our' audience – that is the audience gathered to see the play about Padmini, Devadutta and Kapila. But we are not that audience – we have gathered to see the play *Hayavadana*. So we are also re-cast in a role, even it is a role of a different audience for a different play. Just as the Bhagavata was to link the two worlds of apparent reality (the ticket buying audience for *Hayavadana*) and the illusion (the world of the play) he introduces another world – a third level of reality, and calls into question the stability of the

other two. One of the most lasting consequences of Western theatre has been the effect of separation between the audience and the action of stage – the 'fourth wall'. If Bhagavata can so casually destroy this separation by including the audience in his dramatic world as participants and fellow-actors, the comfortable separation that we are used to, that allows us to safely comment as disinterested observers can no longer be relied upon.

The Actor is reminded that he is 'on stage' when he describes what he was doing on the side of the road when he first heard Hayavadana's voice – so this frame or level of the action is a self-conscious one, where the actors acknowledge that they are actors on a stage, but this is not the case in the next story, the next level or frame where Padmini, Devadutta and Kapila do not acknowledge the presence of the audience or the fact that they are performing on that very same stage.

This initial introduction of Hayavadana also emphasises that appearances are deceptive – because the Actor saw the head of a horse when he heard the voice, he assumed it was a talking horse, no matter how far-fetched the idea seemed, he was still unable to imagine the idea of a hybrid being, a half-horse half man. The Bhagavata compels the Actor to go back and have a second look at the being which has frightened him, commenting caustically to the audience in an aside "God alone knows what he saw - and what he took it to be! There's Truth for you … Pure Illusion."

[Act One]

When the actor rushes back followed by Hayavadana however, the Bhagavata decides to be prudent and shield the 'gentle audience' from the sight which has so frightened the Actor. Hayavadana is thus given a classical Kathakali entrance, shielded by a curtain behind which he hides when he realises that he can be seen by everybody. The Bhagavata believes he has seen through the trick and tries to

take off the 'mask' that Hayavadana is wearing. For the stage director/ actor, the only possible truth behind Hayavadana's appearance is that of illusion. The irony of his shock when he realises that it is not a mask but a real horse's head on a real man's body is not lost on the audience who recalls his hymn to Ganesha at the opening of the play. The lines between myth/story/illusion and reality are thus constantly being called into question here.

Karnad's mix of 'reality' with religion does not simply undermine traditional beliefs. Just as the figure of Hayavadana – the half horse-half man is foreshadowed by the very serious prayer to Ganesha the elephant headed God, the seriousness of Ganesha is underscored by the tongue-in-cheek treatment of Kali. There is no clear stand one can take on religion through this play, except that it does not necessarily belong to an alternate dimension of reality. What makes Ganesha revered is what makes Hayavadana a laughing stock. We pray to Ganesha to remove all obstacles but the followers of Kali in the world on stage avoid her temple because she grants all wishes indiscriminately.

In the typical Yakshagana style of questioning Bhagavata asks Hayavadana what he has done to 'merit' this curse of incompleteness. Hayavadana's answer is illuminating – he refutes the standard text-book formula of having being cursed and caused someone harm. He was born with the horse's head because his mother fell in love with a horse. His mother was cursed by her celestial husband when he reverted to his human form to become a horse because she wanted him to stay in his horse-form. The parents went away, and Hayavadana was left in his 'half' form searching for a way to complete himself.

It is through this search for completion that we see Karnad's most strong criticism of the postcolonial condition and the various nationalist projects to 'de-colonise' the Indian mind. Hayavadana

tries to 'become' Indian, thus exposing the dichotomy between being and becoming, of the project of self-construction. He says he tried to 'become a complete man' by taking an interest in "…the social life of the Nation – Civics, Politics, Patriotism, Nationalism, Indianization, the Socialist Pattern of Society…" [Act One] The capitalisation of each word makes it a concept, a state to aspire to, and even reminds us of Ezekiel's famous satirical poem "The Patriot". Hayavadana tries to gain acceptance as 'Indian' by adopting various legitimised ways of being, but of course he cannot find 'his society'. The half-being cannot find completeness simply by negating part of himself. He must accept himself as a total being, horse head and all before he can aspire to wholeness in the abstract.

The boundary between the 'real' world of the audience and the 'stage world' of Hayavadana is further threatened when the Bhagavata tells the Actor to take Hayavadana to the Kali temple on Mount Chitrakoot, a temple that plays a central role in the Padmini/Devadutta/Kapila plot as well as being known in India as a 'real temple'. We are of course aware that the play we are apparently waiting for has not yet begun, but the play has, of course actually begun. It is this complex interweaving of time and reality that is negotiated so skilfully by the Bhagavata that it is only later that many audience members and/or readers become aware of this manipulation of their different worlds.

It is only when the Actor and Hayavadana have left the stage for the Kali temple that the central plot of Padmini begins. The presence of the female Chorus speaking for Padmini complicates the narratorial mode of the play even further as they fulfil a more traditional role and narratorial point of view. The female Chorus frames our reaction to Padmini at the beginning and at the end and speaks "for" her in a completely different way from the Bhagavata, which makes us look at the complexity of the Bhagavata even more carefully. The other narratorial device used

for Padmini are the Dolls. These Dolls were bought for Padmini's unborn child by Devadutta/Kapila from the Ujjain fair, and they form the complement to the child by being able to speak while he remains silent. The Dolls are privy to Padmini's secret desires, dreams and unarticulated hopes. They can see the secrets of her soul and they reveal them to us with their judgements and their opinions:

> Doll I : As the doll-maker used to say, 'What are things coming to!'
> Doll II : Especially last night – I mean – that dream …
> Doll I : Tut! Tut! One shouldn't talk about such things!
> Doll II : It was so shameless…
> Doll I : I said be quiet …
> Doll II : Honestly! The way they …

> [Act Two]

If the commentary by the Female Chorus is one kind of overarching frame to view Padmini through and the Dolls are the censorious and vicarious gossiping tongues of public opinion, which form another layer of narratorial comment, the Bhagavata is yet another and the most complex layer.

Although he is located in the outer frame of the plot, forming the link between the audience and the characters, the Bhagavata transcends the boundaries between these worlds as well as the boundary between 'reality' and 'illusion' by literally speaking for Padmini at the climax of the play. When Padmini takes her child to the forest to meet Kapila/Devadutta the first intervention by Bhagavata remains at the level of 'outsider' to the action, still within his role as narrator/chorus. He sings a song which may refer to the situation that Kapila/Devadutta finds himself in when confronted by Padmini the woman he loves and her child. Then when he asks Padmini why she has left Devadutta/Kapila, the head and the man

who it was decided was he lawful wedded husband, it is the
Bhagavata who answers, but speaking for Padmini:

Bhagavata: How could I make you understand? If Devadutta
has changed overnight and gone back to his original form, I would
have forgotten you completely. But that's not how it happened. He
changed day by day. Inch by inch. Hair by hair. … That's what
Padmini must tell Kapila. … But she doesn't say anything. She
remains silent.

[Act Two]

In this speech the Bhagavata effortlessly straddles completely
different times, worlds, narratorial roles and realities. He explains
Padmini's position *as* Padmini , becoming Padmini even as she
stands in front of the audience, articulating her position without
rendering it in third person or with the prejudice of another
perspective. In the same speech, he also is an exponent of Padmini,
seeing her from the outside and explaining her position as well as
her silence. The silence which is Padmini's greatest defense as well
as her greatest offense against traditional values – the silence when
she has to explain which man she loves more, which man she wants
to be with.

It is this silence of Padmini's which trickles down to her son,
rendering him quiet and incapable of speech. If the son of Padmini
and Kapila/Devadutta, Devadutta/Kapila were to speak, what voice
would he communicate in? The sophisticated educated speech of
Devadutta or the rough rustic tongue of Kapila? This is the dilemma
of the postcolonial subject, Padmini's son and Hayavadana. When
Padmini decides to commit sati with both Devadutta and Kapila,
she calls upon the Bhagavata to take care of her son, to introduce
him to the forest dwellers first as Kapila's son and then to the
Reverend Brahmin Vidyasagara for his formal education as
Devadutta's son. The apparent contradiction is completely accepted

by Bhagavata who then seems to formally end the play of Padmini and her two lovers with a namaskara to the audience.

Who the Bhagavata was in the Padmini play is unexplained as he remains the Bhagavata and the lead in the continuing action of the Actor and Hayavadana. The apparent separation between the two plots is completely destroyed by the entry of Padmini's son into this part of the action. The different time frames, worlds and plots that have been subverted by the presence of Bhagavata have been commented on before in this paper, now they are all subsumed into one as all the frames of action and all the plots come together in a moment. Bhagavata doesn't recognize the child, but does recognize the Dolls the child is holding on to. This time it is the second Actor who has met Hayavadana, who is now referred to by Bhagavata as the horse-headed man. And once again, we see the folly of assuming something without seeing the whole, as Hayavadana is revealed not as a horse-headed man but as a complete and whole horse, albeit with a human's voice. All contradictions are resolved and all halves are made whole when the child laughs and Hayavadana loses his human voice. The horse becomes complete, the child becomes whole and we have no further need of the Dolls, the censorious and moralising narrators. The play ends with the Bhagavata praying as he had when they began, but this time the prayer is to make the leaders of the country whole, to impart a little sense to them.

As has been said before, it is the character of the Bhagavata that most completely marks the fusion that according to Karnad is the hallmark of the postcolonial Indian citizen. He is both a combination of traditional Indian and Western dramatic devices, and yet more than the sum of them. In his persona the Bhagavata is a representation of that device that successfully questions the division of the theatre into 'real world' and 'illusion', who brings together the different streams of time marked out in the separation of story-

telling and the real world. The Bhagavata is the consummate oral narrator shining in the world of the scripted word – he steps in and out of roles and defies a single character or characteristic that would define him as anything other than Bhagavata – an avatar of Vishnu. It is through the narration of Bhagavata that a play becomes more than a scripted text which is 'acted' and presented 'live' in front of audiences who assume that their roles require them to sit passively and accept that the action on stage has little to do with their lives off stage. The Bhagavata brings together our different realities and shows us that if we reject a part of ourselves and our histories we will always remain half and incomplete, longing for wholeness but forever denied it, a sight as absurd as a horse that sings patriotic songs.

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Collective Memory, Oral History and Identity: Retrieving the story of Thengphakhri/Birgosri

Anjali Daimari

The place of collective memory in oral history is undisputable. Writing about the significance of collective memory in their essay "Collective Memory – What is it?" Noa Gedi and Yigal Elam writes: 'Today it is almost impossible to read a text in history that does not mention the term "collective memory" or its complementary counterpart "narrative."' (Gedi & Elam 30) In his seminal work *Oral Tradition as History* Jan Vansina considers the expression "oral tradition" as applying

> both to a process and to its products. The products are oral messages based on previous oral messages, at least a generation old. The process is the transmission of such messages by word of mouth over time until the disappearance of the message. Hence any given oral tradition is but a rendering at one moment, an element in a process of oral development that began with the original communication. (Vansina 3)

Orality itself is coterminous with memory. Jan Vansina in his book discusses how diverse oral sources can be seen as contributing to written history. Vansina also discusses the special importance of collective memory.[1] Traditions according to him are "memories of memories". According to him "to a point all memory is collective" and it is this collective character which is important. There is therefore a symbiotic relation between oral tradition and collective memory.

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[1] Vansina discusses in Chapter Six in the section *Corpus as remembered over time* the importance of collective memory. See pp. 160-162.

Collective memory, plays a particularly important role in the life of a community. According to Hasian and Frank, "Histories are those punctuations of time that have been accepted by the majority of intellectual communities as an authentic record of past events."[2] They go on to define collective memories as "the public acceptances or ratifications of these histories on the part of broader audiences". History, therefore is not the only kind of rhetoric that deals with the past. The rhetoric of collective memory does so, as well. Collective memory includes a selective appropriation of the past by the multiple publics inspired by historical imagination.

Evoking collective memory, for example like invoking the names of national heroes and events, not only make us to commemorate them, but also reshape our memories of them. Taking into consideration the discussions on memory and history, this paper would like to do a reading of a forgotten name in Bodo history, a name that does not find a mention in recorded canonical history, but how there is an attempt in recent times to retrieve this figure in fiction as well as in history written from 'within'. In recent decades the notion of who constitutes the proper subjects of history has been considerably expanded to include women, sexual and ethnic minorities, orphans, social "deviants," and many others previously consigned to the margins of history.[3] This study is an attempt to

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[2] See Hasian and Frank as quoted in "History, Collective Memory, and the Appropriation of Martin Luther King, Jr. : Reagan's Rhetorical Legacy" by Denise M. Bostdorff, & Steven R. Goldzwig in *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Volume: 35 No. 4, 2005.

[3] Antoinette Burton in *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India,* 2003 constitutes an attempt on her part to stretch the parameters of what professional historians would ordinarily construe as "history," and in particular, the "historical archive." Various theoretical trajectories such as poststructuralism and postcolonialism over the course of the last two decades have explored who should constitute the proper subjects of history.

look at a woman who has almost been forgotten but whose memory lingers among the community and whose retrieval can also be seen as a desire for and sense of history.

Legend of Thengphakhri in the Bodo Pantheon:

The choice of Thengphakhri was inevitable for the study considering her prominence in Bodo oral history and her presence in the collective memory of the people. During the British rule prior to independence, her role as the first tax collector is memorable. However, the fact that she does not figure in written history is one of the most prominent absences from the history of modern Assam. The fact that in a man dominated society she was the first woman tax collector in entire India who could be so sidelined requires critical enquiry regarding the whole question of construction of history. So what is needed now is re-evaluation of this legend retrieving her from the silences of written history. A workshop organised under the aegis of Bodo Sahitya Sabha in 2005 at the Bodoland Guest House for the first time seriously sat to discuss and recover this serious omission in written history. This workshop went a long way in collecting any bits of information about this legendary woman. This research resulted in the writing of at least two novels based on her life – Mamoni Raisom Goswami's *Thengphakhri Tahsildarar Taamor Toruwal* (2009) and Bidyasagar Narzary's *Birgosrini Thungri* (2004). Though they are fictionalised stories based on the life of Thengphakhri, yet both the writers have drawn materials from the existing resources on Thengphakhri. Both the writers in the introduction to their work write about the absences of history and the need to retrieve this woman from the silences of history. In writing their work it is their attempt to preserve the collected memories of people about her through fiction and thereby perhaps restore to her the place denied to her by written history. Her legend can still be traced to the Baageshwari Temple at Bijni

where it is believed her sword still stands as a testimony to the existence of this legendary woman.

Thengphakhri in History:

It is now a given that views of history are often mobilized for political and other ends. In this context it is relevant to quote Le Goff: "To make themselves the master of memory and forgetfulness is one of the great preoccupations of the classes, groups, and individuals who have dominated and continue to dominate historical societies" (Le Goff 54). Kaplonski in his book *Truth, History and Politics in Mongolia: The Memory of Heroes* while discussing history of Mongolia quotes Edward Said where he put it rather more bluntly:

> the art of memory for the modern world is both for historians as well as ordinary citizens and institutions very much something to be used, misused, and exploited, rather than something that sits inertly there for each person to possess and contain.[4]

Drawing from Said, Kaplonski says thate Said speaks of the dangers of misappropriating history towards one's own personal ends. Nineteenth-century and earlier historians pursued a belief in an objective history, but Ernest Renan noted that nation-making depended in part on getting history "wrong". The major shift perhaps was not in the overall stock of historical knowledge itself, but rather in the public presentation of and debate about such knowledge. The legend of Thengphakhri was available in the collective memory of the people but somewhere suppressed. In writing their fiction based on this legend what the authors were doing was presenting as new knowledge that which wasn't actually

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[4] For more refer to Christopher Kaplonski's *Truth, History and Politics in Mongolia: The Memory of Heroes*. London & New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004.

new. But writing her into their fictional works Mamoni Raisom Goswami and Bidyasagar Narzary have brought this almost forgotten name in Bodo oral history to historical discussions. By bringing her back in this way to their history, the Bodos now invoke her for legitimation purposes. They do so by projecting contemporary ideas and values into their narratives of the past. This figure has thus assumed a certain specific place, in the Bodo imagination.

Paul Veyne[5] points to the critical use of sources as the distinguishing hallmark of contemporary historians. Canonical history books on Assam history (Edward Gait, L.Shakespear) do not make any reference to this woman tax collector. It is only in recent times that Bodo historians have mentioned her in the pages of their history books. Katindra Swrgiary in his book *Bodoni Jarimin arw Somaosarni* records that in the present Bongaigaon district, at Bijni there was a place known as Baagdwar. With the coming of the British, this place was made into a revenue circle (mouza). He mentions that in this Bijni circle the collector was Birgosri Sikhla. Her name was Thengphakhri but because she could horse ride she was called Birgosri. When the people could not pay the tax on time the British imposed fine and this was extracted by force from the gullible villagers. In order to relieve the poor villagers from such force, she revolted against the British, who for her act considered her a traitor. She thereafter turned against the British. The manner in which she rode horse and fought astonished the Britishers. One day as she was resting on the banks of river she was killed. One Sadhu found a sword near the shore and took it to a nearby temple. This temple is now known as Baageswar (Birgosri) or Sword of God. Katindra Swargiary says her story cannot be

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[5] Kaplonski in his book *Truth, History and Politics in Mongolia: The Memory of Heroes* draws on the work of Paul Veyne. My reference to Veyne is drawn from this book.

considered as folk tale but a legend as this incident really happened. A testimony to this according to him is Rupnath Basumatary who collected tax for Thengphakhri.

At the present time it becomes pertinent for the Bodos to claim the legend of Thengphakhri in order not only to present the Bodos as "a people without history" but importantly to bring a feeling of pride to own a woman who was the first tax collector in British India at a time when there was rampant female infanticide and women in other parts of India had to still live under *purdah* and die as *satis*. According to Veyne awareness of the past does not always necessarily equate with "history" as "a genre", or as a specific way of thinking about the past. Whereas as a community the Bodos are well aware of this past but this past does not figure as history, the official record of the past, history as a genre. It is not so much an awareness of the past *per se* than the attitude various Bodos have adopted towards that past at different times which is of significance. What Ladislav Holy says is of significance in the context of the Bodos, that "nationalism is a discursive agreement that history matters without necessarily agreeing on what it is and what it means"(Holy, quoted in *Truth, History and Politics in Mongolia: The Memory of Heroes*)..

Role of Public and Collective Memory in Reconstructing History:

Collective memory has been defined as "what remains of the past in the lived reality of groups, or what these groups make of the past" (Kaplonski 9). In this definition according to Kaplonski there is the collapsing of memory into history. Referring to French historian Jacques Le Goff observation that "recent, naïve trends seem virtually to identify history with memory, and even to give preference in some sense to memory" Kaplonski opines that although written over a decade ago, his observation still stands.

While the two mutually influence each other, social memory is ultimately the more expansive category. Social memory includes acts of commemoration, monuments, street names, definitions of self and other, etc (Kaplonski 15). History in its attempt "to understand, narrate or reconstruct the past", on its part serves social memory. It provides source material and justification for remembering in a particular way. "Remembering" as Vansina writes "is an activity, a re-creation of what once was. It uses for this purpose not just this or that bit of information, but everything available in the information pool that is needed in this circumstance, reshaped as needed for this particular re-creation (Vansina 147-148). Thus although both memory and history are not the same both are in the business of reconstructing the past. In the present time there are different ways of writing and thinking about history.

Usually the state possesses a monopoly over interpretations of history and identity. But it is not always that people accept the state truth. In Duara's words, "The state is never able to eliminate alternative constructions of the nation".[6] This can be held true for the Bodo case as well though it is not without its complications. Jacques Le Goff addresses the concern of historians when he writes: "the conditions under which the document was produced must be carefully studied … The structures of power in a society include the power of certain social categories and dominant groups to voluntarily or involuntarily leave behind them testimony that can orient historiography in one direction or another" (Le Goff quoted in Kaplonski 12). The question that arises over here is who are the writers of history? What is the politics that is involved in writing histories? Each historian may have agendas? Official histories are generally written by the intelligentsia, the "culture makers" to use Katherine Verdery's (1991) phrase, but they too are open to to

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[6] Duara, quoted by Kaplonski in the Mongolian context.

multiple interpretations. Collective memory, oral traditions do contest the official versions of history.

In contemporary times there is this search for alternative history and this history is often loctaed in official silences. Very often what is not said is more important than what is said. The study on Thengphakhri points towards these silences of history. Dwelling on the importance of public memory Noa Gedi and Yigal Elam writes:

Evoking public memory, then, is an inherently rhetorical activity, for speakers must choose which stories from the past they desire to tell, how they wish to recount particular people and events, and what words from history they want to share. Sometimes, what politicians offer us in these rhetorical constructions are revisionist histories and messages. (Gedi & Elam 31)

In this case, we can see that Thengphakhri was obviously remembered, during the period of British rule in this part of Assam. But there were definitely certain understandings of her that were not spoken of openly. These would include more positive interpretations of her role in history today. Other events had to be "not remembered." This holds true even in the post-independent period. In seeing Thengphakhri as the first Bodo tax collector, it is "forgotten" that her methods in doing so included what would perhaps by even current standards be considered inappropriate.

Kaplonski in his study considers commemoration as one of the key concerns of memory studies and he goes on to find a link between memory and location Citing the case of the ancient Greeks, and medieval Europeans he explains how they used envisioned physical arrangements as memory aids. In this context the Baageswar temple at Bijni which houses the sword of Birgosri is particularly interesting in regard to social memory. This reinforces the peculiarities of social memory to the Bodos. The interiors of

the temple are not accessible to the public. Nevertheless, imagery and spectacle are co-opted.

Importance of Such a Reconstruction in Shaping the Identity of a Community:

To the Bodos of the present generation, the historical figures like Thengphakhri reflect the key tendency to construct a concept of "being Bodo" in opposition to being Assamese. The reclamation of a past that is almost forgotten becomes significant for a construction of their identity. It is now being brought back into the discussion, as particular versions of this story proliferate and become more widely established and offer a platform on which to base new concepts of "being Bodo", giving scope to intellectuals, writers, researchers and others to deal more directly with the legend of Thengphakhri. As a consequence history itself becomes identity-centered as readings of history now have to come to terms with claims to new historical knowledge. In keeping with present needs and the prevailing political context the past continues to be reinterpreted. The whole process of reclamation of a past, in this instance of Thengphakhri, raises questions? The narratives on Thengphakhri by Mamoni Raisom Goswami and Bidyasagar Narzary published around the same time have once again brought this once forgotten legend of Bodo history to discussion. A highly politically sensitive group, the Bodos now feel the importance of claiming this figure as an instance of Bodo political and cultural self-assertion. Such a process seeks to legitimate how these are important for the preservation of Bodo history and identity. Thus recuperation of historical images from the past can best be understood as attempts to establish a Bodo identity in contrast to and different from an 'Assamese' identity.

The particular choice of Thengphakhri for the Bodos in this context becomes essentially a non-question. The recuperation of

this figure from oral history gives the community a sense of pride. Her exploits as a woman tax collector makes her unique and her absence from official records thus registers speculations. In Bidyasadar Narzary's *Birgosrini Thungri* that aspect of Thengphakhri is adapted into the narrative that makes her exclusive – a brave fighter and a revolutionary, because it is those ideals that the author perhaps wants to exalt as characteristic of this community. The explicit political aspect is absent in the narrative. Nevertheless, it tells more than it says. Thengphakhri was seen much more as a legendary figure rather than a political one. The political aspect of Thengphakhri's accomplishments has now become important in the present context in the era of identity politics and ethnic assertion. The particular emphasis on Thengphakhri's role in history is more recent.

Thengphakhri's story calls for a more nuanced approach to memory, history and identity. Thengphakhri's story is important and instructive for it argues that we need to broaden our understanding of social memory, collective memory and at the same time acknowledge that in reconstructing history remembering figures like her becomes equally important especially for the Bodos, who are still in the process of writing their history.

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Moyon Cultural Traditions: Its Transition

Bridget Nungchensha Nungchim

Origin and Habitat

The Moyons have a mythical belief that they emerged from the underworld to the world we live in through a hole, which they perceive was located somewhere in China. They live in eighteen villages, out of which seventeen are in Chandel District, in the south-east of Manipur, and one in Myanmar, along the Indo-Myanmar borders. Their immediate neighbours are the Meiteis, also called Manipuris, Aimols, Anals, Kukis, Chothes, Lamkangs, Marings, Taraos and Monsangs.

The Etymology of the Name Moyon

The Moyons, among themselves are called Bujuur. They are among the earliest indigenous inhabitants of Manipur. According to Oinam Bhogeswar Singh, in 33 A.D., Poreiton, the younger brother of demi-god Pakhangba, the first king of the Meiteis, with a band of people consisting mainly of women and young people, roamed all over Manipur in search of a suitable place for settlement. When they came to a Moyon village, they were on the brink of starvation as their provisions ran short. The Moyons gave them rice in exchange for 'moithaap' (refined cotton ready for spinning). For Poreiton and his party, it was selling moithaap to the Moyons to buy rice. In Manipuri, the word 'sell' is yonba. Taking the initial syllables from moithaap and yonba, they called the Bujuurs "Moyon".

The Moyon Ethnicity

In about the middle of the 19th century, when the Kukis entered the Moyon area, the Moyons, together with their neighbouring communities: Anals, Lamkangs, Chothes and some more others, were labelled as old Kukis. But, the Moyons assert that they are Nagas. Capt. R. Boileau Pemberton, as early as in 1835, perhaps before any thought of political or ethnic alignment, called the Moyons Nagas when he said, "Further south through the Anal and Mueeyol tribes of Nagas…." T.C. Hodson also has a similar conclusion: "In Tengnoupal, there are four tribes (i.e. Naga tribes). viz., Maring, Anal, Lamkang, Moyon-Monsang."

The Language

The Moyons speak Naga-Kuki language of the Tibeto-Burman group. Broadly speaking, their language is Naga in sound, and Kuki in its pronominalizing feature. In vocabulary, it is related to both languages. Because the Moyons and the Kuki-Chins live side by side and share social life, and that the Kukis are much larger in number, they influence the Moyons culturally, especially in language.

Social Composition

Moyon has twelve lineages called *'shungkhur'*. The lineages are organized simultaneously in two and three umbrella moieties. The lineages are paired according to the nearness of relation. The organization in two moieties is shown in the following two tables.

TABLE I

MOIETIES
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↓			↓		
SHIMPHUW			**ZIINGVEN**		
↓			↓		
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Nguruw	Bungjeer (E)	Sherbum	Chineer	Ruwen	Khaartu
Laangrom	Charii	Suwngrip (E)	Nungchim	(Roel)	Beengpih(E)
	(Chara)	(Thuwrrip)		Vaanglaar	

TABLE II

MOIETIES
↓

↓			↓	↓	
SHIMPHUW			**ZIINGVEN**	**RINIH**	
↓			↓	↓	
			Chineer		
↓	↓	↓	Nungchim	↓	↓
Nguruw	Bungjeer (E)	Sherbum		Ruwen (Roel)	Khaartu
Laangrom	Charii	Suwngrip (E)		Vaanglaar	Beengpih(E)
	(Chara)	(Thuwrrip)			
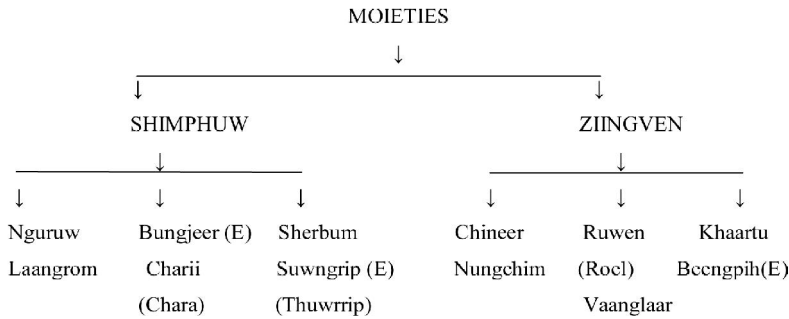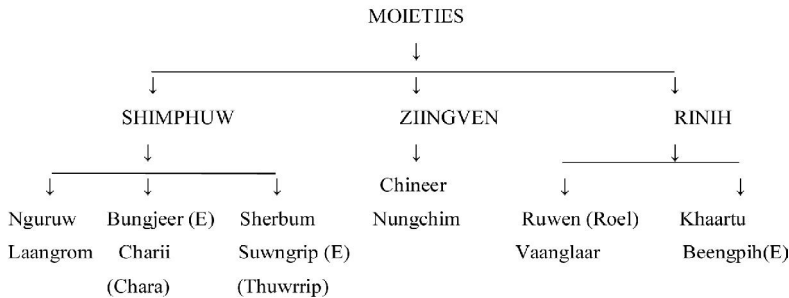
Of the twelve lineages, three, namely, *Bungjeer* and *Suwngrip* or *Thuwrrip* of Shimphuw moiety, and *Beengpih* of Rinih moiety, are extinct. Each moiety has a progenitor of its own: *Vangruwng* is the progenitor of Shimphuw moiety, *Vangchar*, of Ziingven moiety, and *Shiree*, of Rinih moiety. As there should be no moiety without progenitor, the theory of three-moiety in Moyon society should hold good. Among the twelve lineages, three of them with E in brackets, namely, Bungjeer, Suwngrip (Thuwrrip) and Beengpih are extinct.

Nomenclature

The system of naming children born in a Moyon family is distinctive. There are five distinguishing forms each for boys and girls. Those for boys are Motee, Kotee, Betee, Angtee, Thompa; those for girls are Teenuw, Tonuw, Shangnuw, Penuw, Thomnuw. The name of a natal position of a boy or a girl born after five, will be formed by adding a suffix 'nuh' (here the final letter 'h' signifies a glottal sound) to the first syllable of the positional name. For example, the sixth boy's natal positional name will be Mo+nuh i.e. 'Monuh', similarly, the sixth girl's will be Tee+nuh i.e. 'Teenuh'. Nuh means repetition. Likewise, a traditional proper name is formed by suffixing a morpheme or more to the initial natal positional name of the boy or girl, e.g. Mo+Paarsha 'Mopaarsha' 'glorious first born son.' It will be the same for the 6th son. The system applies for girls also.

Form of Addressing

Elders are not called by name by youngers. They are addressed by prefixing the vocative forms 'a' or 'aa' to the terms of respect for elders. For example, the term for 'father' is pa, so *apa*; the term for the husband of father's sister is brang, so *abrang*; that of father's sister is nee, so *aanee*; that of eldest brother is mo, so *aamo*; that of eldest sister is tee, so *aatee*. Father's eldest brother is *apaafhuw* which means 'big father'. Father's younger brothers are addressed by prefixing apa, with the final 'a' lengthened, to the natal positional form, e.g.: *apaako* 'father's younger brother just next to him'; *apaabe* 'father's second younger brother.' In like manner, *anuwfhuw* 'big mother' is mother's eldest sister; *anuwto* is mother's younger sister, immediately after her, and so on. Eldest brother is *aamo*, the second elder brother is *aako*; eldest sister is *aatee*; next to her is *aato*, etc. Elders generally address youngers by name, or by the natal positional forms: otee, kotee etc. for males,

teenuw, tonuw, etc. for females. They may be addressed also only by the first syllables, or by their reduplications, e.g. Mo, Ko, Momo, Koko, Tee, To, Teetee, Toto. If a person has children, he/she may be addressed as the father or mother of so and so, mentioning the name of the eldest son or daughter, e.g. Mokanpa/Mokan ampa 'Mokan's father'; Mokan amnuw 'Mokan's mother'; Teekenpa/ Teeken ampa 'Teeken's father'. They may be addressed also as Momo ampa, Momo amnuw, Teetee ampa, Teetee amnuw. Form of address for traditional special friends both between man and man, and woman and woman of the same moiety is *Kajuurfhuw*; for opposite moieties, it is *Karuupa* or *Karu* for men, *Karangnuw* or *Karang* for women. Grandfather is *afhuw*, and grandmother is *apuw*.

Marriage

A boy and a girl to be in courtship is called *ynriir*. Long ago when a girl wanted to know whether her boyfriend really loved or not, she would fry rice with salt and put it in the boy's pocket. If the boy ate it, it meant that he really loved. The fried rice with salt was known as '*chumpang*', which actually means salt. A boy, to assure a girl of his love and to reserve her, would give her a secret present, such as a hanky, or any clothe, or so. This present was called '*kikthuur*'. If the girl does not like the boy, she does not accept the present. A girl loves a boy and receives kikthuur, later, if she stops loving him, returns the kikthuur to the boy.

When a boy and a girl decide to live as life partners, both of them- some girls fail to do- inform their respective parents. Then, the boy's parents, with a few of their elder relatives go to the girl's parents with a domestic fowl and a bottle of country liquor, known as '*jeeruw*', generally after dark, to give a formal information, at the same time to request for the hand of their daughter in marriage. This step is called *ymmanthang*. The girl's parents may accept or refuse the request. If they accept, the next big step is *juktuw*.

Formerly, better in pre-Christian days, juktuw was the final act of tying the knot for a boy and a girl. In it, a big pig of five palms and a big jar of rice beer, called '*shavaezuw*' (prepared with rice and husk) were compulsory. Relatives and friends would bring more meat and rice beer. There is customary distribution of boiled slices of meat with rice beer. Share of drink is '*zuwtuwng*' and that of meat is '*shakam*'.

There are different kinds of distribution. The umbrella name for them is '*jutuwngshakam*', which also is the term for the main distribution to the male members of the girl's clan. Then, there are *zuwrsha*, which is the distribution of meat to the girl's female members of the clan; *amnuw tuwng*, which is given to her mother and mother's female relations; *fhuwtuwng*, distributed to mother's brothers; and *uupa tuwng*, distributed to village authority members and other prominent males present in the function. Formerly, when population was very small and guests in juktuw function were very few, rice beer used to be distributed in *numbeng* 'dry gourd container', which was later changed to bamboo stem. Today, when the Moyon society is cent percent Christian, distribution of rice beer in jutuwngshakam has become a practice of the past.

After marriage, the boy goes to the house of the girl and stays there for three years. The purpose is to give service to the in-laws. Whatever the boy earns in this period belongs to the in-laws. This tradition now is no longer in practise.

Unlawful Marriage

Moyon is an exogamous tribe. A boy or man who marries a wife from the same clan has to pay a fine of a big pig of five palms measure. Women and children, particularly the pregnant were not allowed to eat it. In times of yore, a child, born of such a wedlock, used to be taken outside the village and kill it, and the boy and the girl would not be allowed to live together.

When a girl is pregnant outside wedlock, and the boy is not willing to take her, the boy is fined with a pig of the size mentioned above. The care of the child will depend on the agreement of the families of the boy and the girl.

Divorce

The wronged party is allowed to take away the things he/she brought to the family. The wronged party has to be paid money, the amount of which changes from time to time. Presently, it is 30,000 INR, and he/she also has the right to take the children. An application for divorce is to be accompanied with fee, which goes to the village authority.

Child Birth

In a village, where doctors or nurses are not available or not near, some experienced women of the village assist in the delivery. When the child is delivered, it is wrapped in clothes and put in a basket and is kept by the fire side to keep it warm.

A women with a baby or child, or in pregnancy, does not enter a house where there is a dead body, or within some days after disposal of the body. The air or atmosphere in a house where there is a dead person, or for a few days after its disposal, is called thidae. A person with wound, or who is sick, or is unwell, does not go into thidae. It is believed, thidae worsens wounds, deteriorates the health of ailing persons, even kills them, and affects kids, if it does not kill them.

Naming Ceremony

In pre-Christian days, a child would be given its name at any time or day, even at birth. But, no special ceremony would be performed. If felt needed, a priest or priestess, called *ithiim* would utter some incantation. To shed the blood of fowls or animals on the day of birth was not allowed, believing the child born would die.

Today, after Christianity, child naming is performed on the 8th day of the child's birth, perhaps in keeping with the circumcision of the child Jesus.

Disposal of the Dead

In pre- Christian days, a Moyon family had a common tomb. A tomb was perpendicular first, and then horizontal at the bottom. Before decomposition of the previous dead, if another person died, extraordinary undertakers, able to open the tomb and bear the stench of the previous dead, used to be required. Such undertakers would be rewarded with *zuwning*[1] or *zuwren*[2] before opening the tomb, and after burying the new dead body.

Moyons believed in life after death. They believed, it was materialistic-like life, similar to life in the world. So, at least a domestic animal, generally, a buffalo or a pig, things basically required and things the dead person liked in life would be given at death. The head of the animal, say a buffalo, killed on the day of death, was hung at the tomb. It was believed, the animal would be with the soul of the person in the next world. If the dead person is a male, weapons, like bow and arrows, spear, dao '*chem*' were placed either inside or outside the coffin. Similarly, other domestic implements and gadgets and agricultural products, such as yam, arum, pumpkin, etc., would hung on a parallel bar erected at the tomb.

To make the way to the next world free from evil spirits that could trouble the departed soul on the journey, pungent variety of ginger '*siingkha*' would be tied at the tip of an arrow and be shot towards the coffin as the coffin comes out of the house.

To give a gun-shot is also the practice to scare the evil spirits. The domestic weapons: dao, arrows and the spear also would be

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[1] zuwning is a very powerful drink formed in malt due to over fermentation
[2] zuwren is the first extracted rice beer from malt after water is poured into it and kept for some hours

the soul's defence on the journey and in the next habitat. For maintenance of the soul, money coins would be strewn on the way between the house and the cemetery and at the tomb in the funeral.

There was taboo for a few days for guests or strangers to enter or lodge in the house of the dead person. As a sign of the taboo, a rice-pounding pestle would be put against the low roof at the front of the house.

Inheritance

Moyons are patrilocal and patrilineal. Traditionally, the youngest son inherits the parental house and gets the lion's share of other family properties. Legally, daughters have no right to land property because they go to a different clan. As a rule, land property is kept in the clan. When there is no male issue, land, river and the house would go to the nearest male member in the family circle. Today, traditions in connection to family properties have changed. Daughters have rights. Distribution of family properties depend on the will of the parents, particularly the father.

House Construction

Houses were constructed on stilts. There were no room partitions in them. There were two doors; the main door in the front and another door at the other end. The second and subsidiary is called '*chiphuh*'. It is meant for throwing dirty kitchen water and also for short needs in the night. To select a house-site, a few grains of rice would be put together at the site in the evening. In the morning, the grains remain unmoved, the site would be selected. If they move, another site would be looked for.

Furniture, Utensils, Implements, Weapons

Seats were moras and wooden low stools. Cots were thick and broad planks put at both sides of the fireplace.

Utensils were chiefly earthen. Seasoned dry gourds were equally used as water-containers or water-carriers. The main agricultural water-dippers were also smaller dry gourds with long handle. The main agricultural tools were *chem* 'dao', *utuw* or *utuwchiih* 'hoe', *rii* 'axe' and *thaangkee* 'sickle'. Chem was of two kinds: *chemfhuw* 'big dao' and *chemshaeh* 'small dao'. *Tangsii* is a small, rainbow-shaped knife with a long bamboo made handle. There is no real knife as such. Tangsii is the unsubstitutable implement in the kitchen and in cane-bamboo works. As mentioned earlier, spear, bow and arrow, and dao are the main weapons. *Chuwr* 'poison' prepared from a certain creeper root may be pasted at the tip of an arrow. Such an arrow is called '*chuwrpum*'. It can kill the biggest and strongest animal easily.

Musical Instruments

The chief musical instruments are *khuwng* 'drum/dhol', *taamfhuw, puuru* 'a small bamboo pipe', *phatrae*/*pengkum* 'bugle', *rusheem* 'back-pipe like', *daar* 'big gong' and *ruungbuwr* and *tingting*.

Weaving

Loin-cloth weaving, it can be said, is the only way of weaving. Earlier, cotton used to be cultivated. The people themselves processed it in making threads to weave clothes. They wove blankets, loin wears and cloth for shirts.

Selection of Village Site

To select a site for a new village, some male elders of the village go to the intended site and spend a night there. One of them from Ziingven moiety would take a rooster with him and 'make' it crow. If any one of them dreamt a bad dream, (such as seeing a pig), it is considered inauspicious. In that case, they would have to try and locate another site. Women, particularly, the

pregnant, were not allowed to come to the site during the selection period. It is taboo.

Agriculture

In the selection of an area for cultivation in a year, *Khurfhuw*, the village priest boils an egg at *Lamthah*, outside the village, in the vicinity of the village gate. If the egg boils well, the area selected by the village elders is cultivated, if not, another area is looked for. This ceremonial boiling egg is known as *Paam Rachii Isuwng*.

When the forest trees felled for jhuming are dry enough for burning, the village priest Khurfhuw makes fire at Lamthah. Each family in the village makes a roll of old piece of cloth and burns the tip of it in the fire. That roll of cloth with fire is taken to the field, and with it, the jhum field is set on fire. The burning roll of cloth is called *Peensii Mee*.

In the course of the year, the paddy field, as well as paddy, are looked after as a doctor takes care of the sick. Before paddy grows, evil spirits that possibly may be in the paddy field to spoil paddy, are exorcised by Khurfhuw. Again, when paddy grows quite tally, say knee-deep, the village priest performs rituals to ward off any possible sickness from attacking the paddy. That performance is called *Shaangrii Ithee*. When paddy is about to flower a welcome ritual, called *shaangken*, is performed. When it is ripe and can be harvested, *Buwren Ympeh* ritual is done. It is a kind of inauguration of harvest. In it, a woman of Ziingven moiety, who is morally clean and not pregnant, plucks an ear of the paddy. Before that, nobody in the village is allowed to perform harvesting.

Some Prominent Moyon Festivals

With the exception of Vaangcheh, Ikam, Rutha ikuur, Een Iruwh (house inauguration) and some smaller others, most of the Moyon festivals, strictly speaking, are religious rituals.

Ikam

Ikam is the grandest, most expensive and longest festival. It takes minimum five days. One of its distinctive features is the erection of Y-shaped wooden monuments called '*sharing*' at the celebrant's courtyard. A person, who can afford, can perform the festival six times. Each performance has its own name. They are *Eezuw*, *Marzuw*, *Habae*, *Niing*, *Madeen*, *and Phamtuk*. After these, there will be two minor festivals related to them. They are *Rashong Shangka* and *Aesiiteen*.

Ikam is marked, among others, by the killing of mithun, consumption of rice beer, meat and rice, as mentioned above, by the erection of Sharing. One who performs upto the last stage, has a name.

Rutha Ikuur

This is performed after paddy and job's tears harvest. In it, each family goes for *ichir enjaar* hunt. *Ichir enjaar* is a crab found in hill water springs. Its season is winter. The crabs are steamed and eaten with *ithae buw* 'sticky rice'. Ichir enjaar with ithae buw is a mouth-watering delicacy.

Meedim

Meedim is a village-cleansing religious ritual. At the same time, it is a festival for the fact that there is eating and drinking. It is house-cleansing function. On this day, all the families clean their fire places in the houses by throwing away the ashes and charcoals, leaving only one charcoal each. In each family, that charcoal is crushed into powder ad mixed with water on a plantain layer. Every member of the family smears the forehead with a bit of the mixture. Khurfhuw, the village priest makes fire with flint and he also prepares that charcoal and water mixture for himself and the elders who are with him. From the fire he makes, all the families take fire for their

families. Finally, Khurfhuw takes the remnant of the mixture and goes to throw it away at distance somewhere. He also takes a shield with him. As he goes, the elders throw embers at him. He protects himself with the shield.

There is taboo on the next day. No stranger is allowed to enter the village, and the villagers are not allowed to go out of the village for work. Only after Meedim, seed-sowing and plantations can be done. It is final function of the year.

Berkaap

Berkaap is performed some day soon after meedim. *Ber* means 'target' and *kaap* 'shoot'. A ber is prepared with plank of soft wood called *menchuwr*, about 2ft. each in length and breadth. There is fixed size. That is put on a tree towards the west and shoot it with arrows in a competition. The picture of a human like head is drawn on it with charcoal. He who gets at the target, particularly at the head image, offers drink out of joy. The idea behind berkaap is to scare and drive away evil spirits from the village or area.

Khuwthee (Khuw Ithee)

Khuwthee or *Khuw Ithee*, actually is a religious ritual to free the village from prevalence of sickness or diseases. Khurfhuw, with a branch of *shabra* (trunkless plant whose leaves resemble those of date-palm) in the hand, walking past every house saying, "Go away all evil spirits, sickness and diseases".

On this day, the village is under taboo. An outsider who enters the village is made to go back and is fined.

Land-Owning System

The Moyons in the hills, have two types of land–owning system. In the villages abutting Myanmar, it is community ownership.

There is no private land. The same with rivers. So, anybody can cultivate any part of the land and finish in any part of the river. But, in the two oldest villages: *Khungjuur* (Khongjon) and *Matung* (Mitong), the traditional system of ownership is that, all the land has an individual owner. A person cannot cultivate an area that does not belong to him. There is no visible demarcation of the land. But, the people know it. Similarly, rivers are divided. A person cannot make a dam of any kind either on the main river or at the tributary. Normally, land is not transferrable to people of other clans.

Religion

The Moyons formerly were animists. They had a vague concept of all pervading God whom they called '*Thangnang*'. At the same time, they believed in several other gods or spirits. Some of them were believed to be localized. There was a belief in the existence of a group of spirits, known as '*Sheenlong*'. They were believed to be dangerous. Whoever met them would die. Excepting *Larepma*, the goddess of harvest, no god was benevolent. It was a religion or belief of fear.

When a person died, if he/she was good in life, his/her soul would go to the happy land of death. If the person was bad, the soul would remain in the world and plague people. Such a bad soul, till today, is known as *Irae*. The souls that plague people, among others, are those of children dead at birth and those who died unnatural death. As a matter of fact, those who died unnatural death, were not to be brought into the village, and were not buried in the common cemetery. Today, the Moyons are cent percent Christians. Their first conversion to Christianity was in 1924 with a person, named N. Thomchung.

Village Administration

A Moyon village is governed by a traditional government, a village authority, known as *phamnae*. A rank or a seat in the

government is *pham*. There is no fixed size of the village authority body. Positions may be created and names for them coined when required. Nineteen traditional positions are given below. The names of most of them are changed or modified. The hierarchical meanings of the ranks are also given under.

	Former	Present	Hierarchical meanings
1.	Iruwng	Iruwng	Chief & Chairman
2.	Senapati	Ruwngchang	Vice-chief & vice-chairman
3.	Khurah	Khurah	Cabinet rank
4.	Lukrah	Lukrah	Cabinet rank
5.	Mentri	Rukuum	Cabinet rank
6.	Pakhangrah	Paarcheer	State
7.	Chingshaangrah	Veenthang	State
8.	Vaangkhreh	Ruuja	State
9.	Laangching	Chiingram	State
10.	Jupaar	Jupaar	State
11.	Nahaarah	Duungkuum	State
12.	Ningollaakpa	Zuwrkuum	State
13.	Khaangsher	Khaangsher	State
14.	Sherung	Shirring	State
15.	Kaerung	Shakrung	State
16.	Khurfhuw	Khurfhuw	Village priest
17.	Khunchaan	Meechaar	State
18.	Loumilaakpa	Ruwrah	State
19.	Chaangruw	Phamzii	Grade IV

Numbers six to eighteen are not in hierarchical order, whereas, the first five and the last one are strictly speaking, Phamzii, formerly Chaangruw is not an administrative position.

The position of Khurfhuw, the village priest is traditionally the prerogative of the Ziingven moiety. Khaangsher, while it is a rank of authority member, it is also a collective name for the unmarried

young men of the village. They have a hierarchical order of authority members of their own.

Ruwnchang, formerly Senapati, was and still is an ex-officio vice-chief and vice-chairman. The position had or has nothing to do with military position or service. A meeting of the village authority members is called *khumtin*, and the meeting in judgement is *charaap*.

The Moyon village administration is democratic in the real sense of the term. None of the authority ranks, including that of Iruwng, is hereditary. But, they can be in office for life unless they are removed by impeachment, death, or resignation. They are chosen by voice vote, keeping in mind the competence of the candidate. In the choice, representation of the different moieties and lineages, which is known as *tumtiir-naakhaar*, is given a careful thought. Women are not included in the village administrative body.

