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Folklore and Environment

Guest Editor:
Arupjyoti Saikia



NATIONAL FOLKLORE SUPPORT CENTRE

National Folklore Support Centre (NFSC) is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation, registered in Chennai dedicated to the promotion of Indian folklore research, education, training, networking, and publications. The aim of the Centre is to integrate scholarship with activism, aesthetic appreciation with community development, comparative folklore studies with cultural diversities and identities, dissemination of information with multi-disciplinary dialogues, folklore fieldwork with developmental issues and folklore advocacy with public programming events. Folklore is a tradition based on any expressive behaviour that brings a group together, creates a convention and commits it to cultural memory. NFSC aims to achieve its goals through cooperative and experimental activities at various levels. NFSC is supported by a grant from the Ford Foundation.

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Folklore and Environment

***** ARUPJYOTI SAIKIA *****

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Introduction:

Two recently published books on India's environmental history Rohan D'souza, *Drowned and Dammed: Colonial Capitalism and Flood Control in Eastern India*, (OUP, 2006) and Ghazala Shahabuddin and Mahesh Rangarajan, *Making Conservation Work: Securing Bio-diversity in this New Century*, (Permanent Black, 2007), though far way from the primary objective of the present volume, had again called for re-investigating the paradigms of the colonial postulations about science and development. That the colonial era had demonstrated the inevitable strength of science as the only way to understand nature has always been under scanner. What was missing in the whole history of the 19th century is colonial attitude towards natural resources and the intricate relationship of people, who were dependent on these resources for their survival, with the nature. In the post-independent period, with the growth of India's environmental history, despite occasional expression of doubt about the nature of historical documents to speak the language of the everyday experiences of the people, the people remained at a safe distance from the nature's home. Yes, there has been tales of people's resistance to various colonial policies which were detrimental to their dependency on nature. But the everyday life of people is more than that.

It is a known fact that historians and other social scientists had to rely extensively on ranges of written documents, fashioned as archival sources and produced at the behest of colonial government, to examine historical dimension of colonial environment. However, as mentioned above, such reliance has been often under serious apprehension. There has been call to further investigate the nature of these documents so that truth can be unravelled. The foremost British historian of the 20th century Edward P. Thompson while speaking to the Indian historians in 1970s had called for serious attention to crucial world of folklore to write better social history. It was not that Indian historians were not sensitive to these issues. In fact in the 1990s Ajay Skaria, for instance, had masterfully handled various folklore materials to tell a masterful account of the tribes and forests in western India. An increasing number of scholars from across the disciplines had become more sensitive to this complex

world of folklore and general ecology. Similarly historians of environment have in the last decades become more sensitive to the questions of popular perception in matters of environment and ecology. An increasing number of works have been produced re-emphasising the need of locating crucial documents in understanding man and nature relationship.

The theme of this volume is Folklore and Ecology. There is no doubt that in the context of our relocation of attitude towards ecology, folklore plays and would play an important role. Folklore in the form of tales, sayings, songs, ballads, dances and other music and poetry can be highly illuminative of man and nature relationship. Often it has been asserted that many of our fundamental scientific ideas and policies about nature draw from myths and modern folklore. We manage our natural resources on the assumption that a balance of nature that never existed and is frequently invalidated by scientific observations, but oddly still shapes much of the foundation of the science of ecology. The accumulated traditions, in the form of folklore could throw significant light towards re-understanding of ecology particularly in the age of technology. This has become a more relevant subject in South and South-East Asia.

The essays in this volume clearly show how folklore can play a vital role in a more sensitive understanding of ecology. Sarit Chaudhuri, drawing from his field studies of Arunachal Pradesh, indicates the link between ecology and folk belief systems which traditionally served the purpose of resource conservation in direct or indirect ways. Chaudhuri also tells how such tales can be textualised looking at the length and breadth of Arunachal Pradesh which is considered as one of the biodiversity hotspots of India. This need not be romanticized. One need to look at the other side of the coin, Chaudhuri again reminds, as with the growing influence of money, market and other agents of change. In the last two decades there was a boom in timber trade in Arunachal which ultimately lead to the predicament of resource use in the province. And that was done with the active nexus of the people whose narratives are depicted above. The essay by Benita Stamble studies the perception of rain god in Gujarati folklores. Stamble argues that folksongs are often referred to as expressions of a primitive society, or as primitive expressions of a social group. But this notion of primitive has pejorative overtones, implying that the society that produced or uses such cultural elements may be crude or less developed, maybe even undeveloped, in some way. Those who study Gujarati folksongs, often note, for example, their expressions

and attitudes concerning rain, a natural phenomenon, and explain that the sentiments expressed in such songs derive from the simple and less-developed social systems that fall victim to such natural elements. Annu Jalias told us the complex story of the archipelago of islands that are the Sundarbans where a little-known goddess graces its forests. For Jalias, the story goes that *Bonbibibi*, the 'woman of the forest', was chosen by Allah to protect people who work in the Sundarbans against a greedy man-eating half Brahmin-sage half tiger-demon, *Dokkhin Rai*. Meena Bhargava, also drawing

from the same location like Jalias, tells the story based on eighteenth century account. It relates to how forest dwellers and wood-cutters, who also often worked as salt makers allegedly protected themselves or at least believed to have secured them from tigers and alligators, who abounded the forest tracts of Sunderbans. The last essay by Ashok Kumar Sen discusses the methodological constraints of studying myths, as an element of folklore, to understand contemporary ecology. Sen argues that Ho myth is neither as comprehensive nor diachronic as the Santal myth is. ❖

Folk Belief and Resource Conservation: Reflections from Arunachal Pradesh

***** SARIT K. CHAUDHURI *****

SARIT K. CHAUDHURI, Arunachal Institute of Tribal Studies, Rajiv Gandhi University, Rono Hills, Arunachal University.

With in the tremendous boon of science, technology, medicine etc., there is a gradual realization all over the world that still there are so much to learn from the people who are rooted with in the nature and whose sense of collectivism, respect and reciprocity with their surrounding ecosystem not yet driven by market forces or by the narrow sense of individualism and instant culture under the fashionable wave of globalization. This provides us some ground to think or rethink about the people's belief system. Folk beliefs may be sacred or secular, as a dimension of folklore tradition in understanding as well as popularizing conservation to our natural resources or even biological diversities which are conceived as the priority concern on the international environmental agenda.

In spite of various contested voices concerning many intricate issues, such as, Traditional Knowledge, IPR, politics of power structure, access and sharing of benefits etc., there is a general agreement that there are various important lessons to be learned from the cognitive and empirical dimensions of folklore tradition for conserving our natural resources aiming at the sustainable development of the communities in specific and mankind in general. There are significant contributions which deals with such issues (Kothari et al 1998, Ramakrishnan et al 1998). This paper only supplements the above notions taking a few examples from the tribal communities of Arunachal Pradesh.

Backdrop

Arunachal Pradesh, the erstwhile NEFA, being part of great Himalayan range, reflects huge heterogeneity in physiographic, climatic conditions, cultural as well

as biological diversity. This is the largest state in the north east India with a population of about twelve lakhs constituted primarily by 26 tribes and more than 100 smaller sub-tribes. On the basis of religious and some other cultural commonalities, sometimes the whole tribal population is divided into four broad cultural areas. Generally *Adi*, *Nyishi*, *Apatani*, *Monpa*, *Wancho*, *Mishmi* etc., are familiar names who are the major tribes though there are good numbers of smaller tribes exists, such as *Aka*, *Miji*, *Howa* etc., who are equally important in understanding linkages between the ecology and belief system.

Folk belief and resource conservation

Most of the tribes believe that the forest is the abode of their numerous gods and spirits, both benevolent and malevolent in nature. For example, *Adis* believe that the huge tree like *Rotne* found in their surrounding forest is the abode of the evil spirit called *Epom* for which they usually don't fell such tree. In case it is inevitable then they perform rituals by sacrificing pig and fowls to appease the spirit whose habitat is destructed. Similarly, they never indiscriminately cut cane bamboo and leaves for thatching traditional houses. For instance, *Epoeng* (big bamboo with huge circumference) has been felled during the *Ruruk* - the dark fourth night just after the full moon night as it is commonly believed that during that period this bamboo remains free from a insect locally called *Takit* which can reduce its longevity. There are some specific plants, such as, *Tattong*, *Taapit*, *Tan* etc. having sacred value. According to their belief such trees have sprung from the bones of *Kari Bote* - the great mythical hunter who is considered to be repugnant for the evil spirits and for this they hardly cut these trees unless and otherwise it is inevitable.

