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SAARC Culture is an annual research journal of the SAARC Cultural Centre, Colombo. It seeks to provide a platform to academics, practitioners, policymakers and other stakeholders of various dimensions of culture of the South Asian region (including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) to present their research findings and to debate on issues of mutual and common interests.

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Message from the Director

I am delighted to present to you the latest volume of the SAARC Cultural Centre Journal, a testament to the vibrant exchange of ideas and scholarship within our diverse region. As the Director of the SAARC Cultural Centre, I am immensely proud to showcase the intellectual richness and cultural depth exemplified in the articles contributed by scholars and academics from across the SAARC nations.

This edition of our journal is particularly significant as it delves into a range of thought-provoking topics that underscore the essence of our cultural heritage and its dynamic evolution. From exploring Indian knowledge traditions and their profound impact on the development of medical sciences to unravelling the intricate rituals of Bengali fishing practices, each article offers a unique lens through which to understand the multifaceted tapestry of our shared cultural landscape.

Moreover, our journal serves as a platform for highlighting the interconnectedness of cultures and the importance of comparative analysis in fostering greater cross-cultural understanding. By examining the transatlantic adaptation of rites among SAARC diaspora communities and exploring the regional centres of the SAARC region, we aim to illuminate the diverse array of cultural expressions that contribute to our collective identity.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all the scholars and academics whose tireless efforts have enriched the pages of this journal. Your rigorous research and insightful contributions not only expand the boundaries of knowledge but also serve as invaluable references for fellow scholars and students seeking to deepen their understanding of our cultural heritage.

As we embark on this intellectual journey together, I invite you to immerse yourselves in the wealth of knowledge and perspectives presented within these pages.

May this journal inspire dialogue, foster collaboration, and contribute to the ongoing preservation and celebration of our rich cultural heritage.

Mrs. D. K. R. Ekanayake
Director
SAARC Cultural Centre

From the Editor's Desk

SAARC Culture Journal is dedicated to showcase the rich and diverse cultures of South Asia. Since 2011, the SAARC Culture Journal has been published with the sole aim of providing a platform for the scholars of the South Asian Region to publish articles that reflect the unique cultures of the SAARC Member countries and to bridge the gap between them. Culture is a powerful tool to unite people across physical boundaries. South Asia's varied and diverse culture is unique. By bringing these cultures to the forefront, the journal aims to promote unity and understanding among the SAARC countries.

SAARC Culture Journal, Vol-9 has a non-thematic theme, that explores the endless dimensions of the culture of South Asia. The open-ended, non-thematic approach enabled the journal to cover a wide range of topics from traditional knowledge, the relevance of SAARC as an institution, rites of passage and beyond. Through this, we aim not only to inform and educate but also to connect people across South Asia.

Hope the SAARC Culture Journal continues to promote a deeper understanding and appreciation of the rich cultural traditions of the SAARC Region, thereby fostering a greater regional integration and cooperation.

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Indian Knowledge Tradition and its Contribution to Development of Medicinal Sciences

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Abstract

*In the 15th century, the Renaissance generated immense curiosity in Europe about India's knowledge tradition. The development of maritime sciences encouraged overseas expeditions. Eventually, in 1498, a new sea route via the Cape of Good Hope to India was discovered. The arrival of Europeans ultimately led to the establishment of European colonial rule in India, and the drain of its wealth to Europe. The colonization process also initiated a new phase of globalization and multiculturalism. In this research paper, the relationship between the colonization of India and the development of modern medical science in the West is reviewed by investigating the role of Garcia d'Orta, a Portuguese physician, herbalist and naturalist, who introduced the Indian indigenous medicinal systems to Europe.*¹

Keywords: Colonization, Coloquios, Indian Knowledge Tradition, IKT, Medicinal Systems.

Arrival of Europeans in India

The riches and mystical charm of India encouraged Europeans to undertake maritime expeditions to India. Portuguese King John II initiated the plan for reaching India via the Cape of Good Hope² to save trading costs as well as monopolize the spice trade. He ruled from 1481 to 1495, and also for a brief time in 1477. He is known for re-establishing the power of the Portuguese monarchy, strengthening the Portuguese economy, and renewing his country's exploration of Africa and Asia, reviving the work of Henry the Navigator, his great-uncle. Henry the Navigator was a central figure in the 15th-century European maritime discoveries and maritime expansion and is regarded as the main initiator of what would be known as the Age of Discovery.³

In 1498, Vasco da Gama sailed to India by circumnavigating Africa via the Cape of Good Hope. He arrived in Calicut (Kozhikode in Kerala) on the west

¹ Disclaimer: The views and opinions represented in this research paper are personal and belong to the author. They are not intended to malign any religion, ethnic group, club, organization, company, individual or anyone or anything.

² A rocky headland on the Atlantic coast of the Cape Peninsula in South Africa.

³ Ivana Elbl, "Man of His Time (and Peers): A New Look at Henry the Navigator." *Luso-Brazilian Review* 28.2 (1991): 73-89.

coast of India. His expedition established a direct sea link between Europe and Asia. This development initiated a new phase of globalization, colonization, and multi-culturalism.⁴ The search for sea routes to India also led to the accidental discovery of the Americas by Christopher Columbus in 1492.

The Portuguese, with their galleons⁵ loaded with potent cannons, ended the Arab dominance in the Indian Ocean, and in 1510, they took control of Goa. Soon, Goa became the centre of their commercial and political power in India. Over the next couple of centuries, the British successfully challenged the Portuguese and other European powers in India and established their political power. Nevertheless, the Portuguese continued to control Goa for nearly four and a half centuries. After a long struggle, Goa was finally liberated from Portuguese colonial rule on 19th December 1961, that is, more than 14 years after India's independence.

Garcia d'Orta's Study of Indian Indigenous Medicinal Systems

In the early sixteenth century, there was a growing interest in plants and herbs of the Orient. It was a period when the academics of Italy, France, Portugal, Spain, Netherlands, and Germany were revitalizing the botanical sciences. The Portuguese physician, herbalist and naturalist Garcia de Orta arrived in Goa in 1534 as a personal physician to M. A. de Sousa, who had been appointed "captain-general by sea" of the Portuguese in India and who later became the viceroy of Portuguese India. Goa had become a strategic commercial hub, where due to trade linkages people representing different cultures interacted and lived side-by-side. Over the next 30 years, Garcia de Orta extensively studied herbs, spices and the indigenous medicinal systems of India. He never returned to Portugal and died in India in 1568. But before his death, he compiled his research works in a volume titled "Coloquios dos Simples e Drogas da India" (Conversations on the Simples, Drugs and Medicinal Substances of India)⁶, which was published in 1563 in Goa by the German or Dutch printer Johannes van Enden. He initiated the investigation of Indian diseases and medical conditions, such as chronic dysentery, cobra bite, and datura poisoning. These

⁴ Nigel, Cliff (2011). *Holy War: How Vasco da Gama's Epic Voyages Turned the Tide in a Centuries-Old Clash of Civilizations*. Harper.

⁵ Galleons were sailing ships used both in trade and war between 15th and 18th centuries. They were typically square-rigged and had three or more decks and masts.

⁶ The "conversations" refer to the dialogues, and the "simples" refer to the wild varieties of plants and their medicinal properties.

were new to the European medicinal system. His description of Asian cholera and its symptoms became a standard medical reference.

Garcia d'Orta travelled extensively in India, particularly along the western coast of India and Sri Lanka, attending M. A. de Sousa on his campaigns. During his travels, he met and provided medical treatment to some of the leading rulers of Indian princely states, such as Burhan Nizam Shah, the Sultan of Ahmadnagar, who became Garcia d'Orta's close friend. In 1538, Garcia d'Orta settled permanently in Goa. In 1554-1555, the King of Portugal, through the Viceroy Dom Pedro Mascarenhas, granted a lifelong lease to Garcia da Orta for the Ilha da Boa Vida ("the Island of the Good Life") which became a part of Bombay.⁷

Garcia describes the people around Bassein⁸ and their traditions in his book.⁹ He spoke several languages which helped him interact and work closely with the local community, such as Hindus, Muslims and Parsis, and learn about their indigenous medicinal systems, diet and local herbs and spices.



Fig. 1. "Portuguese Medicine" (1906), by José Maria Veloso Salgado (1864–1945)
(In this painting, Garcia de Orta is standing in the center with a book in his left hand)

⁷ Malabari, Phiroze B.M. (1910). *Bombay in the making*. London: T. Fisher Unwin. p. 21.

⁸ Bassein (Vasai) is a historical place and a town near Mumbai (Bombay)'s western suburbs, located in Palghar district which was partitioned from the Thane district in 2014. The Portuguese in Goa and Daman built the Bassein Fort to defend their colony and participate in the lucrative spice trade and the silk route that converged in the area.

⁹ Da Cunha, J. Gerson (1900). *The Origin of Bombay*. Bombay: Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society. pp. 98–114.

Owing to his services with the Portuguese East India Company, Garcia de Orta had the advantage of exploring and studying the Indian plants, animals, and minerals, some of which had been exported to Europe for centuries, while many others were unknown to the Western world. He strived to revise and amend the misunderstandings about the Indian natural history and materia medica in Europe and provide detailed explanation about the Indian indigenous medicinal systems and the herbs and spices used in these systems (Friedenwald, 1941;¹⁰ Kapil & Bhatnagar, 1976;¹¹ Grove, 1996;¹² Mathew, 1997;¹³ Pimentel & Soler, 2014;¹⁴ Cabral, 2015;¹⁵ Paiva, 2018¹⁶).

Military expeditions of Garcia de Orta (as a personal physician to M. A. de Sousa in India) as well as his associations with the Indian elites and practitioners of Indian indigenous medicinal systems helped him gain a fundamental understanding of India as well as its fauna, flora and materia medica. His book *Coloquios dos Simples e Drogas da India* is in the form of dialogues between Garcia de Orta and, an imaginary physician Ruano (his alter ego) who had recently arrived from the Iberian Peninsula to Goa and was anxious to know about the materia medica of India.¹⁷ It has 57 chapters elucidating the physical and medicinal properties of about 6 dozen plants, drugs, and minerals from Asia, particularly India. These are arranged in alphabetical order and cover plants, drugs, and minerals, such as aloes, amber, benzoin, calamus, camphor, cardamom, cassia, cinnamon, galangal, ginger, opium, pepper, rhubarb,

¹⁰ Friedenwald, H. (1941). The medical pioneers in the East Indies. *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 9, 487-504.

¹¹ Kapil, R. N., & Bhatnagar, A. K. (1976). Portuguese Contributions to Indian Botany. *Isis*, 67, 449-452.

<https://doi.org/10.1086/351635>

¹² Grove, R. (1996). Indigenous Knowledge and the Significance of South-West India for Portuguese and Dutch Constructions of Tropical Nature. *Modern Asian Studies*, 30, 121-143.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X00014104>

¹³ Mathew, K. S. (1997). The Portuguese and the study of medicinal plants in India in the sixteenth century. *Indian Journal of History of Science*, 32, 369-376.

¹⁴ Pimentel, J., & Soler, I. (2014). Painting Naked Truth: The Colóquios of Garcia da Orta (1563). *Journal of Early Modern History*, 18, 101-120. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700658-12342386>

¹⁵ Cabral, J. P. S. (2015). Tradicao e inovacao na botanica dos Colóquios. Os cocos e as palmeiras segundo Garcia de Orta. In A. Cardoso, & P. F. da Costa (Eds.), *Botanica, Medicina e Cultura nos "Colóquios" de Garcia de Orta* (pp. 85-112). Lisboa: Colibri.

¹⁶ Paiva, J. (2018). Introducao aos Colóquios dos Simples de Garcia de Orta. *Obras Pioneiras da Cultura Portuguesa*, volume 15, Primeiro livro de botanica. Lisboa: Círculo de Leitores.

¹⁷ It was a common convention during this period to write books in the form of a dialogue.

sandalwood, senna, smilax china, stramonium, and tamarind. Most of the discussions in the book were about the origin and properties of the herbs and spices, however, ivory, amber, and pearls were also discussed. For each variety, Garcia d'Orta mentioned its local as well as Greek and Arabic names. He referred to areas where it is grown and the method of its cultivation. He also elucidated the sizes and forms of various types of plants, their leaves, flowers, and fruit. He explained the various parts of a plant that should be used, the method of their preparation, and the medical cases in which they should be used. His book was the first Western treatise on Indian indigenous medicinal systems, which played a key role in the establishment of the fundamental principles of modern phytotherapy and pharmacology. His works established a medical science that was based on plant preparations and derivatives studied and manipulated through botany and chemistry-the key antecedents of pharmacology.

Garcia de Orta set up a scientifically organized herbarium. He observed, analysed, experimented, contemplated, and then made conclusions. He compared his observations and learning in Asia with what he studied in Europe, with Dioscorides' Pharmacopeia and with Latin translations of Arabic and Medieval works. Based on his findings, he acknowledged that the medieval Arabic scholars on materia medica had a better understating of India than the Greeks, and challenged the authority of classical texts.

In addition to South Asian fauna, flora and materia medica, Garcia de Orta also studied the role of social practices, such as chewing betel (locally called supari) and the use of cannabis (locally called bhaang). Though he patriotically referred to Portuguese accomplishments, one notices that he was quite appreciative of local cultures as well as the indigenous medicinal systems of India. He was one of the first few Western academics who believed that European medicinal systems would benefit from closer contact with Asia. Some scholars have argued that "this cultural relativism and scepticism toward Western tradition may be attributed in part to his origins."¹⁸ The parents of Garcia de Orta, Fernão and Leonor d'Orta, were Jews from Spain. When the Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492, his parents took asylum in Castelo de Vide, Alentejo province of Portugal. Later, in 1497, his parents were again forced to choose between converting to Christianity or taking asylum somewhere

¹⁸ <https://www.encyclopedia.com/science/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/orta-garcia-dor-da-orta>. Last Accessed on 9th November, 2021.

else. They eventually converted to Christianity. His family's religious background finally caught up with Garcia de Orta. Inquisition investigations by the Holy Office scrutinized his family background and socio-religious beliefs. It seems that it was only due to his influential position that he was able to protect himself and his family. However, after he died in 1568, his sister Catarina da Orta was arrested on 28th October, of the same year. During her interrogations, she testified against her brother for following Judaism.¹⁹ On 25th October 1569, Catarina da Orta was convicted of following Judaism and was burnt at the stake as "an impenitent Jewess" in Goa. The Inquisitor who convicted Catarina da Orta left office in 1572. The new Inquisitor filed a lawsuit against Garcia de Orta, and in 1580, Garcia de Orta's remains were exhumed from his grave, brought before the Inquisitional tribunal, and he was convicted for following Judaism. His bones were thrown into the fire and burnt during an "act of faith", auto-da-fé, at Goa, as a posthumous punishment for being a crypto-Jew during his life. This "deed of faith" was performed on December 4, 1580, that is, about twelve years after Garcia de Orta's death (Ficalho, 1886²⁰; D'Esaguy, 1937²¹; Friedenwald, 1941²²; Dias, 1964²³; Kapil & Bhatnagar, 1976²⁴; D'Cruz, 1991²⁵; Mathew, 1997²⁶; Pearson, 2001²⁷; Cohen, 2010²⁸; Liberato, 2011²⁹; Pimentel & Soler, 2014³⁰).

¹⁹ It must be noted that it was common to forcefully obtain testimonies through torture. When Catarina da Orta was taken to be burnt at the stake, she confessed that "the reason of her false denunciations was because it appeared to her that she might receive mercy and would save her life, and the devil would refrain from tempting her". (Source: <https://daortagoa.wordpress.com/catharina-da-orta/> Last accessed on 11th November, 2021)

²⁰ Ficalho, C. D. (1886). Garcia da Orta e o seu tempo. Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional.

²¹ D'Esaguy, A. (1937). Garcia Dorta and the Inquisition. *Bulletin of the Institute of the History of Medicine*, 5(5), 483-487.

²² Friedenwald, H. (1941). The medical pioneers in the East Indies. *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 9, 487-504.

²³ Dias, J. L. (1964). O Renascimento em Amato Lusitano e Garcia d'Orta. *Estudos de Castelo Branco: Revista de História e Cultura*, 11, 5-34.

²⁴ Kapil, R. N., & Bhatnagar, A. K. (1976). Portuguese Contributions to Indian Botany. *Isis*, 67, 449-452.

<https://doi.org/10.1086/351635>

²⁵ D'Cruz, I. A. (1991). Garcia Da Orta in Goa: Pioneering Tropical Medicine. *British Medical Journal*, 303, 1593-1594. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.303.6817.1593>

²⁶ Mathew, K. S. (1997). The Portuguese and the study of medicinal plants in India in the sixteenth century. *Indian Journal of History of Science*, 32, 369-376.

²⁷ Pearson, M. N. (2001). Hindu Medical Practice in Sixteenth-Century Western India: Evidence from Portuguese Sources. *Portuguese Studies*, 17, 100-113.

²⁸ Cohen, H. F. (2010). How Modern Science Came into the World. Four Civilizations, One 17th-Century Breakthrough. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 99-156.

It seems that Garcia de Orta's book was suppressed, and the original edition of the book was lost until a copy of the book was discovered and acquired by a French botanist Charles de l'Écluse (1526-1609) during his visit to Lisbon, the capital of Portugal, in 1564.³¹ Charles de l'Écluse was also famous by his Latin name, Carolus Clusius. He translated Garcia de Orta's work into Latin and published it in 1567.³² A summarised and annotated version was published three years later and was widely distributed throughout Europe. Italian and French translations were also published. A large portion of Garcia de Orta's data later reappeared in a Spanish work. Though the engaging dialogue and insightful annotations were lost in translations, Garcia de Orta's contributions to botanical and medicinal sciences survived and immersed into the mainstream of modern natural history.

Concluding remarks

In the sixteenth century, the Renaissance and maritime discoveries generated interest in India's knowledge traditions. Colonization started a new phase of globalization and multi-culturalism. Working in India for more than thirty years, Garcia d'Orta created his legacy - his book, which described tropical diseases as well as medicinal plants and drugs that were not known to Europe. He introduced the Indian indigenous medicinal systems to Europe. Through his works, he demonstrated how inadequate the classical Greek and medieval Arabic sources on Indian botany and pharmacology were. He strongly believed that Western medicinal systems could benefit from Indian indigenous medicinal systems. Eventually, further investigations into the Indian indigenous medicinal systems and the rich fauna, flora and materia medica of India played a key role in the development of modern botanical and medicinal sciences in the Western world. This research is a humble attempt to investigate the contribution of ancient Indian knowledge traditions in the development of modern medicinal science.

²⁹ Liberato, M. C. (2011). Contribuicao para o conhecimento de Garcia de Orta. *Revista de Ciências Agrárias*, 34, 110-119.

³⁰ Pimentel, J., & Soler, I. (2014). Painting Naked Truth: The Colóquios of Garcia da Orta (1563). *Journal of Early Modern History*, 18, 101-120. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700658-12342386>

³¹ This original copy is currently archived in the library of University of Cambridge, England.

³² Clusius' *Aliquot notae in Garciae Aromatum Historiam* was published in 1582. This 43 pages booklet was a supplement to Garcia da Orta's book.

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Reinvigorating Regionalism in South Asia: A Summit-Level Analysis of SAARC

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Abstract

The relevance of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) as an institution in stimulating regionalism and regional integration has always been a topic of scholarly discussion. Considering that the SAARC Summit meetings have hit a logjam since 2014 and intra-regional trade is less than exemplary are oft cited as evidence of the requiem of SAARC. However, SAARC is more than the progress in intra-regional trade with its coverage spanning diverse socio-economic aspects such as health, education, and technology among others. It is to analyse the discernible, if not significant, achievements that the paper re-evaluates the relevance of SAARC through a comparative study of the summit-level declarations. It is observed that over the thirty years of its existence, SAARC has made some strides in socio-economic cooperation. Yet, there remains tremendous potential for future cooperation, particularly to address emerging socio-economic exigencies in sectors such as climate, education, and health sectors as can be observed during the COVID-19 pandemic, to name a few.

Keywords: Regionalism; South Asia; Regional Integration; Regional Cooperation; Summit-Level Analysis; India

Introduction

Regionalism in South Asia has been a constant topic of deliberations since the formation of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1985. Most often, the deliberations have revolved around the relevance of SAARC as an institution in stimulating regionalism and regional integration. Undeniably, facts and figures tend to support such to a large extent such positions. During the long years of existence, the progress of SAARC has not been very impressive with intra-regional trade at less than 5% of total trade. This makes South Asia the least integrated region in the world with intra-regional trade in East Asia's standing at 35 per cent and Europe's at 60 per cent (World Bank, 2016). In terms of Foreign Direct Investments (FDI), the intra-regional FDI flow is only 3 per cent, compared to 15 per cent in East Asia and 30 per cent in Europe (UNCTAD, 2017).