Meetings of the village authority (if there is no office room) are generally held in the chief's house. Each family has to give a domestic fowl and a bottle of liquor or a jar of rice beer in a year or a period specified by the authority for refreshment in village authority meetings. The subscribed fowl is called *aarthang*, and the drinks, *zuwthaang*. Practically in all the villages now, authority meeting refreshments are managed with the village fund.

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Woman and Desire in the Sawan Folksongs

Bhoomika Meiling

I have used the term 'counter system' in my title. The term probably makes too strong a claim, but I have used it for want of something better. It implies a concerted system, while I wish to assert only that these stories present an alternative way of looking at things. Genders are genres. The world of women is not the world of men. (Ramanujan 53)

That women's oral traditions and personal narratives often speak critically of the solidarities of patrilinial kinship, is by now a fairly commonplace observation in anthropological and folklore literature. (Raheja 173)

As one can deduce from the above assertions of Ramanujan and Raheja, the consideration that folklore of women forms a subversive system generally, is well-accepted and need not be questioned. This idea forms the background of the paper which takes off from here in order to inquire into certain dominant motifs in Sawans and to locate therein an articulation of various subversive desires of women. Folklore is the space where fantasies, wishes and desires of women find an articulation. Even those women, who belong to the lowest substratum of society and who have no language or medium of self-expression, take recourse to folk tradition to articulate their desires. Critics have regularly tried to locate subversion and rebellion in female folk forms. However before exulting in the euphoria of such discoveries, one needs to recall that folklore is an unlimited resource system forever shifting and in the making. It is extremely heterogeneous and hence the

task of finding material suitable to one's own understanding of female folklore is not easy. Within the genre of sawan, for instance, one found songs which are extremely sexually aggressive and explicit, bordering on transgression and one also found songs conforming to the given patriarchal notions of matrimony, chastity, domination and control. Hence, to provide one unified reading of a certain genre within folklore is a formidable task. With this reservation, I proceed to examine the folk form of sawan which has traditionally provided the much-needed space to expression of female desire. The desire for emotional bonding, sexual pleasure, power in the in-laws' family and the desire to own and control are expressed in this folk form.

Sawans are sung in the month of Shrawan or Sawan of the Hindu calendar. The question of origins is, as in case of any folk form, redundant. However, one may go back in history as far as the sixteenth century and still find evidence of sawans in written literature. Tulsidas' *Ramcharitamanas* (1574-77) has a passage in Kishkindha Kand where Rama describes the beauty of Sawan as part of a 'Niti Upadesh' or moral tutoring to Lakshman. Though the passage is formally a sawan, the content is at odds with this folk form. Even earlier than that, in Malik Mohammad Jayasi's *Padmavat* (1540), the love story of princess Padmavati of Sinhala and Raja Ratansen of Chittaur, one finds several sawans in the viraha mood incorporated as parts of Barahmasas (i.e., songs of twelve months in which the plight of the protagonist, over a whole year, as s/he pines away in viraha, is described). Thus, one can safely presume that sawan is a fairly old folk form and has survived in its various avataras over several centuries.

There are many types of sawans depending upon the mood or theme they represent. Kajari is the sawan which directly mentions clouds and Krishna (and hence the name), Jhula is the sawan about the swing which is a very important image in sawan, Biraha is the

sawan immersed in Viyog Shringara Rasa and Malhaar is the sawan which takes the form of a story or a narrative. The folk tunes are mostly adaptations of Raga Desh, Megh, Pahadi, Mian Malhaar, Khamaj, Jay Jaywanti and Pilu. Several festivals fall in the month of sawan – 'Sawan ki Teej' for married women, fasts of 'Sawan somvar' (Mondays of Sawan) for unmarried girls, 'Rakshabandhan' and 'Nagapanchami' (a fertility ritual). One can notice that these festivals are centered around women and have a characteristic spatial connotation. Sawan ki Teej and Rakshabandhan are especially supposed to be celebrated by married women in their natal homes. Sawan is therefore the month when women are expected and allowed to visit their parents. Sahab Lal Srivastava points out that Sawan is the month of relaxation when neither sowing nor reaping is to be done. Women are free of their agricultural roles, and hence, this is the time of the year when they can rightfully proceed to their parents' homes. The theme of relaxation and enjoyment, of vacation is reinforced through rituals like wearing green glass bangles, wearing mehendi, swinging in the orchard, and of course, singing sawan. All these acts signify a temporary closure of physical labour and a mood of rest, socializing and holiday. Even in today's post-industrialised context, sawans have retained these meanings and metaphors though the social practices and characteristics associated with them may be becoming irrelevant due to urbanization.

Regarding the folk nature of sawan one can say that the number of tunes is rather limited. There are few fixed tunes on which varying lyrics are set to form different sawans. There are of course regional variations in theme, tune and lyrics. Yet the basic structure of the songs remains more or less the same across the Hindi-speaking belt. Sawan is basically a female form. Raheja indicates that malhaar in Western Uttar Pradesh is a male form. But even in malhaar, the narrative voice is female although the singer is male. This is true of

most of the sawans where the perspective is female irrespective of the singer's gender. This gendered quality of sawan gives rise to a problematique of space and meaning which shall be discussed with examples in the second section of the paper. Sawans involve extensive repetition of words and phrases. The stanzas are only one or two lines long and the refrain takes much more space than it does in other songs. The repetition of the theme reinforces the significance of Sawan, clouds and rain. The personal emotions come in the stanza. The feeling associated with Sawan is underlined several times over. One may also read this quality of repetition in the light of the fact that every month has a particular folk genre appended to it. The refrain or the first few lines must clearly demarcate songs of different seasons and months. A sawan therefore is immediately recognizable as is a Holi or a Chaita. The concepts of memory and improvisation may also have dictated the need to repeat. The refrain is often same for several songs with different stanzas. It is easy to remember. The singer can always improvise on and personalise the stanza. Hence, unless relating a story, sawans are lyrically short.

The themes of sawans are varied yet always related to the season. The most recurrent is the Biraha theme. It is interesting to note that the voice and the theme of biraha is invariably female. The woman pines away amidst a profusion of fertility, growth and rejuvenation for a husband/lover who has gone abroad/ 'pardes'. Hence curiously enough, the song of separation is based on migration and not the woman's vacation. This adds another dimension to sawan- that of the articulation of grief of a lonely (wo)man. The articulation happens in a female subcultural space. For instance, the nanad (husband's sister) becomes the companion and confidante to whom the daughter-in-law of the family tells all her woes:

> *Ghar aaye nahi hamre sajanva, badariya ghir aayi nanadi…*

Dear sister-in-law, clouds have gathered in the sky and my husband is still not home.[1]

And

Ghir-ghir aayi nanadi kaari re badariya, sajanva nahi aaye O chhoti nanadi…

Clouds are gathering fast in the sky, my husband did not come back O younger nanad.[2]

In certain birahas, 'sakhi' or friend becomes the confidante:

Aaya Sawan suhana maas, sakhi mere piya gaye hain bides…
The lovely month of sawan has come.
O friend, my beloved has gone abroad.[3]

Apart from these, there are other birahas too which seek to create a similar mood yet do not refer to any subcultural bonding. For instance,

Kaare badra re tu toh julum kiya
Ek toh kaari raat dooje piya pardes
Teeje bijuri re dhamkave jiya…
O black cloud, you are troubling me
Firstly, the night is pitch dark,
Secondly, my husband is abroad,
And thirdly, the lightening is scaring my heart…[4]

Hence, the description of the weather is generally associated with the fear of loneliness and the need for male protection. Through the reinforcement of the stereotype of the woman as 'the weaker

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[1] My translation.
[2] ibid.
[3] ibid.
[4] ibid.

sex' who is perpetually in need of male protection, one feels that such songs also provide the female singer a language, no matter how clichéd it is, to express her desire for sexual proximity. Considering that such expression of female desire is taboo in a male dominated culture, women seem to have worked their way out of the problem by taking recourse to the very norms of patriarchy for cloaking their desire.

The theme of fear and insecurity has been appropriated quite differently in a particular sawan one came across. Here Sita has been left behind in a forest by Lakshman.

> *Roway thadi Janak dulaari, ban mein chhodo devariya,*
> *Nanhi-nanhi bundiyan padin badan pe, jaagin Sita maat,*
> *Idhar-udhar jab najar pasari, Lakhan nahi hain saath.*
> Left alone in the forest by her brother-in-law,
> The daughter of Janak stands crying.
> When tiny raindrops fell on her body, mother Sita woke up
> After looking here and there, she realized that
> Lakhan is not with her.[5]

The biraha is in a narrative form and tells the story of Sita being brought to the forest by Lakshman to meet some sages. When Sita falls asleep out of fatigue, Lakshman leaves her and vanishes in the forest. Sita fears how she will go back and what her mother-in-law will say if she gets too late. The incident is not part of the mainstream *Ramayana* and seems to be a folk appropriation of the Sita-Lakshman relationship to fit the mould of the Dewar-Bhabhi theme in sawans. The viyog is particularly interesting here as it is caused due to separation from the 'guardian' and not the husband. Similar insecurity is expressed in the birahas where the daughter is separated from her parents' home and sent after marriage to an unknown place, the Sasuraal or the husband's home which could symbolically

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[5] ibid.

be seen as an unknown and fearful forest. The apprehensions of the daughter that probably her own kins have forgotten her are represented in these songs. They also represent the desire of the daughter to return to her natal home and to relax and enjoy a holiday there. Hence, these birahas often portray married women wishing that their brothers or father would come in Sawan to escort them to their natal homes. For example,

> *Haro haro gobar, piyari hai maati, Raani ji ko mahal lipaiye*
> *Mahal upar kagaa jo bole, kagaa ke bachan suhavane*
> *Udi udi jaiyo kagaa dakhin ka Beer Bhaiya khabar le aaiye*
> *Kagaa becharo udnao na pavo, Beer Bhaiya khadey darwaaj na*
> *Beer aaye, kachhu na laye, saas nanad muhn modiye…*
> (Tewari 219)
> The cow dung is green, the mud is yellow, I smear the Queen's palace with them
> The words of the crow that crows from the top of the palace, are pleasant.
> "Fly O crow, towards the south and bring news of my brother."
> Even before the crow could fly, my brother arrived at the door
> Though he came, he brought no gifts. So my saas and nanad turned their faces away.[6]

In such sawans, the brother returns to his home after being thoroughly disgraced by the sister's in-laws for not bringing proper gifts. Later he comes back with expensive gifts and takes his sister away. The gifts are so magnificent the second time that his sister's honour in her sasuraal increases manifolds and she is immediately

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[6] ibid.

granted permission to go with her brother. The folk form of sawan becomes the fantasy space for the woman where all her wishes are fulfilled. This is the space where her kinsmen are forever eager to protect her honour even when she is in her sasuraal. This may be a far cry from reality for a majority of women today. Yet the folk form provides an alternative to reality. Another thing one notices here is the singer's desire to wield power in her husband's home. In a variation of the above sawan, when the brother comes empty-handed, the sister, who has applied mehndi on her hands, does not wash it off and does not meet her brother. Only when he comes back with many gifts, does she go to meet him. Through her gesture she makes it obvious that she is angry at being let down by her own brother and that her position in the husband's family is directly proportional to the dowry she brings. In this case, the sister's gesture is a sad reminder that even today the well-institutionalised practice of dowry, extends well beyond the marriage ceremony.

Apart from these common themes, the fertility motif is used through many sexually explicit metaphors in sawans. For example,

Baare balam pardeswa re sajni, sapne ma nahi sukh chain re…
Bau chalai purvaiya meri bairin, sulgai barasiya ma aag re.
Mere pichhwaray ek bagiya lagati hai, laage hain nibula anaar re.
Pahilo nibula suvana khutari gayo, par gayo chunariya ma daag re.
Mere pichhwaray ek dhobiya basati hai, vah hai nanadiya ko yaar re.
Paanch rupaiya mein tohe deun dhobiya, chunri ko daag chhutav re.
Taal ma chamke taal machhariya, ran chamke talwaar re.
Sejiya pe chamkai saiyan ki pagariya, maathe ma bindiya hamaar re.

(Tewari 222)

Dear friend, my inexperienced husband is abroad and I am restless even in my dreams.

When my enemy easterly wind blows, the pot burns in fire.

In the orchard in my backyard, lemons and pomegranates grow.

The first lemon was pecked by the parrot, my chunri got stained.

There is a washerman in my backyard, he is my nanad's lover.

"Clean my chunri O washerman, I'll give you five rupees."

A fish shines in the pond, a sword shines in the battlefield.

My husband's turban shines on the bed and my bindi shines on my forehead.[7]

As one can notice, this song alludes not only to the loss of virginity of the singer (which happens outside the wedlock as the husband is described as "inexperienced") but also of a love affair between the nanad and the washerman and later, also of restoration of "normalcy" with the return of the husband. In other sawans, the desire for sexual union is represented through various local images such as the 'nath' or the nose ring, the red or green chunri, bangles, etc.

> *Barse kaari re badariya, mori chunariya bheegi jaay.*
> *Dhaani re chunariya, laal rang choliya, boond padat dhoomil hui jaay*
> *Paiyaan padoon main baanke chhayalwa, leejo garwa lagaye…*
> The dark clouds have brought rain, my chunri is soaked.
> My green chunri and red blouse are becoming dull due to the rain drops on them
> I touch your feet and request you my handsome beloved, Please embrace me.[8]

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[7] ibid

[8] ibid.

The soaked female body is the erotic central image in these songs. The shyness of the protagonist becomes the trope through which she can refer directly to her own body and its desires.

Bheegi jaun mein piya, bachaye liyo
Kanchuki mori bheejan laagi, aavat laaj dekhat
Naari binti karat, chhupaye liyo…
I'm getting soaked my beloved, please save me
My blouse is getting wet, I feel ashamed looking at it,
This woman requests you, please hide her…[9]

Another important motif is that of the 'nath' or the nose ring. It symbolizes the chastity of a woman. In some sawans therefore it is invoked to indirectly talk about sexual escapades. For instance,

Nathwa ke moti hiraye gayal ho, sawan mein hamaar.
Socha sawan mein saiyan ke saathe,
Hari-hari ghaase pe karab hum baatein
Saath na dekh le pipariya ho, sawan mein hamaar …
I lost a pearl from my nath in the month of sawan.
I thought in this sawan to sit with my beloved
On the lush green grass and talk.
But I'm afraid, the ants in the grass may see us together…[10]

The narrator here tries to escape social surveillance to be able to enjoy the company of her beloved. However, even the ants in the grass are enough to disturb the lovers' solitude. 'The loss of the pearl from the nath' under such strict surveillance adds a touch of transgression and its pleasure to the song.

Sawan as a female folk form generates a female subculture where women sing about their desires, their fears and trepidations in group or individually. The title of the paper refers to this aspect

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[9] ibid.
[10] ibid.

directly: "sawan aayo ri" runs often as a refrain in many sawans, functioning as a reminder to the singing group that the lively month of Sawan has come and that it is time to sing, relax and enjoy. The songs integrate well with daily chores, moving at a slow pace and allowing women to join in or abandon singing at any point of time. The songs work well at the individual as well as the community level. Sawans operate through a commonality of personal aspirations and desires of participants- desire to go back to the natal home, desire to be together with the husband, for sexual proximity, for friendship and also for financial and familial security. Hence, functioning in a subcultural milieu, the genre of sawan is inextricably enmeshed into the concept of space. The first thing to note in this connection is the very name of the genre. The folk form derives its name from the month to which it is associated. This temporality dictates the content of all these songs. In a way, the month of Sawan and the genre sawan constitute that carnivalesque space which women are allotted every year to sing their desires out lest the unsung feelings create havoc in the normative institutions of marriage, family and society at large.

However, such a reading would seem simplistic if one does not recall that most of the sawans are created and sung by women only and are not 'given' to them by their male counterparts. The process involves a greater hybridity- both the sides are implicated in this process of cultural production. The themes therefore, present contradictory impulses, at times conforming to and at times defying patriarchal norms. For instance, though most of the sawans operate within matrimony, there are songs which show strong desire for transgression and which also document transgressive behaviour (e.g. *Baare balam* song quoted earlier). Such subversive subjects shed light on the nature of desire of women who compose and sing these songs. In rural areas of northern India, where migration of men to cities for better prospects is a day-to-day reality, sawans

document not only the loneliness of the women left behind but also the alternatives worked out by them to satisfy their carnal and emotional needs. Sawans though do not endorse subversion openly, they are open to subversive interpretation. Though the folk imagination seems to limit itself to the space of matrimony, maayka and sasuraal, yet it provides ample possibility for subjective reading. For example, sexual desire in these songs operates in or is contained within the matrimonial space. But interestingly, the distinction between the lover and the husband is not stated in many songs. The lyrics more often give no indication of the married status of the singer. They are fairly clearly addressed to a lover. However, the folk imagination resists from utilizing this scope for subversion which is potentially present in the lyrics. Also one must note the dichotomy in the situation- the Radha-Krishna theme which is necessarily extra-marital in nature, is the basic crux of the Kajri, Birha and Jhula tradition. Yet these songs are sung as if the repartee takes place between husband and wife. The patriarchal conventions of love within marriage are adhered to strictly though the subversive subtext is always available.

In terms of performance, sawan tradition can be read in two ways- firstly as a female genre produced, sung and shared by women only. In this case, sawan provides women the scope for criticizing, ridiculing, caricaturing and of course desiring men. Hence, even in wedding ceremonies, not falling in the month of Sawan, sawans are sung to create an atmosphere where women try to teach the bride-to-be the ways of men and the tricks to deal with them. In such performances, male is the marked 'other' who must be ridiculed and joked about. They are directed by and also towards a coterie of female knowledge (and its propagation).

Secondly, sawan performances can be read as those sung by men with a female narratorial voice. This mode of performance lends itself to a critical reading in terms of agency and representation.

The singing of sawans with explicit sexual desire as theme, by male singers, is an act of intrusion into the private space of women (remember that the narratorial voice is still that of a woman). The act of singing sawan in such a context is equal to mimicry of female desire. Ved Prakash Vatuk points out "another factor operating here may be the notion that it is women's sexual yearnings, not men's, that are uncontrollable and that women are generally thought of as the dangerously aggressive sexual partners."(Vatuk 219) In this context, songs not addressed to the husband go on to further stereotype women as sexually voracious and licentious in nature. Also such songs often sung and composed by men border on vulgarity, representing and objectifying the female body in a bawdy manner. The female narratorial voice adds to the vulgarity as the woman is portrayed perceiving herself as a sex object and 'showcasing' her sexual vulnerability and availability.

The malhaar songs, another category of songs sung by men in western Uttar Pradesh, represent a female voice but not the local female perspective. These songs tend to depict separation from the lover and the images are picked up from very canonical tales like those of Raja Harishchandra (relating the story of Queen Tara's helplessness when her son Rohitaashwa dies of a snakebite and Harishchandra refuses to cremate the body unless Tara pays the cremation tax) and of Alha and Udal (whose sister requests them to help her as her husband Prithvi Raj Chauhan, has been attacked by enemy armies). The distress and not desire of the women is highlighted in these songs. They also tend to be narrative-like in nature and are lengthier than sawans. The woman is represented here as one constantly in need of male support and assistance. Therefore, instead of enabling women with a voice of their own, these songs seem to corrupt the image of woman available in the folk oeuvre.

The idea of Viraha is also quite problematic in sawan. Diving into history, one finds in Malik Mohammad Jayasi's *Padmavat*, that the folk form of barahmasa is applied to represent Viyog and Viraha of Ratansen, Nagmati his first queen and Padmavati, his second queen. The barahmasa is used to represent male Virah here. However, as Ramya Sreenivasan argues in her paper 'Padmini, The Ideal Queen: Sufi and Rajput Codes in Malik Mohammad Jayasi's *Padmavat'*, the male virah is unconventional here as it emerges from an appropriation of Sufi ideology by Jayasi. "In the non-Sufi tales love is first kindled in the woman, and therefore viraha is also sharper in her, to the point where the heroines of these poems are defined by and valued for these attributes. In the Avadhi Sufi 'tales of love', in contrast, both the experiences of love and viraha with their metaphysical underpinnings are the domain of the man. The *Padmavat* actually seems to be aware of this inversion of gender-roles, as it were: Ratansen as the lover in viraha explicitly likens his situation to those of Sakuntala, Damavati and Kamakandala."(Ramaswamy 107) One finds that the folk-space of viraha assigned to women has been usurped by a man here. Viraha seems to be something that people have experimented with a lot in case of sawan. Fifty years after *Padmavat*, Tulsidas inserted a song in *Ramacharitmanas* in an excerpt when Ram and Lakshman are looking for Sita in the forests after her abduction. They begin searching for her in the month of Sawan and to express the length of the search, a barahmasa ensues. The situation, apt for viyog, is however turned into a Niti Updesh to Lakshman by Ram.

> *Mahabrishti chali futi kiaarin, jimi sutantra bhayn bigarahin naari.*
> *Krishi niravahin chatur kisana, jimi budh tajahin moh mad maana.*
> As excessive freedom spoils women,
> So does excessive rain spoil the flowerbeds.

Clever farmers are weeding their fields
Just as wise men weed out worldly desires, pride and ego
from their lives. [11]

The passage is full of unusual images of Sawan where frogs
are likened to students, clouds to wicked men, peacocks to ascetics
and rivers to greedy misers. It seems that the viyog space is not
available to men except in the case of tempering with the tradition
as it is done in *Padmavat*. In the context of Sawan, the singing of
the female viyog songs by men may be considered as the expression
of a feeling which men have but they don't have a language and
discourse available for it. However, what is even more interesting
is the fact that when a man sings biraha, it is often automatically
interpreted as an allegory of Atma yearning for Parmatma. The
physical level gets assigned therefore to the woman and the
metaphysical to the man. Also, in *Ramcharitmanas,* the idea of
Sawan and in *Padmavat*, that of viyog, is related entirely to
distinctively male spheres. Viraha drives Ratansen to conquest- he
proceeds as an 'ascetic' in search of his beloved to Sinhala. Sixteen
thousand men accompany him and lo! it is an army. In case of
Rama, Sawan is seen as a month that gives rise to sinful feelings
which, in the patriarchal sphere of idealism, need suppression.

The relation between male voice and female narratorial voice
and its various implications can be understood through the metaphor
of Krishna disguised as a woman to meet Radha, a theme very
popular in the sawan tradition.

*Arre rama Krishna bane maniharin, pahin lai saari re
haari…*
Kaanan mein kundal baali, maathe pe bindiya nirali rama
Arre rama gale ma sohe haar, naar matwari re haari…

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[11] ibid.

O Rama, look at Krishna, he's wearing a green saari and is
disguised as a maniharin
Earrings in his ears, bindi on his forehead,
And a necklace in his neck, it all looks so well,
she is a wonderful woman.[12]

The male voice dressed as female seems to mix with the female
genre as Krishna mixes well in the female crowd of Radha's palace.
Yet its motive is as deceptive as that of Krishna. The female body
is the object of male desire in both the cases. In case of Krishna, it
is approached through the discourse of love, where the author of
the act, the one who holds the position of subjectivity is the man. In
the case of male singer appropriating the female genre, the discourse
is patriarchal, which, through its gaze, approaches the female form,
female voice, female body and at times the female subculture too
(because several sawans composed by men are also sung by
women). In terms of the question of desire, Krishna uses cross-
dressing as a technique for the fulfillment of his desire for proximity
with women. Similarly, it is male desire which is articulated and
sung about in these songs which are dressed in a female narratorial
voice. Also, this song very subtly, points at the caste equations.
Krishna becomes not any other woman, but a 'Maniharin' (a
woman belonging to the lower caste of bangle-sellers) who is
allowed access to the princess Radha because in Sawan, Radha,
as a married woman, needs to put on new green bangles. Hence,
Krishna appropriates not only the 'second' sex but also a lower
caste to fulfill his own desire. The act of adopting the doubly
subjugated status of 'Maniharin', at least in this case, turns out to
be quite rewarding. One must say here that most of the Sawans
(except some malhaars) hardly have any reference to caste. It seems
as if Sawan month is happy, peaceful and relaxed for all alike. One

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[12] ibid.

may doubt this presumption keeping in mind the fact that people of lower castes, like the Maniharin here, hardly have a vacation. In fact they work the most in this month. The Sawans generally seem to be pointing towards an upper caste culture. Yet the fact that most of the lower caste people also sing them with equal ease, fervour and flavour, manifests a work song–like quality in Sawan as pointed out in the beginning. These songs go well with the rhythm of any slow, routine work- be it house work or work in the fields. However, one feels that a caste demarcation may be read in the themes and not in the space of performance. Migration of men to cities is a lower caste phenomenon. The landless labourer class often finds it easier and more profitable to move to the city. The women thus left behind, lead harsh lives full of hard work, worries and trials of all sorts. Hence, they are not the ones who could be singing of the beautiful weather and a vacation at the natal home. The only theme available and adaptable to their situation is that of viraha. So the difference in perspective and theme is the locus of caste difference in this genre. The aspect of performance does not provide clues to caste demarcation simply because people of all castes sing all sawans. The caste-specific activities associated with sawans have gradually lost their significance with rapid growth in urbanization and industrialization.

Finally, one comes to the audience of sawans. Ramanujan, in his essay on female folktales points out that in case of female lore, the objective of 'telling' is not to enlighten anyone but to lighten oneself. "The tale of woe is told to express and affect the speaker's own mood, to change one's own state. It is cathartic for the teller in the tale."(Ramanujan 43) The female singer mostly tells her tale to herself and hence lightens herself. Thus, we may read sawans as auto-narratives. The performer and the audience merge together so that it is impossible to separate the two. The creator, the propagator and the interpreter coalesce to produce live narratives

of the female self. Hence, the subculture looks at and appreciates the erotic, tragic, ecstatic aspects of its own self. This could be a cathartic experience because it is uninhibited (by male presence) and creative.

Today the audience of sawans however has grown beyond the auto-narrativising space. The appropriation of the genre by male voice was the first step towards this widening of audience. Now sawan has crossed the threshold of folk tradition and entered the popular space through the flourishing Bhojpuri music and film industry. Popular renditions of these folksongs incorporate items such as sleazy music videos, modern musical instruments and lyrics pertaining to newer and more sellable issues. This commercialisation has its own positive and negative effects. While it has made sawan accessible to a wider audience, it has also affected the language of desire in the songs adversely. Whose desires are these songs selling? Definitely not of those women who have no language and medium to express it openly. The desire articulated here is absolutely mediated by the rules of the market and the rules of the dominant gender, caste and class. The enabling nature of the folk space is missing here as this popular appropriation addresses the needs and desires of those who have access to power.

To conclude, one may say that sawan has traditionally provided a space to women which can not be simply explained away as carnivalesque. The interaction between gendered values, needs and critiques within the genre has led to a plethora of meanings that are embedded in these songs. Hence, at some instant the genre is conformist and at another, it is revolutionary. The form can at one level be read as the voice of women's desires which can not be voiced in the day-to-day masculine language given to us. This paper attempts to study this voice to an extent. In the course of research for the paper, one noticed the paucity of literary readings of female folklore in northern India. It seemed as if the bastion of

patriarchal folk literature has eclipsed and relegated to the margins, the folk traditions of women. One also got the impression that women's lore is material good enough for only anthropological archiving and writing. Though one finds occasional essays by women on the subject, the area still needs critical attention. The genre still continues to inhabit the space of an auto-narrativisation not studied by 'outsiders' to the female subculture. This is a sad reminder of the fact that female desire can be listened to and celebrated for all the wrong reasons in the popular space. Beyond that it has failed to evoke any curiosity. Therefore, the folk realm requires critical attention of scholars with a sense of utmost urgency. The academia needs to collectively revisit folk literature lest this elaborate system of knowledge dies.

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Dialogic Narration and the Discourse of Memory of U Manik Raitong
"Differing natures find their tongue in the presence of differing spectacles"
Thomas Hardy, Tess of the D'urbervilles in General Preface to the Wessex Edition of 1912

- Desmond L Kharmawphlang

Often, a story assumes a position of such prominence in the collective consciousness of a society that its recurrent telling not only define and empower storytellers but charts a consequential trajectory of the narratological strategies. It helps to constitute and recraft social norms by integrating society, encapsulates politics and ideology, critique ethical and moral positions and provide a semiotic space for interpretation of the text. It also invites an interrogation of tradition through representations in folk and mass media. Such a story is the celebrated legend of Manik Raitong, the approximately 500 hundred year old account of the tragic love between a young man, a commoner and lieng Makaw, the wife of a powerful chief. I have collected several versions of the story from different parts of present day Ri-Bhoi District of Meghalaya and my effort in this has only been to add to the numerous documentation of the story which exists. The first published text of the story appeared as early as 1899 in *Ka Kitab Jingphawar* , the pioneering work of Rabon Sing Kharsuka. The story or versions of it has unfailingly found their way into collections that routinely come off press since then. These versions are replete with ambiguity and paradox, an inherent versatility in interpretation arises that allows for conflicting readings and dissident, challenging voices.

Despite the near identical nature of many of these versions (which seeks to establish a monologic certitude), the openness supported by its protean characteristics, the Manik Raitong story creates the potential for contradictory explanations and interpretations.

In the process and experience of the narrative, narrativization and narratology, a discourse emanates from the exchange of authoritative and challenging tellings. This provides space for an episteme of inquiry over the interpretation and uses of the story. Authoritative voices attempt to create and fix meanings and stabilize order, whereas challenging voices question established meanings with their own brands of deconstructive projects. Taken together the various tellings and interpretations lead to what we call a process of dialogic narration.

Ideas in this paper about dialogic narration are derived from the profound insights of Mikhail Bakhtin (1981). In using this term, it is assumed that the accepted premise to begin is that a story cannot be viewed in isolation, as a monologic static entity, but must be seen in a dialogic or interactive framework, in a dynamic chorus of styles which voice the social, political and ideological positions they represent. Stories are polyphonic-they characterize performance, voice the narrative action, the reported speeches of characters, the commentaries of tellers and listeners, accommodate and amplify interpretive statements, and audience acknowledgments. This dialogic freedom creates in storytelling a field for the contesting of views and of power. Therefore, seen in this perspective, the term dialogic is not restricted to a two-way binary interchange but calls attention to multiple languages, to "plural voices, and to the heterogeneity of speech acts, genres, and styles.

A similar view of language as the interaction of formal givens and spontaneous utterances is held by Bakhtin (1981:276), who points to the interactive embeddedness and dialogic orientation of any utterance or story:

It is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view ... enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environ-ment of alien words, value judgements and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile. The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape in a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads,... cannot fail to become an active participant in a social dialogue.

Taking Bakhtin's ideas about ʿlanguage and applying them to narra-tion, the concept of dialogic narration acknowledges that no story is "a" story or "the" story but ʾ rather a dialogical process of many historically situated particular tellings. In our theoretical perspective, narration refers to a process rather than to an entity; to discourse rather to a text; to interpretation and feeling rather than to the abstract sequence of events. Narration includes voice, point of view, and the positioning of a narrative within a discourse. In sum, we do not conceive of narration as monologic in voice or monolithic in structure since we find that within any narration the elements of style, rhetoric, point of view, plot, interpretation, evaluation, and performance choices are not necessarily concordant or isomorphic. At the end of a story, for example, one may have incomplete and unresolved styles and points of view, as ex-pressed by dialogues among characters, whereas the plot itself may be total-ly resolved (see Bakhtin 1981:349)

The legend of U Manik Raitong or the wretched one is a moving story about a handsome young man, orphaned at a very early age and who had an affair with the wife of a powerful chief. The woman was attracted to Manik Raitong because of his skill on the flute. The fruit of the relationship was a boy and it was obviously

destined that the affair eventually would come to public light. Manik Raitong, the orphan lover was condemned to death at a pyre by the chief. Before Manik the wretched jumped to his death into the pyre erected on the top of the hill, he planted his flute upside down into the ground. A bamboo grove which has species of bamboo with branches and leaves grow downwards sprung up on the spot.

This story has been told and retold, circulated and re-circulated wherever the Khasi language and its myriad dialects are spoken. There are three plays and two novels written based on the legend. Long narrative poems and songs, ballads, two feature films made, some three documentaries are also the other genres and cultural productions that have been directly influenced by this narrative. There is a village and a school named after U Manik Raitong, organizers of annual beauty and fashion pageants have also seized upon this popular legend and used it to infuse drama into their shows. There is even a Government building named after the tragic hero and a popular radio jockey also uses Manik's name professionally.

The Khasi word for memory is stone or maw and hence memory is jingkynmaw. Stone culture has been an integral part of the life of the community especially in the way in which it is used to compute history. The elaborate (and sophisticated) megalithic culture and its various dimensions are all tied to conceptualizations of time and space. In conventional historiography and history, there is an absolute time scale into which the facts studied are fitted. In oral tradition on the other hand there is no such time scale as time is relative and only becomes meaningful in relation to the social organizations and historical time is replaced by structural time. Ignoring historical time, the tradition of oral history begins with details of origin and founding of the communities and they end with details which can be shown to be historical facts. However details into which period in time these details will fit into are blurred. For

much of the North East there is a prehistory and it may be argued an ancient history is unrelated to the regional histories. Indeed, several communities have histories that have moved swiftly from prehistory into the modern without the intervening histories experienced by other communities.

Their histories tell the history of the tribe, their migration, settlement, village formation, inter-village feuds, their *jhum* cultivation, their culture and traits that made them what they are. There is nothing unique of the tribes or their histories other than their distinguishable traits and position within the broader community of humanity. Tribal histories by the very nomenclature are more in the form of micro-history and as their histories are more recent the actors of the past become more personal and meaningful to the tribe today.

Social and cultural memories are generally passed down through many numbers of a community. This enables the passage and continuum of the memories. The memories have a social and cultural base and may only occasionally be related to events of the past related to significant events of natural phenomenon. Such collective memory of tribes will have the regional variation as in the migration stories, their beliefs and practices and so on.

We may refer to another set of memory namely collection memory, which refers to the shared pool of information held in the memories of two or more members of a group. Collective memory can be shared, passed on and constructed by groups both small within a smaller section of a tribe for instance, and large, the entire tribe or community. There will be any number of instances where these forms of memory remain within members of a tribe/community. The question is what form of memory the historian will use in the reconstruction of history. The collective of a smaller section of a tribe just might not correctly reflect entire tribe' views. And there is sure to

be some or several smaller groups within the tribe who will not entirely give accord to the collective memory of the larger numbers.

Ceremonies performed and occasions observed and celebrated in association with stone erection and consecration are always informed by memorialization underpinnings and there are at least twenty two kinds of stone cultural tropes and icons that are veritable memory installations. But time will not permit me to go into all this now.

Work on narration and performance, style and power currently being advanced by folklorists and anthropologists are many. While some privilege the basic story as the primary object or goal of research emphasizing on analyzing a series of stories or tales in space and time to reconstruct an archetype or Ur-type.

In reaction to these paradigms, other approaches to narration (e.g., Herrnstein-Smith 1980) focus so intensely on the presentness of the narrative act and on the responsiveness of form to situation and speaker that they end in pure emergence, thereby diminishing the importance of history; and tradition. Bakhtin's notions of hierarchy in language and of authoritative voices are especially significant in understanding dialogic processes. The "authorita-tive" in this view is not inherent in some authoritative version of the story but in the authoritative positions of tellers within a community, in the in-teraction between a performance situated within a locus of power and which has been conveniently appropriated by public domain. My interest in the Manik Raitong narrative is in the jostle over the interpretation and use of the story by different constituents and this creates the dialogic discourse. I shall focus on one, a strong subaltern strain which offers a subtle but consequential response to the narrative and two, on the issue of space and mediascape, imagined and otherwise, which became moot while Manik Raitong, the film was conceived, made and released.

I have researched the various versions of this legend and have discovered that it gained currency during the period when this part of Bhoi area came under the suzerainty of the Sutnga chief who controlled his kingdom from the winter palace of Jaintiapur (in present day Bangladesh) and the summer capital of Nartiang now in Jaintia Hills District of Meghalaya. The chief who is mentioned in the story was the syiem khynnah or nephew of the overlord chief, a young man who was given the responsibility of governing the vast tracts of conquered land in Bhoi area. The chief's uncle and overlord wanted his nephew to find a wife from within one of the various Bhoi clans and in order to find a suitable match, a dance was organized so that maidens from all over would converge at the appointed arena and enable the young chief to select his bride-to-be. The man, upon seeing Lieng Makaw, a beautiful girl, was captivated and soon he made his intentions known to his uncle, the overlord chief and his family. It did not take very long for formalities to be concluded and soon, despite Lieng Makaw's aversion to the marriage, it took place. Lieng Makaw, some versions state, was the childhood mate and later lover of Manik Raitong who was an orphan boy who lived on the outskirts of the village. Stuck by a series of tragedies, he was prone to melancholy, dressing in rags during the day. After sunset, he would retire to his hovel, bathe, put on clean clothes and play the sharati, a flute till morning. His skill on this instrument was legendary and it was said that his music could move nature itself to display a plurality of moods. The last blow to Manik's wretched life was when Lieng Makaw married the chief. Since then he shunned company and became even more reclusive than before.

It so came to pass that the chief had to go on a long tour which would take him away from his newly wed for many months. Lieng Makaw, who was never happy with the chief, stayed with her husband's sister in the royal household. Many a time she would

think of Manik but she realized that in her new exalted position, Manik was as distant as the stars from her. Many a night she would be woken up by the haunting sounds of the sharati and would never be able to sleep, the melody disturbing her to her core. This went on for many nights. One night, she decided to see and find out who this unknown musician was and guided by the tune she followed it to a hovel on the outskirts of the village. Arriving by its side, she peered inside and was stunned to see Manik dressed in clean clothes and playing the sharati by the fireside. She went inside and the two.

It has been hinted here and elsewhere that films built on folkloric themes do contains of what the sociologist, Craig Calhoun calls 'The Imagined Communities' living in mediascapes, which are being presented in documentary forms. As a student of folklore, it is tempting to undertake analytical study of the film using the Proppian model as Peter Wollen's of *North by Northwest* did; however my focus would be on capturing the contextual realities surroundings - the pre-filming period, the actual filming period and the post filming period. The film in question is Manik Raitong directed by D. Talukdar and produced by Mr. Rishan Rapsang of Cine productions in the year 1984. The outline of the film is as follows:

Long ago there lived a man named Manik. He was very poor and lived all alone at the outskirts of the village. Because of his wretched condition the villagers called him 'Manik Raitong' a name used to address wretched people. During the day time Manik would go to work and at night he will put on his traditional dresses, sit besides the hearth and play the flute, his only companion. It was due to this flute's sweet and melodious tone that Liengmakaw the wife of the Chief of that area was attracted and forced herself to find out who the person playing it was. When Liengmakaw searched the man during the absence of her husband, she found that it was Manik who produce the melodious tone. Looking at him, she fall

in love at the first sight. At last she succeeded in seducing him and as a result a child was born.

When the Chief returned from his tour, he discovered that his wife has become a mother in his absence. In order to find out who the father of the child was, he made an announcement that every male member of the village should appear before him with a banana to offer to the child. U Manik was caught at the moment when the child took the banana, and thus he was sentenced to death.

My attempts will be to study these places and their inhabitants, settings, the vernacular and the folklore that has emanated from what James F. Abrams called the Documentary Landscapes.[1]

A month long field work was conducted between May and June 2005 in and around Umroi Village, the place where Manik Raitong was shot. It has to be kept in mind that the locale of the Manik Raitong story was not this village, but one, some 30 km away in the village of Raitong. The removal and relocation of shooting from the original village of Raitong to Umroi is directly linked to the interest of my research. What was responsible for this and what were its effects?

Informants told me that due to the extensive shooting requirements, the entire setting had to be constructed artificially. The setting comprises of the Ing Sad, huts and dwellings of character in the movie and assorted structures have to be constructed. Grounds, village lanes and irrigation canals had to be excavated to meet the requirement of the shooting.

It was revealed to me that as many as 50 men and 25 women from the village and its adjoining area were employed as laborers to put up props and work on the set. Some even manage to be hired as extras in the movie. However a clear distinction between

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[1] Roberge, Gaston: The Ways of Film Study. 1992 page 8

the leading characters and the secondary ones was made in that the former were professionals brought from Shillong and the latter were semi professionals brought from the village. An exception was made in the case of the baby who played the role of the child, who was born as a result of the illicit relationship between U Manik and Ka Liengmakaw. The child whose real name is Dripti Manik Syiem is the son of Mrs Sara Syiem who was incidentally employed in the film as the baby's nurse mate. The child now a strapping young man of 23 years of age goes to college and is actively involved in the beauty and fashion pageant in the state and has also featured in some music videos. In fact, during my second field trip to the village, he led group of fashion contestants from Ri-Bhoi districts to Mumbai to reportedly meet Sushmita Sen.

Since Dripti Manik Syiem studies in Shillong. I did not meet him during my work in his native village, but it was very clear to me and this was supplemented by feedback from the village that the fact of his having start in a movie, albeit, a child, has motivated him to take interest in showbiz. The village folk have nick named him Manik and even his middle name is Manik, a name given after he figured in the film. It is obvious that the child was not Manik but his son, and thus probably earned the name because the Khasis are fond of giving nick names and the other reason is that after 22years of the film shooting the people of Umroi still remembers it.

One very interesting fact that had its roots in the traditional institution system also came into focus during my interviews. The traditional system of governance is vested in the Syiems or Chief who rule over the Hima or traditional states. The Hima is composed of different Raid or small provinces made up of villages. The film-maker obtained permission for filming from the Syiem of Raid Mawbuh who is under the Syiem of Mylliem. At first the latter objected to the project on ground that the film would adversely affect natural beauty of Umroi area. The proposal had to be

postponed due to this. At last, the Syiem of Mylliem had to convene a Dorbar or Village Council to have a discussion on that matter. It was agreed that the filming be allowed. What is interesting to focus here is that while the film portrays the Chieftainship system among the Khasis, it does not account for the discourse of power that is usually associated with chieftainship. The fact that the Syiem or chieftain sentenced Manik to die in a pyre does not mean that the power for issuing such a dictat emanated from his office as chieftain. It is more convincing to believe that this authority came from his being the aggrieved party that is the wronged husband.

As mentioned earlier that before the filming, in reality, there was a mild conflagration between the two authorities i.e., the Syiem of Mylliem and the Syiem of Raid Mawbuh. The film was about personal and social tensions prevalent in the state. And ironically this tension was reflected in contemporary society when the actual filming of the movie was about to start.

The film has brought about socio-economic consequences which I have recorded collecting statements from individuals who were part of the film. Mr. Olkas Nongkseh said that 15 sites were chosen and developed as sets. On completion and during the shooting, the entire village looked like a village suggested by legendary accounts. This obviously produced the nostalgia strongly evoked by folklore.

Coming to another point Mrs. Syiem said that the film also brought some resemblance of development such as better road communication which resulted from improvement of village tracks. On a personal level she further said that the film introduced her to a way of life that was faster. Before the film she was a teacher leading with a small class to mind. But having to act in the film she had to adjust to the shoot scheduled which was quite alien to her then. Now she understands the pressure of work in a fast paced environment.

Dwar U Ksuid, a place of natural scenic beauty is one of the prominent locations of the film. After the film, the place became well known as a picnic spot and the name 'Lover's Paradise' came to be attached to it. It is in this place that the film shows how U Manik and Ka Liengmakaw use to date as lovers before and even after the marriage of Ka Liengmakaw in the absence of her husband. The lane they used to walk upon was also given the name lover's lane. This place is still well known for its beauty. Though it is now closed to the public.

With regards to the feeling of discomfiture amongst the people of Umroi and the village of Raitong about the film, when interviewed I was told that the former had no feeling as such where as the latter harbour a sentiments that the whole thing was unfair since the shooting did not take place in the village of Raitong the original place of the legend. People of this village are now trying to develop those areas and spots which are mentioned in the legend. Documentation of the entire village of Raitong was also done last year.

To conclude, an interesting question which emerges is what this new development will produce when the original sites are weighed against the filmy and artificial spaces created for the capturing of the documentary landscape.

Where is the Poem? Some Readerly Speculations…

Jharna Sanyal

After teaching Reader-response criticism for a long time to my students in the university and discussing the intriguing role of response in the realization of any work, I, once, as a matter of self-indulgent experiment, tried to check the process with a poem I myself wrote about a year back. This was published in Muse India. I reproduce the poem below for ready access.

The Snake

Like a skein of silk weaving
itself into the green fringe of
the winding uphill asphalt road
it glided: a cursive script
magically writing itself
only to disappear without a trace.
Was it Eve's counselor?
Was it Manasha's deadly messenger?
Was it speckled with the shades
of my fear?

Yet, all seemed to be in perfect peace:
the dark clouds floating past
the meditative rooftops
squatting on the green hills;
the overwhelming benediction
of a sudden shower
moistening the hard asphalt.

> And all the while,
> the snake kept on weaving
> itself into the warp and woof
> of an Aizawl dawn.

Before I had submitted it for publication I had sent it to a reader, who is a Professor of English in one of the universities in West Bengal: an enthusiastic trekker, animal lover and an avid reader of books on wild life.

'Reminded me immediately of - of course- Lawrence/ Coleridge. But as the poem 'wended' its way down the page- it was more the difference from theirs that stood out. There is a certain co-existence in this poem that is not there in theirs, where the human world and the snake world are distinct. Here you have brought the two seamlessly together in the 2nd stanza while hinting at the distance in the first. And to hint at the distance you have mentioned man-made myths, nothing in actuality or real fear. Very surprising I felt- almost as if the fear is engineered by man, - resisting the wildness that the snake represents. Unpredictable- and so totally in harmony with the natural world. And so the cursive script/magic writing that you talk about seems to become Thought. And with the mention of Eve and Manasha,- it becomes Woman's thought, free of the more formalized institutionalised Male thinking ..I honestly loved the

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• *Manasha* is the snake-goddess worshipped mostly in the snake infested areas in riverine Bengal. Her story is celebrated in the *Manashamangal Kavya*. According to the legend *Manasha* would not receive popular acceptance unless Chand Saudagar, a prosperous merchant, worshipped her first. Chand, a devotee of Shiva, refused to do so. *Manasha* sent a deadly snake to bite his son Lakhinder,to death; the daughter-in-law Behula, propitiated the gods with her dance and her husband came back to life.. Chand Saudagar, finally worshipped Manasha-but offered the flower with his left hand.

poem…. Perhaps I was somewhat biased by the fact that I love nature and animals. I am now reading Griffiths' book Wild….And the last 3 lines are like haunting song lines.'

In a very critical way she has tried to map the poem in a tradition of writing which includes two important British male poets and points at the gendered perception of the subject. The main impressions of our 'fear' (about the snake) and (its' being in) 'harmony' (with the landscape) that I wanted to convey were very perceptively received.

The second reader was I myself,-distanced as I was from my performance as a writer and the written/published script; the poem was no longer in my private domain. After I had read the above response I tried to recapitulate the originary site of the incident and composition in order to analyze what perceptions had gone into the making of the poem. While on a visit to Aizawl, my friend and I were enjoying a morning walk, we suddenly stopped on our way: a snake was crossing the road. My friend commented that we were intruders in her habitat. I questioned, how could he presume it was a 'she'? The light banter that followed could be said to be the first impulse of the poem. The snake's cursive movement, its' lithe, graceful gait were the most arresting impressions that I carried with me to the guesthouse. When I sat to scribble them down, it's not words but images that that came to mediate my thoughts on the subject. The Eve reference springs not from Milton (in spite of our UG and PG prescriptions), but from an illustrated Bible my father had sent me from Portsmouth in my distant childhood. The first page carried a message for me in his 'cursive' writing. I had no conscious memory of the book, long devoured by neglect and silverfish. Suddenly, from the frozen depths of memory, the picture of a red snake tempting Eve appeared as a stunning revelation. The book was there all along with me! The second, ie., the Manasha byte comes from collective mythic, narrative, performative

resources still prevalent in Bengal.[1] The third image, signposted by an expression '*speckled* by my fear' may only be visualized by one who remembers watching *The Speckled Band*.[2] The word appeared as if by a chain of involuntary association from my 'snake archive'.[3] Of course, the significance of this last line of the first stanza was in no way dependant on the reader's awareness of the film image.

