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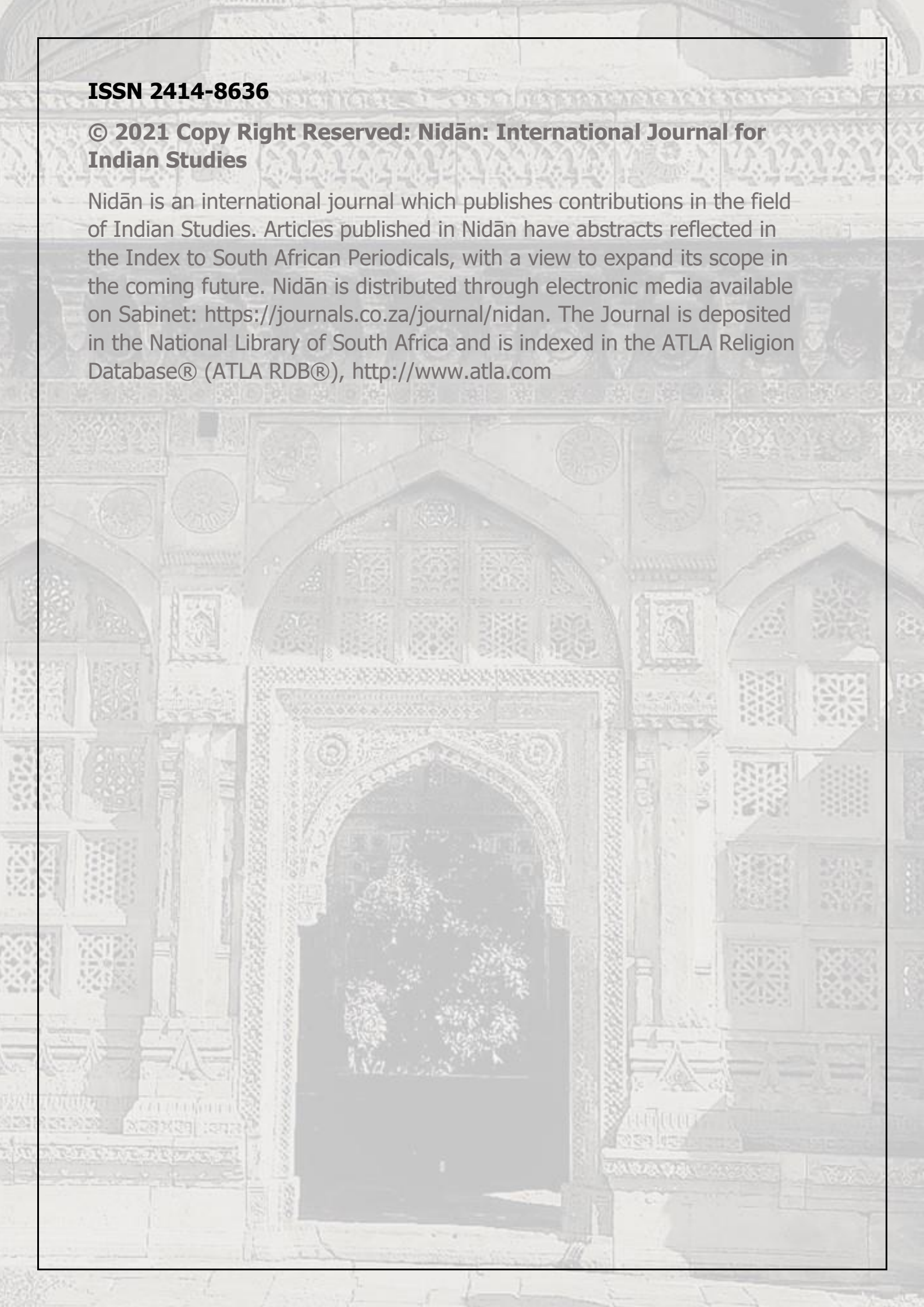

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Forward

Pratap Kumar Penumala, Editorial Advisor

It gives me great pleasure to announce the release of the July Issue of 2021 on the theme "Folklore in South Asia". At the very outset, I wish to register my apology to the readers, and members of the board for the delay in releasing the issue due to the obvious challenges the pandemic had thrown at us.

Despite the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, the authors of the papers as well as the book review authors have done everything they could, to meet the deadlines. I, therefore, take this opportunity to thank all the authors of papers and the book reviewers for their excellent contributions to this Issue. I also wish to thank the peer reviewers for their comments and helpful criticisms, and for obliging to do the work in the most difficult of times.

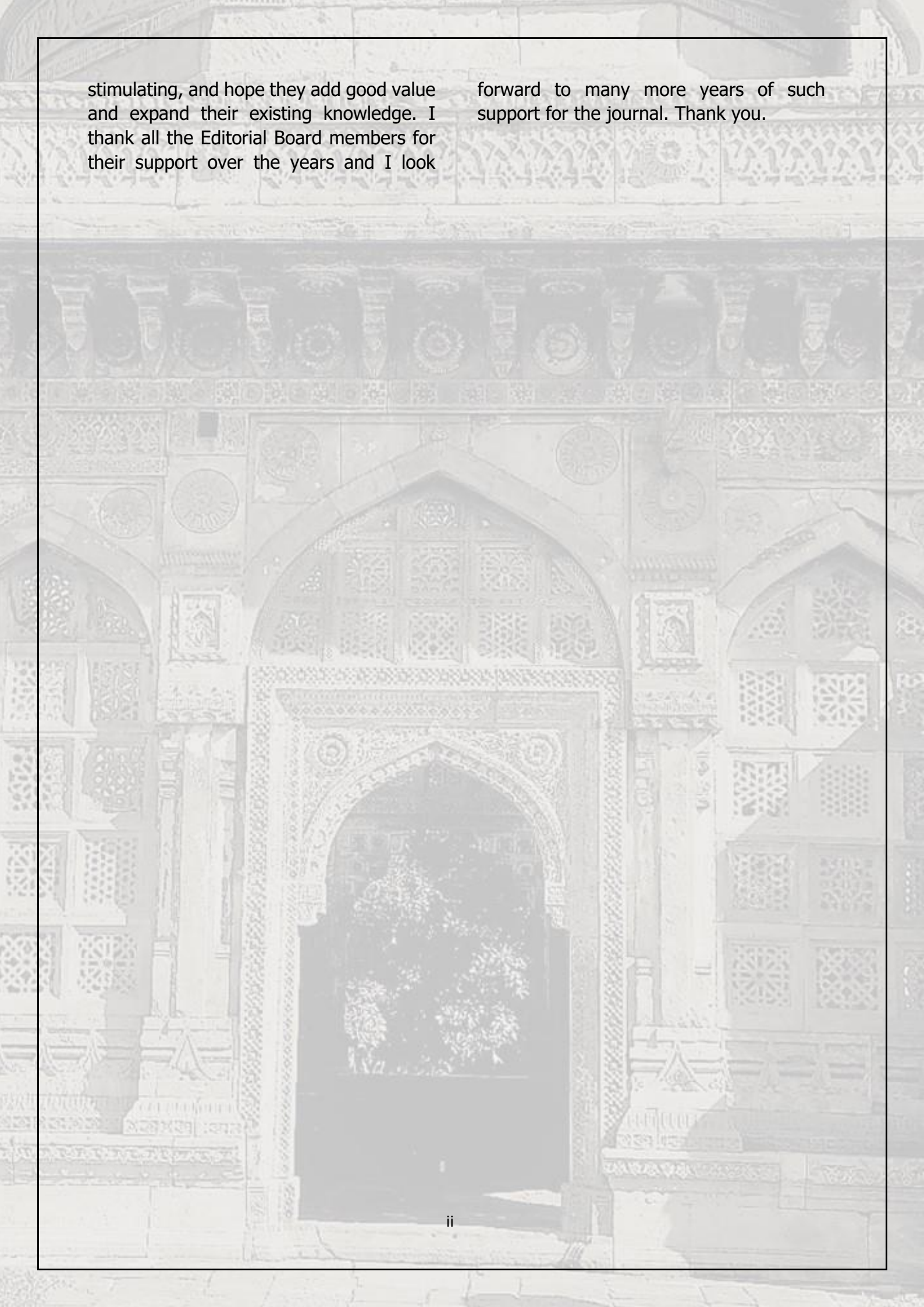
All this has been possible due to the tireless work and dedicated labour put in by our guest editor, Dr. Lopamudra Maitra Bajpai, an eminent visual anthropologist and folklorist. I cannot thank her enough for working so hard to bring this issue to fruition from start to finish—identifying these excellent scholars in the field, working with them, and encouraging them in time of challenges, and ensuring that the work is of excellent standard that meets the approval of the peer reviewers. I would seriously miss if I do not shine the light on the person behind the scenes, who is ever so gentle and a sensitive scholar, author with great eminence in her own right, Deepra Dandekar.

Both Dr. Bajpai and Deepra Dandekar struck very close bond which became evident in the manner they worked together as a team. Deepra Dandekar has so far worked with the journal as Associate Editor and remained a constant support in ensuring that not only the guest editor, but also all the authors were able to pull together as a team to produce this issue. I have always been humbled by her dedication and commitment to the editorial tasks of the journal.

From the inception of her association with the journal she has always brought new ideas and great enthusiasm to the work of the journal. So, when I say thank you Deepra, it comes from the depth of my heart. After much deliberation, it has now become apparent that Deepra Dandekar is well qualified, and equipped with the necessary skills to become the **next Editor-in-Chief of Nidān: International Journal for Indian Studies.** This is with immediate effect. The July 2021 issue will be her debut issue as the Editor-in-Chief. I shall continue as the Editorial Advisor from hence forth. I trust that the Editorial Board members will welcome her and give her the necessary support that she needs to take the journal to the next level.

Finally, I hope that the readers will find the excellent papers on the theme as well as the book reviews very illuminating and

stimulating, and hope they add good value and expand their existing knowledge. I thank all the Editorial Board members for their support over the years and I look forward to many more years of such support for the journal. Thank you.



Editorial Preface

Deepra Dandekar, Editor-in-Chief

I am humbled and excited to write this preface for Nidān: International Journal for Indian Studies as its new Editor-in-Chief. This position has not just been the result of long-standing discussions about the Journal's future between Professor Pratap Penumala and me, but it has also been the result of his faith and trust placed in me. I am very grateful for this. I hope Nidān will continue as a space for scholars exploring their intellectual ideas, as well as a space for budding academics seeking independent, intellectual feedback. Also, in this new phase, I would welcome suggestions and feedback from you, our readers, to make the Journal more meaningful and enjoyable.

My journey with Nidān has not been too long, but it has been intense. While I began as guest editor for a special issue on Christianity and Christians in India in 2019 that published many interesting papers, I progressed to Associate editor in 2020 that saw a focus on multi-religious entanglements in peninsular India guest edited by Ines Županov, combined with excellent papers on the Citizen's Amendment Act, and the activism surrounding it. With 2021 and 2022, we have taken up a new, and prolonged focus on folklore from South Asia, guest edited by Lopamudra Maitra Bajpai.

We considered the subject of folklore to have deep social relevance that has historical, literary, anthropological, and artistic potential for academics. And we are not wrong, given the overwhelming response we received. With some overlaps, we have presented a focus on gender and women in this July 2021 issue that presents readers with an academic dilemma: is folklore a feminist medium? All our papers conclude somewhat to the contrary. While folklore is sensitive to the question of gender and women's oppression in a patriarchal context, it does not oppose patriarchy *per se*. It rather provides women with solutions and the means to live within the patriarchal frame, while seeking their humanity in a system that opposes their social equality. Our papers are excellent and original, and we have enjoyed working with our contributors on these themes.

We have other new features introduced from the July 2021 issue onwards, that includes a newly designed look. Along with our book reviews – some of which run into detailed essays, we have now, added small interviews with authors, that clarify any doubts arising from the reading and reviewing process. This, we hope, will make our reviews more comprehensive. Furthermore, from the December 2021

issue onwards, we introduce a new section that will announce fresh arrivals interesting for Nidān's themes, with small descriptions written by authors that we hope, will provide their research publications with further visibility.

Finally, it is by now a truism that Covid hit us all badly. What came as a terrible surprise in 2020 with illness, deaths, lockdowns, and financial instability, is now, something, we are all gradually, but unfortunately, getting used to in 2021, even as renewed waves of the pandemic continue to hit and destabilize us. Needless to say, this has been added to by all varieties of natural, and man-made calamities. And although Covid in its myriad avatars is likely to continue into the next years till all of us are abreast with vaccinations and medication, a small voice inside me nevertheless grows in resilience. We will become stronger, as we survive, struggle-on, work, and learn, despite obstacles, to find creative happiness and expression. But yes, the July 2021 issue was obviously difficult for Nidān, with some of our contributors almost untraceable during the second wave of the pandemic in India. I take this opportunity to thank all our contributors from the bottom of my heart for being patient with us, and soldiering on with Nidān, as the July 2021 sees the light of day. I am grateful to Lopamudra for her hard work, solidarity, good humour, intelligent insight, and perseverance that in addition to the Covid crisis in India, saw her struggle with a painful tennis elbow that almost incapacitated her. Finally, I am eternally grateful to Pratap for being a staunch and dependable friend, mentor, and guide. I want to specially recommend his contribution to this July 2021 issue, as he continued editing our texts amidst the terrible riots that raged in Durban.

All this has been a tremendous, and fantastic achievement for Nidān, and I end by sending across warm wishes for all our health, well-being, and prosperity throughout the rest of the late summer and autumn months – a breather till we resurface with our next Nidān December 2021 issue!

Introduction, Gender and Folklore

As the journey continues against all hurdles!

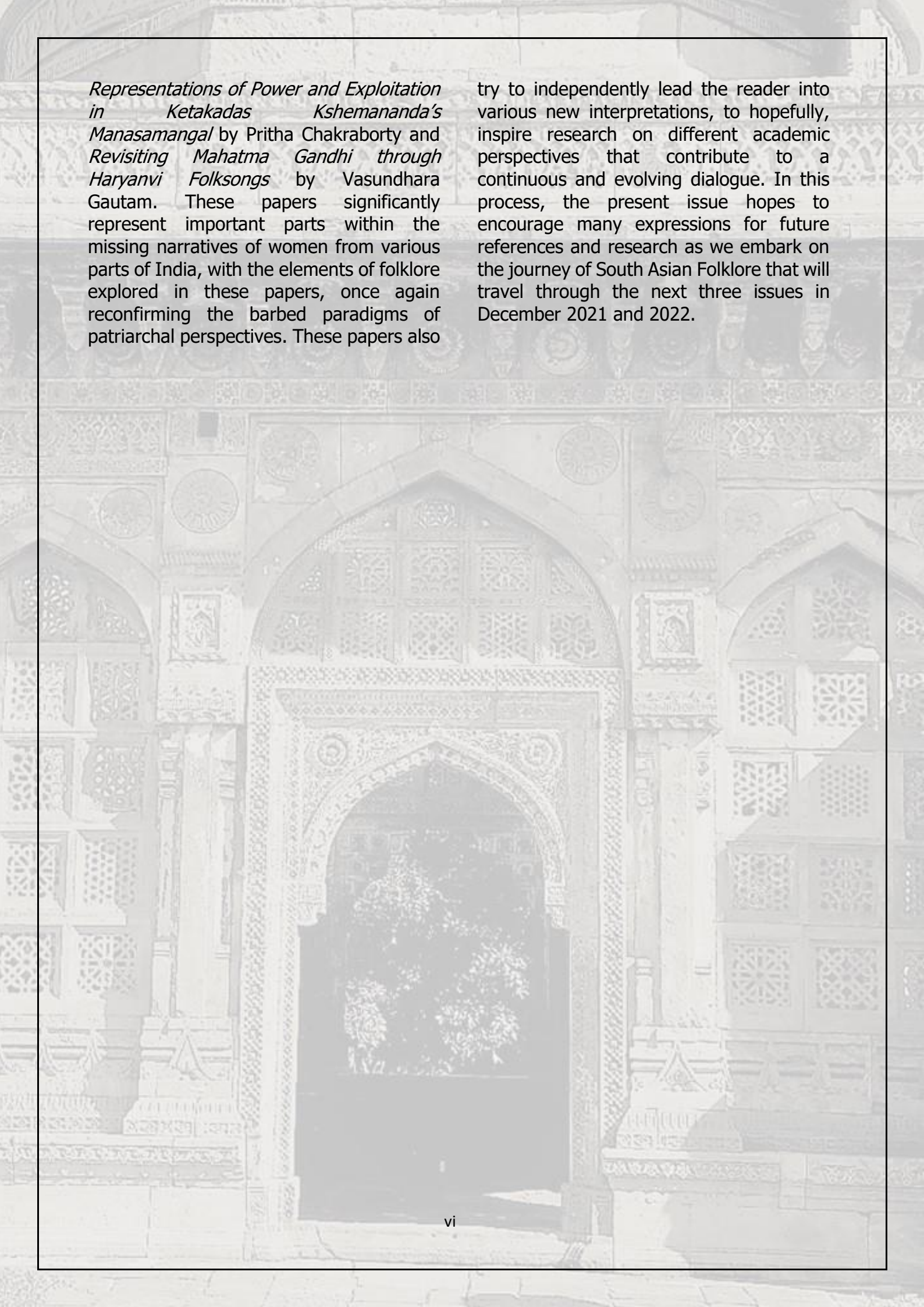
Lopamudra Maitra Bajpai, Guest Editor

It was in September 2020 that I was indeed pleasantly surprised to receive an invitation to guest edit a special issue on Folklore in South Asia for the journal, Nidān- International Journal of Indian Studies. I accepted this offer, and am greatly honoured to share this platform with esteemed scholars, Professor Pratap Penumala and Deepra Dandekar. With both of them, it has indeed been a rewarding journey so far, a journey that we intend to continue through the next year as well. With our initial discussions focusing only on the July 2021 issue however, a simple CFP soon turned into a larger enterprise, as we received an overwhelming response of over seventy abstracts from contributors all over the world. This made us contemplate the importance of the theme, and planned the next issues of 2021 and 2022 to continue with the subject. Still, because of the lack of space, and the intellectual competition the eliciting process generated, many submissions had to be rejected. We were however, left with some of the most promising research articles that also helped to streamline our forthcoming issues. Though there are overlaps, as not all contributors could prepare themselves in time, we are going forward with the present issue of July 2021, with a focus on the question of Women and Folklore.

Though we were delighted at this response, and even as the work began, a massive second wave of the coronavirus hit India. Life, as we know it, stood at crossroads with some of us facing the toughest challenges possible, and with health taking precedence over work. Bereaved by the inflow of continuous messages about the loss of near and dear ones, it was a frightening situation that often led to the perplexed question, how do we go ahead with the final submissions of papers amidst this? And indeed, it was a question that did not have a simple answer. Communication was difficult and full of apprehension about the continuation of the July issue — an anxiety that took a centre-stage. But finally, and seemingly impossibly, all the papers were submitted, and we moved ahead to the final stages of editing. It was a moment of tremendous relief to realize and achieve this important milestone in the journey that was begun last year, initially only as a series of simple discussions.

I was extremely fortunate to have been guided throughout this tough road by the constant support, help and reassurance provided by Professor Pratap Penumala, and Deepra, and I thank them both for being such understanding and encouraging people. Thus, as we reach the final desk of the July 2021 issue, it is indeed a pleasure to share this space with four important and interesting papers- *Gender and Performance in Kashmiri Folklore* by Arif Nisar, *Village, Caste and Gender in Vijayan Detha's duvidha and kenchuli* by Ritu Jangid, *The Goddess of Ambiguity:*

Representations of Power and Exploitation in Ketakadas Kshemananda's Manasamangal by Pritha Chakraborty and *Revisiting Mahatma Gandhi through Haryanvi Folksongs* by Vasundhara Gautam. These papers significantly represent important parts within the missing narratives of women from various parts of India, with the elements of folklore explored in these papers, once again reconfirming the barbed paradigms of patriarchal perspectives. These papers also try to independently lead the reader into various new interpretations, to hopefully, inspire research on different academic perspectives that contribute to a continuous and evolving dialogue. In this process, the present issue hopes to encourage many expressions for future references and research as we embark on the journey of South Asian Folklore that will travel through the next three issues in December 2021 and 2022.



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Gender and Performance in Kashmiri Folklore

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Abstract

The folklore of Kashmir, from the traditional oral traditions of the past, down to the present times, has become a viable medium for the masses to raise their voice against injustice and exploitation. This paper is an attempt to explore not only the marginalized voices seeking to address questions about social injustices, but also explores the changing patterns of discontent in Kashmiri folklore as a means of cultural resistance that is important from a gender perspective. Additionally, the paper explores the reversal of gender roles and the cross dressing of performers within folkloristic genres, arguing that these constitute acts of resistance against orthodoxy and power. The paper finally aims to understand the performativity of gender identity as a social construct by studying select verbal and performative folklore forms.

Keywords: Discontent, Folklore, Gender, Kashmir, Performativity

Introduction

While folklore represents the socio-cultural and political patterns of life in artistic forms, it also reproduces social, culture, and political life, by introducing changes and providing commentaries on it through its integrated art forms. Folklore has importantly contributed to supplement the understanding of societies and their nature, especially the functioning of societies that are defined more by orality than by literary exchange. J. Hinton Knowles (1888: v) famously sums up the entire gamut of Kashmiri folklore by acknowledging, "Kashmir as a field of folklore literature is, perhaps not surpassed in fertility by any other country in the world". The oral character of Kashmiri society also transforms folklore into a cardinal element that re/creates gender identity, configuring the status of folklore as a significant site for understanding gender dynamics in the socio-cultural and political history, tradition, and legends in and surrounding Kashmir. Chitralekha Zutshi (2004: 295) emphasises that it

"is the only arena in which Kashmiris can engage with the past, and inevitably its current situation, through storytelling and performance". The folklore and folk life of Kashmir as highlighted by Jawaharlal Handoo (1988: 1297) "have remained, and still remains, the most neglected area of Kashmiri studies", nevertheless, folklore has effectively succeeded in deliberating folk expressions through multiple narratives. Such notions are supported by Moti Lal Kemmu, an eminent contemporary playwright from Jammu and Kashmir, who in an interview with Chitralekha Zutshi (2014:193) remarks that, "Kashmiris did voice their opinions on political and social issues through discussions and traditions such as *dastaan and bhandpether*". Some functionalist perspectives on the social role of folklore, like that of William Bascom (1954: 346) considered folklore to have played an enormously influential role in building social capacity within a given community by reinforcing authority and gaining tighter control. However, this functionalist model cannot be entirely endorsed since it does not explain folklore expressions across culture and genre—failing to elucidate why certain forms of expression and performance are privileged over other forms.

In the case of Kashmiri folklore, one can observe how the metaphoric language of legendry and its concomitant signs are specifically coded within the subversion model—subverting dominant social authority and patriarchal control that in a performative context, reduced to stereotypes, function to counterbalance the discontent and critique expressed against patriarchal control. Therefore, discussed against Bascom's functionalist model that propagates a teleological view of folklore as an instrument of social control, it is more pertinent, especially from the perspective of Kashmir, to argue for folklore as a powerful medium of attaining social balance, even amidst expressions of critique and discontent. This dynamic nature of Kashmiri folklore that subverts to attain social balance, therefore becomes necessary to be read against the grain of instrumentalization theories, to reorient scholarship on societal issues and gender relations in Kashmir, contextualized within the framework of narrative discontent that can be viewed as an alternative narrative configured towards including gendered and other marginalised minorities. Though scholarly attention to Kashmiri folklore has mostly focused on collecting, compiling, and translating oral narratives and legends, there has been no significant efforts in analytically exploring this folklore corpus thematically.

Understanding Kashmiri folklore from a gender perspective thus, constitutes a fresh, innovative, and interesting area hitherto largely unexplored. It can provide scholarship with some insights on the oral history and identity building within the region. This paper, endeavouring to address epistemic gaps, discusses some examples from the Kashmiri folkloristic tradition, with reference to legends and stories, songs, and proverbs from a gender perspective, presenting scholarship with fresh perspectives on the marginality

of Kashmiri women, their self-awareness, and their attempts at subverting their marginality through folkloristic narratives that express discontent. Moreover, as mentioned above, discontent about gender identity and marginality is performed in Kashmiri folktales as a self-conscious social construct reflected in specific gender roles that include cross dressing, with performers acting out resistance against orthodoxy and patriarchy as part of community knowledge and discourse. Thus, it is not just that marginalised voices address questions of gender and social injustices, but the pattern of discontent itself changes through the performance of discontent in Kashmiri folklore, producing the importance of women's resistance to patriarchy as a cultural identity of region and community. As argued above, the performance of gendered resistance counterbalances the urgency of feminist critique, sometimes reducing resistance to stereotypical representations of women.

Kashmiri Folklore

As is common for much of folklore in South Asia, Kashmiri folklore is also believed to have oral origins, passed down from one generation to the next. There is a distinction within the Kashmiri folklore corpus between oral and verbal folklore, with 'verbal folklore' connoting the artefacts of folklore, preserved as symbols of culture and identity. This category has retained both oral and written modes of transmission that Richard M. Dorson (1982: 2) describes in the following manner: "under this rubric [verbal folklore] fall spoken, sung, voiced forms of traditional utterance that show repetitive patterns". In the context of Kashmiri folklore, among all other folkloristic materials, "the oral narrative [folklore] is one big subdivision of this group which in turn has its own manifold distinctions" (Handoo, 1988: 1294). Kashmiri folklore consists of a vast corpus of available folksongs in a variety of themes that leave no aspect of Kashmiri life untouched, providing an understanding of Kashmiri culture, beliefs, and traditions that document women's experiences and their response to conventional stereotypes associated with femininity. Through folk songs, women express their desires both covertly and overtly to produce themselves as culturally legible in the patriarchal (con)text, their voices recounting lament, protest, and discontent.

According to Aili Nenola (1999: 22), both women and men are equally responsible for shaping oral and verbal traditions of a culture, with the only difference being the silencing of women: "[t]he fact that women's ideas and articulations have not been part of the mainstream cultural tradition does not mean that they never existed. It only means that they have remained invisible – in life, as in scholarship and research". Extending Nenola's argument to the case of Kashmir, this is true; the position of women has been eliminated from the public domain of Kashmiri folklore despite their remarkable contribution to shaping its huge corpus. Several genres within Kashmiri folklore provide ample space for women to articulate themselves, and women, compared to men,

have indeed actively participated as composers and singers of folksongs, making significant contributions to the sustainability and survival of these folksongs. Every important life stage and rite of passage in Kashmir is accompanied by women singing folksongs.

Women's songs of labour are a representative example of Kashmiri folklore that has much in common with the songs of labour from many other migrant and labouring communities in South Asia. The case of Bhojpuri *bidesia* has been well documented in recent research, (Singh, 2016; Sharma, 2009), exploring the voices of Bhojpuri womenfolk, their articulation of pain, struggle, grief, and yearnings. Neha Singh (2016: 523) highlights that, "these songs [*bidesia*] reflected both internal and external migrations from various regions of the Indian society. From the pilot study it was found that migrants carried this song tradition which demanded question and answers, they carried the folk ballads, theatre and dance forms like *Raam Leela* with cultural practices and musical instruments". Similar folksongs from Kashmir that are sung by women in association with labour and migration has been inadequately highlighted within scholarship. Some recent works include Farooq Fayaz's *Kashmir Folklore: A Study in Historical Perspective* (2008). Fayaz's attempt brings forward the historical significance of folk songs, folktales, folk theatre, riddles, and proverbs. The other works referring to the subject of *begaer* include "Folklore as an Alternative Historical Discourse: A Perspective of Ladishah as a Dominant Folk Narrative" (Lubna Reshi and Sabeha Mufti, 2016) and "The Institution of Begaer as reflected in folklore of Kashmir" (Muzamil Rashid and Aushaq Hussain Dar: 2013). Women in Kashmiri society have suffered equally from the rigours and cruelties of *Begaer* or forced labour, and this has given birth to a large corpus of folksongs that document the emotions of discontent, especially expressed by women. This feminine discontent echoed in numerous symbols, idioms, and metaphors evokes the gloom and despair of polygamy, child marriage, patrilineal ownership, and patrilocal marriages and the subsequent migration of labouring husbands. A woman who waits impatiently for her lover sings[1]:

> Oh, my friend, my lover hasn't returned home.
> Now, I will send a love note to him.
> I groomed myself for him,
> At last, he has gone far away from me.
> My eyes searched him everywhere,
> Now, I will send my love note to him!

[1] All the translations from Kashmiri that are included in this article, unless otherwise specified, have been made by the author. The original songs are documented and edited by Shad Ramzan. See, Ramzan, Shad, editor, (1997). *Kasheren Luke Baetan Hund Intekhab*. Sahitya Akademi, p. 24.