Folk perception related to a creeper called *Ridin*, which is a sacred plant used to ward off evil spirits, can be mentioned here. *Padams* believe that this plant

and attitudes concerning rain, a natural phenomenon, and explain that the sentiments expressed in such songs derive from the simple and less-developed social systems that fall victim to such natural elements. Annu Jalias told us the complex story of the archipelago of islands that are the Sundarbans where a little-known goddess graces its forests. For Jalias, the story goes that *Bonbibibi*, the 'woman of the forest', was chosen by Allah to protect people who work in the Sundarbans against a greedy man-eating half Brahmin-sage half tiger-demon, *Dokkhin Rai*. Meena Bhargava, also drawing

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Folk perception related to a creeper called *Ridin*, which is a sacred plant used to ward off evil spirits, can be mentioned here. *Padams* believe that this plant

emerged from the placenta of *Pedong Nane*- the mother of all living beings. While *Litung Liman* was giving birth to *Pedong Nane* her placenta was thrown beneath the house from where a creeper grew which is identified as *Ridin* with great difficulty by the expert *Siking Kepir Leni Taabe*. And this is narrated in their *Abang* (ballad) in the following words:

*Keyum Pedonge Rindo Si
Rindo Torgo Em Torge Bomye
Keyum Donie Aji Me
Aji E Einem Dutum Bomye*

This ballad reveals that the *Ridin* which is originated from the placenta of *Pedong Nane* would guard and protect mankind from any misfortune (Tayeng1996). During various ceremonies and rituals Padams exhibit various taboos, specially after both of a child and death funerals people abstain from cutting plants or visiting the area where bamboo shoots sprout otherwise it may cause damage to the new shoots (Megu 2007:72). The concept of sacred plant is also traceable among the Hill Miri tribe of Subansiri district. Surrounding areas of certain plants, such as, *Sigrek Sin*, *Tam* etc., are considered as sacred place and naturally Hill Miris don't spit or throw stones or urinate in such area which may affect the spirits residing there.

Among the Wanchos of Tirap district log-drum, the biggest musical instrument found among the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, constitutes one of the finest symbol of their culture and it is found in every boy's dormitory (Pa) and in Chief's residence. During the days of head hunting listening to the beating of this drum and organizing defense mechanism defined survival of the villagers. A number of different beats symbolized different meaning to the villagers. Construction of such huge drums involves series of sacred and secular activities. But when this is dragged towards the village from distant forests Wanchos sang songs through which they beg pardon from each and every creature of the forest expressing how inevitable that tree was to them for which they had to cut it and disturbed their habitat. Perhaps this can be taken as one of the finest examples which reveals traditional notion of sustainable use of resources by the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.

The concepts of sacred resources are evident among many tribes. Aka of West Kameng district have a concept called the *Nowu-yiew* which means forest lands and water resources (pond/lake) which are considered sacred. They believe that interference to such resources will result loss of life as it is the abode of supernatural force called *Ubro* or *Ubram*. The highest mountain peak in the Aka inhabited area called *Wojo phu* is considered as sacred mountain and extraction of any resources from that mountain and even hunting is strictly prohibited. Akas believe that breaking of such taboo will lead to bleeding from nose and mouth finally leading to death. So, even today this mountain

has a huge dense forest cover. Similarly, they have the concept of sacred pond (*Nearma Husu*) which is located near Nechiphu pass which is about 5000 feet above the sea level. People worship this pond and plucking of even leaves from the plants surrounding the pond is tabooed. They believe that if some one pluck leaves from this pond then he or she will loss direction on the way back home and they will reach the same place again and again (Nimachow2002). Such concept of sacred pond is found among the Khamptis of Lathao village located in Lohit district where fishing is strictly prohibited and this pond is used during the most important Buddhist festival of the village known as *Sangken*.

Various beliefs and taboos of Arunachal tribes related to animal world promote an indirect mode of conservation of various animal species. For instance, killing of tiger is tabooed among the Mishmis and Galos. However, if some one kills a tiger by mistake or due to inevitable circumstances then not only the person but the whole village has to go through various restrictions and performance of rituals. Among the Galos a tiger hunter can not consume certain types of birds, fish, meat and even he has to prepare his own food for a month and more over consumption of certain spices like local onion (Dilap) and ginger (Takee), are tabooed for life time (Lollen 2007:103). In fact, Galos believe that man, tiger and elephant originated from the same stock. They even don't kill certain seasonal birds which they consider sacred and they are also perceived as the agents of new season and symbol of good productivity (Riba 2003:94). Any one who visits Mishmi Hills of Lohit or Dibang valley districts will be moved listening to the howling of Hulloek Gibbon which is profusely available in the forest habitat. None of the Mishmi tribes kill this animal as they strongly believe that it will bring severe misfortune to the killer. Digaru or Miju Mishmis even don't go nearer to them while moving within the forest for hunting as they believe that incase Gibbon urinate on any individual then for at least next seven generations one will suffer from acute poverty. Many individuals are having strong faith on such belief system which has saved this particular species where as many other species became rare in their surrounding forest areas. In case of any killing the whole village has to follow certain taboos followed by certain rituals. Though hunting is very much important aspect of livelihood pattern of the Mishmis there are lot of restrictions related to the consumption of hunted animals. Among the Idus in case someone hunts wild animals than he has to undergo taboo by restricting eating of spices like onion, chilli, some leafy vegetables he cannot touch and use domestic utensils and cannot prepare the meat inside the house. He is not allowed to drink local brew prepared by women who is under pollution period. Idus also strongly believe that wild animals which are hunted by the male members are the gift given to them by the forest spirits like *Golo* and therefore, consumption of such meat by a

woman may cause harm to her as well as the child she would conceive. Such belief of Idus let their women in restriction in eating wild animal's meat, such as, deer, bison, wild goat, monkeys, boar, etc.

While sacrifice of animals in various rituals is very common in majority of tribes this is not allowed by the Buddhist tribe like Monpas of Tawang and West Kameng districts. They use varieties of animal products in rituals and animal motifs find a special space in the Monpa oral tradition as well as in their performing art tradition.

Conclusions

Our discussion provides some indications linking ecology and folk belief systems which traditionally served the purpose of resource conservation in direct or indirect ways. More such tales can be textualised looking at the length and breadth of Arunachal Pradesh which is considered as one of the biodiversity hotspots of India. But this need not be romanticized as we need to look at the other side of the coin which has emerged with the growing influence of money, market and other agents of change. In the last two decades there has been boom in timber trade in Arunachal which ultimately has led to the present predicament of resource use in the province. And that has been done with the active nexus of the people whose narratives are depicted above. With the intervention of Supreme Court such indiscriminate exploitation of forest resource, which goes against the traditional conservation ethics, has come to a temporary halt. There is no doubt that

through such appropriation of natural resources a few powerful elites have accumulated wealth whereas even today people living in interior villages still strive for their livelihoods by upholding traditional sacred or secular belief systems that encode the message of sustainable resource use.

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Bonbibi: Bridging worlds

***** ANNU JALAIS *****

ANNU JALAIS, Research Fellow, Department of Anthropology, London School of Economics.

In the archipelago of islands that are the Sundarbans a little-known goddess graces its forests. The story goes that Bonbibi, the 'woman of the forest', was chosen by Allah to protect people who work in the Sundarbans against a greedy man-eating half Brahmin-sage half tiger-demon, Dokkhin Rai. Dokkhin Rai, 'King of the South' (in this case to be understood as referring to Lower Bengal – i.e. the entire region that was once part of the Sundarbans) was a Brahmin sage who lived in the forest. One day, in a fit of greed he decided to feed on humans. For this, he took the form of a tiger. This was possible for him as, through his ascetic powers, he could magically transform himself into anything. His greed increased and soon the sage was refusing to share any of the forest resources with humans. He also started legitimising their killing by calling these a 'tax' (*kar*) – one they had to pay with their lives for the products they usurped from

what he had come to consider as 'his' jungle. Soon his arrogance and greed knew no bounds and he proclaimed himself lord and master of the Sundarbans mangrove (*badabor*) and of all the beings that inhabited it: the 370 million spirits, demons, god-lings, spirits and tigers. With time he became a demon (*rakkhosh*) who preyed on humans. Tigers and spirits became the chosen subjects of Dokkhin Rai and, emboldened by him, also started to terrorise and feed on humans. The trust that had existed between tigers and humans has now been broken.

But Allah, on noticing the frightening deterioration in relations between tigers and humans, decided to take action. In his compassion for the people of the 'land of the eighteen tides' (*athero bhatir desh* – another name for the Sundarbans) he decided to put a stop to Dokkhin Rai's reign of 'terror' and insatiable greed. He chose for this task Bonbibi, a young girl who lived in the forest. Bonbibi's father, Ibrahim, following his second wife's wishes, had abandoned his first wife Gulalbibi

woman may cause harm to her as well as the child she would conceive. Such belief of Idus let their women in restriction in eating wild animal's meat, such as, deer, bison, wild goat, monkeys, boar, etc.

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In the archipelago of islands that are the Sundarbans a little-known goddess graces its forests. The story goes that Bonbibi, the 'woman of the forest', was chosen by Allah to protect people who work in the Sundarbans against a greedy man-eating half Brahmin-sage half tiger-demon, Dokkhin Rai. Dokkhin Rai, 'King of the South' (in this case to be understood as referring to Lower Bengal – i.e. the entire region that was once part of the Sundarbans) was a Brahmin sage who lived in the forest. One day, in a fit of greed he decided to feed on humans. For this, he took the form of a tiger. This was possible for him as, through his ascetic powers, he could magically transform himself into anything. His greed increased and soon the sage was refusing to share any of the forest resources with humans. He also started legitimising their killing by calling these a 'tax' (*kar*) – one they had to pay with their lives for the products they usurped from

what he had come to consider as 'his' jungle. Soon his arrogance and greed knew no bounds and he proclaimed himself lord and master of the Sundarbans mangrove (*badabor*) and of all the beings that inhabited it: the 370 million spirits, demons, god-lings, spirits and tigers. With time he became a demon (*rakkhosh*) who preyed on humans. Tigers and spirits became the chosen subjects of Dokkhin Rai and, emboldened by him, also started to terrorise and feed on humans. The trust that had existed between tigers and humans has now been broken.