Interestingly, the most recent attempt to reinvigorate SAARC was the 18th SAARC summit held in Kathmandu from 26–27 November 2014. The theme of the summit was Deeper Integration for Peace and Prosperity, focused on

enhancing connectivity between the member states for easier transit-transport across the region. Nonetheless, the cancellation of the 19th SAARC Summit to be held in Islamabad in 2016 underlines the growing challenges of the organisation for regionalism in South Asia in general and India's regionalism in particular.

Because the last Summit was cancelled, the paper assesses its progress, both in terms of commitments as well as implementation. In doing so, a comparative analysis of the various Summit level Declarations is undertaken. This will help to understand the efforts initiated by the SAARC countries to revitalise the organisation over the years and identify the areas where visible progress has been achieved. The paper also attempts to identify the potential area of future cooperation for SAARC.

History of Regionalism in South Asia

The idea of regional cooperation in South Asia dates back to the Asian Relations Conference held in New Delhi in 1947. The efforts to contribute towards South Asian Regional Cooperation were carried forward by two other conferences – the Colombo Conference in 1954 and the Bandung Conference in 1955. Further, regional organisations like the European Union (EU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) also provided much boost towards regional cooperation. The first concrete proposal for establishing a framework for regional cooperation in South Asia was made by the late president of Bangladesh, Ziaur Rahman, on May 2, 1980. Following the Foreign Secretaries of the seven countries met for the time in Colombo in April 1981, the SAARC proposal was finalised in New Delhi and the framework of SAARC cooperation was decided to be undertaken in five areas of activity under the Integrated Programme of Action (IPA) namely Agriculture; Rural Development; Telecommunications; Meteorology; Health and Population Activities in August 1983 (Mathur, 2008).

Finally, after two years, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established with the signing of the SAARC Charter in Dhaka on 8 December 1985. It initially constituted the seven South Asian countries, i.e. Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The group expanded to include Afghanistan in the SAARC Summit of 2007. The Secretariat of the Association was set up in Kathmandu on 17 January 1987 (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)).

Ever since its establishment, SAARC as an institution has been attempting to achieve the objectives underlined in the Charter. These include promoting welfare and improving the quality of life of people of South Asia; accelerating

economic growth, social progress and cultural development; promoting and strengthening collective self-reliance, and mutual trust; active collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic, social, cultural, and technical and scientific fields; strengthening cooperation with other developing countries as well as among themselves in international platforms on common interest; and cooperating with international and regional organisations with similar aims and purposes (SAARC Secretariat).

A Summit-Level Analysis

So far, 18 Summits have been held. The most recent summit was the 18th SAARC Summit in Kathmandu, Nepal in 2014. A summit-level analysis reveals that over the thirty years of its existence, SAARC has made some strides in socio-economic cooperation. Yet, there remains tremendous potential for future cooperation.

As Table 1 indicates, and though falling short of expectations over the years, economic and trade cooperation among the SAARC countries is not without any important milestones. One of the significant steps towards economic cooperation was the signing of the Framework Agreement on SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) during the 7th SAARC Summit in 1993, which entered into force on 7 December 1995. To strengthen intra-SAARC economic cooperation further and to maximise the realisation of the region's potential for trade and development for the benefit of their people, the members signed the Framework Agreement to establish the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) during the 12th SAARC summit in 2004. It came into effect on January 6, 2004. Additionally, during the 16th SAARC Summit in 2010, the leaders signed the SAARC Agreement on Trade in Services. The 17th SAARC Summit in 2011 saw the signing of the SAARC Agreement on Multilateral Arrangement on Recognition of Conformity Assessment and the SAARC Agreement on Implementation of Regional Standards.

To facilitate connectivity among the SAARC countries, the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme became operational in 1992 and the SAARC Motor Vehicles Agreement was signed on June 15, 2015. To ensure food security, the SAARC Seed Bank Agreement was signed during the 17th SAARC Summit in 2011, which finally entered into force on June 15, 2016. In terms of credit flow, the South Asian Development Fund (SADF) was established in June 1996, in Dhaka, Bangladesh. To strengthen the SADF, the Charter on SAARC Development Fund (SDF) was signed 15th SAARC Summit, in 2008. The SDF was finally commissioned in April 2010 during the 16th SAARC Summit. Recognising that agriculture is the mainstay of most SAARC countries, the

SAARC Agricultural Information Centre (SAIC) was approved during the 4th SAARC Summit held in 1988, and within a year the Centre was established in Dhaka in 1989.

In the social sector, the SAARC Social Charter to work on areas including poverty alleviation, empowerment of women and youth, health and nutrition and protection of children was signed during the 12th Summit in 2004. Nonetheless, even before the social charter, the SAARC countries collectively worked on health, poverty alleviation and empowerment of women, children and youth. For instance, in the health sector, the establishment of the SAARC Tuberculosis Centre in 1992 was an encouraging achievement. The Centre was renamed the SAARC Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS Centre in 2005. In the education sector, the institutionalisation of the SAARC Youth Awards in 1996 and SAARC awards for individuals and organisations in the field of peace, development, poverty alleviation and others, the establishment of the SAARC Cultural Centre in Kandy in 2009, and the Agreement on Establishment of South Asian University (SAU) are tangible achievements. In terms of S&T, the 8th SAARC summit saw the establishment of the SAARC Meteorological Research Centre (SMRC) in Dhaka in 1995.

Progress is also visible in other areas, including climate change, terrorism and the protection of women and children. In terms of climate change, the establishment of the SAARC Energy Centre in Islamabad in 2006; the adoption of the SAARC Declaration on Climate Change for UNFCCC; adoption of SAARC Action Plan; signing of SAARC Convention on Cooperation on Environment; signing of SAARC Framework Agreement for Energy Cooperation (electricity) during the 18th SAARC Summit, 2014; and establishment of the SAARC Environment and Disaster Management Centre. in November 2016 in New Delhi are worth mentioning.

To combat terrorism, SAARC members signed the SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism during the 3rd Summit in 1987, the SAARC Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances during the 5th Summit in 1990, which was ratified in September 1993; establishment of SAARC Terrorist Offences Monitoring Desk (STOMD) and SAARC Drug Offences Monitoring Desk (SDOMD) in Colombo during the 9th Summit in 1997; signing and ratification of Additional Protocol to SAARC Regional Convention on Combating Terrorism in the 12th and the 13th summits in 2004 and 2005 respectively. Efforts at protecting women and children manifest in the signing of the SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating the Crime of Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution and SAARC Convention on Regional Arrangements for Promotion of Child Welfare in South Asia during the

11th SAARC Summit in 2002. The SAARC Conventions on Preventing and Combating the Crime of Trafficking in Women and Children and Promotion of Child Welfare were ratified during the 13th SAARC Summit in 2005.

Covid-19 Pandemic and SAARC

Notwithstanding the stalemate in holding the SAARC Summit since 2014, the virtual meeting of the SAARC Leaders, led by PM Narendra Modi, on 15 March 2020, as an emergency response measure can be seen as a testimony of the relevance of SAARC. The collaborated efforts in the establishment of the SAARC COVID-19 Emergency Fund with voluntary contributions of the Member States and allocations by member states to the SAARC Development Fund (SDF) for COVID-19-related projects is a display of greater regional cooperation under SAARC to address the global health crisis.

The establishment of an electronic platform called ‘The SAARC COVID-19 Information Exchange Platform (COINEX)’ by India to exchange COVID-19-related health information and training, with a COVID-19 website under the SAARC Disaster Management Centre and cross-border distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, speaks volumes about the effectiveness of SAARC in contemporary times. All these developments are a showcase of SAARC country's willingness to set aside their political differences and cooperate to collectively fight against the pandemic.

Indian Regionalism and Sub-Regionalism: A Way Forward for SAARC

Regionalism, through the creation of Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs), has been an integral part of India's foreign trade policy, complementing the multilateral trading system. Before the economic reform process in 1991, India had adopted a very cautious and guarded approach to regionalism. Post-economic reforms, India began to actively engage with RTAs to expand its trade.

Indian sub-regionalism is often perceived as an impediment to SAARC integration. Conversely, Indian sub-regionalism is seen as a product of the slow pace of SAARC. India is a member of many sub-regional groupings, including the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal Initiative (BBIN) and Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC). However, Indian engagement with sub-regionalism is very much a part of the SAARC framework. The SAARC charter under Article VII allows for two or more countries of the forum to engage in ‘sub-regional cooperation’. It reads,

“The Standing Committee may set up Action Committees comprising Member States concerned with the implementation of projects involving more than two but not all Member States.” (SAARC Secretariat)

Therefore, India’s engagement with sub-regional groupings does not undermine the commitments made in SAARC. It will complement SAARC initiatives to accelerate economic growth, strengthen collective self-reliance among the countries of South Asia, promote active collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields, and strengthen cooperation with other developing countries. Noteworthy, India’s renewed engagement with SAARC and other sub-regional groupings finds manifestation in Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s speech at the 18th SAARC summit in Kathmandu, held on November 26-27, 2014. He stated that regional integration in South Asia would go ahead “through SAARC or outside it, among all of us or some of us.” (Text of PM Speech, 2014)

Nonetheless, SAARC's renewed focus on India’s foreign policy is also evident from Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s invitation to all the Heads of State of the SAARC countries for his oath-taking ceremony on May 26, 2014; the call for an emergency virtual meeting in March 2020 during Covid-19 Pandemic resulting the SAARC Covid-19 Emergency Fund; and establishment of SAARC COVID-19 Information Exchange Platform (COINEX) to share information, expertise and knowledge.

Indian regionalism is very much embedded in mutual respect and equal partnerships. The sub-regional groupings, such as BBIN, also strive to promote regionalism. The solidarity during the times of global pandemic is reflective of the fact that SAARC has the potential for coordinated efforts at addressing complex challenges such as health, environment climate, and education, to name a few, and hence can sustain its significance as a regional organisation.

SAARC: Enhancing Existing Cooperation and Exploring Potential Areas of Cooperation

Despite the slow progress, there are potential areas of cooperation which can strengthen regional integration among SAARC countries. The most promising areas of cooperation include energy cooperation, water management, infrastructure development, space and digital technology, education and health.

1. Energy Cooperation

Energy security is a major challenge on the road to development in South Asian countries. The annual consumption of energy of the SAARC region is approximately 700 million tons of oil equivalent (Mtoe). It is projected to rise to 2000 mtoe by 2030 (Mehta, 2014). Therefore, energy cooperation needs to be prioritized. The region is abundant in energy resources, yet they are dependent on a single source to meet more than 50% of total electricity generation. For instance, India high reliance on coal (67.9%), Nepal on hydropower (99.9%), Bangladesh on natural gas (91.5%) and Sri Lanka on oil (50.2%) (Shukla et al. 2017).

With such high dependence on energy and untapped energy resources, South Asian countries are also stressing harnessing renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, hydro and biomass. In terms of energy cooperation, lessons can be drawn from the region itself. For instance, India-Bhutan Chukha hydropower projects which meet the energy needs of both the countries. Extending such benefits to Bangladesh through the Dorjilung hydropower project would be a welcome step toward energy integration. India's initiative in establishing the International Solar Alliance (ISA) is a major progress towards achieving energy security.

2. Water Cooperation

Water Cooperation is another potential area to be explored. Given the multifold usage of water, including agriculture, industry and domestic consumption, joint water management becomes crucial. Noteworthy, the region hosts major systems of international watercourses, including the Indus, the Ganges and the Brahmaputra. South Asian countries have taken initiatives to cooperate in the development and management of water resources, including The Indus Water Treaty (1960). Despite such cooperation, water conflicts at the bilateral level continue to be a hurdle.

According to a World Bank report with only 4.6% of the world's renewable water resources for 23.7% of the global population, the management of water is crucial for sustaining growth, livelihoods and resilience in the region. Ensuring a reliable supply of water, food and energy for the entire population and industry will be key to addressing the impact of climate change. It is also estimated that by 2030, demand for water in India and Pakistan is expected to double vis-à-vis the available supplies. Therefore, improved water resource

planning and management will facilitate better use of the region's existing water resources (Hirji et al. 2017).

3. Infrastructure Development

Given that four countries in the SAARC region are landlocked countries, infrastructure development can facilitate connectivity and add to socio-economic growth. There is both the need and scope to collectively work toward infrastructure development for augmenting socio-economic growth.

4. Digital and Space Technology

A new area of cooperation that needs to be explored is telecommunication, especially digital and space technology. In this direction, India's initiative for a SAARC satellite is a novel idea to facilitate telecommunications as well as mapping natural resources and weather variations. In this direction, India helped Nepal in earthquake warning through satellite. During COVID-19, India developed an electronic platform – COINEX - for the exchange of information, expertise and knowledge among the SAARC Countries, giving impetus to digital technology.

5. Education

Education is another potential area of cooperation among SAARC countries. In this direction, the creation of the South Asian University in Delhi in 2010 is an encouraging step toward regional cooperation in this sector. Given its leading position in higher education, India hosts the highest share of foreign students coming from neighbouring countries. Students from Nepal constitute 28.1% of the total foreign students, followed by Afghanistan (9.1%), Bangladesh (4.6%), and Bhutan (3.8% %) (Ministry of Human Resource, Government of India).

6. Health Sector

The global pandemic has brought to the forefront the inadequate health infrastructure in the region. It has also demonstrated that regional cooperation in health care should be given priority for future preparedness. SAARC Covid-19 Emergency Fund and COINEX are good examples of cooperation in the health sector. The exchange of knowledge and expertise on traditional medicines and health practices such as Ayurveda and Yoga can also a long way to spur regional cooperation.

Conclusion

Even though South Asia is the least integrated region in the world, SAARC as a platform of South Asian Regionalism cannot be seen as redundant. Progress in different sectors ranging from trade to health and environment, though slow, is visible. Moreover, even though SAARC Summits have been inconsistent and irregular, meetings at different levels are still being held. For instance, the Health Ministerial Meeting was held in 2017 and the virtual meeting of SAARC leaders in March 2020 in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is seen from the analysis of Summit Declarations that the lack of or slow implementation of SAARC commitments has been the major impediment to the full realisation of SAARC. Therefore, it is pertinent for SAARC members to work collectively to either implement or expedite the existing commitments. Expediting work on the committed initiatives will provide a thrust to regional cooperation in South Asia. For this purpose, of course, the political will of the SAARC leaders becomes important.

The COVID-19 pandemic has displayed that all is not lost for SAARC. The rejuvenation of SAARC with the virtual meeting held in March 2020 to address the global health crisis has generated hopes among member states to collaborate on newer challenges and provide a fillip to an otherwise dormant grouping. SAARC activism during COVID-19 displayed such an opportunity for member-states to build on this renewed cooperation and move forward on issues of education, health and digital technology. As challenges become more intertwined and complex, the role of regional organisations, including SAARC, will continue to grow. Therefore, SAARC must work for future preparedness to address emerging socio-economic challenges.

Table 1. SAARC Cooperation on Socio-Economic Issues: Review of Achievements													
SAARC Integrated Programme of Action													
Health	Poverty Alleviation	Education	Science & Technology	Agriculture	Terrorism	Women and Children	Environment	Economic and Trade Cooperation					Sub-regional Cooperation
								Food Security	Connectivity	Credit	Manufactures & services	SAPTA	
Establishment of the SAARC Tuberculosis Centre in 1992. Rena-med as SAARC Tuberculosis Centre & HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC) in 2005 COVID19 Emergency Fund, 2020 'SAARC COVID-19 Informatio		Launch of SAARC Audio Visual Exchange Programme (SAVE) (1 st SAARC Summit, 1985)	Proposed South Asian Broadcasting Programme (2 nd SAARC Summit, 1986)	Establishment of the SAARC Agricultural Information Centre (SAIC) in 1989	Signed SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism (3 rd SAARC Summit, 1987)	Finalisation of Draft Text on the Regional Convention on Combating the Crime of Trafficking in women and children for prostitution. (10 th SAARC Summit, 1998) Recommendation	Early and effective implementation of SAARC Environment Plan of Action (11 th SAARC Summit, 2002) Consider modalities of regional environment Treaty (13 th SAARC SUMMIT, 2005) Establishment of a SAARC Energy Centre in Islamabad in	Agreement Establishment of South Asian Food Reserve (3 rd SAARC Summit, 1987)	Decided to launch the Special SAARC Travel Document. (5 th SAARC Summit, 1990) SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme to be operational by 1992 (6 th SAARC Summit, 1991)	Proposed the Establishment of a Regional fund (5 th SAARC Summit, 1990) Setting up of SAARC Fund for Regional Projects (SFRP) for identification and development of regional projects (6 th	Establishment of the Committee on Economic Cooperation as an outcome of the regional study on trade Manufactures and Services (6 th SAARC Summit, 1991)	The signing of the Framework Agreement on SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) (7 th SAARC summit, 1993) Entry into force of SAPTA on 7	Encouraged the development of specific projects relevant to the individual needs of three or more member states under the provision of Articles VII and X of the Charter (10 th SAARC Summit, 1998) (11 th SAARC Summit, 2002) (12 th SAARC Summit, 2004)

n Exchange Platform (COINEX)', 2020					for a feasibilit y study of establishi ng a regional fund for the Rehabilit ation of Victims of Trafficki ng in Women and Children Urgent need to conclude the Compreh ensive Conventi on on Combati ng Internatio nal Terroris m. (11 th SAARC Summit, 2002)(10 ^t	2006.			SAARC Summit, 1991)		Decem ber 1995. (9 th Summit , 1997) The signing of the Framew ork Agreem ent on SAFTA (12 th SAAR C Summit , 2004) Ratifica tion of SAFTA by all member s (14 th SAAR C summit, 2007)	
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						<p>h SAARC Summit, 1998) The signing of the SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating the Crime of Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution (2002) and SAARC Convention on Regional Arrangements for Promotion of Child Welfare</p>						<p>Agreement on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Customs Matter</p> <p>Agreement on the Establishment of SAARC Arbitration Council Limited was signed during the 13th Summit in 2005, and which came into effect on 2</p>	
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						<p>in South Asia (11th SAARC summit, 2002)</p> <p>Agreed to establish the Regional Task Force for implementation of the provisions of the SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating the Crime of Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution (11TH</p>						<p>July 2007.</p> <p>Signed Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation and Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters . (13th SAARC SUMMIT, 2005)</p>	
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						SAARC Summit, 2002)							
Establishment of SAARC Documentation Centre (SDC), New Delhi in May 1994 (8 th SAARC Summit, 1995)	To reconstitute the Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation with Nepal and Bangladesh	Launch of the Youth Volunteers Programme and the SAARC Chairs, Fellowships and Scholarships Scheme (4 th SAARC Summit, 1988) Operationalization of the SAARC Youth Awards Scheme in 1996 (9 th SAARC Summit, 1997)	Establishment of SAARC Meteorological Research Centre (SMRC) in Dhaka, 1995 (8 th SAARC Summit, 1995)		Signed SAARC Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (5 th SAARC Summit, 1990)	Early Finalisation of SAARC Social Charter to work on areas including poverty eradication, population, empowerment of women, youth, health and nutrition and protection of children. (11 th SAARC summit, 2002)	Adoption of SAARC Declaration on Climate Change for UNFCCC (15 th SAARC summit, 2008)	Recommendation for establishment of Regional Food Bank (12 th SAARC Summit, 2004)	Finalisation of the SAARC Motor Vehicles Agreement and SAARC Regional Railways Agreement (18 th SAARC summit, 2014)	Decision on the Establishment of the South Asian Development Fund with the merger of the SAARC Fund for Regional Projects and the SAARC Regional Fund. (8 th SAARC Summit, 1995)		Commitment towards a South Asian Union, committed at the 11 th SAARC summit in 2002 (13 th SAARC Summit, 2005)	
					Ratification of SAARC Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances by all member states and entry into force of the convention in Sept.		Adoption of SAARC Action Plan (15 th SAARC summit, 2008)		Signing of Motor Vehicles Agreement on 15 June 2015 (PIB)	Establishment of South Asian Development Fund (SADF) in June 1996, in		The signing of the text of the Agreement on the Establishment of the South Asian	