The song articulates the absence of a lover or husband in a woman's life, as the wailing protagonist addresses her female friends, expressing her romantic longing for him. This longing belies structural difficulties that women confront in patriarchal societies, which Frooq (2008: 70) describes as follows: "social evils like child marriage, polygamy, domestic feuds, long separations, periodical migration of male members to the plains of Punjab and breaking of nuptial bonds and other like problems mark the prominent features of women's life in Kashmiri society, which owe its existence directly or indirectly to the issue known as gender discrimination." The strains of song that express the suffering of a long separation from male family members within patriarchal society predicated by labour migrations, is a familiar theme that documents the suffering of Kashmiri men in distant places like the Punjab, complaining of the harsh treatment meted out by the Dogra regime in the valley:

> How lovely men languishing in Punjab
> When will they return to Kashmir?
> How lovely, handsome young men languishing in Punjab When will they return to Kashmir?
> Broken, fallen and wretched!
> When will they return to Kashmir?
> Delicate as flowers and brittle as mushroom, they are!
> When will they return to Kashmir?
> (Ramzan, 1997: 24. Translation mine)

The female protagonist asks a rhetorical question that she finds no answer for, even as she interrogates the mass exodus and forced labour migration of Kashmiri men to Punjab. The singer expresses discontent and laments the suffering of women like herself whose brothers, fathers, and husbands are forced into *begaer*, while they as women suffer from the powerlessness of lonely marital and parental homes. The women left behind incessantly wait for their brothers, fathers, and husbands to return. The idioms, imagery, similes, metaphors, and symbolism in such songs manifests the real as well the cultural imagery of feminine yearning, amidst situations of oppression and poverty. The repeated simile, 'how lovely men' is especially poignant here, when used in the context of 'migrated labor', evoking a deeper dread about being doomed. The last line not only portrays the innocence of wailing woman but also emphasizes the hardships of men, when the singer compares them to delicate flowers, and brittle mushrooms, the rhetorical repetition of 'when will they return to Kashmir?' demonstrating their urgent desire to meet loved ones again. The tradition of repetition has been historically significant in folklore practices as narrative instruments that recollect and memorialize suffering. Therefore, these recurrent lines of longing and discontent together demonstrate, question, and criticize the socio-political realities of Kashmir, while also presenting listeners with tropes about the changing idea of femininity

transformed through the prevalence of forced labor in the valley. This narrative practice hence, connotes more: the deep-rooted psychological trauma of women, alienated and apprehensive that her husband/brother/father will never return, signifying the metaphoric failure of a community dream of returning home to their collective homeland—a recurrent theme in many a folksongs that cite disjuncture between men and women, family, marital, and social structures to negatively impact community cohesion, and the community's mythological discourse about common origin, common destiny, and return to a common homeland. The alienated woman in extreme cases of neglect, long separation, and marital abuse, increasingly abandons her husband and marriage for another man, and Farooq (2008: 56-57) provides a reading of such instances of separation and displacement by contextualizing feminine longing within infidelity. He comments on the subject of feminine moral laxity in the face of long masculine absence within Kashmiri families, particularly of peasant backgrounds, resulting in unending family feuds, separations, divorces that disrupts the emotional balance of the traditional Kashmiri family.

> "Oh! morning breeze don't shake the door
> My son's father returned home late last night".
> Farooq writes (2008: 57),

The metaphoric expression morning breeze has been used here for the lover of the woman who had been visiting the house of his paramour in the absence of her husband. In addition to this evil of infidelity, there seem to have emerged a number of other negative traits in the social life of the Kashmiri people due to the migration of the male population to the plains of India (Farooq, 2008: 57).

While women engaging in sexual relations outside of wedlock is deeply condemned and frowned on as something that breaks the fiber of Kashmiri family and society, this sexual engagement is also a poignant response to the cruel behavior meted out to women within their marital homes. It is within such contexts that women's songs of discontent plaintively enumerate their woeful complains about absent husbands, and the neglect and abuse of marital families. This feminine voice of discontent goes hand in hand with the experience of *bagaer* and migratory labor, and the strength of these folksongs is in their ability to directly address the marginal position of women, contextualized in this scenario of labor, documenting their collective experience of torture at the hands of mothers-in-law, and sisters-in-law taking advantage of the husband's absence—narratives instruments that help women negotiate their gendered position within families as wives and daughters-in-law at multiple levels. For example, the lines below are from a song that voices discontent against patrilocal marital structures by extolling the maternal and natal home that a woman must leave after marriage, only to confront the debacle of her husband's long absence and a life lived amidst oppressive, and

unsympathetic marital strangers. The woman below addresses the discontent of her miserable life in her marital home by concealing it under the metaphor of the natal home that represents heaven for married women:

> Walking into one's parental home is like entering heaven,
> And it feels like walking on a golden staircase!
> (Ramzan, 1997: 25. Translation mine)

While Kashmiri folksongs are specifically pertinent to one context, as in the case of many other folksongs across South Asia, in the context of changing times that now negotiate with the trauma of forced labor, they are often sung to imply other updated contexts, becoming encoded through their **inclusion** within the genre, into the cultural heritage of Kashmiri community life. For example, *menzil baeth* or 'cradle songs', that are sung to lull infants into sleeping also transmit cultural knowledge and customary regulations about appropriate behaviour that is to be adopted by infants. The exact purpose of 'cradle songs' also varies across Kashmir's internal context in changing times, becoming increasingly associated with the broader category of women's discontent, where the mother while lulling her child to sleep, also expresses her own miseries and deprivations that are marked by the absence of her husband, forced into *Begaer* or jailed wrongfully for some mysterious crime he has not committed. These cradle songs therefore acquire the feeling of discontent that tacitly and implicitly provides a critical commentary on the repressive system, where women must bring up their children alone. Therefore, these complaints that are concealed inside a genre, is yoked to new purposes, and changes contexts that can be understood as silent protest. Such old songs communicate new, additional, and extended messages about the life of women and children in families, struggling without fathers, husbands, or brothers. For example, a popular cradle song *dodd cho daam daam gale galey, ho ho karyo adkaley* reveals a young woman's exasperation, as her husband is forced into *begaer*. She sings metaphorically to the blooming bud—her infant child, by blaming her own destiny for their condition, lamenting her difficulties of bringing up the child alone, where the unfortunate infant grows up as an orphan, despite his father being alive. She is sad, even as she reassures her child of her continuing love and care:

> There is none to complain to, of my inevitable fate,
> I could not fight back against my own destiny!
> I will create a path for your living…
> I will care for you, as if you were my earing (jewel)!
> (Ramzan, 1997: 24. Translation mine)

The journey of Kashmiri women has been mapped in different ways, in terms of diverse historical, poetic, and folkloristic traditions, across the Kashmir valley. But this representation of women according to high tradition has increasingly become male-centric within the public domain, serving to marginalise and oppress women. These 'male' traditions require revisiting to explore the systemic marginalization of Kashmiri women within culture that is justified through a traditional, customary patriarchal position. Male traditions about women, hence, requires revisiting, to rediscover women's discontent, that is not just aware of this deliberate marginalization, but contains their subversion of marginalization within oral performances. Otherwise, scholarship on Kashmiri folklore may run the risk of understanding women's status and experience, predominantly from the prism of masculine narratives. There is presently very little space for Kashmiri women within masculine cultural narratives about women that, moreover, misrepresent women. Though folklore, with all its limitations, may provide women with a subversive and counterbalancing space necessary for articulating their experiences in ways that transforms genre, not all women are trained or allowed to master competency in executing performative genres. While they must learn genres within patriarchal contexts, they lack the liberty of performing their own themes and questions from an internal perspective, with cross-dressing men reducing their protest and discontent into stereotypes that strengthen patriarchy. The finest example that demonstrates women's social inability to master folklore genres is evident in two popular performative forms- *bhand pather and ladishah.* In terms of their traditional contours, women have been strictly prohibited from actively participating in these two forms of folk performances, with all performers, being exclusively male, playing the roles of women. This is reminiscent of many South Asian folklore performances that are reified as 'high culture', taught, and reinvented within elite institutions, and increasingly sought to be purified. They are 'made' respectable by not eliminating the role of women, but eliminating their bodies from these roles, debarring them from representing themselves in public, and instead, reducing their protagonist position to non-empathetic stereotypes played by men.

The prohibition on women from participating within folklore genres is not accidental. Rather, this exclusion is internalised within the traditional patriarchy of Kashmiri society. Recently, the traditional, male-dominated folk genre, *ladishah,* was challenged for the first time in the year 2020, when a woman performer from the Valley, Syed Areej Safvi began performing *ladishah* on social media[2]. This resulted in a lot of critical attention, as her performances were criticized for being transgressive and subversive by many. This gender specific shift not only challenged masculine notions about genre, but also

[2] (see You Tube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XRAtsUW-Lzc&ab_channel=Areejological)

defied audiences' expectations. In an interview with GK Web TV, Syed Areej Safvi insisted on providing women's perspectives, to the performance of this form and genre of folklore, which she criticized as male dominant form[3] *Ladishah* is a prominent art form dating to the late 13th century that is identified with the arrival of Sultans in Kashmir. The Sultan dynasty, also known as Shah Mir Dynasty, was founded by Shams-ud-Din Shah Mir named after him. Formed in 1339 CE, Shah Mir's dynasty was established after the death of Kota Rani, the last monarch of the Hindu Lohara dynasty, and ruled Kashmir Valley for more than two centuries, which lasted till the year 1561. *Ladishah* is a dramatic solo performance that is in the form of a monologue. As described by Amaresh Datta (1987: 345), this is "a unique kind of ballad" [that] "brings out the wit and worldly wisdom of Kashmiri people. *Ladi Shah* ballads are sung by the minstrels [males] in one single tone accompanied by the music created by stirring in iron rings strung on an iron rod". The semantic load of the term 'shah' in this case, that is a suffix to *ladi*, meaning a line or row coincides with the period of the Shah Mirs of Kashmir.

The word *ladi* here, also stands for the actor (male) after whom the art is named *Ladishah*, to connote 'the art of Ladi'. Farooq states that this folk-art form first attained its name from its creator, who belonged to a rural inhabitation called 'Lari' in the Pulwama district in Kashmir. It can be argued, if a folk art can be named after a male actor (*Ladishah*), we can now introduce another interpretative, meaningful layer to the name by referring to it as (*Lady-Shah*), named after a female actor of the same folk-art form, which does not disrupt the original layer much. It also resonates phonetically with the indigenous name. While this case has been described here as a potent example, similar gender biases within different folklore genres of Kashmir are also perceptible in the performance of *bhand pather*, which strictly prohibits women from actively participating. Female roles are performed by males, demonstrating how women are debarred from representing themselves, and how their role within gender performativity, even within temporary artistic spaces undermines the importance of women in society. To William Sax (2004:293-306) such notions of power relation, domination and subordination are reproduced by the aesthetics of performance which is always political. To sum up, the concept of genre is a pivotal, but an irresolute topic within the domain of folklore studies.

Genre classifies any mode of communication as one of the most difficult undertakings of folklore and literary scholarship. The importance of genre in folklore studies, however, remains an important emphasis for scholarship for many major folklorists. For example, Alan Dundes (1971: 93) is of the opinion, "genre theory has been instrumental in shaping the discipline of folkloristics", further deliberating that (ibid: 93), "once the corpus of folklore has been

[3] (see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3jmkj3sjzU&ab_channel=GreaterKashmir).

collected, it is to matters of genre classification that folklorists invariably turn." Folklorist Richard Bauman (1992: 53) additionally states, "Genre and classification have been central preoccupations in folklore, shaping frameworks for the collection, archiving, teaching, and scholarly study of folklore." Attempts have been made to study the classification of folklore and the production of genres that draw clear-cut means of eschewing the perplexity arising from a complex regional, cultural corpus. However, in the context of Kashmir, the production of genre generates further complexity when discussing questions of gender within folklore. This demonstrates the axiom that neither regions, their demography, nor economy ever remain static. Regional changes within patterns of labor, migration, and even ecology, transform social, familial, and gender relations within communities, and between individuals and families that are part of a community. This change in the context and structure of the Kashmir valley transforms sexual and gender relations, expressed in folk songs, and articulated in the new frame of feminine ownership of traditional masculine folk performances that indicates to the increasing negotiating power of women in the absence, and disempowerment of laboring, migrant Kashmiri men.

Recounting Folklore as a Social Activity

The telling and retelling of folktales, is a social activity that always carries with it a sense of morality, and political commentary depending on the socio-cultural context of narration. Folktales can be studied from multiple perspectives, and each culture preserves and transposes its folklore from one generation to the next, especially due to its didactic nature that according to Farah Aboubakr Alkhammash (2014: 14), "are analysed in the light of their ideological meanings and functions within the socialisation process of a particular society." In the Kashmiri context, extensive work has already been done to compile and translate Kashmiri folktales into Urdu, and English.

Some prominent folktale collections are: J. Hinton Knowles' *The Folktales of Kashmir* (1888), *Hatim's Tales,* recorded, with the assistance of Pandit Govind Kaul, by Sir Aurel Stein, and edited by Sir George Grierson, (1923), S. L Sadhu's *Folk Tales From Kashmir* (1962) and Somnath Dhar's *Kashmir Folk Tales* (1949). Apart from their structural-functional analysis however, very few attempts have been made to explore their ideological import that documents women's voices of discontent. Chitralekha Zutshi (2016: no page)[4] "Stories and Storytellers of Kashmir") remarks that folk stories "are the lifeblood of Kashmiri socio-cultural and political life", that proffer new perspectives, and insights into gender roles and identity. Due to their symbolic and fantastic, oral content, they retain a non-author function and constitute a significant source for understanding the various social interfaces of Kashmiri society.

[4] http://www.sutrajournal.com/stories-and-storytellers-of-kashmir-by-chitralekha-zutshi

In most Kashmiri folktales women are depicted to be subordinate to men in everyday contexts. From the purview of analyzing the articulation of discontent, five folktales that center on the lives of women have been taken up for discussion below, some of which are also narrated by women. For instance, the story 'The Cat Who Became a Queen' (Knowles 1888: 9-10) is set within the context of polygamy and patrilineality, wherein the tale explicitly demonstrates the personal threats faced by women who do not bear children. Like any other patriarchal society, Kashmiri society saw woman as an essential instrument for the perpetuation of patrilineal lineage. But patriliny is a patriarchal social relationship, within which women do not leave behind any ancestral imprints of her own, in contrast to men, viewed as heroes and leaders due to its patriarchal and virilocal organization of marriage. In the story, a king threatens his wives of banishment if they do not bear him a child. Another folktale called 'A Stupid Boy' (Knowles 1888: 189-190) that is narrated by a woman named *Panditani* similarly portrays different socio-cultural aspects of Kashmiri life, along with providing a critical perspective and commentary on patriarchal practices, norms, and traditions. From a narratological perspective, women narrators provide different narratives compared to their male counterparts, as women narrators empower the female protagonists of their story empathetically. In both the tales in this case, women narrators empower the mother figure. Whereas the mother in 'A Stupid Boy' guides her half-witted son, the mother of the prince in 'The Cat Who Became a Queen' consoles her daughter-in-law, who is actually a cat, by telling her that, "she was determined to speak strictly with her son on the matter as soon as he return[ed]" (Knowles 1888: 10), thereby creating an alternate cultural imagery of a mother-in- law. It would be pertinent to argue here that the narrative is more than just a didactic instrument; the narrative itself constitutes critical information to distinguish the gender of a narrator, since men and women narrate differently and therefore produce different narratives. It is just as Ruth B Bottigheimer (1999: 5) describes in the introduction to *Folklore and Gender*, "in the process of folk narrative production, every story component and every analytical process is fundamentally conditioned by gender. Voicing within tales depends to a very great extent on the gender of the voice that tells a tale".

Folktales popularly also subvert dominant norms, where women, oftentimes, are proved to be more powerful than men. In fact, in some tales, it is not the woman who is a 'damsel in distress'; rather it is 'a man in distress', waiting to be rescued. This subversion of dominant norms that dictate only strong men as being capable of rescuing helpless women can be found in the folktale 'All for a Pansa' (Knowles 1888: 144-153), in which a young merchant who travels to another country to trade his merchandise is captured by a wicked woman, after he loses to her in a game of chess. He is salvaged later from captivity by his clever wife. Despite being a clever and resourceful woman though, a tinge of irony continues to linger throughout the story, as she must, first seek permission from her in-laws to disguise herself as a man, before rescuing her

husband. While the woman protagonist blurs gender roles by actively partaking in a world dominated by men, not only does she earn for her family's sustenance, but she also rescues her husband, the (merchant) from the clutches of the wicked lady. Thus, she challenges the idea of gendered helplessness. Though there is the analytical concern of gender performance here, where a woman is literally the saviour and has to play the role of man, the tale, nevertheless challenges male preference in Kashmiri society by describing how women prove to be no less heroic than men. Though this projected narrative, forms the ground of social criticism, such stories also continue to function according to patriarchal parameters, where women can be exactly like heroic men only in difficult times, in the absence of men, and only after gaining support from larger patriarchal structures like marital families, where they still remain devoted to nurturing the family. These are not her free choices, and her exceptionality in such stories only reflects the exceptionality of the situation of his absence. After normality is resumed and he returns to his rightful role in family and society, it is unquestioned that the wife must return to her submissive and domestic gender roles—contrasted in this case by the real evil of independent women who trap innocent merchants by winning against them in chess.

The change in gender for women in such stories, thus depicts the disruption of society, within which women's heroism becomes a very temporary, new, and necessary normal in the absence of men, rather than any social transformation that can continue to remain normative even after men take back their power—and there are many examples of this in 19th and 20th century Indian history such as the Rani of Jhansi, fighting against colonial policy for the succession rights of her child in the absence of her husband. This brings the discussion back to the articulation of discontent, discussed in the earlier section of songs, where the absence of Kashmiri men in the context of forced labor and migration, introduces longstanding change to Kashmiri society, than just a brief spell of disruption where wives act as allies and extensions of men.

In such long-standing changes, where women are not just temporary heroes, but burdened with semi-permanent burdens, their songs are plaintive and full of pain, for now being forced to become like men. Although Vladimir Propp (2010: 36) in his *Morphology of the Folktale* provides a structural description of the hero as the masculine concept, this is nevertheless subverted in 'All for a Pansa' through the very blurring of lines in the everyday acts of women heroines. Vladimir Propp (2010: 36) classifies heroes into two types, "if a young girl is kidnapped and disappears from the horizon of her father (and that of the listener), and if Ivan goes off in search of her, then the hero of the tale is Ivan and not the kidnapped girl. Heroes of this type may be termed "*seekers*". While transforming the definition of hero in this story seeks to subvert patriarchy, this transformation remains within the boundaries of patriarchy, providing a counterbalance to complete male dominance within narratives—especially in narrations by women that empower women protagonists by garnering

empathy for them. According to Lalita Handoo's (1994: 190) comments from a structural and thematic approach, the role transformation between heroes and heroines is a peculiar, but a characteristic feature of Kashmir folktales. However, there are other approaches to role transformation that might be equally important here, which introduce a larger vista in the traditional presence of such narratives in Indian and South Asian history. For example, it is not uncommon to encounter strong women in temporary leadership roles borrowed from men in situations of distress in Hindu mythology either: Sita who left the comforts of the palace and followed her husband Rama into the forest; Kannagi who burned down the city of Madurai after her husband was wrongly punished; Savitri who followed Yama to the netherworlds when he carried Satyavan away; and many other examples of militant goddesses like Durga and Kali, who avenge themselves for being humiliated by demons, borrowing the weapons of male Gods. The important question here, when treating either Kashmiri folklore or other folklores in South Asia that are deeply influenced by oral narratives, performances and renditions of Epic and Puranic stories is: do these stories and their narration by women subvert patriarchy? Or can we treat the folktale as raw dough, shaped differently by different narrators dependent on their gender? This paper would support the latter argument: it is women narrators who refashion folktales as feminist tales of subversion and empathy, and not folktales per se that are feminist. It is the dynamism between narration and narrator, where power, ideology, empathy, and didacticism, is produced.

In our last example of a folktale, 'Why the Fish Laughed', a farmer's clever daughter acts to help the minister's son, assisting him to resolve the riddle of 'why the fish laughed?' The answer to this riddle that has troubled the queen, then the king, and finally his minister in this case, meant that a man was roaming around the king's palace in female disguise. The king identifies this disguised man by making all his female attendants jump over a pit. Only that one female who succeeded in fulfilling this task was identified as a man in female disguise and punished. The farmer's daughter was rewarded by offering her hand to the minister's son. Similarly, in another folktale, 'The tale of a princess', a princess disguised as a man wins the king's confidence into allowing her to fight a dragon. She slays the dragon in return for which she is married to the king's daughter, only to later reveal herself to be a woman. Gender disguise constitutes a striking note in these two stories and many other Kashmiri stories. Unlike the merchant's wife disguised as a man that enabled her to defeat the wicked woman and become a hero, the man disguised as a woman in the king's palace construed him as a dangerous villain. A man cross-dressed as a woman was hence seen as more threatening according to established patriarchal gender codes, since a man was not considered weaker, or an extension of woman. On the other hand, women dressed as men were allowed to feel victorious, since they were weaker than men, and their extensions in disrupted times marked by the temporary absence or

unavailability of men. In 'All for a Pansa', while becoming a man constituted the potential of subversion of patriarchy, even an attempt at this subversion failed miserably in "Why the Fish Laughed", depicting the role of men as powerful within patriarchy, while women were either seen as his helpers, or extensions, if not outright evil-defeated by good women who represented paragons of patriarchal femininity that allied with men.

Kashmiri folktales analyzed so far presented one-way cross dressing (men disguised as women) to be especially transgressive and challenging of gender codes, unless it was deployed to the good cause of purification that debarred and eliminated women from representing themselves within public domain performances. Men performed feminine gender roles only to eliminate women and distort their appearance by making them unrecognizable. In the instance of 'The Tale of Princess', performing the opposite gender also played an equally vital role. The princess disguised as man was rewarded for slaying the dragon, and the reward was couched in the commonly encountered motif of marriage. The princess was rewarded for doing the job of a man, and constituting his extension and proxy, despite being a woman. Therefore, while her disguise potentially possesses the subversive power to upend the dominant male order that perceives the female body to be too feeble and fragile to save kingdoms, the fact that she is rewarded for being a man and not for who she is—a woman, is also an undeniable expression of patriarchy that delegitimizes the female body and identity. In this case, the disguised princess's actual gender is overridden in recognition of her having transcended it to become something else, and something better than what she is—a woman. While male disguise is often interpreted as 'female desire', instances of cross-dressing prove significant within folktale performances where the punishment of men disguised as women is homophobic in contrast to cross-dressing women, who may challenge patriarchy and become heroes only temporarily and in exceptional situations, as aspiring, weaker beings who are patronized. The merchant's wife, the princess, and the farmer's daughter, who helps the minister's son are not portrayed as typical folktale stock characters however, who safeguard their female chastity and purity. Instead, these women transgressively participate in public life, possessing the masculine attributes of intelligence and valour, that are extolled virtues within patriarchal societies, especially evident in Rajasthan, that demand women to sacrifice their bodies, genders, and roles, for men, marriages, children, and marital families. And yet, there is no getting away from the fact that these folktales and folksongs, in however limited and typical a manner, contain the independent voices of women, voicing their emotions, their discontent and criticism, exerting their power to reinvent their gender identities, and masculine attributes like intelligence and valour. As Farooq emphasizes (2008: 69-70),

> marginalised Kashmiri women expressed themselves in different varieties of Kashmiri popular literature (*Folklore*). To have a comprehensive analysis of Kashmiri women, no study can be treated

as fair and objective, unless oral traditions are situated with utmost degree of seriousness alongside the conventional source.

Conclusion

Summing up, this article has explored songs, tales, and genre performances to investigate the changing role of women in Kashmiri society, who have for generations been dominated, treated as subordinate by men, and silenced by patriarchal family. Farooq (2008: 75) identifies 'silence' to be the major hallmark of gendered roles ascribed to women in Kashmiri society reflected in proverbs such as *Shareef Kori(di) Hinz Tchopaie Gayie Aenkaar* translated as, "the very silence of a girl symbolizes her decency, her gentleness, and her approval of the marriage contract". This proverb is very revealing in its highlighting of women's silence as a means of communicating submission and the acceptance of patriarchal norms that confers her with high status for not making independent decisions.

That said, this article concludes by picking up some of the discussion threads from above that explore Kashmiri folklore narratives and performances by women to contain criticism, discontent, and alternative virtues of valour and intelligence—narrative tropes through which they make their voices heard. The question in terms of functionalism here is: are the voices of women encoded within Kashmiri folklore a symbol of patriarchy? Or are these compensatory instruments seeking to counterbalance the disempowerment women face, by building images of emancipation that are not too threatening within patriarchy—at least, not as threatening as cross-dressing men. And finally, do narrative folklore voices transform genre, merge it with other genres, or invest it with a new independence, to reflect the tension of Kashmiri society as its economy and demography change due to labor migration patterns? The answer to all these questions is more philosophical, pertaining more to the expressions of a self-aware community seeking internal balance, even while they prepare for external changes.

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The Goddess of Ambiguity: Representations of Power and Exploitation in Ketakadas Kshemananda's *Manasamangal*

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Abstract

The Mangalkavyas are an important cultural text in the region surrounding Bengal. Not only does the text define the cultural scenario of the region, but also highlights the literary development of the period of its composition. Ketakadas Kshemananda's *Manasamangal* first popularised in 1770, is a eulogy on the Goddess Manasa. Manasa, the goddess of snakes is an important deity in the lower Gangetic region, an area infested with snakes. Communities unable to secure safety from snakes and snakebites, worship of the deity, as a ritual means of protecting themselves from snakebite. This paper focuses on mythological conflicts between Manasa and various figures, to highlight themes of power and cult competition, embedded within the text. The representation of women, especially, in the goddess's quest for power in a world dominated by Shiva, constitutes the main interest in this paper.

Keywords: snake, goddess, narratives, gender, exploitation

Introduction

The Mangalkavyas[1] play a dual role in the historical development of religion depicted within Bengali literature. These texts are not just religious in nature, but they also depict social, political, and economic conditions of various communities in the period of their composition. The texts mainly consist of eulogies dedicated to specific deities that highlight the importance of their worship and are an amalgamation of various popular myths, narratives, and songs. The

[1] Mangalkavya is a term used in Hindu literature especially in Bengal. It can be roughly translated as "auspicious poems" which eulogises gods and goddesses. For more details, cf. Curley (2008: 1-17).

Manasamangal,[2] and the *Chandimangal* are the most popular texts in the Mangalkavya literature, devoted to the female deities, Manasa and Chandi[3], respectively. These texts combine myriad images from the social and cultural life of the period that include descriptions about landscape, clothes, food, and trade. They also represent religious and political changes taking place in that period, and the ways in which communities tried to assimilate and adjust themselves to these changes. Apart from its socio-cultural representations, these text popularised folk deities by combining them with other Puranic deities[4]. While the descriptions of goddesses are mostly drawn from Puranic texts, adapting these to the folk pantheon,[5] these texts amalgamate indigenous folk traditions in to the Sanskritization process of folk deities.

The *Manasamangal* is one of the earliest eulogies dedicated to a folk goddess and extant versions of it are scattered across Bengal, Assam, Bihar, and Orissa (Chatterji 2014: 1-18). While the text narrates the victory of goddess Manasa over Chand Saudagar[6] (an affluent trader), who is a devotee of Shiva, the mythic conflict between Chand Saudagar and the snake goddess Manasa is quite well known, with numerous smaller conflicts embedded in the narrative that have hitherto been ignored within popular representation. This paper therefore highlights some smaller instances of conflict between Manasa, other deities, and humans that leads to the final climax or showdown between Manasa and Chand Saudagar, wherein the goddess uses Behula and Lakhindar, his family members, as a bait to subdue him. While many identify the *Manasamangal* as a feminist text,[7] these interpretations are drawn from the obviously feminine, though ambiguously feminist figure of Manasa[8], who is a goddess disrupting the patriarchal system surrounding Shiva's devotion that includes exploiting women, to gain her personal footing. Upon a close reading, it is therefore clear that simplistic categorizations around the binary of feminism and patriarchy, is not as clear and persuasive as it would seem at first glance. Manasa's character is filled with ambiguities, as she carves her own way through a milieu of male gods, attaining prominence through cunningness and manipulation. This paper intends to highlight the exploitative and manipulative aspect of the goddess's quest for power, wherein she incessantly beguiles men and women in the wake of her

[2] This is one of the adaptations of the Manasamangal, first published in 1770. Ketakadas Kshemananda belonged to the *Kayastha* class and hailed from the Southern Rarh region of Bengal. For more, cf., Sukumar Sen, (1940: 573-582).

[3] Shiva's wife. Considered as the manifestation of Shakti (the divine feminine power of creation and transformation). Also known as, Mahamaya, Durga, Gouri, Parvati, etc. For details on Shakti worship in Bengal, cf. Kinsley (1986: 132-150, 161-177), McDaniel (2004: 3-26).

[4] For classification of deities as folk/tribal, tantric/yogic, or, devotional/bhakti, cf. McDaniel (2004: 6, 27-66).

[5] There are 18 main *Puranas*. These texts are considered to be sacred and narrate the greatness of deities and the blessings achieved through penance and devotion to them.

[6] Chand Saugadar emerges during the churning of the celestial ocean and is considered as Shiva's son, which makes him a brother to Manasa. In the text, he is the key antagonist to Manasa, whom Manasa has to win over in order to be accepted as a deity on Earth.

[7] For more discussion on classification of goddesses, cf. Kinsley (1986: 155-160); Matrikas and feminism in India, cf. Chawla (2019: 13-17, 75-79, 114-116); Goddesses and feminism, cf. Hiltebeital, and Erndl (2000: 11-23).

[8] For details on Manasa as an ambivalent goddess, cf. Doniger (2015: 26-28)

goals. The main conflicts this paper highlights, include the battle between Manasa and Chandi (Shiva's wife and a goddess in her own right), Manasa and Hassan-Hussain (the Muslim Sayid descendants of Prophet Muhammad), and her beguiling of the cowherds who worshipped her, and Dhanvantari's[9] wife, Kamala.

There are some interesting facets in these battle stories—the first being the analytical lens of feminism, that is problematic here, simply because of its obvious modern 20th century connotations. Patriarchy is a concept that cannot be easily applied to a time before, and that too, to religious texts. According to feminist theory, goddesses and by extension, women are sisters and support each other against the oppressive male order[10]. Goddesses do not exploit or take advantage of other feminine peers, or subalterns to gain personal power—something that Manasa completely resorts to. The second issue is the ambiguous nature of Manasa's deity status since she is not pitted in battle against her equals—viz. other goddesses and gods. She is pitted against humans, who seem like her equals, just by the power of them being bhaktas of Shiva. Similarly, though Hassan and Hussain are powerful as Sayid, since they are inheritors of Prophet Muhammad, are nevertheless human and mortal. Manasa's struggle with humans not only reduces her to the status of a demi-goddess, but also indicates to the existence of a cult war between new ecological deities such as herself and other disease goddesses, and powerful bhaktas, and inheritors, who champion powerful pantheons, and established religion.