But Allah, on noticing the frightening deterioration in relations between tigers and humans, decided to take action. In his compassion for the people of the 'land of the eighteen tides' (*athero bhatir desh* – another name for the Sundarbans) he decided to put a stop to Dokkhin Rai's reign of 'terror' and insatiable greed. He chose for this task Bonbibi, a young girl who lived in the forest. Bonbibi's father, Ibrahim, following his second wife's wishes, had abandoned his first wife Gulalbibi

in a forest while she was pregnant. Gulalbibi had given birth to twins but had decided to keep only her son, Shah Jongoli, as she feared not being able to raise them both. A passing deer took pity on the abandoned daughter Bonbibi and became her surrogate mother.

One day, when she had grown up, Bonbibi heard Allah bidding her to free 'the land of the eighteen tides' from the exploitation of the Brahmin man-eating sage Dokkhin Rai who took the form of a tiger. At the same time, Ibrahim returned to retrieve his first wife and children from the forest. But as her mother and brother prepared to leave Bonbibi called out to her brother and told him to accompany her on an urgent task – they had to go to Mecca and Medina. Her brother decided to follow her and together they leave for Medina to receive the blessings of Fatima and from there continue to Mecca to bring back some holy earth. When they arrive in the infamous land of the eighteen tides they call out Allah's name and mix the holy earth of Mecca with the earth of the Sundarbans. Dokkhin Rai hears their call for prayer and resenting their intrusion and their invocation of Allah decides to drive them away. But Dokkhin Rai's mother Narayani appears and insists that it is better for a woman to be fought by another woman and decides to take on Bonbibi. As she starts to lose the conflict, Narayani calls Bonbibi 'friend' (*soi*). Bonbibi, gratified by the appellation, accepts Narayani's 'friendship' and they stop warring.

Bonbibi's story is always followed by Dukhe's tale. Dukhe (literally 'sadness') was a young boy who lived with his widowed mother grazing other peoples' animals. One day, his village uncle lured him into joining his team to work in the forest as a honey collector. Dukhe's mother did not want him to go but finally allowed him to leave with the recommendation that he should call out to Ma Bonbibi should any harm befall him. The team left for the forest but couldn't locate any bee-hives. Dokkhin Rai then appeared to the uncle, whose name was Dhona (from *dhon* – 'wealth') and promised him seven boats full of honey and wax if he could have Dukhe in return. After some hesitation, the uncle left Dukhe on the banks of Kedokhali island and sailed off. Just as Dukhe was about to be devoured by Dokkhin Rai, he called out to Bonbibi who rescued him and sent her brother Shah Jongoli to beat up Dokkhin Rai. In fear for his life, Dokkhin Rai ran to his friend the Ghazi. Ghazi, who is a pir, suggests Dokkhin Rai ask forgiveness from Bonbibi by calling her 'mother'. He then takes him to Bonbibi and pleads on Dokkhin Rai's behalf. Bonbibi, heeding the Ghazi's intervention, accepts Dokkhin Rai's apology and accepts him as her 'son'.

However, Dokkhin Rai starts arguing that if humans are given a free reign there will be no forest left. So, to be fair and ensure that Dokkhin Rai and his retinue of tigers and spirits stop being a threat to humans, and humans stop being a threat to non-humans (i.e.

wild animals and spirits), Bonbibi elicits promises from Dukhe, Dokkhin Rai and the Ghazi that they are all to treat each other as 'brothers'. She does this by forcing Dokkhin Rai and the Ghazi to part with some of their wood and gold respectively and by making Dukhe promise that he and his kind heed the injunction that they are to enter the forest only with a *pobitro mon* (pure heart) and *khali hate* (empty handed). She then sends Dukhe back to the village a rich man so that he does not have to work in the forest again.

Following on Dukhe's story, the islanders of the Sundarbans, often explain that they have to identify with Dukhe, whose unfailing belief in Bonbibi saved him, and consider the forest as being only for those who are poor and for those who have no intention of taking more than what they need to survive. This is the 'agreement' between non-humans and humans that permits them both to depend on the forest and yet respect the others' needs. The 'pure heart' means that they have to enter the forest without any greedy or violent disposition, the 'empty hands' mean they have to enter the forest without firearms and only if they do not possess riches or own land. It was only if they honoured their part of the agreement and left the forest and its resources to those who are dispossessed that tigers would respect their part of this arrangement worked out by Bonbibi explained the islanders.

Bonbibi's story is not very old. The *Bonbibi Johuranamah*, the booklet that narrates her story – was written by one little-known Abdur Rahim towards the end of the 1800s, and is written, although in Bengali, from back to front to emulate the Arabic script. The story between the Ghazi and Dokkhin Rai is more famous. The story is a version of an epic poem called *Ray-Mangal* composed by Krishnaram Das in 1686 (it thus predates that of Bonbibi by a couple of hundred years). The historian Richard Eaton believes that this story is a 'personified memory of the penetration of these same forests by Muslim pioneers' i.e. Sufi holy men (read his excellent *The rise of Islam and the Bengal frontier 1204–1760* for more info on how Bengal was Islamised – not through the sword but through agriculture). Today, Dokkhin Rai and the Ghazi are always represented together – marked in Dokkhin Rai's case by the symbol of a human head and the Ghazi through his tomb represented by a little earthen mound (these are also always present in the Bonobibi shrines).

For the islanders, Bonbibi goes against the distinctions of caste, class and religion. This is the reason why those who work in the forest as fishers and crab-collectors stress the fact that they have to consider all *jatis* – whether Brahmin or Malo, rich or poor, Hindu or Muslim, or even human or animal – 'equal'. Tigers and humans 'share the same food', they explain, because they both depend on the forest – tigers eat fish and crabs like the villagers, and like them, tigers are greedy for wood. These facts not only make tigers equal to humans but it also 'ties' them to humans.

Also, Dokkhin Rai, the Ghazi and Bonbibi have to be placed together in shrines, point out the villagers, to show how different *jatis* and must coexist and come to an agreement when dealing with the forest. Many Sundarbans islanders say that the most

important factor for ensuring their safety in the forest, apart from entering the forest 'empty handed' and 'pure hearted', is that they should entrust their lives to Bonbibi, live up to her injunctions and not dwell on their differences. ✽

Primal vs. Primitive: Observations on the Ecology of Rain in Gujarati Folksongs

***** BENITA STAMBLER *****

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Folksongs are often referred to as expressions of a primitive society, or as primitive expressions of a social group. But this notion of primitive has pejorative overtones, implying that the society that produced or uses such cultural elements may be crude or less developed, maybe even undeveloped, in some way. Thus, when examining Gujarati folksongs, some analysts have called attention to their primitive qualities. They note, for example, their expressions and attitudes concerning rain, a natural phenomenon, and explain that the sentiments expressed in such songs derive from the simple and less-developed social systems that fall victim to such natural elements.

However, it is also possible that such attitudes can be viewed from a different perspective, one that is supported by an examination of similar attitudes expressed in the hymns of the Rigveda. When we examine these hymns, there is no doubt that they express many similar attitudes toward the natural environment that we find in Gujarati folksongs. Additionally, particularly in their outlook toward rain, we find attitudes that have been consistent for millennia. Analysis of the similarity of ecological attitudes in these different cultural expressions, created thousands of years apart, may suggest a primal source for the attitudes articulated in selected Gujarati folksongs, one that is fundamental to human existence, rather than simply the outpourings of undeveloped minds. Therefore, it is important to examine the differences and similarities between the Rigveda and selected Gujarati folksongs regarding the relationship between humans and rain, to determine the "nature" of the continuity of such attitudes and sentiments.

India lies in a region of the world that has a particularly complex relationship with rain and rainfall. Situated in a climatic zone that is affected by monsoons, the effects of rain (and drought) are more intense here. Therefore, we should expect that the cultures of the

region have paid more attention to matters of rain than in other regions with less variable patterns.

Folklorists (Chaudhury, 1971) have suggested that our attraction to folk literature stems from its explanations of the puzzles of life developed by primitive societies. Thus, the vagaries of nature become the very source of folk expressions in their various forms, and ecology and nature the very subject and force that cause these verbalizations. It can be argued that such a connection to the natural world, and the need for explanation of it, is not a primitive urge but a primal one. Thus, such a desire existing in sophisticated societies as well as primitive ones indicates some inherent quality beyond a desire to explain phenomena that requires advanced skills to understand. Rather, this ongoing need speaks to a continuous and continuing characteristic built into humans, one that goes beyond reverting to primitive explanations.