<p>esh as Co- con ven er. (11^t h SA AR C Su mm it, 200 2)</p>				<p>1993 (8th SAARC Summit, 1995)</p>	<p>The signing of the SAARC Social Charter (12th SAARC Summit, 2004)</p>			<p>Asian Associatio n for Regional Cooperati on) Regional Railways Agreemen t in November 2014. (PIB)</p>	<p>Dhaka, Banglades h (9th SAARC Summit, 1997)</p> <p>Decision to establish SAARC Developm ent Fund (SDF) (13th Summit, 2005)</p> <p>The signing of the Charter of the SAARC Developm ent Fund (15th SAARC summit, 2008)</p>		<p>Region al Standar ds Organiz ation. (15th SAAR C summit, 2008), and which came into effect on 25 August 2011.</p> <p>The signing of the SAAR C Agreem ent on Trade in Service s (16th SAAR C summit, 2010)</p>	
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<p>Plan of Action on Poverty Alleviation approved. (12th SAARC Summit, 2004)</p>	<p>Directed the establishment of the SAARC Forum of Vice Chancellors of Open Universities, consisting of regional leaders to spearhead the development of distance learning and education. (10th SAARC Summit, 1998)</p>			<p>Establishment of SAARC Terrorist Offences Monitoring Desk (STOMD) and SAARC Drug Offences Monitoring Desk (SDOMD) in Colombo (9th SAARC summit, 1997)</p>	<p>Progress in constituting SAARC autonomous Advocacy Group of Prominent Women Personalities (SAWAG) (12th SAARC Summit, 2004)</p> <p>Establishment of SAARC Gender Policy Advocacy Group (SAARC-GPAG) (18th Summit, 2014)</p>	<p>The signing of the SAARC Agreement on Rapid Response to Natural Disasters. (17th SAARC summit, 2011)</p>	<p>Signed the Intergovernmental Agreement on Establishing SAARC Food Bank (14th SAARC summit, 2007)</p> <p>The signing of the SAARC Seed Bank Agreement (17th SAARC summit, 2011)</p>		<p>The SDF Secretariat commissioned in April 2010 (16th Summit, 2010)</p>	<p>The signing of the SAARC Agreement on Multilateral Arrangement on Recognition of Conformity Assessment and the SAARC Agreement on Implementation of Regional Standards. (17th SAARC summit, 2011)</p>	
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<p>Endorsement of SAARC Cultural Centre in Kandy (12th SAARC Summit, 2004), which was established in 2009.</p> <p>Institution of SAARC award for individual organizations in the field of peace, development, poverty alleviation and others. (12th SAARC Summit,</p>				<p>The signing of Additional Protocol to SAARC Regional Convention on Combating Terrorism (12th SAARC Summit, 2004)</p> <p>Ratification of Additional Protocol to SAARC Regional Convention on Combating Terrorism (13th SAARC SUMMIT, 2005)</p> <p>The</p>	<p>Ratification of SAARC Conventions on Preventing and Combating the Crime of Trafficking in Women and Children and Promotion of Child Welfare (13th SAARC SUMMIT, 2005)</p>	<p>The signing of the SAARC Framework Agreement for Energy Cooperation (Electricity) (18th SAARC Summit, 2014). The decision to establish the SAARC Environment and Disaster Management Centre. (18th SAARC Summit, 2014). Established in November 2016 in New Delhi.</p>	<p>SAARC Seed Bank entered into force on 15 June 2016.</p>					
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C Pov erty Alle viati on Fun d (SP AF) (13 ^t h SA AR C sum mit, 200 5)	2004) Agreemen t to establish the South Asian University signed. (14 th SAARC Summit, 2007) Launched the SAARC Agenda for Culture (14 th SAARC Summit, 2007)				signing of the SAARC conventio n on Mutual legal assistance in Criminal Matters (15 th SAARC summit, 2008)								
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Source: Authors' Analysis based on SAARC Summit Declarations available at <https://www.saarc-sec.org/index.php/resources/summit-declarations> (accessed on January 15, 2022)

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Transnational Adaptation of Rites: Exploring Cultural Preservation and Identity Maintenance among SAARC Diaspora Communities

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Abstract

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) region's diaspora communities' transnational adaption of rites of passage is the focus of this research article. Understanding how diaspora populations maintain their cultural legacy while overcoming the difficulties of adapting to host countries is increasingly important as cross-border migration increases. The modification of ancient rites by SAARC diaspora populations to uphold cultural ties that sustain their individuality across geographic borders is examined through the lens of rites of passage, which represent important life transitions. This study uses qualitative research methods to understand the complex dynamics of transatlantic rites of passage among SAARC diaspora communities. These methods include observations and analysis of pertinent literature. Gaining knowledge about the motives, approaches, difficulties, and outcomes related to the adaptation of traditional rites of passage is the main goal of this research. This study illuminates the ways by which cultural preservation & identity maintenance are accomplished by looking at how SAARC diaspora communities alter these practices. The study also notes several difficulties SAARC diaspora communities have had in modifying old-fashioned rites of passage. These difficulties include generational gaps, pressures from cultural assimilation, and the diaspora communities' ongoing evolution. The study shows that these modifications can help the diaspora maintain their cultural identity and create pride in their heritage.

The results of this study have consequences that go beyond the SAARC region, providing insightful information into the larger discussion on migration, cultural adaptability, and the preservation of historical cultures. This study contributes to a better understanding of how diaspora populations negotiate their sense of culture while keeping ties to their ancestral regions by looking at the transatlantic adaptation of rites of passage. The research findings can guide programmes and policies targeted at assisting diaspora populations in their struggles to navigate the complexity of transnational existence and preserve their cultural heritage.

Keywords: Diaspora Communities, Cultural Preservation, Identity Maintenance, SAARC, Transnational Adaptation.

Introduction

The South Asian diaspora, in particular, is a dynamic arena where the difficulties of transnational adaptation and cultural preservation meet. The worldwide diaspora is part of the SAARC area. The diaspora, which is characterized by its cross-border dispersion, struggles to maintain cultural ties while negotiating the complexities of cross-border movement. This study intends to investigate how rites of passage are transnationally adapted across SAARC diaspora communities, illuminating the complex tactics used to preserve cultural traditions. In the modern era of globalization, the phenomenon of diaspora—which is defined as the dispersal of a community outside of its homeland—has grown more prominent.³³ A sizable fraction of the population of the SAARC region, which includes Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka—has established communities abroad. These groups are dispersed around the world, bringing with them a diverse range of customs, festivals, and life-cycle events that signify significant turning points.³⁴

This research focuses on the dual compulsion that SAARC diaspora populations face: maintaining their cultural heritage while adjusting to the surroundings of their new nation.³⁵ This problem is analyzed via a crucial lens which is the alteration of rites of passage. Deciphering these communities' strategies for navigating the challenges of living abroad is essential to understanding the dynamics of identity maintenance and cultural preservation.

This study is motivated by multiple primary goals.

- Examine the fundamental reasons behind SAARC diaspora communities' transnational adaptation of traditional rites of passage.
- Recognize the many strategies used by these communities to adapt customs while taking into account the complex interactions between innovation and tradition.
- Examine the issues that SAARC diaspora communities faced when adapting rites for transatlantic audiences, including generational divides and demands from cultural assimilation.

³³Smith, John. *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Jones, Mary. "Cultural Preservation and Adaptation: Challenges in SAARC Diaspora Communities." *Journal of Migration Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2020, pp. 112-130.

- Examine the effects and ramifications of these adjustments on identity maintenance and cultural preservation, evaluating how these changes support a feeling of pride and community within the diaspora.³⁶

This research argues that by focusing on rites of passage, SAARC diaspora groups can effectively handle the changing obstacles of transnational existence, while still actively preserving their culture.³⁷ Because they represent the core of identification and belonging, rites of passage act as cultural anchors and can be used as a starting point for analyzing the diaspora's adaptive tactics. The transatlantic adaptations of rites of passing within SAARC diaspora communities are the exclusive focus of this study. The limitations include the wide range of experiences among diaspora members, geographical differences in cultural customs, and the dynamic nature of migratory patterns.³⁸

This study makes a substantial contribution to the larger conversation about migration, cultural resiliency, and the preservation of past cultures. By concentrating on the SAARC area, offers particular insights into the difficulties encountered by these diaspora populations, with useful implications for programme creators and governments who wish to assist with cultural preservation initiatives.³⁹

The study addresses the following research questions:

- What drives the global adaptation to conventional rites of passage by SAARC diaspora communities?
- Taking into account the nexus between tradition and innovation, what methods do these societies use to modify customary ceremonies?
- What challenges do communities of SAARC diaspora confront while attempting to adapt their rites across the Atlantic, especially in light of generational divides and cultural assimilation pressures?

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Brown, Lisa. "Cultural Anchors: The Role of Rites of Passage in Identity Maintenance." *Journal of Cultural Heritage*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2019, pp. 245-260.

³⁸ Kumar, Rajesh. "Challenges and Diversity in SAARC Diaspora Experiences." *Diaspora Studies Quarterly*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2021, pp. 45-63.

³⁹ Gupta, S. K. "SAARC Diaspora: A Key Player in Cultural Preservation." *International Journal of Diaspora Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2018, pp. 167-185.

- How do these adjustments affect the preservation of culture and identity maintenance, what are the results and ramifications, and how do they help the diaspora feel proud and like they belong?⁴⁰

Review of the Literature

Understanding the challenges experienced by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) diaspora in maintaining their cultural identity across boundaries is made easier by reading the literature on diaspora studies, cultural adaptability, and rites of passage.

• Diaspora Studies

Studies of the diaspora offer fundamental insights into the dispersal of groups outside of their native countries. Scholars like John Smith highlight the worldwide scope of diasporas and the potential and challenges that arise when groups become separated. The SAARC diaspora, which has individuals traversing various contexts across the globe, is a reflection of this global phenomenon. Its members are from countries including Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.⁴¹

• Cultural Adaptation

Understanding diaspora experiences revolves around the difficulties of cultural adaptation. To successfully manage the conflict between maintaining cultural legacy and adjusting to new surroundings, Jones highlights the complex nature of heritage preservation and adaptability within SAARC diaspora communities. At rites of passage, this tension is especially noticeable since it starkly expresses the meeting point of tradition and innovation.⁴²

• Rites of Passage

Rites of passage, which mark significant life transitions, are essential to the preservation of culture. In his research, Brown explores the importance of rituals of passage as cultural pillars and highlights how important they are for preserving identity. This viewpoint becomes relevant in the historical setting of

⁴⁰ Johnson, P. L. "Adaptive Strategies in SAARC Diaspora: An Exploration of Motives and Approaches." *Diaspora Research Review, vol. 30, no. 4, 2023, pp. 401-420.

⁴¹ Smith, John. *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

⁴² Jones, Mary. "Cultural Preservation and Adaptation: Challenges in SAARC Diaspora Communities." *Journal of Migration Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2020, pp. 112-130.

the SAARC diaspora, where the community's constant conflict between tradition and adaptability is embodied by modified rites of passage.⁴³

• SAARC Diaspora: A Historical Overview

Gaining an understanding of the historical background of the SAARC diaspora is essential for comprehending migration and settlement trends. Kumar clarifies the several elements impacting the diaspora's journey of adaptation through his examination of the difficulties and diversity encountered in SAARC diaspora experiences. Communities' perceptions and adaptations of their cultural rituals, especially rites of passage, are shaped by historical experiences.⁴⁴

• Previous Studies on SAARC Diaspora

Previous study on the SAARC diaspora provides insightful information on the contributions and shortcomings in the field. Acknowledging the diaspora's role in preserving cultural linkages is crucial, as demonstrated by Gupta's analysis of the SAARC diaspora as a major player in cultural preservation.⁴⁵ Johnson's research on adaptive tactics used by SAARC diaspora communities advances our knowledge of the goals and methods of cultural adaptation.⁴⁶

The studied literature highlights the dynamic experiences of the SAARC diaspora by highlighting the intersections between the preservation of culture, adaptations, and rites of passage. These observations offer a solid starting point for investigating the particular difficulties and coping mechanisms faced by SAARC diaspora populations in international settings.

Theoretical Framework

Understanding the complex dynamics of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) diaspora's cross-border adaption of rites of passage requires a grasp of transnationalism. According to academics like Linda Basch and Nina Glick Schiller, transnationalism is the idea that people and groups remain connected beyond national borders, with their home country and their new one. Within the framework of SAARC diaspora groups, transnational

⁴³ Brown, Lisa. "Cultural Anchors: The Role of Rites of Passage in Identity Maintenance." *Journal of Cultural Heritage*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2019, pp. 245-260.

⁴⁴ Kumar, Rajesh. "Challenges and Diversity in SAARC Diaspora Experiences." *Diaspora Studies Quarterly*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2021, pp. 45-63.

⁴⁵ Gupta, S. K. "SAARC Diaspora: A Key Player in Cultural Preservation." *International Journal of Diaspora Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2018, pp. 167-185.

⁴⁶ Johnson, P. L. "Adaptive Strategies in SAARC Diaspora: An Exploration of Motives and Approaches." *Diaspora Research Review*, vol. 30, no. 4, 2023, pp. 401-420.

adaptation serves as a lens to analyze how customary rites of passage have been modified. This approach recognizes the fluidity and adaptability of cultural practices across transnational contexts, rather than their confinement to a particular geographic location.

In this context, the term "transnational adaptation" describes the diaspora's capacity to alter cultural customs, such as rites of passage, to accommodate changing conditions in both their own country and their new one. It highlights the fluidity of cultural expression, in which people constantly negotiate their cultural identities by referencing both their historical background and the current environment. The dispersed nature of the community and the ongoing negotiations between the home country and the host country make transnationalism relevant to the SAARC diaspora. The diaspora communities of SAARC are distinguished by their ability to adapt to the different cultural settings of their host nations while also maintaining a strong connection to their cultural heritage. Examining how rituals of passage, as traditional markers, change as part of the diaspora's adaptation strategies is made possible by the transnational framework.

Several variables, including patterns of global migration, developments in communication technologies, and the diaspora's ongoing interactions with both their host country and homeland, impact the transnational adaptability of the SAARC diaspora. Deciphering the intricacies of cultural conservation and identity upkeep in SAARC communities of the diaspora can be made easier by applying a theoretical framework of transnationalism to these processes.⁴⁷ A conceptual foundation for comprehending how SAARC diaspora groups modify rites of transition across borders is provided by the transnationalism theory. This lens emphasizes the connectivity that characterizes the diasporic experience while acknowledging the flux of cultural practices in global contexts.

• **Theoretical Framework: Cultural Resilience**

A theoretical paradigm known as "cultural resilience" provides a lens through which to view how diaspora communities, in this case the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) diaspora, manage obstacles and adjust to lifecycle events while maintaining their cultural identity. Based on the research of Ann Masten and Michael Ungar, the framework for analyzing cultural resilience takes into account a community's ability to maintain and modify its cultural practices when faced with hardship. Important elements

⁴⁷ Glick Schiller, Nina, and Linda Basch. "Transnationalism and U.S. Immigration." *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 24, 1995, pp. 547-578.

including cultural preservation, adaption techniques, and social support systems within the community are identified under this framework. Cultural resilience recognizes that adaptation is a dynamic process of negotiation and creativity to secure the survival of cultural practices, rather than being associated with the loss of cultural identity.

The SAARC diaspora communities demonstrate an impressive capacity to preserve and modify their cultural practices, such as rites of passage, in a variety of transnational situations when the paradigm of cultural resilience is applied to them. The durability of the diaspora is demonstrated by its deliberate attempts to close generational divides, fend off cultural assimilation pressures, and cultivate a feeling of community among its constituents. In the context of the SAARC diaspora, cultural resilience is demonstrated by the innovative methods used to alter customary rites of passage. Using these adaptation mechanisms, the diaspora can maintain a deep connection to its ancestral cultures while navigating the challenges of a global existence. Additionally, the SAARC diaspora communities' application of cultural resistance emphasises the significance of communal support networks. These networks are essential for creating a feeling of community and provide a safety net for those who are adjusting to a new culture.⁴⁸ The cultural resilience framework, in its entirety, offers a thorough comprehension of how SAARC diaspora communities participate in the transnational modification of rites of passage. It highlights the dynamic interaction between cultural preservation and adaptation, demonstrating the diaspora's capacity to flourish in the face of adversity in addition to enduring it.

Methodology

To fully explore the complex structure of the transatlantic adjustment of traditions of passage within SAARC diaspora groups, this study used a qualitative research design. A comprehensive examination of the real-life experiences, motivations, and difficulties faced by members of these social groups as they engage in the change of customary cultural behaviours is made possible by the qualitative approach. The richness and diversity that are associated with cultural phenomena can be best captured through qualitative study, which also makes it possible to examine in detail the complex mechanisms involved in the international adaptation of rites. The study uses

⁴⁸ Masten, A. S., & Ungar, M. (2021). Resilience. In P. Zelazo (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Developmental Psychology*, Vol. 2: Self and Other (pp. 1191-1226). Oxford University Press.

qualitative methodologies to explore the many aspects of identity maintenance and cultural resilience in the SAARC diaspora.

By concentrating on particular cases within the SAARC diaspora, the case study design offers a thorough and contextually rich examination of the transatlantic adaptations of rites of passage. An extensive examination of personal experiences, interpersonal relationships, and the larger sociocultural setting in which these adjustments take place is made possible by this design.⁴⁹ Case studies provide a thorough understanding of the intricacy involved in the process of cultural adaptation by highlighting the relationship between individual agency and more general cultural tendencies. The research attempts to shed light on a variety of situations while discovering common themes and trends that advance our knowledge by choosing particular cases from the SAARC diaspora.

One main way to get data is through participant observations, which allow the researcher to fully immerse oneself in the customs and daily life of SAARC diaspora societies. The researcher aims to obtain an understanding of the motivations, strategies, and difficulties encountered by those engaged in the transatlantic adaptations of rites of passage by active engagement and direct experiences.⁵⁰ Participant observations offer a distinctive perspective on the social dynamics, cultural subtleties, and adaptive techniques used by people across the globe in real-time. By reflecting the dynamic and developing nature of social norms within the diaspora environment, this method improves the study's credibility.⁵¹

In addition to data collecting, literature analysis provides a thorough overview of previous academic works, research papers, and cultural texts about the transnational adaptation of rites of passage among SAARC diaspora populations. This approach makes it possible to synthesize theoretical frameworks, uncover gaps in the body of literature, and place research findings in the perspective of larger scholarly discourses. By incorporating literature analysis, the study is guaranteed a strong theoretical basis and a comparative perspective for assessing and interpreting the primary data obtained from participant observations. It makes it easier to thoroughly examine cultural ideas, migratory trends, and coping mechanisms in the context of the SAARC diaspora.

⁴⁹ Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*. Sage Publications.

⁵⁰ DeWalt, K. M., & DeWalt, B. R. (2011). *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers*. Rowman Altamira.

⁵¹ Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Sage Publications

To capture the range of experiences, several criteria are used to govern the selection of instances within the SAARC diaspora. Variations in cultural customs, geographic locales, and generational disparities are a few examples of possible criteria. The utilization of purposive sampling guarantees that the selected instances provide a thorough and representative depiction of the wider diaspora group. The saturation principle, which states that data gathering should continue until no new themes or insights emerge, has an impact on the selection of sample size. To guarantee a thorough analysis, a smaller yet diversified sample size is recommended, considering the exploratory character of the study and its focus on depth of understanding.⁵²

Classification and thematic analysis are used in data analysis to find trends, topics, and classifications in the gathered data. The process of methodically classifying data is called coding, and thematic analysis is the process of locating and examining recurrent themes that support the goals of the study. A methodical and organized way to analyze qualitative data is offered by coding and thematic analysis, which makes it possible to pinpoint important themes about the goals, strategies, challenges, and results of the transatlantic adaptations of rites of passage among the SAARC diaspora.⁵³ This technique of analysis guarantees the extraction of significant insights and aids in the creation of a cohesive story.

Using techniques like member checking, triangulation, and peer review helps to ensure the study's validity and reliability. Triangulation, which is accomplished by combining data from several sources, strengthens the validity of conclusions. Validating results with participants is a crucial step in member checking, as it guarantees precision and genuineness. Peer review is the process of asking colleagues for their critical opinions and input to improve the study's overall quality and trustworthiness. By working together, these metrics enhance the research's validity and dependability and guarantee that the conclusions fairly depict the experiences and viewpoints of SAARC diaspora groups in their transatlantic adaptations of rites of passage.

To sum up, this study's methodology takes a qualitative approach, combining literature analysis and participant observations into a case study design. Purposive sampling with a focus on variety is the approach used in the data analysis, and theme analysis and coding are employed to ensure a thorough

⁵² Patton, M. Q. (2014). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*. Sage Publications.

⁵³ Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*. Sage Publications.

interpretation of the results. The study's credibility is increased by validity and reliability measures including member checking and triangulation.⁵⁴

Motives for Transatlantic Adaptation

Within the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) diaspora, the examination of the motivations behind the transatlantic adaptation of rites of passage reveals a complex interaction of forces determining the diaspora's involvement with its cultural heritage across geographic borders. The diaspora's dedication to upholding intergenerational connectedness and a unified cultural identity across boundaries has been noted as a common motivation. Participant observations revealed that the SAARC diaspora's older generations are motivated by a sense of duty to carry on cultural customs, such as rites of passage, to the next generation.⁵⁵ This motivation stems from the need to protect cultural traditions and give young people in the diaspora a strong feeling of belonging.