The Story of Manasa's Birth:

There are two key events in Manasa's life that underlie her conflict with gods and humans—the first her outside of wedlock birth, and the other, her desire to be accepted into the mainstream pantheon. Unlike religious representations, which highlight Shiva as an ascetic, folk narratives tend to sketch Shiva often within the domain of the erotic[11], often representing him as a seducer of young women[12]. Shiva in the *Manasamangal*, is a whimsical character prone to becoming attracted to various women[13]—incidents that result in Manasa's birth for example:

> *Once while doing penance, Shiva was seduced by his wife Chandi, disguised as a boatman's wife. Chandi chastised Shiva for his philandering ways after revealing her true identity to him, leaving him stricken with desire. The desperate Shiva saw a pair of copulating storks and ejaculated on a lotus leaf. The semen passed*

[9] Dhanvantari is a friend and confederate of Chand Saudagar. He possessed the power to revive the dead and hence, he inadvertently turns into Manasa's nemesis. Not to be confused with Dhanvantari; a god, who is physician of the gods.

[10] For details on the concept of sisterhood and women's solidarity, cf. Hooks (1986: 125-138)

[11] For erotic representations of Shiva in mythology and the ambiguity surrounding his character, cf. Doniger O'Flaherty (1973: 1-39).

[12] For folk representations of Shiva associated with fertility rites amongst women, as in a Rajasthani village, cf. Gold (2015, 252-271).

[13] Shiva is often represented as an ascetic, a householder, and an adulterer. For details cf. Doniger O'Flaherty (1973: 172-254).

> *through the lotus stem and fell onto Vasuki's[14] lap. Vasuki kept the semen in a copper pot, and Vidhata[15] created Manasa from it.* (Kshemananda, 2015: 11-16)

Shiva's philandering ways are further highlighted when he attempts to rape Manasa, when he first meets her (Kshemananda, 2015: 18). Shiva refuses to believe that Manasa is his daughter, upon which she narrates the entire story of her birth. Assured of the truth now, Shiva hides Manasa in a basket of lotuses that he then carries to his abode.

Since birth, therefore, Manasa had to struggle for acceptance. Even after being accepted by Shiva as his daughter, she was taken to his abode and kept hidden in a basket of lotus blooms. Shiva ordered Chandi, not to look into the basket which she immediately did as soon as he left. Upon finding the beautiful Padma (another name of Manasa which means the lotus flower) she mistook her for his co-wife, and in a fit of rage blinded her in the left eye. Enraged, Manasa called forth all the snakes of the world to attack Chandi (Kshemananda, 2015: 21) and both the goddesses prepared for war. Shiva intervened at the last moment, stalling the war by informing his wife that Manasa was his daughter. In order to avert further complications and to keep his wife happy, Shiva thereafter took Manasa away to the Shijua[16] forest and abandoned her there. Manasa was denied a place at her father's home due to her stepmother's jealousy. Upon realising that she was being abandoned, Manasa tells Shiva that without friends or family, she would be unable to survive her exile in the forest, and that none would ever worship her as a deity without a proper legitimate station in life. At this point Shiva assures her with a prophecy about her acceptance by local cowherds, her subsequent conflicts with Hassan and Hussain, her acceptance by the fishermen community from the city of Champai[17], and ultimately, her conflict with Chand Saudagar, and Dhanvantari, which would result in her ultimate triumph—her triumph over Chand Saudagar here, being emblematic of Hindu Brahminical caste society. Shiva's prophecy presented Manasa as a lower being, merely meant to follow her destiny, as laid out by her father (Sen, 1911: 257). But what is also important to remember is, that though Chand Saudagar was a Shiva devotee, Shiva agreed to share his cult following with Manasa in the form of a prophecy and thereby bestowed her with cultic benevolence as well. The cult of mother goddesses was intrinsically associated with primitive agrarian communities, more attached to subsistence cultivation[18], and did not become too major a part of the Puranic pantheon, unless through extensions, as demonstrated by Shiva's prophecy for Manasa (Sen, 1911: 250-252).

[14] Vasuki is the king of snakes; the eldest son of the sage Kashyap and his younger wife Kadru. For details cf. "Vasuki", in Mani (1975: 838-839)

[15] The God of fate is known as Vidhata.

[16] Shijua in the present day is a village in Jhargram, West Bengal.

[17] Also known as Champaknagar, it is a small city in present day Bangladesh; earlier it was a part of Bengal before partition.

[18] For details on the cult of goddesses in agrarian communities in Sunderbans, cf. Jallais (2010: 109-145). She emphasized how agrarian communities choose to worship certain deities for protection vis-à-vis their location and occupation.

The Sanskritization of the Sakta cult with predominantly mother-goddesses[19] and fertility symbols[20]; its recognition and integration into Brahminical Hinduism[21] and Tantrism[22] was a later process predicated on the social mobility of erstwhile communities, hitherto considered as outside of Hindu caste, through their entry into the caste system[23]. With the entry of many communities into Hindu caste society, many erstwhile clan, community, and village goddesses, largely interpreted in terms of a diversified Sakta cult negotiated the power of Shaivism in the region. The stories of Chandi and Manasa, and their interaction with Shiva, represents this cultic negotiation for power in a larger and more diversified Hindu society[24] (also cf. Sen, 1911: 250-252). Shiva's prophecy for Manasa in the story also indicates this long-standing power negotiations between Shiva and the Sakta cult, where local goddesses like Chandi and Manasa are accommodated despite being considered inferior, because of the biological or community links they establish with Shiva, or in this case, Brahminical society. This power struggle and cultic negotiation produces Chand Saudagar, a mortal human, as an important protagonist/antagonist of Manasa's story, since as a bhakta of Shiva, Chand Saudagar's worship of Manasa is a powerful symbol of Manasa's conquest over caste society, without which she would be 'abandoned in the jungle' with no source of survival. However, as is also evident, there are many ambiguities within the text that counterbalance Manasa's seeming powerlessness with Shiva, with her comparative power enjoyed over others, and this ambiguity that is compensatory—not allowing readers to outright pity, or for that matter, outright blame of Manasa, makes it difficult to categorize Manasa as a feminist icon from the perspective of how we understand feminism, as a 20th century social movement spearheaded in the US.

Manasa and Chandi

Beginning with the conflict between Chandi and Manasa, Chandi becomes angry with Shiva and Manasa, as the latter's sudden presence arouses Chandi's jealousy, who is unable to believe that Manasa is Shiva's daughter. As per Shiva's habits, Chandi suspects him of foul play, and the animosity between Chandi and Manasa here, refers to an important aspect of family life, where a younger co-wife's presence threatens the older wife (Maity, 1969: 295-305). Chandi's jealousy of Manasa reflects and represents a social reality, where even goddesses fear the intrusion of younger co-wives. Shiva unfairly decides to exile Manasa to keep his wife happy. To provide Manasa with solace at her isolation in the forest, he creates another female being called Neta from his perspiration, ordering her

[19] For details on Hindu goddesses in Vedic, Puranic, and folk traditions, cf. Kinsley (1986: 1-5).
[20] For details on goddesses and their association with fertility rites, cf. Jayakar (1980: 5-32).
[21] For understanding the developments of the cults of Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma within Indian theological mythology, cf. Bhattacharji (1970: 1-22)
[22] For details on Tantric manifestations of goddess worship, cf. McDaniel (2004: 67-144).
[23] For details on the nature of Indian caste system, and the transition from the pastoral to the agricultural economy, cf. R.S. Sharma (1975: 1-13).
[24] Chitgopeker (2002: 12) has commented that the origin and establishment of the shakti-pithas could be traced back to Shiva's dance with the body of his dead wife, Sati.

to be Manasa's sister and companion (Kshemananda, 2015: 24). Despite being born later than Manasa, Neta provides her with much required counsel during her distress and is the only woman with whom Manasa shares a wholesome relationship. In fact, Manasa's relationship with Neta is the only instance of positive female camaraderie depicted in the text.

Chandi, the primary mother goddess of the story is often petty, menacing, and possessive about her husband Shiva. Chandi constantly demeans Shiva for his philandering ways, while as yet remaining subservient to him. When Shiva dies after drinking the poison that emerges from the churning of cosmic oceans, Chandi decides to die with him on the pyre, until she remembers Manasa, who can revive those who die as a result of poisoning. She then sends word to her estranged stepdaughter and invites her to revive her dead father. Manasa, instead of being sad or pensive about her father's death, basks in the new opportunity, of avenging herself to Chandi, by reminding Chandi of her ill-treatment in the past that had Shiva throw her out of the house. Just like Shiva thought nothing of abandoning her, Manasa too, was unmoved by his death, exulting rather, in her stepmother's apparent fall from pride. Here, Chandi's pride and power is dependent on Shiva's presence, and without him in the picture, Chandi is easily subdued by Manasa, reiterating for readers the power struggle between Hindu caste-society, and emergent forest communities—symbolic of Shiva and the seemingly-independent Shakta cult. As a revenge for her blinded left-eye, Manasa now slaps Chandi out of the pyre, permanently marking her on her back (Kshemananda, 2015: 52-57), this process of disfiguring constituting a marking on the body—a stamp that asserts power over subdued persons within a slave society. It is interesting to note that after resurrecting Shiva, Manasa's dominance over Chandi suddenly increases, shifting the power dynamics between the women, for Chandi's inability to resurrect Shiva and her subsequent dependence on Manasa.

Goddesses in India can be classified into two types: 'the breast goddess' and 'the tooth goddess' (Chitgopekar, 2002: 14, Doniger O'Flaherty, 1980: 90, Masilamani-Meyer, 2004: 50-51, 94-97, Ramanujan, 1999: 498). According to Ramanujan's classification, breast goddesses are consorts and subordinate to their male counterparts, tooth goddesses are independent, and insubordinate to male counterparts even if married. Breast goddesses are characterized as benevolent, pure, and chaste deities. However, tooth goddesses are ambivalent, and often angry, lustful, and coquettish (1999: 498). Following these categories, Chandi is a 'consort goddess' and therefore subordinate to her husband. Manasa, however has a different character. Though we can classify Manasa as a predominantly tooth goddess, who 'mimics' a breast goddess in order to be accepted within the larger Hindu pantheon, both she and Chandi fall ambiguously between the two binary categories, as goddesses with a strong tooth element, aspiring at the same time, to the status of breast goddesses. It is this negotiation and aspiration of goddesses that produces the *Manasamangal* as an empathetic narrative that reflects the everyday life of women, who are structurally speaking, subservient to males within family and society, while battling the oppression of men within personal relationships. At the same time, they require validation from

these men, as they aspire to become gentle and powerful wives and mothers with status in society. It is this aspiration that produces their negotiation with men as a motivated power-struggle in everyday life. Similarly, Manasa initially seeks validation from her father, but in the absence of this validation, after the initial period of feeling rejected at being exiled, she does not brood any longer, but settles down in Shijua, remaining independent, active, and busy, with Neta by her side. Upon his resurrection, Shiva accepts her as his daughter and declares that she would henceforth be known as Bishahari, or the conqueror of all poison. Upon hearing this all the gods paid her obeisance and offered her the pot of poison in the universe, so that she distributes it among snakes and scorpions (Kshemananda, 2015: 57).

At this point, one might have thought the conflict between Chandi and Manasa is resolved. But Chandi still harboured malice towards Manasa, while Manasa appears to be trustful. Upon revival, when Shiva decides to get Manasa married to the Sage Jarathkaru, the sage however, humiliates Shiva by rejecting his proposal. Enraged Shiva avenges the insult by ordering Yama to carry all of Jarathkaru's ancestors away to hell. The only way they can be freed, is by Jarathkaru accepting Manasa's marriage proposal. Compelled, Jarathkaru accepts the proposal and prepares to marry Manasa. However, Chandi does not share her husband's enthusiasm about Manasa's marriage, declaring that Manasa is no daughter of hers, for she has never breastfed her. Hearing this, Manasa makes Chandi's dry breasts fill with so much milk that the stream of milk jets towards Manasa, allowing the latter to partake it. Chandi's claim about not breastfeeding Manasa is nullified now, and Manasa has forced Chandi to accept her as a daughter (Kshemananda, 2015: 61-65). So, not only the husband, Manasa also gets a mother, forcefully, demonstrating Brahminical uneasiness about worshipping a feisty goddess like Manasa. Following the forced breast-feeding event, Chandi does not sit idle either. Her pride hurt, Chandi decides to break Manasa's marriage. She instructs Manasa to dress herself in her choicest snakes, while entering the marriage chamber, despite knowing full well, the sage's aversion to snakes. Chandi also gifts Manasa a frog that agitates the snakes and turns them violent when Manasa lies down beside her husband. This scares Jarathkaru so much that he flees to the inside of the ocean and hides in a conch, later to be retrieved by Shiva. Manasa is heart-broken, and rather than being stuck in a loveless marriage, she instead requests Jarathkaru to leave after impregnating her, as this would fulfil her desire for marriage. As a result, she gives birth to Astika, who later plays an important role in the *Mahabharata* (Kshemananda, 2015: 67-69). By this time, Manasa has gained legitimacy as Shiva's daughter, as Jarathkaru's wife, and as Astika's mother. She has fulfilled all her roles as a woman, and acquires legitimacy, making her a prominent, respectable figure within the celestial realms, and an eligible candidate as a 'proper goddess' to be accepted within the Hindu pantheon[25].

[25] According to Chitgopekar (2002: 14-16) marriage and childbirth are attempts to domesticate and reign in the destructive powers arising from a goddesses' sexual energy.

Manasa and the Cowherds

There has been significant amount of scholarship on death and disease goddesses in the Bengal region[26]. According to S. Sen, Manasa is "the goddess of life, cure and prosperity, and the demoness of death, decay and misfortune" (1953: xxix). True to these descriptions, Manasa's first exploits on earth begins with 'tricking' and threatening a group of cowherd children into worshipping her, as she, with Neta's counsel, assumes the disguise of an old, poor Brahmin widow. As soon as she appears to them, the children mock her and begin pushing her around, at which she becomes enraged and steals all their cows, disappearing into thin air. This leaves the cowherd children feeling confused and scared. Manasa tells them that only after they worship her, and placate her with offerings, she will return them their cows. Ashamed and chastised for misbehaving with an old woman, the children happily start preparing to worship her. Because Manasa was symbolised by her snakes and a pitcher made of mud, the cowherds first established a votive pitcher of her, to which they offered their prayers. Upon the completion of all rites and rituals, Manasa returns them their cows and blesses them by protecting them from snakebite (Kshemananda, 2015: 70-82). Now, while this episode can simplistically be viewed as Manasa's triumph over animal herder communities, there is a deeper implication of threat and violence in these conversions. The cowherd children are scared and blackmailed into worshipping her, and Neta intentionally counsels Manasa to take the form of an old widow, knowing fully well that the mischievous children would harass her, and thereby offend the goddess. This story provides important imagery about the status of old women and widows in society, who may have been socially vulnerable and unkindly treated, if they at all lived to be very old[27]. The cowherd children bullied the disguised goddess, and while it is tempting to think that her punishment of them was meant to instill respect for old vulnerable women within the heart of young rural community, this seems unlikely. At the same time, while the behaviour of the children reflects parental and societal opinion about the old, there is a certain clandestine character to this hatred, since the children bully the old widow, also considered inauspicious due to their inability to work and being a financial burden to an already impoverished community (Chakravarti, 1995: 2248-2256).

Battle with Hassan-Hussain

The malevolent and menacing nature of Manasa's personality becomes all the more evident in the Hassan-Hussain episode that reflects the prevailing Hindu-Muslim tensions in society. As the Mangalkavyas have emerged in Bengal after Muslims emerged as a strong social and political group in Bengal, the conflict between Manasa and Hassan-Hussain represents a dramatic socio-political reality (Haq, 2015: 31). As the story recounts, Muslim rulers dominated agrarian

[26] For more research on ambivalent goddesses of sickness and diseases in Bengal, cf. Curley (2008: 1-70), Kinsley (1986: 197-211), Nicholas (2016: 156-185), Wadley (1980: 33-62).

[27] For research surrounding practices on aging in rural Bengal villages, and the loss of power and agency of elderly widows, cf. Lamb (2000: 1-26, 115-143, 213-238)

settlements, and cowherd communities dependent on agrarian settlements in the time of the text's composition. When the messengers of Hassan-Hussain came across the cowherd children worshipping Manasa, they informed Hassan about a Hindu deity who has infiltrated his lands of Hassanhati[28] (Kshemananda, 2015: 88). Enraged, Hassan ordered the messengers to punish the cowherds, disrupt the worship, and convert the cowherds to Islam. Manasa, still residing in the pitcher the cowherds were worshipping, saw the Muslim messengers arrive. She abandoned the pot immediately, as their touch would have defiled her. The messengers scared away the cowherds and vandalised the place of worship, taking away all their offering, and desecrating the spot by breaking the sacred votive pitcher (ibid.: 89-90). They thereafter tried to convert the cowherds to Islam. However, after their attempts at convincing and converting the cowherds failed, the messengers returned to Hassan, informing him about Manasa's celestial beauty. And this resulted in Hassan desiring her. He sent an army to bring her to him, but she defeated his army using hornets, and nettle leaves as her weapons. The soldiers called forth to Allah for help, but those prayers remain unanswered, indicating that Manasa was superior to Allah (ibid.: 91-96). According to Haq, this "encounter then may be seen as yet another instance of conflict between an expanding agricultural economy and an older pastoral economy" (2015: 49). The pastoral community that was losing strength found in Manasa a saviour to restore them, thereby negotiating power with Muslim agrarian settlements that were more dominant. The conflict between Manasa and Hassain-Hussain that is depicted as a religious battle, reflects a conflict between two modes of livelihood economies. In the narrative, Manasa not only defeated Hassan-Hussain, but she also completely eradicated their entire clans, only leaving the two brothers alive. She sent across a very small snake called a 'bighatiya', to Hassan-Hussain's palace, and the snake, that is considered very poisonous, killed all of Hassan's and Hussain's subjects, including their wives and children. Broken and grief-stricken, Hassan-Hussain decided to leave Hassanhati, but were interrupted in the process by Manasa. She told them, that they could only leave after demolishing their mosque, and building a temple for her in its place (Kshemananda, 2015: 97-108). Two events are worth explaining here: the bighatiya is one of the smallest snakes found in Bengal, just a handspan in length, and it was this small snake that took the entire responsibility of eradicating Hassan-Hussain's clans and subjects, whereas all the other big, poisonous snakes were scared to venture into the treacherous lands of Hassanhati (ibid.: 99). The small size of the snake refers to Manasa herself, who, despite being an outsider, and from the lower rungs of society, possessed the potential to bring about change—though one of a devastatingly destructive variety.

The other instance worth pondering is Manasa's treatment of Hassan and Hussain. Despite defeating them and breaking their pride, Manasa was not satisfied with their vanquishment. She decided to exterminate their entire clans, mercilessly killing women and children without scruples. In what mimics a narrative of dissent, Manasa reinvented herself as a powerful tool of destruction. While Manasa's unhesitant killing of Hassan-Hussain's subjects stemmed from

[28] Hassanhati is a village in Kalna subdivision of East Bardhaman in West Bengal.

being oppressed by agrarian communities, one must be careful about reading religion too literally into the frame of this conflict. The pitting of a woman as a goddess, against a-dharmic oppressors also continues in the same style as adopted within the *Devi Mahatmya,* the cultic tradition that has goddess Durga, along with all her *matragana* (army of Matrikas) face Mahisasur, and the demonic brothers Sumbha-Nisumbha[29]. It is equally important therefore, not to view these cultic battles as feminist battles. The figures of Hassan-Hussain have cultic similarity with the demons Sumbha-Nisumbha, although in this case, quite curiously, Manasa lets Hassan-Hussain off alive. The fact that the brothers remained alive (in contrast to Sumbha-Nisumbha), demonstrates the continuing dominance of Islam in Bengal, and the power struggles and negotiations Manasa and the Shakta cult had with Islam. It is exactly like her relationship with Shiva explored above: while her power struggles with him and Chandi demonstrate the Shakta cult's negotiations for power with Shaivism, Manasa's mythology demonstrates not the defeat of Shaivism or Islam per se, but the emergence and arrival of a volatile Shakta cult that was more ecological in nature, epitomized in Manasa's poisonous and threatening nature.

Defeating Chand Saudagar

After the Hassan-Hussain episode, the *Manasamangal* narrative moves to Manasa's victory over Chand Saudagar. According to their story of animosity, Chand was born during the churning of oceans, and was declared as Shiva's son, and he also received a special mantra from Shiva that allowed him control over death. This declaration also made him Manasa's brother (Kshemananda, 2015: 48), while also being ambiguously placed with her—on the one hand, he was her superior as a son, and male inheritor imbued with the power of immortality,on the other hand, this sibling-hood also made him feel inferior, since despite his mysterious birth, and control over death, he was still mortal and not a deity. However, the knowledge of this special mantra, made Chand arrogant, and he constantly belittled Manasa. Therefore, Manasa set about breaking Chand's arrogance. This story of Manasa's triumph is very popular and adapted in the form of shorter versions into many vrata-kathas—collectively read narratives by women and priests to worship household deities (cf. Dimock, 1962: 307-21 for more discussions on Manasa's story)[30].

Manasa with Neta's counsel hatches an elaborate plan. By tricking Indra's two sons, she curses them to be reborn on earth as the brothers Jhalu and Malu, in the fishermen caste. She tricks them as an older Brahmin woman, into establishing her votive golden pitcher in their mother's household (Kshemananda,2015: 109-120). She infiltrates the household and community thus, from being playfully worshipped by cowherds, to a proper goddess heralded with pomp and ceremony in Jhalu-Malu's home and to the other homes of the

[29] For details on the development and interpretations of the Devi Mahatmya, cf. Coburn (1991: 1-10)

[30] For more extensive research on vrata-kathas in Bengal, cf. Curley (2008: 1-70), and Rathod Mahanta (2010, 2018), for a discussion on the confluence of brahmanical and indigenous elements.

community. From here, Manasa ascends to upper caste households, ensuring that upper caste women come in contact with lower caste women on the pretext of everyday tasks, and thereby become influenced by Manasa. Chand's wife is similarly influenced and brings Manasa's votive pitcher home, only to be confronted with Chand's rage. When Chand finds out that his wife is worshipping Manasa, he takes his staff made from the hental tree,[31] and breaks the pitcher, angering Manasa and causing her significant anxiety (ibid.: 122-124). The breaking of the pitcher with Chand's staff is quite an intermittent theme in the narrative, repeated to demonstrate how afraid Manasa is of Chand's menacing staff. The staff designates masculine control and resistance over women, and the female body, and power since the votive pitcher is Manasa's body at the moment of ritual propitiation after all—a control that even goddesses cannot escape. Since the combination of the special immortality mantra from Shiva and the hental staff made Chand invincible, Manasa sets about seducing Chand in disguise, in order to rob him of this mantra, trying in various ways to gain superiority over him.

The power dynamics between the male and female gods are often asserted through the goddess's own body. Seduction in the guise of hapless, lower caste woman is a frequently used trope in Indian mythology and folk narratives (Doniger O'Flaherty, 2013: 288-300). The use of disguise as lower caste women by both Chandi and Manasa to gain an object or power from men is extensively used throughout the text. In the text, we encounter Chandi seducing Shiva in disguise of a lower caste boatwoman, to get an upper hand over him, and expose his cheating ways. Manasa on the other hand, takes the form of a beautiful nautch girl to seduce Chand into giving her the immortality mantra. She also seduces Dhanvantari and his disciples, ultimately resulting in the former's death.

Betraying Dhanvantari's Wife

Manasa evidently struggles a lot to establish herself, but her methods are almost deliberately unscrupulous mixed with naïve trustfulness, as if she is self-aware of her decisions, counselled by Neta, to constitute the 'weapons of the weak'. Seen from this perspective, her conniving is almost justified by the empathetic text that dissolves social mores such as friendship between women, as repositories of social privilege. Being disempowered and ill-treated herself, with no one interested in upholding social mores in relationships with her, whether it be parents, siblings, or husband, Manasa sees no reason to adhere to these social mores herself. She is equally manipulative when it comes to gaining personal power. Her manipulation of Dhanavantari's wife Kamala, under the pretext of friendship is a case in point.

Now, since Dhanvantari supported Chand Saudagar, Manasa decided to eliminate him by first gaining access to Dhanvantari's wife Kamala. Manasa approached Kamala as a friend and confederate, a shoi[32]—a special relationship between two

[31] A tree that is commonly encountered in the Sundarbans region. Latin name: Phoenix Paludosa. A swampy plant also known as mangrove date palm.

[32] A soulmate.

women with the same name. Since Kamala, like Padma is one of Manasa's names (hidden as she was by Shiva in a basketful of lotus blooms), she approaches Dhanvantari's wife, whose name is also Kamala, and professes herself a shoi. Dhanvantari's wife, upon learning they shared the same name, also embraces Manasa, and pledges herself as Manasa's shoi. Manasa then manipulates Kamala, and extracts information from her about how Dhanvantari can be killed, and proceeds to kill him thereafter through deceit and trickery (Kshemananda, 2015: 151-156). She uses his wife Kamala merely as an instrument towards her own power and sacrifices the social mores of female comradeship and friendship that transcends class and caste among women. Manasa is relentless as she relishes Chand's agony, never caring whom she exploits and kills in the process, deliberately unmindful of their innocence and suffering. This aspect again, reveals the empathetic nature of *Manasamangal* as a text that closely demonstrates the cynicism and apathy setting in among disempowered and orphaned members of society, may these be individual persons, communities, or the emerging Shakta cult, that did not possess legitimacy, but single-mindedly pursued their aims of winning battles, their ends justifying their means. Though Manasa was ultimately successful in her endeavours, she remains a discontented, brutal, a-moral, and apathetic goddess, who primarily seeks appeasement, and remains cynical and untrusting of the world, just as a human woman, with similar experiences in their everyday life, would do.

Conclusion: Goddesses and Feminism

Alf Hiltebeitel and Kathleen M. Erndl (2000: 11-23) asked an important but provocative question in their book on goddesses and the postcolonial political deployment of goddesses to social justice causes: "Is the Goddess a Feminist?" The answer to this question is quite a unanimous "no", since no Indian goddess is completely non-ambiguous; in fact, each goddess according to her origin myth has some or the other aspect of rage and 'tooth', especially in the period before she joins the Puranic pantheon, emerging from a grassroots circuit of devotion, to becoming a full goddess, her appended community of devotees traveling along with her, to combine with an extremely diverse, vast, and somewhat chaotic constellation of what is known as Hindu caste society in India today. The problematic underlying the asking of such a question in the first place is a misconception—a misconceived assumption that being ferocious means being a feminist, accompanied by its corollary: a passive woman as inherently complicit within internalized masculine control. Hindu goddesses could not have been feminists against patriarchy before the binaries of feminism and patriarchy were ever coined, and that too, in the US. Not all masculine control was patriarchal. And the empathy for women, combined with their benevolent control is starkly evident from the *Manasamangal*—a Hindu religious text composed wholly in a masculine context. The *Manasamangal* demonstrates the plight of women without being either completely oppressive or totally emancipatory, but instead depicting a more human image of existing relationships between the genders, for the society in which the text was compiled. In fact, Manasa's story is far from either patriarchy or feminism, but instead ambiguous, reflective of real-life, and

everyday relationships between Shaivism and various other devotional communities of the time[33].

As the title suggests, Manasa is ambiguous, and this is where the empathetic power of the *Manasamangal* lies. As a myth performed quite popularly within the rural, folk genres encountered in Bengal, the text creates empathy for the travails of women who are sexually, and biologically disconnected from the mainstream, and whose presence reflects the presence of other marginalized devotional communities, like the pastoral and lower caste fishermen communities, that were hitherto outside the caste system. The integration of these deities and communities into the ambit of an over-extended and ever-enlarged Puranic pantheon and caste system that simultaneously distinguishes itself against Muslims, is reflected in Manasa's battle with Hassan-Hussain. But despite this competitive distinguishing process, Shakta cults and communities nevertheless continue to negotiate for space within the caste structure, just as Manasa continues to battle with Chand Saudagar. As a woman without active sexual or biological bonds to powerful men and mainstream society, except Shiva, and without confidants and supporters, except Neta, Manasa must disguise herself to seduce men. More than anything else, Manasa's story demonstrates the face of Shakta religion and its accompanying, adherent communities, in the mainstream religiosity of precolonial Bengal.

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[33] William Sax (1996: 355-382) investigates the way in which *pandav lilas* created gendered persons and identities, especially Draupadi and Kunti.

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Village, Caste and Gender in Vijaydan Detha's *duvidha* and *kenchuli*

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Abstract

Rajasthan is home to rich traditions of folklore where folklorist Vijaydan Detha (1926-2013) has made the most significant contribution to its documentation over time. Born in a family which historically consisted of geneologists, Vijaydan Detha or "Bijji" as he is affectionately called has documented more than eight hundred tales in Rajasthani language and received several awards for writing folktales originating in the Thar Desert region of Rajasthan. There have been many film and theatre adaptations of the tales he collected, which have also been translated into English, securing him an international audience that has enjoyed his unique colloquial style. This paper examines two among Vijaydan Detha's valuable folktale renditions, wherein he provides space to female narratives to explore gender. Additionally, this paper will demonstrate how these gender concerns of the narrative, continue to resonate with contemporary readers. The paper will further attempt to establish how class dynamics and caste hierarchy in rural India, especially Rajasthan become contexts for the sexual exploitation of women. Detha exposes duality within established social order, and through his tales, questions the social sanction and sexual agency that the marriage institution bestows on women.