This appearance of images was unpremeditated; they just piled up to help me make sense of the morning encounter. The originary impression was a combination of fear, respect and aesthetic admiration for the snake's sleek, graceful gliding disappearance into grass on the fringe of the road. The last was the keenest, the first, ie. fear, the least. This could have happened, may be ,for two reasons: — the serene atmosphere of the early dawn seemed to diminish the 'fear' element and secondly I had no personal experience of a threatening /dangerous snake except on the Nat Geo channel, films, zoos, narratives etc. and all live encounters were from a safe distance. The power of the hold of cultural 'prejudices'[4] in the form of these myths/narratives was such that my writing began with the 'fear' element. The whole scene had impressed on me a sense of peaceful coexistence in a habitat we, human beings, share with the animals, reptiles and other creatures. So, the second stanza in which I try to recuperate from, and contest, the hold of the fear inducing cultural 'prejudices' begins with a break; '*Yet*'. For me that was my poem.

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[1] I myself had written a poem in Bangla, *Behula,* -see the note to the poem. There are several other Bangla poems on her.

[2] The film version of Arthur Conan Doyle's 'The Adventure of the Speckled Band'. The India connection in the story is interesting.

[3] *The Mahabharata* is full of snake-stories: the most dramatic is perhaps Janmejay's snake-burning Jagna in the Adi Parba which also provides a long list of names of snakes.

[4] in Gadamer's sense of pre-existing, untested ideas, -not in any pejorative sense.

Re-reading the poem on the Muse India site I suddenly became aware, - of what I would call an ethical lapse in my in my perception and execution of the poem. Poetry is not only emotions and feelings,-it is about intellect as well. Between the emotion/feeling and its concretization as a meaningful verbal structure as a poem intellect intervenes. My images appeared from a Christian religious text, a Hindu myth from Bengal and a British Film production: the baggage with which I travelled. All these were far removed from the site of the encounter. I was in Mizoram, and this snake could have belonged to any place! There was nothing local about it-except that I saw it in Aizawl. What stared me in the face was our, the tourists'/outsiders'/'mainlanders'/visitors' indifference to the local culture. How much ever we may appreciate the flora and the fauna and the natural beauty of the place, most of us hardly take the trouble of getting familiar with the 'local'. (In the guesthouse, I had once enquired about local food – I was told that they are not ready for it as guests don't want it.) This endemic lack of interest in local culture, particularly of places like the North-East, keeps us away from reaching out to the true diversity of India.

To come back to the point, - I felt that I should have looked up Mizo folktales on the snake before I decided to submit the poem for publication. My search led me to *Folklore from Mizoram*.[5] Here was a tale: 'Chawngchilhi'. It is a grisly story of horror: the most repulsive I have ever read or heard.[6]

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[5] By Margaret L Pachuau. Writers' Workshop. Kolkata.2013. pg.63-68.

[6] Chawngchilhi, a jhoom cultivator's daughter, fell in love with a snake. When her father comes to know about it he kills the snake, and hacks his daughter too. When her womb is cut open, hundreds of little snakes crawled out. The father managed to kill all but one, which ultimately becomes a threat to the village. An old woman who knew its hide out helps the villagers to find it out; It is killed, and its' meat was eaten by the villagers. The old woman got her chosen portion, the head,- but it could not be properly cooked, and was thrown away. It grew to a gourd with a single seed, but before that all those who ate the snake's meat lost their homes to a tremor.

I chose for my second reader the author of the collection who herself was a Mizo and a teacher of English at Mizoram University and snakes are a part of the daily life in Mizoram. I could not find a better reader for my experiment. I quote below her response to my poem.[7]

'The poem is intriguing to say the very least... 'silk' 'cursive script' 'deadly messenger' 'fear'...terms associated with the snake as subject.

As a native and an inhabitant of Mizoram this would perhaps be the first time I have read (in any genre) a description and an association of the snake in terms that are so intricate and artistic and associated with (in the second stanza) the term' peace'. Perhaps because for a Mizo, the term 'peace' has a very differing connotation altogether!! It fascinates me and I may perhaps mention here, that having been born, brought up and educated outside Mizoram, I know that many cultures have a reverence for snakes but the Mizo sensibility is distinctly one that is not Our own literatures pre and post colonial, have little mention of the snake and even where the snake is mentioned, it is as you have pointed out 'Eve's counselor' and thus abhorred, and Manasha's deadly messenger would of course be more revered in another culture altogether.

The first five lines especially are enchanting and artistic. I'm reminded of Mizo traditional looms, far fetched as it may sound; wooden shafts being gently lifted in and out to weave enchanting, mesmerizing patterns. The Mizo response immediately would of course be that of ; would snakes behoove such description? And in MZU where we have seen snakes almost everyday (topography and construction work contributing) and pray incessantly in the

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[7] I thank both my readers for letting me use their responses for this paper. None were aware that I could be using their responses for this paper - hence the responses are spontaneous and informal.

monsoons especially that snake bite be not a part of our daily schedules, I thank you for showing a differing paradigm to the 'snake sensibility'(if there could be one).

Your 'fear' too has not escaped my notice here though... it reminds me of the numerous arguments between Deptt. Of Zoology at MZU and the rest of us at MZU(literally),the former cautioning us against harming/injuring/killing snakes in any form shape and size(laboratory and research based interests) and the latter, all too eager to kill and destroy the snake(s) because of sheer fear. I recall an incident in the year 2011, in the monsoons, where a huge snake was beaten to death by our office peons, by the water cooler, in our deptt., and I had to rush out to prevent a fight between a lab. attendant from the Deptt. Of Zoology and our peons ...the former deptt. is perhaps the only one in MZU that asserts that snakes are harmless and ought to have a right to move and live freely. Point noted. A colleague of mine from the said department in fact keeps pet snakes and is fiercely protective about them. However, for the rest of us its fear... fear ...fear...!I studied at JNU where snakes (and not so snakes) were in plenty, and morning and evening walks (with snakes prying perhaps on our physical fitness?) are still etched in memory.

Anyhow, I'm not digressing, I hope. I am fascinated by the ending too, 'the meditative rooftops' 'the overwhelming benediction', ...a time to leave fear in the hands of the omnipotent Maker perhaps? It is reminiscent of a grim yet astute reminder of the fact that fear, peace and all else notwithstanding, the 'Aizawl dawn' would continue to encapsulate albeit inadvertently, the intricate dynamics of snake, poet and nature.'

The significance of this response lies in establishing the relevance of 'situatedness' in our reception of poems, among all other things.

I felt that I needed to rewrite 'The Snake' acknowledging the Mizo folktale, -

The Snake (*revisited*)

Like a skein of silk weaving
itself into the green fringe of
the winding uphill asphalt road
it glided: a cursive script
magically writing itself
only to disappear without a trace.
Was it Eve's counselor?
Was it Manasha's deadly messenger?
Was it Chawngchilhi's secret lover?
Was it speckled with the shades
of my fear?

....

The question is, does the additional line add significantly to the tenor, texture and significance of the poem, which otherwise remains unchanged (reason why I do not quote the last stanza)? I leave the answer to my readers. However, I consider 'The Snake Revisited', a more inclusive and hospitable a poem than its first version.

Finally, out of the dialogue with my readers, emerges a poem which I dedicate to the Departments of English and Zoology, Mizoram University.

The Snake Behind the Water-Cooler

Hills are blasted, forests cleared.
An avalanche of rocks rolls down with rabid rage.
Severed from their roots, trees fall smashing the
wild flowers and plants caressing their sturdy feet.
Birds madly circle above, screaming a storm.

The earth quakes.
Habitats crushed, - the inhabitants of the terrain,
are sharply ejected to an unknown, alien space.
They also had inherited the earth,
Now, they disperse: refugees, without a road map,—
lost in the wilderness of an all devouring progress .

In between you and me
there stands the water-cooler;
in between you and me
distrust raises its head in hooded apprehension.
Locked with fear in each other's eyes,
we do not see each other: we only watch…
each… other…we   only watch…
we   only   watch…
each other , as is the strategy of the survival game.

Multi-vocal and Multifarious Narratives of Memories in *Beloved*

K.C.Lalthlamuani

"The memory of slavery that nobody wants to remember had to be written, and the unspoken stories had to be told and remembered. No matter how it hurts"

-Toni Morrison

The first African-American writer to win the Nobel Prize for literature in 1993, Toni Morrison throughout her writing uses narrative forms to express dislocated, marginalized oral tradition and culture of the African-Americans', and reclaim their historical experiences.

Morrison defines memory as "a form of willed creation. It is not an effort to find out the way it really was – that is research. The point is to dwell on the way it appeared and why it appeared in that particular way ("Memory, Creation, And Writing" 385). When asked why she wrote *Beloved*, her response was "the invisibility of black people in 'official' histories - there is no memorial, no place, nothing that summons the presences and absences of slaves" (Liscio 31). By encoding black women's individual voices telling the story of the unspeakable history of slavery The **history of slavery** covers many different forms of human exploitation across many cultures and throughout human history. Slavery, generally defined, refers to the systematic exploitation of labor for work and services without consent and/or the possession of other persons as in America, *Beloved* bridges the hiatus between purely historical

representations of facts and the representations of horrible psychological traumas and suffering.

Toni Morrison's Pulitzer Prize winning novel *Beloved* (1987) is set in rural Ohio after the Civil War. It centers on Sethe Suggs, a woman, who escaped from slavery and kills her own daughter to save her from the torments of it but is haunted by its heritage. It unearths the historical realities of horrifying experiences during the Middle Passage, Slavery, Emancipation and its aftermath. Rewriting the life of Margaret Garner, who killed her child to prevent her recapture into slavery, and sets this story as the focus of an epic-scale recreation of African-American life under slavery and in its aftermath" (Rody 93). However, the technique with which the novel is written is much more important than the mere fact that the novel is based upon a real historical event. The way the text intertwines pieces of characters' life stories based upon their memories of slavery creates an alternative historiography revealing hidden truths of slavery in America from the experience of black ex-slaves.

To survive, one must depend on the acceptance and integration of what is past and what is present. In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison carefully constructs events that parallel the way the human mind functions; as a means to understand the activity of memory. "Rememory" enables Sethe, the novel's protagonist, to reconstruct her past realities. The vividness that Sethe brings to every moment through recurring images characterizes her understanding of herself. Through rememory, Morrison is able to carry Sethe on a journey from being a woman who identifies herself only with motherhood, to a woman who begins to identify herself as a human being.

Beloved amalgamates its characters' memories intricately resembling a huge quilt woven out of various painful experiences of slavery. The structures of memory Morrison constructs throughout the novel are generally initiated by memories of Sethe's

experiences at Sweet Home, a slave plantation beautifully populated by trees, and her children. While Sethe's memories of slavery take the most part of it, *Beloved* embodies a number of other characters' memories such as Baby Suggs, Denver, Paul D, Stamp Paid, Sixo, and Ella, to name a few. Just as the quilt is woven through various colourful pieces of cloth, Morrison's text juxtaposes various characters' traumatic experiences of slavery and claims for revising the official version of American history written from the perspective of the white historian.

Since the 1980s the relationship between memory and history has been much discussed as a historiographical problem. History has become negatively associated with the 'public,' and 'objectivity,' while memory has become positively associated with the 'embedded', the 'local', the 'personal' and the 'subjective" (Radstone and Hodgkin 10). According to Jacques Le Goff "Memory is the raw material of history .... the living source from which historians draw" (xi-xii). Equating memory with the past, Le Goff considers history as reconstructed, therefore an impure and imperfect version of the past. Pierre Nora argues that "History is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it" (9). For both Le Goff and Nora, memory thus exists as an authentic entity of the past itself, and as a devastating critique of the totalizing, equivocating aspects of historical discourse, because history exists as an ideological reconstruction of the past. For Halbwachs, memory is "not an individual faculty but a technique of framing experience, generated through the group connected with the thoughts that come to us from the social milieu (family, church, community organizations, political parties, neighborhoods, ethnic groups etc.)" (53). In this sense, what appears as an individual's unique inner world of memory is nothing other than the uniqueness of the layering of social memories. Collective and individual memories are deeply entwined – an individual's memory is socially/

culturally/nationally constructed; much of social/cultural/national memory is mediated through an individual's memory. Put more simply, what one remembers and forgets is, to some extent, shaped by one's larger social/cultural/national narratives. Furthermore, cultural historians have proposed that memory be further extended as the constant re-negotiation and circulation of such collective stories and practices that produces and maintains community. In this sense, memory works as the privileged instantiation of a space in-between, a space neither individual nor collective, but one that emerges as a site of intersubjectivity. Contemporary scholarly interests in memory converge, then, in seeing memory as possessing "the potential to contest public regimes of History and of official narratives of the happened" (Radstone& Hodgkin 11). The character Beloved effectively represents how these two levels of memories can coincide: one as a personal level, the other as a racial/collective one.

On the personal level, Beloved represents Sethe's baby daughter who was murdered at age two in order to be saved from a life of slavery; socially, also represents African-Americans in general who have gone through the Middle Passage and slavery (Wyatt 479). She is both an individual and the collective black people. Beloved can also be interpreted on three levels: first as "the incarnation of Sethe's baby girl and of her most painful memory," second as "everyone's ghost," and third as "the reader's ghost, forcing us to face the historical past as a living and vindictive presence" (Krumbolz 400).In this sense, Morrison in *Beloved* "constructs a parallel between the individual processes of psychological recovery and a historical or national process" (395). The magic of memory is that "it is interpersonal, that it is the basis for constructing relationships with the other who also remembers. The reality of memory is that it must be experienced individually, first, before it becomes communal property. In individual experience,

memory is painful, as ... Sethe discover[s]. In shared experience, memory is healing, as everyone in Morrison's narratives discovers" (Rushdy321). Painful and traumatic memories which might hurt and disrupt individuals could in turn console and heal each other's traumas and challenge official history when shared collectively throughout the community.

In other words, Sethe's painful memory in which she had to kill her daughter in order to prevent her from being captured as a slave can be expanded to become a racial history speaking for all the blacks who had to undergo this painful experience of the Middle Passage and slavery. And Sethe's memory threatens the white male historian's monolithic history which has attempted to leave these memories out. Sethe's memory reverberates all the muted voices in this mono-vocal history. However, as Sethe walks out of the prison-like 124 into the village people, personal memories should be united with others' in order to heal and critique official history. Only when personal memories get juxtaposed and interwoven along with others' memories, can the national official historiography be revised into the version including African-American voices. In this context, Morrison's novel enshrouds the official version of national history of a single, homogeneous, pattern and constructs one where personal memories get combined with collective ones.

The narrative style of *Beloved* in which personal memories are weaved into a collective story is based on the dynamic process of parts constructing and critiquing the whole. A number of crucial moments of the novel register this significant process of coalition on the level of its content as well. This process is tremendously significant because it invalidates the very effects of slavery which leaves blacks as fragmented pieces. *Beloved* first records the painful process in which slavery ruptures African- Americans into fragments:

> … at night he sat down to write in his book. It was a book
> about us but we didn't know that right away. We just thought
> it was his manner to ask us questions. He commenced to
> carry round a notebook and write down what we said. I still
> think it was them questions that tore Sixo up. Tore him up for
> all time. (Morrison37)

Narrating her experience as a slave to Denver, Sethe mentions
how Schoolteacher's discourse left slaves as inhuman. He literally
charts and records the existence of the slaves in his book, with
their characteristics divided into the binary opposition of "animal"
and "human," their bodies measured in pseudo-scientific ways,
aimed at dehumanisation as a means of social control. Under the
gaze of the master who writes only his version of the narrative into
his "notebook" and thereby excludes all other stories, Sethe cannot
but be contained by his words. At Sweet Home days, Sethe
observes Schoolteacher teaching his nephews:

> No, no. That's not the way. I told you to put her human
> characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right. And
> don't forget to line them up.(Morrison 193)

In this way, "Schoolteacher uses writing in a detrimental way"
(Rushdy, "Daughters" 588).

While the African-American community attempts to put torn pieces
together and restore their wholeness, the white masters try to rent
the black community into pieces and reduce individuals into their
body parts such as hands and legs for labor and sexual organs for
reproduction, less than human beings:

> Shackled,…Paul D hears the men talking and for the first
time learns

> His worth. He has always known, or believed he did, his value
> – as a hand, a laborer who could make profit on a farm –

> …The dollarvalue of his weight, his strength, his heart, his brain, his penis, and his future. (Morrison 226)

Gazed from the perspective of the slave master, the blacks cannot but be seen merely as an assembly of bodily parts which can be converted into monetary value.

For Stamp Paid, this image of the torn body is the ribbon he picks up from the river by accident:

> Tying his flatbed up on the bank of the
> Licking River, securing it the best he could, he caught sight
> of something red on its bottom. Reaching for it, …
> in his hand was a red ribbon knotted around a curl of wet
> wooly hair, clinging still to its bit of scalp. (Morrison 180)

This ribbon is probably from a black body, who has been lynched by the white. Since a bit of scalp and hair are knotted around the ribbon, this ribbon embodies a piece of the black body itself, which, again, is torn into pieces by white violence. More specifically, at the same time, this red ribbon reminds Stamp Paid of the "black ribbon on her [Vashti's] neck" that "she used to wear put ... every time she went to him" (Morrison 233). According to his memory, Stamp Paid had to send his wife to his master's son she wore the black ribbon whenever she was sent to the master's son. This ribbon becomes represents Stamp Paid's disintegrated marriage life. In this way, *Beloved* records the debacle of blacks' identities resulting from "de-subjectifiction" and "un-differentiation" (Moglen 22) under slavery.

Beloved also registers the reverse process in which African-Americans restore their wholeness in their communal effects. Baby Suggs, preaches to her black community about how valuable their bodies are although abused by the whites:

> … we flesh; flesh that

> weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love
> it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They
> despise it. They don't love your eyes; they'd just as soon
> pickem out. No more do they love the skin on your back.
> Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your
> hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave
> empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and
> kiss them. (Morrison 88)

The slave's black body, which has been reduced to a kind of property by the white master, is restored its intrinsic value through Baby Suggs' preaching. By making them caress each part of the body, she helps her people regain the wholeness of their body, which has been torn into pieces by the whites. Here, Baby Suggs' sermon-ritual in the form of pseudo-religion emphasizes the collectivity of this process. When Sethe arrives at 124 running away from the Sweet Home, Baby Suggs bathes Sethe's body from parts to parts so that she can recover her wholeness as a human being. When washing Sethe's body, Baby Suggs cleans off the dirt of slavery and prepares it for freedom:

> …bathed her in sections, starting with her face.
> …Sethe dozed and woke to the washing of her hands
> and arms. After each bathing, Baby covered her with a
> quilt and put another pan on in the kitchen. (Morrison 93)

Here, the quilt that covers Sethe's body becomes meaningful. Just as the quilt is made up of many different pieces of fabric, Sethe's body is healed by Baby Suggs' bathing of her bodily parts. Moreover, the quilt is also a reminder of the text's peculiar narrative style in which various narrators put their personal memories next to each other's. These pieces of memories construct a collective history of slavery and rewrite its official version. Earlier in the story, Sethe sews up her wedding gown grabbing patches of fabric here and there:

> …The top was from two pillow cases in her mending basket.
> The front of the skirt was a dresser scarf a candle fell on
> and burnt a hole in, and one of her old sashes we used to test
> the flat iron on. ... Finally I took the mosquito netting from
> a nail out the barn (Morrison 59).

Both Sethe's wedding gown and Baby Suggs' quilt symbolize the regained wholeness of the torn identities of African-Americans. Only in these instances can "fragmentation find a form of cohesion, as all the pieces are given a place of their own in the wider scope of existence" (Scarpa 103).

At the end of the novel, it is Paul D who returns to 124, reaffirms Sethe's wholeness and her value as a human being, after she suffers from the lurid confrontation with and then separation from her painful memory:

> ... Suddenly he remembers
> Sixo trying to describe what he felt about the Thirty-Mile
> Woman. "She is a friend of mind. She gather me, man. The
> pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in
> all the right order. It's good, you know, when you got a
> woman who is a friend of your mind."
> … He wants to put his story next to hers.
> "Sethe," he says, "me and you, we got more yesterday
> than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow." (Morrison
> 272-3)

Putting his secret memory next to Sethe's, Paul D wants to be liberated from his own painful memories. By sharing repressed memories together, they can turn toward "tomorrows" of free life emancipated from the prison of "yesterdays" traumatic memories. In this way, the novel repeatedly records the process in which African-Americans' recover their wholeness again with their community's coalition. Here, "the quilt patched in carnival colors"

under which Sethe lies symbolizes the collective efforts to restore their wholeness by sharing individual memories.

However, this kind of interweaving of collective memories is different from the forced collectivity through which institutionalized slavery disallows individuality and categorizes African-Americans as a group without individual traits. Paul D's memory of Georgia prison where forty six men had to remain chained and move in perfect order specifically reflects how dehumanizing this forced collectivity is. This forced collectivity stereotypes racial 'others' ignoring their individual differences and potentialities. Unlike forced collectivity, the process of collective memories of individual painful stories is empowering and healing. And this dynamic is reflected by Morrison's particular style in which characters' different pieces of narratives are put together to comprise the text as a sort of quilt, nullifying the narrative written from the white perspective:

> I am Beloved and she is mine. I see her take flowers away from leaves she puts them in a round basket the leaves are not for her she fills the basket she opens the grass I would help her but the clouds are in the way how can I say things that are pictures I am not separate from her there is no place where I stop her face is my own and I want to be there in the place where her face is and to be looking at it too a hot thing (Morrison 210)

> When the four horsemen came – schoolteacher, one nephew, one slave catcher and a sheriff – the house on Bluestone Road was so quiet they thought they were too late. Three of them dismounted, one stayed in the saddle, his rifle ready, his eyes trained away from the house to the left and to the right, because likely as not the fugitive would make a dash for it. (Morrison 148)

The two narratives quoted above reveal the striking differences in both style and content between the black's ragged quilt and the white's totalizing ink. While the first narrative is woven out of fragmented pieces of unconscious memories of Beloved (both as an individual and as a collective black), the second one is recorded from the transcendental perspective of the Schoolteacher/slave master. Schoolteacher's narrative is "the only linear, straightforward account of the murder [which] comes during a break in the narrative where a white patriarchal narrative interrupts the narrator's" (Liscio38). The narrative written by Beloved, the victim of the Middle Passage, records this traumatic experience painfully and porously; the narrative by Schoolteacher, records how to catch fugitive slaves objectively and practically. In Beloved's passage, punctuation disappears altogether, "leaving the sentence of each participant open to the sentence of the next speaker, and the personal pronouns 'I' and 'you' move toward each other, losing their difference first to become interchangeable and then to mesh in the possessive mine" (Wyatt 481). On the contrary, Schoolteacher's "pseudo-scientific ledgers ... transform feeling flesh into dead specimens of science and machines of (re)production" (Dobbs 564).

The pivotal tragedy in which Sethe had to kill her child in order not to be captured as slaves is also dealt with totally differently according to perspectives:

> Simple: she was squatting in the garden and when she saw them coming and recognized schoolteacher's hat, she heard wings. … Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them. Over there.Outside this place, where they would be safe.

(Morrison 163)
Inside, two boys bled in the sawdust and dirt at the feet of
a nigger woman holding a blood-soaked child to her chest
with one hand and an infant by the heels in the other. She
did not look at them; she simply swung the baby toward the
wall planks… (Morrison 149)

According to Sethe's version, her intention is simple: to choose
death for both herself and her most beloved rather than accept
being forced to return to slavery and have her children suffer
institutionalized dehumanization. Her action results from nothing
but her boundless maternal love to protect her children from danger,
which in Sethe's thought is worse than death. Sethe's narrative
whether justified or not inscribes it as an inevitable choice. Seen
from the slavemaster's transcendental perspective, this same action
is stigmatized as crazy violence of a former slave woman only to
prove blacks' inferiority. Schoolteacher might appropriate Sethe's
action as evidence to prove their animalistic instinct to kill their
young which are endangered by an outside agent. Under this
totalizing discourse, blacks cannot but be contained and enslaved
regardless of slavery's abolition.

Toward the end of Part II of *Beloved*, however, the passage
describing silent conversation among Sethe, Denver, and Beloved
exemplifies how this quilt of different people's personal memories
can be weaved seamlessly:

Tell me the truth. Didn't you come from the other side?
Yes. I was on the other side.
You came back because of me?
Yes.
You rememory me?
Yes. I remember you.
You never forgot me?

> Your face is mine.
> Do you forgive me? Will you stay? You safe here now.
> ...
> Beloved
> You are my sister
> You are my daughter
> You are my face; you are me
> I have found you again; you have come back to me
> You are my Beloved
> You are mine
> You are mine
> You are mine (Morrison 215, 216)

This passage above inscribes the silent conversation among Sethe, Denver, and Beloved without smoothing out their peculiar characteristics. Here, Sethe's, Denver's, and Beloved's words merge into a soundless articulation of repressed memories. Ashraf H. A. Rushdy regards *Beloved* as "speakerly text," "whose rhetorical strategy is designed to represent an oral tradition and to produce the illusion of oral narration" ("Daughters" 586). Including Sethe's, all the black characters' memories in *Beloved* can be seen as "speakerly text"; Schoolteacher's narrative and the newspaper clipping about Sethe's murder Stamp Paid shows to Paul D are the only examples of "writerly text" in the novel. While memories are fragmentary and symptomatic, white narratives are straightforward and manipulative with an aim to subject others to the white's totalizing discourse. The whites attempt to transform blacks into a sort of *tabula rasa*, a blank page, on which they can inscribe whatever they want blacks to signify. In this context, black people's memories can function as a counterdiscourse to disrupt this kind of organizing discourse.

This kind of speakerly text has much to do with African oral tradition and their peculiar sense of history. Lacking chronological,

linear perspective, individual stories unfurl, move forward, convolute, and start up again, only to merge with others' stories. However, Morrison's narrative style full of fragments represents the fragmented life of the African-Americans who were uprooted from Africa, transported to America, and positioned under the yoke of slavery. According to Giulia Scarpa, *Beloved* is a novel of fragmentation "epitomizing the experience of African-Americans since their displacement from Africa" (102). In this way, Morrison's narrative makes up a huge text of memories: "structured as some aspects of memory are structured: disjointed, circular, insistent, urgent". She consciously writes "from a black folk tradition in which a story is told meanderingly, constantly retold, constantly imaged within a framework. As images and memories pile up, collide, and re-emerge, as rusted hearts and bruised bodies opens, as characters bump into one another's memories, ... Morrison in her impulse as a writer repudiates the linear, the monologic, the uninterrupted narrative ..." (Koolish 422).

Memories in *Beloved* are at the very core of what makes life meaningful. Every memory that the characters share weave a fabric upon which lives are altered. Morrison outlines the state of the human condition and experience when subjugated to cruelties and beauties. She exposes the monopoly that memories have on the perspectives and experiences of life, and the fundamental element of what it means to be human in a shifting world. Morrison attempts to tell the reader that sociality and civility are not barriers for the influence of one's memories; it is not something that can be controlled when they have such a lasting impression. She does not simply tell the reader what the history of atrocities can have upon a group of people or individuals, but evokes an experience that will not be forgotten. *Beloved therefore,* is a narrative upon which lives are altered because it gives the reader insight on the power of their own particular struggles in life and convictions that are developed

because of past transgressions or wrong doings, past love and hatred; every microcosmic and macrocosmic event encoded with significant meaning is grandiose in its significance.

Thus Morrison's novel makes us redefine the concept of history as "as an amalgamation of local narratives, as a jumble of personal as well as publicly recorded triumphs and tragedies" (Davis 246). The alternative historiography redefined is not necessarily in the form of writing. The scars growing in the form of a chokecherry on Sethe's back also can be incorporated into this alternative historiography. As Sethe's physical pain is transformed into aesthetic beauty, the symptoms of pain and traumas of African-Americans is sublimated into a vast quilt of aesthetic beauty, much like *Beloved*.

Not aiming to fill in all the gaps of the historical past; "the result of the literary archeology is not a complete skeleton, but a partial one, with pieces deliberately missing or omitted" (Davis 252). These gaps invite readers to participate in interpreting and filling in gaps of the text, which have been left incomplete, perhaps, strategically for the readers' interpretations. The tragic memories of slavery can be completed only when readers juxtapose their own memories along with the text and reconfigure history itself. Morrison ends her novel with the repeated statement that "it was not a story to pass on," re-emphasizing readers' participation in filling in gaps and stitching in their own pieces of memories into the novel.

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Creating an Archetype: Mizo Creation Myths and the Dream of Home

Kristina Z.Zama

This article aims to put forth two hypothesis: firstly, that the myths dealt with here are highly diffused myths thus establishing Mizo oral narratives as having a universality to it, that it does not necessarily stand outside the ambit of 'old' cultures, that it is therefore a very 'old' culture rooted in antiquity; secondly, that the creation myths translated and paraphrased here largely shed a light on the 'inner psyche' of the Mizo both from history and in the present.

In theory, application of any specific theory to a single culture or ethnic group would seem a rather reductive and random thing to do. But taking cue from Geertz and Dundes on the benefit of 'close' study and discovering 'deep' meaning through intense study of one culture at a time, the employment of psychoanalysis, albeit in a rudimentary manner, is but a tool without any claims to being an expert in the field. On reading Anna Birgitta Rooth's essay on "The Creation Myths of the North American Indians"[1] and the elaboration of what she describes as eight different types of creation myths that she has identified, one wonders on the creation myths that exist in the Mizo myth context which, though a very rich area for study is yet to be explored to its full potential as a field of study. Since no study exists in this field in context to the psychoanalytical analysis and rereading into mizo creation-myths, various

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[1] Dundes, Alan. Ed. *Sacred Narratives: Readings in the Theory of Myth.* Berkeley: University of California Press. 1984. p-166-181

theorists from anthropology and psychology will be employed to help us justify and construct the aim of this article.

Let us propose 5 types of creation-myths in mizo folktales although closer study may reveal more types. As one can see these are already universal types which may be found in any culture in any combination of numbers but employed here for our study:

1. The Earth-Diver myth
2. The Emergence myth
3. The Separation of Earth and Sky myth
4. The Cloacal myth
5. The Cosmic-Egg myth

These identified 5 types afford us the freedom to further propose that the folktales translated and paraphrased may contain one or more myth types. To make our point let us look at our first creation myth type, a rather uncommon myth that not too many Mizos' themselves know about as it is not narrated often[2]:

Myth 1:

In the beginning existed nothing but an endless stretch of vast empty rocks. No earth nor dirt nor soil. The only other that existed was the great sea called *Tuihriam* or Sharp Waters for its waters bit those hands that dipped into its freezing depths. Many creatures risked precious life and limb to cross to the other end of Sharp Waters for it was said to hold a tiny amount of precious earth. Sadly, most attempts met swift death.

Mustering up all courage and will, Porcupine finally succeeded in this difficult task of diving into and swimming across Sharp Waters, loading some earth onto its nose, returning half dead. The creatures put their heads together to decide how to expand the bit

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[2] Vanlallawma, C. *Hman Lai Hian Mawm...* Aizawl: Lengchhawn Press. 1992. P-1-3. Print. Translation- Scholar's own.

of precious earth in their possession but found themselves thoroughly disappointed at the impossibility of the task. On hearing this, Earthworm decided, "I will eat the earth and excrete it. Eat some more and excrete it again and again until the amount of earth expands!" The other creatures rather suspiciously shouted in unison, "Such lies! You just want to eat it all by yourself!" To which Earthworm replied, "No! No! May you strike me dead if all I do is eating it!" And so in this way the others were thus convinced that they unanimously agreed, "So be it."

Earthworm began eating the bit of earth and proceeded to excrete more and more of it. On and on this cycle was repeated after which a great mound of earth was created and all became immensely happy! Amongst the creatures, *Chultenu*[3] smoothened out the earth, stretching it into a great big plain leaving out valleys and mountains, making the earth flat.

And so it was that *Vanlaiphai*[4] was spread just beneath the highest point of the skies. It was only here that *Chultenu* could stand erect between heaven and earth. Other regions of the sky hung so low over earth and were inseparable from each other that *Chultenu's* head touched the heavens. It was in this *Vanlaiphai* region that an immensely tall tree lived called *Thingvantawng,* the 'Tree-that-touches-heaven'. One fine day the creatures decided to chop it to the ground. Since they were afraid the 'Tree-that-touches-heaven' would shatter their precious earth to pieces as it fell, they decided to wait until the wet earth hardened. After the passing of time, it was decided to send *Lailen* the wagtail, out to fly over different parts of the earth to check if it had thus hardened. Wagging its tail up and down, *Lailen* flew far and wide inspecting

[3] Literally means one-who-smoothens, and it looks like it is represented in the story as a female.
[4] *Vanlaiphai* is the name of a place that exists to this day that literally means flat-plain-under-the-skies/heavens.

the earth as best it could. On returning, it declared, "The earth has hardened! It has thoroughly dried all over. Let us cut the tree!" The mighty 'Tree-that-touches-heaven' henceforth fell over earth, shattering it, thus creating mountains and valleys, its huge branches creating mighty rivers and its smaller ends creating little streams.

The heavens curved over the earth like a downturned bowl! The point where the heavens touched the earth was called *Kawlkil,* the edge-of-the-earth, the Horizon. And it was in this edge that a *Sunhlu kung*[5] pregnant with its berries in branches twain was said to grow. With a long staff in hand, an old lady desperately poked at these berries, but failed to gather any as they rolled farther and farther away from her! Not far away though was *Pawngeklir* the Dung Beetle hard at work, rolling and toiling away at a ball of dirt. When Dung Beetle came to the edge of the earth, it exclaimed to the keeper of these edges, "Look around! There are no more humans left! They are all dead and so here I am rolling their faecal dirt around into a ball!" To which the keeper replied, "If that be the case then why not shake the earth and destroy everything in it!" And so it was that the earth shook for the first time from what came to be called an 'earthquake'.

As the earth sat atop *Satel* the Turtle, when Dung Beetle claimed that there were no more humans on earth, the creatures put burning live embers on top of *Satel*. And when Turtle started to move, it caused such a violent earthquake that the living human population desperately shouted, "*E khai!*[6] We are yet alive! We're alive!" When they realised Dung Beetle had uttered a lie, Tortoise was immediately requested by the other creatures to stand still, moving in slow motion only when required. And so it was that

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[5] Also called the 'traveller's thirst', a berry that is sour to taste. Also given the scientific name of emblic myrobalan. Also called amla in hindi.

[6] An exclamation of surprise.

whenever there was an earthquake, Mizo forefathers would exclaim, "We're alive! We're alive!" [7]

Freud's suggestion that mythology is psychology projected upon the earth is a good starting point. After all, folklore scholarship does support that myth and folktales reveal and diagnose the cultural modal motivations. Through a closer reading, this creation-myth type can be identified through the first four types. It is also an example of the excremental myth very much in support of the hypothesis that men do think of creativity in anal terms as Freud and psychoanalysis has stated in a 1938 work[8]. Anal here refers to Freud's sexual theory in children which states that children since they lack the knowledge of the existence of a vagina assume that a woman gives birth through the anus. Although this is for both sexes, women eventually experience the truth when she herself gives birth through the vagina and not the anus. This theory talks about pregnancy envy in men as they lack the ability to give birth and are denied the experience of ever giving birth to a human being. Other psychoanalysts like Fromm[9] who talk not necessarily of a pregnancy envy but of male desire for creation through defecation have suggested that mans desire to create and produce something out of their own mental capacity springs from this aspect of being anal expressed through a desire to conceive. Through the Earth-Diver myth type and Cloacal theory, the anus largely figures as indicated through the defecation of, and increasing amount of excretion of earth by Earthworm and also when Porcupine fetches the bit of dirt after crossing the primeval waters. Amongst all the animals, it is only *Chultenu* who is mentioned as female, *nu* here indicative of

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[7] Vanlallawma, C. p-1-3. Translation is scholar's own.

[8] Freud, Sigmund. *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*. New York: International Universities Press. 1938.p-164

[9] Fromm, Eric. *The Forgotten Language*. New York: Grove Press. 1951. p-233

female. We assume then that all the others are male characters, including the diver and the one who multiplies earth; hence, the creator, the multiplier, expander and agent is 'male' who gives birth to the earth. This is a hypothesis in context with the mizo myth although earth-diver myth is said to represent a creature agent who is a pre-human form. According to Jung[10], anal birth supports the idea of the myth of the origins of man by saying that "The first people were made from excrement, potter's earth and clay". Hence, if the mizo male psyche or mizo ancestor is likewise anal in character, then it beckons a new interpretation of the traditional social institution of the boy's dormitory or the *zawlbuk* which also further supports the culture as patriarchal. Here the psychological and psychoanalytical interpretation is that of an institution created by men and therefore born out of men. This symbol of *zawlbuk* can be likened to the earth being created out of the male anus and not female vagina while the creation myth successfully propagates man as creators of the earth. The best example for this hypothesis is found in the book of Genesis in the Christian Bible that narrates creation of the earth and man by a male God also from earth/dirt/mud/dust. Therefore, *zawlbuk* is an institution that functions solely on its male membership while prohibiting membership to women, barring entry of women into their dormitory, excluding women from participating in conversations and activities within the male space. The institution teaches skills of weapon making, survival skills like hunting and combat only to men thus ensuring men own all knowledge. This power then remains in the hands of men through hegemony rather than sharing precious knowledge by keeping it within the confines of the *zawlbuk.* In her seminal book Gerda Lerner writes, "Those who owned the means of production could dominate those who did not...It is through the man that women

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[10] Jung, Carl Gustav. *Psychology of the Unconscious.* New York: Moffat, Yard and Company. 1916. p- 214

have access to or are denied access to the means of production and to resources".[11] *Zawlbuk* as an institution that admits young boys of puberty age are required to fulfil certain criteria and learn certain skills until they are allowed to rejoin society as adult men. This maturation of the young boy into an adult man mirrors the act of 'giving birth' of men into society by other men as opposed to the physical and vaginal 'giving birth' of a baby by its female mother.[12]

The earth-diver is thus male in Mizo context. The earth-diver as a 'double vector'[13]is interesting wherein Geza Roheim, a psychoanalytic anthropologist interprets the body of the earth-diver, in our case, Porcupine, as a 'penis entering the vagina' and therefore the diving into the primeval waters is an erection which further postulates a monogenetic origin. This monogenetic origin is important as it proves mizo cultural and oral antiquity. What Roheim further does is to show how the growing earth is indicative of a pregnant woman's growing belly and a male desire for procreativity. In the Earth-Diver, the primordial water is then only a passive being and therefore hostile to creation and procreation especially in contrast to the 'earth'. This type of myth is also often believed to be the most ancient amongst creation myths, again giving the culture its antiquity as opposed to the very entrenched colonial hangover that mizo culture found its 'origin' only post Christianization where the past is cancelled as mere stories. The reference to the Turtle is significant as it is a universal symbol, a universal reference made by many cultures of the world as carrying the earth on its back. We

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[11] Lerner, Gerda. *The Creation of Patriarchy.* New York: Oxford University Press. 1986. Print

[12] Battelheim, Bruno. *Symbolic Wounds.* London: Thames and Hudson. 1955. This issue has also been dealt with by Bruno Battelheim who relates male desire for creation to the practice of couvade.

[13] Roheim, Geza. *The gates of the dream.* New York: International Universities Press. 1951

find this reference in what are considered as the oldest living cultures in the world including many African and Asian cultures. The Turtle is represented as wise, slow moving and having an immensely long life span. It is also capable of migrating to great distances while giving the illusion that it is motionless. Thus the Turtle mentioned in the first myth is significant as it further threads mizo myths and culture among 'old' cultures of the world.

In continuation of this idea of a male desire for creativity and anal birth is another folktale that can be identified as belonging to the Cloacal theory myth type that is paraphrased as follows:

Myth 2:

Chhura once travelled to a town called *Mawngping khua,* the 'village-with-no-anus'. One morning the people of the village saw that Chhura was defecating with such ease that made them wonder as to how he managed to do so (as the people had no anuses and therefore could not defecate). When questioned Chhura revealed that during his childhood, the parents in his village made holes for anuses for all the children with hot heated rods after which they were all able to defecate with ease. Naturally after hearing such a solution the adults requested Chhura to do the same for their children. Unfortunately all the children died and even the ones barely alive were torn apart by parents who fought amongst themselves for the possession of the children. Of course Chhura escaped using his cunning trickery even though the villagers condemned him to die.

The character of Chhura is usually read as representative of a trickster type in folklore but as a creative myth type, the desire for creating and gifting certain abilities, (in this case the ability to defecate) is an interesting case in point. The story of the villagers of *Mawngping khua* goes horribly wrong when all the children die and Chhura is chased out of the village. What arrests our attention

here though, is the preoccupation with defecation and desire to create by a people who put the future generation at risk to gain such creative powers. As Chhura is also representative of a cultural hero type, both moral and amoral at heart, plays both god and man like the cultural patriarchal desire. The sexual interpretation through psychoanalytical interpretation is in clear reference to creation of an anus with the help of a 'heated rod' while desirous of the ability to create, in this case excreta. The glossing over of Chhura as a sodomite may have been clearly missed by scholars who have read this tale, but as a cultural hero, Chhura's ability to 'create' and endow upon children the ability to defecate is an important one since Chhura is often said to be an archetype of the mizo patriarchal personality.

Myth 3:

The other origin myth, often told as stories to children and written about by historians as part of history on migration, tells the tale of mizo ancestors who came out of a 'hole' in the ground/wall. This myth of an emergence from a 'hole' in itself is not unique to mizo culture as it is distributed fairly widely throughout the North East region of India. 'Mizo' here includes other tribes like Paihte, Hmar, Mara, etc who all fall under the umbrella term 'Mizo' as they are all sister tribes who trace a common ancestor, migration trail and heritage. All of these tribes and sub-tribes narrate this common tale of forefathers who 'came out' or 'emerged' from a hole in the ground/wall in large numbers from a place called *Chhinlung* or literally 'Closed Stone'. The story goes that the hole in the ground/wall was shut or closed after the Ralte clan loudly chattered and made such noise that in order to avoid detection, a stone was rolled over the hole, shutting it for eternity. The people who came out from the hole are said to represent different tribes and clans collectively called 'Mizo'. As the forefathers were believed to have been in a great hurry, historians through

ethnographic study have concluded that they were making their escape or running from threat of plunder and annihilation. This particular *Chhinlung* theory proposed by historian B. Lalthangliana has been the basis for the hypothesis that mizo ancestors were fleeing from great and powerful kings in China many thousands of years ago because of political intrigue directly linked to rivalry of succession to the Emperor's throne. This oft narrated myth 3 about *Chhinlung* has another source paraphrased as under:

Myth 4:

This creation myth tells the tale of creation of life on earth, from rain to plants to creation of man by *Khuazingnu,* the female/feminine counterpart or part of *Vanapa* and *Pathian,* both male counterpart of the godhead; and the appointment of the first chief to maintain order amongst a people whose population had multiplied. This chief in his dream swallowed the moon whole and immediately spat it out again after it caused his mouth to bleed. When he awoke, he was told of a phenomena that while he was asleep the moon had vanished making the people so agitated that they made all the noise they could, clanging their utensils, beating their drums and shouting and howling at the moon. Only then did the moon appear again. When his people checked their Chief's mouth, it was discovered that the moon had indeed been swallowed as his mouth bled, and that he was right to have spat it out. This incident led the people to credit their Chief for eclipsing the moon.

When the Chief died, he transformed into a fabulous creature called *Awk,* the swallower of the sun and moon and creator of the eclipses. One particular day, the *Awk* continued to swallow the sun, continued still for more days, continuing to *awk* the moon too for entire nights. This caused such chaos amongst his people who bumped into each other as the world became completely dark. A phenomenon thus comes to pass where all people on earth

metamorphosed/transformed into another life form. Some changed into monkeys, tigers, elephants, while others into glow worms and still some others into bears and birds. This phenomenon came to be called *Thimzing,* or 'Amongst-darkness', 'In darkness' where '*thim'* means dark/darkness and *'zing'* indicates being amongst something.

The creator *Khuazingnu* witnessed all this in utter consternation and was so upset to see that all her creations had transformed into something different because of *Thimzing.* Before even more humans could turn, she collected human couples from different clans and tribes, and couples of different animal species and put them deep into the ground covering this hole with a huge stone called *Chhinlung,* Closed Stone or Stone Cover.[14]After some time when *Khuazingnu* opened the lid, she found both animals and humans had multiplied to a great number. A great many of the human and animal creations clambered out of the hole in the ground while producing an extremely loud noise that resounded through the entire world. The loudest noise is said to have come out of the Ralte clan. At this point, *Khuazingnu* finding the noise unbearable shut the stone cover for eternity.

In myth 3, the ancestors 'emerged' from a hole to begin a long and arduous journey, wondering as nomads from place to place and taking refuge wherever they could where ever they found themselves welcome. This wondering has been reflected in very old songs composed in couplets. These songs have reflected early settlement of mizo ancestors in different locations at various point of time in history before the final settlement in current Mizoram. The 'hole' represented in myth 3 therefore has become a very convenient telling that lends itself very generously to the China

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[14] Tribal Research Institute. *Mizo Thawnthu.* " Thil Tobul- Pi Pute Ti Ti".p-2-4. New Delhi: Allied Publishing Pvt Ltd. 1992.

migration theory as historians and the culture itself tends to coalesce and fuse together fragments of history and fragments of myth to form an oral reality. Although we cannot underestimate the genuine nature of the geographical distribution and spread of this myth 3 in the region, it is not easy to date the origin of the myth itself. But it is myth 4 according to studies in mythology[15] that could well be a better representation of dreams of the first ancestors. The emergence in myth 3 we assume occurs from the earth's own inner power from inside its vestiges as we cannot tell what is on the other side of this hole or from where the ancestors are said to have emerged from. The myth does not specify children only as emerging from the hole but different mizo tribes representing different age groups. There is undoubtedly then the tendency to view the 'earth' as a woman's womb and her ability to give birth and create life. The discourse today is also often about these tribes being *chhul khat chhuak* or 'emerging from the same womb'. This particular discourse has oftentimes led to strained relations between tribes and clans that is reminiscent of quarrelling siblings on who emerged first out of the hole. This has also led to politicization of tensions over self assertion and separate political identity, and issues over representation. Because majority of the corpus of mizo history, origin and collective memory is based on oral history, folktales and folksongs, myth 3 then, from a psychoanalytical point of view can be conjectured to represent a desire for a mother figure, driven by a desire for concrete knowledge of parentage in a child orphaned. This is then manifested in the mother symbol of a 'hole' in the ground that belongs to mother earth. The wandering, nomadic existence of thousands of years and the uncertainty of 'where' one comes from can be said to then foreground this particular myth 3.

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[15] Roheim, Geza. "Fairytale and Dream". *The Psychoanalytical Study of the child.* 8:394-403. 1953

The aspect of wandering symbolised in an orphans child's search for parentage and concrete knowledge of origin still features largely in mizo psyche. Although the nation of India is accepted as a kind of adopted parent, the soul still searches. This has led to the other, although hotly debated theory that Mizos belong to one of the ten lost tribe of Israel called the Bnei Menashe or Sons of Menasseh, exiled by the Assyrians when they captured the northern Kingdom of Israel in the 8th century B.C.[16] The Bnei Menashe in Mizoram, although very small in number have their own myth about their origins which also features *Chhinlung.* In the myth, the Sons of Menasseh narrate tales of a people also fleeing from persecution. They trace their migration from northern Israel to modern day Iraq/ Assyria, into Afghanistan, travelling many years through the entire stretch of the Himalayan range and entering Mongolia. From Mongolia they entered China only to be persecuted for their beliefs and difference which resulted in them living and taking shelter in caves. They were therefore called *Sinlung* or *Chhinlung,* in this case interpreted as 'Cave Covering'. Recent years have seen members migrating to Israel in the belief and hope that they are returning 'home' after having been 'lost'.