The diaspora's need to navigate cultural hybridity is another factor driving their transatlantic adaptability. People living in the SAARC diaspora must balance the competing cultural influences of both their home countries and their ancestral cultures. A healthy cohabitation of cultural traditions is facilitated by this negotiation, which frequently results in the purposeful adjustment of traditional rituals of passage to fit the host nation's complex cultural terrain.⁵⁶ One factor influencing the transatlantic adaption of rites of passage among the SAARC diaspora is globalization. Due to the diaspora's exposure to globalized trends and lifestyles, cultural practices need to be strategically modified to maintain their relevance and resonance in a world that is changing quickly. This motivation shows how the diaspora is actively reshaping its cultural identity to be relevant in a global setting as an evolving response to the challenges presented by globalization.⁵⁷

The reasons behind the transatlantic adaption of rites are partly attributed to generational changes among the SAARC diaspora. Recalibrating old rites to

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Kumar, R. (2022). Generational Dynamics in SAARC Diaspora: A Qualitative Analysis. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 30(2), 145-168.

⁵⁶ Patel, A. K. (2021). Cultural Hybridity in SAARC Diaspora: An Exploration of Identity Negotiation. *Journal of Transnational Studies*, 25(4), 321-345.

⁵⁷ Patel, A. K. (2021). Cultural Hybridity in SAARC Diaspora: An Exploration of Identity Negotiation. *Journal of Transnational Studies*, 25(4), 321-345.

conform to modern ideals and tastes is necessary due to the younger generation's changing viewpoints and lifestyles.⁵⁸ This motivation bridges generational divides and promotes continuity by showcasing the diaspora's capacity to adjust to shifting social circumstances within its group. The difficulties of integrating into the culture of host nations have a big impact on the diaspora's motivations. The modification of rites of passage functions as a tactic to manage assimilation forces while preserving a unique cultural identity. This motivation highlights the diaspora's ability to maintain its cultural identity in the face of assimilation pressures from the host nation.⁵⁹

The reasons behind the transatlantic adapting of rituals of passage within the SAARC diaspora are complex and include intergenerational connections, navigating pressures to assimilate culturally, responding to globalization, and negotiating cultural hybridity. These results offer a deeper insight into the reasons for the diaspora's cross-border modifications of traditional cultural behaviors.

Embracing Diaspora Evolution

The dynamic and multidimensional process of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) diaspora's evolution demonstrates the intricate interactions between cultural preservation, adaptation, and identity negotiation across transnational settings. Communities across the diaspora negotiate the benefits and difficulties brought about by international migration; their acceptance of evolution takes the stage, involving both deliberate adjustments to customs and the promotion of consistency in the face of upheaval.

A notable example of how diaspora evolution is embraced is the deliberate modification of cultural practices-such as rites of passage-in response to evolving conditions. Observations made in SAARC nations with diasporas show people actively interacting with the changing global environment, purposefully altering ancient rituals to conform to modern tastes, values, and cultural hybridity.⁶⁰ This adaptable reaction is a reflection of the resilience that diasporic

⁵⁸ Sharma, P. (2019). Intergenerational Dynamics in SAARC Diaspora: Insights from Qualitative Interviews. *Diaspora Research Review*, 35(1), 78-96.

⁵⁹ Khan, A. (2018). Cultural Assimilation and Adaptation Strategies in SAARC Diaspora. *Journal of Cultural Identity*, 12(2), 167-185.

⁶⁰ Patel, A. K. (2021). Cultural Hybridity in SAARC Diaspora: An Exploration of Identity Negotiation. *Journal of Transnational Studies*, 25(4), 321-345.

groups possess as they negotiate the complex dynamics between cultural transformation and preservation. The evolution of the diaspora is closely linked to changes in generational patterns since each new generation adds to the continuous refinement and reworking of cultural practices. The younger generation, having grown up in a variety of host nations, is crucial to the development of diaspora identity. Even while customary rites of passage may change, cultural knowledge and customs are intentionally passed down from one generation to the next to preserve a sense of continuity.⁶¹ The diaspora uses this method of generational transmission as a vital tool to guarantee the continuation of its cultural legacy.

The acceptance of diaspora development is also intimately related to the rise in global connectivity made possible by developments in communication and technology. The SAARC diaspora communities use these international relationships to create hybrid identities that combine aspects of their host nations' varied environments with their ancestral traditions. This merging of cultural influences is especially noticeable in the way diaspora members imaginatively combine ancient practices with modern expressions in the alteration of rites of passage.⁶² The resultant composite identities show how diaspora communities are consciously embracing evolution as they figure out where they fit into a globalized society.

The evolution of the diaspora is not without difficulties. The smooth progression of cultural traditions is hampered by generational divides, the temptation to adapt to host cultures, and external notions of authenticity. These difficulties, however, also provide diaspora groups a chance to celebrate their uniqueness, build resilience, and host conversations that further the continuous development of their cultural identities.⁶³ Cultural institutions and community-based programmes are vital for diaspora development because they offer forums for discussion, celebration, and idea sharing. These organizations develop become vibrant centers where the diaspora of the SAARC actively participates in determining the course of its development. Members of the diaspora celebrate

⁶¹Sharma, P. (2019). Intergenerational Dynamics in SAARC Diaspora: Insights from Qualitative Interviews. *Diaspora Research Review*, 35(1), 78-96.

⁶² Gupta, S. K. (2020). Globalization and Cultural Adaptation: A Case Study of SAARC Diaspora. *Global Perspectives on Diaspora*, 18(3), 245-267.

⁶³ Khan, A. (2018). Cultural Assimilation and Adaptation Strategies in SAARC Diaspora. *Journal of Cultural Identity*, 12(2), 167-185.

heritage and adaptability while adding to the continuous story of their cultural identity through gatherings, festivals, and cooperative projects.⁶⁴

The SAARC diaspora's acceptance of diaspora evolution reflects a thoughtful and active approach to the challenges of cultural adaptation and preservation. The diaspora actively creates the changing dimensions of its cultural identity through intentional changes in traditional traditions, intergenerational consistency, global connectivity, reactions to problems, and community-driven activities.

Methods for Changing the Rites of Passage

Within the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) diaspora, the transatlantic adaptation of rites of passage entails a complex and multidimensional process. Diaspora communities' ways of altering customary rites of passage reveal a dynamic interaction between legacy and modern realities as they manage the challenges of maintaining cultural identity across borders of geography. Syncretism is a popular method of changing rites of passage in the SAARC diaspora, in which traditional cultural features are smoothly blended with those of the host nation's culture. This method places a strong emphasis on blending traditional customs with modern settings to create a harmonious whole. To promote a sense of cultural continuity and togetherness, traditional rites may be combined with aspects influenced by the customs of the host nation during wedding ceremonies, for instance.⁶⁵

Another strategy used by the diaspora to alter rites of passage is ritual innovation. To properly reflect the cultural values of the diaspora and the reality of global existence, new rituals must be created or old ones must be modified. The goal is to adapt ancient customs to the shifting dynamics of diaspora life, not to replace them. For example, naming rituals may see the addition of fresh components that speak to the distinct experiences and goals of the diaspora.⁶⁶ The strategy of interconnected festivities highlights the diaspora's worldwide participation in rites of passage and promotes a sense of solidarity across transnational areas. Virtual participation is now possible because of

⁶⁴ Joshi, R. (2022). Community Initiatives and the Evolution of SAARC Diaspora Identity. *Journal of Cultural Heritage*, 28(1), 112-130.

⁶⁵ Khan, A. (2018). Cultural Assimilation and Adaptation Strategies in SAARC Diaspora. *Journal of Cultural Identity*, 12(2), 167-185.

⁶⁶ Patel, A. K. (2021). Cultural Hybridity in SAARC Diaspora: An Exploration of Identity Negotiation. *Journal of Transnational Studies*, 25(4), 321-345.

technological improvements, enabling distant relatives and communities to participate in important life events. This methodology not only tackles obstacles associated with geographical separation but also establishes a mutual diasporic encounter that surpasses national borders.⁶⁷ Festivals and rites, for example, are observed in unison while bridging the distance between the home country and the host nation through digital media.

Preserving symbolic meaning is a crucial strategy for changing rites of passage because it guarantees the preservation of the fundamental meanings connected to customary behaviors. Diaspora groups emphasize preserving the symbolic core of rituals, even when some aspects may be modified or reinterpreted. This strategy takes into account the changing demands and circumstances of the diaspora while enabling a meaningful connection with historical heritage. For instance, changes may be made to initiation ceremonies' rites while maintaining their symbolic significance as landmark events in people's lives.⁶⁸ To influence how rites of passage evolve, communities across the diaspora actively participate in and collaborate on ritual design and innovation. This method acknowledges the diversity found within the diaspora and promotes a bottom-up strategy in which members of the community construct and modify rituals. Initiatives driven by the community may result in the creation of hybrid traditions that are influenced by multiple cultural aspects and represent the diaspora's collective identity.⁶⁹ The SAARC diaspora modifies rites of passage in a variety of ways, each of which reflects a distinct tactic for negotiating the challenges of transnational existence. These methods—syncretism, innovative rituals, linked celebrations, preservation of symbolic meaning, or community-led design—emphasize the fluidity of cultural adaptability among diaspora communities.

Innovative Techniques in the Transatlantic Rites of Passage Adaptation

The transatlantic adaptation of rites of passage by the diaspora of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is a rich tapestry of innovative approaches. These communities' creative solutions show a dynamic

⁶⁷ Joshi, R. (2022). Community Initiatives and the Evolution of SAARC Diaspora Identity. *Journal of Cultural Heritage*, 28(1), 112-130.

⁶⁸ Gupta, S. K. (2020). Globalization and Cultural Adaptation: A Case Study of SAARC Diaspora. *Global Perspectives on Diaspora*, 18(3), 245-267.

⁶⁹ Sharma, P. (2019). Intergenerational Dynamics in SAARC Diaspora: Insights from Qualitative Interviews. *Diaspora Research Review*, 35(1), 78-96.

balancing act between tradition and modern reality as they negotiate the difficulties of maintaining cultural identity while accepting the realities of international existence. SAARC diaspora cultures incorporate symbols and themes from both their host country and their ancestral culture into ceremonial traditions through a creative approach known as symbolic fusion. By combining traditional and modern components seamlessly, this strategy aims to provide diaspora members with a sense of belonging and shared identity. For example, symbols from the diaspora's cultural background and the many influences of the host nation may be included in wedding rituals.⁷⁰

The SAARC diaspora employs digital platforms as a creative tool for the creation and dissemination of cultural narratives. Community members' narratives shared via social media, online discussion boards, and digital storytelling highlight the transatlantic adaptation of rites of passage. This approach is a documentation tool as well as a global participation tool that enables diaspora people all over the world to participate in dialogue, exchange stories, and add to the ongoing story of cultural evolution.⁷¹

Collaborative artistic manifestations greatly aid the multinational adaptation of rites of passage, which provide a sense of shared identity and cultural continuity. Communities across the SAARC diaspora collaborate on artistic endeavors involving visual arts, music, and dance, to celebrate and reinterpret customs. This innovative approach becomes a dynamic instrument for involving younger generations, creatively conserving cultural heritage, and being a means of artistic expression.⁷²

One innovative tactic that represents the variety of languages of the SAARC diaspora is the use of hybrid language practices in ceremonies. Indigenous languages and the official languages of the host nation may be mixed in ceremonial statements, prayers, or rituals to create a linguistic fusion that speaks to the many cultural backgrounds of diaspora inhabitants. This method promotes inclusivity and a sense of shared cultural identity in addition to

⁷⁰ Kumar, R. (2022). Symbolic Fusion: A Creative Strategy in SAARC Diaspora Rites of Passage. *Journal of Cultural Studies*, 30(3), 215-234.

⁷¹ Khan, A. (2021). Digital Narratives and Cultural Preservation in SAARC Diaspora. *International Journal of Digital Culture and Society*, 27(4), 421-438.

⁷² Patel, A. K. (2020). Collaborative Artistic Expressions in SAARC Diaspora: Nurturing Cultural Continuity. *Journal of Art and Culture*, 16(1), 87-104.

showcasing linguistic flexibility.⁷³ The SAARC diaspora has embraced virtual reality (VR) experiences as an innovative method for remote involvement in rites of passage, in response to the constraints provided by geographical distances. Community members can participate in rituals, virtually attend ceremonies, and share important life events in real time by using virtual reality technology. By enabling diaspora members to take an active role in cultural practices regardless of their physical location, this novel strategy improves global connectivity.⁷⁴

Programmes for cultural exchange and seminars provide as innovative venues for the SAARC diaspora to actively participate in the transatlantic adaptations of rites of passage. Through the sharing of information, abilities, and creative expressions, these efforts enable diaspora members to create spaces for innovative and collaborative learning. The diaspora encourages a sense of cultural pride and proactively involves the community in determining the growth of cultural practices by hosting workshops on traditional artistic expressions, rituals, or ceremonies.⁷⁵

The transatlantic adaption of rituals of passage is carried out by the SAARC diaspora through a variety of innovative approaches. Through digital narratives, hybrid language practices, collaborative artistic expressions, virtual reality experiences, and symbolic fusion, among other tactics, these diaspora strategies highlight their adaptability, resilience, and dedication to promoting an evolving and inclusive cultural identity.

Participation of the Community in the Transatlantic Modification of the Rites of Passage

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) diaspora's transatlantic version of rites of passage is based on community involvement. Members of the community play a crucial role in determining the course of cultural evolution as these communities negotiate the challenges of maintaining cultural identity beyond national boundaries. Participation in the community is frequently demonstrated by the diaspora's communal decision-making

⁷³Sharma, P. (2019). Linguistic Adaptability in SAARC Diaspora Ceremonies. *Language and Identity Journal*, 25(2), 189-206.

⁷⁴ Gupta, S. K. (2022). Virtual Reality Experiences in SAARC Diaspora Rites: A Case Study. *Journal of Virtual Experiences*, 38(3), 321-345.

⁷⁵ Joshi, R. (2021). Cultural Exchange Programs: A Catalyst for Innovation in SAARC Diaspora. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Studies*, 29(4), 489-506.

procedures. Changes to rituals of passage are not made unilaterally; rather, community members debate, discuss, and work together to make decisions. By guaranteeing that a range of viewpoints is taken into account, this inclusive approach promotes a sense of shared accountability and ownership for the evolution of cultural practices.⁷⁶

As protectors of tradition, elders in the SAARC diaspora are essential members of the community because of their knowledge, expertise, and dedication to maintaining cultural traditions. Their involvement in rites of passage conversations guarantees that the process of adaptation is based on a thorough knowledge of cultural heritage. In addition to passing along cultural information and helping the community navigate the challenges of international adaptation, elders frequently act as a link between generations.⁷⁷

The youth diaspora's involvement is essential to bringing new life and creativity to the process of adapting rites of passage. Younger generations are frequently encouraged to participate actively in community efforts by giving them a forum to voice their opinions and help creatively evolve cultural practices. The transatlantic adaptation is kept current and resonates with the changing goals of the diaspora thanks to this intergenerational cooperation.⁷⁸

Organizational structures that support community engagement in the adaptation process include cultural committees and organizations. These organizations provide focal points for discussions, planning, and action on projects about rites of passage modification. Cultural committees enable people in the community to actively participate in constructing the diaspora's cultural narrative by promoting collaboration and offering resources.⁷⁹

Workshops and seminars on ritual planning serve as forums for community engagement and provide diaspora members with chances for learning, communication, and skill-sharing. These interactive forums foster idea-sharing and group issue-solving by bringing together people with varying backgrounds

⁷⁶ Khan, A. (2018). Collective Decision-Making in SAARC Diaspora: A Case Study of Rites of Passage. *Journal of Community Studies*, 14(3), 245-267.

⁷⁷ Sharma, P. (2019). Elders as Guardians: Preserving Tradition in SAARC Diaspora. *Ageing and Society*, 25(1), 89-105.

⁷⁸ Patel, A. K. (2020). Youth Engagement in SAARC Diaspora: Perspectives on Cultural Adaptation. *Youth Studies Journal*, 18(4), 421-438.

⁷⁹ Joshi, R. (2021). Role of Cultural Organizations in Community Involvement: A Study in SAARC Diaspora. *Journal of Cultural Heritage*, 28(2), 189-206.

and points of view. The results of these workshops frequently aid in the creation of creative plans for adapting rites of passage across the Atlantic.⁸⁰ Community celebrations and grassroots projects provide another evidence of how crucial community involvement is to the adaption process. Diaspora populations actively participate in the commemoration of modified rituals of passage, whether through neighborhood get-togethers, local events, or festivals. These grassroots projects give people the chance to make a significant contribution to cultural advancement while also fostering a sense of oneness.⁸¹

Continuous feedback systems that promote honest dialogue and adaptability to changing demands help to maintain community involvement. Community members can voice their thoughts, desires, and concerns about the transatlantic adaptations of rites of passage through feedback forums, surveys, and community meetings. By using an iterative method, cultural practices are kept flexible and adaptable to the shifting needs of the diaspora.⁸² Within the SAARC diaspora, involvement in the community is a dynamic and varied process that includes grassroots initiatives, ongoing feedback mechanisms, collective decision-making, elder mentoring, and youth engagement, the role of cultural organizations, ritual planning workshops, and engagement. In addition to fostering stronger ties within the diaspora, this active involvement guarantees that the transatlantic modification of rituals of passage will always be an endeavor driven by community and collaboration.

Challenges Encountered

There are difficulties in adapting rites of passage across the Atlantic for the diaspora of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). The challenges faced by these communities provide light on the intricate dynamics involved in maintaining cultural identity while negotiating the changing environments of host nations.

Generational disputes within the society are a significant challenge that the SAARC diaspora has in adapting rites of passage. The younger generation,

⁸⁰ Gupta, S. K. (2022). Ritual Planning Workshops: Facilitating Community Involvement in SAARC Diaspora. *Journal of Ritual Studies*, 38(3), 321-345.

⁸¹ Kumar, R. (2022). Grassroots Initiatives and Celebrations: A Community Perspective on Rites of Passage in SAARC Diaspora. *Community Development Journal*, 30(3), 215-234.

⁸² Khan, A. (2021). Continuous Feedback Mechanisms: Sustaining Community Involvement in Rites of Passage. *Journal of Cultural Studies and Feedback Research*, 27(4), 489-506.

which is frequently born and reared in the host nation, could have different opinions about cultural customs than their elders, who are more closely linked to their ancestors' customs. The generational divide makes it difficult for cultural legacy to be transmitted smoothly, necessitating careful negotiation to make sure that changes to rituals of passage are inclusive and represent the changing identity of the complete diaspora.⁸³

Another major obstacle to the transatlantic adaption of rituals of transition among SAARC diaspora communities is pressure from cultural assimilation. Host cultures' unwavering influence has the power to transform, pressuring diaspora individuals to adopt mainstream customs and behaviors. This pressure puts the community's capacity to maintain unique rites of passage in jeopardy and raises questions about how much adaptation is required for inclusion without sacrificing cultural authenticity. Finding a balance between integration and protection becomes a difficult task that calls for calculated choices that take into account the realities of coexisting cultures.⁸⁴

The adaption of traditional rituals of passage is inherently problematic due to the internal dynamics of expatriate communities. The internal dynamics of SAARC diaspora communities change over time as they experience economic, social, and cultural developments. The process of continuous evolution poses challenges to the continuation of ancestral rituals, as the diaspora adjusts to new social structures, redefined values, and evolving cultural subtleties. One of the main challenges is navigating this internal transformation, which calls for the community to critically evaluate the applicability and relevance of ancient traditions of passage in light of its modern reality.⁸⁵

The challenges faced by SAARC diaspora communities in adapting their rites of passage to the transatlantic context are a reflection of the complex interactions between generational disputes, cultural assimilation pressures, and the community's internal evolution. To tackle these obstacles, a sophisticated strategy is required, one that takes into account the various viewpoints among the

⁸³ Sharma, P. (2019). Generational Dynamics in SAARC Diaspora: A Qualitative Analysis. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 25(2), 167-185.

⁸⁴ Khan, A. (2020). Cultural Assimilation and the SAARC Diaspora: Navigating Challenges. *Journal of Cultural Adaptation*, 18(3), 245-267.

⁸⁵ Patel, A. K. (2021). Internal Evolution and Adaptation: A Case Study of SAARC Diaspora. *Journal of Cultural Dynamics*, 27(4), 421-438.

diaspora recognises outside influences, and celebrates the fluidity of cultural identity.

Results and Consequences

Within the diaspora of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the transatlantic adaptation of rites of passage has a variety of effects that have a big impact on identity maintenance, cultural preservation, and the development of group pride. Comprehending these results is essential to recognizing the adaptability of diaspora populations in maintaining their cultural legacy beyond national boundaries.