Keywords: Detha, Folklore, Folktales, Gender, Agency.

Introduction

This article explores the contributions of Vijaydan Detha, a renowned folklorist who spent his career, collecting and documenting the folklore of Rajasthan. Though the folktales he collected, have been read, translated, and adapted into screenplay, not much of the discussion on gender that he highlighted in his stories have hitherto been adequately analysed. Seeking to fulfil this epistemic gap, this

paper reflects on some theoretical relationships between gender as a modern concept and women's suffering as an articulation of humanity within folklore. It is noteworthy that a large portion of tales collected by Detha are from women across age groups from his own village Borunda, Rajasthan and other nearby places—rural inhabitations that can be defined as patriarchal conglomerates subject to caste hierarchies. M. N. Srinivas (1957: 532) understood caste hierarchy in India as the arranging of familial groups into an order wherein the highest rank enjoys a privileged position. During the 1950s, Mckim Marriott (1955) analysed the culture of rural societies and identified the dependence on caste in determining interpersonal relations in Indian villages. Since caste plays an important role in the fabric of rural life in India, there is a resistance to change that can be identified as a defining characteristic in the rural, feudal, agrarian, caste-based configurations in Indian villages as change can threaten these existing structures. As narrated by Detha in the tale *kenchuli* (The Slough)*,* a member of the 'Dominant Caste' uses his feudal title and economical advantage in an attempt to sexually exploit a woman of the subaltern class. The feudal structure creates ground for such blatant exploitation of women as well as render the family of the woman in question powerless due to their occupational dependence on the landlord. According to S. Jackson (Quoted in Cense, 2018: 247), sexual agency can be defined as "the right and ability to define and control your own sexuality, free from coercion and exploitation". Detha illustrates that women have no will of their own in the patriarchal plane that his tales *kenchuli* and *divudha* represent. He employs an empathetic narrative technique to evoke a pitiful picture of how little choice women have in the matters that concern their own lives. The bridegroom in the story *duvidha* directs his young wife to preserve the honour of the house at all costs while he is away. Her feelings on the subject of his leaving so soon after the wedding are of no importance to the groom. He is to be gone so leave he will. She answers him with silence. Detha points out: 'It was not in her power to say, to do, or to change anything. Her husband's will must be her will' (Detha, 1991: 34).

A Brief Outline of Folklore in North India

Though this paper discusses two of Detha's important contributions to Rajasthani folklore that depicts village life structured in terms of caste and gender, this section outlines some of the important contributions in the field of gender and folklore in North India.

India has a rich history of folkloric traditions. The scholarship that existed on folklore before independence was largely due to western scholars such as William Crooke (1896), R.C. Temple (1883-1900), James Tod (1829) and George Abraham Grierson (1909), a linguist credited with coining a combined term 'Rajasthani' for the dialects spoken in the Indian state of Rajasthan as well as

carrying out extensive linguistic survey on Indian languages and studying folklore etymology and folktales. Colonizers collected folklore in order to better understand the colonized and after independence, the textbooks of regional languages such as Bengali included folktales (Bajpai, 2019: 5) and folklore studies developed all over India. Amol Palekar co-wrote and directed the critically acclaimed film *Paheli* in 2005 which was inspired by the 1997 Kannada film naga-mandala (Play with Cobra) which in turn is based on a play written by Girish Karnad (1988) who wrote it after hearing two tales which are a part of the oral tradition in Karnataka from his mentor and folklorist, A. K. Ramanujan (1991). Thus, often the tales originating in one part of India have travelled to another and multiple oral versions have come into existence of the same tale that include varying supernatural elements based on the myths prevalent in a particular region. This can be attributed as a characteristic of oral tradition.

Indian folklore voices the concerns of women through folk songs and folktales by depicting prevalent customs and interpersonal power dynamics. In the North Indian Folkloric tradition, folk music, folk songs or ballads (*lok gatha*), folk dance, epic poems and folktales (*lok katha*) are a conglomerate that as a whole preserves the oral tradition. Therefore, a study of any one of these can combine the written and oral aspects together (Handoo, 1994: 93) and includes elements of Indian Mythology and epics. Manju Bhatnagar (1985) and K. D. Upadhyaya (1968) have researched the plight of women written about in North Indian folklore. Bhatnagar sheds light on the mention of co-wife or concubine in folk songs as a nuisance and discusses the subservient position of wife to the husband highlighting the exploitative nature of polygamy practices towards women. Upadhyaya also takes up the discussion on, polygamy in Indian epics and ancient India (1968: 93), the co-wife, the tense interpersonal relationships in the marital home as well as examines the place of women in Hindu society as depicted in Bhojpuri Folksongs, and states that these songs reveal how wives are allowed no separate existence from men and are considered as personal property in Hindu society (1968: 82). A wife's worth is determined by the begetting of sons and 'the auspicious songs which are sung on the birth of a son are called 'Sohar'. But no such songs are sung by the women of the house on the occasion of a daughter's birth' (1968: 83). A woman's chastity is celebrated and preached through such narratives wherein peddlers and strangers try to tempt devoted wives with riches and jewels (1968: 89) and 'honour' has to be preserved at all costs, including life. Such narratives can be seen to be upheld by certain stories that women tell each other during religious rituals in the villages that consolidate an idealized womanhood.

Vijaydan Detha however paints a different picture that is in stark contrast to this dominant narrative. Detha is responsible for igniting a renewed interest in the folk tradition of Rajasthan. He co-founded Rupayan Sansthan along with the folklorist Komal Kothari in an attempt to document art, music and folklore. He

made Rajasthani folklore inescapable and accessible and justified the importance of revisiting the folkloric traditions indigenous to a country.

The Dilemma

Detha's short story *duvidha*, translated as 'The Dilemma', addresses the question of female sexual agency by portraying an unnamed bride who elects to consummate her marriage with her husband's doppelganger when faced with the dilemma of desiring his emotional, conjugal support, and suffering from his complete absence.[1] The supernatural doppelganger husband in *duvidha* hence, represents, or is the manifestation of female desire. In the story, the supernatural being, taking one look at the beautiful bride falls deeply in love with her, assuming the form of her parting husband. He presents himself up to her and confesses everything to her, proclaiming his immeasurable love for her; he then leaves the decision up to her. The bride is silent, and facing the first choice of her life, reflects on her fate of becoming the bride of her husband as a consequence of her parents acquiescing and accepting the offer of marriage made by her husband's family, it is her fate that she must go where her parents send her off to, it could just as easily have been another family that became her lot if the auspicious coconut sent as an offering to signify an alliance had arrived from someplace else. That decision or any other for that matter has never been hers to make.

Detha hints in the story that this powerful manifestation of a spirit comes from within the young woman herself, and she has no control over it just as one has no control over one's dream. As explained by the doppelganger supernatural husband when he confronts the woman's actual husband in the end: "I am the subtle being within a woman's body, the lord of her love" (Detha, 1991: 41). The young bride acquiesces to live with the doppelganger, exercising her sexual agency and introspecting (Detha, 1991: 37):

> *If she could not stop the one who went away, how could she stop the one who came? How could she fill her ears with oil when he expressed his love? Her husband had left her in midstream. Though a ghost, this other had shown her love. How could she refuse it? Could dreams be controlled, then might love be controlled!*

Thereafter, the supernatural husband and the young wife spend the next four years together in marital bliss, and await the birth of their new-born who they hope will be a girl, and whose birth they want to celebrate. This is surprising in itself as only the birth of a boy warrants a celebration traditionally. Detha

1 Doppelganger is being used here to refer to the double of the bride's actual husband. This doppelganger is a powerful ghost in the story Dilemma.

describes how the bride ruminates over the memory of her own childhood, and the knowledge that her birth was not celebrated by her parents in the same way, as a son's would have been. It is at such a moment that the actual husband returns, and everyone in the village mistakes the real husband to be a trickster. Even his own mother refuses to recognize him—so totally has the supernatural husband won everyone's heart in the household. The 2005 film adaptation of the story entitled *Paheli* directed by Amol Palekar depicts this amiability beautifully wherein the actor Shahrukh Khan plays the role of the jovial supernatural husband and the state of the minds of the couple are shown through string-puppet narrators voiced by actors. Apara Tiwari (2013) has done a comparative study between the film adaptation and the tale to study the figurative language aspects of the two retellings.

In *duvidha*, there is an obvious difference in the affluence of the bride's and the groom's family. The groom points out right in the beginning that the young bride would have to mend her 'village bumpkin' ways (Detha, 1991: 33), suitable only for shepherds. Within a span of a few lines, Detha is able to paint a lively and vivacious picture of the young bride who is not quite a woman yet, still fond of her dolls and playmates and how her new life will strip away all of this from her. And the husband does not waste any time in doing so. Her behaviour, when she expresses a fondness for wild berries is unbecoming, according to him, for an upper-caste, wealthy, moneylender and businessman's daughter-in-law. Her husband's derision hurts the young bride, and kills her appetite for the berries. This incident is craftily depicted in the rustic film of 1973 shot by Mani Kaul entirely in Rajasthan. The bride wonders at the coldness of the newly-wed husband, who is so quick to leave her, just two days after the wedding, uncaring of any romantic sentiments and expectations, as business is more important to him than marriage, which is just another task to be completed. His wife is disappointed with his eagerness to leave her behind for a long business trip, even though the family is quite affluent. This class difference becomes evident in the story when villagers assemble to enjoy the scandal that ensues after the return of the real husband.

In his analysis of Rampura, a multi-caste village in South India, M. N. Srinivas (1959: 1) describes the importance of 'dominant castes' to the social fabric of Indian rural life, where community dominance is established through the numerical and socio-economic hegemony, established through land ownership, that accords communities with political power, and higher status within the caste hierarchies of a micro-region. Similarly, though the moneylender's family in *duvidha* is not Brahmin, it belongs to the dominant caste as well as the dominant class of the region, owing to the family's affluence and increasing prosperity that accords it a higher place in the caste hierarchies of a micro-region. The villagers demand that the moneylender's family bear the responsibility of setting the moral tone of the village, with the paradigm of justice demanded, encompassing not

just justice within one family (the moneylender's family), but justice for the whole village with adultery threatening its very fabric through the institution of marriage that affects everyone in the village.

Vivek Bharti (2015: 147) states that Detha captures 'the situation of a female' well, and by 'the end of the story where the bride, though is reunited again with her husband she cannot say anything about her emotional relationship with the ghost.' All her duties as a daughter-in-law become mechanical at the end of the story, with her being depicted as the ideal daughter-in-law, faultless in every way, emotionally closed, and responding to social expectations alone—concerned with routine housework, rituals, and whatever labour is demanded of her—without any complaint, or any need or desire for emotional satisfaction, love, or pleasure. Bharti (2015: 146) explores how Detha addresses a patriarchal conspiracy of subduing and rendering women invisible, by shrouding them within their gender roles that are full of labour and other social responsibilities. By showing the bride as the very ideal of the domestic expectations on a woman, Detha appears to be critiquing the multiple rituals that are the lot of women which need to be performed on a daily basis, religious or otherwise in nature, which signify the ideal behaviour for the daughter-in-law of the family. The bride is well versed in those rituals which she then goes on to perform flawlessly, as the faith in her faultlessness is restored in the family. No one is interested in exploring the numbness within her robotic actions thereafter, as these mechanical tasks accord such great importance in the cultural fabric, that it is the established mode of appropriation. The mental duress or emotional dissatisfaction have no space whatsoever, especially for the daughter-in-law who exists as the giver in the family, the carer, demanding nothing in return. Interestingly, the family never questions her, and the husband *forgives* her for being blind to the tricks of the doppelganger supernatural husband stating 'how could *she* have been wiser' when his own parents were duped. And the bride keeps her silence, saved by the notion that she is neither expected to be more intelligent than her patriarchs nor expected to carry opinions on any issues.

Whenever a woman desires human kindness, she exposes herself to manipulation, with her desire becoming construed as wrongful revolt, despite the indifference and cruelty of patriarchy. This kind of patriarchal control is an established norm within the social fabric of rural Rajasthan. Detha's characterization of the mother of the actual husband can be seen as an example when he returns home. She is a reflection of her husband's wishes and opinions as he has total control over his wife, who cannot exercise a will of her own, and waits to take all her cues from her husband. She cannot have a different opinion from her husband, and it would almost seem as if she did not have the freedom to think for herself. It was as though her tongue became 'glued to her palate' (Detha, 1991: 39) when her son asked her how can she, his own mother not recognize him. But, the truth is that, even if she did, she is not allowed to think

in a manner contrary to her husband at all. Hence, she just hangs her head down and buffs him as though *he* is the impersonator, come to destroy the peace in their lives. The lines with which the story ends, are (Detha, 1991: 43):

> *Even animals cannot be so easily used against their will. At least they do shake their heads in protest. But are women allowed to have any will of their own. Until they reach the cremation ground, they must be in the bedchamber, and when they escape the bedchamber, they go straight to the cremation ground.*

To summarize this section before proceeding to an analysis of Detha's next short story, it is important to note that *duvidha* is finally a story about the property rights of men, and the justice and restitution of these masculine property rights. The husband leaves her for a long business trip with alacrity even before consummating the marriage. In doing so, he is exercising his property rights over her, who is already feeling uncomfortable with her romantic, conjugal expectations, but hoping to enjoy a personal relationship with him. Instead of indulging her with friendship, he reprimands her, treats her like an object that would fit into his family, like a newly acquired curio for a showcase, and not like an individual deserving of a personal relationship at all. The story is similar after he returns. The question of justice, that he may be recognized as the true heir of the family, and the true husband of his wife, is a justice about his masculine property rights, since his inability to do so in the face of the supernatural doppelganger husband renders him a criminal and fugitive, and finally destitute. It is important for him to regain his property rights, since the doppelganger supernatural husband is an imposter who has the power to disinherit him, and not because he is attached to his property, that includes his wife. Justice in this case is about rightful ownership and inheritance, and about the importance of inheritance and ownership among the dominant castes of his village. Many other such villagers demand that the merchant's family set the moral tone for them. The fact that the wife has to now remain silent, not just indicates to her punishment for having desired love and companionship from her husband, but punishment for endangering her husband's property rights by entertaining an imposter and intruder. *Duvidha* is also a story of female agency as depicted through the character of the young bride who knew her happiness will have an expiration date. In her marriage, that is all the entitlement she will ever receive, and even that is allowed her, because a supernatural being took a fancy to her. So, she receives this genuine affection offered her, without scruple and with open arms because something is better than nothing in her opinion as she is grossly disappointed in her husband for not recognizing her need for companionship in a marriage as well as emotional and physical satisfaction that is her due; and in her parents for choosing a family wrongly for her. The narrative was shifted towards a much reconcilable one in the film adaptation *Paheli*, where the doppelganger returns and possesses the real husband permanently in order to be able to live out a life with the bride and their daughter.

Vladimir Propp et al. (2000: 21) define a function to be understood 'as an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action'. The various powers of the supernatural being although vague are consistent with the use of a 'function' in folktales to advance and aid the narrative. The folktale *duvidha* recounts a story of not just feminine sexual agency, but its inevitable loss and failure, where feminine desire is demarcated as a dangerous weapon against family ownership and inheritance, subverting patriarchy by refusing to be an object, and through this subversion, fundamentally threatening the village community. This story that articulates feminine desire, therefore, simultaneously articulates its danger in patriarchal society and also illustrates how Detha employs subversion and brings an alternative narrative to the fore as the central and marginal characters etched by him are disenfranchised in dominant narratives.

The Slough

Detha explores the existence of caste-based power structures and village hierarchies through his tale, *kenchuli*, in which he depicts the agglutination of capital among dominant castes that sexually oppress women from poorer families. He relates the story of Laachchi, a girl from the shepherd caste, and her exploitation by the feudal owner and landlord of the village, Thakur (also a caste title and surname). Laachhi confronts her husband's powerlessness to the landlord, who lusts after her. When her husband is unable to defend her against the landlord, Laachchi begins questioning the marriage institution, and her subservient role in society, and the domestic sphere, as she identifies with the writhing snake, helpless, until it frees itself from its own skin or slough (*kenchuli*). Detha reveals how marriage is idealized as the sole source of emotional and financial security for women, but how, on the other hand, it traps a woman too, by reducing her to nothing more than free domestic labour, exposed to the violent will of rapacious, powerful village men. Kancha Ilaih (Quoted in Kannabiran, 2009: 37) states that it is the dalit bahujan communities that define the concept of egalitarianism in society that should serve as a model for other communities. This is also what readers perceive in Laachchi's determination to lead a dignified and decent life against all odds. Further, because private property and its ownership is outside the realm of the subaltern castes, this makes women from such families completely dependent on the mercy of land-owners (Kannabiran, 2009: 37).

Anupama Rao (2005: 14) provides a perspective on the relationship between caste and gender, its theoretical tendencies and frames of reference by compiling the discourse of the last decade on the subject. The marginalization and oppression of lower caste women is explored by Banerjee and Ghosh (2019: 19) in an edited volume to examine how caste system manifests hierarchy and

patriarchy, feminizes labour to legitimize violence against women while interrogating identity across intersections of caste and gender as well as the role played by religion. In *kenchuli*, Laachchi confronts age old, and systemic gendered exploitation, but courageously refuses to tolerate injustice, by acknowledging her own agency and personhood in confrontation with patriarchal, and marital oppression. Time and again, Detha refers to the various tasks Laachchi must finish throughout the day as a shepherd's wife, even as she reflects on her status and safety within the home that provides her with space, only because she contributes free domestic labour to it. Her name Laachchi—she is named after the goddess Lakshmi, is a simulacrum in *kenchuli*. Goddess Lakshmi, considered the Hindu deity of wealth and prosperity, is often sought to be emulated by women, as wives are compared to the goddess, they are expected to bring prosperity into the home, in terms of good luck and children. Laachchi realizes that her husband does not care for her honour and dignity, in the face of attempts made by Bhoja, the Thakur's henchman to coerce her into becoming the Thakur's mistress, as he (the husband) is fearful of the consequences of Laachchi displeasing the Thakur. Her husband reprimands her by saying: 'do not be so arrogant about beauty, just because the dagger is of gold does not mean one should use it to kill oneself, I can bring upwards of twenty women such as yourself to cook food and make dung cakes on this farm but where will I go if the landlord throws me off of this farm (translation is mine)'? Bhoja begins harassing Laachchi on his own accord, soliciting sexual favours from her. In addition to Bhoja's wielding of power over the shepherd community (of which Laachhi's husband is a member), Bhoja also has the landlord's ear. There is, therefore, a constant looming threat over the shepherd's family, of being evicted from the fields they harvest and their village home that belongs to the Thakur. Both the Thakur and Bhoja are hence, directly in a position of power, and ready to exploit Laachchi. Once when propositioned, Laachchi slaps the landlord, not caring for the consequences, the shepherd reprimands Laachchi for inviting trouble by disrespecting the landlord and instructs her to be wise. Laachchi reflects how 'she had gained the wisdom of thousands of years in that one moment' (translation is mine). He clarifies that she is free to have an affair with the Thakur or any of his henchmen. This reveals the fluidity of marital sexual morality, evident in the way the Thakur successfully solicits sexual favours from other married village women. Bhoja even solicits help from these women to coerce Laachchi successfully. Detha critiques this hypocritical fluidity of the marital institution that selectively fails to safeguard women within marriages, when women are wrongfully exploited and coerced by powerful men, but on the other hand, expects unpaid domestic labour from them, expecting them, like goddesses, to bring prosperity into the marital household. Not even Laachchi's mother-in-law is able to shield her from Bhoja's overtures, as he frequents their home, pretending to be a helpful guardian. She shuts her eyes to the threat faced by her daughter-in-law, just as the landlord's wife overlooks her husband's sexual misconduct, reduced as she is, to a marginal fixture, encased in marital traditions

and family customs. In the film adaptation *Kaanchli* (2020) directed by Dedipya Joshii, her inactive state of being is apparent.

It is interesting to note that the young bride in *duvidha,* being the daughter-in-law in an upper caste family is expected to engage in various religious rituals along with her duties as the carer to the family, whereas Laachchi's chores largely revolve around the farm and the animals on the farm. Even the character of the mother-in-law, although she appears rarely in the story, is not shown to be religious at all which is put in stark contrast with the upper caste wife of the Thakur, who fasts religiously and follows other customs and rituals dutifully. This even helps Bhoja at one time when he is in the garden of Laachchi's family awaiting her and her husband walks in. Bhoja is able to get out of a tight spot as he just surreptitiously lies about the Thakur's wife needing tree leaves for her religious rituals. Hence, it could be assumed that Detha centres his narrative at a time when roles are largely defined by occupations and the lower castes or tribes do not emulate the rituals and customs of the upper castes for cultural appropriation and social mobility. This can help explain why the hierarchies of class and caste are so rigid in this tale and how the women of a lower caste and class are openly exploited since they are not seen as deserving of the same esteem due to their menial occupations, lack of capital and a dependence on the upper castes for the dictates of custom, propriety and morality. Since, the dominant caste has an obvious and total advantage over the women of the lower castes, it leads to an exploitation that is perpetuated through the established structures. It is accepted by the subaltern classes as permanent even to the extent where subaltern men cannot fathom protecting or protesting, either for their own sakes or for the sake of their womenfolk.

Laachchi's husband questions her loyalty for eliciting the lustful male gaze of the Thakur and Bhoja, with no heed to her flawless character which she continues to uphold and protect. He questions her audacity to slap the landlord for the sake of her honour, without caring for him and the family, and the retribution it would bring them—making her responsible for the Thakur's and Bhoja's lust, without supporting her in protecting her honour and safety. It is at this juncture, that Laachchi starts questioning her own role as a woman and wife in family, village, and society. Laachchi's own conclusions in the story are bolstered by a gendered reading of Ambedkar (Kannabiran, 2009: 37) that describes the concerns of justice, religion, gender, and violence to be bound together with caste. Caste oppression thrives on gendered violence, and the establishment of hierarchies between castes. S. M. Patil has called Dalit women as triply oppressed on the bases of caste, gender and class, and discussed caste-based sexual violence (2018: 3), while Sharmila Rege's narrative (2013: 77) has situated women's voices in Dalit feminism and their varying struggles across 'caste, culture and practices of labour, the school, humiliation, violence, resistance'. As expected, unfortunately, Laachchi does not win, due to her position as a woman from the

subaltern class and caste, located within a traditional, feudal, agrarian system. While her marriage to a shepherd promises her an existence of abundance—no lack of butter, milk, and food at home, a characteristic feature of shepherd households, as explained by Detha, she is at the mercy of the landlord. Bhoja continues to accost her, and Laachchi loses her safety inside her own home, for which she cannot respect her husband any longer. There is mention of Laachchi suffering from insomnia due to the considerable duress she is under in the story. The impactful 2020 film adaptation brings this out remarkably which helps humanize the struggle of being hunted and feeling unsafe at all times in your own space. It illustrates how the contemporary reader and viewer can relate to the main character's struggle, meanwhile also demonstrating how the act of lovemaking became mechanical for her after she lost respect for her husband, and she started to fall out of love with a husband she had previously adored. This further illustrates how the imbalanced power dynamics of a rural feudal setup may end up threatening the domestic sphere, thereby inversely impacting the family institution as the marital act of procreating also becomes exploitative in a country that still does not recognize marital rape as a felony. This renders the bodies of women such as Laachchi exploited as objects— the husband's property.

Neither family, nor husband, nor Bhoja, and let alone the Thakur have any love or compassion for Laachchi. Finally, even as she acquiesces to Bhoja's demands, admiring his daring and quick-witted responses that help him come out of all the tight spots orchestrated by her to teach her husband a lesson, only *her* mental peace is in shambles, her husband doesn't even bat an eye. Bhoja's interest wanes, and he moves to another woman, leaving Laachchi feeling disconnected from her husband, and marriage, and the fruitless effort of protecting her dignity—the privileges of upper caste and affluent women, who were equally powerless to demand the fidelity of their husbands as is the case of the Thakur's upper caste and upper class wife who remains oblivious to her husband's sexual exploits. (It is telling that so insignificant is her presence that her character is not even provided a space in the 2020 film adaptation.) The metaphor of 'the slough' thus accurately describes Laachchi, as she finally does away with the false notion of marital chastity, moving out into the open as her own true mistress, to go, of her own free volition to Bhoja. Her self-confident walking towards him is symbolic in the story of her inner awakening, as she exercises her sexual agency, no longer reprimanding herself, and refusing to be bound by false, sanctimonious, marital ideals, that were only meant to control and oppress her.

Summarizing this section before concluding the article, this story is not only about women as property, as was the case in *duvidha*. There is an additional layer of caste-based sexual violence in *kenchuli* that makes it a complex narrative of gender and agency. It becomes obvious that *kenchuli* in contrast to *duvidha* is centred around the metaphor of hunting, where predatory, powerful men hunt and prey on powerless women because through the very act of hunting, they can

prove themselves as powerful and dominant in a masculine way, based on their elite higher caste status within the region as depicted by the Thakur's desire for the fresh young face in the village. He wishes to possess her only because he can, because he has this power over her, because he owns the land that her marital family farms. By extension, he regards himself as the owner of Laachchi and other women in the village as well, and it is to establish *this* ownership that have her he must. It is because she is the only woman who has dared refuse him that she becomes the most beautiful woman in the village. Interestingly, this also allows Laachchi what little control and power she can have over the likes of the Thakur and Bhoja. They dare not upset or insult her even while actively soliciting sexual favours from her which will make her an adulteress.

There are various layers of power and powerlessness in *kenchuli*, that depict the unequal power between men, disproportionate in specific ways to the powerlessness between men and women, since not all women are equally powerless. While *kenchuli* demonstrates how patriarchy functions in rural India, it exemplifies how patriarchy defies an examination of simple binaries between men and women, since these binaries do not exactly fit the binary between patriarchal oppressor, and the patriarchally oppressed in any uniform manner. If we were to start at one end: Laachchi is powerless only because of the powerlessness and frustration of her husband, who blames her for physically manifesting his powerlessness with her beauty, irrespective of morality—very similar to the doppelganger husband in *duvidha* who manifested the new bride's romantic aspirations. While Laachchi's husband is relatively more powerful than her, he is more powerless against Bhoja and Thakur than Laachchi herself. And this powerlessness, which bolsters the masculine, sexually violent, and predatory power of Bhoja, emasculates and feminizes Laachchi's husband as a lower caste, lesser man, a lesser husband with no power and no voice, and no claim over the sexuality of his wife. The Thakur's wife is not just safer and hence, more powerful compared to Laachchi, but she is also more powerful than Laachchi's husband, since she is recognized for her gender role in the house, in contrast to Laachchi's husband who is cuckolded. Even Laachchi hates her husband for his caste-based powerlessness, demonstrating how caste violence draws a wedge between men and women, disabling them from supporting each other, and bonding together, in the face of sexual violence. Bhoja may be more powerful than Laachchi's husband, but he is the Thakur's henchman, his position being that of a hyena, eating the remains after the lion's share. Laachchi's perspective of a snake waiting for the slough to drop away, presents readers with the classic courage of the hunted in the face of destruction—salvaging not her honour, but her dignity, as she walks towards her predator, matching his bold aggression with her own, and thereby robbing him of the pleasure of humiliating her, even if he finally has her.

Conclusion

Vijaydan Detha delivers a powerful gender critique of the marriage institution, and the way its hollow hypocrisy is moulded to caste and sexual violence in *kenchuli* and *duvidha*. While his stories provide space for the articulation of sexual agency, the experiences of his women protagonists singe the reader with both helplessness and agency, and in the self-reflexivity of these women in being able to subvert patriarchy to grab some of their own power and dignity back. Perhaps representing the condition of rural women in Rajasthan in all its truthful poignancy, Detha's stories, nevertheless, also articulate the limitations of these feminine aspirations, due to their emotions of love, and their desire of intimacy, counterbalanced against respectability and dignity that silences women, and also silences men from subaltern backgrounds. Detha's stories continue to resonate with contemporary readers from Rajasthan, India, and beyond, interested in understanding systems of caste and patriarchy in India that are tied together with feudal agrarian systems of ownership and production that includes women within its fray, as agrarian objects, sources of progeny, and a village and family resource of labour that produce owners, inheritors, and hence ownership, prosperity, and production itself—a goddess who must always give, but never take. Many writers and scholars such as Christi A. Merrill et al. (2011), Akshay Pathak (2013) and Surbhi Jiwrajka (2018) identify Detha as a feminist writer, who encourages and incites women to break out of their sloughs, claim their own pleasure and agency, and roam free, as though they were banished from the universe, and carried 'immortal hope within their bellies' (translation is mine). Detha's writing is also important in a didactic sense—he demonstrates the importance, and indeed culpability of women's cooperation within patriarchal systems, which they can easily upend, in his estimation, if they recognized their own complicity in their saga of exploitation, and simply stopped cooperating, and complying with it and started claiming control over their own lives to live out a dignified existence.

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Revisiting Mahatma Gandhi through Haryanvi Folksongs

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Abstract

This article attempts to revisit the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi on women education, their empowerment and self-reliance, their potential of leadership qualities and capabilities to contribute to nation-building through the folksongs of Haryana and also how these ideas are adopted, adapted or rejected by women in the process of gaining agency. Innumerable nameless women have memorialized dignitaries like Mahatma Gandhi, Sir Chottu Ram, Bhagat Singh and many others in their folksongs. These women were not only the foot soldiers of the national movement but also acted as the backbone to Gandhi's ideas of self-reliance and 'Swaraj'. An attempt would be made to explore how Gandhi inspired women of Haryana to transform their lives in the process of evolving as self-confident individuals instead of a dependent subject. These folksongs act as a source of an alternate unchronicled narration celebrating Gandhivis-à-vis themselves as part of history.