We can explore this phenomenon through an examination of continuing expressions of sentiments and feelings across thousands of years, providing evidence of a continuous strain of attaching man to nature in its life-giving properties, particularly regarding rain and rainfall. When folklorists (Bhagwat, 1958) have examined some of these expressions they have found connections to ancient texts, suggesting an historical, rather than a modern, source for some of the attitudes expressed. In particular, studies of Gujarati folksongs have postulated Vedic roots (Gupta, 1964, Chandervaker, 1963), suggesting that these attitudes toward rain spring from an essential ecology embedded within the cultural psyche and, in a period of increasing global warming, provide a counterbalancing primal concern toward respect for the environment.

The attitudes expressed in the Rigveda are an indication of the relationship of the humans to the natural world, and may encompass beseeching, praising, expressing fear and giving thanks, besides providing descriptive information. Though the descriptive information is helpful in providing a context for the emotional component, it is the emotional/attitudinal concepts that provide an indication of the ecological

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Folklorists (Chaudhury, 1971) have suggested that our attraction to folk literature stems from its explanations of the puzzles of life developed by primitive societies. Thus, the vagaries of nature become the very source of folk expressions in their various forms, and ecology and nature the very subject and force that cause these verbalizations. It can be argued that such a connection to the natural world, and the need for explanation of it, is not a primitive urge but a primal one. Thus, such a desire existing in sophisticated societies as well as primitive ones indicates some inherent quality beyond a desire to explain phenomena that requires advanced skills to understand. Rather, this ongoing need speaks to a continuous and continuing characteristic built into humans, one that goes beyond reverting to primitive explanations.

We can explore this phenomenon through an examination of continuing expressions of sentiments and feelings across thousands of years, providing evidence of a continuous strain of attaching man to nature in its life-giving properties, particularly regarding rain and rainfall. When folklorists (Bhagwat, 1958) have examined some of these expressions they have found connections to ancient texts, suggesting an historical, rather than a modern, source for some of the attitudes expressed. In particular, studies of Gujarati folksongs have postulated Vedic roots (Gupta, 1964, Chandervaker, 1963), suggesting that these attitudes toward rain spring from an essential ecology embedded within the cultural psyche and, in a period of increasing global warming, provide a counterbalancing primal concern toward respect for the environment.

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perspective, particularly in relation to rain. These aspects of expressed attitudes can be compared to similar sentiments found in Gujarati folksongs. Though we can see some differences in the metaphors (or lack of metaphors) between the rain-centered hymns of the Rigveda and the folksongs from Gujarat, it is also clear that the basic range of sentiments expressed, and even some of the metaphors, have varied little over the millennia, suggesting a consistency of attitudes that goes beyond the label of "primitive."

In both the Rigveda and Gujarati folksongs the rain is personified in various forms. In many instances pleas or requests are addressed to a specific deity who is responsible for the production or cessation of rain. In some cases the deity is addressed as a deity, a higher order of being with supernatural powers. In other instances, the relationship with the deity is of a more personal nature, more like a relationship between humans. Rather than examine the rituals associated with propitiating the rain gods regarding either too much or too little rain, we will look specifically at the words of the songs (in translation) and the sentiments and desires they express in contrast to comparable verses of the Rigveda, also in translation.

The theme of historical continuity in Indian folk culture has been presented in various studies of Indian folklore. We can examine some passages from selected verses of the Rigveda and previously collected Gujarati folksongs to examine some of these observations.

- **effects of rain on creatures:**

Rigveda

...the plants shoot up...

Food springs abundant for all living creatures
(Griffith translation, book 5, hymn 83, verse 5)

Gujarati folksongs:

Pour for the sake of ants and worms
(Desai, 1963, p.95)

The birds and beasts are waiting for thee
(Patel, 1974, p.59)

- **effects of rain on streams:**

Rigveda:

...let the liberated streams rush forward
(Griffith translation, book 5 hymn 83, verse 5)

Gujarati folksong:

The water currents of rivers flow very swiftly...
(Chandervaker, 1963, p.62)

- **rain as milk of heaven:**

Rigveda:

...Imperial Kings, bedew us with the milk of heaven
(Griffith translation, book 4, hymn 63, verse 5)

Gujarati folksong:

Clouds thunder and rains pour
As it pours it will spread
It is a rain of milk
(Desai, 1963, p.95)

When we examine the folksongs, we see many more with descriptions of the problems associated with lack of rain. While this is consistent with comments about the essential pessimism of the folksongs when compared with the Rigveda (Crooke, 1926), there are several plausible explanations for this. First, the Rigveda is a set of hymns. It would be inappropriate to include complaints regarding current conditions in hymns. Second, there is a generally more descriptive quality regarding aspects of daily life in the folksongs in comparison to the Rigveda, so problems would thus tend to be more prevalent.

A lack of extensive metaphor in folksongs may be deliberate. In an analysis of the structure of Gujarati prose, poetry and songs, Durbin (1971) found that the grammatical language and pattern of songs are altered to be consonant with the melody, rhythm, rhyme and musical structure on and through which the words are enunciated and carried. Along with the addition of certain syllables to enable the words to match the melodic structure, several different speech patterns are eliminated toward this same end. That is, grammatical simplification occurs. It is possible that, to a similar purpose, metaphorical allusions are eliminated, or at least reduced, as well. If so, we could postulate that the transition from Rigveda to folksong was not simply a "dumbing down" of its metaphorical components, but a move to enhance the fit between the language and the musical structures that were used to create the songs. Though we have concentrated on the songs themselves and not the rituals surrounding them, it is clear that the rituals that accompany such songs, including their location, time of year, weather conditions, etc. would, in effect, render some of these messages easily understood without close attention to the words.

Through an examination of the content and attitudes expressed in both Gujarati folksongs and the Rigveda we have discovered both similarities and differences in regard to consideration of rain and rainfall. The similarities in attitude may be attributed to the primal human relationship with rain, at once thankful yet fearful of the capriciousness of the natural and supernatural powers. The consistency across the centuries and millennia provides yet another illustration of the continuity of Indian civilization and its cultural and ecological attributes, and helps to contradict the primitive label applied to such folksongs. The differences in the expression of these attitudes may be attributed to a variety of factors. The language of Gujarati folksongs meets the needs of the localized cultures while expressing universal attitudes toward rain. In-depth study of Gujarati folksongs in their original language should be undertaken to further explore these issues. In our own time of climatic change it is important to note the primal connection of mankind to rain, providing hope for continued attitudes respecting the power of nature and appreciating the bounty of rainfall.

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Forests, Wild Beasts and Supernatural Powers: A Folk Tale from Sunderbans

***** MEENA BHARGAVA *****

MEENA BHARGAVA teaches history at Indraprastha College, University of Delhi.

This folk tale is based on a few eighteenth century accounts. It relates to how forest dwellers and wood-cutters, who also often worked as *malangis* (salt makers) allegedly protected themselves or at least believed to have secured them from tigers and alligators, who abounded the forest tracts of Sunderbans.

The insalubrious and dreary climate of the Sunderbans and the fact that it was infested by wild animals, particularly tigers and alligators, rendered it risky and dangerous for the inhabitants. Many of them were reportedly carried away or devoured by tigers and alligators. The tigers had caused terrible havoc among the cattle, the wood-cutters, the cultivators and their family. The depredations of a single fierce tiger had frequently compelled the cultivators and wood-cutters to abandon their lands even if at the cost of that land relapsing into a jungle. Thus the southern portion of the Sunderbans which comprised the jungle tract along the seashore was almost entirely uninhabited except for the occasional wanderings of the groups of wood-cutters and fishermen. These jungles were also infested by enormous alligators that were often found asleep or basking in the sun completely motionless, appearing like a log wood. The wood-cutters were often deceived by their appearance until the alligator was woken by a shot or vigorously scrambled into the waters or attacked the wood-cutters. Tigers too infested the margins of the forests but frequently swam towards the seashore and attacked the people in the anchored boat.

The forests – though infested by tigers and alligators – were the sole source of livelihood of the wood-

cutters. This fact made them intensely superstitious and prejudiced by their belief in forest spirits. They were confident that their safety depended entirely upon supernatural agency. None of the wood-cutters or the *malangis* ventured into the forests without a *puja* (worship) performed by a *Brahmin* (priest) or a *Fakir* or a *Pir* (saint). So strong was the conviction amongst the *malangis* about the performance of this *puja* that they even sought payment from the East India Company for the *Brahmins* or the *Fakirs* to conduct the *puja*. The Company was rarely convinced by this demand of the *malangis*, yet it was compelled to make the payment for that seemed to be the only way of motivating the *malangis* to manufacture salt in tiger-infested zones of the Sunderbans.