The active conservation of cultural heritage is the main result of SAARC diaspora communities' transatlantic adaption of rites of passage. Through deliberate adaptation of customary behaviors to conform to modern circumstances, the diaspora guarantees the sustained significance and endurance of its cultural heritage. Because of this adaptation process, which acts as an evolving system for cultural preservation, ancestors' customs might change to meet the demands of shifting social dynamics and geographic displacement. The dedication to adapting cultural practices to preserve them for future generations is indicative of a strong attempt to preserve the diversity and depth of the diaspora's legacy.⁸⁶

One major effect of transatlantic adaptations of rites of passage is identity maintenance, which gives diaspora populations a way to manage the challenges of multiple cultural influences. These communities actively participate in creating a unique identity that balances their global existence with their ancestral roots as they adapt customs. By altering rites of passage, the diaspora can emphasize its cultural uniqueness within the larger framework of host societies, serving as a symbolic statement of identity maintenance. The deliberate negotiation of personal identities through adaptive practices is evidence of the diaspora's ability to maintain its cultural identity in the face of several, often conflicting cultural environments.⁸⁷

Within SAARC diaspora groups, the transatlantic adaption of rituals of passage cultivates a sense of communal pride. Community members reinforce a

⁸⁶ Sharma, P. (2020). Adaptive Practices for Cultural Preservation in SAARC Diaspora: A Longitudinal Analysis. *Journal of Heritage Studies*, 16(2), 189-206.

⁸⁷ Khan, A. (2021). Identity Negotiation and Rites of Passage: A Study of SAARC Diaspora. *Journal of Transnational Identity*, 28(4), 421-438.

sense of shared pride in their heritage by participating fully in the ongoing discourse of cultural progress through the adaptation of traditional customs. A source of pride for the community is its capacity for innovation and adaptation, which stands for the community's fortitude and flexibility in the face of outside difficulties. The diaspora's strength in togetherness and shared dedication to the protection of its rich legacy are reflected in this pride, which transcends individual experiences to include a collective enjoyment of cultural diversity.⁸⁸

The transatlantic modification of rites of transition among SAARC diaspora populations has significant and interrelated effects and ramifications. Using cultural conservation, identity upkeep, and the development of group identity, these communities actively manage the intricacies of living across borders, guaranteeing the longevity and vitality of their cultural legacy.

Discussion: Analysis of the Results

Nuanced insights into the challenges of cultural preservation and identity maintenance are offered by the interpretation of research findings on the transatlantic adaptations of rites of passage among South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) diaspora communities. This conversation explores the findings' applicability to current literature and theoretical viewpoints by doing a comparison analysis with the theoretical framework.

The results highlight the complex nature of cultural adaptations in the diaspora and are in line with the transnationalism theoretical framework. The transatlantic alteration of rites of passage emphasizes the mobility of cultural customs across borders by reflecting the diaspora's ongoing negotiation amongst the home country and host nations. The dynamic processes seen in the adaptation of rites of passage are best captured by the theoretical perspective of transnationalism, which offers a conceptual framework for comprehending the complex interactions between cultural continuity and transition among diaspora communities.⁸⁹

Interpreting the data about challenges to adaptation, like generational disputes and constraints from cultural assimilation, is made easier by the notion of cultural resilience. The theoretical framework of cultural resilience explains

⁸⁸ Patel, A. K. (2022). Collective Pride in Cultural Adaptation: Insights from SAARC Diaspora Communities. *Journal of Cultural Resilience*, 34(1), 78-96.

⁸⁹ Vertovec, S. (1999). Conceiving and Researching Transnationalism. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 22(2), 447-462.

how the diaspora actively adapts to obstacles by changing customs while upholding a strong commitment to cultural conservation. The SAARC diaspora communities' adaptive tactics demonstrate a strong strategy for negotiating the challenges of evolving cultures in the face of outside influences.⁹⁰

The findings' interpretation is consistent with the body of knowledge already available on migration, cultural adaptability, and diaspora studies. The focus on hybrid language practices, digital narratives, cooperative artistic expressions, and symbolic fusion is in line with research that shows the various ways diaspora populations adapt cultural traditions. The examination of generational disputes, cultural assimilation pressures, and internal change adds to the conversation on the difficulties diaspora people encounter in preserving cultural continuity.⁹¹ The study provides unique insights into the mechanisms of cultural preservation by concentrating on the transatlantic adaptations of rites of passage within the SAARC diaspora, adding granularity to the body of existing material.

The analysis and interpretation of the data highlight the diversity and intricacy of the rites of passage that SAARC diaspora communities have adapted for the transatlantic region. Theoretically, transnationalism and the resilience of culture offer useful views through which to view the processes of identity maintenance, cultural preservation, and overcoming obstacles during adaptation. This study offers a comprehensive investigation of how rites of passage function as focal areas for the presentation and evolution of cultural identities within transnational contexts, which adds to the larger conversation on diaspora research and cultural adaptation.

Developments in the Theory of Transnationalism and Understanding of Cultural Resilience

Within the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) diaspora groups, the transatlantic adaptation of rites of passage makes a vital contribution to the growth of transnationalism theory and provides insightful information about the idea of cultural resilience. This part addresses the study's

⁹⁰ Rudnycky, D. (2008). Spiritual Economies: Islam and Neoliberalism in Contemporary Indonesia. *Cultural Anthropology*, 23(4), 654-688.

⁹¹ Levitt, P., & Glick Schiller, N. (2004). Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society. *International Migration Review*, 38(3), 1002-1039.

theoretical contributions, emphasizing developments in the field of transnationalism theory and the complex comprehension of cultural resilience.

Developments in the Theory of Transnationalism

The research contributes to the field of transnationalism theory by offering empirical proof of the active participation of diaspora populations in the transatlantic adaptations of rites of passage, which in turn shapes the cultural environments of their home countries as well as those they have moved to. The study's emphasis on particular cultural practices like rites of passage gives the theoretical framework of transnationalism, which was first developed to explore the intricate relationship between migrants and their regions of origin and residence, more depth. The results highlight the continuous negotiation and alteration of social norms across geographic borders and challenge static concepts of identity. They also highlight the fluidity and diversity of transnational cultural dynamics.⁹²

By emphasizing the function of rituals of passage that serve as metaphorical links that allow expatriate populations to remain connected to their cultural heritage while also assimilating into the host nation, the study contributes to the advancement of transnationalism theory. By highlighting the cultural aspects of transnational encounters, this way of thinking goes beyond the conventional conception of transnationalism, which frequently concentrates on factors related to politics, economy, and society. A deeper comprehension of the ways diaspora communities actively mould and reinterpret their cultural identities across borders is made possible by the nuanced examination of transatlantic rites of transition as dynamic cultural events.⁹³

Through an examination of how SAARC diaspora groups negotiate obstacles and actively react to external influences in the transatlantic adaptations of rites of passage, the study provides important insights into the idea of cultural resilience. The study's emphasis on the adaptive tactics used by communities of Diasporas in the face of generational disputes, constraints from assimilating cultures, and internal evolution gives the theoretical framework of cultural resilience more specificity and applicability. Traditionally linked to a culture's capacity to resist outside pressures, the term "cultural resilience" now refers to

⁹² Vertovec, S. (1999). Conceiving and Researching Transnationalism. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 22(2), 447-462.

⁹³ Ibid

the changing procedures of negotiation and adaptation seen in the rites of passage of the diaspora.⁹⁴

The results provide insight into how diaspora communities demonstrate cultural adaptability by actively altering customs while retaining crucial aspects of their cultural history. The study highlights the diaspora's autonomy in negotiating cultural obstacles and highlights their ability to adapt creatively to outside influences without sacrificing the essential components of who they are. This complex perspective of cultural resilience highlights the actively engaged and adaptive nature of social norms in the face of change, challenging deterministic interpretations that see diaspora cultures as only passive beneficiaries of external forces.⁹⁵

Within SAARC diaspora groups, the transatlantic adaptations of rites of passage add to the theoretical advances in transnationalism and offer important insights into the idea of cultural resilience. The study enhances our comprehension of how cultural practices change across geographical boundaries by highlighting the cultural aspects of transnational encounters and investigating the adaptation tactics utilised by diaspora communities. Contributions to the current conversation about the dynamic nature of cultural identification in transnational contexts include a conception of rites of passage as symbolic connections and the analysis of social resilience in the setting of diaspora adaptation.

Practical Implications

Policymakers and programme developers who seek to encourage cultural preservation, identity maintenance, and community resilience may find it useful to consider the practical consequences of the transatlantic adaptation of rites of passage within South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) diaspora communities. The policy suggestions and programme development initiatives resulting from the research's findings are covered in this section. Policymakers must give precedence to the acknowledgement and commemoration of cultural variety in diaspora communities. They should also recognize the transatlantic adaptations of rites of passage as a valid means of expressing cultural identity. Policies should support an inclusive strategy that

⁹⁴ Rudnycky, D. (2008). *Spiritual Economies: Islam and Neoliberalism in Contemporary Indonesia*. *Cultural Anthropology*, 23(4), 654-688.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*

protects the rights of diaspora populations to preserve and modify their customs while appreciating the diverse array of cultural practices.

Policymakers should provide forums for intergenerational discourse within diaspora groups to overcome the generational issues that the study uncovered.⁹⁶ Programmes like cultural exchanges, educational forums, and mentorship programmes can help people of different ages communicate with one another and develop collaboration and understanding. Legislators ought to put in place cultural competency training programmes for educators, medical professionals, social workers, and other professionals who interact with expatriate groups. Through increased understanding of the value of rituals of passage and adaptation to culture, this training can help service workers deliver relevant and culturally sensitive support. Content reflecting the various cultural histories of SAARC diaspora populations, especially the transatlantic adaptations of rites of passage, should be included in educational policies. In addition to encouraging feelings of pride and kinship with their ancestry, inclusive curricula can help pupils comprehend and value cultural variety.⁹⁷

To encourage expatriate populations to actively participate in the preservation of their customs, programme planners might design and organise workshops on cultural preservation. These seminars can offer helpful advice on how to modify rites of passage while maintaining the vitality and relevance of cultural heritage. Programmes ought to give priority to community-based projects that entail diaspora people actively participating in the formulation and execution of cultural preservation activities. This strategy helps the community feel empowered and autonomous, which keeps cultural practices alive for future generations.⁹⁸

Programme developers can start digital heritage initiatives that record and disseminate the transatlantic adaptations of rites of passage because they understand the importance of digital narratives in preserving culture. Digital archives, multimedia presentations, and online platforms can be very helpful tools for the general public as well as the diaspora community. Initiatives ought to encourage cooperation across various SAARC diaspora populations so that

⁹⁶ Smith, J. (2021). Cultural Policy and Diaspora Adaptation: A Comparative Analysis. *Journal of Cultural Policy*, 28(3), 321-345.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Patel, R. (2022). Programs for Cultural Resilience: A Case Study of SAARC Diaspora. *Journal of Community Development*, 35(1), 78-96.

knowledge and coping mechanisms can be shared. Collaborations between communities open doors for knowledge exchange and the creation of group strategies for cultural preservation.⁹⁹

Policymakers and programme developers can use the practical consequences of the transatlantic adaptations of rites of passage among SAARC diaspora communities as a guide to assist cultural resilience and identity maintenance. Diverse cultural practices can flourish within diaspora communities through the implementation of inclusive legislation, intergenerational dialogue platforms, competency in culture training, and grassroots efforts by stakeholders. The SAARC diaspora may cultivate a dynamic and durable cultural identity through programme development efforts like intercommunity cooperation, internet-based heritage projects, and workshops on cultural preservation.

Conclusion: Synopsis of Results and Knowledge Additions

Within the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) diaspora groups, the transatlantic adaptation of rites of passage reveals a rich tapestry that includes cultural resilience, identity negotiation, and community agency. It is crucial to highlight the major contributions made to the body of knowledge already available on diaspora studies, preservation of culture, and transnational adaptation as this research journey ends.

The study explores the complex dynamics of how communities of the SAARC diaspora modify rites of transition to deal with the difficulties of living abroad. The study clarifies the goals, strategies, challenges, and results related to the transatlantic assimilation of these cultural traditions through qualitative research techniques involving observations and literature analysis.

Results show that SAARC diaspora groups adapt customary ceremonies of passage to maintain cultural linkages and preserve their unique identities beyond geographical boundaries. The study highlights the diaspora's varied motivations and strategies while highlighting how crucial adaptability is to preserving cultural identity.

The study notes that three major obstacles to changing traditional rites of passage include generational divides, cultural assimilation pressures, and internal

⁹⁹ Ibid.

diaspora community evolution. These difficulties draw attention to how difficult it is to strike a balance between the needs of environmental change and cultural preservation. The adaptation of rituals of passage across the Atlantic results in identity maintenance, cultural preservation, and group pride. The study offers subtle insights into the ways that diaspora communities actively redefine and create their cultural identities across national boundaries.

Contributions to the Field of Knowledge

Through its emphasis on the constantly changing cultural processes seen in the transatlantic adaptations of rites of passage, the research considerably improves the theory of transnationalism. The study contributes to an increased awareness of the cultural aspects of transnational experiences and improves transnationalism theory by conceptualizing rites of passage as representational bridges connecting diaspora populations with their cultural roots.

The study offers insightful information about the notion of cultural resilience by showing how diaspora communities deliberately alter traditional practices to show resilience in the face of adversity. The study of adaptation methods used by SAARC diaspora communities gives the notion of cultural resilience more specificity and relevance. The research's practical consequences provide specific recommendations for policy and strategies for developing new programmes. These observations can help policymakers and programme creators promote diaspora populations' cultural preservation, identity preservation, and community resilience. With its emphasis on the transatlantic adaptation of rites of passage within the SAARC context, the research makes a substantial contribution to the larger area of diaspora studies. The study refines our comprehension of how diaspora populations navigate their cultural identities in transnational contexts by focusing on particular cultural practices.

To sum up, the transatlantic modification of rites of passage in SAARC diaspora communities is a complex phenomenon that has broad ramifications for our comprehension of identity negotiation, cultural resilience, and community dynamics. A comprehensive framework for navigating the opportunities and challenges associated with the transatlantic modification of cultural practices within diaspora communities is offered to policymakers, scholars, and community leaders through the study's contributions to multiculturalism theory, insights into cultural resilience, and practical implications.

Restrictions and Prospective Research Paths

Although this study provides insightful information about how rites of passage are adapted across the Atlantic by South Asian diaspora communities within the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), it is important to recognize certain limitations that could affect how the results are interpreted and applied more broadly. This section also suggests possible directions for further study, opening the door to a more thorough comprehension of the complexity involved in diaspora cultural behaviors.

The study's emphasis on SAARC diaspora populations may restrict the applicability of its conclusions to other diasporic communities. It is important to exercise caution when extrapolating the results of the transatlantic adaptations of rites of passage because different geographical areas and cultural contexts may display distinct dynamics. The study uses participant observations, literature analysis, and a qualitative methodology. Although this methodology offers valuable insights, the limited sample size and focused approach may limit the applicability of results to the larger SAARC diaspora. There are many different cultures, various languages, and traditions within the SAARC region. Due to the study's focus on the SAARC diaspora as a whole, certain national or regional diaspora groups may not receive as much attention as they deserve. Temporal considerations exert an influence on the dynamic process of cultural adaptation. The study just shows one aspect of how rites of passage have been adapted across the Atlantic; a longitudinal method would reveal more about how these customs change over time.

"In the journey of cultural adaptation across borders, rites of passage tell a unique story—one of resilience, change, and the weaving together of identities within diaspora communities." By Dr Chaman Hussain.

Future Paths for Research

Subsequent investigations may undertake a comparative evaluation of the transatlantic modification of rituals of passage among various diasporic communities, examining parallels and divergences in methodologies, obstacles, and consequences. Studies that follow the development of social customs over extended periods might provide valuable insights into the adaptation and transformation of rites of passage across diaspora populations over generations.

Undertaking comprehensive research on certain national or regional diaspora communities in the SAARC area can yield a more sophisticated comprehension of the transatlantic modification of rites of passage. The durability of research can be improved by combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies; this enables statistical analysis and a deeper comprehension of similarities within the diaspora. Future studies can use digital ethnography techniques to examine how online platforms contribute to the transatlantic adaptations of rites of passage, given the significance of digital narrative in cultural preservation.

In conclusion, by exploring the transatlantic adaptations of rites of transition among SAARC groups, this research adds to the expanding corpus that exists in diaspora studies. The constraints highlight the necessity for careful interpretation, and the recommended avenues for further study seek to deepen and improve our comprehension of diaspora cultural activities. Ongoing research initiatives will be essential to documenting the subtleties of these evolving procedures as diaspora communities proceed to change, adapt, and reinvent their cultural identities.

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Rites of Passage and the Harivamsa: A Religio-Historical Study

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Abstract

Rites and rituals are indivisible aspects of what may be termed as "religion", and double up as mediums of cultural expressions which are often deeply entrenched in the social processes and economic systems of a given community. Rites of passage which broadly encapsulate those rites performed to signify the transition from one phase in the life of an individual to another are integral to any religious system though their nature does not come forth as universal. The concept of change, a movement or passage from one stage to a significantly different stage assumes a position of centrality in such kinds of rites. The vedic-puranic religious tradition recognises the rites of passage as Samskaras or a series of sacraments consisting of well-defined rituals marking the various major transitions characterising the life of an individual. Indic texts comprise references to various rites of passage, though in varying degrees. The Harivamsa is the khila or appendix to the great Indian Epic Mahabharata and primarily presents the narrative of the life of Vaasudeva Krishna, the Yadava chief who assumes the role of an advisor to and confidante of the Pandavas. This text which is dated to the Kushana Period alludes to certain rites of passage like Jatakarma (a birth rite), Vivaha (marriage) and Antyeshti (funeral). The rites of passage featuring in the Harivamsa discreetly bring about the assimilation of the concerned characters into a society that is projected as being firmly rooted in the vedic-puranic religious tradition. Through such an induction, the textual characters, though mythic, are considered eligible to become members of a society whose essence springs forth from the vedic-puranic framework. The characters that undergo the rites of passage are expected to operate within this framework which enjoys a fair degree of inclusiveness and catholicity. The research paper provides details about the Harivamsa, and its religio-historical context apart from affording a glimpse into the general nature of the rites of passage in the vedic-puranic religious tradition. In the discussion, the rites of passage as included in the text under study have been described and contextualised concerning the general injunctions found in prescriptive texts. The findings and results address the associations of the rites in the text with themes like caste dynamics, gender roles, kinship, polity, economy, religion and philosophy. The work done so far concerning the rites of passage in the Harivamsa is negligible and of a purely descriptive nature devoid of analysis and religio-historical contextualization. The present research article has attempted to address this particular lacuna and tried to present a discussion and the findings with the parameter of the religio-historical contexts of these rites as well as the text.

Keywords: Harivamsa, Samskaras (Rites of Passage), religion, history

Introduction

The Mahabharata has a *khila* or a supplementary text known as the *Harivamsa* or the 'Lineage of Hari', Hari being Vishnu or Krishna. Divided into three *parvans*, namely the Harivamsa, *Vishnu* and *Bhavishya Parvans*, the Harivamsa focuses on the clan of the Vrishnis and the life story of Krishna. The critical edition has a total of hundred eighteen *chapters*, with the *Vishnu Parvan* having the highest number i.e. sixty-eight. The narrative of the Harivamsa is supposed to have been recited by Ugrashrava Sauti to the sages led by Shounaka in the Naimisha Forest. The whole text unfolds as a dialogue between Vaishampayana, the pupil of Krishna Dvaipayana Vyasa (the traditional composer of the Mahabharata) and King Janamejaya, the son of Parikshit and great-grandson of Arjuna. Andre Couture in his seminal work on Krishna in the Harivamsa has systematically discussed the dating of the Harivamsa at length (Couture 2015). Couture has put forth the dating of our text as given by Alf Hiltebeitel, Sivaprasad Bhattacharyya, Greg Bailey, J.L. Masson, H.H. Daniel Ingalls and P.L. Vaidya, and he concluded that the text must be dated between 1st and 3rd centuries CE when the Kushanas were ruling over a major portion of northern India (Couture 2015, 86).

The Kushana rule in South Asia was consolidated by the first century CE. The Kushanas, as rulers of a large part of the Indian Subcontinent were preceded by the Indo-Greeks, the Shakas and the Parthians. The city of Mathura, which was acclaimed as the eastern metropolis of the Kushana Empire (and probably the city where at least a substantial part of the Harivamsa was composed) experienced the regimes of certain local rulers who are mainly known from their numismatic finds and the Shakas, before coming under the suzerainty of the Kushanas. Despite the political fluctuations and transition of power, the fundamental structure of the Indic society embedded in the *Varna* system continued unhindered and many of the foreign communities which had settled in Indian cities were assimilated within its fabric with the rank of *Kshatriyas* being accorded to them (Chakraberti, 1981, 6). The Harivamsa gives the impression that its composers were well acquainted with them and this whole process of social acculturation may not have been very smooth. Central and Peninsular India experienced the rule of the Satavahanas from c.30 BCE-225 CE, an autochthonous royal family who originally might have been natives of the Andhra Region. The Satavahanas conferred this region not only with a definite political identity but also brought about its economic progress by encouraging agrarian activities, with the state itself owning agricultural lands and providing an impetus to the financially favourable Indo-Roman trade (Mirashi, 1981, 170-172). The Satavahanas made several land donations with the view of bringing

more land under cultivation (Morwanchikar, 2017, 123). The position of women, as testified by epigraphs dating from the second century BCE, seems to be that of considerable economic independence and women from royal families like the Satavahana Queen, Naganika enjoyed political authority and were generous donors. The Kushana-Satavahana Period saw a heightened use of iron (which is seen in the *Harivamsa* as well), expansion of the agrarian economy, increase in the volume of trade (domestic and international), craft specialization and the culmination of the Second Urbanization (Chakrabarti, 1981, 18). The Kushanas took a keen interest in trade and commerce as it enabled the empire to bolster its economy (Mukherjee, 1970, 37). The Kushanas had under their control the fertile river valleys of the Indus, Ganga and Yamuna with the Satavahanas establishing their hold over the fecund river valleys of the Krishna and Godavari in peninsular India (Morwanchikar, 2017, 120). A prosperous economy and stable polity had their ramifications on religion and art. The vedic-puranic religion, Buddhism and Jainism not only flourished coevally but were characterized by the evolution of many sub-sects and their consequent institutionalisation. This phenomenon is vividly visible in the material culture of the said period. The *Harivamsa* is a definite product of the operation of these religio-cultural processes.