Keywords: Folksongs, Haryana, Mahatma Gandhi, Women Empowerment, Leadership

Introduction

> As we struggled for our freedom,
> Gandhi made an army,
> That had no spear arrow nor sword.
> Truth and non-violence his real weapons,
> The tricolored high in his hands
> To bust the deception of British
> (Sharda, 2011: 298-299)[1].

[1] All translations contained in this essay are of the author's own, unlessspecified otherwise.

This song is not just a clarion call to the freedom fighters of India's Independence but a song of invisible multitudes that are often ignored and oppressed, operating far from the front lines, and scattered across the hinterlands, not far from Delhi. The song translated above, is a folksong sung by women from Haryana, a region[2] that has gained notoriety in the last few decades for systematically depriving women of their fundamental rights.[3] It is hard to believe that such invigorating voices calling for Gandhi's *Fauj* or Gandhi's army belonged to the women of Haryana. While folksongs sung by women have constituted an indispensable part of agrarian society in North India in general and Haryana (Chowdhry, 1994)[44] in particular; folksongs are also used by women as instruments of mobilization, a vehicle to raise their voices against the systemic and social, patriarchal injustices. Contrary to popular imagination, Haryanvi women, despite their marginal existence, are vocal about their political opinions, and though women's folksongs were not considered part of the traditional, celebratory public sphere, they remained important in the domestic sphere. They are popular among women and their listeners, with women mostly singing these songs within personal and entrusted spaces. The folksong translated above is an example of this domestic, popular narrative that not only reflects women's opinion, but also their active engagement in politics. While the folksong describes Gandhi's contribution to India's Independence, women allude not only to concepts like '*Sat*' (truth) and '*Ahimsa*' (non-violence) popularized by Gandhi, but also to how he was responsible for bringing people together and making them part of a mass movement deployed against British rule. In what was the late colonial period, Gandhi managed to reach out to the masses, many among them, uneducated, like in this case the women in Haryana. Several women's folksongs contain seminal concepts popularized by Gandhi like: '*Satyagraha*', '*Ahimsa*', Hindu-Muslim unity, *Swadeshi*, and '*Charkha'* (spinning wheel) to name a few—concepts that have continued to retain their political charge today. Given below is an example in the same vein:

[2] Haryana is a state in India, carved out of East Punjab in the Year 1966.

[3] Ahlawat (2012: 15-17) observes that after "The Hindu Succession Act of 1956", which gave women the right over their father's property, female foeticide and violence against women increased dramatically in Haryana. Taking the argument further, R. Kaur (2014: 18-20) states that the skewed sex ratio did not act as an impetus to reform society's attitude towards their women but laid the foundation of some liberal marriage reforms that allowed inter-caste marriages and importing brides from different states by the *khap panchayat*. In such conditions one understands the importance of Gandhi. Gandhi has been an important figure for postcolonial struggles for subaltern and gender rights in Independent India. Gandhi and his ideals were invoked, as recent as, in Anti CAA protests across country (2019-20) and Farmer's protest (2020-21), which is still ongoing.

[4] Chowdhry, in *The veiled women,* provides a pivotal insight into gender relations in Haryana in pre- and post-colonial period. For more details one could look into the district wise census of Haryana. "Haryana,1901". Accessed on May 25, 2021, https://censusindia.gov.in/2011census/PCA/A-2_Data_Tables/06%20A-2%20Haryana.pdf; Also see "Haryana 1981". accessed on May 25, 2021, http://lsi.gov.in:8081/jspui/handle/123456789/4648., skewed sex ratio is reflective of troubled gender relation in a society.

To seize the tribulation of India,
Gandhi preached sermon out loud.
Hindu, Muslim, Sikhs and Christians,
Are brothers to each other.
Everyone took these words to heart,
And never fought with each other ever again
(Sharda, 2011: 299).

Repeated references to concepts like '*Satya*', '*Ahimsa*' and Hindu-Muslim unity in women folksongs indicate the inclusion of women within the country's political climate. Gandhi gained popularity among women who, though unmentioned in history, memorialized Gandhi, and his ideas in their folksongs. Needless to say, while women managed to make their way into the history of India's struggle for Independence, briefly elucidated in the next section, this paper explores Gandhi's ideas appropriated in the folksongs of innumerable, nameless women, who were foot soldiers in Gandhi's '*Fauj*' or army, also emancipated contributors in his '*Swaraj*' or self-rule.

Women folksongs are an interesting category that include seasonal songs, ceremonial songs, work songs, spiritual songs, and miscellaneous other varieties according to categorization made by S. Sharda (2011: VIII-XII) and O.P. Kadyan (2012: X-XIV). The miscellaneous category covers further themes such as love songs, and political songs. While most song collectors did not imagine rural women from Haryana to be politically opinionated or individualistic, S.L Yadav (1960: 123) devotes an entire category in his research, to political songs that contain folksongs applauding leaders like Gandhi, Bhagat Singh, Sir Chotu Ram, while also covering specific political events like killing of J. Saunders and execution of Bhagat Singh (Kadyan, 2012: 282)[5] Though rural women of Haryana mighthave remained illiterate due to lack of educational opportunities, women, who were and continue to be opinionated subjects outsidethe domestic sphere. While ceremonial, seasonal songs fall under the traditional category, sung and passed down between generations, they regulate the social system, which according to D. Punia (1993: 11) involuntarily reiterates the presence of systemic, patriarchal injustices that have no possibility of changing ever. While women are hesitant to modify these traditional folksongs for fear of losing their didactic value that upholds traditions, they are more open to advocating political and social change through new folksongs that are flexible in terms of the occasion, their singing graces, and the applicability of the theme that has a timeframe. Political folksongs can be reread as an alternative variety of gender narrative that interweaves women's emotions and their political commentary with

[5] Bhagat Singh with other members of Hindustan Socialist Republican Army planned to kill J.A. Scott, but in a moment of misapprehension killed Saunders. Later, Bhagat Singh and other members of the party were convicted and hanged. For details see Noorani, 2001: 18-27, 258.

circumstances. They form a corpus of social criticism, composed and sung from the margins. In his political career, Gandhi was known to have made many conscious decisions that brought the marginalized to the fore, strengthening them within the Independence Movement, by using non-violent protests that maximized the participation of ordinary people. Women's folksongs that use Gandhian precepts about subaltern marginality, women's rights, and non-violent revolution are, hence, an essential part of an ongoing struggle that is still unfulfilled for the rural women of Haryana.

Considering the continuing importance of Gandhi's political ideas about women's education, their empowerment, self-reliance, their leadership qualities, and contribution to the task of nation-building, this paper revisits the incorporation of Gandhian principles within the alternative narratives of women's folksongs in Haryana, closely knitted with the lived experiences of ordinary people. The preliminary brief section outlines the role played by Haryana and the Haryanvi community in Independent India, and the role of song within nationalist and postcolonial social empowerment causes, especially in the domain of gender. The paper will then analyse a few Haryanvi women's political folksongs to inquire into the (in)appropriateness of the Gandhian ideals in colonial and post-colonial movements, configured to present-day demands, discussed for women's leadership, their participation in the Independence Movement, their struggle for self-reliance, and education.

Theoretical Framework of Folklore as Mobilization in Haryana

The present state of Haryana was part of the undivided Punjab before the partition of India in 1947, later carved out of East Punjab on 1st November 1966, under The Punjab Reorganisation Act of 1966,[6] on a linguistic basis. The modern history of Haryana is only a couple of decades old. But if one looks at Haryana not as a whole but district wise, one can still find clear allusions to districts in the history of colonial India, like Rohtak, Hisar, Kurukshetra, Ambala and many others. Scholars like, H. Verma (2017: 3) and S. L Yadav (1960: 52) are of the opinion that the history of Haryana has been significantly overlooked by historians or, to put it in other words, it has been overshadowed by the glorious past of the undivided Punjab in the colonial period. However, K.C.Yadav (1968: 97), makes a noteworthy attempt to write a comprehensive history of Haryana, states that its Haryana's contribution could be traced back to Rao Tula Ram, from Rewari, who was an important figure in the Revolt of 1857. Later, in the year 1885, the emergence of the Indian National Congress marked a new beginning of the Independence Movement. People like Lala Murlidhar (Ambala), Pandit Din Dayal Sharma (Jhajjar) and Babu Balmukund Gupta (Rewari) attended Congress meeting and supported their actions from

[6] Government of India. "The Punjab Reorganization Act of 1966".GOI. Accessed on May 23, 2021. http://csharyana.gov.in/WriteReadData/Acts/Re-Organisation/1474.pdf

Swadeshi to opposing Rowlatt Act of1919 (Yadav and Singh 2010: 69-82). The movement to oppose Rowlatt Act was spearheaded by Choudhary Peeru Singh, Sir Chotu Ram and supported by Swami Shraddhanand. By that time *Arya samajists* had some hold over Haryana. Choudhry Ranbir Singh, Lala Lal Sharma, Daulat Ram Gupta and many other names remained at the heart of different movements. On Gandhi's call, a noticeable public presence of women was seen along with men in mass movements. From non-Cooperation in 1920s to Quit India movement in 1940s, Haryanvi women participated in all. Women namely Smt. Kasturi Bai, Smt. Manni Devi, Smt. Darka Devi, Smt. Mohini, Smt. Chand Bibi, Smt. Bhagwani Devi and many others not only participated in the Independence Movement but many of them were in the forefront and courted arrest (Ibid).

After spending twenty-one years in South Africa, Gandhi's arrival in India in 1915 was one of the crucial junctures in the history of Indian Independence Movement. Upon his arrival in India, Gandhi found India fragmented on the lines of caste, class, gender, sex and many more through successive colonial policies, (R. Gupta 2019, 37). Gandhi entered the socio-political scenario of Indian Independence Movement in the middle of the almost a century old social reform movements and rising agitation against the British administration. On the one hand where people like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Annie Besant, Jyotirao Phule, Swarna Kumari Debi and so on, emphasized on emancipation and education for women, to become self-reliant, they found practices like *Sati*, child marriage, and '*purdah*' as impediments in achieving their goals (Kumar, 1993: 7-53). On the other, a revolutionary fervour was rising along with the Bengal Partition of 1905 and *Swadeshi* Movement where, "revolutionary terrorist groups which now started to develop, anti-British feeling was imbued with Hindu Nationalism in which *Kali* was repeatedly invoked" (Kumar, 1993: 44). In the same vein, Sarla Devi Chaudharani was also leading a political and paramilitary organisation named '*Suhrid Samiti*', where religious ceremonies, songs, literature to wrestling was taught to become an active participant in Indian Independence movement. Similarly, "In 1942, 10,000 women of Bajali came in procession…sang songs and requested the officials to resign from their post" against the police repression in Assam (Mies, 1975: 60-61). Songs played an instrumental part in connecting and mobilising masses and Gandhi was mindful of the role that music could play in bringing people together. L. Subramnian (2020: XVI) states that Gandhi was engaged with the spiritual dimension of music, especially prayers, unlike Rabindranath Tagore.

> Gandhi's pursuit of music was not driven by purely aesthetic and artistic considerations. His overriding concern was to create conditions for the constitution of the perfect moral subject, the satyagrahi, and thereby facilitate his/her pursuit of swaraj or self-rule. (Ibid.)

Across ideologies, songs were deployed to draw the masses to unite against a common enemy, from '*Vande Mataram*', '*Ramdhun*', '*Sare Jahan se Acha*' to '*Sarfaroshi ki Tamanna*', songs coloured the imagination of Indians in India's Independent Movement. Manini Chatterjee (2001: 41-42) credits the mass mobilization of women, especially in 1930's, to Gandhi,[7] it was his practice of *Satya* and *Ahimsa* through various means that drew faceless multitudes, in this case women, from every social stratum of the society, walking side by side with men. Women like Sarojini Naidu, a poetess, a political activist, and president of Indian National Congress in 1925 demanded for women suffrage as early as in 1917, (Norvell, 1997: 17); Aruna Asaf Ali, a political activist, "grand old lady of Independence Movement and heroine of 1942 Movement", (Kumar, 1993: 63); Urmila Devi, Basanti Devi and Sunita Devi founded *Nari Karm Mandir*; Durgabai Deshmukh and numerous other women laid the foundation of freedom in this country. According to A. Kumar (2013: 316-17), Gandhi did two important things when it came to women— first, he opened up the public spaces for women participation and secondly imparted a 'sense of independence' in women.

Before Independence, women were working towards a single goal i.e., achieving Independence. In other words, women were neither demanding nor focused on gender rights. According to R. Kumar (1993: 99), the stalling of Hindu Reform Bill was a major impediment towards achieving equality, as promised by Congress in the wake of Independence but delivered partially at best. Feminists were divided in different ideological factions over the question of equality and liberation; some adhered to the Gandhian path and worked towards reforms in the society; some moved towards the Hindutva ideology and criticized women's movement of liberation in the West; and some took to radical militant view, of fighting for their rights.[8] Songs, sloganeering, and other artistic endeavours remained at the heart of all movements. One such movement was '*Bhu-Mukti andolan*' (liberation of land movement), a united front of "Sarvodaya (Gandhian) workers, independent young radicals, the Maharashtra Landless Laborers and Poor Peasants Union (led by the Lal Nishan Party) and Bhil Adivasi Sewa Mandal", (Mies 2019: 64) came together against the exploitation of the Gujar landlords, where processions were led by militant women, who were using anti-government, anti-Gujar slogans and sang revolutionary songs to express dissent. Similarly in the year 1973, '*Shramik Sangathana*', led by militant women, who understood the importance of mass organization, sang songs made by local poets, to spread the movement and

[7] Gandhian thought has been a matter of intellectual curiosity across disciplines. For more information of Gandhi's relationship with low-cost architecture, see V. Maddipati (2020); with Israel-Palestine conflict see P.R Kumaraswamy (2020); with music and nationalism see L. Subramanian (2020).

[8] G. Shah (2012: 148-53) provides a detailed analysis of different women movements and standpoints.

class consciousness among the landless or poor peasants during famine relief work, states Mier (2019: 64). One of their song was called 'Indira songs'. It ridiculed Indira Gandhi for her anti-poor policies. From Telangana Movement (1948-50), in Andhra Pradesh to anti-dowry[9] and anti-rape[10] campaigns in Delhi (1990s), violence against women has been a matter of concern for the feminists and civil society, whether in the form of rape, female foeticide, sexual division of labour, domestic abuse and so on, women are deprived of their fundamental rights. Given his penchant for non-violent protest, Gandhi would have started another satyagraha against the violence of thought and action and urged people to follow the path of '*Ahimsa*'.

Gandhi in Hind Swaraj writes, (1938: 15), "I felt violence was no remedy for India's ills and that her civilization required the use of a different and higher weapon of self-protection". M. N. Srinivas (1995: 1490) finds Gandhi's idea of non-violence deeply religious and probably a solution to violence even in today's world. To date, many women movements use non-violent methods to put forth their point of view. For example, a play named *Om Swaha* was performed in Delhi, 1980, to raise people's awareness about the ills of bride-burning and dowry. Plays, demonstrations, songs, Bhajans, folksongs and other form of artistic expressions are used in agitations to express dissent."*Sab yaad rakha jayega*"[11] (everything be remembered), "*Hum Kagaz nahi dikhayenge*"[12] (we will not show our papers) to Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poem "*Hum Dekhenge*"[13] (we will see), overpowered the common man in the anti-CAA protests[14] of 2019. Similarly, "*kaliyan neeti*" (bad policies) and many other *'Punjabi'* songs got overwhelming response from all over the country[15] for the

[9] H. Nagpal. "The historical Journey of anti-Dowry laws". Accessed on May 20, 2021. https://feminisminindia.com/2017/06/21/historical-journey-anti-dowry-laws/ and N. Bhadre. "Satya Rani Chadha: The Face of India Anti Dowry Movement". Accessed on May 20, 2021.https://www.livemint.com/Specials/ltOkZTJF9pkky8dWh8NarO/Satya-Rani-Chadha-The-face-of-Indias- antidowry-movement.html.

[10] L. Plummer. "In a Country Struggling with Sexual Harassment, These 5 Initiatives are Fighting Rape Culture". Accessed on May 20, 2021. https://www.thebetterindia.com/107782/rape-culture-initiative-india-misogyny-women-rights-safety/

[11] Lyricsraag. "Sab Yaad Rkha Jayega-Amir Aziz". Accessed on May 26, 2021. https://lyricsraag.com/sab-yaad-rakha-jayega-translation-aamir-aziz/

[12] Lyricsraag. "Hum Kagaz Nahi Dikhayenge-Varun Grover". Accessed on May 26, 2021. https://lyricsraag.com/hum-kagaz-nahi-dikhayenge-varun-grover/

[13] S.Singh. "The story of Faiz's Hum Dekhenge-Pakistan to India over 40 years". Accessed on May, 26, 2021. https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/the-story-of-faizs-hum-dekhenge-from-pakistan-to-india-over-40-years-caa-protest-6186565/

[14] PTI. "With poems and songs activists in delhi lend support to anti-CAA protest". Last accessed on May 26, 2021. https://www.outlookindia.com/newsscroll/with-poems-and-songs-activists-in-delhi-lend-support-to-anticaa- protests/1698455

[15] Timesnowdigital. "From Punjab To Delhi-Songs that have gone viral during farmers protest". Accessed on may,26,2021.https://www.timesnownews.com/the-buzz/article/from-punjab-to-delhi-songs-that-have-gone-viral-during-farmers-protest/690775 and B. Barn. "Lift as we sing-the role of songs during farmer's protest". Accessed on May 26,

farmer's protest (2020-21).

Various artistic ventures are used to express dissent against the persecution of the authoritative regime. But not all forms of art invite public view, as many forms remain an invisible part of the domestic sphere. Haryanvi women's political folksongs are one such category that engages in political views without getting noticed in the public sphere. There are numerous folksongs, such as mentioned earlier, sung across cultures to register dissent and celebrate the spirit of revolution.

Women's Leadership and Participation in the Independence Movement

> My, dearest, standing with her hair untied,
> Requests her grandfather:
> Father dear, don't get me married so soon,
> For I am only of 12 years.
> Register my name in the congress instead,
> For then, I will be the vanguard of truth!
> (Kadyan, 2012: 275-276)

This folksong centrally addresses three concerns—a woman's act of defiance even if couched as an entreaty to a patriarch, a criticism of child marriage, and women's urge to join the Independence Movement that frames their entry into public space as a moment of truth. In this song, a twelve-year-old girl requests her grandfather to call off her wedding and help her to join the Congress Party instead, so that she may make individual and independent choices. The word truthful in the poem (*Satyavati*) has a double meaning, for it also indicates her desire to be like Satyavati Devi,[16] a Congress leader, and social worker, who devoted her life to uplifting the poor within the context of the nationalist struggle. Since Haryanvi society is essentially a peasant and agrarian society that is deeply patriarchal, where women are noticeably absent in public, P. Chowdhry (1994: 1-2) discusses how in the case of Haryanvi women, the public is a mere extension of private spaces, wherein they are always working, and never encountered loitering.[17] In this context, a young girl, her hair loosened on her back, asks her grandfather to defer her marriage; this is a

2021.https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/opinion-lift-as-we-sing-the-role-of-songs-during-farmers-protests/376454

[16] Satyavati Devi (1904-1945)- She was a social worker and participated in the Independence Movement. She founded the Congress Mahila Samaj and Congress Desh Sevika Dal. She also co-founded the Congress Socialist Party, often affectionately labelled Toofani Behan by Mahatma Gandhi. For further details "My Only Wish is India's freedom- History Sheet of Satyavati Devi", journals.sagepub.com, Accessed January 24, 2021), https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/097152159800500205.

[17] S.Phadke (2020:2) explores the idea of unconditional accessibility of public spaces, for fun, without a purpose, towomen through a series of experiments and feminist campaigns. In the case of Haryanvi women, that possibility seems bleak.

subversive act, in addition to which she defiantly criticizes child marriage, and wants to legitimately enter the public sphere, without a husband or any authoritative presence. This song is obviously an expression of compensation, since in reality, such an act in Haryana would be more foolish than brave, due to its consequence that would result in her ostracism and the ostracism of her family. As P. Chowdhry states (1994: 1), "A ubiquitous sight … is the veiled woman who covers either the whole face or just permits the eyes to show." It is a society in which women, considered *parayadhan* (the property of others), are married off at a very early age to prevent any kind of sexual transgression, yoking them to the biological task of marital reproduction.

Gandhi's social activism is very relevant in this case, since he inspired countless women to transform their lives in the process of becoming self-confident individuals, (Norvell, 1997: 13). Unlike many other elite leaders, Gandhi's grasp on grassroots realities, made him accessible to the masses that in turn mobilized them. Gandhi believed the potential of women to constitute a 'moral force', and he understood the urgency of freeing women from the shackles of cultural, traditional, and personal inhibitions as self-aware, confident women, in the positive task of realizing Swaraj (Kishwar, 1985: 1692), that he equated with truth and the realization of God. Apart from the gendered and sexual violence it perpetuated on girl children, child marriage was also linked to an increasing number of child widows in India. Gandhi strongly felt that people, who had committed the sin of marrying their daughters off as children, should rectify this mistake by getting them remarried if and when they become widowed. Gandhi believed that it was better for widows to re-marry than fall into promiscuous sexual relationships. M. Kishwar (1985: 1692) in her essay 'Gandhi on Women' observes, "When Sarda Act sought to raise the age of consent to 14, Gandhi felt it should have been raised to 16 or even 18." Gandhi was convinced that women should marry only after they were old enough to give consent. Though one might disagree with Gandhi's ideas about chastity, sin, strength of character, or women as a moral force, because it problematically portrayed women primarily as sexual beings, it is undeniable that his opinions gained mass popularity.

As M. Kishwar (1985: 1691) points out, "Sita, Damyanti and Draupadi were three ideals of Indian womanhood that Gandhi repeatedly invoked as inspirations for the downtrodden women of India", as he favoured their cultivation of spiritual and moral courage, in contrast to the physical strength of Rani of Jhansi.[18] However, Gandhi's followers did not find his views on women as repositories of moral, spiritual courage problematic or threatening, since it fitted in with traditional belief systems, and the traditional role ascribed to women in patriarchal society. As P. Chowdhry, in her analysis of the change

[18] Harleen Singh in her book *The Rani of Jhansi: Gender, History, and Fable in India* (2014) critically analyzed the historical and folk narratives on Rani of Jhansi from feminist and post-colonial perspective.

brought about in Haryanvi society under the impact of Gandhi's ideas, points out (1994: 316)

> …the institution of widow remarriage in this region has no longer remained only in its levirate form, as it had primarily been in the colonial period, when both the widow's late- husband's family as well as the state, frowned upon any form other than the levirate and actively intervened to stop it.

Women Empowerment and Self-Reliance

> Bring clothes only from the handloom!
> Follow Gandhi's instructions!
> The poor weavers' family will
> Earn their daily bread from it!
> (Sharda, 2011: 301)

This poem focuses on the plight of weavers and craftsmen, many of whom lost their occupations in the upsurge of large-scale industries, and the imperialist cotton trade. Gandhi played an instrumental role in reviving small-scale industries to strengthen the economy, and he firmly believed that "the reconstruction of the villages should not be organised on temporary but permanent basis", (Gandhi, 2013: 97). British policies for India strategically destroyed employment in the small-scale sector and in turn emphasized the export of raw material, to import cheap finished products. In such a situation, *Swadeshi* became a movement towards self-sufficiency, empowering the masses. Gandhi's extensive grassroots research is reflected in his book 'The India of my Dreams', wherein he writes (2013: 111), "What they need is some kind of occupation, and the occupation that will give employment to millions can only be hand spinning…I have described my spinning as a penance or sacrament. And since I believe that where there is pure and active love for the poor there is God also, I see God in every thread that I draw on the spinning wheel." For Gandhi, the spinning wheel was a physical as well as a spiritual activity that he felt kept him near truth or God. He was greatly critical of mechanization and the pace with which industries grew, resulting in the alienation of human labour, and the folksong above demonstrates Gandhi's faith in the spinning wheel and his hope that it would yield some earning for the poor. Apart from *Swadeshi* being a movement towards self-reliance, it also had an important role for women in it—boycotting British goods. British goods. The following folksong expresses a woman's desire to be part of the *Swadeshi* movement by using *khadi* and spinning the wheel.

> Husband dear, get me a spinning wheel
> that I shall also spin thread,
> Oh Rama! I will get a frilled skirt stitched

from forty yards of cloth, Oh Rama!
I will order shiny mirror decorations
on my stole of *khadi*, Oh Rama!
I will wave the khadi tricolour flag
in my hands, Oh Rama!
Husband dear; get me a spinning wheel
that I will also spin thread, Oh Rama!
(Sharda, 2011: 301)

There are three important words in the song above: '*banaungi'* doing it oneself—in this case spinning, '*simwaungi'* getting the skirt stitched, and '*mangwaungi'* and getting the mirror work embroidery on her stole ordered. These words clearly demonstrate the employment generated from *Swadeshi* that involved spinning at home, tailoring shops, and small-scale cottage industries. Since Haryanvi society is agrarian, women who participated in agricultural tasks, had some time when the crops were standing, to stitch, spin, embroider, and make use of new work opportunities that gave them additional income. As mentioned above, while girls were often unwanted in traditional Haryanvi society, the lack of emotional investment was due to "the temporary nature of their stay in the parents' home and being less valuable in economic terms", (Chowdhry, 1994: 49). The same girls were praised for becoming economically valuable, becoming mothers of male children, and functioning as the source of unpaid labour in the field and at home. But women gained a greater sense of identity through nationalism and Gandhi was aware that their participation in *Swadeshi* was imperative for its success, since men alone could not sustain it. *Swadeshi* did not challenge women's traditional social roles and accorded them with greater integrity and dignity in family and society.

While Khadi soon became an Indian brand, the idea behind *Khadi and Village Industries Commission*[19] (KVIC) has not changed too much as yet, with many small-scale, village-based businesses being an integral part of it. M. Kishwar, quite appropriately, called Khadi a "common bond uniting women" (1985: 1695). *Swadeshi* movement united women and other weaker sections of society that boycotted British goods and produced locally made clothes to support poor craftsmen that generated employment opportunities for both men and

[19] Khadi or Khadar is handwoven and handspun cloth, it was used as a weapon by freedom fighter like Dada Bhai Naoroji, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and many others during the *Swadeshi Movement*. It was later popularized by Mahatma Gandhi. For details "Swadeshi Movement", culturalindia.net, (Accessed on May 16, 2021), https://learn.culturalindia.net/swadeshi-movement.html. KVIC was formed in April 1957 by the Government of India, Under the Act of Parliament, 'Khadi and Village Industries Commission Act of 1956'. This was to plan, promote and develop small scale industries in the villages. For details "THE KHADI AND VILLAGE INDUSTRIES COMMISSION ACT 1956", archive.org, (Accessed on May 16, 2021), https://msme.gov.in/knowledge/khadi-village-industries-commission-act-1956-no61-1956-amended-upto-22nd-march-2006-page-0

women. Gandhi's leadership therefore gave rise to the massive participation of women in the nationalist movement, and as A. Bose states (1975: 12), "… when the colonial government rejected women's demand for equal franchise, the Indian National Congress at the Karachi session in 1931, under Gandhiji's guidance accepted unconditionally women's rights to the vote without discrimination based on sex." Gandhi saw women as self-conscious subjects in contrast to being passive recipients, and the spinning wheel allowed women to become self-reliant. Gandhi's idea of a self-sufficient and self-reliant woman was a self-conscious woman with an individual identity that did not change or challenge the patriarchal, or caste paradigm of Indian society.

Women's Education

> Dear father I will study enough to make
> my own rules and laws!
> A, for English, but the English would have to go!
> AA, for us women from the Arya race uniting together!
> G, for Gandhi and Govind Singh,
> with the sword in his hand!
> Dear father I will study enough to
> make my own rules and laws!
> (Kadyan, 2012: 283-284)

The above-mentioned folksong is very special, since it not only discusses women's education, but also outlines the kind of education important for women. In this song, a young girl asks her father about *kaida*, the law, further indicating the *akshar mala* or book of alphabets, from which she was free to learn. The singer raises an important point about the content of textbooks in schools, that to date remain static, and does not change according to the need/aptitude of the student. Gandhi, clearly understanding the pitfalls of uniform content in a diverse country like India, writes (2013: 184), "…They (textbooks) might even be the best for the people and the environment for which they are written. But they are not written for Indian boys and girls, not for the Indian environment." The song translated above also emphasizes the awareness of cultural identity among women, as learning English does not mean the acceptance of colonialism, but also the importance of one's own origins.

Gandhi was a supporter of nationalist history, patriotic cultural, and religious identity, combined with practical knowledge that helped students to earn. For him, knowledge was not restricted to classrooms or textbooks, and one could learn from anything or anyone. He writes (2013: 183), "…mass illiteracy is India's sin and shame and must be liquidated. Of course, the literacy campaign must not begin and end with a knowledge of the alphabet. It must go hand in

hand with the spread of useful knowledge." The literacy rate[20] of women in Haryana in 2011 was approximately 66%, but the hypocrisy of such census data is such that it only reflects the number of people capable of writing their own names, and not beyond. Gandhi firmly believed that India could never be liberated unless education was ensured for women as well. The song presented above, remains remarkably invested in this Gandhian view also making references to English that demonstrates the flexibility of the folk genre, despite its linguistic heritage. The protagonist in the song moreover expresses her desire to learn and mould *kaida* to her own wishes—an expression of power that is uncommon for Haryanvi women who are not as articulate in public.