Myth 4 then also has its own tale about the myth of *Chhinlung* and its place in the origin and creation of mizo ancestor and archetype. Because of the phenomenon of *Thimzing, Khuazingnu* causes a situation to occur which would further cause a return to an ideal state of pre-corruption by sheltering her creation in a deep 'hole' in the ground. Since the earth is also created by *Khuazingnu* the feminine godhead, the 'hole' that she buries them into has nurturing qualities and the mother symbol attached to it. This act of burial in this myth seems to be in protection and preservation of the

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[16] Jewish Voice Ministries UK. www.jewishvoice.org. "The Bnei Menashe of Northeastern India". July/August 2010, Jewish Voice Today

original perfect form rather than an end to creation, a rebirth of sorts. *Thimzing* here then is symbolic of chaos. The restoration of order is then only possible through a return into the 'hole' in the earth, a return into the womb to be covered by *Chhinlung.* So whether first Mizo ancestors emerged from the 'hole' in the ground only to cover this 'hole' with a large stone or take shelter in a cave called *Sinlung* or be buried in a deep hole covered by a large stone, the creation and origin myths of where the Mizo ancestors came from will remain in dreams and survive through telling of these myth. What myth 1, 3, 4 and Bnei Menaseh myth have in common is that elements of both separation and attachment feature largely in the psyche of both past and present Mizos. Whether the separation and attachment is at once to a mother figure, to sky or earth or whether these origin myths reveal a manifestation of a desire to create and destroy, what we learn is the possibility of Mizo creation myths as also being a part of universal symbols long before the coming of Christianity and its dualism, its separation between good and evil, between devil and God, female and male. In the Separation of Earth and Sky myth, myth 1 mentions *Chultenu* as unable to stand erect in certain regions of the earth under the big sky. The sky is portrayed as hung too low and close to earth, thus causing inconvenience for man. *Chultenu*, in her capacity as a feminine entity here is the agent of separation although not 'the' separator of sky and earth. There is no specific mention of separator but to a large extent *Chultenu* proves, through her inability to stand straight, that sky and earth need separation. The 'Tree-that-touches-heaven' becomes an important symbol of union in this myth, the agent that both separates and unites earth and sky, tying them together. The tension of both separation and attachment also feature largely in this myth which gives rise to chaos. Because the creatures are unhappy with this inconvenience the situation is resolved through the cutting down of the tree. When the tree is cut,

earth becomes free, and thus order is restored. Who restores order? It is the creature agents, interpreted as male here because only *Chultenu* is given a female reference. *Chultenu's* contribution is only in aiding in the separation. The separation that follows is marked by creation of mountains, valleys and many other physical features on earth. The chaos and ensuing creation of earthly features on earth, it can be said is mans role in creation, his psychoanalytical projection and perception of the creative impulse and also the sublimation of these desires from one of chaos to one of creation. Mans dream of creation then can be said to have projected this desire onto myth. And so chaos is necessary for creation just like order that follows chaos although in some myths chaos is seen to be as passive as water in the process of creation.

The next myth about the war between the creatures of the earth and creatures of the sky is another Separation myth. This myth also holds the Cosmic-Egg myth and the creation of order out of chaos hypothesis. It is paraphrased as follows:

Myth 5:

This tale begins with a competition between Barking Deer and Turtla. Barking Deer challenges Turtla to a game which would involve jumping over Python's egg which Turlte had been given the task of protecting on behalf of Python's request. Turtle's reluctance to participate and the fear of breaking the egg proved a prophetic one for when Turtle failed to jump as high as Barking Deer, it resulted in the eventual breaking of the precious egg! What followed was a series of unfortunate events. Turtle knocked door to door seeking refuge from Python's wrath but all the creatures, which like him lived on earth, turned him down as Python was greatly feared. As luck would have it, Eagle sitting atop a great tree willingly accepts Turtle's plea, protecting him by hiding him under its wings. Python on learning this declares war between all creatures who

walk on earth, and those who fly over the earth. Although it looks like creatures of the earth will win due to Python's great strength, the creatures of the sky finally win when Eagle takes a timely opportunity by pecking on its opponent's spine, tearing it into many pieces thus claiming victory to a thunderous applause!

In this myth 5, 'Separation' in this context here has originated out of chaos, the war, which has resulted in creating order. In many myths, sky and earth are represented as male and female, or represented as one lying on top of the other. Still in other myths the attachment of earth and sky is represented through darkness engulfing the entire world because of this union. Although some myths find this an advantageous situation, there are other myths that find it disadvantageous and inconvenient as in myth 1. In Mizo context too, there exists the universal claim that there was a relation between the earth and sky in the primeval time, based on myths 1 and 5. Water alone existed in the beginning in myth 1 creating a chaotic situation, while in myth 5, order is born out of war, a chaotic situation. Both myth 1 and myth 5 seems to relate the separation in terms of a competition, a struggle, an urgent emergency where creatures compete or unite to solve a chaotic situation. This struggle and competition is usually triggered by a situation that involves issues of origin and creation, of survival and establishing power and influence. Not some random reason. In myth 5, the competition and ensuing war has been brought on by the destruction or breaking of the egg. The egg here although characterized as python/snake/serpent egg, is none-the-less a signifier of the cosmic egg myth type or a symbol of fertility just as the earth as 'womb' in myth 1. The egg is a macrocosmic symbolic of a cosmic centre, as a source of life. The creation myth 5 can also be identified as the chaos myth type. The chaos occurs because the egg is symbolic of creation and further contains the germs of creation. The egg is a symbol of totality from which all life comes forth, being born out of an egg,

and the symbol of new life. It is thus a womb containing the seeds of future generations. The python/snake/viper is not represented as female or male, nor are we claiming an anal birth here, but myth 5 is important in Mizo context because we establish here the existence of a universal signifying symbol of the 'egg' present in Mizo pre-historic past before western education or western religious influence. The 'egg' plays an important role in mizo folklife even today. When a neighbour or relative falls ill, one visits with a few brown/farm eggs as goodwill and encouragement for a quick recovery in times of sickness.

Myth 6:

This myth is not a folktale but more so a part of the myth and belief system surrounding the concept of *Pialral* or a paradise-like world believed to exist in the after-life. When an infant dies, it is believed that an egg rolls in front, just a little ahead so the child can follow and be guided on the right path into *Pialral*, a haven meant for selected souls. The path to this entity is believed to be a long distance away that involves an arduous journey. An egg in this myth can be conjectured to indicate a rebirth, a cycle of death and being born again. The egg here symbolises a hope for resurrection. The concept of 'rebirth' is considered to be an alien concept to present modern Mizo psyche. In its present context as a Christian society, it clashes with the Christian concept of 'rebirth'. But for the sake argument, and using this cosmic-egg myth, Mizo ancestors seem to harbour either a belief in 'rebirth' or at least a desire for it, a form of wishful thinking that a child who follows the egg in death can be reborn again as a potential warrior of chieftain or to find his way home.

What these myths feature largely in essence is the insistence by mizo ancestors of their status as the 'original' people in the world who created the earth and life as we know it. Because there

is no specific reference to a particular place or a particular time except as the 'origins', the orality and the nature of these creation myths as having the quality of the 'spoken word' gives it both the telos and the condition of an agency required to support these very myths as archetypes of creation in the larger macrocosmic world of creation myths.

The Role of Language in Intangible Heritage of the Mizo

Lalrindiki T. Fanai

Human language as a system of communication is primarily as a communication through sounds. Speech therefore has always been considered primary to the written form. As a principal means of communication, emotions, intentions, social and cultural values of a homogenous community or a nation are expressed first through spoken language. Language thus is an important component of culture because much of it is normally transmitted orally and subsequently expressed physically.

When new political visions are enacted, planning codes written, engineering decisions made and when new value system evolved in accordance with the ever progressive world, cultural heritage that are physically embodied viz. tools, artifacts, monuments are subjected to replacement, modified to suit contemporary period or to processes of obliteration. And often, such tangible cultural heritage are reduced to mere replicas of the original. While the value of cultural heritage and its preservation have been a major concern globally, preservation of intangible cultural heritage too has been regarded equally important.

The answer to the question; "What is Intangible Cultural Heritage?" can be had in the UNESCO Convention 2003 Article as follows :

"According to the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, the intangible cultural heritage (ICH) – or living heritage – is the mainspring of our cultural

diversity and its maintenance a guarantee for continuing creativity."

The Convention states that the ICH is manifested, among others, in the following domain:

· *Oral traditions and expressions : including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;*
· *Performing arts (such as traditional music, dance and theatre);*
· *Social practices, rituals and festive events*
· *Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe.*
· *Traditional craftsmanship.*

The 2003 Convention defines ICH as the practices, representations, expressions, as well as the knowledge and skills, those communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.

The definition also indicates that the ICH to be safeguarded by this Convention :

· *Is transmitted from generation to generation;*
· *Is constantly recreated by communities and groups, in response to their environment, their interaction with nature, and their history;*
· *Provides communities and groups with a sense of identity and continuity;*
· *Promoted respect for cultural diversity and human creativity;*
· *Is compatible with international human rights instruments;*
· *Complies with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, and of sustainable developments.*

The ICH is traditional and living at the same time. It is constantly recreated and mainly transmitted orally. It is difficult to

use the term authentic in relation to ICH; some experts advise against its use in relation to living heritage.

The depository of this heritage is the human mind, the human body being the main instrument for its enactment, or – literally – embodiment.

The knowledge and skills are often shared within a community, and manifestations of ICH often are performed collectively.

Many elements of the ICH are endangered, due to effects of globalization, uniformization policies, and lack of means, appreciation and understanding which – taken together – may lead to the erosion of functions and values of such elements and to lack of interest among the younger generations.

The role of language, as a vehicle or transmitter of intangible heritage in Mizo culture cannot be over-emphasized. It has only been a little over hundred years since the script for Mizo language was formulated by Welsh missionaries who had little or no training in linguistic science. Till date, the Mizo orthography is under constant review thus rendering the spoken component of the Mizo language crucial to the transmission and continuity of Mizo cultural values even today. Moreover, orality encompasses individual variations that can only be captured through the spoken medium. These variations, be it story-telling, rendering of folk songs or social codes embedded in proverbs contribute to the richness of cultural heritage in spite of their intangible characteristics.

It is assumed that Mizo have about fifty folk stories (B. Lalthangliana; 2004). Some of these stories are in print now and some are even translated into English language (Laltluangliana Khiangte; 1997). These fifty folk stories have survived through oral tradition of story-telling for more than hundred years. Folktales are those that belong to the oral tradition of story-telling and were

handed down by word of mouth through successive generations and across different cultures. These tales were important carriers of culture, since they reflected the culture of the people who first told them. To illustrate the significance and the deep import of language as a vehicle for intangible heritage with reference to story-telling, I would like to first make mention my own childhood experience of listening to Mizo folk-stories told to us by my grandfather, whom I shall remember as the finest and a diligent story-teller for his grandchildren. The folk-stories of the Mizo which I know and remember are passed on to me by my grandfather. As I now read one of the folk-stories in print, I could discern the richness of individual variations that my grandfather incorporated into his story-telling and which could never have been captured in the print media.

The story of 'Zawlpala and Tualvungi' is a story that was repeatedly told to us. Below is its translation from 'Folktales of Mizoram'. (1997)

"Once upon a time there lived a man called Zawlpala who had a beautiful wife named Tualvungi. These two

loved each other very dearly.

Since Tualvungi was very beautiful, people from difference places used to come to their village just to see her beauty.

Knowing of her beauty one day, a king called Phuntiha also came to their village and met the loving couple. As Tualvungi was very beautiful, Phuntiha fell in love with her. Zawlpala was very proud of his wife and told Phuntih that she was his sister.

The King then asked Zawlpala for Tualvungi's hand and (according to the custom) Zawlpala believing that Phuntiha would not be able to meet a fantastic price, felt safe and named an enormous bride-price for his wife.

To Zawlpala's utter disappointment however, Phuntiha was easily able to give the demanded price as he was also a magician. So the happy couple was thus unexpectedly parted due to inevitable circumstances.

Phuntiha then returned home with the lovely Tualvungi and Zawlpala was left alone with his grief and wealth. Zawlpala could not bear his loneliness for long and went to visit Tualvungi in her new home and it so chanced that Phuntiha was away when Zawlpala reached his place.

Tualvungi was afraid for the life of Zawlpala and warned him not to partake of anything the crafty Phuntiha would offer him. Phuntiha later came home and saw Zawlpala, and fearing that he would take away his new wife, he offered poisoned food to his guest in order to kill him.

At first, Zawlpala was able to resist the food but on persuasion, he ate a little piece of the meal offered to him. Tualvungi knew the fatal mistake that her former husband had made and advised him to return home at once as he was sure to die of poisoning.

Zawlpala, infact, died a few days after he reached home. People came to mourn his death and it was decided to send someone to Tualvungi to inform her of the sudden demise of her former husband.

The crow volunteered its service, saying it would go to Tualvungi and cry out "Caw, caw" which no one would understand. For its foolishness the crow was dipped in black dye and has remained black ever since.

Next the crab offered to go saying it would say "Ai, Ai" and the angry people stamped on the poor crab making it low to this day.

As they were so much worried about sending information at last, the pigeon to go and say to Tualvungi "Zawlpala has died

recently; Tualvungi should come to mourn for him". The pigeon satisfied the people and it was send to Tualvungi.

Accordingly, the pigeon was rightly informed about the message to be handed over to the old wife. When Tualvungi came to know of the death of Zawlpala, she was determined to return to the village and mourn for him.

As designed by her husband, Tualvungi wounded her foot but her determination was so strong that she managed to go despite her wounded foot. And she proceeded to pay her last tribute to her former husband. On reaching the village of Zawlpala, Tualvungi enquired the place where Zawlpala was buried. When she reached the exact burial place, overcome with grief at the death of her beloved Zawlpala, she asked the grand old woman who followed her to take her life at the grave of her true lover.

Therefore, the grand old woman then killed Tualvungi with her knife and buried her just at the side of Zawlpala.

Soon after that Phuntiha arrived at the same spot, trying to take her back but was just in time to see both Zawlpala and Tualvungi changed into two yellow butterflies and fly up in the air happily.

So, he too changed himself into a big black coloured butterfly and flew after them, but was not able to overtake the two united lovers.

Hence, it is believed till this day that you can see a big black butterfly chasing a pair of yellow butterflies. Even children used to say that two yellow butterflies are the spirits of Zawlpala and Tualvungi, and the black one flying alone is the spirit of Phuntiha.

So ends the story of 'Zawlpala and Tualvungi'.

What made this story engrossing to us is the pigeon-messenger's song, through which it conveyed the death of Zawlpala to Tualvungi:

"Hui hui e
Ka ti hui hui e
Tuanah Zawlpala a thi e
Tualvungin va ral rawh se
Ka ti hui hui e"
"Hui hui e" is an imitation of a wood-pigeon cry.

The next two lines in the Pigeon's Song refer to the death of Zawlpala and request to Tualvungi to come and mourn his death. The rendering of the Pigeon's Song in the form of chanting by my grandfather was like a mournful wailing to suit the theme of sadness in the story. He would lengthen the last syllable in *"Hui hui e"* in a monotone. And the lengthening of the last syllable "e" in the chanting creates a sense of distance between Zawlpala and Tualvungi, and the effect of distancing in the context of their inability to unite and the subsequent death of Zawlpala, rendered the story sadder to a child's ears.

Another favourite childhood song which my grandfather used to sing for us is, a song called *"Tawkdangi* Song" (A She-frog Song). The song is about a she-frog asking everything to be quiet because she is going to dance. Although I have forgotten the lyrics, I still remember the improvised accompaniment my grandfather incorporated in the song after every two line which is-"*Pim, Pim, Pim"* (an imitation of perhaps the sound of drum) Depending on the length of the sentences in the lyric the *"Pim,Pim, Pim"* is reduplicated not only three times but four or five times.

Strangely enough, the rhythm of the improvised accompaniment became the basic rhythm acquired and retained in the mind.

Extra-linguistic appliances like intonation, pitch and pauses in the process of story-telling could leave an indelible marks in the mind of the listener upon persons, landscapes and objects reflected

in the narration, The smallness of the widow and her house in the story of *"Chemtatrawta"* for instance which was emphasized by my grandfather with the help of various degrees of superlative phrases denoting smallness, in the course of his story-telling, conveyed a sense of the unreal on the widow and her house thus creating a world of fantasy for the child listener, after many years. The element of fantasy remain in the mind whenever one comes across the story of *Chemtatrawta*.

The *Sapir- Whorfian* hypothesis poses that much of our world-view is governed by the language we speak, which again is dictated by what we see and hear. The main tool we have for organizing the world is through spoken language. This notion is often referred to as "linguistic determinism". To a great extent, "linguistic determinism" is at work in the oral tradition of story-telling. The freedom to use extra-linguistic appliances in the course of story-telling inculcate in the listener primary concepts about various objects, notions, etc. My concept of "flooding river", "height of laziness", "magic" to cite a few examples, are formed through the stories told to me viz: *"Ngaiteii""Samdala", "Kungawrhi"* respectively.

For the sake of good governance and harmonious living in a given community, moral codes of conduct and practices specific to a homogeneous community are often reflected in fables, proverbs, etc. denoting the knowledge, wisdom, social practices and beliefs of the people. In fact, they embody the emotional and spiritual truths of the community of people and like folk-tales they have survived through the medium of spoken language. In these proverbs moral codes and good practices are embedded that touch upon both community and individual lives. The role of language in inculcating such value system among the people is significant because they are not learned in formal institutions but are expressed and stated in accordance with the context in which their relevance

is perceived through interactions within a given community both at home and outside. A few examples of the Mizo proverbs are :-

a) *"Anchhe lawhin mahni chungah a tla thin"* (When you curse, the curse falls on you)

b) *"Piangsual nuih suh, piansual leh pharin tlailuat a nei lo"* (Do not laugh / mock the handicapped, it is never too late to become handicapped or to be a leper)

c) *"Nu leh pa pawisa lo an dingchhuak tak tak ngai lo "* (Those who do not respect their parents, never prosper)

d) *"Thenawm mangang thawm chhan ngam lo chuan pawnfen fen mai tur "* (A man who does not have the courage to help a neighbor in trouble should wear a skirt)

e) *"Thenawmte do aiin khaw sarih do a thlanawm zawk"* (It is better to wage war against seven villages than against your neigbours)

While the discussion focuses on language as a vehicle for the preservation and continuity of intangible cultural heritage within the premise of oral tradition, one must take note that language (the spoken form) itself is a part of the intangible heritage. Language is intangible and susceptible to the process of dying in the course of time. Such cases with reference to the fate of many languages have been attested all over the world. Even in a young community like the Mizo, the Ralte dialect is now a dying language.

Language is dynamic. It is not static and therefore changes all the time. When certain linguistic features in a given speech community go through change, some of its cultural heritage is lost because the change occurs due to the influence of external factors viz. other languages, culture or exposure to other value system than one's own. On careful observation and comparison, one could perceive that the Mizo language too is undergoing change in usage

and in some areas future changes in linguistic features can be predicted. Colloquial usage that escapes the process of standardization in the written form too is a potential candidate for obliteration. The linguistic changes or modifications in a language often reflect acculturization. The discussion below denotes some aspects of language change in Mizo:

1. The phonotactic of Mizo does not allow the sound "s" to occur at the end of a syllable and also the vowel sequence of "ei" is never followed by any consonantal sound except the glottal stop. When chieftainship was abolished and the society was transformed to a political system that necessitated elections, the word "campaign" becomes a part of the Mizo vocabulary in the absence of its equivalence in Mizo language. The word "campaign" now is a part of the Mizo vocabulary. If the Mizo spelling is adopted, it could either be spelt as "kampein" or "kampeen", while the latter does not violate the Mizo phonotactic, the former would introduce a new co-occurrence principle in the Mizo phonology as a result of the influence of the English language. In the same way, slang like "*chhas*" *(*meaning boyfriend or girlfriend) which is now a very common usage could herald in change. Such changes in themselves are not surprising because language is dynamic but the important point to note here is that, these changes are brought about when we begin to live in bilingual or multilingual society.

2. There are certain linguistic traditions that each language group observed as part of its cultural practices. This is interconnected with the social belief based on superstition. When twins are born, the comment on the twins must always be negatives. One is not to remark how cute or beautiful they are but how terrible they are and the words in Mizo is *"An va rapthlak e!"* based on the traditional status of women in the society.

The word *"tam"* (many) is never used with reference to "many" in a family or group of people because it is believed to have a negative connotation. The word *"thahnem"* is used instead. However, in modern usage such restriction is no longer observed thus signifying loss of linguistic practice based on traditional belief.

3.   There is also an example of colloquial usage in Mizo which is not attested in the grammar of Mizo language and which has failed to undergo process of standardization to become a part of the written form. The use of nouns as verbs with reference to proper nouns :

a)   *Thawhtanniah ka Delhi dawn.* (I am going to Delhi on Monday") (Thawhtanni = Monday, ah= post=position, dawn = future aspect marker)

b)   Question : *Zemabawkah I kal dawn em* ? (Are you going to Zemabawk ?) (Zemabawk = name of a locality in Aizawl, I = you, kal=go, dawn = future aspect marker, em = question marker)

Answer : *Aw, bawk dawn e.* ("Yes, I am going to Zemabawk.") (Aw = Yes, bawk = the second syllable in Zemabawk, dawn = future aspect marker, e =affirmative ending)

When colloquial usage just discussed above including slang words in a language do not become a part of common usage in the written form, they are more susceptible to the process of obliteration, thus making them more intangible than other forms of usage within a specific linguistic community.

In sum, language as a transmitter and preserver of intangible cultural heritage will continue to play its important role, ensures continuity and provides a given community with a sense of identity in a specific cultural context. However, language itself is intangible

and redefines and recreates itself continually but will continue to be a vehicle of expressions for intangible culture as long as it possesses an independent, defining characteristic of its own in the midst of constant process of change.

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Can there be Oral Literature?

Margaret Ch. Zama

This article seeks to critique the term 'oral literature' commonly used within academic circles to refer to the body of oral narratives that exists in pre-literate culture. In this connection, Walter J.Ong's theorization on 'primary' and 'secondary' orality will be briefly examined, so too the term 'orature' coined by the Ugandan scholar and linguist Pio Zirimu in the early 1970s, who linked it with not only orality but orality as performance. The paper will also attempt at exploring briefly the possibility of a more generic and inclusive alternative term to 'oral literature'.For some time now, scholars have often questioned the use of the term 'oral literature' commonly used both in academic and popular writing, considering it a paradox, an oxymoron and a contradiction in terms. Furthermore, its usage to generally refer to the oral traditions of pre-literate early cultures insinuates the primitiveness and backwardness of ancestors who possessed no other means of expression as it were. Pre-literate societies did not possess written literature, but possessed rich and varied oral traditions such as folk epics, folklore, songs and proverbs – all of which constitute a rich 'oral literature' in common parlance. Today, orality in its different manifestations has gained due recognition and legitimization particularly in academia and popular culture and an attempt is made here to go into the new parameters being mapped and theorized today.

The coinage of 'oral literature' as a concept is often credited to folklorists and anthropologists and the idea started gaining wider circulation since the writings of H. Munro Chadwick and N.

Kershaw Chadwick in their work *The Growth of Literature* (1932-40) in 3 volumes, and in 1960 when Albert B. Lord published *The Singer of Tales.* The term 'oral literature' started to frequently appear in the works of literary scholars and anthropologists from the 1970s – for example, Ruth Finnegan in *Oral Literature of Africa* (1970), and *Oral Poetry : Its Nature, Significance, and Social Context* (1977), and in research articles of others published in journals.

Looking back further, Ferdinand de Saussure in his lectures on General Linguistics at the turn of the twentieth century (1906-08), in calling attention to the primacy of oral speech, had already made a point about the persistent tendency even among scholars, to privilege and think of writing as the basic form of language. Writing, to him, is a kind of "complement to oral speech, and not a transformer of verbalization" (quoted by Ong 5).

Despite the interesting worlds that writing creates and opens up, orality or the spoken word still continues to be alive and fundamental or how else are we humans communicating / interacting amongst ourselves since time immemorial? All written texts relate directly or indirectly, to the world of sound to yield their meanings so "writing can never really dispense with orality" (Ong 8)**.** Oral expression existed without the written word but not the other way round. Ong rightly points out that ironically, till today, we have no satisfactory term or concept to refer to a purely oral heritage, such as the traditional oral stories, proverbs, prayers and so on, while we have the term 'literature' which essentially means 'writing' to cover a given body of written materials. It is in this connection that Ong comes up with his concepts of 'primary' and 'secondary' orality.

By 'primary orality' he refers to the orality of a culture totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or print and by 'secondary

orality' is meant that which belongs to present-day high-technology culture, in which a new orality is sustained by telephone, radio, television, and other electronic devices that depend for their existence and functioning on writing and print (Ong 11). When examined from the standpoint of mnemoculture and oral histories, pre-literate tribal cultures from the Northeast of India at some point certainly possessed the primary orality referred to here. In fact the textualization of this very orality (eg. stories, sayings, songs) only began in earnest long after bridging the gap from non-script to script with the advent of the modernization process of education, conversion from indigenous to alien faiths and so on. On the other hand secondary orality which is technology driven, permeates most cultures today due to the globalization process, unless there exists a conscious effort to preserve an element of orality in some areas deemed to be unassailable by the onslaught of technology – say in the realm of the mind-set, or perhaps the spiritual.

This article at this point makes an attempt to examine the more recent considerations and theories revolving around the term 'orature' and the performance theory of orature propagated robustly by Black African scholars today such as Pio Zirimu, Ugandan scholar and linguist, and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Kenyan writer and critic. Orature is the oral transmission of narrative, customs, traditions. It can also be said to be an analogue of literature, for though similar in function, it differs in origin and structure.

Though the term has been used variously since Pio Zirimu first coined it in the early 1970s, it was the Romantic era (late 1700s, early 1800s) which may be said to have actually opened up the critical mind to the possibility that orature such as native myths and folktales, fairy tales and jokes may be a form of literature, just as that which is written and considered mainstream. Thus we can say that the romantic thinkers (like Rousseau) brought about a paradigm shift by shifting as it were, the emphasis of literature from

the form it appears in (written form), to that which is expressed – written or not – and what is actually said, the values it contains, its emotional content and so on. Some of us still preserve family stories which have been handed down over the years – can this not be a form of literature, we may ask, if accepted as orature ?

Orature thus corresponds to the sphere of the spoken (oral) word and literature as literature operates in the domain of the written word. It can thus be considered as a more fundamental component of culture but operates in many ways just as literature does. As already mentioned earlier, pre-literate societies by definition, have no written literature, but may possess a rich and varied orature which covers oral traditions, folk epics, proverbs, folklore and folksong, and it would be foolish to discount them or delegate them as secondary and anachronistic.

Andre Kabore in his article on "Pacere as the demiurge of orature" makes an interesting observation about writing and print operating as a remedy for forgetfulness in spoken literature, and that printed literature appeared as a subset of and support to spoken literature. However, it is also true that though the advantage of writing lies in it being an instrument against forgetfulness, the fact is that an event written down on paper but never read or subsequently destroyed is the same as a story that is orally told / narrated, and then forgotten by both the audience and the teller. So there are cases where print fails to close the gaps left by spoken literature. It is then that orature comes into play as a necessary connector between print and the spoken, or oral. On the flip side, as a result of in-depth studies that have revealed that before writing, there was a spoken/oral literature, many literary critics still prefer the traditional phrase 'oral literature' or 'spoken literature'.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o makes an interesting study of orature in the light of the all-pervasive presence of Performance which in turn

may also help to shed light on a whole lot of other arts and systems of artistic thought. He states that "A focus on performance brings out the obvious fact that much of our relationship to reality, even to the everyday, is negotiated through performance. The invisible too is often made visible through performance" (Ngugi 1).

Pio Zirimu's brief definition of orature according to Ngugi is the use of utterance as an aesthetic means of expression, which in turn points to an oral system of aesthetics that did not need validity from the literary (Ngugi 1), nor, we may add, the written form. There are various theoretical possibilities in the term that can be teased out so to say, which can be further dilated upon. Pio Zirimu in coining the term orature was actually attempting to counter the tendency to see the arts communicated orally and received aurally (through sense of hearing) as an inferior or a lower rung in the linear development of literature. He was actually rejecting the term 'oral literature'.

Ngugi talks about Pitika Ntuli, a talented sculptor, poet and storyteller from South Africa, who in his years of exile in London during the 1980s, saw and spoke about the atomization of life and culture in Western bourgeois society, as a result of which he saw more clearly the value of the oral-aural arts of the African people as a healing opposite, a wholeness. He saw no boundaries between art forms in the arts of his childhood. Instead, what he saw was fluidity between drama, story, song, discourse and performance. Pitika claimed that a fusion of all art forms was the basic characteristic of orature, a kind of *gesalt*, the wholeness of all that is bigger than the parts that contributed to it. He says that "Orature is more than the fusion of all art forms. It is the conception and reality of a total view of life. It is the capsule of feeling, thinking, imagination, taste and hearing. It is the flow of a creative spirit." (as quoted by Ngugi 2, from Pitika Owusu Ntuli, ed. "Orature : A Self-Portrait". *Storms of the Heart,* London, Camden Press. 1988,

215). In other words, his treatment of the concept focuses on its central core of fusion and connections of features and elements that made up the wholeness. This definition of orature generates new dimensions to our understanding of the term.

Ngugi further dilates on the above concept of orature vis-à-vis fusion and wholeness, the connection between nature, nurture, supernatural, supernurtural and, now, cybernurture (cyberture) and cybernurtural, as if each of these was an expression of the primary substance that connects them all. It also expresses the interconnection of phenomena, and as a result, the interdependence of all existence. This interconnection of phenomena does not exclude humans, who are definitely part of nature. In this sense humans are not different from animals and plants that all depend on the same environment of earth, air, water and sun. They are all products of the same mother-environment, and it is orature that takes all of this for granted. We can explore and take this whole line of thinking further into the realms of ecocritical theory as well, wherein the entrenched idea of the universe as anthropocentric is overturned and new equations are born out of man-nature relationship.

It will be seen that in the narratives of orature, humans, birds, animals and plants interact freely, and they often assume each others' forms, including language. Humans in distress talk to birds, enlist their help and give them messages, and some notable examples can be gleaned from our own backyard. The Mizo have an example of the *vahui* bird (wood pigeon) in the tragic folktale of *Tualvungi and Zawlpala,* where the bird was the one finally selected amongst the other creatures to carry the sad news of Zawlpala's death to his beloved Tualvungi. Ngugi cites the example from Genesis in the Bible where a dove was sent by Noah to survey the land after the Floods / Deluge, as well as the classic example from the Homeric epics *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* wherein the same interactive

mutuality between the various realms of being is seen. The most clear example about this is Ovid's *Metamorphosis* where different forms of being change into each other – change itself, in fact, being the central theme. This concept was as we know, further taken up by Franz Kafka in his engrossing and powerful 'long' short story "Metamorphosis" (1915). It should be further noted that the classical epics in all cultures are rooted in orature, and therefore rendered more effective through the oral medium.

Since the major generic elements of orature such as riddle, proverb, story, song, poetry, drama and dance – are all imaginative attempts to explain or express interconnectedness with the universe, an emphasis on their primal and basic nature cannot be taken as markers of primitive backwardness. Far from it, studied in the light of what we have read so far, it would be no exaggeration to state that orature has the capacity to transport one into the realms of spirituality.

Viewed from this point of view, the term 'orature' is abandoned as an alternative for 'oral literature', and now beginning to be given another meaning. It has been reconceptualized to mean "an interdisciplinary aesthetic system weaving together numerous genres in the performance of a concept" (Mshai Mwangola, 2003). Orature mixes different performing genres in one. The same literary work can be poetry, sung music, story, and drama at the same time. Again, it may be noted that not all unwritten literatures are necessarily oral literatures. They would more appropriately be referred to as spoken literatures, in a wider sense of literatures that use different means of communication (mouth, gestures, body movement, instruments). For example the deaf "speak" with signs. Although deaf people communicate manually (hence performative) rather than orally, their culture and traditions we are told, are considered in the same category as oral literature. Stories, jokes and poetry are passed on from person to person with no written medium. So although Pio Zirimu proposed the term 'orature' to

conceal as it were, the alleged contradiction in the phrase 'oral literature', in-depth studies have shown that prior to writing, there was a literature which was spoken, as a result of which many literary critics still prefer the traditional phrase 'oral literature' instead of the suggested 'orature'. Meanwhile 'orature' undergoes reconceptualization to encompass and merge with the more performative genres as already denoted above.

Consequently, the term 'orature' taken up in performance studies, as pointed out, is designated even further by Andre Kabore, as "a genre of written literature at the cusp between spoken and written literatures, referring to written fiction that mix different performing genres". The implications of the genre of orature are thus manifold. It calls for a whole redefinion of literature as whatever a given society considers as literature. It demands an interpretation of literature based on an understanding of culture. In other words it would appear to be a study from below, from the deeper layers which the written form per se, may not quite reach or carry off.

In the light of this, Andre Kabore goes on to describe the parameters of orature which brings together the live, dynamic, flexible, repetitive and mnemonic qualities of spoken literature and the permanent features, especially the letters, of written literature. While the oral and aural dimensions of spoken literature are often lost when the folklorist transcribes spoken traditions into print, the artist of orature, in contrast to the folklorist, uses different typographic techniques in order to preserve the oral-aural elements of spoken literature, that is, through dance, narration, gestures etc. Orature thus underlines the fact that the spoken and written traditions are not mutually exclusive. It lays emphasis on the transfer of aural aspects of spoken discourse to writing.

In conclusion, the question hereby posed is, whether we in academia can attempt at exploring the possibility of a more generic

and inclusive alternative term to 'oral literature', be it in Ong's attempt to offer an alternative which would include both purely oral art and literature, by resorting to self-explanatory phrases such as 'purely oral art forms', 'verbal art forms' (Ong 14) and the like. Then there is also the definitive 'spoken' literature and 'written' literature to distinguish the two, though some would argue that such a usage still contains a contradiction in terms and roundly condemn it as "preposterous" just as Ong did so in condemning the term 'oral literature' (Ong 11). Meanwhile, though 'orature' as originally defined and intended by Pio Zirimu, has been convincingly appropriated by the exponents of the Performance Theory of Orature for their own purposes, the term still holds true for many, to be the most appropriate replacement for 'oral literature'. But though the term 'oral literature' is already losing ground, its total elimination according to Ong is very unlikely, just as human consciousness cannot achieve its fuller potentials without writing. In this sense orality needs to produce and is indeed destined to produce, writing. (Ong 14).

I may add that literate societies may continue an oral tradition – particularly within the family, community or informal social structures. The telling of urban legends may be considered as an example of oral literature, as can jokes and also oral poetry including slam poetry, and performance poetry, which is a genre of poetry in popular culture, that has consciously shunned the written form, but seen in televised uploads, Youtube etc. (hence again, performative). It is also pertinent for academia particularly from Northeast India, to generate more discourse on oral literature / orature, from new and challenging theoretical perspectives while highlighting parallel studies on our own local inherited lores so that we can begin to address issues such as : where do we situate our own oral traditions, and how can we tease out more relevance and import out of them

for deeper studies in the humanities and social studies that pertain to our own people and our own culture.

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Laltheri and Chalthanga[1]

Margaret L.Pachuau

This folklore has been translated from the original Mizo.It highlights the centrality of class distinction in precolonial Mizo society, and its subsequent removal from the same.

A long time ago there lived a comely maiden by the name of Laltheri. She was the daughter of a chief called Lalsavunga, and she was in love with a commoner called Chalthanga.Chalthanga had a friend who was a composer by the name of Chhawnthanga.Laltheri was deeply in love with Chalthanga but he did not dare to reciprocate her love for him because she was the daughter of the village chief.However, so madly in love was Laltheri with Chalthanga that she would follow him wherever he went, and she would even block his path even as he set off for the jhum. Yet even though she tried her level best in her pursuit of him Chalthanga was afraid to reciprocate her love for him.However Laltheri was adamant in her pursuit of Chalthanga and so he too found it difficult to resist her charms and eventually they both fell in love with each other.

After a while the entire village came to know about their love for each other and when Laltheri's brothers heard about their relationship they were enraged because they did not want their sister to fall in love with a mere commoner. In a frenzy they drove

[1] First published in *Folklore from Mizoram*, Writers Workshop, Kolkata 2012. Copyright mine.

out Chalthanga from their village and they even wanted to kill him.So they sent a man to track him down and the man then invited Chalthanga to share rice beer with him,

"Since you are leaving the village,why don't we share some rice beer together?"

Chalthanga was not a fool and he was well aware of what the man was up to, so in great alarm he followed the man .And as he did so,he engaged Chalthanga in conversation ,

"Since you are leaving the village why don't you partake of the brew first?"

Chalthanga then did as he was told and in the process, the man pierced him with a dao and he died instantly. Now at that time, it so happened that Laltheri was pregnant with Chalthanga's child and when she heard about Chalthanga being driven away from the village she was wild with remorse. In grief she roamed about wildly and so she did not care about her attire anymore and her hair was always shabby and unkempt. She was unaware that Chalthanga had died. Eventually she came to know of his death when a servant in the household enquired,

"Do you know what has become of Chalthanga?"
To which she replied,
"Why, what has happened to him?"
The servant said.
"He has been killed and his body has been thrown on the outskirts of the town."

As soon as she heard the news, Laltheri threw away the clothes that she was wearing and she ran about like a woman possessed. She ran about the village, in a state of nakedness and the villagers would gaze at her in amazement and would wonder in trepidation as to whether she had lost her sanity. After this she

refused to wear any clothes and very soon she refused to eat any food.Her mother would cajole her by saying,

"My dear please wear your clothes, it does not become you to behave in this manner."

However she refused to listen and her mother's pleas went in vain.Finally she no longer wanted to live with the villagers and she ran away to the forest, which was far away from the village. As she no longer partook of any food she grew faint with hunger after while and soon she fainted in the jhum that she took shelter in.She could no longer speak and finally the villagers found her in a state of unconsciousness and they carried her back to Chhawnthanga's home.

Laltheri refused to wear clothes and she continued to live in a state of nakedness.She was still lonely with grief and she refused to eat.Instead she drank rice beer all the time and in this manner she passed her time. Her temperament was greatly affected and she would get annoyed at the slightest provocation and she no longer had any friends.Only the memory of Chalthanga occupied her mind.Eventually with the passage of time, she gave birth to a baby boy.At first the birth of her son did not bring her any happiness. Whenever she gazed at her son she was filled with grief and she would hold him and weep all the while. However, after some time there was a change in her and she began to participate once again in the throes of life.She began by wearing clothes, which she had discarded a long while ago, and later she would even fetch wood for fire in the forest.One fine day her brother Lalphunga who had ordered for the death of Chalthanga fell very ill and as his condition worsened he called for a messenger and said,

"My sister Laltheri must come and pay me a visit as I am on my deathbed."

But when the messenger went to her home she refused by saying,

"Why did he kill Chalthanga?Woe should befall him.I shall not go."

This message was conveyed to him and when Lalphunga heard about it, he knew that he had indeed committed a grave wrong and only then did he realize the error of his ways.However there was little that he could do and so he did the best that he could and he called his family members and declared,

"What we did to Chalthanga was wrong.I am about to die. But after my death should anyone in the family fall in love with commoners , it must be ensured that they live happily and that no harassment should befall them."

Saying thus, he died and so it came to pass that chiefs and commoners began to pay court to each other in ernest and at liberty with one another.

Laltheri's son soon grew up and she too was eager to see him grow.This was because she wanted him to take revenge upon his father's killers.After a time she asked him,

"My son, come here, do you think you can now seize the head of your father's killer?"

And saying this she would make him lift a pumpkin.Now it so happened that the man who had killed Chalthanga was of the Pawi tribe. When he heard of this incident and of Laltheri's determination to hunt him down and kill him, it is said that he and his family left the village they dwelt in, never to return again.

Megaliths and Folktales of the Mizo

Malsawmliana

Megaliths and folktales have a distinct interrelationship and in some cases it is said that ancient monuments all over Europe are often surrounded by folktales and sometimes associated with strange customs. Apart from memorial purpose, megaliths are associated with some legends and it is sometimes used to reflect incidents or significant events and to witness the incidents of the past as well. Thus, due to this fact, megaliths serves as one of the important sources for the study of the early history of a particular tribe.

In Mizoram, some of the megaliths are connected with folktales and its erections are based on folktales denoting that such stones are raised to commemorate the undying affairs between the main characters in romantic tales..

Megaliths and Folktales:

The word '*Megalith*' is of Greek origin meaning a large stone (*mega* –large, *litho*-stone)[1]. According to Gordon Childe,[2] the term (megalith) was first introduced by antiquarians in the middle of the 19th century, to define a class of monuments in western and northern Europe, consisting of large undressed stones bearing celtic names such as dolmens, cromlechs, menhirs etc. These names were subsequently adopted to term complex stone structures, widely

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[1] Encyclopaedia Brittanica Inc, *The New Encyclopaedia Brittanica* Vol, VI(15th edition), USA, 1981.

[2] Quoted in KM Srivastava, *New Horizons of Indian Archaeology*, New Delhi, 1998, p.156.

distributed over Europe, the Mediterranean region, some parts of western Asia, Japan and south east Asia including India. Even today, megalithism is still a living tradition among some tribal groups in some parts of the world including India and particularly among some of the northeast Indian tribes like Khasi, Nagas and the Mizos.[3] The Mizo, like many other tribal groups in northeast India, have a living megalithic tradition and the practice of erecting megaliths is one of the striking features of the Mizo culture. The megaliths served as memorials to the dead as well as to the living. In Mizo society, megaliths are closely connected with the feasts of merit. Erection of menhirs or upright stones is a common practice followed by the erection of other types of monuments, such as stone seats, platforms and heaps of stone (cairns), etc. Similar types of megalithic structures are also found in other north eastern states of India. The Mizos erected megalithic monuments usually at the entrance of the village (kawtchhuah) and alongside the road and sometimes in the courtyard of the chief.

The Mizos have raised megaliths to mark various events of significance in society such as, the commemoration of the achievements of chiefs, the *thangchhuahpa*, warriors, and also on the foundation of villages, and settlements. Memorials were not only raised to the living but to the dead as well. Irrespective of the event, megaliths are primarily commemorative in nature, serving as a link between the world of the living and that of the dead. Memorials may be of wood or stone, sometimes both, on which the figures of humans, animals and other goods were carved. These carvings provide valuable insights into several aspects of early Mizo society.

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[3] Cecile A. Mawlong, "Megalithic Monuments of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills : An Ethno-Archaeological study", (Unpublished Ph D thesis submitted to the Department of History, NEHU, 1996), p.29.

On the other hand, a folktale is a story or legend forming part of an oral tradition.[4] Mizos have a number of folktales which have been told mainly for the 'purpose of entertainment and much of their dissemination has been through the telling of tales to children.'[5]

The folklore of ancient monuments can thus be seen as an expression of the history, culture of the tribe. In case of Mizoram, some of the megaliths are connected with folktales and they are based on folktales and the stones are raised to commemorate the undying love between the main characters in some romantic tales. Due to this fact, megaliths serve as one of the important sources for the reconstruction of the past history of a particular tribe

Sometimes, folktales are reflected on megaliths of the Mizo. Some of the megaliths are raised to commemorate the undying love between the main characters in the tales, and some are engraving with figures connected with the tales. Interestingly, there are a number of stone monuments which are neither commemorative nor of memorial purposes, but are left or believed to have been raised by the main characters of the tales. Therefore, there are three types of megaliths having an association with folktales:

a)   Stone of Tools and Implements – Stones which are designed and used as implements and tools by the characters of the tale, are directly or indirectly connected with the activity of the main character in the tales. Thus, most of these stones are associated with the characters of the tale. Such stone monuments are Mualzavata Tahreuh, Chhura Chi rawt lung, Tualvungi Vawk thleng etc.

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[4] http://americanfolklore.net/folklore/2010/07/folklore_ definitions. html
[5] Lalrinmawii Tochhawng, 'Introducing and Classifying Mizo Folktales', a paper presented at the National Seminar on 'Traditions of Folk in Literature', IGNOU, August 30 & 31, 2010

One such monument is associated with the legendary folktale of Chhurbura. The Mizos have various numbers of funny and interesting tales connected with Chhurbura which offered perennial source of amusement to the Mizo. Though funny in their context, the stories of Chhurbura often convey very significant aspects of the earlier Mizo life and culture.

There are various numbers of stone monuments which serve neither commemorative nor memorial purposes, but are believed to have been raised by the main characters of the tales. Most of them are the implements and tools used by the main character in the folktales i.e. Mualzavata Tahreuh, and Chhura Chi rawt lung.

The Mizo legendary folktales concerning Chhurbura were permanently reflected on stone structures. For one instance, the engravings of a series of human figures standing side by side with hands interlocked depicted in most of the stone monuments were commonly called 'Chhura fa rep'. Such kinds of stone monuments are found in Lungpho, Ruallung, N.Vanlaiphai, Khawbung and other places.[6] If one sees such kinds of human figures with hands interlocked, it reminds us of Chhurbura's visit to Mawngping village where he performed a small incision with hot iron on the buttocks of children which later led to the death of all children except one in the village. Though the incidents might not be symbolized by such kinds of picture, the Mizo gives such kinds of pictures a name as 'Chhura fa rep'. Besides, there are many monumental stones found in different places of Mizoram which gives a name relating with Chhurbura. For instance, a large spherical stone located in Farkawn village in the eastern corner of Mizoram was given a name 'Chhura Chi rawt lung' (Chhura's grinding stone for salt). Subsequently,

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[6] Malsawmliana, "Megalithic Monuments of Mizoram : A Descriptive study", (Unpublished Ph D thesis submitted to the Department of History, NEHU, 2010), p.145.

another stone monument lying on the ground at Cherhlun village was also known as 'Chhura vawk'(Chhura's pig). Thus, the folktales of Chhurbura have an important significance on the megaliths of Mizoram.

Another folktale that falls under this category is the tale of Mualzavata. Mualzavata was a strong man, and he was known as Mualzavata as he could clear hundred ranges of forest in a single day. His wife too could mow ninety nine hill ranges in a day. Later, Mualzavata was said to have divorced his wife because she could not even mow one hundred hill ranges in a single day. The huge and big Pukzing cave located near Pukzing village in Mamit District were said to have been carved by Mualzavata with his hair pin. The Pukzing cave is measured to be118metres width, 80metres depth and 32 meters height.[7] Being capable of clearing hundred ranges of forest in a single day, he would need various numbers of hone to sharpen his dao. Accordingly, Mualzavata hone (Mualzavata Tahreuh) has been found at different places such as Rawpui, Cherhlun,[8] Pukzing, Tachhip, Sakawrtuichhun. It is said that the hone was a smoothened conical shape stone, which had later fallen at different places within Mizoram from the hole of Mualzavata's bag.Mualzavata Tahreuh at Sakawrtuichhun was measures 5.11feet length, 2feet width and 590kg in weight while one found at Cherhlun measured 3.10ft in diameter and 3feet length.

Tualvungi Vawk thleng'(Tualvungi's pig trough), a huge trough -shaped rock measuring about 8ft long 5ft wide located at Phulpui Village has its association with the folktales of Tualvungi and

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[7] Tribal Research Institute (henceforth TRI), *Monoliths and Landmarks of Mizoram* Vol-II, Firma KLM Ltd. Kolkata, 2001*,* p.63.

[8] District Art & Culture Office(henceforth DACO), *Monoliths and Landmarks of Southern Mizoram*, Lunglei, 2008, pp.44-45.

Zawlpala[9], which are classified as romantic tales.[10] Till today, the graves of Zawlpala and Tualvungi can be seen at Phulpui and Thenzawl village respectively.

b) Memorials or Commemoratives Stones– Sometimes, stones are raised and erected to commemorate the tales and thus folktales are made eternal through carvings on stone monuments. For instance, a stone monument named *Chawngchilhi Lung* is situated near Zote village in Champhai district and it bears the figure of a woman and a snake of about 52 centimeters long. The rock is of legendary fame connected with the life of Chawngchilhi. The stone measures 3metres in length and 3m in breadth and the figure of the woman measures 1.17metres in length. It is ascertained that the stone is erected to commemorate the unnatural love of Chawngchilhi for the snake.[11]

The story of Lalruanga and Keichala is one of the prominent wonder tales of the Mizo. Lalruanga was known an expert sorcerer to the Mizo. His tombstone was erected at Leng village in Serchhip district in which the picture of his bow and arrow, tiger man, and his own figure were engraved, and it still can be deciphered.[12]

Another type of megalith is a stone which is a natural stone which were given names after the tales. Such stones can be seen at different places of Mizoram such as 'Lalruanga Lung kah keh' (Riangtlei), 'Lalruanga Lungpui khalh chhuah' (Suangpuilawn).