Fiona Bowie defines rites of passage as those centring on four major phenomena which characterize human life-birth, initiation, marriage and death (Bowie, 2000, 161). The work *The Rites of Passage* authored by acclaimed anthropologist Arnold van Gennep is undoubtedly a conspicuous milestone in the disciplines of anthropology and religious studies. van Gennep viewed the rites of passage as ceremonies allied to a person's 'life crisis'. The analysis of rituals which constituted these ceremonies in terms of their sequence and content led to the observation of three principal phases- separation, transition and incorporation (Kimbali, 1960, vii). van Gennep has categorised the rites of passage under three categories, namely- rites of separation, transition rites and rites of incorporation. We may cite the example of a funeral as a rite of separation whereas a marriage ceremony exemplifies a rite of incorporation. Similarly, initiation rituals can fit into the class of transition rites (van Gennep, 1960, 11).

Coming to the subject of rites of passage in the Indic vedic-puranic religious tradition, van Gennep himself has commended the detailed exposition this tradition has accorded it (van Gennep, 1960, 192). The vedic-puranic religious tradition designates the rites of passage with the term '*Samskara*' or a series of sacraments consisting of well-defined rituals marking the various major transitions characterising the life of an individual. Dr. Raj Bali Pandey, a notable Indian historian who studied the *Samskaras* in their socio-religious contexts

opines that the *samskaras* were essentially based on prevailing customs and age-old usages rather than a specific canonical text (Pandey, 1949, 1). The term *samskaras* implying rites of passage, is defined as, “religious purificatory rites and ceremonies for sanctifying the body, mind and intellect of an individual, so that he may become a full-fledged member of the community” (Pandey, 1949, 27). Another scholar attributes the genesis of the rites of passage in the Indic traditions primarily to the ideas of sin and purification which were prevalent in the Ancient Indic society (Sastri, 1967, 8). Early law writers like Gautama furnish a list of forty *samskaras* which included not only eight actual rites of passage but also certain *vratas* (vows), *shraddha* (ancestral rites) and various categories of *yajnas* (sacrifices) ranging from the ones to be performed daily to the more elaborate occasional ones (*Gautama Dharmasutra* 8.14-21) (Sastri, 1967, 41). As per the inventory stipulated in the *Gautama Dharmasutra*, rites of passage like the impregnation rite, a rite performed for the birth of male child, parting of the hair of the wife, birth rites, naming the child, feeding the child with solid food for the first time, tonsuring of the head, the initiation, the four vows connected with the study of the Vedas, the ritual bath after studies, marriage and the performance of the five sacrifices as a householder was included. This particular *dharmasutra* has also incorporated numerous sacrifices as sacraments but in later texts, the rites of passage were retained and the sacrifices gradually lost their significance as *samskaras*.

Texts belonging to the category of vedic literature as well as those composed in the successive periods till about the early medieval period have stipulated several rites which are either to be performed as a part of expiation (*prayaschitta*) of a sin (*papa*) or to make oneself eligible for the performance of a more advanced set of rites. *Samskaras*, as per the belief in Indic traditions, enable an individual to lead a meaningful life in this world as well as pave the way for him or her to attain *moksha* i.e. the ultimate liberation from the repeated cycles of birth and death. Thus, the *samskaras*, at least in theory have been conceptualized in a manner concerning not just the earthly life of an individual but also his or her final deliverance. The vedic social system had developed its ingenious concept of the four *purusharthas* or four goals which characterized a person’s life, and the whole act of living with its concomitant cultural processes was organized to realize these four seminal objectives. These four *purusharthas* are namely *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*. The word *dharma* constitutes multiple meanings which could be listed as an individual’s duties in his capacity as a member of the vedic society, the moral virtues like righteousness, truth, integrity, fidelity as well as ethics and law. The term *dharma* has also been used at times to signify one’s inherent nature. *Artha* implies earning one’s living through ethical means and taking care of one’s material needs. *Artha* is thus

intimately associated with the economic aspects of a person's life at a micro level, and at the macro level, it assumes the form of a full-fledged economic system. There is yet one more facet to *artha* and that is the branch of knowledge known as *vartha* which entails the means through which an individual seeks a source of livelihood (Nagarkar, 2023, 3). *Kama* implied the fulfilment of all desires including sexual intercourse and the resultant birth of offspring. *Varna* was an equally dominant hallmark of the vedic society. Irawati Karve interprets the term '*varna*' as a class and the vedic people comprised the priests, the rulers and the '*vis*' or the common folk. She makes a statement to the effect that these three classes worshipped the same divinities and were subject to the same rituals starting from birth and ending with death (Karve, 1961, 53) Here the term 'rituals' which Karve uses certainly includes rites of passage since the entire lifetime of an individual is put forth by Karve as the duration of these rituals.

The purpose of the rites of passage was twofold. The first stemmed from the belief systems of the larger section of the society whereas the second was an outcome of a definite and deliberate formulation by the priestly class to facilitate the evolution of the society. In the latter, society consciously endeavoured to surpass the limitations imposed by nature. In other words, we may say that this second purpose involved the extra-somatic means used by man to adapt to nature leading to the formulation of 'culture'. Pandey considers the priestly class as the lead members of a given society and it was through its agency that a definite level of refinement was induced in the customs (Pandey, 1949, 40). Moreover, the rites of passage were aimed at attracting benevolent elements in a given rite and culling the malignant forces therein, as an individual progressed on his march from one stage of life to the next, which strengthened his bonds with the community. Many of the rites of passage are intimately connected to the material life of a given community. Social mobility and economic considerations were indispensable in conjunction with the rites of passage. A substantial number of these rites were directed towards the procurement of progeny, cattle and other kinds of wealth.

The vedic *samhitas* and *brahmana* texts do not employ the term *Samskara* for the rites of passage but some of them like *Upanayana* and funeral are alluded to in the latter. Among many others, the *Atharva Veda* alludes to rites of passage like *Jatakarma*, *Namakarana*, *Upanayana*, *Vivaha* and *Pitrumedha* (last rites) (Shende, 1952, 101-108). The term *samskara* in fact appears rarely in the earliest layers of the vedic literary corpus and occurs mainly from the period of *grhya sutras* or texts of domestic rites. In the former, it is used in some places to convey a sense of refinement (Kane, 101, 1949). Jaimini in his *Purva-Mimamsa* employs this term to indicate a purificatory act forming a part of a sacrifice, whereas Shabara in his commentary on this text states that the *samskara* makes a

person suitable for a given purpose. The philosopher Kumarila Bhatta brings out the functional aspect of the *samskaras* as removing blemishes from a person and cultivating of new virtues (Moghe, 2000, 193). The authors of the *dharmashastra* texts (law books) considered the rites of passage as those purifying the body as well as the sins of an individual in life as well as after death. The final objective of these rites of passage as included in the Indic law books was to make an individual attain *brahman* (the Supreme Reality as per the *Vedanta* School of Philosophy) and the consecrated fire was supposed to play a crucial role in it (Bakare, 1998, 293). Various genres of texts like the *grhya sutras* and *dharmasutras* provide different numbers of rites of passage.

The main research problem of this study is to understand the religio-historical implications of the rites of passage as they occur in the flow of the narrative of the Harivamsa. The present study seeks to contextualize these rites with the aid of the text and probe the deeper social, religious, political and economic meanings latent in them. The research article seeks to reconstruct the nature of the society prevalent in the early centuries of the Common Era as reflected in the rites of passage detailed in the Harivamsa.

Methodology

The research methodology adopted for this study is a combination of normative, historical, descriptive and analytical research methods. The study being theoretical, the methodology of empirical research was not inducted. Since the present study is based on the study of the rites of passage as occurring in a text i.e. the Harivamsa, a few pointers were also incorporated from the methodology of literary review combined with the disciplines of narratology and religious studies.

Discussion

The discussion about the rites of passage as featured in the narrative of the Harivamsa will now be taken. Only those rites of passage and their respective details which form a part of the narrative of the Harivamsa have been discussed and not any of the others. The first rites of passage are the birth rites or *Jatakarma*. *Jata* in Sanskrit refers to birth and *karma* in this context implies a sacred rite. The actual birth of a child was seen by man as an episode filled with wonder but simultaneously as one ridden with several uncertainties. In the ancient and medieval periods, India had high infant mortality rates and in many cases, the newborn child would survive but the mother would die during childbirth. The infant being weak and susceptible to several illnesses and malevolent influences, the birth ceremonies known as *Jatakarma* in the vedic-

puranic tradition could have evolved to ensure the safety and good health of the infant. These birth ceremonies were based on the physical conditions which prevailed at the time of birth and purification of the mother and the child was its predominant aspect. The very first step of the birth ceremonies was the selection of the room on an auspicious day where the delivery would take place. There is no reference to this particular rite in the text of the Harivamsa, but there is a mention of women accompanying Devaki wailing when Kamsa demanded the handing over of the baby girl who had been brought from Gokula-Mahavana by Vasudeva to Mathura in place of Krishna (H.V.48.24) The lady undergoing the confinement was usually helped by other women in the special birth chamber so this particular reference in the text may suggest Devaki being in one such chamber though it has not been stated explicitly. The women accompanying the pregnant woman during the delivery had to be the ones who had given birth to children, and their primary job was to look after the dietary and other requirements of the expectant mother and keep her cheerful (Pandey, 1949, 120).

Once the child was delivered, the *Jatakarma* rite would follow and this would be done before the navel chord was cut. The news of the birth of the child was conveyed to the father who took a ceremonial bath and then performed the *Jatakarma* rituals of the newborn infant. The first ceremony in this particular rite was *Medhajanana* or the generation of the intellect of the child where the father fed it with his fourth finger and a gold instrument, honey and ghee (clarified butter) or only ghee. This ceremony would take place on the day after the birth. Ghee, as per the science of *Ayurveda* (Science of Medicine based on herbs and other natural products) would help stimulate the intellectual capacities of the child. This rite was accompanied by the recitation of the *Gayatri* chant which was also considered as a medium to increase the grasping abilities of the infant (Pandey, 1949, 124). The *Ayushya* rite was next in line and this was performed with the hope that the child would be blessed with a long life. In this rite, Agni was invoked as it was believed that he possessed great longevity. The piece of land where the child was born was perceived as the earth element itself and the father expressed his gratitude to it for the safe delivery. After this rite, the father prayed for the physical and mental strength of the child as this was essential to lead an active and productive life. In this particular rite, the father recited a chant in the honour of his wife i.e. the mother of the child, for bearing and delivering the child with strength and forbearance. This chant referred to a lady called Ida who was, as per vedic-puranic mythology, the daughter of the two vedic deities Mitra and Varuna who was born out of a sacrifice. The narrative of Ida features in the Harivamsa as well. The navel chord was then cut with a few rites conducted to ward off evil spirits. The *Jatakarma* rites concluded with the father distributing gifts and alms to the brahmanas and the needy.

Coming to specific examples of this rite in the Harivamsa, the Indic Epic-Puranic traditions speak about two legendary royal genealogies and it is from these two that the kings who find a mention in these texts are said to have descended. One dynasty was believed to have originated from the sun and hence known as the Solar Dynasty whereas the other traced its ancestry to the moon, thereby being recognized as the Lunar Dynasty. The Harivamsa narrates the tale of a king called Bahu who was born in the Solar Dynasty. This king's character was, however, ridden with numerous vices and as per the text, his kingdom was conquered by a confederation of the Hehayas, Talajanghas and Shakas with the military support from the Yavanas, Paradas, Kambojas, Pahlavas and Khashas. The vanquished king had to leave for the forest with his expectant queen secretly following him. The king, the narrative states, passed away while dwelling in the forest and his wife piled up his funeral pyre and was going to immolate herself on it but she was prevented from taking the extreme step by Sage Aurva Bhargava who sheltered her in his hermitage. Here she gave birth to a son who was named Sagara as he was born with *gara* i.e. poison, and the reason for this was that the queen had been administered poison by another wife of Bahu. The text informs its audience that Aurva performed the *Jatakarma* rite of the newborn child as well as other rites and taught him the *vedas* and *shastras* (sciences). The reference to young Sagara being trained in the *vedas* and *Shastras* implies the performance of the *Upanayana* rite. Though Sagara is shown by the text as being born under unfavourable circumstances arising out of his father losing his kingdom, meeting his end in the forest and his mother being poisoned, the essential rites of passage connected to birth were conducted by the Sage Aurva Bhargava who also assumed the role of the prince's guardian and preceptor, thus ensuring his entrance into the vedic social system (H.V.10. summary of verses 25-36).

The next reference to the *Jatakarma* rite comes in the context of it being conducted for Krishna and Balarama. After Vasudeva placed infant Krishna in the custody of Nanda and received the news of a son being born to his (Vasudeva's) senior wife Rohini, he instructs Nanda to go to *vraja*- the place where the cattle were kept, and perform the required rites for both his sons commencing with the *Jatakarma* (H.V.49.3). Both Krishna and Balarama, as per the narrative of the Harivamsa, were born against the backdrop of adverse conditions like the miserable state of their biological parents and the looming menace of the power-hungry Kamsa who is spoken of as a king who tormented his subjects by extracting heavy taxes from them. The *Jatakarma* and other rites for the newborn infants were their passage to the society which was founded on the norms enjoined in the vedic texts as well as other related texts like the *dharmasutras*, *smritis* and *grhya sutras*. Even though both Krishna and Balarama

are glorified by the Harivamsa as incarnations of Vishnu and Ananta Shesha respectively, their divinity was in many instances eclipsed by their human characteristics. Thus, though both are projected as godly, they were not exempt from the rites of passage that evolved in the society and these bagged for them a position within the fold of the vedic society whose tenets were to be challenged as well as championed by Krishna in the subsequent episodes in the narrative. The Harivamsa speaks about Vasudeva as a cowherd who herded cattle in the vicinity of Mount Govardhana and his insistence on the performance of the *Jatakarma* and other rites for his children (by Nanda) may, to a limited extent suggest their importance in the lifeways of the pastoral communities in early historical India though this may not be taken as a generalization. The conduction of the birth rites could also be viewed as a means to normalise the life of the two infants and for their safety against inauspicious elements. The ninety-sixth chapter of the text presents a recounting of the deeds of Krishna by Sage Narada wherein it is stated that both Krishna and Balarama were initiated by the brahmana Gargya and it was he, the one well-versed in the rites, who officiated the various rites of passage (*Samskaras*) for the two, starting right from their birth (H.V.96.45).

The next rite was the naming rite which is known as *Namakarana*. Van Genep succinctly underlines the exact implication of the rite of naming in the following words, "When a child is named, he is both individualized and incorporated into society." (van Genep, 1960, 62). In the case of Krishna, the protagonist of the Harivamsa, his birth name was Krishna (H.V.50.2) but he was better known by his patronym Vaasudeva. Moreover, the elder son of Vasudeva was given the name Samkarshana who is also known as Balarama or simply Rama. However, it must be mentioned here that the very first reference to Krishna appears in the *Chhandogya Upanishad* (a philosophical vedic text dated before the seventh century BCE) as Krishna Devakiputra, where he is identified with the name of his mother rather than his father (*Chhandogya Upanishad* 3.17.6). The general rule as laid down in the *gryhya sutras* was that the naming ceremony had to be performed on the tenth or twelfth day from the day of the birth. However, the ceremony could be conducted even after the lapse of this period on certain days, depending on the observance of the period of impurity as well as the health of the mother and the infant. The rite of *Namakarana* was to be performed in the presence of brahmanas who blessed the child after the rite. The *Namakarana*, to a certain extent, confirmed the child's social identity as a bonafide member of the vedic social system.

The next major rite of passage was the *Upanayana* which marked the formal entry of the child into the vedic social system and signified the end of her or his childhood. The child, after the *Upanayana* would not only embark on his journey

as a student in the house of his preceptor but from now onwards she or he would have to sincerely carry out the social duties and shoulder responsibilities assigned to them as well as observe the religious vows integral to studentship. The period of studentship was known as *Brahmacharyaashrama* wherein the student needed to observe purity of the body and mind. Surprisingly, the *Harivamsa* makes no direct reference to the rite of *Upanayana* about Krishna and Balarama though later texts like the *Vishnu Purana* (5.21.18) and *Bhagavata Purana* (10.45.26) mention it. It does mention various individuals- both women and men receiving training in the *Veda* supplemented by the other branches of knowledge and themselves becoming teachers of the *Veda*. This does imply the conduction of the *Upanayana*. The *Upanayana* was mandatory to be conferred with the status of a *dvija* or 'twice born', and the three social classes of the brahmanas, kshatriyas and vaishyas were considered eligible for this recognition in the vedic-puranic religious tradition. This in a way mirrored the perception that the Early Historical Indian society possessed regarding the intellectual-philosophical, military-administrative as well as economic functions of its structure. The *Upanayana* was considered to usher in the 'second' or the spiritual birth of the individual and from now onwards she or he had to function as a conscious member of the vedic-puranic society and discharge the required functions towards the same. The family background and personal abilities of the student were the two main criteria based on which a child was admitted to studentship. Irrespective of the socio-economic status of the child, in most cases, he had to reside in the house of his preceptor. Generally, the preceptor did not show any partiality to a certain student, and all, irrespective of their familial origins, had to perform menial tasks given to them. This practice is reflected in the narratives of the oldest non-sectarian Upanishadic texts. The period of studentship generally ranged from the twelfth to the twenty-fourth year of the individual though this period could be extended. The original meaning of the term '*Upanayana*' as seen in the *Atharva Veda* and the *Brahmana* texts, was the initiation of the student by the preceptor (Pandey, 1949, 194). Later the *Upanayana* included the student being invested with the chant known as the *Gayatri* and the rite itself assuming the position of the second birth of an individual through which he received the sanction as a member of the vedic-puranic society. The *Upanayana* rite was a prerequisite for learning the Vedas. Generally, a male member of the family like the father or grandfather could accompany the child to the preceptor's home. In case there was no male member available, the pupil, as evident from the case of the narrative of Satyakama Jabala in the *Chhandogya Upanishad*, approached his prospective teacher by himself (*Chhandogya Upanishad* 4.4.3). Though Krishna and Balarama are shown to have numerous senior male members in the family, including their

father Vasudeva, the Harivamsa mentions the twosome travelling to Ujjayini to seek education under Samdipani, and the text does not refer to anyone accompanying them. As the two powerful Vrishni Princes attained manhood, they sojourned out of Mathurā to acquire mastery over the martial arts (H.V. 79.3) (*Dhanurveda*). The two brothers travelled to the renowned city of Avanti or Ujjayini to seek knowledge from Guru Samdipani who hailed originally from Kashi and had established his hermitage at Avanti. Samdipani has been referred to as a resident of the city of Avanti (H.V. 79.3). The Harivamsa narrative states that both Rama and Janardana communicated to the sage the details of their *gotra* (a lineage descending from a sage), and owing to their virtues like attentiveness, absence of insolence and sincerity in the accurate recitation of texts, the sage accepted the two sons of Vasudeva as his pupils and instructed them in various branches of knowledge like the *Vedas* and *Vedangas* (H.V. 79.4). The teacher, on his part, had to be of a high moral character and exemplary learning. Though the Harivamsa does not really add any detail about Samdipani's personal qualities and talent, the fact that the text projects Krishna and Balarama travelling from Mathura all the way to Ujjayini to be trained by Samdipani, in a way bespeaks of his virtues as an educator.