The *malangis* or the wood-cutters refused to go to the forests to cut wood unless accompanied by a *Fakir*, who had, as they believed, acquired supernatural powers from the presiding deity, whom he propitiated with offerings over the tigers and other wild animals. A large number of boats with the *malangis* proceeded together in a party, taking a *Fakir* with them. These *Fakirs* were generally Muslim devotees, who claimed to possess magic charms against the terror of wild animals. Living by the riverside, these *Fakirs* were greatly revered by the forest dwellers and wood-cutters, who offered them food and *cowries* to win their support and goodwill. Invariably, these *Fakirs* were also carried away by the animals but the longer they lived, the more they were venerated. It is believed that the Muslim wood-cutters had assigned particular portions of Sunderbans to their *Pirs*. In the huts of the *Fakirs*, they raised a small mound of earth, like a grave and prayed before it prior to the commencement of their operations. The Hindu wood-cutters too like their Muslim counterparts, had allocated parts in Sunderbans

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The *malangis* or the wood-cutters refused to go to the forests to cut wood unless accompanied by a *Fakir*, who had, as they believed, acquired supernatural powers from the presiding deity, whom he propitiated with offerings over the tigers and other wild animals. A large number of boats with the *malangis* proceeded together in a party, taking a *Fakir* with them. These *Fakirs* were generally Muslim devotees, who claimed to possess magic charms against the terror of wild animals. Living by the riverside, these *Fakirs* were greatly revered by the forest dwellers and wood-cutters, who offered them food and *cowries* to win their support and goodwill. Invariably, these *Fakirs* were also carried away by the animals but the longer they lived, the more they were venerated. It is believed that the Muslim wood-cutters had assigned particular portions of Sunderbans to their *Pirs*. In the huts of the *Fakirs*, they raised a small mound of earth, like a grave and prayed before it prior to the commencement of their operations. The Hindu wood-cutters too like their Muslim counterparts, had allocated parts in Sunderbans

to their various gods and goddesses. They also raised elevations three or four inches high, about three feet in square and placed balls of earth on them, which were painted red. Having painted these balls red, they performed *puja* with offerings of rice, flowers, fruits and Ganges water. Before the wood-cutters set out to work, each *Fakir* assembled his group of wood-cutters, cleared a space at the edge of the forests and erected a number of small tent-like huts, in which forest deities were kept for worship and offerings. The boatman (the one who carried the wood-cutters to the forests) then observed a fast and went off to sleep. The latter was most significant in the entire exercise of propitiation. It was in his dreams that the boatman was informed by gods and goddesses which forests may be cut without the dread of the tigers.

The *malangis* and the other wood-cutters believed that the invocation and worship of the forest deities rendered the allotted forests free of tigers. Each one of them, therefore, before commencing his work, made an offering to the forest spirits to gain a right to be protected by the deities. However, despite the elaborate offerings and worship, if anyone from the party was carried away by the tigers, the *Fakirs* decamped but the wood-cutters or the *malangis* placed flags at the prominent corners of the allotted forest area to warn the others. Nonetheless, so great was the belief in the efficacy of the protection afforded that no wood-cutter or *malangi* entered the forests without receiving the protection of the *Fakirs* or *Brahmins* or without propitiating the forest deities.

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Gleaning Historical Materials from a Myth: A Study of Kole History of the Creation of the World

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Introduction

Strategizing the recovery and reconstruction of the indigenous history had not merited the desired attention of mainstream historiography. But fortunately it has lately emerged as the growing engagement of researchers all over the world. This stir may be attributed largely to the serious mobilization of the natives themselves, who contest this marginalization and claim due recognition in the mainstream episteme. Moreover, as this demand emanates from a group with a sizeable number recapturing of this past and its incorporation in Indian history is believed to serve the important purpose of emancipating the discipline of history itself or, to use Thompson's word, its democratization.

We should however begin with the question why the natives are epistemically benighted. It may be ascribed to the dominance of the Rankean dictum of 'No document, no history'. As the pre-literate adivasi societies mostly failed to inscribe the long pre-colonial past in their oral tradition, it created the erroneous notion that they belonged to the domain of pre-history. When the ethnographies and histories were written during British rule this mindset adversely affected the appropriation and evaluation of the role of adivasis in history. Colonial and elitist reading of history kept the entire pre-colonial past out of focus. This again generated the erroneous idea that during the colonial phase the natives moved from historilessness to history. The basic fragmentation of colonial sources makes the invocation of oral source necessary in spite of the general lack of faith in its veracity. And the source that I cull in this paper to reconstruct the history of the Ho of Singhbhum in Jharkhand is the collective memory as represented by their creation myth.

I am aware that due to the theocratic and atemporal character myth may not be considered an 'irrefutable' and 'objective' source material of history. Being 'culturally selected narratives', a myth is understood to reveal the working of human mind. In fact creation myth, as I shall show later, was evolved as a modality of codifying the past in order to express ethnic identity of a group at a given point of time and space. This is expressed in two ways. First by relating the origin of

the ethnic group along with other people, it seeks to signify its own distinct position and then to justify the bases of existing society. As such a myth tends to be 'a social charter' rather than being a fictive and untrue account. Next the narration about its fall in the past or at a recent time may be taken as a conscious attempt to strategize a revival as we notice in the Kherwar and Birsite movements.

Among the Jharkhand tribes, while sociologists and anthropologists have elaborately taken up Munda and Santal myths in their general accounts, but for two very recent papers, Ho mythology has been ignored by scholars. Of these two, the first takes up Ho origin myth, as narrated ritually during *Maghe parab* in Ho villages, to understand the relationship of a Ho with the supernatural and natural worlds. While making a general study of the mythology of the Jharkhand tribals, the second seeks to understand tribal cosmology, including Ho, as formulated in their creation myths. Ahistoricity of the intervention coupled with the expectation to trace historical materials inspired this probe into Ho myth.

Divided into four broad sections the first relates the corpus of Ho creation myth. The second makes a comparative study of tribal myths to understand the specificity of Ho myth. The next section explores historically relevant materials, which I think can be utilized to reconstruct their history from within. The concluding section underlines the limitations of the myth in historical reconstruction and its plausible use for the students of history.

Ho Myth: Notion of Origin and the Mental World of a Ho

We have different versions of Ho creation myth. Lt. S. R. Tickell, the first assistant political agent of Kolhan, was perhaps the first to record this myth shortly after the subjugation of Ho-dominated areas and formation of the Kolhan Government Estate in 1837. The informants were some knowledgeable Mankis (heads of *pirs* i.e. cluster of villages). The source did not state how and in what changed form the legend of creation survived up to Tickell's time. But since the Ho represented an oral society, it had surely been generationally transmitted. This was partially reproduced a few decades later by E.T. Dalton. Recent ones are those recounted by Hebbar and Purty which clearly show how the structure has evolved and survived down to the present time through its ritualistic reproduction during *Maghe parab*.

I have however used Tickell's version as the staple for this essay for its proximity to pre-colonial Ho past.

The myth narrates the staged creation of the world, each in the form of episodes. Apparently these do not always have causal link as they follow each other but not from each other. Really episodes form part of the generic theme of genesis. It begins with the notion of self-created divine elements of *Ote Boram* and *Sirma Thakur* or *Singbonga* seemingly to usher them as the primal cause at whose intervention the world was supposed to be made. This is how the essential theocratic character of the myth and the theocratic basis of Ho culture are reasoned.

Then follows the gradual creation of other elements in a dateless past, thus adding atemporality to Ho myth. The world was created first, being followed by grass, trees, rocks and water, and then cattle and wild animals. In this biotic background *Singbonga* introduced human elements in the form of little boy and girl, who were given a crab's cave to live in. Then through the first pair, in whom sex urge was created due to the use of *eely* (rice beer), the world was populated.

Deviating from the thematic continuity the next episode narrates the story of marriage between *Singbonga* and *Chando Omol* i.e. the moon, who was self-created like *Singbonga*, birth of their four sons and numerous daughters, destruction of these four sons, cutting of the moon into two as punishment for her betrayal and conversion of her daughters into stars. This deviation to narrate the origin of celestial world may be a human slip in the order of narration. But one may also discern in it the introduction of the divinely ordained idea of marriage as a necessary precondition for human procreation depicted later. Here I would like to link this aberration to the specificity of Ho narrative style. Presumably what signifies here is the conjuncture rather than the particular event. Accordingly the two apparently disconnected episodes in the event of human procreation are somewhat linked by the conjuncture of marriage. I draw parallel from my study of the Great rebellion of 1857-58 where two temporally disordered events of tribal protest were contained within the conjuncture of *Ulgulan* (rising).

The story then rejoins the original theme to detail how the world was peopled. It first mentions the birth of twelve pairs of brothers and sisters. This represents the universalistic vision of world demography, living as one family at one place without the distinction of race, caste, language and geography. They were called the grand children of *Singbonga* suggesting thereby that the first man and woman were his children. The episode ends with the description of a great feast to set the stage for the origin of tribes and castes.

Through willful coupling of man and woman, suggesting marriage, the tribes like Kole, Bhumij, Bhuiyan and Santal and such castes as the Brahmins, Rajputs, Chatris, Kurmis and Ghasis were created. At

this stage the separation of the early men was believed to have taken place. This was first spatial when they started living separately; next it was cultural when people picked up different languages, trades and implements. This meant the evolution of different communities and cultures. Within the same episode the creation of the English is mentioned but it seems to be interpolated. But this interpolation appears to have followed tribal narratological primacy of conjuncture in place of the temporal sequence of individual events.