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[9] For details about the story of Tualvungi and Zawlpala, please read Laltluangliana Khiangte, *Folktales of Mizoram*., L.T.L
Publications & Art & Culture Department, *Mizoram*, 1997, pp.175-177.
[10] Lalrinmawii Tochhawng, Chawngchilhi' in *http://mizowritinginenglish.com/2008/04/chawngchilhi.html*
[11] TRI, *op.cit.*, p.3.
[12] SEDAL, *Serchhip District chhunga Pipu Sulhnu leh hmun hmingthangte*, Serchhip, 2009, p.62.
[13] Laldena, *Hmar Folktales*, Publisher, Scholar Publishing House, 1995, p.197.

A Hmar folktale is titled 'Rengte'[13], and 'Uipa/Phingnu and Phingpa' were the two brothers, who were the gods of Rengte-a, and are ever ready whenever Rengte need help. Rengtea, the main character has a winged horse, and to commemorate the winged horse in the tale, there was a picture of a winged horse carved on a natural rock, lying on the ground at East Phaileng.

In many ways, megaliths are useful as sources for the study of folktales and history of the Mizo.

1.   Mizo folktales are often made eternal through carvings on stone monuments and through which folktales and oral stories can be transferred from generation to generation. Thus, as long as a megalith stands, folktales are seemingly permanent.

2.   It can also be said that folktales produce monumental stones. Megaliths having connection with folktales indicated that Mizo folktales have a vital significance in the life of the early Mizo.

3.   Erection of megaliths is considered to be a way of denoting prosperity and prestige in the society.

4.   The geographical area covered by some particular folktales can be located from megaliths. For instance, a Hmar folktale 'Phingnu and Phingpa/Rengte' though familiar to Hmar inhabited areas denoted that the stone was located in East Phaileng in Mizoram. Furthermore, Chhurbura's remains and stones connected with Chhura's tales are also confined mostly in Champhai in Mizoram. The remains connected with Zawlpala and Tualvungi such as Tualvungi vawk thleng, Zawlpal thlan, Tualvungi Thlan, Zawlpal ram were also confined to Tachhip, Phulpui and Thenzawl, all within Mizoram state.

Megaliths and folktales have a distinct relation to Mizo oral culture. Among the Mizo, carvings of pictures on stones were the only way of preserving past life, and to denote the glorious life of the past.

The Journey of the African Epic *Sundiata*

M. M. Nivargi

The contemporary study of African literature, adopting a broader perspective, and recognizing the legitimacy of exploring the oral traditional heritage, includes the examination of oral tradition along with the written literature (both in indigenous and European languages). *The Epic of Sundiata* , is one of the most significant instances of classic Traditional African literature surviving in the form of oral tradition in present day West Africa. With the help of technology, it has reached wider audiences through the medium of print, film, audio recordings etc. The thrust of the present discussion is towards specifying the propagation of this text from the oral tradition, that is , from the bard's narrative into the printed book and other forms, while demonstrating some of the features its excellence that give it recognition as an epic.

The Sundiata epic belongs to a group of linguistically and culturally related people known as the Mande/Manding. The Mande territory is located in the present day northeast Guinea and southern Mali. Mande people are also situated in the surrounding much larger portion of West Africa. All these people located in different areas regard the Mande territory as their homeland. The Sundiata epic represents their identity as a people and the lore unites them in a sense of common origin.

Though there are many versions of this epic, the common motifs can be identified for the purpose of the foregoing discussion. The tale recounts how the Mande king Nara Maghan Konate was visited by a divine hunter who predicted the birth of a mighty

successor son to the king from a woman who would be brought to him in near future. Shortly afterwards, two hunters from a neighbouring kingdom present him Sogolon, an ugly, hunchbacked woman whom they have captured in the forest in the form of a strong buffalo having magical powers. Remembering the earlier prophecy, the king marries Sogolon, the buffalo woman, though his present queen Sassouma has borne him a prince named Danakaran. Sogolon soon gives birth to a son, the hero of our epic, Sundiata Keita (Keita is the clan name, diata/jata means lion and sun/son denotes the name of the mother Sogolon; some scholars interpret 'son' as 'thief' in the Mande language, thereby suggesting a person who stole his brother's birthright to rule). This son is a disappointment to everyone because he is crippled and gluttonous. The king still believes in the prophecy and grants Sundiata his own bard because a bard is necessary to provide constant consultation to the growing up king. Sogolon is repeatedly insulted on account of this useless son, more so after the death of the king when Danakaran is coroneted and starts ruling. One day she cannot endure the insult as Sassouma refuses to give her the baobab leaves used for preparing the soup. On seeing her plight, Sundiata declares that he would be getting up to start walking that day. He asks his mother to bring an iron staff from the blacksmith and raises his body leaning on it. The staff is bent in the shape of a bow in this process. This event is celebrated in the epic with a special 'hymn to the bow'. After this, Sundita is no longer weak. But the jealous stepmother now resolves to put an end to his life as he has become a real threat to them. Some such attempts are thwarted by Sundiata but Sogolon eventually advises him to leave the kingdom for his own safety.

The next part of the epic covers Sundiata's life in exile. He journeys across the continent, visiting many kingdoms. This is sort of a training period for the hero. He learns the art of warfare,

governance, and lives as a honoured guest with a king. Meanwhile, the king of Sosso, the cruel and oppressive antagonist Soumaoro Kante captures Mali and other areas. Sundiata's half sister is forced to marry Soumaoro. Sundiata's bard is also made to serve in the court of Soumaoro. When Sundiata comes to know about these happenings, he decides to go back to his homeland for liberating his people. It is the time for the return of the hero.

The final part of the epic describes how Sundiata unites different nations/tribes to fight against Soumaoro. But only bravery would not suffice. Soumaoro has magical powers. Fortunately, Sundiata's bard and half sister escape from Soumaoro and reveal the secret of Soumaoro's magic. Armed with this knowledge, Sundiata is able to defeat Soumaoro. He establishes the empire of Mali, which is like a confederate of several nations and empowers different rulers to coexist peacefully.

History records that Mali became a very prosperous kingdom in the 13th century by means of trade, mainly by exporting gold to North Africa, Europe and the Middle East. This can be called as the Golden Age of Mali, the most glorious period of West African historical legacy. From that time onwards the Sundiata story has been passed down orally for over seven hundred years through bards (griots in French and *Jeli* or *Jali* in Mande language). The bards play an important role in the Mande society. John William Johnson, in his study *Son-Jara, The Mande Epic,* details the multifaceted role played by the bards. The bard's words are believed to have occult powers and he earns his living by receiving gifts after his oral performances. "He is the chronicler, and even more importantly analyzer and interpreter of history of the nation"(23). Apart from being an entertainer, he also preserves social customs and values, acts as mediator between the parties involved in some of the Mande rites of passage. On the whole, "The roles of the bard, then, are, varied and complicated, and his

or her integration into society is complete. Many years of training are required for the bard to perform these duties well"(24). These facts reveal that the songs performed by the Mande bards are those that have been carefully persevered and handed down with a certain sense of responsibility. Hence the recital by the bards can be taken up for serious scholarly investigation. This task was performed by the European anthropologists in the colonial period. The recital by bards and their counterparts in other African nations were recorded and studied. But The Epic of Sundiata was really able to make significant transition from the bard's mouth into the printed text when Djibril Tamsir Niane, African historian, playwright and short story writer transcribed it from the bard Djeli Mamoudo Kouyate(a modern day bard of the Keita clan, claiming descent from Sundiat's bard Balla Faseke) and translated it into French for publication in 1960. This was translated in English by G D Pickett in 1965who also referred to the original Mandekan text. As the epic became accessible to the world outside, scholarly interest in the work developed, resulting into many recordings of the Sundiata performances and their translations into European languages. Today, nearly twenty such translations are available in English. Apart from Naine's book *Sundiata An Epic of Old Mali* (reprinted sixteen times), which remains the most popular version to date, Camara Laye has written an account of the Sundiata story as he received it from the bard named Babu Konde. These two texts are presented more in the manner of a novel whereas other prominent versions are the texts edited by John William Johnson, Gordon Innes and David C Conrad. These are more exact translations of the bard's words. The authors in all these texts have mentioned the names of the bards form whom they have received the story.

Each of these authors venerate Sundiata epic as a masterpiece and show appreciation for the role of the bard by giving the respective bards the credit for the account rendered. D T Niane

closes his introduction to his text with the prayer "May this book open the eyes of more than one African and induce him to come and sit humbly beside the ancients and hear the words of the griots who teach wisdom and history"(vii). Gordon Innes calls the epic "…to be one of the world's greatest living epic oral tradition" and recognizes Sundiata as the "an important cultural symbol for Mande peoples"(xi). John William Johnson calls Sundiata as the "most celebrated oral narrative today"(02). Scholarly studies like Professor Ralph Austen's *In Search of Sundiata, The Mande Oral Epic as History, Literature and Performance* examining the three aspects of Sundiata tradition mentioned in the title compiles essays which are "… at once a testament to the universal appeal of African Cultural production and a set of inquiries into the very particular conditions under which such works come into existence and reach their audiences…."(01).

The Keita clan to which Sundita belongs, has the Kouyate family as its bards. As stated earlier, a member of this family recited the epic for D T Niane's book. Another member, Dani Kouyate chose the medium of cinema for his recital. In 1995,he produced and directed his first feature film *Keita! The Heritage of the Griot* (originally made in French as *Keita!L'heritage du Griot*), to portray the complexity of the contemporary situation and its relation with the Sundiata epic. As this happens to be an African film, it can claim to be representing that aspect of reality which is really important for the African people to communicate to the world. Winner of the best first film prize at the Pan African Film and Television Festival, and the Junior prize at the Cannes Film Festival, the film has Dani Kouyate's father Sotigul Kouyate, a distinguished bard, in the central role. The film tells the story of Mabo Keita, a schoolboy who is a descendant of Sundita Keita and an old bard Djeliba Kouyate who visits his home in the city of Burinto Faso, to teach him the meaning of his name. The Sundita story, being recited by the bard,

so captivates the boy that he can barely come out of it. He starts telling the story to his friends. Moreover, he neglects his studies, skips school and here a confrontation arises between the bard and the boy's mother, along with the boy's teacher. The bard has been able to recite only one third of the story until this time. He has to leave the boy's house, and the story remains unfinished but the magnificence of the epic is successfully conveyed to the audience. Moreover, the film also conveys three underlying messages: "With Western education a European Language such as French comes to eclipse African languages. The commitment to a written culture, and teaching based on written text, entails a loss of the power and beauty of oral communication. And African history is submerged by Western History."(Gugler 40).

The words of the bard have found other medium in the form of radio and television broadcasts. In ancient days the bards were patronized by the royalty, today they find assistance from their governments who value the cultural significance of their recitals. In the introduction to Gordon Innes's *Sunjata, Gambian Versions of the Mande Epic* we are informed that a tune from the Sundiata epic 'Death is Better than Disgrace' was adopted as Mali national anthem. The government of Gambia often begins its official musical programmes with the Sundiata song. On the popular music scene, the recorded versions of Sundiata are widely circulated. Popular African singers such as Mory Kante and Salif Keita have performed versions of Sundiata in non-traditional styles. Mory Kante belongs to the family of Guinea's best known bards and has been brought up in the Mande tradition of music. Mory Kante is a big name on today's world music scene. Salif Keita happens to be the direct descencent of Sundiata Keita. According to tradition he ought to have been killed or abandoned because he was born with albinism which is a taboo in his society. He has had to face exile from his society for other reason also. It is considered to be beneath a

member of royalty to adopt the profession of a bard and Salif chose music as his career. Credited as one of the founders of the Afro-pop genre, and praised with the epithet 'the Golden Voice of Africa' this descendent of Sundiata has not only broken the taboo, but has gained love and respect of his people. Along with the traditional versions of the bards, the new versions the modern day bards have also found favour with the audiences.

It is evident that the Sundiata epic has survived the travails of time and is still very much dear to the people to whom it belongs. With the distribution of the text in the print form, and other forms like the film, the recordings (both in traditional as well as innovative musical compositions), Sundiata has been able to elicit positive response in the academic circles and the popular market. The African American Cultural Association's annual festival for celebrating cultural arts in the Seattle area (US), established in 1980, is named as Festival Sundiata to honour the ruler who not only established a powerful kingdom but also protected the art form entrusted with the family of the bards. Sundiata thus becomes synonymous with what is classic in African art for the outside world. For the African people, the memory of the glorious period is a source of inspiration, and this is cherished through the Sundiata songs performed today in the homeland. On a deeper level, however, the captivating power and timeless appeal of this narrative has to be ascribed to the genre to which it belongs. Alongside the Ozidi saga of the Nigerian people, the Sundiata stands as one of the most important epics in the African oral traditional literature.

This brings us to the crucial question of determining the form and content of a text that qualify it for the status of an epic. In its form, Sundiata is a long narrative poem recounting the heroic deeds of its protagonist. As far as the question of the content is concerned, Thomas Cooksay observes succinctly that the Sundiata epic "...embodies the cultural assumptions of its world, becoming a

centre of cultural identity, …transmitting their cosmology, their social structure, their wisdom literature, their linguistic modes and verbal texture, and their sense of themselves in the world"(67-68).

Unlike other epic heroes Sundiata is born with a handicap. He overcomes it with his own inner strength and goes on to become a mighty leader of the people. He wins the wickedness of the witches sent to kill him, by his kindness and generosity. He acquires the skills for warfare and governance with his own effort while in exile. He is looked at as the heir to his patron king distant from his homeland but he decides to endanger his life for the sake of his own people. An ideal man, a perfect king, Sundiata's personality and his story undoubtedly have universal appeal.

By its vibrant presence in various forms- the traditional song, the Afro-pop song, the printed word, the feature film, the ongoing traditional and modern performances in Africa and other parts of the world, it has demonstrated that the Sundiata tradition is animate in the contemporary times. The words which were once recited only by the Mande bards have now moved from one mode of representation into diverse other means of expression. The bard still remains associated with whatever form the Sundiata text moves into, and due to its high artistic merit the text remains as appealing as it was centuries ago,

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Multifaceted 'Truth': Representation of India

Nakul Kundra
&
Navdeep Kaur Gill

India is a multicultural and multilingual land; its identity lies in its diversity. Consequently, the idea of India is too comprehensive and varied to be grasped wholly and homogeneously. Following the doctrine of 'art for life's sake', a number of writers and scholars have attempted to portray India with certain implicit as well as explicit motives at the backdrop. Thus, in literature, India is presented from innumerable points of view, perspectives, and attitudes, and today's literature abounds in the varying shades of India that appear segmented and sometimes poles apart. "For instance, Forster is lost in the exotic Indian 'muddle'; Tagore's approach is patriotic; and Niradh C. Chaudhuri shatters the glorification of the nation" (Kundra 32). Multifaceted 'truths' of India challenge a complete, indisputable, and apolitical representation and call for an intensive as well as extensive exploration. About India's pluralism, Shashi Tharoor rightly says,

> How can one approach this land of snow peaks and tropical jungles, with seventeen major languages and twenty-two thousand distinct dialects (including some spoken by more people than speak Danish or Norwegian), inhabited in the last decade of the twentieth century by nearly 940 million individuals of every ethnic extraction known to humanity? How does one come to terms with a country whose population is 51 percent illiterate, but which has educated the world's second largest pool of trained scientists and engineers, whose teeming cities overflow while four out of five Indians scratch a living from the soil? What is the clue to understanding a country rife with despair and disrepair, which nonetheless moved a Mughal emperor to declaim, "If on earth

there be paradise of bliss, it is this, it is this, it is this ...?" How does one gauge a culture that elevated nonviolence to an effective moral principle, but whose freedom was born in blood and whose independence still soaks in it? (7-8)

In this paper, Max Muller's *India: What can it Teach us?* (1883), Parmahansa Yogananda's 'My India' (1935?)[1], Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935), and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) have been chosen for a brief study of the representation of India, a country which is marked by pluralism. The paper attempts to reveal that possibility of multiple perspectives problematizes access to Truth. At the backdrop, the paper also intends to show how a writer's representation is dominated (or, at least, said to be dominated) by his socio-cultural forces or what Hippolyte A. Taine means by the phrase 'race, milieu, et moment'[2] in his book *History of English Literature*.

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[1] In a personal email to me, Nayaswami Surendra , Spiritual Co-Director, Ananda Pune, writes that "I believe the poem was written during or shortly after Yogananda's visit to India in 1935-36. He had been living and lecturing in the U.S. since 1920, and after this return to his homeland, where he spent time with many great saints including Anandamoyi Ma, Sri Yukeswar, Gandhi and others, he returned to his Mt. Washington residence in Los Angeles. It was here that he had founded Self-Realization Fellowship, which served as the base of his operations and teachings until his passing on the night mentioned above. SRF is still headquartered at that location, and its Indian affiliate organization is Yogoda Satsangha."

[2] "**race, milieu, and moment,** according to the French critic Hippolyte Taine, are the three principal motives or conditioning factors behind any work of art. Taine sought to establish a scientific approach to literature through the investigation of what created the individual who created the work of art.

By "race" he meant the inherited disposition or temperament that persists stubbornly over thousands of years. By "milieu" he meant the circumstances or environment that modify the inherited racial disposition. By "moment" Taine meant the momentum of past and present cultural traditions.

The literature of a culture, according to Taine, will show the most sensitive and unguarded displays of motive and the psychology of a people." *(Encyclopædia Britannica)*

I

In *India: What can it Teach us?,* the chapters are *compiled* from a *series of lectures delivered* to the candidates for the Indian Civil Service by Max Muller at the University of Cambridge. Keeping its focus on the "useless, tedious, if not absurd" (Muller 7) view of the legacy of India by "most people", the book attempts to re-build the vibrant image of India.

In his first lecture, Max Muller claims that Sanskrit literature is knowledgeable and inspirational; it is the elder sister of all the Indo-European languages. "Sanskrit literature, if studied only in a right spirit, is full of human interests, full of lessons which even Greek could never teach us…" (8). He refers to India as a "paradise on earth", richly blessed with wisdom, "wealth, power and beauty the nature can bestow" (9). He discusses about two very different Indias: "as it was a thousand, two thousand, it may be three thousand years ago"and the India of to-day. He further adds that India, at present, can be perceived as "the India of cities and towns and that of villages". He says that he understands India as it was long ago and regards "the India of village communities, the true India of the Indians"(9). He gives emphasis on the availability of ample opportunities for research in various fields in India. In his opinion, "India will supply you with a laboratory" for research in almost every field from Geology, Botany, Zoology, Archeology to Mythology(13).

In the second lecture, Muller speaks about the prejudice of the rulers regarding "the Hindus as an inferior race, totally different from ourselves in their moral character ,and, more particularly in what forms the very foundation of the English character, respect for truth…any real friendship, is supposed to be out of the question". This mindset creates a kind of stony hurdle between the Hindus and their rulers (28). To challenge the prejudice, Max Muller refers

to the views of Professor Wilson who has found amongst native artificers, mechanics, and labourers "cheerful and unwearied industry, good-humoured compliance with the will of their superiors, and a readiness to make whatever exertions were demanded from them; there was among them no drunkenness, no disorderly conduct, no insubordination" (32). Professor Wilson says that the skilled and unskilled workers have "confidence without fear, frankness" which are the"most universal features in the Indian character" (32). About the higher classes in Calcutta and elsewhere, Prof. Wilson shares his experience that he has "witnessed among them polished manners, clearness and comprehensiveness of understanding, liberty of feeling and independence" (33). Muller also makes mention of Warren Hastings, a pro-Indian scholar, who has positive view about the Hindus in general : "They are gentle and benevolent, more susceptible of gratitude for kindness shown them, and less prompted to vengeance for wrongs inflicted than any people on the face of the earth; faithful, affectionate, submissive to legal authority" (45-6).

In the third lecture, Muller glorifies "high mountain path of literature" in India. In a bibliographical survey, he says, it was observed that "the number of separate works in Sanskrit, of which MSS are still in existence, amounts to about 10,000. This is more I believe than the whole classical literature of Greece and Italy put together"(61). One must pay attention to the Vedic literature if he cares to have knowledge about "the Education of the Human Race", historical growth of language, growth of religion, evolution of "science of astronomy, meteorology, grammar and etymology" (64-5). The Aryan man whom we are aware of in different characters (Greek, Roman, German, Celt and Slav), Muller asserts, can be known to us in entirely new character only through ancient Sanskrit literature.

The fourth lecture, titled 'Was Vedic Culture Exclusive?', focuses on the traditional legacy of India- the Vedic culture.

According to Muller, the Vedas provide a glimpse of the past that no one would have set forth to calculate; they present reliable description of the history of human thought which was undisclosed to us before the discovery of the Vedas (82). He says that "we have poems composed in perfect language, in elaborate meter, telling us about Gods and men, about sacrifices and battles, about the varying aspects of nature and the changing conditions of society, about duty and pleasure, philosophy and morality" in the Rig Veda (85). He believes that the Vedic poets are primitive if the word primitive means, "the first of the Aryan race to leave behind literary relics of their existence on earth". He also refers to the claims of Sanskrit scholars that the religion of Vedas is distinct and pure, as it has been secured from all "strange infections" (86).

The rest of the three lectures are entirely devoted to the Vedas, Vedic Deities and Vedanta. Max Muller considers the understanding of the Vedas beneficial. In the ending, to prove his point about the admiration of the Vedas and particularly about the Upanishads, he quotes some of the famous philosophers including Schopenhauer, who claims that "In the whole world there is no study so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Upanishads. It has been the solace of my life—it will be the solace of my death" (67).

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"My India" is one of the 'official'[3] patriotic poems of Hindustan. It outlines Parmahansa Yogananda's chauvinism at its peak. The poet rejects all the pleasures and comforts of this world and the world beyond- "where the musk of happiness blows", "where darkness and fears never tread", "homes of perpetual smiles",

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[3] Last stanza of the poem written by Paramahansa Yogananda is displayed on the official website of government of India. The selective stanza constructs India as "Better than Heaven or Arcadia". http://knowindia.gov.in/myindia/myindia_frame.php?id=8

"heaven of a land of prosperity". He is ready to embrace "dread famine", "million thieves of diseases", and "scalding drops of searing sorrow" in Hindustan if he "must put on mortal grab once more". It is not "blind sentiment", but Yogananda's deep love for the land where he has learnt "first to love God and all things beautiful". Sages of this land have taught him "to find myself". After travelling far and wide, it is only here he could find himself.

Written under the influence of the Hindu ideology of dharma, the poem eulogizes Hindustan, "mother of religions, lotus, scenic beauty, and sages". Land is personified; it has a soul that couldn't be won over by "the guns of science and matter". India, the poet says, has now braced herself up to "conquer" the souls of "the bandits of hate, prejudice, and patriotic selfishness" with love. Her "soldier saints" are away on a mission. The reference is to the great men who journeyed around the world to spread the message of humanity and love.

In the last lines, the poet expands the boundaries of his chauvinism to universalism. He looks forward to sharing the "newfound boundless love" of India with "every brother nation that lives" and refers to the predicament of human existence on earth in the following words:

God made the earth;
Man made confining countries
And their fancy-frozen boundaries.

Assimilating culture of India has welcomed "God's true sons through all ages". This land is remarkable for its spirituality, Ganges, woods, and Himalayan caves. Here, the poet's body, which is originally "hallowed", has been sanctified- "touched that sod".

In a personal email to me, Radhika of Ananda Sangha Worldwide writes, "One interesting thing about this poem though is that Paramhansa Yogananda recited it immediately before his

passing. There was a big banquet at the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles, California to welcome the Indian Ambassador. Yogananda then gave a brief speech and recited this poem. As he said the last word of the poem, he fell to the floor and was gone."

***

Untouchable, written in 1935, is Mulk Raj Anand's first and the most closely knit and artistically gratifying work. Having been rejected by nearly nineteen publishers, it finally got published with a short preface by E.M. Foster.

Anand points out the economic and social causes that challenge humanity. He is the first person to portray his main character as an outcaste who struggles for his identity and individuality amid social suppression. The novelist attacks the high class Hindus who, according to E.M. Foster, "... have evolved a hideous nightmare unknown to the West; the belief that the products [human excreta] are ritually unclean as well as physically unpleasant, and that those who carry them away or otherwise help to dispose of them are outcastes from society. Really, it takes the human mind to evolve anything so devilish. No animal could have hit on it" (Ram 636). Bakha satirically says, "They think we are dirt because we clean their dirt" (Anand 89).

Untouchable is the story of a single day in the life of an eighteen year old low-born boy, named Bakha, before the independence of India. The protagonist has a strong will power and sense of self-respect; he wants to be like 'Tommies', but he has to clean the latrines and beg food to survive. Food is not given, but it is thrown to him and other untouchables, who are not permitted to draw water out of the well because it will 'pollute' the whole water. These low caste people are punished if they accidently touch anyone belonging to the high caste; they are not allowed to enter schools to get education. They pocket all this insult without making a cry of protest.

The snobbery and hypocrisy of the Hindus is painted through the character of Pandit Kali Nath who tries to molest Sohini, Bakha's sister. When the girl refuses to yield, Pandit accuses her of defiling him. The writer effectively presents a contrast between moral and physical concepts of defilement.

The author suggests three paths of liberation for the untouchables through the characters of Colonel Hutchinson, Gandhi, and Iqbal. The Colonel, chief of the local Salvation Army, wants Bakha to follow the path of Christianity, as it does not entertain any caste distinctions. However, Hutchinson fails to convince Bakha to embrace Christ and Christianity. Ironically, the Colonel who claims to uplift the life of Bakha fails to change his irreligious and harassing wife. Besides, it appears to the reader as if his main aim was to propagate Christianity in the name of eradicating untouchability. The second path which appears as a ray of hope for the untouchables is shown by Gandhi who encourages habits of cleanliness among the untouchables, so that no one shall be able to point finger at them. Delighted Bakha feels like shouting that he is an untouchable when Gandhi says, "they (Untouchables) should realize that they are cleaning Hindu society" (155). Another path is the path shown by Iqbal Nath, who says,"When the sweepers change their profession they will no longer remain untouchables" (173). He thinks that the introduction of flush system will root out the stigma of untouchability.

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The White Tiger, the debut novel of Aravind Adiga, which was first published in 2008 and won the 40th Man Booker Prize in the same year, is an amusingly gloomy account of the two parts of India- 'the Light' and 'the Darkness' (Adiga 251). The main story revolves around Balram Halwai, a driver, who slits his master's throat to assert his identity and individuality as an attempt to break

"the rooster coop". The novel throws light on the socio-moral problems of India which range from drinking water, electricity, sewage system, public transportation, and sense of hygiene to lack of discipline, adulteration, prostitution, dowry, corruption, dirty politics, punctuality, and courtesy. Ironically, the country which faces complicated internal problems does have "entrepreneurs" who have "set up all these outsourcing companies that virtually run America now" (4).

The Government of India, symbolized by the Black Fort, is now occupied by "a tribe of monkeys" (22). Adiga says that there was a zoo law earlier and "the day the British left-the cages had been let open: and the animals had attacked and ripped each other apart and jungle law replaced zoo law" (63-4). At present, Indians have only two categories of castes: "Men with Big Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies, and only two destinies: eat- or get eaten up" (64). Notably, the seeds of corruption are sown so deep nowadays that even the noble professions are unable to escape from it. Earlier it was confined only to the people with "big bellies", but now even a ward boy has to be bribed to get any work done.

India got political freedom in 1947, but it is still constrained by social evils and "36,000,004 gods" (8). In order to achieve individuality, "to live like a man"(30) and to free oneself from the rooster coop, every Indian's failing efforts leave him discontented and restless and make him isolated and greedier day by day. In this rat race for materialism, values such as humanity, honesty, and sincerity are lost. Trade has now silently accepted the master-slave relationship. Slaves are treated like dogs although "they (masters) expect their dogs to be treated more than humans" (78).

The education system is unable to produce industry-oriented workers because everyone is "half baked" here, and there is lack of "real schools" (35); this crisis has led to unemployment. Nothing

in India seems to be 'bright' now. Even a holy dip inside the Ganga is unable to purify man as it fills his "mouth full of faces, straw, soggy parts of human bodies, buffalo carrion, and seven different kinds of industrial acids"(15). People claim to be god-fearing, but they lack moral values. In this society, "the girls would not be safe on buses or trains anyway. The men of this city, frankly speaking, are animals" (298).

Adiga beautifully portrays the post-modern spirit of simulacra and simulation (Baudrillard). The local prostitute with golden dyed hair pretends to be 'imported' in order to charge more money (235). Ideology of Gandhi appears to have turned to dust, whereas Gandi's bronze statue is erected on chowks, with cameras fitted into the eyes, to keep a watch over the traffic (141). "Glorious parliamentary democracy" (10) is anti-democratic in spirit, according to the novelist.

II

All the works under study for this paper explore India through different perspectives. Parmahansa Yogananda and Max Muller arguably glorify India, whereas Anand and Adiga disputably criticize the social problems of India. The tone and style of the first two writers convey a note of acceptance and the latters' rejection.

Literature is not born in a vacuum; every writer's intellect is largely fed on the ethnic and sociological forces surrounding him, and every representation in literature carries the writer's own impression, outlook, and implicit/explicit motives. Resultantly, a representation becomes subjective, political, and disputed. This is clearly evident in Max Muller's *India: What can it Teach Us?* which is not a 'neutral' book just like the other works chosen for the study. Although Muller portrays a glorious picture of India in his book, yet he has been criticized on a number of grounds. In the beginning of his career, Muller openly said, "Vedas were worse

than savage" and "India must be conquered again by education… its religion is doomed" (Osborn 17). Muller's early views which are contradictory to his later views in this regard along with his controversial[4] dating of the Vedas clearly allude to so called political motives behind Muller's writings and question his sincerity as a scholar in general and his commitment as an Indologist in particular.

Professor Prodosh Aich, the author of the book "Lies with Long Legs", presents his facet of 'truth' about Max Muller in an interview with Satish Misra. Prof. Aich calls Muller a "swindler", who "did not get a job in Germany" and ultimately landed a position with the East India Company in England. It is assumed that Muller portrayed a shining picture of India in his lectures only to reap the maximum benefits out of the outgoing civil service officers. Obviously, the candidates who were being psychologically prepared to mix up with the colonised through Muller's lectures could definitely govern better and channelize and condition their subject for the realization of India of Macaulay's vision[5]. Along the same

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[4] Govindarajan Padman in "Rewriting the History of Ancient India" finds fault with Muller's work and **says, "**Muller arbitrarily and deliberately assigned the oldest Rig Veda to 1200 B.C. and when questioned by critics he disowned his chronology saying: "Whether the Vedic hymns were composed 1000 or 1500 or 2000 or 3000 years B.C., no power on earth will determine." In formulating his chronology, Muller must have been strongly influenced by his Christian belief that the creation of the world had taken place in 4004 B.C. He must have feared that the assignment of any date to the Vedic hymns prior to 4004 B.C. may shake the already fragile faith of Christians in Genesis and critics may brand the creation of world in six days, origin of man in the likeness of God and Noah's Ark as borrowed ideas from the more ancient Vedas. Muller relied wholly on philology, as no archaeological evidence was available then." (Padman) <http://www.salagram.net/GP-home.html >

[5] Macaulay opined in 1833:"We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect".

lines, Nanda Kishore in his book review of *India: What can it Teach us?* refers to Max Muller's "delusion" (that in fact may be a political move !): "…like all other European Historians, is to consider "India" as a country in its entirety with a singular cultural or historical identity. This was probably done to provide uniformity in thoughts to its readers and sponsors, mostly rich colonial European administrators" (Kishore).

Swami Prakashanand Saraswati in *The True History and the Religion of India: A Concise Encyclopedia of Authentic Hinduism* claims that Muller's services were hired by the British to misrepresent the Vedas in such a demeaning manner that the Hindus should lose faith in them (268). Muller was basically employed to spread Christianity in India. The writer gives evidences from Muller's letters written to his wife and other people. To the Dean of St. Paul's (Dr. Milman) Stauton House Bournemouth, on 26 February 1867, Max Muller wrote: "I have myself the strongest belief in the growth of Christianity in India. There is no country so ripe for Christianity as India, and yet the difficulties seem enormous". He wrote to the Duke of Argyll, Oxford, on 16 December 1868: "As to religion, that will take care of itself. The missionaries have done far more than they themselves seem to be aware of…The ancient religion of India is doomed, and if Christianity does not step in, whose fault will it be?" (268-70).

All such references leave one to re-think about Muller's apparent ambivalence which is now seen to be rooted in his dubious motives. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's criticism of Muller, perhaps, is resultantly bipolar when he simultaneously praises and criticizes Muller. Bankim says, "No man has laid us under a greater debt of gratitude for his services" "to the study of Vedic literature" and rejects Muller's criticism of a Vedic injunction, which is believed to be against widow marriage, as "the most flagrant instance of what can be done by an unscrupulous priesthood". He also criticizes

Max Muller for his neologism 'henotheism' which was used to convey neither monotheistic nor polytheistic characteristic of Hinduism. Bankim takes umbrage at Max Muller's ignorance of Hinduism and takes Henotheism as another term for Polytheism. (Haladar 129-30)

In "My India", the poem chosen for this study, Parmahansa Yogananda views India as a platform for his spiritual alleviation and self-realization. Being a follower of *The Bhagavad-Gita* wherein it is mentioned that soul is immortal and of great importance[6], the poet looks beyond this world of matter. He is ready to embrace all the difficulties, pains and pangs in India. This acceptance is an outcome of his surrender to the cosmic law and his reverence to the land of saints and sages that has opened up doors to his spiritual awakening. The poem is a timeless[7] and balanced piece of art as it talks about the dark and the bright aspects of timeless India. The poet's spiritual concern outweighs the dark side of India: famine, diseases, and sorrow. Consequently, the poet's ideology which is deeply rooted in altruism and spiritualism may appear blind sentimentalism to the materialists. The representation of India by Yogananda portrays 'the India' of his own vision, from the point of view of a spiritual saint. For him, India is not only a piece of land or a phenomenon of matter, but it is a divine land or 'soul' that has been blessed with the power of love and salvation.

"My India" was written in pre-independent India when colonialism and imperialism showed their dark side, and the poet, perhaps, in this poem is not simply a religious minded patriot but

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[6] "That which pervades the entire body you should know to be indestructible. No one is able to destroy that imperishable soul. 2.17" (Prabhupada *Bhagavad-Gita As it Is* 87)

[7] 'My India' doesn't situate India in any time-frame. It is timeless in its appeal; until there is spirituality and famine, diseases, and sorrow in India, it is valid.

also an escapist who ignores the world of matter riddled with various socio-economic problems. In the ending, even when he glorifies the idea of universalism, the poet, unlike Tagore[8], is conscious of the distinct identity of India, seized by the soft strain of nationalism, which over a period of time fades away in his conversation about 'world citizen'. He says, "'World' is a large term, but man must enlarge his allegiance, considering himself in the light of a world citizen... A person who truly feels: 'The world is my homeland; it is my America, my India, my Philippines, my England, my Africa,' will never lack scope for a useful and happy life. His natural local pride will know limitless expansion; he will be in touch with creative universal currents" (*Autobiography of a Yogi* 467). Nevertheless, the poet always felt special attachment for India; he left his body uttering the final word of "My India" in 1952.

Interestingly, the politics of representation is also observed 'outside' the poem. The last stanza of the poem (not the full poem!) is displayed on the official website of the Government of India. This selection of the stanza constructs India as "Better than Heaven or Arcadia" and attempts to hide "dread famine", "million thieves of diseases", and "scalding drops of searing sorrow" in Hindustan mentioned in the other stanzas of the poem from the world of the Internet. This politics of selective representation is an attempt to construct a taintless godly image of India before the techno-savvy world by the government. On the other hand, Adiga in *The White*

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[8] Tagore in one poem writes, "I have a house in every place but constantly search for my home./ Every land is my homeland/I will fight for that land, if necessary". These lines are translated and quoted by **Pratapaditya Pal in 'Introduction' to** *Something Old, Something New: Rabindranath Tagore 150th Anniversary Volume.* **According to P. Pal,** the lines are taken from the poem included in *Utsarga* (Dedication) from the popular compilation titled *Sanchayita*, Visva-Bharati Publishing Department, Calcutta, revised 16th edition, bs 1395 / 1988 ce, pp. 464–65 with Bengali title *Prabasi* (Outsider).

Tiger executes exactly the opposite. He ignores the bright side of India. Adiga's "The Light" is nothing else but "The Darkness" in disguise. Adiga is biased when he is totally blind to the positivity of India and chooses to be against it in the name of "self-examination" (Jeffries 2008). Resultantly, "It (India) seems to be a totally different country from the one which has been envisioned as a great power in Kalam's *Vision 2020*" (Kundra 95).

Max Muller in *India:What can it Teach Us?* gives us an appealing explanation for the diverse views on India. He justifies his glorification of India in a wider framework. He writes, "…we are chiefly speaking of two different Indias. I am thinking chiefly of India, such as it was a thousand, two thousand, it may be three thousand years ago; they think of India of to-day" (9). It appears that Max Muller suggests the reader to take into consideration what Raymond Williams calls 'historical analysis'. What Adiga has done by throwing light on the problems of Modern India is similar to 'epochal analysis'. He even fails in this 'epochal analysis' because his delineation of the problems is not holistic, but patchy.

Adiga admittedly tries to "highlight the brutal injustices of the society"; he has chosen a stand vis-à-vis stance. Is there anything new in it? Paul Malachiin "The Booker Prize, Aravind Adiga, and the 'White Tiger': Implications for Politics and Culture" exposes the hypocrisy of Adiga in the following words:

> One reason for the book's wide spread acclaim is that it "shines a light" on the under belly of India's development. The general theme in all these admiring stories and reviews is that this is a crucial, timely, and important observation. It is as if this poverty itself is a recent phenomenon – something that arose unnoticed while the nation focused on economic development.

Prof. Rana Nayar in "Class, Ideology and Politics of Globalization: Story of Adiga's Success" also refers to a number of writers such

as Anand, Munshi Prem Chand, Phaneshwar Nath Renu (the pioneer of Anchalik Upanayas in Hindi), Premchand, Gurdial Singh and, several others who have contributed to the fiction of the unprivileged before Adiga.

Both Adiga and Anand claim to be social crusaders. Nevertheless, Anand appears to be more concerned and justified, since he suggests three remedies for the social evil of untouchability[9]. On the other hand, Adiga's work seems to be 'propaganda' with no solutions to offer (Kundra 95). Paul Malachi observes,

> As Aravind's numerous interviews show, it is almost impossible to talk about his book without getting into politics. Indeed, Aravind seems to never shy away from this and takes these opportunities to explain his views on poverty, governance, socialism, terrorism, and colonialism to name a few topics. In all these interviews, Aravind displays astonishing (for his educational pedigree) ignorance about the deeper causes of poverty and suffering in India. While his rhetoric seems radical, his analysis often naively stops at blaming "corrupt politicians" and "lack of healthcare services" as the "root causes" of India's problems. He is eager to berate "socialist politicians and bureaucrats" and enthusiastic about foreign investments but appears completely innocent of any traces of understanding either of the political economy of globalization or of the brutality of the impact of neo-liberal reforms on India's poor.

Whatever Adiga says about India is clichéd, as the daily papers are full of such stuff. At one level, it feels that the novelist is burdened with his style of writing as a reporter, not as a creative writer with

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[9] Anand is not only sensitive to the problems faced by untouchables, but he has also offered some solutions to eradicate the problem-Christianity, the teachings of Mahatama Gandhi, and the flush system to clean the latrines.

a deep rooted conviction. Adiga's presentation is superficial and lacks originality.

Amitav Kumar in his article "Authenticity and the South Asian Political Novel" writes, "Halwai's voice sounds like a curious mix of an American teen and a middle-aged Indian essayist". It is true that the character of Balram in the novel carries a tone of artificiality. Balram is illiterate, but he has chosen to write in English because he believes that "there are some things which can be said only in English" (Adiga 3). The choice of language and its justification are not convincing at all. Adiga's character lacks Indianness. It, perhaps, carries the ghost of the author's experiences abroad, particularly while studying in Australia, Columbia University, New York, and Magdalen College, Oxford.

As far as the motive of Adiga's writing is concerned, the question of prize politics comes into play. It is a matter of further study whether Adiga wittingly 'sold' the underbelly of India to the west or not. "Usually, it is seen that the books and movies which denounce the East or exaggeratedly put light on its underbelly are excessively pampered by the occident" (Kundra 32).

To speak of *Untouchable*, the entire story set in pre-independent India revolves around the burning issue of untouchability. Anand has sketched the first outcaste protagonist of the Indian English Novel. The novel is written so pragmatically that E.M. Forster says: *"Untouchable* could only have been written by an Indian, and by an Indian who observed from the outside. No European, however sympathetic, could have created the character, because he would not have known enough about his troubles and no untouchable could have written the book because he would have been involved in indignation and self-pity" (Kumar 10). Anand, through the character of the Pandit, shows that the upper caste people who get defiled merely by an accidental touch of

untouchables do not hesitate to molest an outcaste girl.The high caste Hindus are portrayed as the people with double standards. On the contrary, it is interesting to note that Brahmins get high regard in a German poem 'Weisheit des Brahmanen' (Wisdom of the Brahman) by Ruckert[10]; the poem may be negated on the ground what E.M. Foster says, "no European…he would not have known enough…".

Being a writer with Marxist leanings[11]", Anand shows how economic 'base' underpins 'superstructure'. As seen in the case of Bakha and his father,material relations also affect human relationships. The writer is mainly concerned with the issue of the working class that has mostly been looked down upon.Bakha has been shown as a dexterous, honest, devoted, and dedicated worker who has his own set of ambitions that are crushed under the jackboots of social discrimination. He is exploited; he is subjected to humiliation and detachment by the high class Hindus. He is unable to challenge the giant system of discrimination and yearns to be born in the high class family. Anand portrays Bakha sympathetically in the backdrop of humanity. Dr. Atma Ram says, "Anand seeks to arouse consciousness and incorporate the philosophy of humanism in his writing" (xix). On the other hand, Adiga's novel lacks it.

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[10] A passing reference to the poem in some other context is given in Max Muller's *India: What can it Teach us?* Pg.7

[11] "While Anand admits that he has studied Marxism systematically, he never professes himself to be a Marxist. He may have been influenced by Marxian thinking and approaches to social reality. His rejection of, and disaffection with religion, creed and cult and his scant respect for superstitions and irrational beliefs and fears are certainly expressive of his Marxian sympathies. Nevertheless it may be unfair to label him as a Marxist. His philosophy of life and approach to art are still 'sui generisf. The societal analysis that undergirds his fictional portrayals may have been inspired or dictated by Marxism. His anti-capitalistic sensibility as expressed in novel after novel is a sure sign of his socialistic persuasion." (Leo Antony Tagore 2010) pg-3

Mulkraj Anand is known all over the world for his robust humanism, peasant sensibility, compassion and forthright outlook. He attacks evil of all sorts, and, like G.B.Shaw, seeks to convert people to his own viewpoint in his fiction of revolt through his anti-traditional stance. (Atma Ram xvi)

The main character, Bakha, in *Untouchable* is sketched as a honest and hardworking boy, in contrast to Adiga's Balram who deceives his master. Interestingly, both the protagonists want to abandon their present identity of lower caste/class. Bakha dresses like Tommies, and Balram tries to copy the style of Mr Ashok. They think if they change their clothes and life style, the attitude of the society would change towards them. Both the characters look forward to outward changes, contrary to the major Hindu spiritual thought which advocates the nourishment of inner life.

Untouchable is criticized as an anti Brahminical text. Dr. Amardeep Singh of Lehigh University doesn't like *Untouchable* for its 'type' description of Bakha. He also says, "The book, in the end, works better as a work of Gandhian agit-prop by proxy than it does as a novel". Moreover, the writer, "an Indian who observed from the outside" (Forster), gives his voice to the subaltern who can speak themselves. The subjectivity of the novelist who himself is not an untouchable makes the novel partial and inferior to the 'self-written' autobiographies of untouchables which appear to be authentic, first-hand, and of course more convincing, contrary to Foster's argument- "no untouchable could have written the book (*Untouchable*) because he would have involved in indignation and self-pity." 'The truth' or agony of untouchability in India cannot be apolitically expressed especially by a non-untouchable.

III

Literature is an integral part of life. Every writer knowingly or unknowingly gets influenced by various sociological forces which

condition him to develop his stand and opt for some specific 'justified' position in relation to it. In this process, the writer is likely to ignore or be blind to holistic approach in order to validate his own version of 'truth'. Consequently,"Although it is true that they (the writers) appear to hold a mirror to so called realities which are not usually acknowledged, yet the debatable question of (mis)representation in the form of exaggeration or litotes demands a deep study" (Kundra 32). Every representation is political in the sense that it is conditioned by the writer's own ideology and beliefs.

India is one, but it is represented from different angles- which negate one another-by the writers under study.Shashi Tharoor rightly says, "Any truism about India can be immediately contradicted by another truism about India" (8). Perhaps, it is because of endless covert or overt motives underlying the writings and multi-dimensional character of India. Every representation is a kind of implicit/explicit construction rooted in politics. Swami Yogananda paints India in spiritual colours; Max Muller's approach is dubious on account of its polarity within and without the text; Adiga appears to sell the underbelly of India to the west; and Mulk Raj Anand is inclined towards Marxism and Gandian ideology in bits. Kenyan nationalist anti-colonial writer and activist Ngugi wa thiong'o rightly emphasizes the political nature of all writings and focuses on the relationship between literature and society in preface to his book*Writers in Politics*:

> Every writer is a writer in politics. The only question is what or whose politics? (ii)

Can we ever have access to the truth of Truth, particularly when Derrida has doubted the reliability of languageitself?

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Tales Retold:Bengali Folk Tales in English

Nandini Saha

In my *Peasant Life in Bengal* I make the peasant boy Govinda spend some hours every evening in listening to stories told by an old woman, who was called Sambhu's mother, and who was the best story-teller in the village.[1]

These stories were handed down to me, and in selecting, arranging, and adapting, I've inevitably reworked them somewhat.[2]

The unique quality that marks the stories of *Thakurmar Jhuli* is the preservation of the oral style – a difficult feat that has been superbly achieved. One almost feels one is listening to, rather than reading, a story.[3]

Printed collections of folk tales in Bengali have a long and rich history. English collections and translations of the Bengali folktales are few. This paper will study some of the collections of Bengali folk tales available in English. These collections are Rev. Lal Behari Dey's *Folk Tales of Bengal* (1883), A.K. Ramanujan's *Folktales from India* (2009) and Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar's *Thakurmar Jhuli* translated as *Tales from Thakurmar Jhuli: Twelve Stories from Bengal* by Sukhendu Ray (2012). While Rev. Lal Behari Dey's work is a compilation of Bengali oral folk narratives collected and translated in to English by Dey in the late nineteenth century, the Bengali folk tales translated and included in Ramanujan's collection and the translated volume of Sukhendu Ray are translations from original Bengali texts. This paper is divided in to two sections. Part I deals with an overview of the three books

mentioned above. Part II intends to focus on some common stories from the treasure trove of Bengali oral folk lore that have been 'retold' in these collections. These tales have been narrated in all three of these collections but by different authors/translators and thus a different version in each case. This section of the paper will spotlight the 'orality' of these tales as well as critique the themes and underscore the politics of subversion that work through these folk narratives.

Regarding the origin of these tales Prof Bharati Ray in the Introduction to the translation of *Thakurmar Jhuli* points out that *rupkathas* belong to the genre of folk tales. 'A folk tale is a story which has been transmitted orally, coming down to us from the lips of the "folk", that is to say the common people of any land' (Ray, xx). Thus such tales, as Prof Ray terms them, are the "communal creation of pre-literary days" (ibid). Rather than an affinity with the Western "fairy tales" because there are no fairies in these tales, the Bengali folk tales "are more akin to the German *marchens* (folk tales); the 'adversaries' in the marchens are somewhat analogous to the *rakshas-khokkas* (demons) in *rupkathas*. … These tales are *rupkathas* or imaginative tales, possibly derived from the words, '*aparup katha*' (wonderful tales)." (ibid)

> *Uttar pub, puber uttar mayapahar ache*
> *Nitya phole sonar phal satyi hirar gachhe*
> (To the east of the north and the north of the east,
> there lies a magic tree of real diamond
> on which grow fruits of gold everyday) (Ray ix)

These 'imaginative tales' or folk tales are a part and parcel of social and community life in Bengal. All Bengali children would have heard some version of these stories from some older member of the family or neighbourhood. While reading the various collections of these tales in Bengali was popular even during our years of growing up,

most of these tales were bedtime tales heard from an older aunt, uncle or grandmother.