Before summing up, it's worth pondering what such songs come to mean that articulate women's freedom, desire, and power demonstrates, especially in a context that systemically disempowers women. What is important to remember is also the context of nationalism that was considered as much of an exception in a history of two hundred years of colonialism, as women's empowerment that reflected this exceptionalism of nationalism that needed women's participation in S*wadeshi* for it to succeed, necessitating Gandhi's call for their participation. In the postcolonial context where India is more sanguine about its sovereign status within the international domain, the singing of old nationalist women's folksongs has a commemorative role, memorializing and reminding listeners about women's contribution to the nationalist movement of yore, as members of the present community.

Conclusion

Folksongs are generally sung on different occasions to celebrate community, history, rituals, and specific life events. However, folksongs are increasingly losing hold over people's lives, replaced by either Hindi or Haryanvi film songs, with folksongs mostly being limited to printed collections. If at all, folksongs are heard on the occasion of state-organised cultural festivals like Geeta Jayanti Mela or on Independence Day, Republic Day, Gandhi Jayanti, and other such occasions. Though folksongs, in the age of new, mass media, are facing competition, they are trying to adapt to the changing medium. Many artists including women are familiarizing themselves with media platforms such as YouTube, or Tik-Tok, and uploading their songs to get wider viewership. This became quite a special feature in 2020 as folksongs by women began documenting the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic.[21]

[20] Census 2011 "Haryana Population" (Accessed on February 15, 2021). https://www.census2011.co.in/census/state/haryana.html#targetText=Total%20population%20of%20rural%20areas, 835%20girls%20per%201000%20boys

[21] Shakuntala and Nirmala. "Corona virus par geet". Haryanvi geet. April 4, 2020. Video length 7.49 min. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nUWEBZvEzAs&t=66s and Shakuntala and

Women folksongs also documented the relevance of the Farmer's Protest in 2020-21, that spread all over India. Haryanvi women not only participated in the nationwide agitation against the three farm laws passed by the Indian Government, but they also sang and danced to folksongs to raise awareness, and to express dissent to it. On February 18, 2021, women sang at the *rail roko andoloan* (train strike) organized at Barsola, Jind District in Haryana to register their protest.[22] It is evident, that folksongs play a massive and quite successful role in competing with the changing world.

This paper presents a case for the contemporary relevance of Haryanvi political folksongs sung by women, with special reference to Gandhian ideals that raise awareness of the social relevance of women's participation in politics. From the sample analysis, it is evident that folksongs have the potential, both in terms of structure and flexibility, to effectively present the subjects that are politically relevant even in present times. Since gender constitutes a prime category in this discussion, the analysis of the songs translated above that depict women as bold, defiant, articulate, resistant, and even critical of patriarchal approaches to child marriage and widow remarriage, are obviously, not borne out by the real-life experiences of women. It is, therefore, important to ponder briefly here on what these feminist voices that do not reflect the real status of women, communicate to listeners, especially as these folksongs are increasingly performed for present-day political rallies or at the sites of local, social movements.

The paper analyses the situatedness of women's folksongs in Gandhi's nationalist movement, *Swadeshi* that asked women to join men as equals, in order to make not just their participation, or public visibility as women possible, but to make the national movement itself possible, which could not have been sustained by men alone. The continuing presence and visibility of women, and their folksongs that articulate content that is in stark contrast to their gendered reality, thus seeks to represent the whole of Haryanvi society, men and women together, as a unified community, against the outside world, where women's internal status within the Haryanvi community does not matter as much as their depiction of the unified face of Haryanvi society to non-Haryanvis, within the national public domain.

Nirmala. "Corona ka ek aur geet". Haryanvi geet. May 9, 2020. Video length 9.33 min.https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qrr-A7_Fl_E

[22] S. Siwach. "Rail roko: women lead protests in Haryana dances to folksongs on railway tracks". (Last accessed on July 15, 2021). https://indianexpress.com/article/india/rail-roko-women-lead-protests-in-haryana-dance-to-folk-songs-on-railway-tracks-7194590/ and R. Saini. "Women in Haryanvi attire dancing to folksongs add colour to tractor parade". (Accessed on January 26, 2021). Women in Haryanvi attire dancing to folk songs add colour to tractor parade : The Tribune India

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Dying to be Remembered: Tamil Warriors' Desecrated Burial Plots (*Tuyilum Illam*) in Sri Lanka's Civil War[1]

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Abstract

In May, 2009 the bloody 26-year long Sri Lankan civil war came to an agonizing end after an estimated 150,000 deaths. The Tamil Tiger insurgency, exhausted, finally succumbed to the Sinhala government victors who engaged in a secret, frenetic, though briefly sustained, period of systemic genocide. The surviving civilian non-combatant Tamil population in northern Sri Lanka bore the vengeful brunt in the advance of government armies. In the face of international scrutiny, the government denied this genocide and banned both the United Nations and the international press from areas where systemic violence might be verified. This murderous rampage was accompanied by governmental determination to destroy not just the remnants of Tamil resistance, but all memories and evidence of it. They bulldozed every one of the 30 major sacred graveyards enshrining those perceived by surviving Tamils as martyrs killed during the war. This paper attempts to explain the unique character of these graveyards and how the government undertook to eradicate efforts to memorialize the venerated deceased.

Key Words: Tamil, Sri Lanka, Tuyilam Illam, Sinhala, Tamil Tigers, martyr bombers, Kaṇṇaki, Māriyamman, Cilappatikāram, Prabhakaran, 'LTTE' (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam) (in Tamil, 'Tamilīl Viṭutalai Puḷikaḷ)

Introduction

On May 21, 1991, a young, modest, bespectacled Tamil Hindu named 'Tēṉmoḻi' ('sweet speaking') Irācarattiṉam (also known simply as 'Tāṉu') arrived by car early in the evening in Sriperumputur, India. That night, after stopping for prayers

[1] I have used customary Tamil transliterations when those transliterations will be generally familiar to Tamils, Sinhalese, and Western readers. I have offered Tamil transliterations in keeping with the system of The Tamil Lexicon when Tamil terms in question might require clarity.

at the local Ganesha temple, she and her three companions arrived well before the meeting at the Grand Hall housing the Indian Congress Party rally. She was hoping to get within close personal viewing distance of Rajiv Gandhi, Prime Minister of India, as he campaigned in southern India for a second term. Clad in a *salwar kameez* with the bright green and saffron Congress Party colors, hair covered in fragrant white jasmine and pink *kaṉakāmparam* flowers, Tēnmoḻi approached Gandhi respectfully as he personally received admirers all evening long prior to the Congress Party campaign event. Tēnmoḻi appears in campaign photographs as she patiently waited while Gandhi blessed the four or five women ahead of her in the queue of admirers. When she was next, she advanced and garlanded him with a lovely sandalwood bead chaplet. She smiled warmly and bent down reverently to touch his feet. She then ignited her explosive-laden bomber belt, obliterating herself and Gandhi, and killing 14 others.[2]

In 1987, sensing an opportunity to exert Indian influence in Sri Lanka's precarious political situation, Gandhi sent Indian troops to Sri Lanka to help suppress the Tamil uprising. However, clashes between Tamils and the Indian soldiers proved unexpectedly bloody, so much so that the Indian forces, despite their greater numbers, eventually withdrew. During the subsequent interval in the campaign for his reelection, Gandhi was encouraged by specific imperialist constituencies to send Indian forces back to Sri Lanka to finish the job of 'pacification.' The LTTE likely feared the possibility that Gandhi would indeed yield to political pressure to send Indian forces back to Sri Lanka. His death meant that an Indian military return to Sri Lanka would never happen.

Preliminary Considerations

I will address in this paper some basic issues concerning Sri Lanka's recently ended civil war. It lasted 26 years, from 1983 until 2009. Distinctive of this protracted internal conflict were several hundred instances of martyr bombing,[3] including the murder of two countries' heads of state, one from India and the other from Sri Lanka. The issue of primary concern here is how a nation's majority population can drive to violently dedicated desperation a minority group it seeks to exclude from full membership in the nation. That minority group is the Sri Lankan Tamils, who comprise about 11.2 % of the island's population. My purpose is to chronicle the context in which the Sri Lankan Sinhala army sought

[2] For a more detailed picture of this murder and its aftermath, see Roberts, 2010: 25-41. I have written in some detail about the phenomenon of female 'suicide bombers' in the Sri Lankan civil war in an earlier article (see, Harman, 2017: 101-113. My description of Ms. Irattiṉam's explosive act of murder appears in this earlier article, pp. 104-105, and is reproduced here with publisher's permission.

[3] I prefer to use the term 'martyr bomber' rather than 'suicide bomber.' The latter tends to have pejorative connotations while the former more clearly matches the intentions and perspective of the acting agents involved. A discussion of this lexical choice can be found in more detail in my above-mentioned article, 'The Martyr Bomber Becomes a Goddess,' pp. 101-102.

to eradicate all traces of the Tamil insurrection, including all evidence of the burial sites of the Tamil martyred. I have sought to convey the emotional and psychological devastation this act of destruction has inflicted on the collective psyches of an already defeated people. Much of this study is based on field work in Sri Lanka from late 2008 through early 2009, a total of 4 months, and involved traveling to several Tuyilum Illam sites. Working with a photographer, I interviewed Tamils at those sites. Given the suspicion under which anyone appearing to be an official investigator was regarded by Tamils, my interviews were conducted informally, without recordings or transcriptions. Notes at the end of the day, reconstructed by memory, were the primary material from which I worked.

Readers concerned to know about possible movements for reconciliation, peacebuilding, and healing after the war, such as those that followed World War II, and as described by such scholars as Miroslav Volf (2019) and Ernesto Verdeja (2009), will be disappointed. Reconciliation and forgiveness in Sri Lanka have been approached with extraordinary reluctance, trepidation, hesitation, and resentment. This is because the more grievous events of the Sri Lankan war have not been openly acknowledged either by the Sri Lankan government or the world community. Further, the Tamils remaining in Sri Lanka continue to endure very serious oppression.[4] They are in little position to discuss such matters as forgiveness. Many simply want to get out of Sri Lanka, and the Sri Lankan government is encouraging precisely that by confiscating their lands and curtailing their rights as equal citizens[5]. The government has made no significant effort to account for the tens of thousands of 'disappeared,' those many thousands of Tamils arrested by the Sri Lankan government, often tortured, and never heard from again.[6] Demands by Tamil families to know what happened to their loved ones have been met with defiant silence from the government. Such a dynamic permits little traction when issues of reconciliation, forgiveness, peacebuilding, and forgetting are concerned. This paper does not deal with post-

[4] See, for example, Taylor Dibbert's account in the newspaper, *The Diplomat*, January 7, 2016). https://thediplomat.com/com/2016/01/sri-lanka-the-peresecution-of-tamils-ccontinues-under-sirisenas-watch [accessed 25 May, 2021]

[5] See for Sri Lankans living abroad struggling to reclaim their lands-- https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sri-lanka-landrights-conflict-feature-idUSKCN22401V [Accessed on 16 May, 2021]; Also see for Sri Lankan government efforts to return land to Tamils-- https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2015/06/19/sri-lanka-returns-land-confiscated-military-during-decades-long-war [Accessed on 16 May, 2021].

[6] See, for example, the Youtube video, 'Sri Lanka's Disappeared.' By *47 Roots Productions*, July 22, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qMSv29EstoQ. [accessed on 23 May, 2020]. See also Tim Adams and Moises Saman, 'Sri Lanka: The Land of the Disappeared – A Photo Essay,' *The Guardian* [October 13, 2018]. at https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/oct/13/moises-saman-interview-sri-lanka-tamil-minority-aftermath-war [accessed on 23 May, 2020]

war issues of healing because it is difficult to do so when perpetrators of violence refuse to acknowledge any responsibility for that violence.

It is important to point out that we deal here with the Sri Lankan government's choice to 'layer' post-war psychological violence upon physical violence. Still, it is also true that during the war, the Tamil insurgency was guilty of several acts of terrorist violence against the Sri Lankan civilian population. Those events will not be addressed here, though they cannot be ignored or forgotten. The Sri Lankan government has elaborated upon them incessantly. But the lasting anger and resentment from both sides provide no basis for reconciliation or impetus for a mutual peacemaking.

The Context of Civil War

Culturally and linguistically Tamils are distinct from the majority Sinhalese population. Tamils are primarily Hindu (though nearly 20% are Christian). They speak Tamil, an ancient language with literature that dates back to the 2nd Century B.C. Sinhalese speak Sinhala, and are primarily Buddhist. Tamil Hindus have lived in Sri Lanka since at least the 2nd century B.C. However, the ancient history of Tamils in Sri Lanka as well as that of Sri Lanka itself is unverifiable due to lack of historical records.[7]

The island-nation of Sri Lanka, off the southern coast of India and about the size of the nation of West Virginia State in the US. It descended into violent civil war in 1983 after the Tamil minority had unsuccessfully sought relief from longstanding Sinhala Buddhist discrimination. A series of violent pogroms broke out, beginning in the mid 1950's, and Tamil militancy initially focused on the need to defend Tamils against these spontaneous outbreaks of violence. But eventually, a significant faction of the Tamils resorted to violence, built an army, and agitated for separate Tamil regions of residence. Following decades of cunning military successes, the rebel Tamil Tiger military eventually succumbed to exhaustion and defeat in 2009. The conflict saw over 90,000 dead and close to 60,000 'disappeared.' The war's most dramatic features included a routine use of martyr bombing by Tamil insurgents, and the prominent role of Tamil women as soldiers and martyr bombers.[8]

The island of Sri Lanka has a long history of multi-ethnic and multi-religious diversity, as well as a long history of living under Western colonial rule.[9] However,

[7] See, https://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1420/Sri-Lanka-HISTORY-BACKGROUND.html [Accessed on 16 May, 2021].

[8] Worldwide, women are responsible for about 21% of all martyr bombings. In the Sri Lankan war, Tamil women accounted for 30 to 40% of these attacks. See Dissanayake, 2017: 4.

[9] See, for example, K. Indrapala, *The Evolution of an Ethnic Identity: The Tamils in Sri Lanka, from c. 300 b.c.e. to c. 1200 c.e.* (Sydney: South Asian Studies Center, 2005).

the 20th century irruptions of ethnic violence, first signaled by a cruel pogrom against Muslims in 1915, have not been typical until the recent century.[10] The distinguished Sri Lankan historian Michael Roberts concludes that over the years there have been three 'nations' vying for survival in Sri Lanka.[11] These 'nations' he designates as Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim. Historians tend to agree: while there were territorial and economic rivalries in early Sri Lanka, the relationships among these various groups were characterized by a relative cultural and linguistic uniformity. Sri Lankans, in fact, early became accustomed to immigration especially from India. In the eleventh century, Indian Tamil Cōḻa royalty established a kingdom in central Sri Lanka, and even in the context of that foreign incursion, Sri Lankan locals adjusted themselves, absorbing the varied cultural elements with relative grace. However, colonial historians depicted Tamils as the destroyers of Simhalese cultural treasures.[12] If a sense of self-consciousness began to develop in the periods from the first to the 15 century, it did so neither in ethnic nor linguistic terms, but rather in a growing religious self-consciousness. Since at least the first century C.E., a majority of the people of Sri Lanka gradually began to understand themselves as destined to advance the cause of Buddhism. However, tension and conflict were rare. Tamil Hinduism accommodated itself to Buddhist consciousness, as Buddhism incorporated Hindu deities and worship styles into the tradition. Deliberately and actively, Sinhalese Buddhists endorsed many of the Hindu deities, worshipped them, and understood them as a part of their practice of Buddhism. Deities such as Kataragama, Dalai Munda, Kannagi, and Vishnu have clear Indian and Hindu origins, but are worshipped by both Buddhists and Hindus in Sri Lanka. Both Hindu and Buddhist shrines to this day are frequented simultaneously by Hindus and Buddhists.

Sinhala Nationalism and Colonial Rule

Nevertheless, a growing pride and self-consciousness began to develop among Sinhalese Buddhists. Key to this development was the appearance in the 5th century of the famous Pali document, *The Mahavamsa*, which told the

[10] Limits of space prohibit a nuanced review of the history of cultural relations among inhabitants of Sri Lanka. The reader is advised that especially with respect to recent history several generalizations offered here will have exceptions, and possibly will evoke differences in interpretation among observers. Points at issue include the number of people that have been 'disappeared,' the extent to which Tamils continue to be persecuted, and the efforts supposedly made by President Sirisena to bring closure to the war. Opposing perspectives are almost entirely the function of government propoganda campaigns and are invariably at odds with publications of international observers. See, for example, the pro-government editorial 'Checkmate!' in *The Island* newspaper, (April 21, 2009) 8.

[11] See Roberts, Michael. *Confrontations in Sri Lanka: Sinhalese, LTTE, and Others,* (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa, 2009), p. xiii.

[12] For colonial interpretations of Cōḻa plunder during the reign of Mahinda V, see Coningham et al., 2017: 23.

unquestionably partisan story of how the history of Sri Lanka was essentially the history of Buddhism's inevitable destiny to become the religion of the island. Tucked into this chronicle was the story of Dutugemunu, a Sinhala Buddhist king who eventually led the army that killed the Tamil Chola king Elara and his troops (Nissan, 1989: 63). The document emphasizes Dutugemunu's regret about the deaths, as a good Buddhist document should do. Indeed, an earlier document chronicling Buddhism's spread in India evoked a similar theme of regret over violence and human suffering in discussing King Asoka's regrets about the conquest of tribal groups in eastern India.

But later Sri Lankan history saw *The Mahavamsa* undergo a change in its interpretation, most likely as tensions developed between Sinhalese Buddhists and Hindu Tamils (the two major 'nations'). The remorseful Dutugemunu became the victorious Dutugemunu and was held up by the Sinhalese as a folk hero who saved the island from marauding Tamil incursions. His remorse over killing Tamils was subsumed beneath a thick layer of emerging Sinhalese pride and triumphalism.

As per 2020 statistics[13], today there are approximately 22.8 million Sri Lankans on the island. 11.2% are Sri Lankan Tamisl (of whom 8% trace their lineages to periods prior to the 10th century), 4.2% Indian Tamils, 75% are Sinhala. The Portuguese and the Dutch have controlled only portions of the island from the 15th to the 18th century. In the 18th Century the British established firm control on the entire island. They made fortunes from the establishment of coffee and tea plantations, and imported from India tens of thousands of Tamil indentured laborers, later to be known as 'Indian Tamils.' Even today they are contrasted with 'the Sri Lankan Tamils' from the North in and around Jaffna, who had a 10-century history of presence on the island.

During British rule of Sri Lanka various groups of Sri Lankan nationals initiated several unsuccessful, violent rebellions. While the rebellions had only limited strategic and military success, they did awaken in the Sri Lankans a growing, articulated sense of self-awareness as a people among whom a nascent nationalism was beginning to grow.

One of the keys to Britain's successful colonial control over the island was its ability, strategically and selectively, to divide the disparate populations, and especially were they successful in using the Tamils in that endeavor. The Tamils from the North, known as 'Jaffna Tamils,' had a long and distinguished history of education and intellectual heritage. The British had prior experience with Tamil populations in southern India and knew that they would be able to exploit traditional Tamil education and managerial skills. Indeed, the British provided Sri

[13] https://www.indexmundi.com/sri_lanka/demographics_profile.html [Accessed on 17 May, 2021]

Lankan Tamils with extensive opportunities to attend advanced educational institutions where Tamils sharpened their skills in English. Eventually the Tamils, though a minority, were given a disproportionate control of the mid-level administration positions in the colonial government. In exercising consistent preferences for Tamils as government workers, the British were able to establish an ethnic and linguistic consciousness that pervaded colonial administration. Tamils began to understand themselves as low-level arbiters of how the country's colonial government machinery should work. And they extended preferential treatment to their fellow Tamil countrymen. Inevitably, this created a resentment on the part of the Sinhalese against the perceived Tamil 'collaborators.'

When independence finally came for Sri Lanka in 1950 there was considerable suppressed anger among Sinhalese who felt that the Tamils had maliciously colluded with the British to enforce a harsh colonial oppression on the island. A firm sense was developing that the Tamils really were not Sri Lankan, even though a significant proportion of them had lived on the island for at least ten centuries. Added to this dynamic was the fact that the Tamils, primarily Hindu and Christian, did not endorse the growing sense that Buddhism should be seen as the inevitable religious destiny of the island, as delineated in the *Mahavamsa*.

The Perils of Democracy

One of the key elements that lay the foundation for the exclusion of Tamils from Sri Lankan political and social life can be traced specifically to 1933. That was the point when British colonial rule decided to plant the seeds of democracy in Sri Lanka by installing a system of universal suffrage. Leaders of the Sinhalese and the Tamils fought in vain to oppose the enfranchisement of the common people. The discrepancy between the educated and the privileged on one hand and the common laboring classes on the other, was enormous. And so both the upper class Sinhalese and Tamils worried that the common people might make rash or uninformed decisions.

By the time independence arrived, universal suffrage was well established and the Sinhalese majority proceeded to use it ruthlessly as a strategy to suppress the Tamils. First, in 1955, they voted to ban the use of the Tamil language in all public and governmental transactions. This meant the immediate expulsion of Tamils from thousands of professional and governmental posts.[14] Next, the Sinhalese set severe quotas on the number of Tamil students who could be admitted to professional, medical, and scholarly programs in universities and colleges. Tamils had always nurtured a tradition of academic accomplishment; in relative terms, they excelled in entrance examinations in numbers well beyond their proportion. But no longer would that talent and training guarantee

[14] Kearney, Robert N. 'Language and the Rise of Tamil Separatism,' *Asian Survey* 18, No. 5, (1978) pp. 521-534.

admission to educational institutions. In short order the power of the Tamil community was diminishing. To fortify its control at the ballot box, the Sri Lankan government disenfranchised the hundreds of thousands of 'Indian Tamil' laborers –those who had come relatively late to Sri Lanka to work the tea and coffee plantations – but who had been in the country nearly five generations. Overnight they became people without a country: neither Indian citizens nor Sri Lankan citizens.

While democracy had become a reality in Sri Lanka, the freedoms and rights of minorities had never been protected by a bill of rights or a guarantee of minority freedoms. In their rush to institute universal suffrage, the British neglected to create a context in which the concept of universal rights held some sway. In legislative bodies, Tamil objections to the constant pressing of repressive measures fell on deaf ears. The Buddhist monastic establishment put its weight squarely behind the anti-Tamil agitations as the oppression of Tamils took on an air of sanctified mandate. Buddhism was granted special protection in the State Constitution of 1972 even though Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity were thriving institutions among a significant number of Sinhalese.

The state's discriminatory policies led to anti-Tamil riots in 1956, followed by deadlier riots in 1958, 1978, 1981, and 1983. The 1983 riot was especially gruesome and caused thousands of Tamils to flee to India and Western countries as refugees, producing a vibrant Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora (Uyangonda, 2007:67.[15] In addition, Sri Lanka began resettling landless Sinhalese peasants in properties seized from land-owning Tamils. This way, districts with concentrations of Tamil populations found it more and more difficult to elect legislative representatives that would advocate for Tamil interests. From the 1960's to the early 1980's Tamil politicians lodged innumerable legislative grievances, denouncing the way the government was sustaining an anti-Tamil vendetta under the guise of operating as a functioning democracy. Using the model of Gandhi's peaceful demonstrations to voice grievances, Tamils expected the Sinhala government to respond as the British had in India, respecting demonstrators and refraining from violence. To the surprise of Tamils, the Sri Lankan government responded to sit-ins and strikes with vicious and violent police action and imprisonment. In addition, after a series of talks between Tamil and Sinhala leaders in which the government pledged a much more humane and open-minded approach to Tamil grievances, the government broke several agreements made with Tamil representatives, agreements that would have moderated the burden of repressive measures.

The Seeds of Tamil Violence

[15] See also Tambiraj's chapter 'The Colombo Riots of 1983' in his *Levelling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. Pp. 94-100.

Eventually, young Tamils who were shut out of universities and work opportunities began to advocate a violent response (Wilson, 2000: 112-134). The Tamil community was by no means united in calling for violence, but the discussion became more strident as a highly disciplined corps of young people emerged who were convinced that the Tamils had no choice: they must insist on a separate Tamil state in the North and the East, and must pursue it by whatever means necessary. Several Tamil organizations advocating specific political strategies began to emerge. Many insisted on nonviolence but many concluded that violence had the only possibility of bringing change. Eventually the 'LTTE' (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam) (in Tamil, 'Tamiḻīl Viṭutalai Puḷikaḷ) emerged as predominant. It had developed a reputation for being ruthless, fearless, and willing to do whatever it took to achieve its goal. One of their primary goals was to wipe out – murder – any powerful Tamil politicians or groups who insisted on pursuing moderate accommodation with the Sri Lanka government. Hundreds of Tamils died in these purges. A brief discursus on the nature of the Tamil Tiger organization is perhaps in order at this point. Before martyr bombing became commonplace in Palestine, Israel, Iraq, and Chechnya, it had become routine for the militant Tamil 'Tigers' of Sri Lanka (LTTE), a group that invented the 'suicide bomber belt,' and was responsible for two thirds of the world's martyr bombings by the time the Sri Lankan civil war ended.

The Tuyilum Illam– An Abode of Repose

The martyr bomber described in the introduction, Tēṉmoḻi Irācarattiṉam, it turns out, was reputed to have been a fierce fighter in the Black Tiger select cadre, from which all suicide bombers came. Not long after Rajiv Gandhi's assassination in Sri Perumputur, a memorial stone was erected to Rajaratnam in the Tuyilum Illam (which I translate as 'Abode of Repose') at Koopay, located in the heart of northern Tamil country.[16] Tamils thronged her shrine, decorating it reverently, while filing past the vast majority of other memorial stones that surrounded hers. Her 'Vīrar Kaḻ,' or 'Hero Stone,' as these markers were called in epic poetry from 14the century Tamil literature, was gleaming granite, as were all the others. They all stood about 3 feet high. At Koopay there were 1,184 of them; there were also

[16] A referee for this paper appropriately noted that the Tamil Tiger propaganda network translated this term as 'sleeping house.' I chose not to use the Tamil Tiger translation because it is an overly literal, minimalist rendering that does not capture the more poetic, multivalent, and suggestive connotation that literate Tamils would likely understand. The term '*Tuyilum Illam*' constitutes something of a syntactic pun. The word '*illam*' connotes a spot or a place of residence. But it is a word that can negate the term coming before it. '*Tuyil*' suggests awakening from slumber. '*Tuyilum Illam'* can therefore be construed as meaning 'The abode of those who sleep not.' 'The Sleepless Ones' (*Imaiyar*) in Tamil is a term that refers to deities who are ever watchful, that is, who do not sleep. Thus, '*Tuyilum Illam'* can easily be understood as 'The Abode of the Deities.' And there is the hint that these deities are constantly watching, protecting, and far from being asleep.

648 stone sarcophagi for the burial of those martyr whose bodies they were able to salvage on the battle fields. A further consideration of those buried martyrs will follow. The Tuyilum_Illam was reserved only for Tamil Tiger heroes who had taken 'the vow' to die, if necessary, in the fight for a separate Tamil homeland in northern and eastern Sri Lanka.

Fig.1 One of 30 Tuyilum Illam (Abodes of repose for Tamil Martyrs) in northern Sri Lanka (Photo by permission of Tuciyantini Kaṇakacapāpattipillai)

All Tamil Tigers, women and men, took a vow to die for the cause of Tamil independence, if necessary. The vow was symbolized by the *kuppi*, the cyanide pill necklace they wore and would crush with their teeth to break the glass, cutting their gums, efficiently bringing cyanide into the bloodstream at lethal levels. It was fast, and estimates say that about a third of all Tamil Tigers died this way in the heat of battle, because they feared imminent capture and did not want to reveal information under torture. There were 30 of these Tuyilum_Illam grounds in the north and east of Tamil occupied Sri Lanka. The large ones were visually impressive: gleaming granite stone memorials enclosed in high walls and all kept immaculately clean. Many of these commemorative terrains were featured in YouTube videos, but most have been removed as a result of pressure from the Sri Lankan government. A few fragmentary pictures of these sites remain, replaced by memorial tributes to those who were buried there.[17] An apt name for

[17] The Sri Lankan government has successfully exerted pressure on media to remove most of the evidence of these sites on the internet. Still, occasional ceremonies of commemoration are documented, especially on ''Great Heros' Day (Māvērar Nāḷ):
(1) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-army-prevent-thuyilum-illam-clear (2) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bVKDNOFmcHs [accessed on 18 May, 2021]
(3) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/%E2%80%9Cthey-think-they-can-just-do-anything%E2%80%9D-%E2%80%93-tna-mp-condemns-theravil-thuyilum-illam-military [accessed on 18 May, 2021]
(4) http://globaltamilnews.net/english/tamil-martyrs-day-emotionally-commemorated-at-kanapuram-thuyilum-illam-rest-house-of-martyrs-located-at-killinochchi/ [accessed on 18 May, 2021]

these sites is difficult to find in English. The term 'memorial cemetery' comes far short of what these monuments meant to people. For local communities from whose ranks the buried and the memorialized came, these terrains were central to Sri Lankan Tamil identity and purpose. Always, there were people visiting during the day, bringing offerings to the deified martyrs: camphor candles, coconut saplings, flowers, incense, food offerings, garlands – all those items of auspicious association that worshippers would bring to a temple to honor the deities.

Figure 2: Offering incense, flowers, and food to the spirit of the departed martyr (Photo by permission of Tuciyantini Kaṇakacapāpattipiḷḷai)

Paying respects was a solemn act, but sometimes became physical: shouting the names of the beloved deceased, people would burst into violent tears, jump up and down, extend their arms to embrace the stone, pound their heads on the stone, and address direct questions or statements to the departed: 'Why did you have to leave? Won't you take us with you?' 'We ache from missing you.' Women especially would actually lay across the memorials, hugging them, begging the deceased by name to appear just one more time or to send advice about how to live on in the midst of a terrifying war.