The notion of fall comes next. The story was that growing incest among people in disobedience to God and superiors so angered *Singbonga* that he destroyed all except sixteen people either with water or fire. To narrate the notion of fall after the introduction of the English may be the symbolic way of referring defeat though apparently this fall belonged to the dateless past. Perhaps it was also the ploy to rationalize defeat by the English by projecting them as one of their kind, to be detailed below, yet highlighting their fall in primordial time. This seems also to underline another characteristic of their temporal sense, rather notion of history. Accordingly time for the native is not only interchangeable like the variation of season, but it is also anti-linear because human progress is attended by the invariable fall caused by internal dynamics.

How the world was peopled again has not been narrated. But the subsequent details relate Ho entry into historic period being represented by British rule, *charak puja* and *sati* as well as Ho contact with the Hindu law of *karma* – good deeds being rewarded in the form of rebirth in better condition and evil act causing rebirth as dogs, pigs or lizards and rejection of the idea of last day. The judgment is however to be made by *Singbonga* to whom the spirits have to go after death. He renders reward or punishment according to the acts done in this world. However since His abode is not mentioned we cannot say if spirits have to visit a world other than the world of humans.

Tribal Myths: A Comparative Reading

Ho myth is however very cryptic and small when compared with Munda, Santal and Oraon myths. While two versions of Santal myth contain in all twenty pages, and Munda and Oraon myths eight pages each, the Ho one covers a little more than two pages only. With differences in details the rest show a thematic resemblance, possibly because of their origin from the same Kolarian stock (except Oraon). Here a self-created God, variously named as *Ote Boram*, *Thakur Jiu* or *Singbonga* created the earth and living creatures and finally designed the world population first of one family and then into tribes, sects and castes. All three agree in the theme of the destruction of the world by an irate God by a rain of fire or water.

Similarities end here and differences begin. The Munda myth consists of detailed legends relating to the separation of land and sea, origin of man and the

division of time into day and night. It implies the origin of human civilization on earth, ending in a universalistic note. The Santal myth details the birth of the earth and all the living creatures. But here we notice a clear shift towards particularism from initial universalism when the division of man into sects and races are recorded, adding to it a notion of feud between Santals and *Dekos* (ethnic others), without however mentioning latter's composition. As against this, though Ho myth approximates the general approach and pattern of creation in Santal myth, it does not record the creation process in details found in Munda and Santal myths.

Ho myth again departs from the two above by recording the birth of the stars and the idea of reward and punishment for the good and evil acts done on this earth. Moreover, while in the Santal myth only the origin of Santals and *Dekos* is mentioned, Ho myth records the origin of different tribes, castes as well as the English. Significantly while the basis of demographic relation in Ho myth is mutuality and co-existence in Santal myth it is the notion of dialectics. Moreover, while the Munda legend is ahistorical because it records the undated origin of cultures, Ho myth is both ahistorical, as it narrates the primordial creation of castes and tribes, and historical when it refers to the English, *charak puja* and *sati*. In Santal myth however historical progression is much more pronounced. It details the birth of their culture in *Cae Campa*, their gradual expansion, the evolution of their distinct customs, contact and incessant feud with the *Dekos*, Hinduization of Santals and other tribes, defeat at the hands of the Hindus, harrowing tale of their migration and suffering as well as the Santal uprising. This way the broad outlines of the Santal past have been enshrined in oral tradition.

Historical Materiality of Ho history of the Creation of the World

The expression historical materiality here means the corpus that contains or refers to historical events and conjunctures as well as the Ho notion of their past. These are classified under the following heads to signify Ho sense of space and time.

Ho Social Environment

The process of multiplication of human race from the first generation that sprang from the primeval pair relates the demographic ambience of the Ho. The people were the Bhumij, Brahmins, Rajputs, Chattris and unnamed some other kinds of Hindus and then the Bhuiyans, Santals, Kurmis and Ghasis. One can discern that Ho social ecology was constituted both by ethnic and non-ethnic people. But how this demography was created? To quote from the myth: 'Go you and make preparations and make a great feast, rice and buffalo's flesh, and bullock's flesh, goats, sheep, pigs and fowls of the air and vegetables.' Out of the pairs partaking of buffalo and bullock's flesh respectively the Kole (Ho) and Bhumij were born. Next the Brahmins, Rajputs,

Chattris and other Hindus were created of the pairs who shared rice and vegetables. Those who took goats' flesh and fish gave birth to other kinds of Hindus. Bhuiyans were the recipients of shell fish. Santals and Kurmis were left only with pig's flesh. When nothing was left the Ho gave some share to the Ghasis.

The list of named and unnamed Hindu castes, whom the Ho called *Diku*, suggests that they were drawn into relations with non-ethnic groups also who lived in and around Kolhan. We do not however find in the Ho the tendency to strike a spatial kind of distinction as we notice among the Santal who identified the '*Dekos*' as those 'living in the plains', while themselves as those who lived 'in the forests and on the hills.' It may be presumed that the unnamed Hindus were the Goalas, Kamars, Kumars and Tantis who were allowed to live in the Ho villages. It seems that entry of these functional castes into the myth dated back to the time when majority of Ho villages were founded in south Kolhan around the beginning of the 18th century. However, one may contend, and rightly so, that these relations may be predated by a few centuries to the time of Ho habitation in north Kolhan when they had a friendly relations with the Porahat raj.

Ho Notion of Self

We know that the Ho belonged to the Munda tribe of the Kolarian group living in the Chotanagpur plateau. A section of it broke away from the parent stock sometimes after the 10th century AD and migrated in groups to Singhbhum. Over time they developed cognate Ho language and culture, which fashioned distinct Hones. This distinct Ho ethnicity was mythically expressed in the story of the creation of the Ho from the first pair, who chose buffalo's and bullock's flesh. To incorporate this important experience of the community the original Munda myth was reconstructed. So we find close resemblance between the Munda and first five paragraphs of Ho myth. While the sixth in the latter evidently records this fact of separation by stating that the people then lived separately, multiplied and evolved their languages and cultures.

Besides distinctiveness, the Ho believed them the first people to be created by *Singbonga*. Two messages are coded here. First that their being born as Ho implied their rejection of the link with the parent stock. Next it strategically asserted Ho superiority in the comity of peoples. This oral narration of superiority was based on their historic success in carving out an exclusive political space in Singhbhum, which they called *Hodesum*. This conjuncture belongs to a period between 12th and 18th centuries AD. The myth also codifies another message. The order of distribution of food items in the mythic feast shows that the Ho rated animal flesh higher to agricultural products. This was why flesh eaters received higher position in the order of creation. Next, the legend of the creation of plough found in Munda myth does not find place in

this version of Ho myth. These details conveyed that the Ho identified themselves as the people belonging to a pastoral and food gathering stage where hunting and animal husbandry occupied a higher position than agriculture. What seems probable is that the Ho in 1840 preferred to highlight their pre-peasant forest-centric image to distinguish themselves from the peasant societies of the caste people.

Notion of the Other

The original notion was that all being the progenies of primeval twelve brothers and sisters coexisted by willfully sharing food and not interfering into other's domain ('none shall touch his brother's share'). But later the demographic divisions crystallized when these brothers lived separately in their chosen places and evolved their distinct cultures. This crystallized Ho mentality to others which was rooted in the hierarchic order of creation of both the tribe and caste. Of the tribes, the Brumes were called *Markus* i.e. next in brotherhood. This affirms a familial relation. Next came the Bhuiyans. Their lower rank showed their marginalization in Ho mental world, a reflection of power struggle for territorial control in an unidentified past. The Santal came next. Their relegation related their political insignificance due to their numerical smallness in Kolhan.

This mythic depiction of inter-tribe they-ness does not however compare favourably with Santal concept of original tribal oneness among the Mundas, the Birhor, Kurmbis and others, who were believed once to belong to the same Kherwar stock. Interestingly the Santal myth also projected the idea of racial oneness with such castes as Doms, Kamars, Tilis, Hadis, Bauris, Kunkals and unnamed others. What could be the mentality behind this mythic code? It may be suggested that the oppression of the Santals by the non-tribal landlords and moneylenders prompted them not only to socialize the doctrine of dialectical relations between Santals and *Dekas* but also to forge the idea of solidarity of the marginal against the oppressors. The absence of this idea in Ho myth may be attributed to Ho superior position vis-à-vis the tribes and castes and the absence of their being oppressed by the non-tribal during pre-colonial times.

The historical experience forced them to similarly subordinate caste groups. So the Brahmins were said to be born of the third pair, Rajputs, Chatris and other Hindus of subsequent pairs. Secondly, they were denied the highest food of buffalo and bullock's meat. These meant that Brahmins and Kshatriyas, who held first and second ranks in the caste system, were relegated to positions lower than that of the Ho and Bhumij, a metaphorical expression of the rejection of caste hierarchy itself rather of their non-Hinduness. Lastly, inferiority of Hindus was further expressed in mythic denunciation of social practices like *sati* rite and *charak puja*. To quote:

Wicked men are born again as dogs, pigs or lizards. Those who swing at Churruck poojas, become some kites, others flying foxes. Suttees never are born again, but remain burning forever in their pits, and come out at night, wandering about, still burning.