No one knows when they originated, what land the stories are describing, or where their protagonists, the kings, queens, and princes, resided, fought, loved, or suffered. It is a sort of 'nowhere land' that exists only in the storyteller's imagination and is passed on to the listening children. The stories, however, have an inherent vivacity and timelessness, which allow them to survive for so long and traverse so far and wide. (Ray xx)

Rev. Lal Behari Dey (1824-1894) mentions in the Preface to his collection how Captain R.C. Temple, of the Bengal Staff Corps, suggested that Dey should attempt to collect "those unwritten stories which old women in India recite to little children in the evenings." (Dey 5) Born to Hindu parents in a small village in Burdwan, Dey converted to Christianity in 1843, and became a teacher in the same institution where he studied, from the very next year. He spent the rest of his life as a teacher and preacher spreading the word and ideals of his adopted faith. Thus Dey, on a colonial mission to collect such indigenous stories, makes no mistake in reminding the reader (western educated Bengali elite or the white colonial master) in the Preface, of his familiarity with the Grimm Brothers, the Norse Tales, the Icelandic or the Highland stories. In his elaborate analysis of the "larger colonial game – a discourse of extraction and control" 4 that Rangeet Sengupta traces in his essay and enquiry in to the absence of colonial characters in Dey's collection, Sengupta does a detailed study of these tales as a colonial exercise. Nonetheless by referring to not only Dey but other collections of English translations of texts of Bengali folk tales, this paper makes a comparative study between the translated volumes of the Bengali folk tales.

"Sambhu's mother" whom Dey mentions in the first of the epigraphs above, is almost a metaphorical name for all those

'storytelling grandmothers and aunts' who would be found in most Indian households. Dey nonetheless refutes this and asserts that Sambhu's mother for him "was no fictitious person; she actually lived in the flesh and bore that name" (Dey 5). In the Preface Dey also mentions how he had gathered his stories from various sources. Apparently he heard ten from a Bengali Christian woman who had heard the stories from her grandmother while in her "heathen" home, two from an old Brahman, three from an old barber, two from an old servant of Dey's and the rest from another old Brahman. In his mission to 'collect' and translate these stories, Dey has managed a fair bit of transcreation. Several of the stories in this collection are jumbled versions of stories as they appear in the Bengali edition of the tales, or if I may add, the version of such stories as even we have heard in our childhood. While Dey comments in the Preface on how he "rejected a great many" stories, as they seemed to "contain spurious additions to the original stories" (Dey 6), it is ironical that his own stories in the collection have such several "spurious additions". In defending his collating and translating of oral narratives, Dey shows confidence that the stories in *Folk Tales of Bengal* are "a genuine sample of the old old stories told by old Bengali women from age to age through a hundred generations." (ibid) The question would be whether it is at all possible or even necessary to justify the "old old stories" as a "genuine sample" when the stories being dealt with are oral narratives that have been orally transferred through the ages. Such justifications only reaffirm Dey's position as a colonial subject – desperately seeking to authenticate his work by firstly linking his work to the European heritage of folk and fairy tales, and then constantly spotlighting the 'native' connection.

A popular poem that every Bengali oral folk tale always ends with and pronounced in a singsong manner is something all Bengali children have often heard. This is a kind of a short ending for every

oral story that is narrated to children. Dey translates this poem in his Preface and includes an abbreviated version of this short poem at the end of each story in the collection to emphasize the indigenous character of the story. This end-poem is worded in a manner to reinstate the endless quality characteristic of an oral tale.

> "*Thus my story endeth,*
> *The Natiya-thorn withreth:*
> *"Why, O Natiya-thorn, dost thou wither?"*
> *"Why does thy cow on me browse*?"
> *"Why, O cow, dost thou browse?"*
> *"Why does thy neat-herd not tend me?"*
> *"Why, O neat-herd, dost thou not tend the cow?"*
> *"Why does thy daughter-in-law not give me rice?"*
> *"Why, O daughter-in-law, dost thou not give rice?"*
> *"Why does my child cry?"*
> *"Why, O child, dost thou cry?"*
> *"Why does the ant bite me?"*
> *"Why, O ant, dost thou bite?"*
> *Koot! koot! koot!*

And thus the poem continues from one question to another in an endless manner till the listener falls asleep! The twenty-two stories in the collection are narratives that are a repository of the complex cultural exchanges that took place in nineteenth century Bengal.

The second of the epigraphs above is from A.K. Ramanaujan's (1929 - 1993) collection titled *Folktales from India* (2009). Ramanujan is an Indian English poet, scholar and an early exponent of Indological Studies who is famous in the West for his pioneering work in South Asian Studes. This collection of Ramanujan's is a volume of translated oral tales from twenty-two different Indian languages. Interestingly while Dey's collection has twenty-two tales, Ramanujan collects the tales in his volume from twenty-two Indian

languages. In the Preface to the volume Ramanujan argues why such a collection of folk narratives should be titled Folktales "from" India and not "of" India, which is the title of Dey's collection – "for no selection can truly 'represent' the multiple and changing lives of Indian tales" (Ramanujan xi). Ramanujan's is a thoroughly researched work of an academic. He does a comparative analysis of the tales. The tales in the collection are represented as a whole panorama of oral narratives from the Indian subcontinent. In the end 'Notes' to the book Ramanujan gives an introduction to every story, the genre that it belongs to and also links it to all other similar narratives from other regional Indian languages. Ramanujan asserts how 'reading' a story inevitably becomes an act of 'retelling' of an oral story. "Every tale here is only one telling, held down in writing for the nonce till you or someone else reads it, brings it to life, and changes it by retelling it." (ibid) Retelling is an inherent characteristic of oral storytelling. About the tales in his collection Ramanujan comments:

These tales were all translated by different hands at different times and places, and I have retold them – making slight changes in some, and more than slight changes in others where the language was fulsome, cumbersome, or simply outdated. I have kept close to the narrative line, omitted no detail or motif, and tried to keep the design of the plot intact. (ibid)

In the 'Introduction' Ramanujan emphasizes the organic nature of folktales. He distinguishes between verbal folklore and the importance of non-verbal and performing arts in the tradition of Indian folklore. He presents the folklore tradition as an Indian cultural practice and even does a comparative analysis of the folktales of different Indian languages. Ramanujan always stresses on the regional folktales as being a part of the Indian folklore tradition and as representing a panoramic view of India. He groups the tales thematically as women-centered tales, male-centered tales,

tales about family relations, tales about "*Fate, Gods, Demons, and Such*", humorous tales, animal tales and "*Stories About Stories*". Ramanujan's well researched 'Introduction' and 'Notes' to this text is a useful source of information for researchers and scholars of folklore. He does a detailed study of the oral tradition of which the folk tales are just a part of the pan-Indian system of cultural folk practices.

Among several of the collections of folk tales in Bengali by Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar (1877-1956), *Thakurmar Jhuli* (Grandmother's Bag of Tales) was published in 1907 with a Preface written by Rabindranath Tagore. In this Preface to *Thakurmar Jhuli* Rabindranath Tagore comments on how the tradition of telling stories, to children for the purpose of putting them to sleep, have vanished from our culture.

The children are increasingly being pushed into the world of books, no longer able to enjoy the deeply instructive tales emanating from the hearts and tongues of loving mothers and grandmothers. The simple fairy tales that have nurtured the children of Bengal through the ages, helping them weather many storms within and outside the nation, have been the product of an intense maternal love that touches princes and paupers alike, a love that can bring even the moon into their boudoirs, gently nudging them into blissful sleep. (Ray xii)

Tagore emphasizes the loss of cultural forms of performance which are inherent "elements of Bengal's ancient culture" – "open air *jatra* performances, songs and dances, and professional narrators recounting mythological stories" (Ray xi). He links this lack to the loss of the innocence of childhood and a resultant "hard-hearted and dispassionate" elderly generation "widening their distance from the younger generation" (ibid). Tagore significantly points out the "musical aura" (Ray xii) that he finds Mitra Majumdar

to have "amazingly succeeded in retaining" (Ray xiii) in these tales. Sukhendu Ray's translation of twelve of these tales from the seventeen in the original version of *Thakurmar Jhuli,* manages to retain, to borrow Tagore's words, the "lyrical ambience of the age-old tales" (ibid). By his own confession in the 'Translator's Note' Ray stresses the "oral style" of the tales in the collection. He mentions about *Thakurmar Jhuli* how one "feels that one is listening to, rather than reading, a story" (Ray xv). In contrast to Lal Behari Dey's colonial project to prove that the "half-naked peasant on the banks of the Ganges is a cousin, albeit *of the hundredth remove*, to the fair-skinned and well-dressed Englishman on the banks of the Thames" (Dey 5; italics mine), Ray's translations are focused on keeping the oral and musical quality along with the original story of the Bengali text intact. Ray's text is also replete with sketches depicting the fantastical worlds narrated in the stories. This is also a feature of Mitra Majumdar's Bengali text. The drawings in Ray's volume are more overpowering than the original Bengali text, where it acts as a supplement rather than overshadowing the printed word, which is the effect in Ray's text. On some pages the text is printed on the background of a sketch in Ray.

Storytelling and listening to tales narrated by an older member of the family at bedtime is so intrinsic to the culture of Bengal and India that Prof Bharati Ray in the Introduction to this volume comments:

Thousands of children in Bengal, be they from wealthy homes or peasant shanties, have, since time immemorial, gone to sleep listening to their *thakurma*'s [grandmother's] tales. Since in many Indian homes, elderly women live with their sons and extended families, it is customary for them to tell bedtime stories to their grandchildren, whose mothers are usually too busy attending to household chores to be able to play the role of storyteller. (Ray ix)

One the one hand the 'orality' and 'rhythmic' quality of the orally narrated stories of grandmothers and aunts to children, are constantly being emphasized by all starting from Tagore to Mitra Majumdar to the translator Sukhendu Ray, on the other hand, Ray desists from making any 'corrections' to the source text. In all the twelve stories translated by Ray, the translator does not take liberties but rather stays loyal to the source text. It is quite a feat that the translator has achieved in translating not only the prose but also the short poems and rhymes in the texts of the stories. In the Introduction Prof Bharati Ray delineates the five markers of a Bengali *rupkatha* or a folk narrative. The unknown source, the narrator usually being some elderly member of the household – didima (mother's mother), thakurma (father's mother), pishima (father's sister), or occasionally the mother, mostly with the intention to put children to sleep, in a language "simple and free of all complexities, … poetic in spirit, and full of rhymes and songs" (Ray xxi). She also points out how the real coexist with the fictive in the worlds of these tales – "reality and dream walk hand in hand. We find magic mountains, imaginary birds – Bengama-Bengami/ Shook-Shari – as also real-life animals like owls, monkeys and snakes. We encounter demons and their tricks, just as we experience parental affection and sibling love." (ibid) In contrast to the *Panchatantra* and *Aesop's Fables*, as Prof Ray affirms, these tales in the Bengali folk tradition usually deal with how the evil is vanquished and the good and righteous rewarded. There is no "didactic moral lesson" but rather narrated more for "entertainment and creation of imagination" (ibid).

This section of the paper deals with the ways in which the Bengali folk tales are 'retold' in the collections being dealt with in this paper. Versions of the same story appear in either two of these collections. These stories are at times even titled differently. The first story in Dey's *Folk Tales of Bengal* is titled "Life's Secret". This is the story of the Prince named Dalim Kumar (*Dalim* means

pomegranate and *Kumar* means Prince). In the Bengali *Thakurmar Jhuli* and in its translation by Sukhendu Ray, the story is titled "Dalim Kumar". But Dey's story is a different version. These tales emphasize the oral tradition that they belong to by narrating different versions of the same story as is wont to happen in an oral tradition of storytelling. To quote Prof Bharati Ray again: "Transmitted orally through generations, a tale changes in terms of details or even events, and certainly in style, but never in form, as the quality of the storytelling remains constant." (Ray xx)

Dey's version, like most of the stories in his collection, sticks to the various stereotypical characters and tropes – the King has two Queens - the bad and the good Queens, the barren Queen Suo (literally meaning 'good') is offered a fruit by a Fakir that results in the birth of a Prince and heir to the throne, the evil or Duo(literally meaning 'bad' or 'evil') Queen usually has either three or seven sons, the Duo Queen's evil machinations lead to the misfortunes of Queen Suo and her son the noble Prince, and the eventual revelation of the evil Queen's misdeeds and her punishment or banishment or death as in this story. In a footnote Dey explains: "Kings, in Bengali folk-tales, have invariably two queens – the elder is called [D]uo, that is not loved; and the younger is called [S]uo, that is, loved." (Dey 7) There is also an attempt in Dey to logically explain improbable events and characters in his story. "The son will be exceedingly handsome, and his complexion will be of the colour of the pomegranate flower; and you shall call him Dalim Kumar." (ibid) And here Dey gives the footnote explaining the meaning of Dalim. This is not the case with the stories in *Thakurmar Jhuli*. As quoted earlier, the stories in *Thakurmar Jhuli* is geared more towards entertainment and there is no such explanation given for weird naming of characters or any other improbable events. The fun quotient seems more important in the tales in Mitra Majumdar's collection. There cannot be any logical explanation

for the winged horses, the suddenly gone blind Prince who even in his blindness can manage to kill the thirty-two hooded python with his sword, or the golden pomegranate tree which "blossomed out in a thousand blooms" (Ray 13) once Dalim Kumar is restored to his rightful place in the kingdom. A longer story with the Prince Dalim Kumar and his brothers travelling across countries on their winged horses, their encounters with various adventures and the eventual bravery and intelligence of the noble prince Dalim Kumar that helps him win back his brothers' lives, is the version in *Thakurmar Jhuli*. While the focus in Mitra Majumdar's collection is definitely on the entertainment factor for children, in Dey's collection it is to explain the Indian culture to a largely foreign reader. Apart from the end poem which comes at the end of every story in Dey's collection there is no poem within the story itself. A version of the formulaic end poem is given at the end of the collection in the Bengali *Thakurmar Jhuli*, which Ray does not include in his translated volume. But the end poems in both Dey's and Mitra Majumdar's Bengali text is a different version, reinforcing the oral character of these tales and rhymes. In Ray's *Thakurmar Jhuli* there are several of such rhymes that Ray translates from the source text. When the evil Queen enquires about where the life of the Prince is hidden she asks in rhyme:

> Oh my asp, my wispy asp
> Listen to me and do my bid,
> Tell me please, tell me now
> Where is Dalim Kumar's life kept hid? (Ray 5)

The stories in *Thakurmar Jhuli* intend to entertain through tales of adventure and fantasy, in a language that is rhythmic and thus narrate fiction through poems. And as Prof Bharati Ray states, these tales apart from entertainment aids the "creation of imagination" (Ray xxi). Many a Bengali adult would vouch for the rides on the "pakshiraj" or winged horses or the white flying steed or even the adventures

that one would undertake in their childhood games and dreams, led on by the wondrous stories heard at bedtime and also create such tales in one's personal diaries all through one's growing years.

In another story that appears in both these collections titled "Sheet and Bashanta" ('Sheet' spelt as 'Swet' in Dey) these are different versions again. In fact Dey's story is a jumble between the "Sheet Bashanta" story and the "Dalim Kumar" story from *Thakurmar Jhuli*. The way in which the blind Prince Dalim Kumar had beheaded the thirty-two hooded python, here in Dey's story Swet does the same, though he is not blind. Ray also manages to retain the 'oral' flavor of the tales by narrating them as if one is 'listening' to rather than 'reading' the tales. For this, Ray maintains a style that is truncated rather than free flowing, as is usual with an oral style of storytelling, where the whole story might not be narrated all at once. The narrative is also in a language that is not exactly literary or writerly. Again in Ray's version not only are there poems in the text of the story, but the language also is rhythmic. An example of such rhythmic language and humour woven in the fabric of the story would be:

After some years, the elder Queen gave birth to three sons. O dear, o dear, what puny creatures they were! As thin as bamboo reeds, and as frail as bamboo leaves! The merest puff of wind blew them off their feet. The Queen howled and growled at this misfortune, constantly creating awful scenes. (Ray 42)

While Dey's collection was one of the early endeavours to record Bengali folk narratives in English and thus of historical importance, it is informative in telling stories about the Indian culture. The stories in Ray's collection are a source of sheer pleasure. These are tales of fantasy and adventure, of magic and witchcraft where the good is rewarded and the evil punished but are not didactic in tone. Ray's tales narrate through a language suffused with poetic rhymes and humour

the stories of adventure and thrill, the world of beasts and demons, of Gods and Goddesses taking a stroll in the forests, as well of the land of the white elephant and talking golden parrots.

Ramanujan's *Folk Tales from India* includes fifteen stories from the Bengali folk tale tradition. Among these one story is common with the other collections. The story titled "Sukhu and Dukhu" appears both in Ramanujan's collection and in Ray's translation of *Thakurmar Jhuli*. Both the versions of the story are more or less the same. Except for minor differences in detail both versions of the story narrate the same tale. It is the story of two sisters from two different mothers – Dukhu (from the Bengali word 'dukh' meaning sorrow) the one who is kind, good and soft hearted but the one who is ill-treated by her step mother and step sister. Sukhu (from the Bengali word 'sukh' meaning pleasure) is the lazy and arrogant one who finally gets punished for her evil ways. Dukhu gets rewarded and she and her mother live happily ever after. In the comparative analysis between the texts it is evident that while Dey propagates the stereotypes of characters and situations in his rendering of the folk tales in English, Ramanujan's is a straightforward translation and Ray's translations render the poetry and humour of the folk tales wonderfully. Ramanujan includes two Gopal Bhar stories. In the end notes Ramanujan mentions "Of the famous court jesters of Indian folklore, Gopal Bhar of Bengal, Tenali Rama (Krishna) of Vijayanagara in South India, and Birbal at Akbar's Delhi court are noteworthy." (Ramanujan 388) Gopal Bhar stories are not included in any of the other two collections dealt with in this paper. In Bengal Gopal Bhar is also a famous comic inspired by the character from Bengali folk tales.

The magical and fantastical worlds of these folk tales are juxtaposed with the real world of Kings and beggars, of the harsh realities of deceit and poverty. The folk tales depict the various

classes of stratified society of the times. There is a distinct division between the royalty, the courtiers, the warriors and the common man. While there are such improbable incidents where just the planting of a magic pill in someone's hair can turn her into a speaking golden parrot, and there are horses that can fly, there are also instances of abject poverty where the poor Brahman has to beg for food or the banished Queen and her virtuous daughter spin cloth to make ends meet. It is a social system where the demarcation between the haves and the have-nots are markedly distinct. The human world coexists with the animal world and nature. In several of these stories the Gods and Goddesses speak to humans and even ask for favours from them. "The Brahman who Swallowed a God" (Ramanujan 23- 27) is a hilarious story about a Brahman who devours "Bidhata, the god who writes his or her future on everyone's forehead at birth" (Ramanujan 23) and how the Gods and Goddesses all visit the Brahman imploring him to release Bidhata, but to no avail. It is only when Lord Shiva approaches the Brahman, does he agree to release Bidhata – "the Brahman relaxed his throat and opened his mouth, and Bidhata jumped out" (Ramanujan 27). This the Brahman concedes only on the promise that Shiva will take him and his wife with him "to his special heaven" (ibid). Thus akin to what Raja Rao asserted in the famous Foreword to his 1938 novel *Kanthapura*, "the past mingles with the present, and the gods mingle with men to make the repertory of your grandmother always bright" 5, these folk tales also appear to uphold such 'mingling'.

The folk tales, due to the innocuous subject matter, seems to be the right place to pit the politics of subversion under the subterfuge of fantastic tales. Thus several of these folk tales revolve around Brahmans and the royalty – Kings, Queens and Princes. In the stratified society of India Brahmans by caste are at the top of the caste hierarchical structure. And the royalty are at the top of

the structure by way of class. Thus these stories have characters of the 'perpetually poor and suffering Brahman', the 'Brahmadaitya' (meaning the "ghost of a Brahman who dies unmarried" [68] as explained by Dey), the stupid Brahman ghost who gets cheated of his wealth by a clever barber, or the Brahman who is fat and lazy and not as 'pure' and 'righteous' as he is supposed to be. Then there are Queens who are cruel, scheming and dishonest. The Kings are either incapable of judiciousness, fortitude and impartial governance, or are constantly falling prey to their weak emotions for the evil Queen. Such subversive portrayals of characters that are held in highest esteem in society are intended to disrupt the balance of the society's established class and caste hierarchies.

In conclusion, inspite of all 'readings' of the folk tales that might be possible, it is undeniable that the primary intent of the folk tales is entertainment meant essentially for children. As Tagore mentioned in his Preface to Mitra Majumdar's classic *Thakurmar Jhuli* in 1907, it is important to revive indigenous cultural forms – the "many streams imbued with the flavors of life" (Ray xi). Without any intention to spoil or waste away the original endeavor of the storyteller to stimulate the imagination and creativity of the listener through these folk tales, this paper merely attempts to study and explore the kaleidoscopic worlds of the Bengali folk tales.

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3. Sukhendu Ray trans., *Tales from Thakurmar Jhuli: Twelve Stories from Bengal* (New Delhi: OUP, 2012; first published by OUP in 1997 as *The Winged Horse: Fairy Tales from Bengal*), p. xv. All further references as Ray.

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5. Raja Rao, *Kanthapura* (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 2005), p. 5.

Mizo Proverb as Code of Conduct

R. Thangvunga

The Mizo term for proverb is *ṭawng upa.* [lit. old or sacred speech] It has been customarily rendered *Idioms & Phrases* after the pattern of English language studies. The variety of orally transmitted *ṭawng upa* is, in fact, classifiable into proverb and idiom but rarely phrase. We understand 'phrase' as a conventional mode of expressing a particular meaning in a condensed form, such as, 'trigger happy', born with a silver spoon', etc. Mizo language has its store of phrases like 'anni akar', 'thophang', 'nu buan chak lo', 'pa dar ben', 'pem buhbel', etc.

Though semi-nomadic in culture, Mizo tribe lived well-settled communal life in zealously guarded economic, social and religious codes of conduct with no recognition of privilege or class. Every individual - man and woman, boy and girl, young and old, rich and poor, chief and commoner, lived contentedly under the umbrella of those communal or tribal codes of conduct, to detract from which invariably resulted in being ostracized by the community. Such drastic measures, which modern rulers cannot afford without danger of serious political and moral imputations from one-sided piety of NGOs and human rights watch, had been the only effective means of maintaining political, religious and social harmony (or integration in our present day lingo). What the rulers could not affect by force of power the inner forces of superstition and faith in the unseen affected by means of the age-proven saws.

Bereft of any form of keeping records except by memory passed on faithfully through generations, we may appreciate with

what degree of jealousy and stricture the codes must have been preserved to the smallest expression. The authenticity of Mizo Proverbs, which have no reference to previous locations as in writing, is indubitable. It is significant how the very people who have such proverb like, 'Unau thawnthu sawi pawh a dang' (Even siblings tell tales with variation), could keep their proverbs intact unelaborated so well that within a hundred years some of the proverbs need to be explained elaborately!

It is to be admitted, however, that there are Mizo Proverbs having parallel in other languages because human society anywhere in the world share similar attitudes and response to their world and their need for survival and wellbeing depend largely on social cohesion and mutual inter-dependence.

Some Mizo Proverbs

1) A dog returns to its vomit.
2) A good *kawi* fruit comes from a good creeper; a bad one comes from a bad one.
3) A master head and a small bird's head are too big for them.
4) A rock cannot rest firm without a pebble to support it.
5) A woman is respected at the smithy, a man at the spring hole.
6) Adultery undeclared calls the tiger's judgement.
7) Beware of backbiting on the way, for trees and rocks have ears!
8) Build your field-hut on the ridge of the hill; it is safe from beasts of prey.
9) Character may be mended but not looks.
10) Cooing lamentably over a baby, though playfully, is undesirable, and it may follow suit.
11) Curses fall upon he who curses.

12) Deformity and ugliness are irreparable, but character may be reformed.

13) Do not desecrate sacrificial remains[1].

14) Do not despise poor orphans; through thick and thin they may become anything.

15) Do not despise the deformed, for its never too late deformity and leprosy.

16) Do not speak rashly to strangers: one may even be your relative.

17) Do not steal from trap. Porcupine stolen from a trap often call a tiger.

18) During spouse's pregnancy, avoid killing snake and larger domestic animals; carrying dead body; carving plates and stool. To do so brings birthmarks on the child.

19) Even a hungry sow comes upon excreta after many rounds.

20) Even a sow does not leave the bowl in a hurry.

21) For a hungry man every bite is sweet.

22) Give and live, hoard and die.

23) He who causes terror in the community is better dead before he begets children.

24) He who desecrates public memorials will not last ten moons.

25) He who torments man and beast does not last ten moons; and have short lived children.

26) It is considered taboo to speak to parents blankly[2]. Do not even speak their names carelessly.

27) It is unadvised to leave a baby unattended for a long time.

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[1] Bawlhlo

[2] i.e., without 'ka pa' or ' ka nu'.

28) Let him wear a skirt that dares not come to the rescue of people in danger.

29) Never refuse errands for your seniors.

30) No fly lights but on sores.

31) None feasts on theft.

32) None prosper who disregard parents.

33) None worries about finding a husband and one load of firewood.

34) Not to observe public holiday may result in less days.

35) Paddy spills in grinding and water spills in washing.

36) Piety earns prosperity through generations.

37) Rumours are bound to fester like sores pecked by chicks.

38) Speaking of a commoner is quicker than a summon.[3]

39) Spilled water and spoken words cannot be retrieved.

40) Spotted mithun begets spotted mithun, hunting beast begets hunting beast. No other fruit hangs on the shikakai tree.

41) Sweet words is valued at one mithun.

42) Taker care your words do not break the elephant's leg!

43) The end of he who lives for himself only and not for others will be miserable.

44) The good way is steep, and the bad way even.

45) The largest chilly is not the hottest.

46) The mole surfaces even when not dugged.

47) The wise claims no wisdom, the fool denies being one.

48) To dig roots with loved one is more preferable to celebrate *khuangchawi* with unloved.

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[3] Parallel to 'Talk of the devil and he appears!'

49) To face seven villages in war is preferable to war with neighbours.

50) To marry without parental consent would not see old age together.

51) To praise oneself and the deer's shin carry nothing.

52) To put a wayward child outside and shut the door on him/her is tantamount to a curse.

53) To speak ill of the chief two is more than safe.

54) We do not pine for the unborn.

55) When married women fight, no daddy should interfere.

56) Women are like pet dogs: they like to be fondled.

57) Women do not learn by mistake.

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The *Adivasi* Metanarrative and the Child: A Discourse on Select *Adivasi* Tales in Odia

Sarangadhar Baral

Adivâsi, the term, as every Odia regularly uses, stands for suggesting the original, pristine, primary, first inhabitant who dwells in and occupies a specific space, land, or territory where his identity integrally involves a certain set of primary practices and beliefs. For the present discussion, *Adivasi* folklore of Odisha are undertaken; and the term *Adivasi* is but an umbrella term, used to accommodate a vast array of distinctly identifiable primary groups of people, clans and communities living in Odisha. The term *âdivâsi* subtly again includes its *âdi-bhâshâ*, i.e. original/ aboriginal (non-Aryan) language, usually in its oral form. This term is not claimed to be adequate to define the distinct identity which each primary community claims as its own and inviolable in Odisha. However, for a limited perspective as mine here, I do not intend to go intensively into such aspects; but I have consciously avoided the more-extensively and controversially used colonial term 'tribal', which would run counter to all essential senses of *Adivasi*.

A common notion of folklore as a sign of past residue of earlier peoples would increasingly show no takers in our time. This early belief smacks of racial prejudice coloured with scientific half-truths in the regimes of imperialist or modernist grand narratives. Folklorists today are, observes Brian Sutton-Smith, more interested in "the actual living performance of these traditional materials (dance, song, tale) in their particular settings, with their functional or aesthetic character in particular

contexts."[1] (1999: 3) The environment surrounding the adivasi which he negotiated in early history or even today has decided most of his growth and change. Hence, the so-called mainstream or advanced society must not assume itself as the reference point or context to the Adivasi culture. For information, the Adivasi population in Odisha constitutes 23 per cent of its total population (4 crores approx.). The Adivasi communities inhabiting the land as their original home in Odisha are 62. Primitive people belonging to diverse linguistic groups have been living for centuries such as the ones of the Mundari linguistic branch (Bhumija, Birhor, Bonda, Didaya, Gadaba, Ho, Juang, Kharia, Koda, Munda, Mundari, Parenga, Santali, and Shabar) as well as the Dravidian linguistic family (Telegu, Olari, Gadaba, Gonrdi, Jitapu, Kondh, Kui, Kishan, Konda, Koya, Kurukh, Oram, and Paraja). Out of the total 62 primitive ethnicities, the prime languages of 36 groups are still intact and undisturbed. Most do not have written scripts of their own. Therefore, their literature is forever continuous and co-evolving with the oral tradition, and discontinuously available in the Odia language. This would sufficiently indicate that the mainstream society, for thousands of years of coexistence, has not politically or religiously imposed its own self-obsessed norms to effect the vanishing of the Adivasi character. Contemporarily in Odisha, Sorang- somped (Saura script), *Kui* (Kondh script), *Warangchiti* (*Ho* script) and *Alachiki* (Santali script) are being developed in the service of creating and committing to writing their respective literatures. On the whole, the fact is not forgotten of the foundational contributions of both the Dravidian and the Adivasi languages besides ancient Sanskrit to the shaping of the Odia language.[2]

[1] Sutton-Smith, Brian. "Introduction" to *Children's Folklore: A Source Book*. (Eds) Brian Sutton-Smith, Jay Mechling & Thomas W Johnson. Utah: Utah State U P., 1999.

[2] Mohanty, Bainshidhar. *Odia Bhabsa ra Utpati O Kramavikash*, 1970; pp.16-30

Moreover, certain cultural beliefs and religious practices of different adivasi groups have contributed to developing those of the dominant Odia society living in close proximity with their sectors.

My understanding and representation of the Advasi child are based on available folktales and resources mostly transcribed in Odia, which remains the lingua franca in Odisha, an eastern state of India. Looking at the belated academic recognition to folklore in general, the recognition of Adivasi children's tales as a literary genre seems to be very recent, emerging in the 1980s at the most. I have attempted to place and understand the figure of the Adivasi child in the grand narrative design of the Adivasi worldview. It may also be admitted that the Adivasi children's distinct socio-cultural parameters are kept in abeyance, mainly for reasons of unsure indicators within the stories themselves as anthologized, some of which are Rabindra Mohan Senapati's *Odisha ra Adivasi* (2006);Ramesh Patri's *Folktale from Baudh* ; *Kalâhandi ra Lokakathâ* (2011); *Folktale from Kondhamâla –Phoolbâni* (2009) that are used for the current analysis.

In the Adivasi metanarrative, the individual does not claim his/ her distinctness, special status, extra-customary position. A non-conforming individual may be let free to live his life, but never to be part of the customary legacy of the society, until he reconciles with customary obedience. Strict customs and stricter punishments for errant individuals are in place in order to subjugate the non-Adivasi character. All narratives, whatever their special flavors or distinctive characters, weave into the great web of the community. The individual carries with him the sense of solidarity with community, and the community does not bear individual signatures as to initiating its cultural calendar. The heroic Adivasi individuals like all small characters in the tales willingly relapse into the wheeling season of community practices and beliefs. These practices and beliefs flourish within the Adivasi worldview, which enshrines the earth as the mother

goddess and the sun as the *dharama* principle (eg, *devtâ* for the Saura; *mahâpru* for the Bonda; *dharamu* for the Kondh).

Secondly, a compatible narrative has evolved slowly over the centuries. We know that 'civilization', by which we understand values of rationalization, change and historical progress, does not lure the Adivasi in the first instance. However, over the centuries, their proximity and interactions with alien civilized societies have come under certain good, and in some cases unwanted, effects on the Adivasi. I do not intend to go into many problems including the erasure of tribal values and languages under the baneful influence of religious conversion as our ill-thought civilizing strategies. Nevertheless, to my mind, a certain composite narrative is born of such dynamic interactions, which points to a blended belief. A certain Hindu practice and the Adivasi custom have dynamically intersected such as in matters of ancestors' worship, the belief in Mother Earth as mother goddess as well as the sacred place in interior house, and belief in good and evil spirits. In this context, a revealing fact is that the Odras in the 3rd century BC at the time of Ashoka's war with Kalinga were mostly the Adivasis, and the Chinese traveler Huen-Tsang in the 7th century AD too came across the same people. The *Skandha Purâna* (8th - 11th c. AD) among others has particularly referred to these Odras, while celebrating the evolution of Lord Jagannath culture from the aboriginal (Adivasi) *Shabar* heritage, which the mainstream Hindus but remember traditionally in the light of Lord Krushna's *avatâric* lineage alone, while giving lip service to the adivasi contribution to a huge cultural phenomenon of faith.

Now, Adivasi children's folklore are committed to writing, expectedly not by children, but by educated Odia writers. There is every possibility of the adult interests and ideologies to have decided many elements of the child's life and turn of events in the folklore. However, it may be admitted that adult ideologies do not normally

prejudice children of any race or belief. On the other hand, any folktale would allow fresh elements to be normally absorbed within over the ages and through the imaginative narration of its distinct speaker who is not usually free from his own socio-cultural parameters including prejudices. I have perceived in almost every tale a certain degree of interbreed, inter-birth, or dialogic blending of the Adivasi and the Odia dimensions and elements. It is almost impossible to determine which element or text came off from what exact source.

The influences identified as Vaisnava and Buddhist as well as the Adivasi have shaped undeniably the very roots of the Odia culture and identity. Not surprisingly, certain cultural tenets and values of the Adivasi have been appropriated into Odia culture, which most educated Odias and elites in the mainstream either do not know or ignore to know and appreciate. The scholar Nilakanttha Das (1977) looking for the seed of Odia culture has said: "Even while by language we are Aryan, we are but Dravidian and Shabar in terms of culture." In *A History of Odiya Literature* (1962), published by the Sahitya Akademi, Manasinha writes of its culture as "an interesting synthesis of both Dravidian and Aryan cultures,"[3] and further noting the native distinctiveness of the Odia language, he soon observes: "This may be the only language in the Indo-Aryan family of North Indian languages to which the Adivasi has contributed so significantly."[4] The contribution of the *Apavramsa /Prakrit* and of Adivasi languages to the growth of Odia as a people's language, and that of the Adivasi rites to the development of Odia culture, are undeniable. The German scholar Herman Kulke too did not consider only the mainstream culture, while attempting to explore Odisha's historical heritage, religious lineage, and cultural

[3] Manasingh, Mayadhar. *A History of Odiya Literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1962. p.1
[4] Ibid.p.10

continuity. Studying the rules of the royal family, the evolution of Jagannath (Deity of the Shabars) and religious practices and also in administration the center -margin relationship and religious symbols – in all these, he encountered an emerging intersection of the dominant Aryan culture and the prevalent Adivasi society in Odisha. It is heartening to acknowledge that the beliefs in ancestors and their invocations held in annual festivities by Odia peasantry, extant even today, are surprisingly the surviving legacy of many existing Adivasi ethnicities. Odisha presents quite a stable intermingling of diverse cultures rather than suppression of the Adivasis unlike in the manner that would recall the Hindus and Buddhists engaging in see-saw battles for religious dominance before producing a culture of synthetic mosaic behind. In a folktale collected from the Baudh locality, the Adivasi child being rescued by the Buddha temple presents a narrative of this synchronic character.

Keeping all the entangled traditions and cultures in view, the Odia Adivasi folktale may also be described as an intertextuality of cultures, beliefs, and practices. The source or thought of purity or originality of a folktale as essentially Adivasi or Odia seems to be at a discount; each tale points to an in-between space, which will further reinforce a dynamic mosaic of cultural tenets. It seems that every piece of folklore is a cultural artifact of this mosaic including the social and moral constructs of childhood. A folktale, which is entitled "The Bondâbuil"[5] may be of interest here. To relate it briefly:

> Once, a subsistent Kondh went into the jungle to fetch wood and fuel. But he could not escape from the *bondabuil*'s attack. The bondabuil living in the deep jungle is a very violent beast with two big horns on the head and an immensely strong body.

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[5] Patri, Ramesh. "The Bondabuil", *Kalahandi ra Lokakatha*, Cuttack: Vidyapuri, 2011.

The little child of the dead Kondh grew a precocious archer, who could aim and pierce the target without fail. His playmates once insulted him for not knowing or seeing his father. His mother told the terrible story of the bondabuil as having killed his father. The boy left home surreptitiously against his mother's persuasion, and wandered through the thick forest. One day he killed the bondabuil.

Suddenly feeling alone in the wilderness, he wept in order to return home, but not without his father who was dead. At this dark moment, the mother goddess Parvati descended from above and granted the child the boon of life to the dead.

Another folktale, "Phoolbeni"[6] relates:

In a small village lapped in dense trees, there lived an adivasi Daknâ, his wife and their cute little daughter named Phool (flower). As usual, they went in to the forest to collect wood and fruits. The little girl was playing under a big shady tree. Suddenly at this moment, dark clouds spread across the sky, and thunderous rains devastated the place. In the deep forest the girl was searching for her parents who were nowhere around. She got tired of crying and rushing around, and slept over dry leaves. As the sky cleared and the sunshine returned, the girl regained her sense only to encounter a color ray descending from the sky, which turned into a goddess just before her eyes.

The goddess (unnamed) groomed her as her own daughter. In the process, Phool forgot her sorrow in the midst of play with deer and parrots among flowering and fruitful trees. Many years thus passed. One day the goddess desired to depart

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[6] Ramesh Patri. Folktale from *Kondhamala* (Phulvani). Cuttack: Vidyapuri, 2009

for her celestial home. The goddess mother put a flower in her braid of hair which was of magical scent and power, and which showed her way to the old village. Phool now grown a maiden met her old parents; and at her arrival, the branches started growing leaves and fruits once again. The villagers became happy and called the place after Phool's flowery braid of hair, ie. *phoolbeni.*

These two Adivasi children's tales, one focused on a boy and other on a girl, are discussed here for bringing out certain characteristic aspects of Adivasi life and social relationship. The boy is groomed to be a traditional hunter and the girl a source of beauty (not to be confused with a beautiful possession as in advanced societies) in every Adivasi clan. In the above tales, the villagers were first astonished, perhaps fascinated at the happy turn of events, but later relapsed into life's normal rhythms without looking to the child as the hero or protagonist of the clan. It is usually the adult members of civilized societies who look to heroic actions of an adventurer and adore him as the culture hero. On the other hand, the Adivasi village would not have taken the event the same way, if a village elder or leader instead of a child would have conquered or killed the bondabuil. Usually there would have started celebrations in a manner of throwing up a big feast and worship of the clan deity; though a new Adivasi hero were not anointed as superhuman, at least a song to corroborate the event, an institution of worship as a new rite in the Adivasi calendar is usual. But this does not find space in case of a child's achievements. From the economic angle, the child is not seen an earner, since the occasion of success is celebrated by the hero himself bearing all the expenses, which might even result in risking impoverishment or bonded labor. For this, one may recall at least how the jail returnees are welcome as no less than heroes in the *Primal*

Land, and who are called to complete customary rites on way to their social re-enfoldment and naturalization.[7]

It is fair to recall in contravention of this rule that the village Tikâbâli (still existing today) is an institutionalization of the goddess who once saved a child with her boon of sands, which would corroborate the function-14 mentioning the magical/ supernatural agency in the Rusian folklore as in Vladimir Propp's morphology of folklore.[8] With this boon, the Adivasi child could pacify the terrible elephant and recover the lost spear of the clan since demanded by the unfeeling clan leader. However, the village named Tikabali in the folktale "Tikabali" does not remember the name of its child founder.[9] It is mostly clear as an act to de-individualize an achievement and dedicate it to a deity or the clan, since the deity forever supports the group identity. It may remind the reader of Lacan's concept which would hold true of the child's growth structured by societal norms and sign systems underlining that 'subjectivity is an effect of language,' the language being the cultural construct.[10]

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* Joseph Campbell underlines that growth in the story ends in the resolution of conflicts and celebration or institutionalization, what Propp labels as transfiguration (i.e., function-29) [11]. The child shows growth in the Adivasi tales, and conflict resolution occurs, but s/he does not

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[7] Pratibha Ray. *Adibhumi* (*The Primal Land*) 2nd edn. Cuttack: Adyaa Prakashani. 2002. pp.671-678

[8] Ramesh Patri. "Tikkabali", *Folktale from Kondhamala –Phulvani*. Cuttack: Vidyapuri, 2009

[9] Anatoly Liberman. (Ed). "Introduction" in *Theory and History of Folklore* U of Minnesota, 1984. p. xxvii

[10] Karen Coats. "Introduction", *Looking Glasses and Neverlands*. Iowa: U of Iowa P. 2004. p. 2.

[11] Elizabeth A. Warner. *ProppVladimir Propp, 1895-1970: The Study of Russian Folklore and Theory*. Hull Univ Pr. (August 1998).

demand special position; instead, his/ her life finally collapses into the clan structure. The child who is precocious in infancy is never seen growing up to be the clan hero. It is natural that Russian folktales and Odia adivasi folktales signify distinct cultures and classless consciousness. One appreciates Alan Dundes who convinced us to regard folklore as 'a mirror of culture' with the word 'mirror' used to capture "the particularistic social identity" and beyond any limiting ethnocentrist beliefs.[12] It is of course to be admitted that though the Bondas, a distinct adivasi society, are confused here with Kondhs or Gonds in the mind of an average Odia, since these ethnicities live in near proximity, and do not appear physically very distinctive in features. Further, as the dominant Odia society tells the above adivasi story, there might creep some element of cultural confusions.

No individualism is honored against or within the clan solidarity: this fact greatly emerges in the Odia adivasi folktale. No child is encouraged with recognitions or special status in order to make adventure or a semblance of it a career of life; never. This establishes the adivasi society's conservative character. Any adventure for the sake of it, or for discovery of the unknown, is not encouraged, since adventure violates the closely structured clan and even the finely inter-connected world outside. It seems the Adivasi is mostly defensive in attitude, in the sense that he does not appear to be a threat to any domain, and never at least to his society. A child's adventure is only perceived as a response to the imminent threat, which comes from the adult society or from an external wilderness domain. It is agreeable that many of the folktales of the Adivasis would elicit better understanding in the light of anthropology's binary paradigms. But the battle is conceived between unequal contestants,

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[12]Alan Dundes. The Meaning of Folklore.(ed) Simon J. Bronner. Logan: Utah state University, 2007.p.55.

between a child and a strangely nonhuman force thousand times more powerful, such as a bondabuil, a king elephant, or a demon.

The tales also structure a way out to the child by succor received from another nonhuman power who belongs to the wilderness or beyond it, and whose power magically supersedes that of the enemy. However, the child's heroism is deemed as an occasional aberration or a social exception, better contained within the web of Adivasi customs and traditions. On the contrary, unfortunate segregation of the child for a period from the village brings in the unforeseen benefits to all. This may be a reason why a child has been adored and much fondly waited for in the unconscious of the Adivasi as a prenatal figure.

Of specific significance is the integrated life of the Adivasi; the fact is that the Adivasi's life moves in a closely interwoven realm in which the human, the animal and the divine or spirit are interrelated, and thus this realm apparently closed is widely open, more so than the civilized societies. As already related in the stories, encounters with a goddess or supernatural being constitute the crucial turn in the plot, of course, bringing in a happy ending. This end is only an ending without drawing the final curtain on life's drama. To the Adivasis, this is the one world in which they live and die and relive; their good/bad action and consequence are inter-born; and there is no external realm awaited for life after death. Adivasi folk narratives certainly get the child relapse into a reconciled state, but cannot afford to imagine its death.

The mother goddess intervenes in the development of the girl child. The supernatural agent in the guise of its goddess (nonhuman spirits/ magical, belonging to the civilized society but above it, ie. not contained within its restrictive structure) meets with and supports the Adivasi realm. Even the supernatural arouses awe like the wilderness realm does outside the borderline of the Adivasi village

and simultaneously protects and supports the villager with all life-sustaining benefits just like the wilderness. Every Adivasi village in Odisha has a space for the worship of the goddess. Interestingly, every traditional non-Adivasi Odia village has its permanent temple assigned to her worship, as against temporary or seasonal celebration sheds in neighboring states. Traditional cities and towns of Odisha are never esteemed without the presence of a potent goddess as the protective mother of the land.

To turn to Phool, the girl's return to the dying village announces new life for all. Change or growth in the storyline is observed. In most adivasi clans, the girl is a symbol of dynamism, fulfillment, and hardy work, not discriminated as weak and object of enjoyment, or subjected to dowry death and ill treatment that keep occurring in mainstream Odisha. Interestingly, in the patriarchal Adivasi culture, the parents of the bride are gifted sufficiently by the groom who brings her to his own home; and one fine example of this may be the Bonda socio-cultural life as narrated in the *Primal Land*. Of course, in the socio-cultural structures of the Adivasi, the child is cared and instructed on norms of conformity with traditional value systems, but never accepted as someone worthy of special treatment or attention, even if she deserves a place by her own perseverance or merit.

The selected tales unfold a narrative of the child who gets separated from the adult male society at an unforeseen crisis; s/he encounters a nonhuman power / spirit domain alive only in the wilderness; and the human and the nonhuman domains intersect at the levels of sympathy and love. From the viewpoint of narrative style, it may be said that the children's tale is evidenced by a rich element of rasa, i.e. the rasa of pity and affection. The final turn of such encounters results in a happy conclusion. No clan would ever dream of a child smothered in an unequal fight. There are also certain aspects, which need to be glossed over here:

Further, the spirit world appears active in the wilderness domain, both in its demonic and divine characters; and the child receives magical or life-transforming help from a deity or an unnamed fairy, mostly female figures. With respect to the Adivasi child contrasted with grownup heroes, the goddess figure appears in the most benign, never the terrible form, and not with the intertwined paradoxes of which commonly figure up in mainstream Hindu adult folktales and other folklore worldwide[13]. However, the goddess once personal and indulgent in caring the human (child) departs and dissolves as an impersonal force out into unknown wild. But the incident of the boon is memorialized in formalizing her worship. A female devotee of the goddess *Mangalâ* may have to suffer the honor-killing or exile over social accusation or apprehension of black magic, which turns out mostly a kind of machination of powerful males in a docile system of strict ancestral rites, prejudices even. It must be admitted that the Adivasi society forever imbibes the benediction and protection of the mother goddess since primal times, though the later appropriations of sophistication in conceiving the goddess in line with the Hindus or Buddhists are not generally resented. One clear illustration of this adivasi heritage is the celebrated institution of Goddess Târini at Anandapur (Keonjhar District) where the Adivasi *deuri* (non-Brahmin priest) still presides, and the Brahmanical system cannot claim primacy. A ruckus of individualistic voices however does not penetrate the strong walls of certain Adivasi societies, such as the Bondas of Odisha. In these stories, women in patriarchal systems as well as children, as marginalized groups, form naturally a domain worthy of sociological studies and criticism.

One does not encounter an adventurous child just like its parents in folktales ever addressing his problems in negotiating with

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[13] One may recall how the goddess guarding Ravan's fort of golden Sri Lanka in the *Ramayana* deserts the demon king.

an alien, modern society outside the wilderness habitats. This aspect leads to an assumption that a kind of iron wall of segregation always exists between the adult Adivasi world and the advanced modern society. This narrative assumption is not a true reality, since many Adivasi communities are in constant negotiations with their neighborly Odia societies across centuries and responding to new influences coming from alien religions and sciences. For example, in a folktale- a child helped by a she-goat gets help from the Buddhist temple; similarly, a Bonda belief in the shaved head of Bonda women/ the Bhuiyan origin myth of Parvati and Mahadev's boons/ a Saura belief in evolution from Vâli/ Sugriva (The *Ramayana*) as their original ancestor. This would indicate the fact that the educated fraternity is not adequately equipped to access any likely folktales in the making and their imaginative worlds of critical relationships. I have heard of certain interesting practices newly evolved in Kandhamal District, such as the women of the Christianized PâEa community continue to worship Goddess Lakshmi in the interior household while attending the church services outside home. This cultural product is a dialogic process over a time period of coexistence, as the New Year celebration cuts across diverse religious communities.