(5) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOPHB2omcWM [accessed on 18 May, 2021]
(6) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czoHxLHjPOA [accessed on 18 May, 2021]

Figure 3: Grief expressed at the commemorative stone for a martyr memorialized at a Tuyilum Illam (Photo by permission of Tuciyantini Kaṇakacapāpattipiḷḷa

People did not go to the *Tuyilum Illam* simply to remember. They went to interact with the deceased. They talked with them, scolded them, praised them, cajoled them, and they asked for help to bear the horrors of this terrifying war, a war in which the country's President, one they had elected, was now hiring mercenary Russian fighter jets to bomb civilian Tamil dwellings, temples, churches, commercial, and governmental establishments. In this war, there was plenty of terror to go around.

Figure 4: Grief expressed at the commemorative stone for a martyr memorialized at a Tuyilum Illam (Photo by permission of Tuciyantini Kaṇakacapāpattipiḷḷai)

The Tuyilum Illam became a symbol of hope, security, and community during the difficult war period for the Tamils. Even today, among the 850,000[18] diaspora Tamil refugees, watching footage on 'YouTube' of these *Tuyilum Illam*-s, especially during the annual 'Great Hero's Day' celebrations each November, is one of the most important ways survivors of the war can commemorate and grieve the lost.

[18] 'The Sri Lanka Tamil Diaspora After the LTTE,' *Asia Report No. 186, International Crisis Group Working to Prevent Conflict Worldwide,* (23 February, 2010) Online at https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/sri-lanka/sri-lankan-tamil-diaspora-after-ltte [accessed on 20 April, 2020]

Figure 5: Grief expressed at the commemorative stone for a martyr memorialized at a Tuyilum Illam (Photo by permission of Tuciyantini Kaṇakacapāpattipiḷḷai)

The revered leader of the Tigers, Prabhakaran (Pirapākaraṉ), always gave his yearly inspirational address in one of the *Tuyilum Illam* sites on Hero's Day. It was a solemn occasion, for Prabhakaran himself held an almost divine status among Tamils and was often addressed as 'The Sun God.' Several of the more slickly produced videos featuring panoramic views of *Tuyilum Illam* grounds make a clear and unambiguous point. 'Ithu oru kōyil, oru puṉita iṭam,' meaning, 'This is a temple, a sacred site.' In the study of religion, I don't always trust the sources of my information to interpret what is going on. But in this case, the narrator of at least two lengthy videos, gets it right, in my opinion.

I have little doubt that each of these *Tuyilum Illam*-s became a religious shrine. Clearly these are instances of martyr veneration. And an appeal to the deaths of martyrs is a powerful way to inspire loyalty and self-sacrifice. The Tamil Tigers, who had established a *de facto* government in northern Sri Lanka, aggressively promoted reverence for deceased martyrs. Burying the deceased is normally not done in the Tamil Hindu tradition except in the case of sacred renouncers, termed *sadhu-s* or *sannyasi-s.*[19] A *sannyasi* is not cremated (as are normal Hindus) because he is intimately attached to the earth. Generally speaking he will not be reborn again. His presence in the earth is thus embedded, and he sanctifies the earth in that spot. People can approach the spot to pray to the embedded spirit there. It seems clear that the Tiger strategy of burying rather than cremating martyrs for the cause was a way to sanctify them, to grant them the status of

[19] Others for whom burial is prescribed, rather than cremation, are children less than two years old and people who commit suicide. No text I have been able to trace prescribes burial for *sannyasi*s. But no Hindu with whom I have consulted has denied that *sannyasi*s should be buried. *Sannyasi*s, apparently, are understood to have renounced their physical bodies already. They have no longer any need to make the transition from this worldly existence to spiritual preparation for rebirth.

holy people. Thus, martyr veneration among the Tigers was not ancillary, incidental, or perfunctory. It was the very substance of a religious impulse that embodied traditional Tamil religiosity.[20] The *Tuyilum Illam* had overwhelmingly sacred significance. The *Tuyilum illam* became the tangible manifestation of that for which all Tamil Tigers pledged their lives: the establishment of a safe, defined space that could be called a Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka.

Prabhakaran, leader of the Tamil Tigers, referred often to his soldiers who had devoted their lives to the cause, as 'great renouncers,' and 'sannyasis.' Indeed joining the Tamil Tigers resembled the life of an ascetic holy person. It began with taking the vow to Prabhakaran. It included absolute celibacy, and no hob-nobbing between male and female recruits. Men and women recruits did not train together, but some managed to meet each other and to end up in romantic unions. When they were discovered, Prabhakaran usually had them publicly shot. They trained long hours in the isolated jungles, enduring extended periods of deprivation, hunger, and thirst. Self-denial and renunciation were among their highest values. Associating with family or former friends were forbidden.

My argument, briefly stated, is this: Tamil Tiger martyrs, by virtue of their ascetic sacrifice and dedication to the sacred Tamil homeland, achieved the status of spiritual beings. Because their stone images were installed in one of 30 *Tuyilum Illam*-s, their spirits were available for contact by surviving Tamils, who came not simply to mourn them, but to ask assistance and blessings from them.

Martyrs and Goddesses

I offer now some suggestions as to why this is true. First, attention directed to the spirits of the deceased in Tamil culture tends to be much more physically substantive, much more vigorous than the mourning of lost loved ones in Western cultures. Certain of the deceased literally become deified, and their burial sites are sought out ritually by a wide swath of worshippers for blessings they reportedly dispense. Stuart Blackburn (1988), for example, has documented the elaborate cults of deceased heroes in southern India. In most cases, the deities he studied were male, and their spirits were summoned on a regular basis in festivals in which they possessed community members and made their wills known. These 'bow-song' deities (named for the instruments that evoke their spirits in song) reside in stone pillars or statues in temple areas. Almost always, these spirits died fighting for a just cause, often against overwhelming odds.

[20] Among authors who have maintained that the Tamil Tiger movement incorporated strong religious overtones are Michael Roberts, (1996: 245-272, 2005a: 67-93, 2005b: 493-514, 2008: 22-24, 2006: 73-102, 2007a, 2007b: 857-887, 2009:25-41, Natali, 2004, 2008: 287-301, and 'Symbolic Postscript: A Terrible Violence,' on line at http://thuppahi.wordpress.com/2010/01/03/symbolic-postscript-a-terrible-violence/. [accessed on 15 March, 2020]

One quintessential example, not mentioned by Blackburn, is that of Madurai Veeran (Maturai Vīraṉ), a warrior who lived in 17th century India, and who dedicated his talents to bring local criminals to justice.[21] An over-reaching king, concerned about the popular power Madurai Veeran was amassing, had the man executed cruelly. Madurai Veeran's shrines can now be found in temples throughout southern India, Sri Lanka, and among Tamils in Malaysia, Singapore, South Africa, and Rèunion.

This phenomenon of apotheosis in the South Asian context includes, indeed explicitly makes necessary, the role of the female as a deified human being. The extensive material on the process of *sati* demonstrates clearly that women can become deities. Such women are believed to be even more virtuous, more faithful and more self-disciplined than their men.[22] Women who take a vow to be immolated on their husbands' funeral pyre are commemorated with 'Sati stones,' and these stones are understood to be the post-mortem locus of their spiritual powers, into which living descendants may tap for special blessings. Effectively, these women become goddesses.[23]

Self-immolation on a deceased husband's funeral pyre is the ultimate expression of marital fidelity and chastity. For women – but only women – in Tamil society, chastity entails spiritual powers. Classical Tamil literature depicts a chaste woman's body as the repository of paranormal powers (Hart, 1973: 233–50). A virtuous woman, endowed with *kaṟpu* (chastity), is the ultimate personification of righteousness. Virtuous women become infused by a force that empowers them to destroy any evil that threatens righteousness. That force, *ananku,* gathers formidable concentrations in women who bear suffering nobly, and its presence effects the transformation of a woman into a goddess after her earthly death. In Tamil Sri Lanka and southern India we find a remarkable number of goddess shrines dedicated to a once-human woman whom local myths portray as having suffered stoically at the hands of male oppressors. The myths vary, but are nearly unanimous in extoling a virtuous woman once shamefully abused, and who – in the end – punishes her oppressors as they and she perish together in a fiery inferno generated by her righteous anger. Her *ananku* transforms her into a goddess, thereafter available to all devoted seekers of her assistance. As a deceased soldier, and particularly as a deceased martyr bomber, a Tamil woman can become (much more easily than men) transformed into a deity, reborn with fearful powers to avenge evil. Two of the vengeful goddesses which model the

[21] Folkloric versions of Madurai Veeran's life appear in pamphlets usually termed 'kathai,' (stories) or '*ammāṉai* (legendary accounts). Feature length Tamil films that narrate his traditional life story include versions produced and circulated in 1939 and 1956. I have consulted Vinanagamoorthy (2007).

[22] See, for example, Courtright (1994: 27-53),

[23] See, for example, Wadley (1994: 92-118).

Tamil woman's transformation are Kaṇṇaki (portrayed in a 5th century epic) and especially Māriyammaṇ (portrayed in literature from the 16th century). Both were women who dealt with abuses of justice by spontaneously exploding, killing the males responsible for the injustice, and then being reborn as goddesses.[24]

The goddess Kaṇṇaki (also called *Patiṇi*) reigns primarily in Sri Lanka (Obeyesekere, 1984; Ilaṇkōvaṭikaḷ, 2001). Her story, from the 5th century Tamil epic, *Cilappatikāram*, depicts how a woman, betrayed by her unfaithful husband, forgives him, but then witnesses her husband's unjust murder in the town of Madurai. Furious, she curses the murdering king responsible as she, the king, and the entire town are engulfed in the conflagration she creates. Her apotheosis ensues. Devotees worship her memorial stone images today at multiple shrines in Sri Lanka by entering her fires – by walking on fire or carrying pots of fire long distances.

Māriyammaṇ is perceived to have been a longsuffering human whom males betrayed, deceived, and treated shamefully. She became a goddess in a fit of fiery, murderous rage. Thus, Māriyammaṇ, and many goddesses like her, show another side: she will destroy males who mistreat women with impunity. The thousands of stone shrines that house her spirit are rock-solid testimony to what a chaste, accommodating woman, who died defending justice, can become. Her temples can be found throughout Tamilnadu, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Malaysia, in Paris and Bonn, as well as in Pontiac, Michigan (Harman, 2010: 185-199; 1999: 66-74).

Devotees have referred to Tēṉmoḻi Irācarattiṉam, Rajiv Gandhi's assassin, as 'Tenmoli Māriyammaṇ' An internationally popular Tamil film made in India was based on the few details known of Rajaratnam's life, a film called 'The Terrorist.'[25] She was portrayed as having been one of the hundreds of Tamil women abused and raped by Indian 'Peace Keeping Forces' when they were invited to Sri Lanka, and thus, her revenge, precisely as it is portrayed in 15th and 16th century texts, took the form of a devastating and fiery conflagration she caused, one that translated her into a goddess, and killed the males responsible for the injustices she suffered.

How we understand worship of martyred spirits in the context of traditional framings of devotion (bhakti) moves us away from devotion as Tamils normally

[24] In addition to Mariyamman and Kannagi, other similar violent goddesses are identifiable. See the following studies— as in the magisterial study of the Tamil goddess Icākkiyammaṉ in Schuler, 2009. Other sample studies of such goddesses include Sundaramurthy, 1989; Somasundaranar, 1973; Balakrishnan, 1996.

[25] *'The Terrorist' ('Theeviravaathi'),* Written and Directed by Santosh Sivan, (Cennai 1998) Available on-line at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ygK-3PrTmeQ [accessed on 12 Feb, 2020].

discuss it. At the *Tuyilum Illam* Tamils do not worship death, but the transformation that arises out of death. What kind of devotion is this that is characterized by a wailing, a pleading, and a gnashing of teeth? I thought the term, 'viraha bhakti,' might apply. It is a type of Hindu devotion especially dedicated to Krishna, in which the worshipper bemoans the absence of a beloved, divine partner, an absent lord. While absence of the beloved is a subtext in the *Tuyilum Illam,* absence does not constitute the entire picture. Spirits of the deceased in the *Tuyilum Illam* are strikingly present – transformed, most certainly, but available.

In writing about a Tamil folk deity named Kattavarayan, said to be one of Siva's sons, David Shulman has suggested that we consider a very different kind of bhakti than is commonly identified. Kāttavarāyaṉ is doomed to die a painful death of impalement so that his mother Parvati can once again take her place with Siva in heaven. The long story ushers us through 4 complete rebirths for the main characters, and resolves the tension in the final rebirth, at which juncture Kattavarayan is impaled, but then becomes a respectable deity after his excruciating death. Shulman's summarizes as follows:

Kāttavarāyaṉ is not an exemplar of bhakti directed toward a higher deity. On the other hand, he does elicit a kind of devotion toward himself, of a type quite distinct from other forms of bhakti. This is *not* the bhakti of separation (viraha) recently analyzed by F. Hardy in a brilliant study, nor is it related to the intellectual bhakti …in the Gita. One could perhaps call it 'cathartic bhakti,' in the Aristotelian sense of arousing and transforming – perhaps also purging the *tragic* emotions of *eleos* (mercy) and *phobos* (a lack of fear). Its outstanding symptom is not ecstasy (the painful delights of viraha), but mourning and lamentation (*pulampal*), to use the term that pervades the description of the impalement scene. This type of devotion requires a victim for its lachrymose display of emotion, even if the victim subsequently recovers, as seems to be the usual case. Ritualized mourning for this divine victim seems here to be accompanied by a fascination with death, with violence leading to death, and with the notion of tragic fate (Shulman, 1989: 56).

Among the Tamils who built those *Tuyilum Illam*, who were living with death all around them, something like a 'cathartic bhakti' was inevitable and sustaining. The mourning and lamentation Shulman saw in cathartic *bhakti* are likely to be those same emotions that built the *Tuyilum Illam*. And those emotions of 'mourning and lamentation' focus on inevitable tragedy, whether it is a question of the impaling of Kāttavarāyaṉ or the gradual evisceration of the Sri Lankan Tamil community. Another person whose work seems prophetic when it comes to understanding the uniqueness of the *Tuyilum Illam* is Stuart Blackburn. He wrote in 1985, and said this of the power of the cult of the dead:

[The dead]…are as powerful as death itself, perhaps because they have met it in its rawest form; in other words, the deified dead have become the violence they experienced. That source, driven inside them at death, then becomes a source that worshippers can call on to counteract other elemental forces of disease, disaster, and even death (Blackburn, 1985: 272).

I think I shall propose an addendum to the current list of *bhakti rasa* moods. 'Bhakti' unqualified involves a self-giving, sometimes erotically toned devotion; 'Dvesha bhakti,' focuses intensely on an object or a person of disgust; 'Lila bhakti' is devotion characterized by play, joy, childhood; and 'desa bhakti'is patriotism, the joy of autochthonous reverence for the land. The Sri Lankan *Tuyilum Illam* clearly brings into stark view one form of devotion that is less recognized. Shulman's suggestion for a name seems apt: the bhakti of catharsis, in which devotees witness cruel injustice, identify with a suffering, dying victim but realize that, inevitably, nothing can be done about it. They can only lament.

Obliterating a Memory

The stone monuments at the *Tuyilum Illam* were temples where this devotion of catharsis played out so visibly. Cathartic bhakti had a distinct and sacred architecture in the design of the *Tuyilum Illam*. There were rousing hymnals written to glorify death and to be sung there. One, for example, extols and exalts the joys of using the kuppi, the suicide cyanide caplet: if death is inevitable, embrace it and take joy in it.

The Sri Lankan government destroyed the first of some 30 *Tuyilum Illam* temples on the western coast in 1988. The *Tuyilum Illam* were just beginning then. Gradually their number increased and became inspiring icons for Tamils. When the war ended in a whimper, the Sri Lankan government wasted no time. One of their first military missions was bulldozing every one of these *Tuyilum Illam* sites into nonexistence. And on the larger ones they constructed fortified military outposts. They knew that the *Tuyilum Illam* sustained a spirit of spiritual solidarity, reverence, and resistance that would die slowly. The *Tuyilum Illam*, they felt, could become a rallying point for remembering the atrocities Sri Lanka does not want the world to remember. In its thoroughly successful efforts to eliminate physical evidence of those Tamil deceased who fought for a Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka, the government acknowledged that even the least relic witnessing Tamil resistance became a threat. Suppressing memories and relics of this violent struggle became crucial to denying any sense of honor and any sense of identity to those who fought so hard to forge a new identity. In other words, the Sri Lankan government was well aware that mortuary artifacts can tell elaborate stories and they can keep memories alive. But we deal here with a context in which knowing the value of mortuary remains becomes the cause for destroying those remnants. It would seem that there was no patience in a Sri

Lankan government for reconciliation or peace-making with the Tamil rebellion. Crushing the Tamil rebellion meant obliterating all memory of the rebels.

The Sri Lankan government has tried to efface all historical memory of the *Tuyilum Illam.* Photographers' and newspaper reporters' websites have been censored if they published articles or photographs featuring the *Tuyilum Illam*. Neither in writing nor on the telephone will any of my Tamil contacts in Sri Lanka discuss the *Tuyilum Illam*. Tamil reporters, especially, have been threatened with violence if they expressed public condemnation of the callous destruction of these temples/cemeteries/memorial gardens. Destruction of these sacred sites made a very direct, indeed, a very chilling point: there is scant space in Sri Lanka for 'the Tamil nation,' as Roberts termed it in many of his publications and political commentaries. It would seem that the distinctiveness and the heritage of the Tamil people must, from the government perspective, be obliterated. Forensic and photographic evidence shows that after the Sinhala government defeat of the Tigers, Prabhakaran's 12-year old son was captured in a bunker with his five body guards. The 12 year-old boy watched as government soldiers executed each bodyguard before his eyes. After he was given a snack, the young Balachandran was then shot point blank with five rifle bullets to the chest (No Author, 2010).

To be Sri Lankan, to remain a part of this island nation, may — for the remaining Tamil community — involve renouncing affinities to things Tamil. From the outside, at least, Tamil identity and Sri Lankan identity seem to be moving toward incompatibility. Sri Lanka's systematic campaign to wipe out all evidence commemorating the Tamil martyrs is a dramatic indication of this 'cleansing' strategy. The eradication of a culture's remnants become coextensive with the eradication of a people.

Without a way to achieve catharsis and eventual recognition of Tamil people's legacy and heritage, the healing process after the war for the remaining 5 million Tamils will be significantly more difficult. Nearly a million have already emigrated to India, Singapore, Canada, the United States, as well as several additional destinations (No Author, 2010). It is no coincidence that over the past 15 years one of the most popular new Tamil Hindu temples in Colombo is one that has spontaneously grown from the back porch of a private residence in Wellawatte, the Tamil section of Colombo. There an image of the Hindu deity Ganesh has been installed, and it commands actively enthusiastic worship from Tamils every evening. Tamil supplicants clog the sidewalks and the street nearby. Locals know the deity as 'Visa Ganesh' because they believe that this particular Ganesh has the power to answer prayers from those who seek a visa to emigrate to a foreign country. Petitions to Ganesh are growing. Sri Lanka's identity may well become one that precludes a prominent Tamil Hindu presence.

As the war was winding down, I talked with an elderly Tamil man at his roadside stall in Colombo, waiting while he repaired my sandal. He knew a bit about the *Tuyilum Illam* sites, but when I told him what was happening, he disapproved, and observed matter-of-factly, 'The *Tuyilum Illam* were places of peace for the restless, suffering spirits of martyrs who died violently. Without a stone to attach them to the soil, all those unattached spirits will roam the country. That will bring even greater suffering to the land.'

I hope he is wrong, but suspect that, in some sense, he may be right.

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Book Review

Jason Keith Fernandes, *Citizenship in a Caste Polity* (Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2020). Rs. 1075. Xvi + 361 pgs.

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Citizenship in a Caste Polity is a work in citizenship studies, a field that lies productively at the nexus of anthropology, political science, and history. The focus is on the Indian state of Goa, and in particular on contestations over language in the period after the region passed from Portuguese to Indian rule. Fernandes provides a compelling history of the processes by which Konkani came to be recognized as the official language of Goa in 1987, and by which the Antruzi (or Antruz) dialect and Devanagari script promoted by Goa's powerful Gaud Saraswat Brahmin (GSB) community came to be accepted as normative, to the exclusion of other dialects and scripts. The more original focus of the work, however, is on what happened afterwards, when several organizations began to contest the government's exclusive recognition of Konkani as written in *Devanagari,* arguing that the Roman script should also be recognized because of its historical and widespread usage.

As Fernandes shows through both archival research, ethnographic work, and his own memory of events—Fernandes had himself once been involved in the debates—Goa's Catholics, on which the study focuses, have found themselves on both sides of the issue. To simplify things considerably, the Brahmin-dominated Catholic hierarchy, trying to shed its embarrassing association with Portuguese colonialism and align itself with the GSB, largely supported the exclusive use of Devanagari as a way of burnishing its mainstream Sanskritic cultural credentials. Conversely, lower-caste and lower-class Catholic communities, among which the Roman script was in wide use, and who were farther removed from the image of the ideal Indian (and Goan) citizen-subject (constructed as an upper-caste Hindu male), favoured recognition of the Roman script.

Fernandes contrasts "citizenship practices," that is, "repetitive actions, actions that are often passive and one-sided," with "citizenship acts," which are acts (quoting Engin Isin and Greg Nielsen) that "disrupt habitus, create new possibilities,…claim rights and impose obligations in emotionally charged tones; pose their claims in enduring and creative expressions; and, most of all, are the actual moments that shift established practices, status and order" (289). In this

case, the language-related "citizenship acts" of the Catholic hierarchy effectively undermined the status of lower-caste Catholics: "…the post-colonial implication of [their citizenship] act was to enable upper-caste and upwardly mobile Goan Catholics to identify with the agenda for Konkani crafted by Brahmanical upper-caste groups. In legitimising a Brahmanical heritage, this citizenship act delegitimised the socio-cultural markers of Catholic groups, and especially Bahujan-Dalit Catholic groups, as valid constituents of national culture" (18-19).

Among the many novel arguments and aims of the book, two are central to the investigation and therefore merit particular mention. First, Fernandes suggests that Partha Chatterjee's binary division of national space into "civil society" (the realm of those who conform to the model of the ideal citizen-subject and are, therefore, addressed as individuals and spontaneously offered rights and privileges by the state) and "political society" (the realm of those who do not conform to the ideal, and who are therefore addressed as population groups that must *press* for their rights while generally being granted only *concessions*) is overly simple. Acknowledging the utility of the theory as a general frame of reference, Fernandes argues that it is difficult to allocate groups neatly into one or the other realm. For example, in the context of Goa's script debates, "groups such as the [pro-Roman script All Goa Citizens' Committee for Social Justice and Action], who imagine themselves within civil society, and in many cases, would actually form a part of civil society initiatives, are in fact forced, as a result of their espousing the cause of subaltern Catholic groups, to engage in forms of activism more suited to political society," while "Groups like the [pro-Devanagari] Konkani Bhasha Mandal, which are firmly hegemonic, reveal a tendency towards undemocratic processes that does not quite fit the imagination of civil society, which is assumed to be rational and have a reverence for a rule of law" (246).

Because in reality these civil and political society realms "merge into one another," what actually exists is not a binary but a "scale of forms" (207). This scale of forms is produced, in part, because citizenship is, according to Fernandes, mediated by the social, not something constructed exclusively in the political realm. "[T]he law is encountered not directly through a reference to the written text, or scholarly discussions of the same, but through its representations in the social field. The representations gain power, first, because of the social standing of the person who makes this representation" (209), and this social standing is in turn increased or decreased by social facts such as state recognition, academic or religious qualification, caste, gender, etc. Therefore, "Citizenship acts must be seen as the [attempt] to create space to manoeuvre in a variety of intertwined social locations, not merely within the realm of the political and in reference merely to the state" (207).

Second, drawing on the work of Saba Mahmood and Veronica Benei, Fernandes seeks to expand the focus of citizenship studies from citizenship *practices* (the field's traditional orientation) to citizenship *experiences,* arguing that, in this context, "citizenship was not merely a matter of practices, or performing bodies,

but…of felt and feeling bodies, and therefore, of experiences as well" (6). Noting the occasionally emotion-laden narratives and testimony of his interlocutors, Fernandes foregrounds three emotions in particular: shame, guilt and humiliation. Shame and guilt emerge, according to Fernandes, from the *incorporation*—and here the Latin roots of the term are significant—of the image of the ideal citizen-subject of Goan modernity into the very bodies of Goans. Such emotions do not arise spontaneously; rather, they result from a "a physical process of inculcation, which is precisely what the development of habitus is, physical training over a period of time so that the response is ingrained within the person" (260). To the extent to which one cannot conform to this (male, upper-caste, Antruzi Konkani-speaking, Hindu) ideal citizen, one feels shame and guilt. "[S]hame and guilt are self-evaluative emotions that arise when one fails to meet self-acknowledged standards of what the citizen-subject should be" (258). Because these emotions produce motivation to conform, they are part and parcel of the project to form the ideal modern citizen-subject. Shame and guilt are internalized from multiple social sites, but central to Fernandes's analysis is caste, which "is synonymous with shame and shaming" (258). These claims serve one of the author's primary aims, which is to show that citizenship is formed not only in the realm of politics ("citizenplace"), but also in local and even extra-national social space (respectively, "communityplace" and "internationalplace").

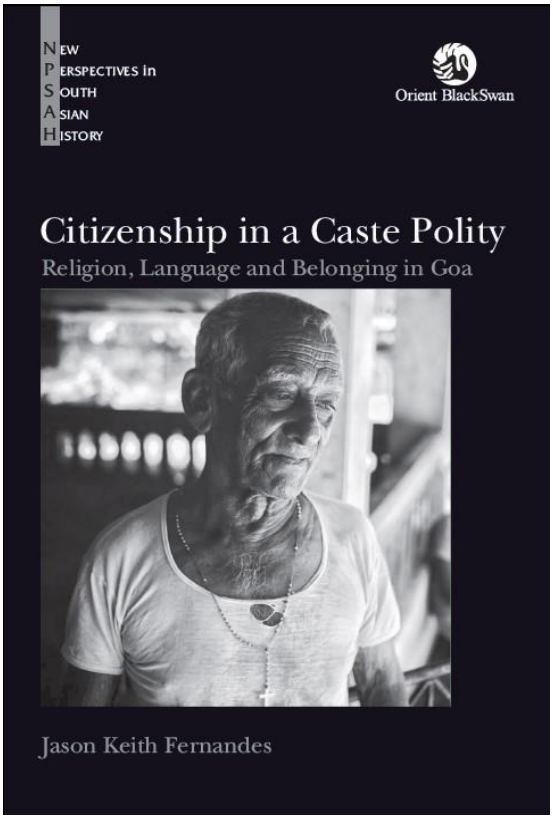
Humiliation, as presented by Fernandes, is less an emotion than a claim made "against…shaming." A citizenship act occurs when such a claim (of being humiliated) is "accompanied by a programme for change" (258). Humiliation "emerges when individuals are able to summon alternate discourses and assert that the shame or guilt that they experience is unacceptable, and challenge the existence of these norms" (296). Citizenship, suggests Fernandes, "is constituted by [such] acts of citizenship—that is attempts by both individuals and groups to challenge" a regime's "disciplinary regime of fixing…the identity of individuals into the frameworks of the ideal citizen-subject" (305).

In the Conclusion, Fernandes raises in a preliminary but provocative way (with the help of Omar Kutty) the question of whether "the citizenship experience of Goans…is so intertwined with caste…that there exists, in fact, [no] civil society in the first place" (314). Is what we view as "civil society" in Goa actually civil society, or just political society governed by a "legally secured casteist polity" (304) "where Brahmanical power is firmly associated with state legality" (314)? If the latter, then what we have in India is perhaps "not so much the realisation of a democratic regime of citizenship, but merely the rhetorical articulation of it" (315).

One of the great advantages of excellent work on Goa is that it allows us to escape the dominant British frame that governs so much of scholarship on colonialism and post-/colonial India. That advantage also makes the book somewhat more challenging, however, for scholars (like me) who are less familiar with Goan history and Portuguese colonization. Because of this, and its strong

theoretical orientation, the book is likely beyond the capabilities of most undergraduates. Graduate students and scholars in related fields, however, will find it a rich and intriguing work, all the more so if they are unfamiliar with Portuguese and Goan history.

Chad M. Bauman in Conversation with Jason K. Fernandes



In the Conclusion, you raise the question of whether "the citizenship experience of Goans…is so intertwined with caste, that there exists, in fact, [no] civil society in the first place" (314), and then suggest that what we have in India is perhaps "not so much the realization of a democratic regime of citizenship, but merely the rhetorical articulation of it" (315). Is this perhaps too high a bar? Are not all polities ones in which certain groups or certain kinds of social construction (caste, class, religion, race) enable the privileging of some groups over others in significant ways? If any such privileging undermines state claims to "democratic regimes of citizenship," then do any such regimes actually exist?

Your question requires that we appreciate the value of rhetoric in a polity. Too often, rhetoric is not taken seriously, or given the value it deserves. Rhetoric, even when not realized in practice is critical to the operation of a polity because it establishes the moral, ethical, and other standards of the polity through which the actions of the leadership, community, or individuals within it, may be judged. In the absence of a rhetoric, polities would be adrift in an amoral world and there would be no way to call the individuals that constitute the community and the community at large, to account.