Mythic marginalization of the castes, particularly upper castes, can also be historically corroborated. What could be its origin point in time? Possibly the bias against Hindus had originated due to Hindu expansion in Chotanagpur plateau forcing the exodus of a section of the Mundas. So they did not allow Hindus and others to either move through or settle in Kolhan. If we are to believe E. Roughsedge, the general leading British army against the Ho in 1819-20, they were very hostile to Brahmins, Rajputs as well as the Muslims.

Rationalizing Subjugation

The myth records: 'And after this from the Koles, from their senior house sprung the English, who also ate bullock's flesh. But they are the senior children, and the Koles the junior!' The sharing of the food and acceptance of juniority to the British symbolically expressed Ho defeat at British hands in 1836-37. But significantly an historical fact found passage into myth almost within three years of the event; the reconstructed myth (or reconstruction itself?) was narrated by the Mankis, who themselves were often key factors in Ho resistance and surrender to the British.

We should not however miss another point. The abdication of the first place to the British, expressive of mythic acceptance of subjugation and defeat, was mellowed down by the willful sharing of food. Moreover, the commonness of Ho and British origins perhaps messaged that they were defeated not by the other but by one of their own, and so they deliberately accepted British rule. This rationalization indicates the hegemonization of a section of Ho leadership. But the fact remains that a phase of anti-British uprising began during 1857-59 when the community challenged British rule. Even then the myth was not reconstructed at that time. Does it mean that acceptance of British rule was more real and the uprising of 1857-59 an aberration for a Ho? It may also suggest that the oral construction/reconstruction of the past is not conditioned by the autonomy of the past *per se* but by the imperative of the present.

The myth leads us to Ho notion of time, both dateless and dated. They believed that the world and all elements on it had originated in primeval time. This implies that a long stretch of time beginning with the origin of the world is beyond human reckoning. To this order belongs the creation of the earth, wild animals and then man. There is also the suggestion of dated time when it referred the English, *sati* and *charak puja*. Having no knowledge of watch and

calendar a Ho did not count months, years, decades and centuries but only followed the course of nature to conduct their agricultural, hunting activities and festivals. They however knew how to reckon smaller units of time like day and night. Though the Ho myth does not record its origin as the Munda myth yet there is a clear suggestion of this temporal sense. The exact words are: 'Now the four sons kept with their father, and the daughters lived with their mother, and as the sun rose everyday....'. This implies knowledge of the day beginning with sunrise. But how the days were constituted into yesterday, today and tomorrow, as we find in Munda myth did not find a place in Ho myth. I would like to suggest that the myth as it originated and progressively developed, belonged to a pastoral people for whom movement into forest for the hunt and food necessitated the knowledge mainly of day and night and for the rudimentary agriculture the knowledge of the changing seasons.

Conclusion

The study thus shows that Ho myth is neither as comprehensive nor diachronic as the Santal myth is. Next, we do not find any reference to Ho history of

migration, even though it was an important marker of Ho past. Lastly, the notion of mutuality and co existence, which the myth conveys, is deceptive mainly because it was through dialectical relations with tribes and castes that Ho identity was also defined and progressively recreated. What then makes the Ho myth historically relevant? It mainly portrays the fructification of their distinctive identity vis-à-vis other tribes and castes, the peoples with whom the Ho had to forge a relationship and its very nature, their attitude to subjection to British rule and their notion of time. Singularly the myth helps us neither in encapsulating the total historical ambience as in Santal myth nor in understanding one decisive event of history as migration in the case of the Santal. But it provides traces of many of the conjectures from the past. More so, it relates how the community conceived the past and what of the past they considered worth retention, a fact very relevant to appreciate Ho rather tribal concept of history. This mentality perhaps more intently provides an access into the process of their thinking where what is suggested is perhaps more important than what is articulated. ✽

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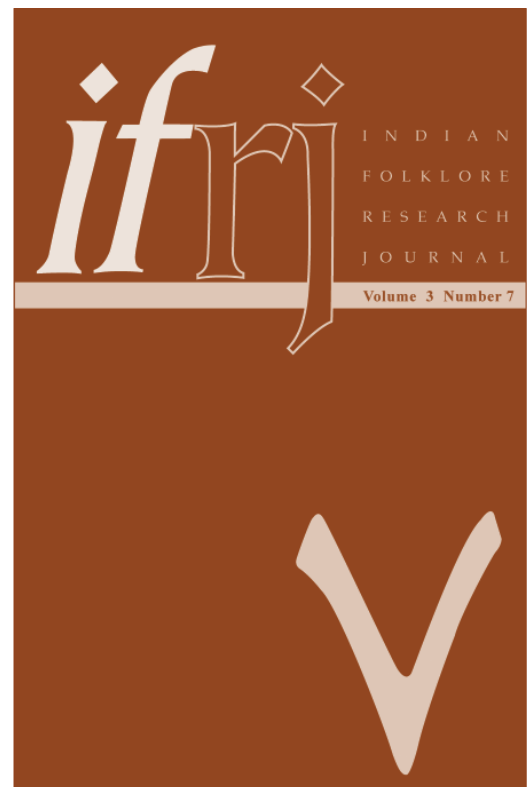
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Folklore, Public Sphere and Civil Society

Edited by M.D. Muthukumaraswamy and Molly Kaushal

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The discipline of folklore has always addressed the travel of folklore by consistently paying attention to several versions of the same texts and by offering meticulous sociological accounts for their existence. The philosophical premise of acknowledging versions even when they are contradictory lends itself, by expansion, to a vision of a multitude of public spheres inside a civil society. The emerging vision of society is one of polyphonic concert punctuated by recognisable gestures. What we see is a 'performing society' that generates public opinion not necessarily through rational verbal arguments and dialogues but also through gestures, genres, frames, versions, performances, stories, narratives and codes.

It is precisely in this context that folklore studies reveal how communities break hierarchies, articulate aspirations that are political and otherwise, constitute new identities, establish inter-cultural contacts and undergo changes through cultural borrowings. As identities are constantly created and recreated, what we encounter through folklore is a complex cultural phenomenon not necessarily rational but in alignment with the logic of the cultures concerned. Such processes do create and influence public opinion.

This collection of papers presented in a symposium organised in New Delhi, 2002, aligns three sociological categories folklore, public sphere and civil society in relation to each other in order to capture social and cultural dynamics.

Contributors: Advaitavadini Kaul, Alan Jabbour, Anjali Capila, Daniel Negers, D.R. Purohit, Rakesh Bhat, Eric Miller, Hanne M. de Bruin, Jawaharlal Handoo, Kailash K. Mishra, Lokendra Arambam, Madhu Khanna, Manju Kak, Michael Nijhawan, Molly Kaushal, M.K. Raina, Pankaj Kumar Jha, Pulak Datta, Purushothama Bilimale, Roma Chatterji, Saugata Bhaduri, Susan Wadley, Theodore Baskaran and Y.A. Sudhakar Reddy.

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Folklore as Discourse

Edited by M.D. Muthukumaraswamy



Nineteen seminal papers on various aspects of Indian folklore written by eminent scholars are collected together here in a volume. Exploring the way folklore organizes itself in different societal contexts in India is the focus of the different scholars presented here. Divided into easy sections, this book organizes complex thoughts on Indian folklore in an accessible format useful for students, scholars, and lay public. While Jawaharlal Handoo, Arupjyoti Saikia and Sadhana Naithani examine the relationship between folklore and the historical discourses, Peter Claus and K.M. Chandar analyze how folklore the discipline handles the problems presented by such social history of attitudes and perspectives. Venugopalan Nair, Kishore Bhattacharjee, Lalitluangliana Khiangte, Pulikonda Subbachary, and Guru Rao Bapat as practitioners of the discipline describe the discourses of distinctive folklore genres such as festival, legends, myths and folk theatre. Chandan Kumar Sharma and Desmond Kharmawphlang enquire into the construction of identities aided by language and lore. While Lalita Handoo presents insights into the power and practices of the discourse of gender, Eric Miller writes on the politics of technology and culture involved in the public presentation of folklore. Nirmal Selvamony, Saugata Bhaduri and Raghavan Payyanad take discourse analysis to examine the workings of ideology, religion, and worldview whereas Bharathi Harishankar, and Theodore Baskaran take it to understand the print medium and Cinema. This volume as a whole would prove to be an essential reading for anyone interested in Indian society and culture.

Contributors: Peter Claus, K.M. Chandar, Jawaharlal Handoo, Arupjyoti Saikia, Sadhana Naithani, Venugopalan Nair, Chandan Kumar Sharma, Desmond L. Kharmawphlang, Kishore Bhattacharjee, Lalitluangliana Khiangte, Pulikonda Subbachary, Lalita Handoo, Guru Rao Bapat, Nirmal Selvamony, Saugata Bhaduri, Raghavan Payyanad, Eric Miller, V. Bharathi Harishankar, Theodore Baskaran.