As children are most impressionable and malleable, their stories may be fabricated ad infinitum in exploiting the elements of simplicity, incomprehensibility, irrationality, as well as pity, belief and readiness toward joys. In the present case of Adivasi children's literature, one does not come across human agencies of subversion, in general, from within the Adivasi community, which reiterates strong clan solidarity; any violence is perceived as a work of the evil spirit, which reinforces Adivasi practices of propitiating spirits.

Moreover, the environmental value of such tales is significant, in the sense that the wilderness always supports and benefits the human, and though in the process of civilization, it is always treated

as an alien domain fit to be subjugated, or as often forgotten like the child. Secondly, many serious scholars are of the similar opinion that the Adivasi and nature are deeply related. In the dark present of our ecological crises, the Adivasi values give us a streak of light. Children as in mainstream cities reared and instructed in the absence of nature's contact may grow civilized but not sufficiently humane or wise. The Adivasi's spiritual beliefs and social practices are nature-nurtured, as the ancient Vedic knowledge and oldest religious systems are born in the wilderness, best born in nature. Further, scholars have found that many of non-Aryan ideas, beliefs, and customs have been appropriated by Vedic motifs and Puranic rites in course of their century-long co-existence. The slangs and fleshy parodies still extant and performed freely in the Rath Yatra (car festival) of Puri are probably reminiscent of the folklife of the Adivasi culture in Odisha. The carnal of life is not suppressed by the reason of societal purities; it is rather better channeled to the advancement of divinity. Therefore, the social sophistication and the reduction of the whole to a partial achievement that accompanies its process remains uncultivated in the adivasi world. The life of the divine is no different in Adivasi culture, for the folklife inhabits all without division. And the Adivasi and the Hindu with respect to this unity of vision are natural children in companionship. To my knowledge, the tales discussed only are occasionally unconscious of the humorous materials that children normally share, even as their sense of wonder and play is available in plenty.

As of the happy turn of events, the significant fact to perceive is that the prevailing socio-moral structure of the Adivasis triumphs in the end. The child is as usual projected as a sign of despondency and dependence, never offered opportunity to explore the world internal or external. The ancestral seat of power preserved by tradition is least affected under any circumstances. Thus, there is little room left for innovation, interruption, or for systemic subversion

in the adivasi world. In most stories, the adivasi child is born a hero in the wilderness, but dies an anonymity on return in to the adivasi society.

Postmodernists emphasize that childhood is constructed by the adulthood in the light of its own perception of the past life; childhood is not inherent. The society creates and imposes its elements, does hardly allow the child its own growth and independence; and needless to repeat, all our schools and socializing institutions are in place to usually inculcate all our repressed adult dreams and adult morals in children's malleable minds. It is no exception that the adivasi childhood is socially constructed as weak or dependent, just as male or female, expected to conform to adult social roles. On the contrary, the child lives the in-between space, without opposing the material and fantastic, the awful and wakeful.

Another very important parameter of the adivasi worldview is the vision of an integrated, interactive whole of nature, man, and the spirit world. Thus, the human domain is rightly conceived as a tiny part of the complex, unintelligible whole. In the Adivasi worldview, the earth mother is below and the *dharam* deity (Sun) is above, and every form of life flourish and gets protected in-between. In the Adivasi worldview, there is no heaven, no hell is born besides this life-world in which material and spiritual realms are overlapping and dynamically alive, and continues to nurture the Adivasis.

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Orality-Literacy Interface in Novelistic Art: The Case of Chinua Achebe

Sanjeev Kumar Nath

The number of languages in the world that do not have scripts far outnumber languages with scripts and written literature, but the dominance of modern, western, literate culture has resulted in most people in general presupposing that oral traditions are in some ways inadequate, and inferior to written culture. In fact, societies with vibrant oral traditions are extremely rich in terms of culture, and the introduction of literary culture and print culture to such a society always leads to a two-way influence: oral traditions invigorate literary culture, and elements of literary culture gradually percolate into oral traditions. The postcolonial African novel, particularly in the early years of its appearance, draws heavily from native oral traditions, and the same would be true of other literary genres such as drama and poetry in Africa from mid-twentieth century.

Orality, by definition, exists in the oral mode; literacy in the written mode. As long as a folktale, for example, remains in the oral tradition, handed down from generation to generation through oral storytelling, it is considered to be in the oral tradition. The moment it is recorded in a script, written down by a collector of folktales, it ceases to be exclusively in the oral tradition. After having been received into literary culture, the folktale loses much of its fluidity. Print has the effect of imposing fixity on the tale. Several print versions of a tale may exist, but each version would be fixed in its structure. In the oral tradition, on the other hand, the storyteller can, and does, tell the tale differently each time it is told. The various elements of performance — tone of voice, gestures, rise and fall of

pitch, etc., — add things that print can't impart. Different storytellers use different combinations of these elements in their own way. Of course, in the act of reading, a reader can dramatize the story in the manner in which it is dramatized and given life and vitality by the storyteller. When one reads a text silently, the dramatization can happen in the mind. When a story is told by a storyteller, however, the dramatization is for an audience. The oral medium is distinguished by its performative dimensions.[1]

When Chinua Achebe set out to tell the world that even pre-modern Africa was not without culture, that Africans did not first learn of civilization or civility from European colonists or missionaries, he tried to show, among other things, what a rich oral tradition of folktales, proverbs, and sayings pre-literate Ibo culture possessed. Through his novels, particularly the ones set in pre-literate Iboland, Achebe attempts to give the readers a realistic account of the complicated oral skills of storytellers, village elders, women, and wise people in the community. But isn't there a contradiction in presenting oral culture through the sophisticated literary art of the novel? Besides, he does not use an African language, but a European language to do all that, and nativist critics and authors like Obi Wali in Nigeria and Ngugi wa Thiong'o in Kenya have argued that one cannot adequately express authentic African experience in an European language. This paper tries to answer these questions concerning Achebe's portrayal of pre-literate African culture, particularly oral traditions, through a western literary form, the novel, and in a European language. The paper argues that despite apparent contradictions involving the concepts

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[1] The meaning of 'performance' can, of course, be stretched to mean all artful use of language, and thus include all kinds of literary language, but components of oral traditions — folktales, folksongs, ballads, etc. — require performance by an artist or a storyteller in a manner that is not comparable with the performative dimension of literary language.

of orality and literary, Achebe is pre-eminently successful in conveying an adequate sense of the wealth of Ibo oral traditions, and that his use of the English language is such that it is capable of expressing authentic African experience.

Of course, Achebe is not alone in effecting a vital connection between African oral traditions and novelistic art. In fact, it is usually not disputed that there has always been a 'two-way traffic between written literature and oral folk tradition' (Davidson 74). Many African authors, particularly the ones from Achebe's generation, have important connections with storytelling traditions. Ama Ata Aidoo, the Ghanaian author, for example, grew up learning about African oral traditions and storytelling in particular. She was the daughter of a chief, and was given training in these areas before she went on to acquire western education. Buchi Emecheta the Nigerian novelist believes in the social responsibility of the writer/storyteller, and sees herself as a responsible Ibo storyteller. Critics have noted that the novel, a western art form known for its flexibility and adaptability, has undergone certain significant changes in African hands, and the most important of these changes involves the strong flavour of oral tradition that many African novels have. It has been argued, for instance, that the influence of oral traditions has given a distinctive character to the African novel:

> Despite the many regional differences in writing styles and thematic concerns, certain common trends have emerged in African novels that demarcate their difference from the Western novel. Most notable is the influence of, and continued reference to the oral tradition. (Sullivan 180)

Thus, the infusion of certain elements of oral storytelling is a general feature of many African novels. Achebe, of course, is a master storyteller, and all his novels provide ample evidence of the manner in which orality and literacy have blended together.

Repetitions of many kinds, for example, are a mark of oral storytelling traditions. The storyteller may repeat certain words for emphasis or for some other effect. The rhythm of the prose might involve a certain regularity of repetition. We can observe such characteristics in numerous places in Achebe's texts, but here are two examples, the first from *Things Fall Apart*, and the second from *Arrow of God:*

> It was this man that Okonkwo threw in a fight which the old men agreed was one of the fiercest since the founder of their town engaged a spirit of the wild for seven days and seven nights. The drums beat and the flutes sang and the spectators held their breath. Amalinze was a wily craftsman, but Okonkwo was as slippery as a fish in water. Every nerve and every muscle stood out on their arms, on their backs and their thighs, and one almost heard them stretching to breaking point. In the end Okonkwo threw the Cat. (3)

> "There is no cause to be afraid, my son. You have seen Eru, the Magnificent, the One that gives wealth to those who find favour with him. People sometimes see him at that place in this kind of weather. Perhaps he was returning home from a visit to Idemili or the other deities. Eru only harms those who swear falsely before his shrine." Ezeulu was carried away by his praise of the god of wealth. The way he spoke one would have thought he was the proud priest of Eru rather than Ulu who stood above Eru and all the other deities. "When he likes a man wealth flows like a river into his house; his yams grow as big as human beings, his goats produce threes and his hens hatch nines." (8-9)

In the first passage, the reference to what the old men of the clan remembered refers to the collective memory of the clan or to something in the oral tradition of the community. The short sentences and the repeated words, particularly the repetition of 'and' produce

the impression of the spoken medium, of a storyteller telling an interesting tale to an audience. The vocabulary consists of simple words and phrases, just like the vocabulary of a traditional storyteller's tale. In the second passage too, the sentences are short and the vocabulary simple. Repetition, like the use of 'his' in the last sentence, produces a rhythm suggesting the spoken medium. A storyteller often gives the impression of being the repository of traditional or esoteric knowledge, something that the younger generation would learn from the storyteller. In the passage from *Arrow of God*, Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu, speaks like a storyteller, someone who has knowledge that his son (Obika, to whom Ezeulu is speaking) doesn't. It's the perfect storytelling situation: the storyteller imparting information or knowledge of something that the audience doesn't know yet, but is eager to hear about.

In discussing how Achebe deals with the apparent contradiction between orality and literacy, there is a need to understand one particular aspect of Achebe as an author: his attitude towards the art of storytelling through the novel. The very title of one of his essays suggests his attitude: "The Novelist As Teacher". Achebe here spells out his mission as a novelist:

> I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past—with all its imperfections—was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them. (*Hopes* 45)

This is, of course, an oft-quoted line from Achebe's prose, and critics have used it to show what Achebe has said about his mission as a novelist, but my concern here is to emphasize the attitude of the teacher that Achebe has adopted here. By "my readers", in this sentence, for example, Achebe means only his

black African readers, primarily for whom he writes. Just as a professional storyteller in an African community would perform before a native audience, Achebe is conscious of addressing a native audience through his novels. This is certainly not the attitude of many postcolonial novelists who are writing today, and are perhaps talking to a world audience, and without the express purpose of teaching anyone. The two things noted here: a) that Achebe is speaking to a native audience, and b) that he means to teach them something place him within the tradition of the African storyteller who speaks to a native audience, and often tries to teach them moral lessons or warn them through the stories told.

It is certainly not coincidental that Achebe makes a village elder in his last novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*, say so much about storytelling and about the story. In quite a long passage in his speech to a group of rebels, the elder talks about the supremacy of the story over the community that possesses it; in fact, he says that it is not the community that possesses the story, but the other way round. Besides, the story is what provides a distinctive identity to the community:

> …The story is our escort; without it, we are blind. Does the blind man own his escort? No, neither do we the story; rather it is the story that owns us and directs us. It is the thing that makes us different from cattle; it is the mark on the face that sets one people apart from their neIbours… (124)

Not everyone who wants to be a storyteller can tell a story well, while a good storyteller is inspired by the God Agwu himself, and it is up to Agwu to give or to deny the mantle of prophecy to anyone:

> Agwu picks his disciple, rings his eye with white chalk and dips his tongue, willing or not, in the brew of prophecy; and right away the man will speak…. (125)

Achebe's modesty prevents him from ever suggesting that he is one of the miracle-makers, one of the extraordinary storytellers inspired by Agwu, but his awareness of being a teacher to his people, showing them what went wrong with them in the past and how they too have been humans with language and culture and history goes with the storyteller's (or the story's) function of being a guide.

Also, when we consider Achebe's coming to write his first novel *Things Fall Apart* as a response to what he felt was the denigrating, highly racist depiction of Africans in such texts as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Joseph Carey's *Mister Johnson*, we can say that the process of *Things Fall Apart* brewing in him is nothing but Agwu's work in the mind of his disciple. In scholarly debates, it is often argued that Achebe may not have been right in treating *Heart of Darkness* almost like an ordinary realist novel[2]. The purpose here is not to open the old Achebe-Conrad debate once again, but to point out another dimension of the issue: that whether Achebe has read Conrad correctly or not, he has certainly done a wonderful job in writing *Things Fall Apart* as a response to Conrad. His essay on *Heart of Darkness* is his critical response, but the more important response to the same text was his creative response — the writing of *Things Fall Apart*, and this creative response can certainly be seen as the result

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[2] Of course, this allegation presumes that Achebe is not as sophisticated a reader as the modernist text of Conrad demands, but that is far from the truth because in the essay ("An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*") Achebe, a distinguished professor of literature, shows his understanding of the devices that Conrad has used. His point is that despite all the tricks of narrative distance, points of view and such things, he finds Conrad to be a racist, someone who chose not to see or show Africans behaving as human beings with language, culture, history.

of the writer's/storyteller's submission to the story or to the god Agwu.[3]

In his essay[4] "The Writer and His Community", Achebe talks about the communalist character of African artists, particularly the Ibo Mbari artists, and seeks to show that character as distinctively African, and certainly in contrast to what is sometimes presented as the individualistic ethos of the artist or writer in Europe. Achebe does not believe in simply showing how different the African writer is from his western counterpart, and he agrees that the differences are not absolute, but he does wish to stress the need to understand the African artist's relationship with his community. Again, he concedes that in the small, rural world of the Ibo Mbari artist, the artist may not have had much difficulty in identifying himself with his community, in feeling himself to be a part of the greater whole, but in modern-day Nigeria, it would not be easy for the writer even to realize what constituted his community. Certainly, this would be a problem for the artist in all the multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, large postcolonial African states with highly complex socio-cultural scenarios. Nevertheless, Achebe argues for the need for the writer to understand his people's culture, and be a representative of his community. In other words, he values the special bond that used to bind the rural African artist with his community, and feels that

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[3] Many of the supposedly esoteric or religious practices of Africans can actually be understood in terms of the metaphorical suggestions thrown up by those practices. Thus, the practice of installing an *ikenga* among some of the Ibos could be understood in terms of the individual's sense of self-respect, personal effort and success. Similarly, the idea of Agwu inspiring storytellers can perhaps be taken to mean specific contexts playing upon the mind of a creative person to produce the text. Here, there is a sense of the writer's willing surrender to some power beyond him, of course, but that is how inspiration can actually occur.

[4] Originally the Regents' Lecture delivered at the University of California at Los Angeles in November 1984.

modern-day novelists would also do well to be community-conscious in that manner. Without a doubt, he tries to be such a writer with a communalist ethos.

Again, Achebe's use of the English language involves the taming of the imperial language to suit his purpose. When he says, in 'The African Writer and the English Language' that 'The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use' (Okpewho 2003: 62-63), he reveals the subversive strategy involved in his use of the English language. If nativists like Obi Wali decried the imperialist, colonialist associations of the English language, Achebe certainly is not one dazed by the glories of the language or culture of the imperialists. He only wishes to make use of — for his and Africa's advantage — what history has thrust into his hands. I believe this pragmatic view of the issue of language and African literature has finally won the day, although there are still some dissenting voices, crying for an ouster of European languages. Achebe does not show any subservience to the imperial language, but moulds it in such a way that it becomes fit to express African experience. In 'The African Writer and the English Language' he explains how he does this through an illustration from his *Arrow of God*. Of course, this requires not just extraordinary linguistic skills, but also deep understanding of African life and intuitive ability to translate that into words. One cannot Africanize the English language merely by sprinkling the text with African proverbs and sayings, but anyone who is sensitive to the attractions of *Things Fall Apart* or *Arrow of God* will agree that Achebe's use of the English language in these two texts involves his ability to suggest an African ethos throughout, something that a traditional storyteller would also do perfectly well. The obvious differences are that Achebe is doing it in the English language, though tamed and tuned for his purpose, and besides his primary audience of the African readers of his novels, he has a large audience of non-African

readers. Of course, it is the modern print and publishing industry that has made it possible for his story to reach millions of people worldwide. Making use of the English language and the modern print and publishing industry by the African storyteller may at first be thought of as a departure from traditional norms, but one has to remember that Ibo culture, to which Achebe belongs, teaches one to adapt to changing situations. So a storyteller's use of new methods would be in keeping with the Ibo way of adjusting to varying circumstances. The adaptability inherent in Ibo culture may perhaps be best explained through a proverb from Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*:

> Eneke the bird says that since men have learnt to shoot without missing, he has learnt to fly without perching. (16)

Achebe's use of the English language in his novels involves a process of deconstructing the imperial language so that it becomes a tool in his hands and serves his purpose of portraying African culture. Isidore Okpewho is of the view that "Chinua Achebe and Amadou Kourouma have not hesitated to deconstruct the dominant European languages of their novels with elements of indigenous spoken art". (Okpewho 2004: 616-617) The many ways in which Achebe domesticated the English language to make it a fit vehicle for communicating the peculiar rhythm and flavour of African oral culture cannot perhaps be described fully because these are matters involving intuition5 besides other things, but it is useful to observe that Achebe's early novels, particularly his first and third novels, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, involve very successful use of proverbs and sayings that tempers the English language in

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5 In 'The African Writer and the English Language' Achebe suggests that writing an English that is perfectly suitable for communicating an African ethos, an English that is 'in character', is 'largely a matter of instinct, but judgment comes into it too.'

the right way, enabling it to covey elements of traditional African culture. In *Things Fall Apart*, for example, there is a passage where Unoka, Okonkwo's lazy and spendthrift father is in conversation with a guest who has come to ask for the money that he had earlier lent Unoka. Clearly, this is a difficult situation for a conversation, with all the awkwardness involved in talking about money, particularly money that had been lent earlier and is now required back, but Achebe handles the situation perfectly, demonstrating the Ibo art of conversation involving the use of proverbs and sayings particularly for difficult situations like the Unoka-Okoye conversation. After the initial pleasantries exchanged between the two, Okoye broaches the subject of the lent money, using proverbs to take him to that difficult area of communication:

> Having spoken plainly so far, Okoye said the next half a dozen sentences in proverbs. Among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten. Okoye was a great talker and he spoke for a long time, skirting round the subject and then hitting it finally. In short, he was asking Unoka to return the two hundred cowries he had borrowed from him more than two years before. (5-6)

While Achebe only tells us how Okoye used proverbs to broach the subject of money, he does not give us the expressions, the proverbs that Okoye may have said, but he uses a proverb in order to stress the importance of proverbs in Ibo conversation: "proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten."

Before mentioning an event in the village, Achebe often describes a particular scene, in the manner of oral storytellers, so that an atmosphere of suspense and expectation is built up before the important event is disclosed. In the beginning of chapter thirteen of *Things Fall Apart*, for example, Ezeudu's death is announced

only after carefully depicting the scene of heightened anxiety and suspense. Repetition of certain words/sounds, once again, makes his technique very similar to the methods employed by oral storytellers:

> Go-di-di-go-go-di-go. Di-go-go-di-go. It was the *ekwe* talking to the clan. One of the things every man learned was the language of the hollowed-out instrument. Diim! Diim! Diim! boomed the cannon at intervals. (86)

The use of the language of the *ekwe* also has an effect on the English language. Without losing its own intelligibility as a world language, Achebe's language acquires some of the characteristics of Ibo oral speech.

In presenting a sense of how an African tribal society functioned, Chinua Achebe has done what the griots have always done in Africa. Griots and other storytellers have worked as oral historians of their communities, and have passed on valuable knowledge about culture to future generations:

> Griots…..embodied the entire history of a people and, when able to pass their craft on to younger members of the caste, formed a continuous oral tradition that could be preserved for many generations. In many instances, modern griots' presentations have aided archaeologists and historians in significant ways, helping them to interpret the reconstruction of physical remnants of the past or supplying missing aspects about the life and culture of ancient and medieval Africa.

Achebe's novels have been taken to contain a wealth of anthropological details on Ibo culture, but sometimes critics have debated if Achebe has actually been able to portray Ibo life and culture accurately. However, before passing judgement on Achebe's portrayal of Ibo culture through his novels, one needs to remember that there are regional variations in Ibo culture, something that

Achebe is quick to point out in his first novel itself. When some of the elders in *Things Fall Apart* speak about the different ways of the people of the world, they are actually referring to the different Ibo communities within Iboland. Regional variations in fact constitute one of the important characteristics of tribal cultures worldwide. Besides, through his portrayal of Ibo culture, Achebe was actually attempting to prove that African cultures in general had certain features that made them human like any other culture in the world. Communal memory, history, individual enterprise, oratorical skills and other skills of particular members of the clan, ritual, religion, a working system of dispensing justice, music, sports, etc., make Ibo culture comparable with other, so-called civilized cultures. In short, Achebe's cultural relativist point of view is effectively proved through the portrayal of various elements of Ibo culture. Although his particular focus is on Ibo culture, his ultimate argument is about all African or non-white cultures.

As has already been pointed out in this paper, Achebe has succeed in conveying the richness of African cultures by integrating the distinctive rhetoric of Ibo speech into his English, by demonstrating how proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten, by making the English language, his medium, a fit vehicle for communicating the wealth of Ibo oral traditions. Also, it is extremely important to note how his special sense of responsibility to his community firmly places him within the tradition of African oral storytelling, the tradition of the griot. He is a modern-day avatar of the griot, one that has adapted himself to changing circumstances like the bird Eneke of the Ibo proverb.

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Understanding Dhritarashtra: Reading the *Mahabharata* from a Disabilities Perspective

Someshwar Sati

Disability is a problem. It is generally perceived by society at large, essentially, as a medically diagnosed problem of the human body gone wrong. Such an understanding of the phenomena is, however, misplaced. Disability is indeed a problem but not because the bodies of the persons with disabilities trouble them. It is a problem primarily because the able-bodied community uses the corporeally different impaired bodies of these people as a pretext to exclude them from the making of the political, economic, cultural and intellectual world we all inhabit. And this is a human rights issue.

Regular violation of the rights of persons with disability is commonplace in India today and this has a long and much maligned history. The present article, however, is not interested in presenting a catalogue of such violations; nor is it keen on tracing the history of these discriminatory practices. Its prime concern is to locate the roots of these practices in the way our culture represents disability and normalizes, naturalizes and legitimizes the violation of their rights. Perhaps the most well known representation of disabilities in this context occurs in the *Mahabharata*, more precisely in the figure of the blind king, Dhritarashtra. The present article intends to read the great epic from a disabilities perspective and problematize its representation of the visually impaired monarch.

The *Mahabharata* has been often described as the compendium of ancient knowledge and legend of India. The plot of this great epic revolves around the story of two warring families with contending claims to the throne of Hastinapur. The conflict

primarily centers around the figure of Dhritarashtra, who though the eldest son in the royal family, is deprived of his legitimate claim to be king after the death of his father as he is blind from birth. His younger brother, Pandu, is coronated in his place. Given the arbitrariness with which Dhritarashtra is not allowed to ascend the throne of Hastinapur, it comes as a matter of little surprise that disability scholars have read the story of the blind Kuru prince as a classic instance of discrimination against a person with physical impairment [See Ghai (2002), Miles (2008) and Ahmed (2013)].

There is little doubt that the *Mahabharata* casts Dhritarashtra in the role of the able bodied society's other and then casts him out, that is, excludes him from and denies him access to the key sites of power and privilege. The text, however, projects the denial of his legitimate claim to the throne as a much desired civilized regulation of the impaired body in the interest of social order and political stability of the kingdom. The irony, however, is that after Pandu's untimely death, Dhritarashtra's impairment apparently ceases to matter as he is installed as a kind of caretaker-monarch until the sons of Pandu are old enough to rule the kingdom. There is obviously more to the family politics of the Kuru clan than meets the 'eye'. It is, therefore, imperative to go beyond the 'apparent' and systematically deconstruct the *Mahabharata*'s constitution of a blind man's subjectivity.

Generally speaking, in the mythical universe of our ancient scriptures, the person with disability is posited as a recipient of compassion, to be treated with pity and sympathy. But it is quite evident that this is not the case with the characterization of Dhritarashtra. Though it may be argued that the *Mahabharata* in its depiction of minor characters with disabilities promotes largely charitable and benevolent attitudes towards physical impairment, at the heart of the epic there lies a concerted refusal to recognize the legitimate rights of a disabled person.

But before embarking on an ideologically sophisticated reading of the *Mahabharata*, it is imperative to outline the definition of disability that the present paper adopts. Traditionally speaking, disability has been conceptualized within a medical model which perceives the phenomena as a deviant physical condition or illness intrinsic to the individual. It is seen as a lack in the body which handicaps, that is, reduces the individual's quality of life, and causes clear disadvantages to the individual. Within such a conceptual framework, disabled people are identified with their impairments and defined in terms of the difficulties of living, which are, according to the idiom of biomedicine - the result of a dysfunctional body.

However, in the 1980s, the understanding of disability in the academia across the world underwent a sea change. The medical view that social restrictions for disabled people were a result of physical dysfunctions was replaced by a then radical understanding of the phenomenon which believed that people with impairments were disabled by a social system which erected barriers to their social inclusion.

Disability, then, is no longer perceived to be an outcome of bodily pathology: it is socially produced by systematic patterns of exclusion that were quite literally built into the social fabric. The built environment, for example, is designed for non-disabled people and the norms of construction are such that those with impairments may, as they often do, find themselves marginalised from society. To make the claim that disability is a consequence of social oppression is to challenge the medical view that the biological body is the proximate cause of disability and the ultimate cause of handicap.

In focusing on the ways in which disability is socially produced, the social model has succeeded in shifting debates about disability from biomedically dominated agendas to discourses about politics

and citizenship. The social model of disability, in this way, breaks the link between the impaired body and the biomedical determinism, linking it with the real cause of disability, that is, discrimination and prejudice. This confrontation with biological reductionism produces a distinction which is central to the theory and politics of the disability movement. The distinction is between impairment and disability, where the former refers to biological dysfunction and the latter to processes of social exclusion. The rationale for this heuristic distinction between disability and impairment is to separate the experience of biological difference from the prejudice, discrimination and other negative social consequences that many disabled people experience. This has been of enormous value in establishing a radical politics of disability.

The *Mahabharata,* however, uses the notions of 'disabilities' and 'impairment' interchangeably, as if the two are synonymous terms conceptualizing disability within a medical model. As just mentioned, in this model, the body is rendered synonymous with its impairment or physical dysfunction. That is to say, it is defined, at least implicitly, in purely biological terms as a deficit. The *Mahabharata* deploys this discourse of medicine within its narrative to legitimize the able-ist act of denying a disabled person his rightful claim to the throne. In discursively constituting the blind king's subjectivity, the *Mahabharata* first and foremost suggests that an individual can be described as disabled simply on the basis of his or her impairment. By virtue of being blind in a place where to be blind is abnormal, Dhritarashtra is counted as disabled according to the medical definition of the phenomenon: he is perceived as having an anatomical impairment that substantially limits his major activities. Given Dhritarashtra's deviation from the biomedical norms of functioning he is deemed to be unfit to run the administration of the kingdom of Hastinapur. The text positions sight (the ability to see) as the standard against which an individual's

visual abilities should be scaled, and thereby positing a blind man as the inevitable locus of lack and inadequacy.

Dhritarashtra's story originates in the concept of the blind as being inherently incapable of running the administration of the kingdom, suggesting that the two disparate experiences are irrevocably linked. Such a conflation of impairment and lack of ability is not only factually inaccurate, but it offers a puerile conflation of two fundamentally different experiences. Unfortunately, the narrative tendency to position disability as a kind of a lack that limits the functioning of an individual has, since time immemorial, been the key governing ideological motif of able-ist discourses and the *Mahabharata* is no different.

The great epic, in fact, renders the social encounter between the blind man and the sighted world analogous to a medical one. The master text of medicine, as discussed above, is evoked to discursively constitute Dhritarashtra's blindness, but his individuality beyond his blindness is simply not acknowledged. What we witness in this story is a form of medical subjugation of a disabled person resulting in him being totally disempowered. The power that the able-bodied community of Hastinapur exercises over Dhritarashtra can be represented as a form of colonialism, to be more precise, as medical colonialism. After all, the process of becoming a blind man, in Dhritarashtra's case, in a sense means being colonized as medical territory and becoming a spectator to his own drama.

It is the contention of the present article, that the act of denying Dhritarashtra the throne is premised on the political subjugation of a socially disempowered blind man to the dictates of an able-ist society. The behavior of the able bodied community of Hastinapur is not only conditioned by belief in a negative stereotype of disability that has its roots in medical discourses; but it also exhibits an element of paternalism, a tendency that limits the disabled person's

autonomy and liberty, ostensibly in the name of his own welfare. This paternalism begins with a defective perception of Dhritarashtra's 'condition', because it superimposes the normative images of a blind person produced by a sighted world on a visually impaired individual. The sighted people who control the affairs of blind individuals commonly do not know blind people and do not want to. Since they cannot 'see' blind people as they really are, they make up imaginary blind people of their own, in accord with their own experiences and needs. The epic's approach to Dhritarashtra's blindness as a deviant form of corporeality, hence, underscores an able-ist unwillingness to engage in a dialogue with a disabled person revealing the text's lack of interest in articulating a disabled identity. Predictably then, the text, fails to examine what makes able-ism a unique form of power over corporeally different bodies.

The medical model, that ideologically structures the *Mahabharata,* makes no concession to the role that society plays in the production of disability and to the constructed nature of the phenomenon: it posits a body devoid of history. But, the denial of disabled person's legitimate right to the throne has a history of its own in the epic. Dhritarashtra may have been the lone physically impaired person of his generation, but he was not the first disabled person to be denied access to the crown of Hastinapur. His grand uncle Devapi, the eldest of three princes, could not inherit the kingdom because he suffered from leprosy and hence had a defective leg. According to the *Nirukta*, the *Brihaddevata*, the *Mahabharata*, and the *Puranas*, he was a Kuru prince and the eldest son of King Pratipa of Hastinapur. Though noble and well-liked, he was not allowed to succeed his father, because he was affected with leprosy. The council of Brahmins and elderly courtiers were opposed to the idea of a leper king. As a result of this, his younger brother Shantanu

succeeded Pratipa as the king of Hastinapur. The story of Dhritarashtra when linked to that of Devapi reinforces the dictum that in an able bodied society physicality determines social status. The impaired body, thus, is part of the domain of history, culture and meaning, and not as medicine would have it, an ahistorical, pre-social, purely natural object.

This line of thought challenges the instrumental, objective, pre-social view of the impaired body and carries an implicit critique of the medical model of disability. The essentialism of the medical model makes a dialogue across the ability divide unlikely and difficult. Indeed, it is only in the context of the king's visual impairment becoming an issue and a source of tension at the court of Hastinapur and its contemplation in the context of the history of Devapi that one arrives at a clear understanding of the blind king's subjectivity.

The present article, therefore, humbly submits that the impaired body in the *Mahabharata* should be conceptualized in Foucauldian terms both as an object of knowledge and as a target for the exercise of power. The various techniques and technologies of power operating within the text not only render the blind king docile, but they also simultaneously render him useful, when the able bodied community has no choice after Pandu's death. For Foucault, the human subject in modernity is constituted by disciplinary techniques of bio-power which structure, produce and optimizes the capabilities of the body (from the perspective of the dominant culture), enhancing its utility and ensuring its docility. Dhritarashtra may not be a modern subject in the Foucauldian sense of the term, but Foucault's understanding of the modern subject is of great significance in mapping out the parameters of the social construction of impairment and examining the way in which 'regimes of truth' about disabled bodies are central to their governance and control in the *Mahabharata*.

The *Mahabharata* employs numerous 'regimes of truth' to regulate the impaired body within its narrative, the most obvious being the discourse of medicine, as already discussed. The other is its strategic use of the doctrine of *karma* to legitimize and normalize its act of denying a blind man access to positions of power. Within this doctrine it was decreed that being disabled is the just retribution for past misdeeds. Most texts from ancient India discursively constitute its society as one based on the principle of justice. Within such a conception of the world, disability is understood as the result of 'wrong actions' in one's past life or the present one. Accordingly, in the *Caraka Samhita*, diseases in the present life were believed to be the result of undesirable actions in the past life [see Anand (2013)].

The philosophy of *karma* defines the general attitude towards disability, with disability perceived either as punishment for misdeeds in the past lives of the persons with disability, or the wrongdoings of their parents. The *Mahabharata* is no different. Dhritarashtra's blindness in the epic is described as being the result of his mother Ambika's indiscretion. Repulsed by the looks of Dhritarashtra's father, Vyasa, she had closed her eyes during intercourse.

Such a construction of a blind man by the sighted not only justifies the complete marginalization and disempowerment of a disabled individual, Dhritarashtra in this case, but also leads to the internalization of such negative stereotypes by impaired persons themselves. Traditional notions like that of destiny suggest an attitude of acceptance. Predictably, in the initial stages of the plot, Dhritarashtra does not come across as a disabled figure who is mad at the world because of his bodily impairment, nor does he seek revenge on the 'normals' for having denied him what is rightfully his. He is acceptable to the able-bodied community of Hastinapur largely because of his passive acceptance of the treatment meted out to him. During this phase of the story, Dhritarashtra is defined by what others think of

him. In a sense, he is deprived of the ability to create the self and is expected to submit meekly to the will of others.

However, towards the latter part of the story, traces of a struggle for emancipation from social oppression and political exclusion can be detected in Dhritarashtra's character. As the plot of the epic unfolds, Dhritarashtra protests against the dominant able-bodied culture of Hastinapur which seeks to subjugate his impaired body to different forms of able-ist regulation. His refusal to hand over the reins of administration to the Pandavas is, in effect, an attempt to produce a new politics of disablement that challenges his oppression and exclusion. Expectedly, the narrative of the text tries to diffuse this challenge.

In literature, as in life, the bodies of those with disabilities are transparent surfaces that leave their limitations openly on display; consequently, their supposed 'incapacities' render them 'most incapable' of resisting their socially and culturally bequeathed fate. Dhritarashtra, however, is somewhat different, insofar as he consciously chooses to fight the destiny scripted for him by society. Having been unjustly denied what he feels to be his rightful claim to kingship, Dhritarashtra fuels his eldest son, Duryodhana's desire to accede to the throne of Hastinapur. The epic, however, diffuses the legitimacy of Dhritarashtra's resistance to the social order by portraying his sons as the dark-hearted antagonists responsible for perpetuating the conflict with their cousins, the Pandavas (which ultimately culminates in the war of Kurukshetra). The crucial question of why and how a disabling condition precipitates Dhritarashtra's and his sons' obsessive and vengeful endeavor to keep the crown to themselves, is simply glossed over.

The able-ist ideology structuring the narrative of the *Mahabharata* always attempts to grant the non-disabled community a moral high-ground, liberating it from the guilt of having

denied Dhritarashtra access to power by underscoring the 'monstrous' character of his personality. After Duryodhana has been defeated and killed by Bheema in single combat, with a blow that is against the rules, the Pandavas go to meet Dhritarashtra. In the place of Bheema, Krishna craftily introduces the blind king to an iron statue. He seizes the statue, and in a fit of anger, crushes it in his embrace, believing that he has killed Bheema. Only after the rage has passed does he realize that he has destroyed not Bheema, but merely a statue.

By underscoring the malevolent side of Dhritarashtra's character after the battle of Kurukshetra, the *Mahabharata* reinforces, in exaggerated fashion, a common prejudice against disabled people. It suggests that disability involves the loss of an essential part of one's humanity: a disabled person resents the non-disabled, and would, if he could, destroy them. But the historical and contemporary reality is that the non-disabled have, from time to time, endeavored to destroy those with deformities. It therefore would be advisable to read the above scene as a subtle able-ist maneuver to transfer the hostile fantasies of the stigmatizers on to the stigmatized, a way of disowning any trace of culpability in these discriminatory practices by blaming the victim and making them responsible for their own ostracism. Disability has been portrayed in texts as a melodramatic device that associates it with malevolence - the deformity of body symbolizing the deformity of souls, corporeal difference being made into emblems of evil. And the *Mahabharata* is no different.

Interestingly, the feelings of anger and bitterness experienced by Dhritarashtra and his children towards the Pandavas are further fuelled by their orthopedically impaired ever-scheming maternal uncle, Shakuni. Endowed with extraordinary skills of trickery at the game of Dice, the wily uncle, along with Duryodhana, comes across as the root cause

of the subsequent great war of Mahabharata. The fact that Shakuni's desire for revenge is born out of the treatment meted out to his blind brother-in-law by the members of the latter's very own family is conveniently ignored. However, what is most disconcerting about the narrative is its rather contrived and unnatural insistence on the parallel between Shakuni's limp and his devious mind, that is, between his physical impairment and a negative trait of human personality. The text's attempt to inevitably and inexorably link the two facets of Shakuni's identity reinforces the old and rather perverse dictum that an unsound body cannot have a sound mind.

Many other sacred scriptures of ancient India subscribe to the above belief. In the *Ramayana*, for example, queen Kaikeyi, while referring to her hunchbacked maid Manthara observes:

Kane khore kubre kutil kuchali jaani
(One should treat the blind, lame, hunchback and dwarf as evil and treacherous.)

Disabilities, in our myths and legends, have always provided an outward sign of monstrous inhumanity. In fact, our ancient scriptures tend to rely heavily on disabled characters in their artistic representations of the darker side of human personality.

The *Mahabharata's* representation of disability as a metaphor for the inherently evil is neither unique nor a radical departure from the traditional narrative practices of contorting the disabled bodies of its literary creations. Even in the *Ramayana*, the crisis of the plot, the fourteen year long banishment of Lord Rama is brought about by the instigations of Manthara. In both the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, the disabled body comes across as an important means of artistic characterization, allowing the narrative to privilege something amiss or 'tragically flawed' in the very biology of an embodied character.

The metaphorical deployment of disability in the above terms is quite revealing, because the connection it makes between quite disparate experiences evokes meanings that shape normative perception and identity of persons with disability, which, to say the least, are negative. As Susan Sontag (1989) has commented, "Of course, one cannot think without metaphors. But that does not mean there aren't some metaphors we might well abstain from or try to retire" (p. 5).

However, the *Mahabharata* does not restrain itself from deploying the metaphor of disability negatively. Images of disability have often been used as metaphors for pain and illness. But in the great epic, Dhritarashtra's impaired body underlines the pervasiveness of dependence in a blind man's life. Despite being central to the plot, he remains deeply dependent throughout the narrative: on his wife, his sons, and his advisors. His blindness symbolically captures his inability to make his own decisions and his dependence on the judgment of his advisors. The conflict in the *Mahabharata,* then, hinges on one key factor—Dhritarashtra's incompetence as a king as he is blind, both physically and metaphorically. He is in effect a king who experiences statecraft only via his advisors.

Many may regard the current paper's analysis of the representation of disabilities in the *Mahabharata* as too simplistic and based on a rather uncritical able-disabled binary and on the model of unilateral oppression. True, the issue of power, agency and resistance is indeed one that many scholars, particularly those working in the field of postcolonial theory have examined through more ideologically nuanced theoretical models. Bhabha, for example, in exploring the cultural and political issues associated with the liminality of the nation-state, stresses that it is important to identify those in-between moments that initiate new sites of identity, new collaborations, and new conflicts over identity. Rather than

look for overt signs of protest and conflict around issues of "oppression", he focuses on the study of the production of "hybridity", "mimicry", and "sly civility" as forms of ambivalence generated by dominating discourses of hierarchy, marginalization and normalization. This ideologically nuanced theoretical formulation suggests that such a binary and essentialist approach to identity is conceptually flawed, inconsistent, and has undesirable moral and political consequences.

From the above, it may be argued just as a white/non-white divide is theoretically inadequate for conceptualizing race or ethnicity, the disabled/non-disabled divide is also deeply problematic and conceptually limited. However, the present article believes that the categories of race or ethnicity, or for that matter, other forms of cultural oppression cannot serve as the standards against which discrimination based on disability can be measured or operate as the blueprint through which it can be understood. Moreover, disability studies may not necessarily find such a complex and subtle approach to power fruitful as it subtly obscures the political effectiveness and the psychologically affective elements of dominant discourses. There are, of course, major differences between the experiences of race and ethnicity and that of disability, which also need to be incorporated into the current discussion. As Tom Shakespeare has noted, the vast majority of people in postcolonial contexts share ethnic identities with their family members, whereas, the vast majority of disabled people are the only members of their families who have that identity. The present paper's approach to the issues of power, agency and resistance is therefore markedly different from the sophisticated theoretical understanding of forms of domination and alterity espoused by Bhabha and other postcolonial scholars.

There is no denying the fact that postcolonial critical and cultural practice has a much more nuanced approach to identity than is

evident within disability studies. A great deal of disability studies still reproduces the disabled/non-disabled divide. Within postcolonial discourse, people often position themselves somewhere in-between or outside the binary categories of race, and this positioning is fluid and contextually dependent. Their ambiguities and contradictions may lead to hybrid identities, ambivalences, and forms of domination and resistance existing beyond the binary. But this is simply not possible in the case of disabilities because a person is either disabled or non-disabled. An in-between hybrid space does not at all exist.

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The Tale of a Folk Song:
Glimpses of Folklore Studies in Colonial Karnataka[1]

Vijayakumar M. Boratti

Contemporary Perceptions of the Ballad

The concept of 'living' tradition has gained a wide currency in the contemporary folklore studies in Karnataka and it is attributed to ever-existing folklore. It is put forward as both supplementary as well as alternative to several other concepts such as 'desi' (native), 'Upa-Sanskriti' (sub-culture). This 'living' tradition embodies "true" characteristic of the soil in which songs such as Halagali Beda was born. Advocating this aspect enthusiastically, Kalegowda Nagavara and H.C. Boralingaiah, who are known for their engagement with folklore for long time, try to retrieve folk songs of tribal communities in Karnataka in a compilation namely *Girijana Kavya* (The Poetry of Tribal People, 2000) and project them as counter to mainstream/ hegemonic culture represented in the Ramayana or the Mahabharata. They take up issues with contemporary theorists of *desi* culture[2] and criticize the notion of "vismriti" (amnesia) which is employed to describe the process of forgetting folklore[3] of India. Both hold the Vaidik notion of culture, besides colonialism, is

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[1] This article was first presented in the International Conference on *Dalit Literature & Historiography: Resistance and Reconstruction* held at the English department of Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi from 19th to 21st December 2013. I thank the participants for their useful comments on my presentation, especially Prof. Harish Trivedi's interventions, who chaired the session.

[2] The terms folk and *desi* are used interchangeably sometimes.

[3] The proponents of this notion blame colonialism and western notion of culture as responsible for amnesia.

primarily responsible for amnesia, if there is one as such. Nevertheless, they do not believe that there is any kind of amnesia. They hold that it is only for the cultural theorists and folklore scholars that amnesia has been bothering. To corroborate this, they have compiled hundreds of folk songs, collected from different parts of Karnataka, which they believe are representatives of 'living' tradition of the tribes. In tune with the intention of the compilation, the folk songs are collected from the tribes belonging to different regions of Karnataka[4]. The motivating force to collect and publish these songs is that they are not part of mainstream culture which is representative of the Vaidik culture. Besides, elements of anti-Vaidik feelings inherent in these songs are highlighted in the compilation so much so that the entire compilation is projected as a strong critique on Hindu culture and tradition. Bedas, as a tribal community, are given sufficient space in the compilation. One of the songs representing the history of the Beda community is the ballad of Halagali Bedas which was collected for the first time by Fleet. This song is placed alongside other songs of the community. But this is the only song which is included as a representative of the Beda community's history in Karnataka. The contents of the song, which will be discussed later, give ample historical details about the Bedas' rebellion against the British.

The second entry point for us to understand the contemporary representation of the ballad is related to the community itself. Of recently, the Bedas, the hunters in traditional sense and the tribal community in the records of the contemporary census, have become political force to reckon with in Karnataka. Priding themselves as the descendents of Valimiki, the great saint in ancient India who wrote the Ramayana, the Bedas have gradually begun

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[4] These other tribal communities are Kadu Gollas, Lambanis, Alemari Kurubas, Gondas, Halakki Okkaligas, Eravas and Adavi Chuncharu.

to construct their identity culturally and historically. Many social and cultural organizations have emerged to fulfill their cultural agenda of constructing glorious and heroic history of their community in which the ballad of Halagali Bedas constitutes an important place**.** In another edition on the history of Bedas' history and culture, D.B. Karadoni enthusiastically recalls the ballad to proudly document the fight of the Halagali Bedas against the British[5].

Beyond the community, the Kannada literati have examined several issues related to the Bedas' culture and folklore of which the "heroics" of the Halagali Bedas's revolt against the British is glorified. It is understood diversely by different Kannada scholars. While, for a few folklorists, it is one of the foremost evidences of 'living' folk tradition (Kalegowda Nagavara and H.C. Boralingaiah, 2000) which has been surviving the test of time, for scholars like M. M. Kalburgi such songs epitomize a sense of revolt and seeds of freedom movement in Karnataka. Both conceptions privilege the song and consider it as containing "genuine" cultural history. In league with such conceptualization, a drama *Halagaliya Bedaru* (Bedas of Halagali, 2009) written by Kyatanahalli Ramanna reinforces the nationalist dimension attributed to the song.

A lacuna in such conceptualisations is the absence of critical and analytical approach to this ballad. They leave many questions unanswered which are related to nuances of collection, compilation, publication, narration, transcriptors, problems and challenges of transmitting oral folksongs into written scripts, etc. This point acquires significance as the two editors, mentioned above, load tribal songs with terms like living, genuine, truth, beauty and freedom without focus on the dynamics of orality into written. The second point is related to the silence of the compilers about the historicity

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[5] "Britishara Viruddha Halagali Bedara Pratibhatane", (The Protest of the Halagali Bedas against the British, 2008).

of the ballad. There is no trace of what structured the collection and publication of the ballad in colonial period. The ballad of Halagali Bedas has historical significance as it was collected by J.F. Fleet who carried the "burden" of orientalism and colonialism on his shoulders. It throws light on when it was collected; why it was necessary to collect; who pioneered such collections; how such collections were accomplished; and within what framework they were represented to the readers (both foreigners and Indians). A cursory look at the ballad in colonial and post-colonial period reveals similitude of judgment with regard to "genuine" and "real" feelings of the folk. But the contexts, purpose and discourse of folklore studies in both time-periods offer a different structural basis, as briefly discussed in the above.

Structuring Parameters: Folklore and Colonialism

The ballad of Halagali Bedas is part of a series of ballads collected by Fleet who published them in *Indian Antiquary* between 1885 to 1890. Generally, the first stage in the historiography of folklore studies in colonial Karnataka is traced back to him[6]. It was Fleet who elevated Kannada folklore to a systematic and scientific analysis and introduced it to the western readers. He was the product of his era. The larger western discourses of folklore, ethnography and history of his times shaped his intellectual adventures. As such, a common pattern of folklore scholarship can be traced and this can be broadly categorized into four constituents:

1.   European nationalist idea of folklore provided the necessary framework for the European colonialists in India to replicate the

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[6] But such historiography suffers from heavy dose of linearity. Critical assessment or any effort to place history in the context of wider issues is conspicuous by its absence in it. There is no scope for critical engagement with this stage.

collection of folklore as colonialism spread its wings gradually in the later half of the 19th century.

2.   The post-1857 colonial state, after 1857 revolt in the north western provinces, needed a better understanding of the rural populace and its mind. The advocates of folklore scholarship in this period felt that collections of folklore would reveal the "mind" of the people. The idea of revealing "depths of popular beneath" (Long, 1874: 340**)** and bring out its authenticity is discernable in such approaches[7]. In a similar vein, R.C. Temple, another scholar-administrator, started a journal *Panjab Notes and Queries* in 1880s for "systematic collection of authentic notes and scraps of information regarding the country and the people"[8]. His remarks assume importance as they reinforce the "diglossic" (Stuart Blackburn, 2004: 122) divide between writing and speech.