Having said this, I would concede that if it is the case that every democratic polity privileges some groups over others in significant ways, then there are in fact no democratic regimes of citizenship. But this concession does not blunt my critique in the slightest! On the contrary, having recognized the value of rhetoric we are able to appreciate that this recognition spurs us onward and performs a larger task by preventing us from sitting back smugly and assuming that we inhabit a perfect polity. Democracy should, in any case, be about striving for a situation, not assuming that the mere

fulfillment of the procedural norms of liberal polities – of regular elections and peaceful transfer of office for instance – incarnates a democracy.

I am persuaded by your assertion that the ideal citizen-subject of India is the upper-caste Hindu male. If we were to extend your analysis to the United States, we would identify the ideal citizen-subject as the Protestant white male. However, beyond that the ideal gets murkier and more contested. Currently the US political system seems more or less equally divided between those who would add, as ideal characteristics, "rural, more pious than educated, white collar, and chauvinistic" (e.g., in their assertion of 'America first' and the notion that the putative glories of the nation emerge from the superiority of white culture and history), and those who would add "urban/e, more educated than religious, technocratic, and cosmopolitan/inclusive." This leads me to ask whether you see the claims of humiliation and the citizenship acts of Dalit-Bahujan communities in India today (in Goa or elsewhere) as a direct challenge to the male and upper-caste nature of the idealized citizen-subject, or merely the imagining of a different kind of upper-caste Hindu male (e.g., a more inclusive one). At times it seems to me your book supports the former thesis; at times the latter.

I have been concerned with being attentive to, and representing, the dynamism of the fields we study ever since reading Bourdieu as a young graduate student, so if it seems that my book supports both theses, then I am glad because it reflects my concern. I believe that your observation about the attempt to tag on features to the ideal citizen-subject is a feature of the dynamism of the political field – the citizen-subject is not set in stone nor frozen in time, but indeed it is constantly being influenced by various groups who seek to capture the space of the ideal citizen-subject and rearticulate the contents of this subject. This has been the case in India as well, where we have seen the movement of the ideal citizen-subject from the unmarked upper-caste Hindu male (i.e., the westernized, urban, upper-caste, "secular" Hindu) to the overtly Hindu upper-caste Hindu male. This movement definitely aids, and has been aided by, members of non-dominant caste groups who identify as Hindu. After all, the fact that the citizen-space is marked as Hindu does allow for some mobility to those who identify as Hindu, even if they are not dominant caste. They gain traction over upper-caste non-Hindus, for example.

To answer your question more directly, the challenges to the extant definitions of the ideal citizen-subject do not necessarily have to be utopian. Indeed, I suggest in the book that political activists are often pragmatic and merely concerned with accessing a seat at the table, and not being left out in the cold. They are not necessarily concerned about other marginalized groups. Thus, the challenges to the nature of the ideal citizen-subject are often about imagining a different kind of upper-caste Hindu male, or simply a different kind of Hindu male – to allow the possibility for male members of Bahujan groups to participate. This is

not to rule out that some activists may envision a utopian challenge to the extant ideal citizen-subject, but the pressures, and realities, of the field do not leave much space for that to be realized substantially.

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Book Review

Joya Chatterji, *Partition's Legacies*, with an introduction by David Washbrook. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2021. Pp. 550+xxi. Cloth. $95.00. ISBN 978-1-4384-8333-7.

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The publication of an anthology of Joya Chatterji's essays is a welcome event, since her substantial *oeuvre*, while focused on the social and political history of Bengal, has contributed to broader fields of inquiry relating to decolonization in South Asia. Not only has she helped shift the onus of scholarly interest in Partition from the Punjab (which, for many, still remains a synecdoche for the gruesome events of 1947) to the Bengal delta; she has consistently used her "location" in Bengal to tease out unique histories of borders and refugees, and, more recently, of citizenship. This intertwining of local and global concerns has long set her work apart, and the thirteen essays collected in *Partition's Legacies* are meant to show, as the late David Washbrook notes in his introduction to the volume, "both Bengal in the world and the world in Bengal" (6).

Since the individual essays were written and published over a rather long span of time (the earliest in 1996 and the newest ones in 2018), the volume presents not so much a single pointed thesis as a set of themes that reflect Chatterji's changing interests and concerns. All of the essays were published after her first book, *Bengal Divided* (1994) — which had held Bengali Hindu political leaders responsible for partitioning the province — and on the whole the present volume signals her turn away from elite politics and psephology to more granular social histories, as well as from the causes of Partition to its consequences. The transition is apparent in her essay on the Radcliffe Line in Bengal (first published in 1999, Ch. 2 in the present volume), which at first privileges the territorial squabbles of local Congress bosses in explaining the shape of the border, but eventually shifts gears to focus (foreshadowing Willem van Schendel's (2004) work) on the "everyday operation" of the new frontier (97). In the present volume, this essay has been placed in the first thematic section ("Identities, Decolonisation, Nation-Making"). The overarching concern in this section, as the historiographical overview (Ch. 1) argues, is to show that decolonization was a moment of change rather than continuity, a process of "disaggregating" the relations and assemblages of power that held the imperial state together (10). This view is substantiated through instances like that of the 1948 Inter-Dominion Conference in Calcutta (Ch. 4), which is described as a moment when both India and Pakistan adopted "secular" practices with regard to property and refugees,

moving beyond the so-called religious basis of Partition (151). The other chapter in this section, a 1996 literature review exploring the *longue-durée* history of Bengali Muslim identity (Ch. 3), seems rather out of place and has aged less well than the other pieces, if only because two works it reviews (Eaton, 1993 and Roy, 1983) have now been replaced by newer approaches (most recently, Stewart, 2019 and Irani, 2021).

The second ("Refugees, Mobility, Migration") and third ("Immobility") sections feature nuanced and original micro-historical accounts of the catastrophes that 1947 unleased on the Bengali people. The essays in these two sections develop on the themes explored in Chatterji's 2007 book, *The Spoils of Partition*: the assertion of "rights" by Hindu refugees from East Bengal in opposition to the "charity" offered by the Indian state (Ch. 5); the divergent fates of state-built refugee camps and squatter colonies around Calcutta (Ch. 8); the importance of "mobility capital" (in the form of wealth and social connections) in determining routes of migration (Ch. 7), and the corresponding "immobility" of those who lacked such capital (Ch. 10); the ghettoization of Muslims in West Bengal due to encroachment by Hindu refugees (Ch. 9); and a comparative study of "migration myths" of the Sylheti diaspora in Britain and the Urdu-speaking "Bihari" minority in Bangladesh (Ch. 6). While the editorial decision to anthologize all pieces in their unaltered form has resulted in some repetition (for instance, the story of Shahid and Jalal Gazi, in p. 292–4 is repeated verbatim, with the photograph, in p. 431–4), the essays here demonstrate a wide range of interventions in migration studies, as well as an increasing keenness on the part of the author to use new research methods—especially in studying auto-ethnographic community histories (Ch. 6) and conducting oral history interviews (Ch. 7 and 10). The final set of essays ("Citizenship") analyzes the long-term effects of Partition in shaping citizenship in a post-imperial world (Ch. 11), making a case for South Asian histories of citizenship in relation to anxieties of refugee movement (Ch. 13), along with a brief account of alternative forms of citizenship envisioned by some of the Indian Princes in the moment of Partition (Ch. 12).

The key contribution of this volume is Chatterji's critique of the myths of nationalism as well as those of globalization through her damning accounts of the wretchedness and misery that Partition brought upon Bengal. Here her position as a historian of Bengal is indeed significant, for she painstakingly shows that neither India nor Pakistan cared enough about people on their eastern frontiers, with Nehru going to the extent of denying the refugee problem there altogether (315–7). Thus, unlike the fate of refugees in the bloodier divisions of Punjab and Sind (as shown, say, in Zamindar, 2007), the abandonment of Bengalis by both states was far more callous and merciless. Moreover, Chatterji is one of the few historians to analyse the plight of Muslims in post-1947 West Bengal seriously: she shows how those who "stayed on" were rendered immobile ("stuck"), without wealth or social capital, often left to be attacked and dispossessed by bands of Hindu refugees from the East (401–2). While a growing corpus of scholarship has produced fine studies of migration (McKeown, 2004; Amrith, 2013), Chatterji is matchless in her exposition of immobility, particularly in showing how "states of exception" like the Enemy Property Act had practically

made citizenship of minorities contingent upon them *remaining* in their place (520–1). Her arguments are humbling for triumphalist accounts of migration in the age of globalization, and her proposed history of South Asian citizenship is of immense significance today, especially in relation to the controversial Indian project of creating a National Register of Citizens to detect illegal migrants from Bangladesh.

Despite the increasing diversity of her fields of inquiry, however, Chatterji's conceptual apparatus seems unable to move beyond the old and tired paradigm of Hindu-Muslim sectarian conflict. She had chosen the frame of "communalism" to explain the political behavior of Hindu elites in her first book (Chatterji, 1994; for a critical response, see Bose 2001:288–9), and her successive works appear to have continued seeing all aspects of Bengali social history through the same lens of perpetual conflict and hatefulness between the two communities. This is reflected in her choice of sources: the accounts of "riots" and other clashes are taken almost at face value from police files, without sufficient critical analysis of the language of post-colonial bureaucracy (see 370–1); even when oral histories are used, they seem to be furnished as anecdotal evidence to confirm extant narratives of conflict (as in 278, or 292–4) than as genuine explorations of different worldviews. These shortcomings are compounded by the lack of engagement with any Bengali-language source (the oral history excerpts too are cited and analysed only in English), the refusal to take seriously critiques of the "communal" view of Partition (most notably Jalal, 1985, 1997), and a complete disregard for cultural practices, which would have revealed quite a different field of Hindu-Muslim interactions (see Mir, 2010 for an analogue in Punjab). In fact, there are moments when Chatterji herself hints at cooperation rather than conflict: be it the agreement reached by elites representatives in the Inter-Dominion Conference (158–9), or the myriad class-based alliances between the two communities in North Bengal (377, 392). But these instances are quickly explained away as momentary aberrations in a relentless conflict, as if the two communities were simply incapable of working out *any* arrangement— based on class, locality, or culture— in their long history of coexistence. To accept this idea of a static, almost racialized antagonism between Hindus and Muslims as an analytical framework is to refuse investigating the structural roots of "communal" conflict, and ultimately, willy-nilly, to give in to the *telos* of Partition and the founding myths of both India and Pakistan.

Chatterji is able to break free of this teleology only once, towards the end of the book (Ch. 12), when she acknowledges that princely conceptions of citizenship represented a "brief moment when alternative outcomes were imagined and deemed possible" (492). A fuller appreciation of such alternative imaginations, along with a more critical understanding of "communal" conflict, would have produced a rather different narrative of the inheritances of Partition.

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Book Review

Caterina Guenzi (2021) *Words of Destiny*. New York: SUNY Press. Pages +402. ISBN13: 978-1-4384-8201-9 (Hard Cover, Price $95), ISBN13: 978-1-4384-8202-6 (Paperback, Price $33.95).

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This work, a revised translation of the author's 2013 volume *Le discours du destin*, is a welcome addition to the as yet meagre English-language scholarship on astrology in India. Based chiefly on fieldwork in Banaras, but with detours into Sanskrit textual sources, it presents a window into the practice of contemporary Indian astrologers, the world view underlying it, and the symbolic universe shared by astrologers and their clients.

Astrology is an immensely important aspect of South Asian culture and society, and its Sanskrit canon, reaching back more than 1500 years, is used by practitioners to the present day. However, despite its continued cultural significance and impact on the ways in which millions of people reflect on and arrange their lives, astrology both ancient and modern has been much neglected in Indology and South Asian studies. Guenzi's work is thus of great value to students of Indian religion and culture, and should also be of interest for the cross-cultural study of astrology: while contemporary western (and globalized) astrological practice is nearly always wedded to depth psychology and 'New Age' spirituality, the practitioners presented in *Words of Destiny* provide divinatory and therapeutic services which in many respects – with allowances made for differences in religious and cultural settings – more closely resemble European astrology in the early modern period.

Having said this, it is still useful to bear in mind, firstly, that Indian astrology encompasses a far wider variety of practices than a single book can do justice to; and secondly, that those practices have not been unaffected by modernized western astrology, first brought to India through the Theosophical Society in the late nineteenth century. This ongoing process of globalization is strikingly illustrated by a modern horoscope scroll described by Guenzi, which, in a puzzling addition to the traditional nine planets (*navagraha*), contained images of the Vedic deities Varuṇa, Prajāpati and Yama. These are in fact the 'mythological translations' of the more recently discovered planets Uranus, Neptune and Pluto, incorporated into western astrology over the past two centuries.

Thinking about astrology

The introduction and early chapters of the book outline the overall structure of the discipline of *jyotiṣa* (astronomy-astrology), its relation to the academy in modern India, and the varying roles of practising astrologers in contemporary Banaras. The author makes a number of important points about the scholarly study of astrology as well as its status in Indian society, contrasting the latter with the (culturally) western world, not least as regards the academy. The last topic is treated with greater circumspection than would perhaps seem strictly necessary, given developments in the field over the past two decades, but this may reflect national sensitivities. Guenzi suggests that the reason for the scholarly neglect of astrology in the west is that the subject does not fit into current academic divisions, being too technical for anthropology, too abstract to be considered an applied science, and too 'arid and dogmatic' for literary and philosophical studies. While some of these characterizations may be debated, it is certainly true that there has long been little room in the academy for the study of astrology, perhaps chiefly for ideological reasons: in many quarters, astrology is viewed not only as outdated or wrong, but as a full-blown heresy against science, calling for shunning rather than study. For generations, few scholars have thus been motivated to acquire the rigorous skill set required for such studies: proficiency in ancient languages, knowledge of traditional observational astronomy and mathematics, and familiarity with the concrete practices of astrology, its intricate symbolic language, and its relation to larger religious and cosmological frameworks.

In India, as Guenzi notes, there has been no rupture either between mathematical astronomy (*gaṇita*) and astrology (*phalita*) or between the latter and religion, where the planets are recognized as deities. This also means that astrology, an important auxiliary discipline for other traditional systems of knowledge and practice, is not perceived as 'occult, esoteric, or mysterious' – a point particularly relevant in light of recent attempts to extend the academic sub-discipline of esotericism studies to include South Asia: while the phenomena typically included in such attempts certainly deserve to be studied, the discourse employed is not always appropriate. In addition to astronomy and astrology as commonly understood, Guenzi describes how non-astral forms of divination – including chiromancy, physiognomy and topomancy – have been subsumed under the Sanskrit discipline of *jyotiṣa*. Though not explicitly discussed, one reason for this privileged status of astrology is presumably the fact that it forms a bridge between ritual Vedic calendric astronomy (*jyotiṣa-vedāṅga*) and the divinatory arts.

Guenzi's analyses are made chiefly from the perspective of Indian cultural studies, and the impact of the extra-Indian origins of astrology and the continuity of its symbol system are sometimes overlooked, as when the author is surprised to find no reference to the caste system in the twelve houses of the horoscope, or emphasizes the important function of homologies in Vedic thought (undoubted though that is) over their fundamental role in horoscopic astrology in all its cultural guises. Nevertheless, for readers with no prior acquaintance with

astrology in India, Guenzi provides an accessible and useful introduction to a complex subject.

Of particular interest from a sociological point of view is the discussion of different types of astrologers in contemporary India – male and female, Brahmin and non-Brahmin, academic and 'professional' – as well as their frequently hybrid identities, resting on the hybrid status of astrology itself as, on the one hand, religious/traditional, and on the other, scientific/modern. The class analysis partly underlying this discussion resurfaces later in the book, when astrology is compared with less erudite (and expensive) ways of understanding and manipulating personal fate. The taxonomy of practitioners further has a bearing on the methodology of Guenzi's study as a whole, which deliberately centres around professional astrologers with a large clientele, signalling 'social legitimacy', and, for pragmatical reasons, on those happy to have a foreign woman academic present at and recording a large number of their consultations. Although the latter consideration in particular is not only natural but unavoidable, it is worth keeping in mind that the astrologers thus selected may not be representative of the entire field even in Banaras, and that 'those renowned for their theoretical knowledge and recognized as famous scholars by a limited circle of cultivated Brahmins' might have given rather different answers to some important questions.

The descriptions of how astrologers handle the cognitive dissonance of incorrect predictions or deductions are particularly illuminating and thought-provoking. All the same, I feel that Guenzi's characterization of some practitioners' tendency to privilege map over territory as 'a constitutive element of the divinatory approach, without which astrologers' work would lose its meaning' somewhat overshoots the mark. While it is true that the destiny predicted by astrologers is typically perceived as partly negotiable by ritual and other means (more on which below), and that such negotiability constitutes a major part of astrology's appeal, it is also the case that an astrologer's abilities are largely measured, by clients and peers alike, in terms of his record of fulfilled predictions, and that strategies such as those recounted would likely be called into question by rival practitioners.

Astrology and karma

Arguably the most controversial thesis in the book, but also one of the most central, concerns the relationship between astrology and the ubiquitous Sanskritic doctrine of karma, treated extensively in chapter 5. According to the author, the two theories are based on 'contrasting conceptual ground[s]': karma on the existence of moral choice, astrology on 'natural and cosmic principles' that amount to a hard determinism and the absence of human responsibility. Guenzi nevertheless notes that both Sanskrit astrological texts and modern Indian astrologers do refer to karma, typically using the central metaphor of astrology as a lamp to reveal the unseen decree of destiny caused by actions in previous lifetimes; but she dismisses that metaphor as a 'trick' of rhetoric used to gloss over irreconcilable differences. This raises the epistemological question: if the incompatibility of karma theory and astrology is perceived neither by the textual

tradition nor by contemporary practitioners, but only by the academic observer, can we be certain that it is really there? While reducing this question to a postcolonialist power discourse would be to sidestep the real issue, Guenzi's claim to see what practitioners do not seems to me a bold one, in need of correspondingly strong evidence.

Like Wilhelm Halbfass, to whom she refers, Guenzi appears to assume an original, underlying or 'real' incompatibility of karma theory and horoscopic astrology on the *a priori* grounds that the latter originated outside India. So it did, but the incompatibility does not follow: in fact, as I have argued elsewhere, the near-perfect fit of the foreign practice with the indigenous metaphysics has surely contributed to its long-lasting influence on Sanskrit culture. This affinity arises from the dual nature of horoscopic astrology: from its inception in the Hellenistic world, long before it reached India, the discipline comprised both descriptive (and therefore partly deterministic) elements, notably in the form of genethlialogy or birth horoscopes, and prescriptive ones – including catarchic or electional astrology, which advises on the best time for various undertakings, as well as planetary magic, apotropaic rituals, etc., and thus presupposing at least a measure of human freedom and responsibility. So far from advocating a hard determinism or denying human choice, astrology thus agrees admirably with the karmic notion of previous actions determining the broad outlines of a person's fate in this life while leaving room for choices of action which will, in time, determine the circumstances of the next.

In support of her thesis, Guenzi points to the fact that the planets are conceived as deities, the worship of which can alter an expected destiny. However, it is not clear from her discussion how such appeasement of the planets (*grahaśānti*) differs fundamentally from the non-astrological performance of atonement (*prāyaścitta*), which tends to take very similar ritual forms: recitation of mantras, oblations to the fire, etc. – or, indeed, from the near-universal formal or informal worship of any kind of deity for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an evil fate. Like other propitiatory rituals, *grahaśānti* is predicated on the understanding that karma is not a one-way street: previous actions may be counteracted, at least to some extent, by present action.

This dual nature of karma also has a bearing on another question raised by Guenzi in passing, namely, how 'karmic residue' could explain the different results expected from undertakings begun at more or less propitious times according to *muhūrta* or catarchic astrology. Within the Sanskrit tradition, the answer would be that choices made by human agents, including those informed by astrology, belong not to the category of residue but to that of present action, which *interacts* with the results of actions from previous lifetimes to form concrete experiences. These two forms of karma are often equated with *daiva* and *puruṣakāra*, 'divine' fate and human effort, likened to the two wheels needed for a cart to move. As reported by Guenzi, the same image – only substituting a scooter for the cart – is employed by present-day astrologers in Banaras to describe the contrasting concepts of *bhāgya* ('fate, fortune') and *karm*, although the author claims that these concepts are not equivalent to *daiva* and *puruṣakāra*. A closer analysis

demonstrating that claim would have been welcome: while the history and semantics of the word *bhāgya* in particular are discussed in some detail, the two conceptual pairs are not systematically compared.

Guenzi further notes that astrologers sometimes attribute a client's immoral compulsions to planetary influences while simultaneously claiming that his or her external misfortunes result from wrongdoing in previous lives. To the author's mind this creates a paradox, as phenomena that would typically be considered to exist within the volitional sphere are assigned an outside cause and vice versa. But are practitioners living that paradox? Putting astrology to one side for a moment, standard karma theory does allow for some people being to all intents and purposes compelled to commit immoral acts: a person is not born a blank slate, but carries with him or her the mental residue of previous actions in the form of subconscious impressions or propensities (*vāsanā*) which, if sufficiently strong from continual reinforcement, may form either positive or negative spirals of action and reaction that propel the person helplessly along. The effects of karma are thus both external (fortunate and unfortunate life circumstances) and internal (character traits formed by habituated action), and from the astrologer's point of view, both may be deduced from the horoscope. On such a view, *vāsanās* and the astrological configurations indicating them explain but do not condone reprehensible behaviour; and as noted by Guenzi, astrologers typically do recognize it as such and encourage clients to correct it, something that would seem self-contradictory in a hard-determinism model.

Signs and causes

Related to these matters is the topic explored in chapter 6: the interconnections between individual destinies, with particular reference to the time of death. Any model of destiny, whether based on karma or on some other principle, must allow for such interconnections: if, out of two brothers, one is destined for an early death, then the destiny of the other should logically include the early loss of his brother. But the causal model discussed by Guenzi goes beyond this kaleidoskopic perspective, claiming that the horoscope of one brother may in fact alter the other's destiny and even lead to his death in a way and at a time not indicated in the victim's own horoscope.

The ethnographic evidence presented by the author on this topic is convincing: some of the astrologers she interviews clearly do express such a causal view, the social and philosophical implications of which are certainly interesting. Nevertheless, one must beware of generalizing from that evidence, either by attributing the same views to all Indian astrologers (or to a reified Indian astrology) or by superimposing them on texts of the astrological canon. I am reminded of the twentieth-century South Indian astrologer K. S. Krishnamurti ridiculing the suggestion of having a young man whose horoscope did not promise children marry a woman whose horoscope did, in order to increase his chances of offspring. If the lady's horoscope indicates children, he said, but her husband's does not, then what does that imply? The intended meaning was clear: it could only mean that she would have children by someone else. On

Krishnamurti's view, then, each person necessarily lives out his or her own destiny as revealed by the horoscope. Unless and until more extensive ethnographic research is done on the topic, which is the majority opinion among contemporary Indian astrologers must remain unknown.

Guenzi also quotes a number of passages from Sanskrit astrological texts which she sees as supporting the notion of interhoroscopic causality. In this analysis I believe she is mistaken, and the interpretative weight that she places on grammatical constructions to prove her point is occasionally too great to be supported. A single example will suffice: a certain astrological configuration (*yoga*) is claimed to mean that 'a son's influence on his father is endowed with a "retroactive" power' causing the father's death prior to the birth of the child. This, Guenzi argues, is indicated by the use of the present optative, violating the grammatical principle of *consecutio temporum* to express 'that at the time of the child's birth, the death of the father that has already taken place will occur'. However, a reader looking up the sentence in question will find it both idiomatically unremarkable and perfectly grammatical. *Prāg janmano nivṛttiḥ syān mṛtyur vāpi śiśoḥ pituḥ* means: 'Before the birth, the disappearance or death of the child's father may occur.' In English, one would have the option of saying 'may have occurred'; classical Sanskrit, lacking an optative of the past tense, has no corresponding option.

That a horoscope cast for a significant moment in time should be capable of *signifying* past events as well as present and future ones is a fundamental assumption of astrology both in India and elsewhere and does say something about the interconnected cosmos that the astrologer inhabits; but it is not evidence of inverted *causality*. In this regard it seems relevant to point out that the same lamp metaphor used in Sanskrit works to describe the function of astrology is also used of non-celestial omens (e.g., in Varāhamihira's sixth-century *Yogayātrā*). At least as far as the question of causality is concerned, the planets are thus placed on an equal footing with a hooting owl or a lizard running up a wall. It would also have been illuminating to bring into this context a topic discussed in other parts of the book: that of interrogations or *praśna*, horoscopes cast not for the time of a person's birth but for the time of a question being asked of the astrologer. When, in chapter 7, an anxious mother consults the astrologer over her fears that her son is planning violently to disrupt a wedding, confirmed by the astrologer from the position of Mars at the moment of consultation, one might ask whether that position is retroactively causing the son's violent intentions – and if so, whose destiny is interfering with his: the mother's or the astrologer's?

The question of whether the planets function as causes or as mere signs is in fact explicitly discussed in the textual tradition. Among the relevant sources we find another Banaras astrologer: the Sanskrit author Balabhadra, who studied with Rāma Daivajña in that city some 400 years ago. Referring to the metaphor of astrology as a lamp, Balabhadra later wrote in his *Horāratna*: 'Here, by this [word] "reveals" it is clearly recognized that the planets, outlining by means of their good or evil positions from the ascendant in a nativity at a particular time

the maturation of the results of good or evil actions earned in another birth, only indicate, but do not cause, [those] results'.

> (*atra vyañjayatīty anena*
> *tātkālikajanmalagnaśubhāśubhasthitivaśena*
> *janmāntarārjitaśubhāśubhakarmaphalapākanirūpayatāṃ*
> *grahāṇāṃ phalasūcakataiva na tu janakatā iti spaṣṭaṃ pratīyate*)

On this view, karma is a causation model where, among other things, individual happiness or suffering is determined by previous actions, whereas astrology is a model of non-causal correspondence through which one type of event – including events caused by karma – may be deduced from another. This is a fundamentally different proposition from Guenzi's claim that astrology is an 'idiom of causality […] strongly anchored in the Brahmanical tradition', 'commensurate' with karma theory but 'provid[ing] radically different explanations'.

Influences and counter-influences

From these and other considerations it seems clear that distinguishing between two or more levels of astrology in India is of paramount importance: the learned level reflected in the pre-colonial Sanskrit canon; the popular or unlearned level, for which textual sources are by definition scarce; and perhaps a semi-learned level where the two commingle, giving rise to contrasts and contradictions. The detailed investigation and vivid representation of the latter two levels in contemporary settings constitute the strength of Guenzi's study, and my only real criticism is that they seem to have unduly influenced her analysis of the first level, leading to a double misrepresentation of Sanskrit-language astrology as deterministic and as a system of causality (the one does not necessarily entail the other).

The last two chapters of the book deal explicitly with popular concepts and methods not found in Sanskrit works on astrology but nevertheless central to its current practice in India. Chapter 7 focuses on some of the most dreaded troubles commonly associated with the malefic planets: the *maṅgal-doṣ* or Mars affliction harming marital happiness; the *sāṛhe-sātī* or seven-and-a-half years' misery brought by Saturn; and the *kālsarp-yog* of the serpentine 'shadow planets' Rāhu and Ketu, causing untold setbacks in life. Analysing the discourse used by astrologers and their clients in discussing such matters, the author finds it similar to that used – mostly by the less educated – to talk about spirit possession and sorcery. However, when it is suggested that the Sanskrit use of the term *graha* ('seizer') for both planets and malevolent spirits constitutes a continuum of meaning, I believe that too much reliance is being placed on etymology. Identical words are often used as technical terms in quite different contexts without any such continuum in evidence: a result of Sanskrit branches of learning forming most of their technical nomenclature from within its own lexicon, in contrast to modern western languages like English, which draw largely on Greek and Latin. Furthermore, the term *graha* is applied equally to all the planets, benefic as well as malefic; and texts within the Sanskrit tradition – such as the

Bṛhatpārāśarahorā, frequently quoted by Guenzi – state that the planetary *grahas* are so called because they 'seize' or 'overtake' not human beings, but the fixed stars: the same phenomenon that underlies our word *planet*, Greek for 'wanderer'.

The causal language of planetary 'influence' (*prabhāv*) is very much present in the astrological consultations reported, and likewise in the prescribed remedies which are, to many clients, the very *raison d'être* of astrology, and which are discussed in chapter 8. Such influences are both variously defined, using modes of discourse ranging from anthropomorphic imagery to electromagnetism, and variously treated: by recourse to ritual worship (mostly of non-planetary deities selected according to non-astrological criteria), to magical devices (*jantar*), or to precious and semi-precious stones considered to have an affinity with particular planets. Here, too, the ethnographic descriptions and interview excerpts provide the reader with vivid insights into an important but rarely discussed aspect of contemporary Indian culture.

Concluding remarks

Notwithstanding my disagreement with some of the author's analytical perspectives where the Sanskrit sources are concerned, *Words of Destiny* is an engaging work well worth reading for its own sake and all the more important for the role it plays in beginning to fill the lacuna in scholarly studies of South Asian astrology. I have no hesitation in recommending it to anyone interested in learning more about the lived experience of astrological clients and practitioners in contemporary India.

For any future editions, a more careful editing and proofreading of the text would be advisable. With regard to Sanskrit and Hindi words, missing or misplaced diacritics are common throughout the book. Also, fairly frequent are both remnants and suggestions of the French original, such as *ou* for 'or', *docteur* for 'doctor', *administratif* for 'administrative', or *Lion and Taurus* for 'Leo and Taurus'; obscure words such as *theme* for 'horoscope' (not generally used in English since the nineteenth century) or *nombril* (now typically used only in heraldry) for 'navel'; and unidiomatic phrases such as *wealth of interrogations*. Together, these create an impression of insufficient copy-editing, a circumstance that must reflect primarily on the publisher rather than on the author.