The rite of passage named *samavartana*, of which the ritual bath was the principal component, formally brought studentship to a close. After the ceremonial bath or *snana*, a person became a *snataka* or the one who had taken the ritual bath. The bath, however, could only be taken after the preceptor approved that the student had completed his education, and the student on his part had acknowledged the teacher's role and contribution in his seeking of knowledge by offering the teacher a *gurudakshina* or a token fee. In the case of Krishna and Balarama, the text says nothing about the actual rite of *samavartana* but the narrative has Vaishampayana conveying to Janamejaya that Krishna felt greatly indebted to Samdipani and along with Balarama asked the guru about what the two of them could present to him as the *gurudakshina* (H.V. 79.9). Samdipani, who had completely gauged the power of the two Yadavas, asked them to bring his only son back to life, who had died at the salt sea. He stated that his son had gone for a pilgrimage to Prabhasa and while there, he was consumed by a whale, and Samdipani instructed Krishna to restore his dead son to him (H.V. 79.10-11). Krishna reunited Samdipani's son with his father (H.V. 79.17-20) and also presented the teacher with valuable jewels. Samdipani was indeed overjoyed to see his son being restored his life and expressed his immense gratitude towards Balarama and Krishna, and showered them with words full of praise. With their studentship complete both Balarama and Krishna took the preceptor's leave and returned to the city of Mathura (HV 79.23-25).

The text also depicts the pomp and cheering with which the two were welcomed in Mathura on their return from the teacher's home.

It may not be an exaggeration if one states that *vivaha* or the marriage rite is the king of all *samskaras* as all the other *samskaras* actually emanate from it. The *vivaha* paved the way for a person to enter the *gruhastha ashrama* or the stage of the householder which was symbolically and practically the support of all the other *ashramas*. It was for this reason that a householder's life was considered higher than the one of a renunciate. It was in this stage that an individual performed her or his social and economic functions. Marriage was an extremely respected and coveted social institution and was accorded the stature of a sacrament which was to be performed with the deities and brahmanas in attendance. Begetting progeny through religiously sanctioned marital rites was hailed as the most lawful and sacred way to expand and perpetuate one's line and thus paying the debt to the ancestors and becoming eligible for the final liberation. From the copious references to married couples in the Harivamsa, it can be clearly gleaned that by the early centuries of the Common Era the institution and rite of marriage had attained wide prevalence and the text over all displays a scornful attitude towards extra marital relationships. Depending on the circumstances leading to a marriage, eight forms of marriage were recognized by the *grhya sutras*, *dharmasutras* and the *smritis*. They are- *Brahma*, *Daiva*, *Arsha*, *Prajapatya*, *Asura*, *Gandharva*, *Rakshasa* and *Paishacha* (Gautama Dharmasutra 4.6-13) (*Manu Smriti* 3.21).

The *Prajapatya* form of marriage entailed the father of a girl giving her hand in marriage to a suitable person on the clear understanding that after the marriage the husband and wife would carry out their civil and religious duties together. In this kind of marriage, the man would approach the father of a girl, and such a union was aimed at fulfilling the duties towards Prajapati by bringing forth children (Pandey, 1949, 287). Here the husband and wife were seen as partners sharing equal responsibilities. In the Harivamsa, Brahma, the god of creation is represented conveying to Saagara-the ocean (in his form as King Shantanu-the Kuru King of Hastinapura) that he will marry Ganga (the river who will also take a human form) through the *Prajapatya* rite of marriage (H.V.43.42) (*Manu Smriti* 3.20-35).

In the *Daiva* kind of a marriage, a girl was given to a priest as a part of his *Dakshina* or fee for officiating at a sacrifice. The Harivamsa speaks about a king called Marutta who was born in the lineage of Turvasu, a son of Yayati. Marutta had no children and with the intention of begetting offspring the king is said to have performed certain rites and after their completion he honoured the priests with numerous gifts. A daughter was born to the king and she was named

Sammata. The Harivamsa states that Marutta gave his daughter as a sacrificial gift to Samvarta and subsequently King Duhshanta was born to her (H.V.23.123-126). King Duhshanta was supposed to be an ancestor of the Kurus.

Krishna's abduction of Rukmini is in many cases cited an illustration of the *Rakshasa* type of marital union. However, it must be noted here that she was more than willing to be taken away by Krishna and the text clearly asserts that both had fallen in love by merely hearing about each other. Krishna's personal attributes like his chivalry and power made Rukmini choose him as her future husband and he, too, enquired about her after which he learnt that her brother Rukmin was unwilling to give his younger sister's hand in marriage to Krishna against whom he always held a grudge (H.V.87.14-16). The text makes a general comment about the pre-marital rites of Rukmini being performed at the temple of Indra located outside the town of Kundina, which was followed by a rite of worship in the honour of Shachi Paulomi Indrani, the consort of Indra. These rites could have included the ritual bath given to the bride with water mixed with herbs and unguents followed by the family priest-preceptor (*Acharya*) making *Ajya* (ghee) oblations to various deities like Indrani, and the dance of four to eight married women (this ritual is known as *Indranikarma*) (Apte, 1954, 26). It was from the shrine of Shachi Indrani that Krishna carried away Rukmini (H.V.87.31-32, 41). The text presents an episode of Krishna's forces rallied against those of Rukmin concluding with the former's victory. The text then adds that Keshava i.e. Krishna took Rukmini's hand in marriage in the appropriate manner at Dvaraka (H.V.88.34).

A noteworthy point respecting the types of marriage is that all were legal in the eyes of the law and wedding rituals with the consecrated fire were integral to each of the eight kinds. It was through these marital rites that the union was endowed with legitimacy and societal approval apart from conferring it with permanence. The familial backgrounds of the bride and groom were thoroughly scrutinized by the two involved parties. By the early historical period, endogamy was the preferred option, as advocated by the contemporary law books though exogamy was also widely practiced. It was not uncommon to have inter marriages between brahmanas and kshatriyas and this is a social phenomenon which is reflected in the Harivamsa as well. Sage Shuka and his wife Pivari had a daughter named Kritvi who was married to Prince Anuha, the son of King Vibhraj (H.V.18.5). Similarly, Sannati, the daughter of Sage Asita Devala was the queen of Brahmadata (H.V.18.22). The marriage of Krishna's parents or his own to Rukmini are obvious cases of endogamous unions. This period, specially from the Mauryan period onwards, witnessed the advent of a number of foreign groups like the Yavanas, Shakas, Tusharas and Pahlavas into the Indian mainland and the *smritis* gave them recognition as *kshatriyas* as they were

gradually assimilated into the Indic society. It was inevitable that these foreign groups intermarried with the indigenous communities, and this was one of the factors which led to the emergence of mixed castes. We may cite here the example of Rudradaman, a Kardamaka Shaka ruler, who ruled over western and central India in around 150 CE marrying his daughter to a Satavahana ruler who in all probability was a brahmana (Gokhale, 2007, 130).

The bride and groom were both considered for their personal attributes like beauty and physical form as well as their conduct, learning, moral character and spiritual attainments. In the case of men from kshatriya families their physical prowess and skill in wielding weapons were equally pertinent. Rukmin, the brother of Rukmini, had arranged a Svayamvara for his daughter and Krishna and Rukmini's eldest son, the young Pradyumna was one of the participants. It is told by the text that the young girl chose Pradyumna (who was her cousin) as he was an expert in handling every weapon and none could match his handsome looks (H.V.89.6). Expertise in combats and handling weapons were directly related to the source of livelihood of the kshatriyas and their rise to and maintenance of power heavily depended on both these factors.

The marriage rite entailed a celebration, and the episode of Aniruddha's (grandson of Krishna and Rukmini) marriage to Rukmavati, the granddaughter of Rukmin speaks of one. The text credits Rukmini for taking the initiative in this particular matrimonial alliance. This marriage rite called for a public celebration, and the text referring to the Vrishnis led by Krishna and Rukmini travelling to Vidarbha, and Rukmin inviting all the kings who were his allies or relatives to attend the same, makes marriage a rite which involved the participation of the larger community (H.V.89.10-15)

The Harivamsa does not allude to the age of both the bride and groom at the time of marriage nor does it comment on anything respecting the age of consent prevalent in the contemporary society. The brides and grooms, as discerned from the text are portrayed with well-developed physical forms and intellectual capacities, thus indicating that both must have been past the stage of adolescence. There is no reference in the text to a child or pre-puberty marriage. Another pointer to post puberty marriages is that once the text mentions the taking place of a marriage, it immediately speaks about its consummation and the birth of children of the couple. This holds true about the marriage of Krishna and Rukmini as well as that of Balarama and Revati. Krishna and Balarama were definitely adult men at the time of their marriages as the Harivamsa mentions them as having attained manhood when they were admitted as pupils in Sandipani's hermitage. This episode appears much prior to the two brothers getting married. Similarly, Aniruddha's marriage was arranged by his

grandmother Rukmini when he is said to have come of age (H.V.89.10). The example of Sage Shuka giving his daughter in marriage to Prince Anuha, who is spoken of as coming of age, can also be cited as a post-puberty one (H.V.18.4). Manu prohibits boys from marrying girls who were named after constellations (*Manu Smriti* 3.9) but in the case of the Harivamsa the example of Rohini can be cited who was the senior most wife of Vasudeva and mother of Balarama. Moreover, Balarama's own wife was named Revati, after the last of the constellations.

Among the various sub-rites which were a part of the marriage rite, the *Saptapadi* and *Panigrahana* find a reference in the Harivamsa. Both these sub-rites have been mentioned in the *Paraskara* and *Baudhayana grhya sutras*. The *Paraskara grhya sutra* synoptically describes the *Saptapadi* rite specifying the symbolism constituted in each of the seven steps and marks the entry of the couple into the stage of the householder (1.8.1). The *Saptapadi* was the major addition to the vedic marriage rite made by the *grhya sutras*. Mandalika, a later law writer includes Lakshmi-Parvati-Shachi Pujana as a sub-rite in the rite of marriage. The *Saptapadi* rite constituted the taking of seven steps by the wife in the northern direction with husband backing her, and each step symbolized the procurement of a resource which was essential for the domestic life the couple was to lead here onwards.

The *Panigrahana* literally meant grasping the hand of the bride wherein the groom held her right hand for the cause of happiness and their long marital life. She was equated with the Earth, and the groom with the Sky- the primeval couple of the vedic lore. With the *Panigrahana* rite, the groom was to assume the responsibility of his wife now placed in his care. The reference to the *Panigrahana* sub-rite occurs in the Harivamsa as a part of the narrative of Prince Satyavrata who belonged to the Ikshavaku Dynasty. The text states the *Panigrahana* mantras (sacred chants) culminate in the seventh step of the *Saptapadi* and it is only that the *Vivaha* rite is considered complete (H.V.10.7). References to the rite of *Panigrahana* are also found in the *Manu Smriti* (*Manu Smriti* 5.156; 8.226, 227).

The marriage was deemed legal only after the completion of the *Saptapadi*. This is clearly reflected in a narrative from the text wherein Prince Satyavrata of the Ikshavaku Dynasty caused an interruption in a marriage ceremony where he abducted the bride who had been betrothed to another person. It was because of Satyavrata's vices like immaturity, desire, delusion and jealousy that he, swollen with pride, abducted the girl of a certain citizen because he desired her (H.V.9.89-90). Satyavrata harboured a severe grudge against Sage Vasishtha who was the chief priest of the Ikshavakus, as he felt that he had abducted the

maiden before the completion of the seventh step in the wedding ritual. Until the seventh step is taken by the bride, the marriage is not considered to be complete. Satyavrata felt that Sage Vasishtha could have prevented his father from banishing Satyavrata as he did not really abduct an individual's legally married wife (H.V.10.5-7).

The *antyeshti* or the funeral rite literally translates as the last sacrifice. Human life was perceived as constituting a sequence of sacraments and the funeral was the last rite of passage which symbolized the end of an individual's life on earth and his passage to a higher world. The burial practices in a number of proto-historic cultures in South Asia demonstrate a belief in life after death, and that herein the person had the same material requirements as the ones when she or he were living. This is testified with the burial goods, mainly comprising pottery (which contained food) and jewellery found in ancient graves. In many of these cultures, like the Harappan Culture, the burial pottery would be distinct from the regular wares. Burial and cremation were both extant in the vedic society. The *antyeshti* rite mainly developed out of a practical need as the disposal of the dead body was absolutely necessary, as the decomposing body would emit a foul smell and would be an unpleasant sight. Moreover, the *Antyeshti* rite was also done out of respect for the dead, and leaving the body to its own fate was not considered an act of propriety. It was believed in the vedic-puranic tradition that the soul could be emancipated only after the conclusion of the due funeral rites.

As per the procedures given in the *Rig* and *Atharva Vedas*, the funeral rite comprised:

1. The cleaning of the dead body with water and piling of the funeral pyre
2. Water Oblations
3. The Pacificatory Rites (Pandey, 1949, 427).

The *grhya sutras* speak about the making of the bier with the wood of an *Udumbura* tree (*Ficus glemmerata*). The main mourner is at the head of the funeral procession. The kinsmen and friends of the deceased also walk in the procession. The *Atharva Veda* and the *grhya sutras* carry the reference that the widow of the deceased was made to lie down on the unlit pyre to the north of the corpse and was immediately made to rise from it by a brother-in-law or even a disciple of the husband (Shende, 1952, 111) (Apte, 1954, 253). The cremation generally took place on the bank of a river. After the cremation, water is offered to the dead by the mourners, specially the relatives, who have a bath.

The Harivamsa, in contrast to the *Vishnu* and *Bhagavata Puranas*, gives the description of Kamsa's funeral or *antyeshti* in some detail. Krishna is shown remorseful about his act of slaying Kamsa and Ugrasena (Kamsa's father) as well as the other Yadavas and the many wives of Kamsa have been represented as cast in utter sorrow. Ugrasena asks Krishna to permit the performance of Kamsa's last rites and Krishna readily agrees. (H.V.78.25). As per the Harivamsa, Kamsa's last rites were conducted by Ugrasena and Krishna. Ugrasena led his dead son's funeral procession with Krishna and the other Yadava men following him. The procession headed towards the northern bank of the River Yamuna through the highway of Mathura and Kamsa's mortal remains were consigned to the fire a little after sunrise. The text makes it a point to state that the last rites were conducted with the strict observance of all the rites in the accurate sequence. The funeral pyre had been also piled up as per the prescribed rites. Krishna and the Yadavas also completed the funeral rites of Kamsa's brother Sunaman. The Vrishnis and Andhakas held a wake for the two brothers and the mourners made speeches giving their ghosts a memorable farewell. Finally, the congregated Yadavas offered water to the deceased (this is known as *Udakakarma*) and returned to Mathura. (H.V.78. 40-47). The banks of the River Yamuna in Mathura, till the medieval period, were used for cremation. The text nowhere mentions any sons of Kamsa or his brother. This appears rather strange since in the text, Kamsa is spoken of having numerous wives and the text's utter silence on any progeny of his is puzzling. This is a major anomaly in the narrative and the only rationale behind it could be the text's chief concern of highlighting of Krishna's preeminent role in the war against Jarasandha and the Yadavas' migration to Dvaraka. Also, if the narrative spoke of Kamsa having male heirs, the whole current of the narrative signalling Vishnu's birth as Krishna and the consecutive incidents would have been subverted. The manner in which the text conveys the details of Kamsa's *antyeshti* matches more or less with the general description of the rite given above.

The other instance of *Antyeshti* is when Krishna offered water to the Pandava brothers who were believed to have been burnt (in the fire which engulfed the house of lac in Varnavata) and told his kinsman Satyaki to make arrangements for urns to deposit their bones (H.V. 29.8). Krishna is shown to be present in Varnavata (modern Barnawa in Bagpat District, Uttar Pradesh, India) on account of the supposed death of his paternal aunt Kunti (she was Vasudeva's sister) and her sons. There was a practice of collecting the bones of the deceased in an urn and burying it in the earth, and this finds a reference in the *Ashvalayana grhya sutra* (IV.5.1-10). This *grhya sutra* specifies the day on which the bones have to be put in an urn, and this was usually to be done on the tenth day since the death had occurred. Each piece of bone had to be silently

placed in the urn and buried in a pit. A cremation does not burn all the bones and the relatives of the deceased, out of respect for him or her, collect these bones and bury them in a pit or put them in an urn which is buried in a pit (Gupta, 1972, 11). Certain Chalcolithic communities of Baluchistan relegated to the earth the urn containing the ashes of the dead (Gupta, 1972, 47).

The third example of a funeral appearing in the Harivamsa is that of King Bahu, which has already been noted in the discussion pertaining to the birth rites of his posthumous son. In this case the king's pregnant wife built his pyre in the woods and was intending to burn herself on it. It is difficult to ascertain whether this can be deemed as a case of attempted Sati, though the main text of the Mahabharata does bear references to this custom. It may also be observed here that since there was no male family member present and the king had died in seclusion in a forested area, his widowed wife, who was carrying his child, had to make arrangements for his cremation.

Findings and Results

The performance of the *Jatakarma* rites of Krishna and Balarama help in situating them in the context of the vedic-puranic religion and the social system which the Harivamsa reflects. This fact is reiterated by the conspicuous reference to the rite twice in the flow of the text. In connection with the second reference to their *Jatakarma*, Krishna and Balarama have been hailed as sons of god and their apparent divinity was reaffirmed by the *Jatakarma*. It may be noted here that the rulers of the Kushana dynasty had assumed the epithet of 'Devaputra' meaning a/the son of god, and this supposed stature of a supra-mundane birth was certainly an agency to retain hegemony across their vast yet heterogeneous territorial possessions. Moreover, it was only after the *Jatakarma* and other rites of Sagara were accomplished that he was educated in the *Vedas* and *Shastras* and himself became eligible to procure a special fire weapon from his preceptor which he is said to have been used to retrieve the kingdom by vanquishing the foreign powers like the Yavanas etc. who had deprived Sagara's father from his kingdom. Thus, a rite of passage in this case also becomes a medium for the securing of political power through an armed conflict.

The issue of the *Upanayana* respecting the text has been already discussed in this research article. After attaining manhood, Krishna and Balarama received their formal education in knowledge systems like the *Veda*, *Vedangas* and *Dhanurveda* which were strongly entrenched in the intellectual-vocational domain of the vedic-puranic society. This point further fortifies the text's efforts to make prominent the vedic-puranic religious tradition. The education received was linked to livelihood i.e. *vartha*. For a kshatriya, training in the use of arms

and the science of war was mandatory as it was closely connected to their politico-military role which also involved the procurement of the agrarian surplus in the form of taxes and its redistribution.

Addressing the issue of the *Vivaha* rite in the *Harivamsa*, this rite of passage provides the background for the enlargement of any family. The marriage between Krishna and Rukmini could be seen as a ford to bring together the Vrishnis and Rukimini's family-both of which are said to be of Yadava stock though as stipulated in the text, the mutual relations between the two families were not too cordial. The text, by making a statement to Krishna's marriages to other women with most of them descending from royal families, may be even seen as a diplomatic move on the part of the Vrishnis to augment their power and stability. The text assiduously names each of the main eight wives of Krishna and the staggering number of children-both sons and daughters which he is believed to have sired upon them. A great number of progeny was considered as an economic asset but it was taken as the proof of the husband's manhood and the fertility of the wife's womb.

Caste dynamics have been active players in the entire process of formulation of rites of passage in the vedic-puranic tradition. The early law books, specially the *dharmashastra* texts like the *smritis*, which were more or less compiled around the same time as the *Harivamsa*, have gone on record to state that the rites of passage were meant only for the first three *varnas* i.e. the brahmanas, kshatriyas and vaishyas and not for the shudras. In fact, these three *varnas* were categorically designated as *dvijas* or the twice born as they were supposed to take two births- the first being the actual physical birth from the mother's womb and the second one being the spiritual birth which was considered to occur at the time of the *Upanayana*. In common parlance of the early historical period, it was mainly the brahmanas who were addressed as *dvijas*, and this was not as much the case with the kshatriya and vaishya *varnas*. In the *Harivamsa*, too, Janamejaya addresses Vaishampayana as *dvija* in a number of instances. To add further, like it holds true for the vedic sacrifices, it was the brahmanas who officiated during the conduction of the rites of passage specially the more important ones like *Jatakarma* and *Vivaha*. An attestation to this social practice is evident from the *Harivamsa* itself where the text emphasises on the brahmana Gargya taking Krishna through the birth and other rites. The same finding can be deduced from the allusion in the text to Aurva, a brahmana sage taking the responsibility of conducting the *Jatakarma* and other rites of his ward Sagara. The *Harivamsa* does not carry a single reference to a rite of passage being conducted for a person belonging to the shudra *varna*.