3.   Preserving the purity and originality of Indian folklore in "critical and unimaginative age" (Mary Frere, 1897: 14)[9] was another propelling factor. A sense of moral duty was felt by the British folklorists to preserve the "real voice" of the natives in the changing world ushered in by the British colonialism. Beginning from Mary Frere to Rev. Long, it was seen as a practically moral duty of the British colonisers to collect, protect, preserve and sort the data that their own "civilizing" presence in India was displacing. Such an approach led to the reinforcement of yet another dichotomy i.e. modern versus traditional.

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[7] Charles E. Gover, who collected the Kannada folk songs in 1871, too echoes the same. He writes in the introduction to *The Folk Songs of Southern India* that the folk songs are "irrefragable evidence of the real feelings of the mass of the people" (1871: vi)

[8] Quoted by Thomas H. Thornton in his article "The Vernacular Literature and Folklore of the Panjab (1885).

[9] *Old Deccan Days or Hindoo Fairy Legends* (1897)

4.   The phenomenon of a thorough study of non-Brahmin vernacular literatures gripped the pursuit of folklore scholarship. Much of the oriental or Indological scholarship of the 19th century had privileged the written, classical heritage of India. This was virtually Brahminical and Sanskritic in its scope. But gradually there arose a group of British scholars who strongly advocated a thorough study of non-Brahmin vernacular literatures. Starting from Sir Walter Elliott (1830s) to Rev. Long to Charles E. Gover in the 1870s and 1880s, there was a conscious effort to highlight the popular literature or folklore of the non-Brahmins. In contrast to mysterious, classical and written texts, folk lore was constructed as the true mouthpiece of "real feelings" of the masses (rural, tribal and non-Brahmin) and *accessible* by anybody. It virtually rendered a new meaning to folklore as being non-Brahmin and sometimes "anti-Brahmin"[10].

The Ballad of Halagali Beda and Fleet's Interpretation

The ballads published by Fleet were of recent in origin and they narrate the 19th century anti-British revolts and several kinds of hardships of the villagers in the northern Karnataka. Prompted by their popularity among the natives, their historical, linguistic significance and important details about the British administration, Fleet studied them to understand what they held for the British government. Did Fleet echo the general alertness on the part of the British administrators about popularity of folksongs which glorify favorite heroes who fought the British? Did this alertness shape the interpretative exercises of Fleet?

Fleet gives a list of ballads sung by "the lower orders of the people" (Fleet, 1885: 293). Of the eighteen ballads collected, only five ballads are translated and published by him in the five volumes

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[10] Stuart Blackburn in"The Burden of Authenticity: Printed Oral Tales" (2004).

of *Indian Antiquary*. He chose the five ballads for translation as they have been "constantly been matters of general interest, which have engrossed the attention of large classes of the community, and have been commemorated in songs that still endure" (Fleet, 1885: 293). Each narrative in the ballads has its own historical background which is adequately outlined by him.

The song of Halagali Bedas is described by him as the resurrection of the Bedas of Halagali in connection with the Disarming Act. The first uprising against the British was evidenced at Halagali (Mudhol taluk of Bagalkot district). The British proclaimed the Disarming Act of 1857 whereby men possessing fire arms had to register them and secure a license. To protest against this law, the Bedas and other armed men from the neighboring villages of Mantur, Boodni and Alagundi assembled at Halagali. The administrator reported the matter to Major Malcolm, the Commander at the nearby army headquarters, who sent Col. Seton Karr to Halagali. The Beda insurgents, under the leadership of Jadaga and Balya did not allow the British to enter Halagali. There was a fight during the night. On the other side Major Malcolm came with his Regiment from Bagalkot, a district in the present day Karnataka. In the subsequent events, his army set fire to the village. This destruction is graphically depicted in the ballad as such,

(With a change of metre),—No one was
left; the whole village was plundered. They
entered (*every*) house and searched; (*all*) the
grain and cattle was destroyed. The little
infants died; they set fire (*to the place*), (*and*)
the village was burnt. See how! on that same
day, (*everything*) was destroyed; I myself assure
you of this (Ballad on Halagali Bedas. Italics original. Translation
by Fleet, 1887: 359)

The following narration of events in the ballad describes the violence and cruelty unleashed on the villagers by the British army. At the end of the revolt, many insurgents including Jadaga and Baalya were arrested and hanged at Halagali in December 1857[11].

Though European romanticism did lurk behind Fleet's collections, he was unromantic about their contents. He presents the insurgency of Halagali Beda as instances of "influence of generations to the lawlessness that had prevailed under native rule" (Fleet, 1885: 293)[12]. Neither does there seem to be any 'romantic' or 'revivalist' aspirations on the part of the narrators or those who collected ballads for Fleet. They were either illiterate villagers or lower level school teachers who copied ballads for Fleet. Fleet paid considerable time to collection of ballads during his *leisure* time. He made arrangements for singing the ballads in the place where he stayed "after dinner in the cool of the evening" (Fleet, 1885: 294). The villagers, notwithstanding "anti-British" elements in the ballads, came out of the village and gathered around Fleet's tents "to sit round under the trees and enjoy what was going on" (Fleet, 1885: 294). The singing, hearing, copying and collecting the ballads, thus, removed historical context of the Bedas' insurgency and they were conditioned by Fleet's academic enthusiasm, singers' narrative skills and listeners' spirit to enjoy the ballads.

Historical Reasons for Translation

Fleet's collection and translation of the ballads exhibit different reasons other than the theory of post-1857 revolt. While the ballads of Sangolli Rayanna[13], Halagali Bedas and income tax are important

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[11]. Fleet published this ballad in "A Selection of Kanarese Ballads" in *Indian Antiquary,* (1887).

[12] "A Selection of Kanarese Ballads" in *Indian Antiquary (*1885).

[13] Sangolli Rayanna was a trusted lieutenant of Chennamma, the queen of Kittur (a town in present-day Belagaum, a district in north Karnataka) who fought the British in 1824

for Fleet to gauge the "turbulent" sentiments of the natives, the ballads of Iravva and Sangya were useful for understanding "Native domestic life" (Fleet, 1890: 415). Under the spell of scientific folklore, Fleet uses the occasion to highlight the differences between facts and fiction in the ballad. It seems to be an extended task of Fleet's obsession with "scientific" epigraphy and chronology. Separating historical facts from exaggerations would also indicate the differences of opinion between the British "official" records and the native "genuine emotions". Fleet does not hesitate to correct the "factual" errors in the ballads with the help of historical/official records available in the offices of the British government. Before giving the summary of each ballad, he gives details from official record about the incident and indulges seriously in correcting certain historical aspects. For example, in the ballad of "The Bedas of Halagali", Hebalak-Saheb (William Henry Havelock, the Districk Magistrate of Belagaum, who was sent to bring the Bedas to agree to surrender their arms) is killed by Jadaga, one of the insurgents. Before killing the officer, Jadaga outpours his anger,

Seventh Verse:-Says Jadaga,—"shoot him
now, he [Henry Havelock] is a traitor; betraying (*our)* trust,
he is beguiling (*us*) with (*sham*) confidence;
by false pretences he takes away much terri-
tory, (*and will be*) in the future an object of
dread to us;" and, so saying, he fired
but a single bullet, and the gentleman fell dead"
(Ballad on Halagali Bedas. Italics in original. Fleet's Translation, 1887: 358).

Jadaga's anger at the British officer is justified by killing the latter. However, Fleet considers such narrations as pieces of exaggeration and factually incorrect. He thinks that such exaggerations creep into the ballads for the purpose of increasing the reputed power of the insurgents. He corrects this exaggerations

by the fact that Henry Havelok was not killed. He continued in the service up to the 1st November 1876.

In Defense of the British

Being a civil-servant of the British government, Fleet finds an excuse to air his political ideology of justifying the British policies of administration and law. In his belief, the natives are rustic and they do not possess any sense of law or obedience. The insurgents, as illustrated in the ballads, are seen as anti-British law but not as somebody waging a war for any political freedom or for ideological triumph[14]. To put it in the words of Gloria Goodwin Raheja, "people were seen as rebelling against British rule, not for political or ideological reasons, but because they were by nature predisposed to turbulence" (1996: 504)[15]. In this connection, Fleet finds an excuse to justify the presence of the British in such "lawless" land and "disobedient" nation. He defends that such people had to be brought into habits of obedience to constituted authority and of mutual peace and goodwill. In tune with this aspect, he highlights that the singing of ballads by the villagers, which contain information about their heroes, were not antagonistic to the British government and its enforcement of law. Moreover, he holds, the ballads were never intended for European ears but to remember their favorite heroes and to entertain themselves.

Tribal or Caste?

In the post-colonial period, the Bedas are returned as tribal community in the census. But their social status in the colonial period

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[14] In this connection, I differ from M.M. Kalburgi who interprets the ballads of *Sangolli Rayanna* and *Halagali Bedaru* as the literature of freedom struggle. For his views on these ballads see his article "Fleet Sangrahisida Swaatantrya Samarada Laavani Saahitya" (1997).

[15] "Caste, Colonialism, and the Speech of the Colonised: Entextualisation and Disciplinary Control in India" in *American Ethnologist*, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 494-513.

was different. In accordance with general notion of the Europeans about the existence of caste among the Hindus, the Bedas are designated as constituting a caste. Ethnographical description of this community by Edgar Thurston and Rangachari (1909) discovers the presence of caste hierarchy and restrictions among the Bedas. Much before this, in the records of Fleet too, we find Bedas as part of a Hindu caste system. He offers many details about the Beda community in the region where he collected the ballad. Given the location of the Bedas in villages and towns as soldiers, poliagars (small chieftains), their traditional profession and names in the ballad such as Hanama, Rama which are akin to the characters in the epic Ramayana, he considers them as belonging to low caste and as having "turbulent disposition". They are also portrayed as dacoits and robbers who indulged in any mischief. However, such portrayals should not mislead us as later surveys and sketches (Castes and Tribes of Southern India, 1909) portray them as followers of different professions like carpentry, agriculture, blacksmith, etc. They had just begun adapting themselves to the new political and administrative system of the British. The song of Halagali Beda, thus, presents itself not as a "traditional refusal" (Blanc: 2009)[16] but as a "modern" reaction of the singers to the British regime in a small village called Halagali. It refers to the working of colonial institutions, the decisions taken by the British authorities and reactions of the natives. It can be seen as the response of the native people to colonization. Rightly demonstrated by Claudine Le Blanc, such ballads are "expressions of a subjectivity which has probably to be acknowledged as a form of modernity" (ibid)**.** Despite this**,** the dominant discourse constituting folklore studies in the contemporary Karnataka is in terms of dichotomous

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[16] Claudine Le Blanc quotes Ranjit Guha while discussing Fleet's ballads employs his terms (2009). See her original article in French "Temps de Malheur" Et Destins Desastres. Echos de la colonization Britannique Dans Les Ballades Collectees Par John Faithfull Fleet au Karnataka".

categories such as tradition versus modernity; oral versus written, colonial-pre-colonial firmly entrenched by the British folklorists.

Nationalism and romanticism of the European folklore scholarship in colonial Karnataka were mired in local compulsions, contexts and pressures of colonial times. This fact in the contemporary folklore studies is neglected while tracing the history of folklore either in Karnataka or elsewhere. And it has led to reinforcement of colonial categories such as "genuine", "depth of popular beneath", "real voice" and "untouched tradition". In more than one sense, hence, the contemporary folklore studies are colonial. This only enhances the need for a critical historiography of folklore in the present times. The foregone discussion has made a small attempt to offer it. Yet, this small piece on the ballad can end with several questions in mind. They can also be part of any comprehensive study of contemporary portrayal of folk songs which have historical significance. What did the song hold for the singers? What meanings they attributed to it as they sang? What was the attitude of the people (elite, middle class, etc.) towards such folksongs who did not sing them? Should we restrict Fleet as somebody who was solely interested in "disciplining" the popularity of folksongs and an administrator who was solely interested in disciplining the Bedas? Can we understand the contemporary tribal status of the Bedas as rejection of 'caste theory' of the colonial period? The trajectory of ballads such as Halagali Bedas over the century can give us glimpses of the transition of the Beda community itself and the history of several tribals which are now becoming part of mainstream culture gradually.

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Sainghinga and His Times: Codifying Mizo Attire

The cultural diversity that is India is often showcased through a costume that is regarded as traditional or typical of a state or a community. Parades at Republic Day festivities and other cultural events are the prime arenas where the diversity is displayed by the State. Mizos are often represented and recognized by a woman wearing the *puanchei* and the *kawrchei*, with a headgear known as the *vakiria*. The bamboo-dance or *cheraw,* wherein the costume is worn by the female dancers is often an extension of that representation. *Puan* is a generic term for all sarong-like wrap-arounds while *kawr* can refer to either a shirt or a blouse. *Chei* literally means 'decorated', but in *kawrchei* and *puanchei* it lends the ensemble a distinctive pattern[1] primarily in red, black, and white with a dash of greens, blues and yellows in intricate designs. Although *puan*s these days come in different colours and designs, some new, some considered 'traditional', the *kawrchei* and the *puanchei* are what the Mizos are typified by. While the blouse or the *kawrchei* is today only worn at such traditional show-casing, the *puanchei* or the traditional sarong is still worn at weddings by the bride as well as family of the couple. It is also worn on other festive-cum-religious occasions. The puan today is also worn by men (although at a shorter length than women), but more rarely,

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[1] Patterns on the *puanchei* have specific names such as l*enbuangthuam, sakeizangzia*

and only in informal settings, or at cultural performances. Even as female attire seems to have taken the front seat in recent times as ways to represent the Mizos, the discourse on dress in the initial years, as we will see was an extremely male-oriented enterprise.

Literature on the history or anthropology of clothing shows that this discussion is not new to the Indian context and some of the debates are also partially relevant for the Northeast. It may be briefly pointed out that the intersection between

Young Mizo girls at a cultural show in Aizawl[2]

colonialism and anthropology in the late 19th and twentieth century did bring out for the colonialists, and in the case of the Northeast too, the significance of clothes, or its lack, as 'frames through which people were understood', as 'badges of identity' and, in their presentations in museums as representations of 'ossified identities'.[3] To put it simply, people were typified or categorised through the clothes they wore or did not wear.

The historical literature on clothing has also focused not only on the changes in clothing over time, but also in its symbolic associations. Cohn's work, explores, through dress, the 'wider relationship between the British ruler and the Indian ruled during the colonial period'.[4] Tarlo, on the other hand, addresses what she

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[2] Collection Denghnuna

[3] Emma Tarlo, *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India,* Chicago, 1996

[4] Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its forms of knowledge,* Princeton, 1996

calls the 'problem of what to wear', i.e. the issue of why people make certain clothing choices. Turner had coined the notion of 'social skin' establishing clothing as a subjective and social experience. Because of its duality as touching the body and facing the world outside, according to Turner, clothing 'invites us to explore both, individual and collective identities'. There is therefore a subjective and social experience of dress, which informs one's choice of clothing. Tarlo explored this further to show that what one wore depended on one's sartorial affiliations, i.e. where one believes one is coming from and whether one wants to affiliate with that or not; moreover, the subjectivity arises due to perceptions of clothing as extension of oneself (for instance, this is shown when we say a particular kind of attire is not 'me'); finally, its receptivity can also be subjective. The article draws from these insights in not only presenting a historical trajectory of that change for the Mizos, but also in trying to understand how the choices of today in terms of how a community decides on what to wear, came to be. It seeks to show the subjectivities involved in the much taken for granted costume of the Mizos.

Attire or clothing in Mizoram, as elsewhere too, is not just 'dress' or 'clothing'. For one, the *puan* or the sarong is also an item through which authority is attempted to be imposed. Women are usually expected to wear *puans* in church, especially when in Mizoram. More recently, the MHIP (Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl, a state-wide Woman's organization) insisted that it be worn at least once a week in government offices, although it is not necessarily followed. More importantly however, considering the mark of traditionality that is attributed to these items of clothing (especially the *kawrchei* and the *puanchei)*, they are often assumed to have existed since 'time immemorial'. An anteriority is often assumed for them. The article thus seeks to look into the history of Mizo attire and the debates surrounding it. This history is deeply

woven with the strands of colonial and missionary interventions, while the context itself enabled Mizos to express agency in sartorial self-expression. I explore two ways in which these changes have been recorded, firstly, photographs, and secondly by bringing out the debates that are found in the *Mizolehvai,* a monthly that began publishing from the end of 1902. Photographs are a very useful tool in highlighting these changes even though it was only in the late 19th century that Mizoram saw the beginnings of this kind of documentation. Interesting exchanges in the *Mizo leh vai* also show that people recognized the significance of clothing, its symbolic aspects beyond its intrinsic material value. The article thus explores through photographs these changes, but also expresses through documentary evidence the active involvement of Mizos in the changing perceptions of the self, as individuals and as a community. This engagement with clothing and its significance can however only be properly understood, if we understand the context. As the title of the article suggests, Sainghinga, who lived during the period when such significant transformations were taking place is used as a way of deciphering and understanding these changes. Let us now briefly explore Sainghinga's story.

Sainghinga and Attire

Sainghinga was born in 1899,[5] soon after the establishment of colonial rule. He died in 1990, thus living for the most part of a hundred years. If we take a political time-line of Mizoram, his life-span included the early years of the establishment of colonial rule in the Lushai Hills, the creation of the Lushai Hills district under Assam in the post-independence period, moving on to union territory status and finally statehood in 1987. His life also encompassed the period of resistance against the Indian government, which began in 1966 and ended in 1986. During the

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[5] Born on 15 Sept 1899 at Pukpui, he died on 20th March 1990.

period of this time-line, Mizos witnessed radical changes in the manner in which life-ways were constituted.

Sainghinga was born in what was then known as South Lushai Hills, just a few years after the missionaries had reduced the language into the Roman Script for the first time. Literacy, as we know, is not a mere reduction of a language to script but also a mode of life and hence its implications were to re-organise life completely for those who could access it, as well as beyond. Other changes had also come in the area of 'world-view'. His parents and grandparents had already become Christian by the time he was born, he himself being baptized in 1909.[6] However, as a family, they had to bear the brunt of their conversion and they were forced, by the chief and elders of the village, to leave their settlement and move to a village close to Lunglei, near which missionaries of the Baptist mission also resided. It was perhaps this proximity that enabled him to acquire the education that he came to have. In the secular as well as the religious Sainghinga can be seen as one who negotiated capably the changes that he and his generation encountered.

In Sainghinga we see a man who was eager to participate in the modernity brought forth by the British and his own sartorial self-expressions are an interesting aspect to this life. One of the earliest pictures that we have of Sainghinga is of him in France during the I World War, as part of the Lushai Labour Corps, wearing a uniform. In a memoir he wrote, which was published as *Indopui* he spoke about how happy he and his cohort were, in receiving these clothes. [7] Another picture of him in France sees him in winter

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[6] He was baptized on 14.04.1909 by J.H. Lorrain. His grandfather, Thangngaia had become a Christian in 1901, while his own father had become a Christian in 1905. His mother, Dosati, born in 1875 had become a Christian in 1905.

[7] Sainghinga, *Indopui 1914-1918: Mizote France Ram kal chanchin.* Aizawl, n.d. (c. 1939).

uniform, clearly signifying the importance of being seen in clothing that was not common for the then Lushai Hills.

Fig. 2 Photograph of a division of the Labour Corps in France. Sainghinga is second from right, sitting, 1917.[8]

From the 1940s to the 80s we see Sainghinga in various kinds of attire. From formal western clothing, to those that seemed to be a mix of the western and the local. The latter was an ensemble of a particular kind of puan(the *ngotekherh*, in white and black patterns), but worn to the length of the knees, rather than the ankles as is the norm for women. This was

Figure 3. Sainghinga and friends in uniform in France, 1917.[9]

[8] Figure 2. Collection Sainghinga/ Chawngpuii

[9] Figure 3. Collection Lalhmingliana and Ramthangi

worn with a shirt and a coat depending on the occasion. The latter seemed to be similar to the Scottish kilt according to AG McCall, the Superintendent at Aizawl in the 40s.

Sainghinga's adoption of this attire seems to have been the result of his constant interaction with colonial modernity at various levels of the government and his, deep sense of pride in his own background. At the cusp of Indian independence he had risen to the rank of Political Assistant and thus was the first Mizo to have reached such a position in the colonial bureaucracy. This was no mean
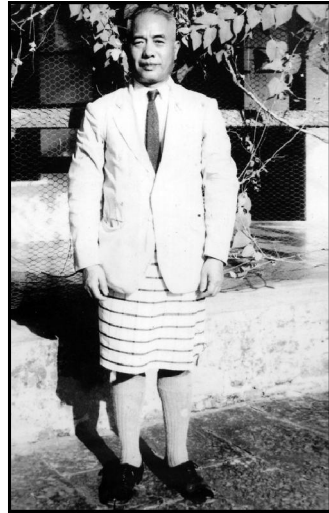
Figure 4. Sainghinga, most probably taken in the early 70s, in a puan and coat[10]

achievement for the Mizos and him in particular - he had only passed the Upper Exam (i.e. 7 years of schooling), had risen from the ranks, serving first as an apprentice clerk at Lunglei in 1915, going on to be the Head Clerk in Lunglei in 1926, and then at Aizawl, at the Superintendent's Office in 1932.[11]

Sainghinga was also a participant-observer to other transformations that came, inadvertently perhaps, due to colonial presence. These included larger macro developments whereby it became possible for the people to identify themselves as Mizo, or

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[10] Figure 4. Collection Sainghinga/Chawngpuii

[11] In 1942, he became the Political Assistant to the Superintendent, the highest official in the district. He retired in 1964. After retirement he continued to be assigned important positions such as the President of the District Aizawl Court, as well as the Liaison Officer for the Border Task Force at Zemabawk.

in other words, as a nation in the modern sense. This meant that unlike earlier times where kinship networks as well as specific settlements defined who a person was, identification was now with a wider territory and the inhabitants of that territory.[12] Settlements prior to colonial occupation had no doubt not been mono-ethnic in the Mizo case, unlike what is considered the norm for 'tribal societies,' which is supposedly marked by homogeneity. Although chiefs in the Lushai areas tended to be from a set of particular related clans, real or imagined, they nonetheless constantly waged wars against each other as access to resources for a jhum based cultivation depended on it. '*Pax Britannica*' put an end to such fighting, providing for an over-arching rule, which facilitated and helped notions of a Mizo 'nationhood'.[13]

Thus, Sainghinga's experiments or, rather, his adaptations, clearly reveal his own engagement with his context, as modern as well as traditional, as being a part of the government, but also outside of it – as one who could lend his own voice to the context in which he had been submerged. It was a means of showing the 'nationhood' of the Mizos. More importantly, however, the development that needs to be noted was the possibility of juxtaposing the idea of a 'local' with that of the Western and inscribing it on to attire. We are not sure when Sainghinga adopts the attire of a kilt for formal occasions, and a timeline for the emergence of what Mizos would call their 'traditional clothing' is unclear.

Sainghinga's story in attire can therefore be seen as a response to the colonial encounter which, in the Lushai Hills, as elsewhere meant new ways of doing things. However, the repercussions could

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[12] See for instance, Willem van Schendel, The Invention of the 'Jummas': State Formation and Ethnicity in Southeastern Bangladesh, *Modern Asian Studies,* 26 (1):95-128.

[13] See Joy LK Pachuau, *Being Mizo, Identity and Belonging in Northeast India,* Oxford 2014.

not but be more in a 'traditional' society that was far simpler in organization and technology, impacting lives in several profound ways, the most profound of course beingin that of self-perception. Essays in the *Mizolehvai* point to very engaged discussions on these transformations. Most of the debates can be subsumed within the category of what the Mizos called *changkanna* or 'self-improvement'. There were calls to be part of the new order through education, through modern medical practices, through the new faith and through abiding with the rules and regulations of the colonial government - all these aspects were incorporated as better forms of living and existence. At the same time, there were others who recognized that such transformations brought about different equations in society, and that old ways of doing things were being superseded by new ways. Thus *tunlaifing* ('wisdom of today') and *hmanlaifing* ('wisdom of old') and *changkanna* ('self-improvement') were the means through which these issues were addressed.[14] In these developments that the Mizos came to be a part of, we can see that attire becamethe means through which the changes were adopted as well as discussed. What was appropriate attire for the Mizos or what was proper clothing for them came to be an important point of discussion.The debate was initiated not only by the many actors who were part of the new context but it alsotook on different contours.Before we look into these issues, I first turn to a brief history of what has come to be known as standard Mizo attire.

A Brief History of Dress

Mizos, for reasons unexplored, did not come as much under the scanner of professional ethnographers. A few early images of the people of the Lushai Hills seem to seek to identify them through

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[14] See for example, LKS, Hmasawnna, *Mizo leh Vai*, April, 1938: 54-56, K. Bawla, Tlawmngaihna thu, *Mizo leh Vai,* April, 1935: 9-17.

clothing and as an extension, their head dress. These include the sketches by R.G. Woodthorpe as well as the photographs by Emil Riebeck. T.H. Lewin too took several images of related tribes in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. [15]
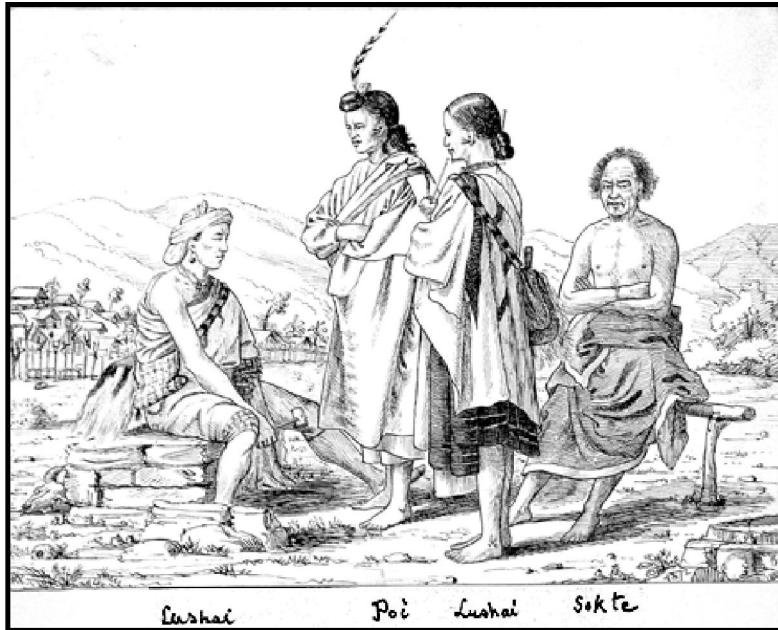

Figure 5 epictions of various tribes of the Lushai Hills[16]

A large number of photographs are also available from missionary archives. However, they are rarely focused on typecasting the Mizo son the basis of their clothing. In other words, the showcasing of the 'backwardness,' or primitiveness of the community, or giving them recognition, an identity, through clothing or its lack was not the aim; instead what we have more prominently are images of the 'transformed Mizo,' of civilization. Thus we have

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[15] For a sample of these photos see Pachuau and van Schendel, *The Camera as Witness*, Cambridge, forthcoming.

[16] The Lushai Expedition,London. 1873

several photographs of converts, of mission-workers where such changes are self-evident. From the photographs we are made aware of the various experiments with clothing that was taking place amongst those who were close to the mission. Challiana's photograph below (one of the first pastors of the Baptist Church) is a clear indication that he had fully adopted western wear, whilst there seem to be a mix of the western and the local in Figure 7 of some of the early mission workers of the Baptist Church.
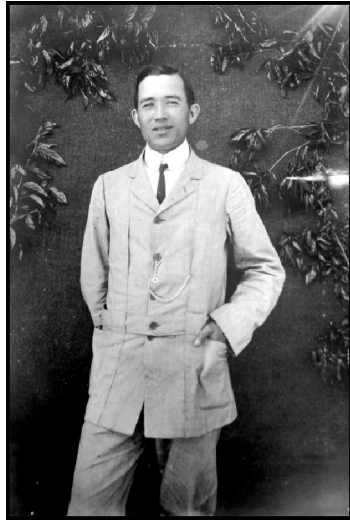
Figure 6 A dapper Challiana, early 20th century[17]

Figure 7 Some of the early mission workers[18]

[17] Collection Baptist Church of Mizoram Archives
[18] Collection Baptist Church of Mizoram Archives

From a range of a collection of photographs that I have access to, as part of a larger project, it appears that the Baptist missionaries, especially J.H. Lorrain (in Lushai Hills 1894-1897; 1903-32) played an important role, much more than colonial administrators, in recording, besides missionary work, Mizo life, having stayed in the hills for more than three decades. Mizos also took to photography, although a proper history of its incorporation and use cannot yet be told fully.[19] A combination of these two factors, that of missionary and local intervention have ensured that 'clothed men' were the focus of photo-taking, rather than say, the nude women that colonial administrator-ethnographers (elsewhere) were wont to take. Men, obviously were those who were educated first, and the photographs represented the transformation that was being brought about especially among them, inscribed on to attire.

Photographs also reveal that there was a broad difference in the way men of the mission clothed themselves in the early years as opposed to those who took up secular jobs. While both commonly wore shirts and coats, the former were also happy to be seen in the puan, while the latter incorporated trousers, and, on occasions, the felt cap as well. Soon, however, the incorporation of western attire was complete for men and it began to follow international trends. Bell-bottoms and block heels, symbols of youthful coolness of the seventies came to mark the attire for men as well as women of the seventies, who, by then, had also begun to wear trousers, especially when outside the state. An interesting aspect of this development was the self-conscious incorporation of cow-boy styles into men's attires in the 50s and 60's.

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[19] Names of early Mizo photographers include Lalhema, Vankhama and Zataia. Lalhema in fact had a store where he sold photographic equipment in the pre-independence period. Also see, Laldintluangi Tochhawng, The Advent of Photography in Mizoram, MA Thesis, National Institute of Design, Bengaluru, 2012.

Major changes were also seen in the way women transformed themselves through attire. Women also seemed to have experimented more with their clothing. Some of the early images of women we have, where the focus is on them, rather than as part of a scenery, are images of the first educated women, where the *puan* is wrapped around the person in a distinctive and purposeful manner, and then draped over the shoulders in a style that is reminiscent of a sari. The *puan*s are also designed with stripes.

Figure 8 Kaithuami, one of the first nurses in Mizoram, 1923[20]

Figure 9 The Mizo Choir, 1929

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[20] Collection Thankhumi

Another important photograph is that of the Mizo choir before their tour of North India in 1929. It was clearly an image that hoped to convey a certain sartorial confidence. Here too, the style of the women's attire is still the same, although the patterns seem to be more elaborate. By the fifties, the draping across the shoulders had been abandoned, and Mizos wore their puans shorter, more akin to a *sarong*. Meanwhile the earliest appearance of the puanchei in photographs was the 50's, which was when I was told the design as we know of it today emerged. It was most often seen at weddings and other ceremonial occasions.

Figure 10 The puanchei worn at the wedding of Lalnghakliana and Zosangi, 1959.[21]

Mizos today have specific names for the designs on *puans* and contemporary *puan*s are often seen as playing with these so-called 'traditional' designs. However, as we have seen, these so-called 'traditional designs' were clearly developed through the course of the first half of the twentieth century. Missionaries also mention the development of new designs by the girls who were educated by them.

Debates on Attire

The taking on of various forms of attire is also reflected in textual evidence and the transformations were not without its share of controversy. These debates reflect the symbolism that accompany

[21] Collection Rinmawia

clothing and attire beyond just what are deemed to be individual choices. To clothes were ascribed morality; and there always were doubts about incorporations, which were seen as moving away from 'traditional' ways of being. Attire thus reflected the social fabric of the transformations that Mizos were a part of. It also suggested that clothing was among the areas in which Mizos inscribed change, or rejected it as the case may be.

Early accounts of the colonial encounter enable us to substantiate the pictographic evidence and most such works describe the Mizos as fully clothed, as opposed to the nudity that is often imposed on so-called 'tribes'. R.G. Woodthorpe and J Shakespear who were part of the early expeditions in the 1870s, the former from the North and the latter from the South, give us useful descriptions. Both are agreed that the people wore a "large homespun sheet of cotton cloth, passed round the body under the right arm, which is thus left free, the two ends being thrown in opposite directions over the left shoulder where they are secured by a strap of tiger or otter skin, supporting a bag in which is carried a knife, a dao, tobacco, flint, steel, and other little necessaries…,"Woodthorpe described the colour and pattern on the cloth as "…generally grayish white, with a dark blue stripe running through it; but sometimes it is dark blue, with a few stripes of white, yellow, or red, or all three interwoven into it".[22] Shakespear who stayed longer in the Lushai Hills was able to differentiate and distinguish different categories of vestments, those worn in colder weather, which included what he called "a white coat, reaching well down the thigh but only fastened at the throat.

[22] RG Woodthorpe, The Lushai Expedition, 1871-72, London, 1873: 70-72. He further adds: " … The women…wear a small strip of cloth, eighteen inches deep, passed round the waist, and over this, a cloth of dark blue wrapped carefully about them, in which they carry their young children on their backs."

These coats are ornamented on the sleeves with bands of red and white of various patterns." He also noted that there was a difference in attire on ceremonial occasions between commoners and the chiefs and people who had earned titles by giving certain feasts, who wore, "dark blue cloths with red lines of a particular pattern, and plumes made of the tail feathers of the king crow, in their hair knots…those who have killed men in war have special headdresses known as *chhawndawl* and *arkeziak*…" All women, according to Shakespear wore"the same costume: a dark blue cotton cloth, just long enough to go round the wearer's waist with a slight over-lap, and held up by a girdle of brass wire or string… the only other garments being a short white jacket and a cloth which is worn in the same manner as the men. On gala days the only addition to the costume is a picturesque head-dress worn by girls while dancing…"[23] All these descriptions are confirmed by the images we have of the Mizos at the beginning of the establishment of colonial rule, suggesting that the people clothed themselves, but that their vestments were rather basic.

While the colonial government itself was the harbinger of change, it was officials of the government who initially rejected the Mizo embracing of clothing change. The official line was that of nativisation, and the mixing of attire - that of the Mizo and the non-Mizo, proved also to be a sore point for officials.In an article written by a Mizo employee of the government in March 1903, and entitled, 'What the Commanding Officer wants', the official line was stated very clearly, saying:

Mizos, giving up their customs are taking up vai customs, and this, according to him [the Commanding Officer] is highly inappropriate. It [i.e. *vai*customs] is followed in this manner: They wear vai clothes, such as the *dhoti*, or wear trousers or shoes. He

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[23] J Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans,* Aizawl, 1988.

[the Commanding Officer] says, " let them always be in their normal customs, this is the best and the most appropriate; however, they should be clean at all times…The bad customs of the vais are being copied by the Mizo, it brings no great glory to him and neither is it pleasing and it is also not what they are accustomed to; moreover clothing is so expensive and they can spend a lot of money on it."[24]

The question of hybrid dressing was addressed too in the same article. It went on to say that 'Some men with long hair tie a knot and use the two-pronged hairpins, and then they wear shoes and socks, with a *puan*/sarong. This is highly inappropriate.' The article encouraged people who worked in the offices to wear the uniforms that were sanctioned by the government while at work and when at home, to stick to local attire. Another wrote, 'Some people take great pains to dress-up; it may be beautiful. But if they [the men] wear necklaces and earrings at work places, it is highly inappropriate. What is important most of all is cleanliness.'[25] Nativising, addressing appropriateness of location, and questions of hygiene were thus addressed through clothing. Moreover, it was the colonial state that was attempting to make its inputs into codifying or sytematising local sartorial tastes.

From the point of view of the colonial state, the economic implications of this change of style was also important and it was addressed. A certain J.N. Sarma, probably a medical officer, believed that it was best for Mizos to stick to their traditional forms of clothing, saying that the acquisition of what was then called *vai* clothing (or the clothing and cloth of the plains people) made no economic sense. In May 1903, he wrote in the *Mizo leh Vai*, in the context of how Mizos could save money, saying,

[24] S.Ch.V, Kammanding sap duh zawng, *Mizo leh Vai*, 1903:8
[25] Dova, Dan Mawi Hriatna thu, *Mizo leh Vai,* Aug., 1905:10

"Mizos ought not covet clothing from the plains and then you will be able to save money… Continue to live in the ways of your fore fathers and then you will be able to save money"[26] To this end, women were also asked not to forget their weaving (1904) so that cloth from the plains would not have to be imported.[27]And yet, contradicting this early asserting clothing was one sure means for the colonial state to establish a dependent relationship with the plains. For instance, in 1905 a 'Big Market' was introduced by a Superintendent at Silchar and Mizo chiefs were invited to bring in their goods which included baskets, and other Mizo craft and cane products, which they could exchange for cloth from the plains.[28] Even in the decades that followed, advertisements for Flex shoes from the plains, as well as yarn and dyes from the plains made a recurrent appearance in the journal.[29] The shops often belonged to the people of the plains, even though a few Mizos also took up shop-keeping.

For the Mizos, the question that needed to be addressed in the area of the taking up of non-Mizo attire was the corresponding attitude that it was felt it conveyed – that of being frivolous or facetious, *lepchiah*. 'If they wore their own clothes, and if they kept it clean all the time, then there was a possibility of being considered less frivolous,' was the opinion of one.[30] Others who were in favour of changing Mizo attire such as S.Ch. V wrote, 'when Mizos say, being properly dressed is a sign of being *lepchiah,* don't you believe it'.[31]

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[26] JN Sharma, Tangka nei theina thu, *Mizo leh Vai,* May, 1903:1.
[27] Harish Chandra, Thu beng lut chanchin thar, *Mizo leh Vai,* June 1908: 77,78.
[28] Hringchar dawrpui kai thu, Feb 1905, *Mizo leh Vai,* p. 1.
[29] 'Man pek a zawrh', *Mizo leh vai,* Sept, 1907:172
[30] S. Ch. V, Kammanding sap duh zawng, *Mizo leh Vai,* Apr, 1903: 8.
[31] S.Ch. V. Bawr Shawmna Hnar, May ,1903:11

Another important discourse that wearing such clothing brought about was that of 'originality' and 'personal integrity'. It was said that many who were not even educated were taking to western clothing such that it was difficult to distinguish those who were (educated), from those who were not. Many, it was said, were taking on to wearing these clothes, without being able to 'speak a word of English or even the language of the plains'. Such people were said to be making fools of themselves. Thus, while being educated was seen as behoving a certain attire, its lack (of education) meant the opposite, and the pursuit of such attire without the necessary qualifications meant a lack of integrity, a presentation that was not deemed fitting or appropriate. Another way in which such clothing was seen to be inappropriate was when people were taking to these clothes in such a way that they were not concerned about the conditions of their own homes. Clothing was to reflect one's background, one's station in life, although not in a deterministic sense, and going against such a practice was inappropriate. It was seen as being deceptive. "Many people do this at the expense of what should be going down our throats. Our families are worried about the next meal and here we are dressing up like people who earn 500 rupees… while our own homes are as empty as escargot shells that have been sucked out …"[32]

In a fashion similar to that of those who felt that clothing should reflect the background of an individual, chiefs in the Lushai Hills also debated on an attirethat could distinguish them from the common people or the Commoners as they were called, and amongst themselves. There were a series of letters and discussions through 1925 in the *Mizo leh Vai*, sent in by

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[32] Zakhama, Mizo zirsanglo te leh mi naran tan a thupuan, *Mizo leh Vai,* July 1926:146

chiefs. Some chiefs wanted a shirt to be designed for the purpose and for others it was a shawl. Others suggested that the clothes should symbolize a distinction that they themselves recognized, that of chief's descended from 'legal' wives or concubines, chiefs who recognized particular ancestors, or chiefs that were installed by the British government. However, such a dress code for chiefs does not appear to have come about. [33]

Even as the appropriation of non-Mizo clothing had its own hill to climb and had to be overcome, we find that it was from the 30s clothing as not being merely vestments but as being a form of self-representation of a community came to be recognised. Unlike in contemporary situations, wherein so-called traditional costumes are seen as primordial and existing in the so-called ancient past of the Mizos, the constructionist aspect and the need to modify along with the times was often addressed. This can be seen when it was written that all nations, even those considered advanced, had at some point in time adapted their clothing. Similary, in the process of finding clothing to self-represent it was argued that Mizos had to adapt what was the best from other communities. A contributor to the *Mizo leh Vai* thus wrote in 1938, 'Taking from others and yet at the same time showcasing your own, that which we can distinctively call our own is something that I would like very much.'[34] By the 1950's when Nehru's call for all the peoples of India to showcase themselves in the Republic day parades to represent the diversity of India came, the Mizos had confidently bridged the gap between 'tradition' and modernity, by, at one level, showcasing themselves as 'primitive' and yet, modern.

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[33] See articles in May, June, July, August 1925 issues of *Mizo leh Vai.*
[34] Mahni hnam incheina, *Mizo leh Vai,* March 1938: 46,47

Figure 11.A choir in the 50s[35]

Figure1.2 Jawaharlal Nehru with a cultural troupe during Republic day celebrations, 1954[36]

One of the interesting things about these discussions on attire, especially in the pre-independence period was that it was men's clothing that had largely been discussed and not so much that of women. The earliest reference to the discussion on women's

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[35] Collection Rev. Dr. Zairema
[36] Collection Sangluaii

clothing comes in the 1940s when it was said that Mizo women, despite the improvements that had been made to their traditional attire , the *kawrchei*and the *kawrchei*were embarrassed about wearing them outside the state, when they had no reason to be. The author was also happy that the young Mizo women at the Welsh Mission School in Shillongwere going to school wearing a *puan*from that year on.[37] When one takes into consideration the over-emphasis on women's clothing in today's context, its inverse in the early states of non-Mizo incorporation is interesting and perhaps requires further research.

Conclusion

The attempt in this article has not been to problematise the photographic representation of a people through clothing or its lack. Rather, photographs have enabled us to underscore people's incorporation of change in attire. In the Mizo case these were tightly woven together with notions of being modern and educated, especially for men. Women, on the other hand, were made more 'traditional' despite going through the very processes of modernity. At the same time, the taking on of western clothing was not without its assumptions. For many, it was a mask, a costume, a theatrical performance, if it didn't come with the right qualifications. Clothes were, in a sense, to reflect the essence of a person. While modernizing was a theme that was recurrent in the pre-independence period, especially for the educated, notions of Mizo nationhood, emergent from the 40s came to underscore attire-making and this increasingly came to be imposed on women.

The article has not been able to trace the changes in clothing for children and this lacuna is acknowledged. Hopefully, further research in the future will be able to give a sense of the direction in which this category progessed.

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[37] Mahni Hnam Incheina, *Mizo leh Vai,* Apr 1940:52.

Contributors

Angelie Multani is Associate Professor in the Department of Humanities & Social Sciences at Indian Institute of Technology New Delhi.

Anjali Daimari teaches in the Department of English, Gauhati University. Her areas of interest include African Writing in English; Contemporary South Asian Literature; North-East Literature; Bodo life & literature. Her present area of interest is Witchcraft Studies.

Bridget Nungchensha Nungchim is a research scholar from MIMS, Manipur University.

Bhoomika Meiling is Assistant Professor, in the School of Liberal Studies, Ambedkar University, New Delhi.

Desmond L Kharmawphlang is a poet and folklorist. He teaches folkloristics in the Department of Cultural and Creative Studies, North-Eastern Hill University Shillong where he is professor. He is on the Executive Board of the Belief Narrative Network of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research and is Coordinator of the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Centre for North East India. A native of Shillong, he is also the General Secretary of North East India Folklore Association (NEIFA).

Jharna Sanyal has recently retired from University of Calcutta where she was Professor in the Department of English. Her areas of interest include Fiction, Medieval Literature, Translation Studies, Literary Theory, Victorian Literature, Colonial & Postcolonial Studies, Indian Writing in English, Post Modernism. She is currently UGC nominee as External expert for UGC-DRS SAP I programme under the Department of English, Mizoram University.

Joy L.K. Pachuau is Associate Professor at the Centre for Historical Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

K.C.Lalthlamuani is Associate Professor in the Department of English, Mizoram University. Her areas of interest include Drama Studies, African-American and Postcolonial Studies.

Kristina Z.Zama is Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Mizoram University. Her areas of interest include Culture Studies, Folkloristics and Modern Poetry.

Lalrindiki T.Fanai is Associate Professor in the Department of English Mizoram University.Her areas of interest include Linguistics, Women's Studies and Postcolonial Studies.

Margaret Ch. Zama,is Professor in the Department of English, Mizoram University, Aizawl. Her areas of research and academic interests are Fiction, Literatures from Northeast India, Tribal Studies, Translation and Cultural Studies. She is currently member of the Sahitya Akademi General Body as well as member of the Governing Body of North East Zone Cultural Centre (NEZCC).She is also founder member of the Spastics Society of Mizoram, which began in 1989 and which has since 1990 to date, been running a successful school and vocational centre for children with special needs at Aizawl.

Margaret L.Pachuau is Associate Professor, in the Department of English, Mizoram University. She won the first prize for fiction in translation, in a competition organized by Muse India in 2008 for 'Lamkhuang' (translated as 'The Jackfruit Tree') by a Mizo author, Vanneihtluanga.

Malsawmliana is Assistant Professor in the Department of History, Government T. Romana College, Aizawl. His published works

include *Political History of the Mizo and Politics of Regionalism in North East India* .

M. M. Nivargi is Associate Professor in the Department of English, Mahatma Gandhi Mahavidyalaya, Ahmedpur, Maharashtra.

Nandini Saha is Associate Professor in the Department of English, Jadavpur University Kolkata. Her area of interest lies in fictional studies. She is currently working on a project on "Salt Lake: The Fringes of Kolkata". She is also working on the translation of writings by Bengali Dalit women writers.

Nakul Kundra is Assistant Professor at DAV University Jalandhar.

Navdeep Kaur Gill is pursuing M.A. in English, at DAV University, Jalandhar.

R. Thangvunga, is Professor and Head in the Department of Mizo, Mizoram University. His area of interest includes Shakespeare Studies and Mizo Language Studies.

Sarangadhar Baral is Professor and Head in the Department of English, Mizoram University .His areas of interest include ,Modern Indian Poetry in English, Modern American Poetry, Literary Theory, Native American Literature, Eco-Criticism and Translation (Medieval Odia Poetry).

Someshwar Sati is Associate Professor in English at Kirori Mal College, University of Delhi. With a specialization in Post colonial Theory and Cultural Practices, his other research and teaching interests includes Colonial Narratives on India, the English Novel and Disability Studies. He is presently working on a book titled "India Within Quotation Marks: *Midnight's Children* and After".

Sanjeev Kumar Nath is an Associate Professor in the Department of English, Gauhati University. His Ph.D. was on the poetry of T S Eliot. His present areas of interest include African literature, folklore studies and translation studies. He has translated books from English to Assamese and from Assamese to English, and has also published a study of Assamese folktales.

Vijaykumar M.Boratti is Assistant Professor of English at University Evening College, University of Mysore.

The next issue of MZU Journal of Literature and Cultural Studies Issue III Volume III March 2016, shall focus upon writings pertaining to and about **Northeast India** within the parameters of the literary paradigm. Articles for the same may be sent by September 2015. All contributors are requested to kindly refer to the prescribed format that has been denoted in the inside back cover of the journal .The themes related to the above may be pertinent to, but not solely confined to the following:

Conflict Writing	Peace, Conflict and Media
Ethics and Conflict Studies	Identity-Based Conflicts
Verbal Expression	Memory
Cultural Traditions	Communication
Performance Arts	Storytelling
Epics	Craft
Belief Narratives	Cuisine
Religion	Trauma
Forgiveness	Witness
Life-Writing	Mourning as a Creative Strategy
Testimony	Communities
Photography	Insurgency
Music	Art

Manuscripts should be duly submitted between 3000-5000 words prepared in accordance with the latest MLA Handbook in MSWord format. Articles are to be accompanied by endnotes if any, and a Works Cited list. A brief statement from the author that the article has not been submitted for publication elsewhere will be welcome, along with the author's full address, and institutional affiliation. The above may be mailed to the following address :