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Indian Folktales from Mauritius

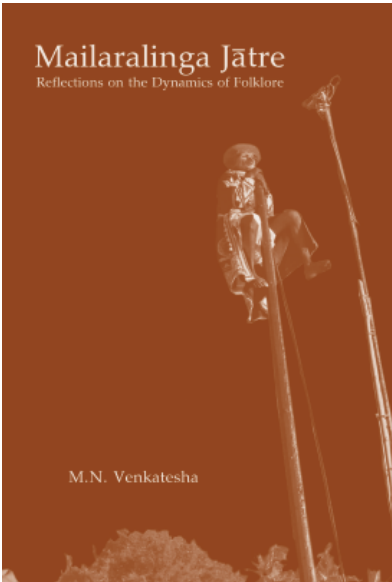
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Mailaralinga Jātre

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by M.N. Venkatesha

"...Venkatesha's work, here, documents and verifies many dimensions of personnel and functionaries—tradition bearers—the distinctions they make amongst themselves, the importance of their interpretations of specific traditions, the significance of their activities and practices... All of this attention to rich contextual detail and multiple perspectives, makes Venkatesha's book exceptional within the body of work on Indian folklore done by Indian and western scholars alike" (in his Foreword, Peter Claus).

M.N. Venkatesha, is now Assistant Professor at the Department of Folklore and Tribal Studies at Dravidian University, Kuppam, Andhra Pradesh.

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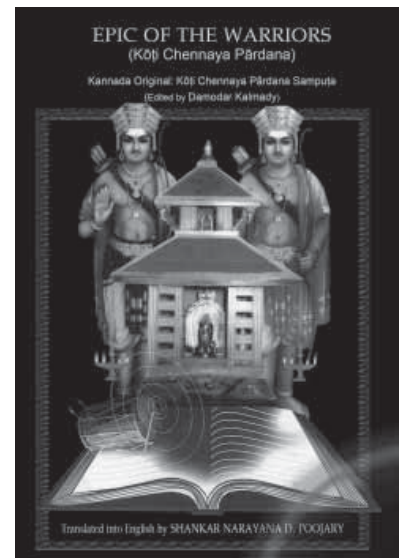
EPIC OF THE WARRIORS

Translated into English

by Shankar Narayana D. Poojary

"...And so it is to this fine lineage of scholarship—little known to the western world—Shankar Narayana Poojary has joined the ranks as a brave and generous contributor... (the translations) are true to the Tulu original and manage to express the feelings and emotions of the singer. The linguistic commentary and cultural explanations he provides in sections bridging the Tulu and English verses should be of great help to the interested reader. And ultimately, his translation should fill a huge gap to scholars of both folklore and linguistics" (in his Foreword, Peter Claus). Shankar Narayan D. Poojary, the translator, hails from Murngi Hosa Mane, Nakre, Karnataka. He retired in 2004 as Faculty, Department of Psychology, MES College of Arts and Commerce, Zuarinagar, Goa. As a Tuḷuva, his fascination for the Tuḷu pardanas culminated in the present translation of the epic Koṭi Chennaya

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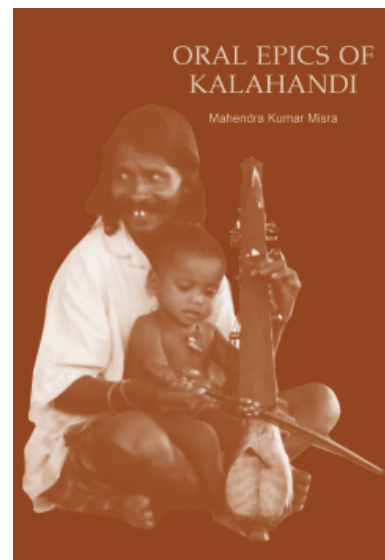


ORAL EPICS OF KALAHANDI

by Mahendra Kumar Mishra

"Oral Epics of Kalahandi" is the result of NFSC fellowship awarded to Mahendra Kumar Mishra and a year long collaborative research and documentation carried out by NFSC in the Kalahandi district of Orissa. Mishra, in this book, offers translations of various oral epics available with Gonds, Sauras, and other tribes of Kalahandi. His translations are interspersed with ethnographic analyses of the singers, and their songs. Through this extraordinary collection of epics and analyses Mishra is able to guide us through voices of people in the famine stricken district of Orissa. This book should be of great interest to scholars and lay public interested in listening to the voices of tribes in the post independence India.

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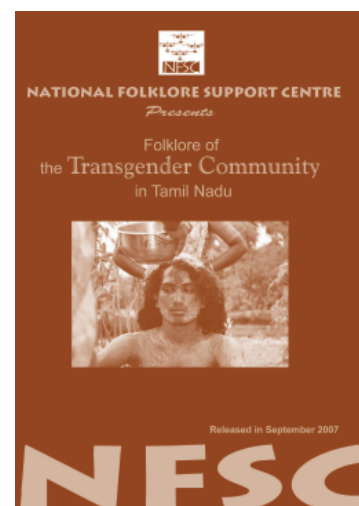


OUR VIDEO DVD, AUDIO CD RELEASES

Folklore of the Transgender Community of Tamilnadu

National Folklore Support Centre (NFSC) announces the release of a video documentary titled "Folklore of the Transgender Community in Tamil Nadu" 39 Minutes: September 2007: DVD Rs.400/- for India and US\$10 for overseas inclusive of postage.

Edited out of a year-long field documentation carried out by NFSC researchers and collaborators from the transgender community, this documentary depicts the life cycle ceremonies of transgendered persons in Tamil Nadu, India. Starting with adoption and initiation in the form of milk-pouring ceremony after the fortieth day of the surgery, the documentary presents the community gathering in Koovagam village, (Vilupuram District, Tamil Nadu) for marriage with the God Aravan, widowhood, and return to the society after his beheading in Mahabharata theatre/ritual/festival. Apart from interviews with the transgendered persons, the documentary includes excerpts from traditional epic singing in praise of God Aravan. To obtain a copy, send demand draft or international money order in the name of **National Folklore Support Centre, payable at Chennai, India.**



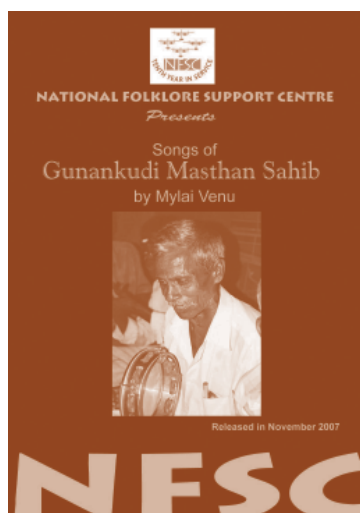
NFSC Folk Music Album: 1. Chennai city folklore Songs of Gunankudi Masthan Sahib from the Streets of Chennai city The Life of Gunankudi Masthan Sahib

Gunankudi Masthan Sahib (born as Sultan Abdul Khader) was born to Nayinar Muhamed and Fathima of Gunankudi village of Ramanathapuram district in Tamilnadu in the late 18th century. He was given the title of 'Aleem' as he recited the Quran in his early years and realized many truths of life. He attained sainthood in 1813. He spent his last days in a small house in Baba Lebbai's garden. It is believed that at night, he sang the songs that he composed himself and walked unto Maqmur mosque in Angappa Nayakar Street, Royapuram, Chennai. He passed away in the year 1838. His compositions are considered to be the source for folk songs genre known as "Gaana songs" sung in the streets of Chennai today. This folk music album is a result of a year-long research and documentation project 'Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Marginalized in Chennai City' carried out by NFSC with the collaboration of V. Ramakrishnan. The studio recording of the songs were done at the L.V. Prasad Recording studio with the famous exponent of the Gunankudi Masthan Sahib tradition Mylai Venu and his team.

Credits: Singer: Mylai Venu • Keyboard: Sathyaraj • Dholak: 'High court' Mari
• Research collaborator: Dr V. Ramakrishnan • Sound Recording: V.S. Murthy, Divya, and John Henry at L.V. Prasad Television and Film Academy, Chennai

Songs: 1. Manonmaniye... 31:23 2. Aiyayo yen vidi vasam... 14:29
3. Suuthira Pavaiye... 7:13 4. Aandavan Yen Ceyvaano... 10:31
5. Paarkka Palavidama...26:41

Produced and Published by: National Folklore Support Centre



INDIAN FOLKLIFE
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Folk Medicine and Biodiversity April, 2003	Folklore and Biopolitic December, 2003	Chennai Conference Special: Folklore as Discourse March, 2004	Life and works of Padma Bhushan Shri Komal Kothari (1929 to 2004) July, 2004

 <p>Genre, Community, and Event</p>	 <p>Folklore and Media</p>	 <p>Folklore Abroad: On the Diffusion and Revision of Socio-cultural Categories</p>	 <p>Teaching and transmission of Indian Performing Arts</p>	<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM NATIONAL FOLKLORE SUPPORT CENTRE</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg); font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">INDIAN FOLKLIFE</p>
<p>Genre, Community, and Event October, 2004</p>	<p>Folklore and Media January, 2005</p>	<p>Folklore Abroad: On the Diffusion and Revision of Socio-cultural Categories April, 2005</p>	<p>Teaching and Transmission of Indian Performing Arts July, 2005</p>	
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<p>Folklore and Children's Literature April, 2006</p>	<p>Globalization and Tribes of Northeast India July, 2006</p>	<p>Post-field Positionings August, 2006</p>	<p>On Memory: Process and Supports October, 2006</p>	
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