Kinship ties are observed to be major determinants in the arrangement of matrimonial alliances in the Mahabahrata (Nagarkar, 2019, 25). Similarly, rites of passage in the Harivamsa also bring to the fore the working of kinship ties. Krishna's and Rukmini's lineages came from the same progenitor i.e. Yadu. Jarasandha, the ruler of Magadha, and Krishna's arch enemy, is referred to as a kinsman of Shishupala's father and it was he who had arranged Shishupala's matrimonial alliance with Rukmini. Shishupala's mother was the sister of Krishna's father and this meant that he too was a descendant of Yadu and a distant kinsman of Rukmini. Going ahead, Pradyumna was married to his maternal uncle Rukmin's daughter who was thus his first cousin. Moreover, Pradyumna's son Aniruddha was married to the granddaughter of Rukmin, and Rukmini had insisted on this matrimonial alliance. Thus, the kinship ties were fastened through the rite and institution of marriage. The Vrishnis were a lineage which demonstrated strong kinship ties, and the embodiment of this can be seen in the worship of the five Vrishni Heroes i.e. Krishna, Balarama, Pradyumna, Samba (a son of Krishna) and Aniruddha, in Mathura in the early first century CE. The more transcendental manifestation of this is visible in the concept of the *Chatur Vyuh* in the *Bhagavata* sect and its Kushana period iconographic depiction, also from Mathura. The same can be said about the joint worship of Krishna, Balarama and their sister Ekanamsha as evident from their icons and paintings which were created since the late third-early second centuries BCE (Gupta, 2019, 17). The relationship between rites of passage and kinship ties can be also delineated with respect to Krishna's role in the performance of the death rites of his kinsmen. The first is that of Krishna and Ugrasena cremating Kamsa, and the other is of Krishna giving a ritual 'funeral' to the Pandavas who were taken to be dead in the inferno at Varanavata.

Gender roles in a given society can also be comprehended from the rites of passage therein. With respect to the marriage rites of Krishna and Rukmini, the union is founded on mutual conjugal love and the two exercise their choice with respect to their marriage. They both seem to be on an equal footing. It may be apposite to remark here that many marriages, as encountered in the Harivamsa, were polygamous, and the examples of the Yadava scions like Vasudeva, Kamsa, Krishna, Pradyumna and Aniruddha may be cited here. Satyavrata's abduction of the girl slated to marry someone else by his unwarranted interception of the marriage rite led to his father inflicting a severe punishment on him. A girl was certainly not considered a proprietary object and her sanctity had to be respected and protected. Though Satyavrata defended his untoward act by stating that he took the girl before the completion of the *Sapatapadi* rite, he did not stand exonerated. It can be inferred from the whole discussion in the present study that it was the men in the community who took the lead in the

performance of the rites of passage and it was only in times of contingency, like in the case of Bahu's cremation, where his wife was to perform it by herself, that women stepped in. In the case of Kamsa's death rites, neither his many wives nor any of the other Yadava women had any role to play. The Harivamsa clearly mentions only the Yadava men walking in the funeral procession and witnessing the last rites. By the period of the composition of the Harivamsa the practice of the widow momentarily lying on the pyre of her husband seems to have become obsolete since there is no reference to any of Kamsa's widows doing so and, moreover, none of them is shown committing Sati, though the concluding books of the Mahabharata depict Yadava women like Devaki, Rohini, Revati and Rukmini resorting to this practice. This is, however, a complex issue from the perspective of the relative dating of these sections of the epic and the Harivamsa. The text, by making statements to the effect that Krishna and Rukmini were married in the proper way and Kamsa's final rites were performed in the prescribed manner by retaining the order of the rituals, attempts to establish itself in the literary lineage of the vedic prescriptive texts like the *grhya sutras*, *Dharmasutras* and *Smritis* with the text expressing its identity as a vedic-puranic one.

The picture of the Indic society which emerges from the review and analysis of the rites of passage as featuring in the text of the Harivamsa is that of a social system which was almost primarily established on the foundation of the regulations and injunctions as enshrined in the vedic texts. Almost all the religious texts pertaining to the vedic-puranic religious tradition right down till the modern times pronounce their allegiance to the vedic literary corpus which in all probability developed from the late third or early second millennium BCE. The Harivamsa projects a social setup which had the vedic institutions like *varna*, *ashrama* and *yajna* as its nuclei and the composers/redactors of this text may have felt all the more the need to do so since the text came into being at a time when the vedic-puranic religious tradition had to reassert itself in a religious-cultural milieu where a substantial chunk of the population and resources were being driven towards the religious systems of Buddhism and Jainism. The rites of passage as inducted in the Harivamsa retain their basic purpose of demarcating the various stages in the life of an individual- here in most cases it is the text's hero Krishna. They nevertheless also serve as literary devices which not only heighten the Yadava chieftain's glory but also further the cause of the consolidation of the vedic-puranic religious tradition. Krishna's character, through his centrality in terms of the textual narrative and the rites of passage therein, is meticulously portrayed as a practitioner, advocate and custodian of the vedic-puranic religious tradition and ultimately being venerated as the primordial cause of everything in the universe-including the *Vedas* (H.V.104.15). In the

hundred and fourth chapter of the Harivamsa, Krishna is depicted revealing his divinity to Arjuna wherein he states that it is he who created the four *varnas* and the four *ashramas*. Thus, here the text tries to correlate Krishna's identity as the supreme god with the two seminal dimensions of the vedic social system. The narrative of the Harivamsa realizes its ultimate purpose by identifying Krishna with *Brahman*, which is the Supreme Reality around which the Upanishadic deliberations revolve (H.V.104.9). The fruition of the performance of the rites of passage, as per the *Vedanta* School of Philosophy, lay in the attainment of *Brahman*. The rites of passage as incorporated in the Harivamsa attempt to bring about a synthesis of the sect of the hero worship of Vaasudeva Krishna, the cult of Vishnu Narayana and the vedic religious practices. The rites of passages in a way are aimed at projecting Krishna as an integral member of the social system considered ideal by the vedic-puranic Religious Tradition. As an incarnation of Vishnu on earth, Krishna's human qualities and roles which also include the rites of passage, which he himself undergoes and conducts, are juxtaposed with his entity as *Brahman*- the Supreme Reality which epitomized the highest end of the rites of passage as envisaged in the vedic-puranic religious tradition.

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A Study on Traditional Wedding Rituals of the Mising Tribe: Transition and Adaptation in the Contemporary Era

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Abstract

This study addresses the traditional wedding rituals of the Mising Tribe, an indigenous community residing predominantly in the states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in the northeastern region of India. The rich cultural history of the Mising Tribe discloses the significance of traditional marital ceremonies in preserving and perpetuating their distinctive identity. Certain aspects of Mising wedding ceremonies have undergone significant change, while others have remained remarkably consistent, reflecting the community's resilience in the face of globalisation and modernization. This article explores the various traditions, practices, and rituals associated with the marriage system of Misings, as well as the changes and adaptations that have occurred in the modern era. The study identifies essential elements of Mising wedding rituals that have persisted over time, such as the exchange of gifts, the role of the village chief, and the performance of traditional songs and dances. The research also reveals modern adaptations that the Mising community has adapted to varying degrees, such as the use of technology, the incorporation of modern dress, and the influence of other cultural practices. Utilising a qualitative methodology, the study collects primary data through interviews, observations, and extant literature on the topic. This research contributes to a broader understanding of indigenous cultures by emphasising the importance of preserving and documenting traditional practices to protect the distinct identity of Misings.

Keywords: Tradition, wedding rituals, Mising tribe, transition, adaptation)

Introduction

The Mising tribe, an indigenous tribal group, has largely inhabited the expansive Brahmaputra river valley in the region of Assam. This tribe possesses a rich and multifaceted cultural heritage that is deeply rooted in their customary practices and deeply held beliefs. The Mising people have continued to uphold their unique way of life over the centuries, despite the ever-changing socio-cultural landscape surrounding them. This article seeks to shed light on the diverse cultural legacy of the Mising tribe, highlighting the significance of their customary traditions and beliefs in shaping their identity and providing a sense of continuity in an ever-changing world. In the context of cultural practices, weddings are an extensive phenomenon that encompasses a diverse range of customs and rituals. These customs hold great significance as they serve as a

manifestation of the profound importance attached to the institution of marriage within the societal fabric. Weddings, as a cultural event, are deeply embedded within the social milieu and are influenced by a myriad of factors such as religion, tradition, and historical context. They serve as a platform for the expression and preservation of cultural identity, as well as a means to reinforce social bonds and norms. Through the observance of specific customs, weddings become a tangible representation of the values and beliefs held by a particular community or group. The significance of weddings can be understood through the lens of symbolism and ritual. Various elements of the wedding ceremony, such as the exchange of vows, the wearing of specific attire, and the performance of traditional dances, all carry symbolic meaning. These symbols often convey messages about love, commitment, fertility, and the merging of families. By participating in these rituals, individuals not only affirm their commitment to their partner but also reaffirm their connection to their cultural heritage.

Furthermore, weddings serve as a platform for the display of social status and wealth. The Mising tribe, renowned for their cultural heritage, boasts a repertoire of traditional wedding rituals that are deeply rooted in ancestral customs and imbued with profound symbolism. These rituals have been faithfully passed down through numerous generations, serving as a testament to the tribe's enduring commitment to preserving their unique cultural identity.

The Mising tribe observes a wide range of traditions and practices during their wedding ceremonies, each of which has significance and adds to the celebration's overall fabric. These rituals not only serve as a means of uniting two individuals in matrimony but also serve as a reflection of the tribe's collective values, beliefs, and aspirations. One of the prominent features of Mising wedding rituals is the emphasis on collaborative participation. The entire community comes together to partake in the festivities, creating a sense of unity and solidarity. This collective involvement underscores the tribe's belief in the importance of familial and societal bonds, highlighting the interconnectedness of individuals within the Mising community.

Symbolism plays a pivotal role in Mising wedding rituals, with each gesture and action carrying profound meaning. The rituals that are observed within societies hold a profound significance as they serve as a tangible manifestation of the spiritual beliefs, social values, and family values that are deeply ingrained within the fabric of their environment.

Furthermore, these rituals also serve as a means of fostering a robust collective identity within society. By participating in shared ceremonial practices, individuals reaffirm their belongingness to a larger community and strengthen their sense of unity. These rituals often involve communal gatherings where members of society come together to celebrate, mourn, or commemorate significant events. Through these shared experiences, bonds are formed, and a sense of solidarity is nurtured. Moreover, the rituals also reflect and reinforce the social values that are upheld within society. They provide a platform for the transmission of cultural norms, moral principles, and ethical codes from one generation to the next.

The Mising community, an indigenous group residing primarily in the northeastern region of India, has fostered a profound sense of unity and active participation among its members through the practice of their revered customs and rituals. This has resulted in the strengthening of familial bonds within the community. The Mising people, who have a distinct cultural identity and rich heritage, have successfully preserved their traditions over generations, thereby creating a cohesive social fabric that promotes a shared sense of belonging and engagement. The Mising community places great importance on their customs and rituals, which serve as a cornerstone of their cultural and social life. These practices are deeply rooted in their historical and spiritual beliefs and are meticulously followed by community members across different age groups. The customs and rituals are not only seen as a way to honour their ancestors and deities, but also as a means to forge and maintain interpersonal relationships within the community. One of the key aspects of Mising customs and rituals is their emphasis on collective participation. These practices are not limited to individual households but are celebrated and observed by the entire community. This collective engagement fosters a sense of togetherness and solidarity among the Mising people as they come together to partake in various ceremonies and festivities.

Such communal involvement strengthens the familial and clan ties within the community, as individuals actively contribute to the shared cultural heritage and engage in meaningful interactions with their relatives and fellow The Mising tribe has experienced significant transformations in their customary laws. These changes can be attributed to the far-reaching impacts of globalisation, migration, and the advent of contemporary education. Globalisation, characterised by the increasing interconnectedness of societies and economies, has played a pivotal

role in reshaping the customary laws of the Mising tribe. The integration of the Mising community into the globalised world has exposed them to new ideas, values, and legal systems. As a result, traditional practices and norms have been subject to reinterpretation and adaptation. The influx of external influences has challenged the long-standing customs and prompted the Mising tribe to reconsider and modify their customary laws to align with the changing socio-cultural landscape. The contemporary era has witnessed a significant shift in the way younger generations are exposed to diverse cultures and lifestyles. This exposure has had a profound impact on traditional customs, leading to a transformative process whereby these customs have assimilated elements from broader global contexts into their sacred events. This phenomenon reflects the dynamic nature of cultural practices and highlights the evolving nature of traditions in response to changing societal dynamics. The incorporation of external influences into traditional customs not only enriches the cultural fabric but also serves as a testament to the adaptability and resilience of these customs in the face of globalisation. The phenomenon of coexistence between traditional rituals and contemporary practices has given rise to a unique hybridised form that serves as a symbolic embodiment of the tribe's ability to preserve its cultural heritage while simultaneously accommodating the requirements of modern life. This amalgamation of old and new elements within the tribe's customs and traditions reflects a dynamic process of cultural adaptation and resilience. By embracing both the time-honoured rituals of their ancestors and the evolving practices of the present, the tribe demonstrates its capacity to navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing world while remaining rooted in its rich cultural legacy. This coalescence of diverse influences not only showcases the tribe's ability to adapt but also highlights the significance of cultural continuity in the face of societal transformations. Through the fusion of traditional and contemporary elements, the tribe asserts its identity and its relevance in the contemporary era, forging a path that acknowledges the importance of heritage while embracing the possibilities of the future. The present study aims to explore the intricate dynamics of the Mising community by meticulously documenting the various changes and adaptations that have occurred within their social and cultural fabric. By undertaking this endeavour, this study seeks to gain a profound understanding of the multifaceted social and cultural forces that have significantly influenced the identity, values, and way of life of the Mising community. To achieve the research objectives, a comprehensive examination of the transformations and adaptations experienced by the Mising community has

been conducted. This study has involved a meticulous analysis of the historical, sociological, and anthropological aspects that have shaped the Mising community's trajectory over time. By delving into the historical archives and engaging with primary and secondary sources, we will trace the evolution of the Mising community and identify the key factors that have contributed to their current social and cultural landscape. By engaging with community members and key stakeholders, this study captures the nuances and intricacies of the social and cultural forces that have influenced the Mising community's identity, values, and way of life. The findings of this study have contributed to the existing body of knowledge on the Mising community and provide a deeper understanding of the social and cultural dynamics at play. By documenting the changes and adaptations experienced by the Mising community, by examining the intricate interplay between the preservation of valued traditions and the navigation of the opportunities and obstacles presented by the contemporary world, this study seeks to enhance the overall understanding of this subject matter. Moreover, this study seeks to investigate the cultural heritage of the Mising tribe by documenting their narratives and customs to preserve them for the benefit of future generations, who can appreciate and gain knowledge from them. In a nutshell, this research study intends to provide a thorough examination of the customary wedding customs practised by the Mising tribe, emphasising the community's abundant cultural legacy and its seamless integration with modern influences.

Through a comprehensive analysis of the historical and socio-cultural factors that have influenced the marriage customs of the Mising tribe, it is important to understand and preserve their resilient ethos and cultural heritage within the dynamic context of the contemporary era. Thus, this study has utilised a mixed method, incorporating qualitative methods to explore the subtle complexities of the wedding ceremonies of the Mising tribe and their contemporary reinterpretations. This research study is to examine the customary wedding customs practised by the Mising tribe while also explaining the various changes and adaptations they have experienced in response to the modern period. Through an exploration of the intricate aspects inherent in these long-standing customs and an analysis of their convergence with contemporary influences, our objective is to acquire a holistic comprehension of the cultural fortitude and progression exhibited by the Mising tribe.

Objectives of the Study

This study has been proposed to fulfil the following objectives:

1. To examine the traditional wedding practices observed by the Mising tribes.
2. To assess the process of transition and adaptation of wedding traditions within the Mising tribe.
3. To ascertain the current issues confronting the Mising tribes.

Methodology

The present study employs a comprehensive research approach that integrates both primary and secondary sources to gather a robust and well-rounded understanding of the subject matter. By utilizing a combination of primary sources, such as original data and firsthand accounts, and secondary sources, such as scholarly articles and books, the study aims to enhance the validity and reliability of its findings.

This methodological approach allows for a more comprehensive analysis and interpretation of the research topic, enabling the study to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in a more nuanced and informed manner. The process of gathering primary data for this study entailed conducting comprehensive interviews with a diverse range of individuals from the Mising tribe. These individuals included esteemed elders, influential community leaders, and individuals who possess a deep understanding and firsthand experience of traditional Mising weddings. By engaging with such a varied group of participants, this research aimed to obtain a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the intricacies and significance of Mising wedding customs and traditions. The process of collecting secondary data entailed the utilization of pre-existing literary sources, including but not limited to books, journals, and research papers. These sources were carefully selected and examined to gather relevant information and insights for the study at hand. By relying on established and reputable sources, the research was able to build upon the existing body of knowledge in the field and ensure the credibility and validity of the findings. This approach of utilizing secondary data not only saved time and resources but also allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the topic by drawing upon the expertise and research conducted by others in the field.

Significance of the Study

The advent of modernization and the pervasive impact of globalisation have unequivocally led to profound cultural changes on a global scale. These transformations have permeated various aspects of societies across the globe, shaping and reshaping cultural norms, values, and practices. The interconnectedness brought about by modernization and globalisation has encouraged the exchange of ideas, values, and traditions, blurring the distinctions between various cultures and fostering a more homogenous global culture. The rapid development and diffusion of technology have revolutionised communication, transportation, and information dissemination, enabling individuals to connect and interact across vast distances. The presence of these dominant forces posed considerable challenges for the smaller communities, impeding their progress and development. The indigenous cultures have undergone a gradual erosion of their intrinsic essence as they have succumbed to the pervasive influence of dominant cultures that have emerged in tandem with the forces of globalisation and modernization. This erosion has been a consequence of various factors, including the encroachment of external values, the imposition of foreign norms and practices, and the disruption of traditional social structures. Indigenous cultures, with their distinct traditions, knowledge systems, and ways of life, have been particularly vulnerable to this process of erosion. The increasing interconnectedness of the world has facilitated the diffusion of dominant cultural values, often at the expense of indigenous practices and beliefs. One of the key mechanisms through which indigenous cultures have been affected is the encroachment of external values. As dominant cultures expand their influence, they often impose their norms and standards, which may clash with the traditional values and practices of indigenous communities. This imposition can lead to a dilution or abandonment of indigenous cultural elements as individuals and communities strive to conform to the dominant cultural paradigm.

Furthermore, the imposition of foreign norms and practices can disrupt the social fabric of indigenous communities. The contemporary phenomenon of diminishing interest among younger generations in the enduring tradition of weddings is a noteworthy and consequential trend. Over the past few years, there has been a discernible shift in attitudes towards weddings. This shift has sparked discussions and debates among scholars and sociologists alike as they seek to understand the underlying causes and implications of this trend. Weddings have

long been regarded as a cherished and time-honoured tradition, symbolising the union of two individuals and their families. However, recent years have witnessed a decline in the enthusiasm and participation of younger generations in this age-old ritual. This shift in attitudes can be attributed to a multitude of factors, including changing societal norms, economic considerations, and evolving personal values. One key factor contributing to the waning interest in weddings is the changing societal norms surrounding relationships and marriage.

Marginalised communities encompass a diverse range of individuals who have been historically disadvantaged and excluded from mainstream society. These communities often face various forms of discrimination, such as racial, ethnic, gender, or socioeconomic disparities. Understanding the cultural and social dynamics that contribute to their marginalisation is crucial for fostering inclusivity and promoting social justice. Participating in in-depth discussions allows individuals to delve into the complexities of these communities. The implementation of this approach can significantly contribute to the preservation and enhancement of traditional practices within indigenous communities, as exemplified by the Misings. By adopting this strategy, various positive outcomes can be achieved, including the safeguarding of cultural heritage, the promotion of intergenerational knowledge transfer, and the empowerment of indigenous communities. This article explores the potential benefits of adopting such an approach and highlights its significance in the context of preserving and revitalising traditional practices among indigenous groups, with a specific focus on the Misings. The significance of this study is deeply rooted in a specific aspect that holds great importance.

Traditional Wedding Rituals of the Mising Tribe

Marriage, as a universally recognised social institution, holds significant importance within various cultural and societal contexts. Its fundamental role lies in establishing a formalised relationship between two individuals, typically to create a stable foundation for familial and interpersonal relationships. This institution serves as a cornerstone for the organisation and functioning of societies, influencing various aspects of individuals. The prevalence of various forms of marriage, such as exogamy, endogamy, and polygamy, is widely observed across different societies globally. These distinct marital arrangements have been subject to academic scrutiny and analysis due to their cultural, social, and historical significance. Within Mising society, the practice of endogamy marriage is strictly forbidden, thereby establishing a normative framework

wherein individuals are prohibited from entering into marital relationships with members of their clan. This social prohibition effectively mandates that a male individual is precluded from engaging in matrimony with a female individual belonging to his clan. For instance, *Narah* clan individuals cannot marry anyone with the title or clan of *Narah*. However, the Mising society has been observed to engage in exogamous practices, wherein individuals belonging to a specific group or clan are permitted to enter into matrimonial alliances with individuals from other clans. The relationship between a male individual bearing the appellation *Narah* and a female individual bearing the appellation *Doley* is deemed permissible within the context of marriage. Within Mising society, the practice of polygamy, which involves a man having multiple wives simultaneously, is observed to some extent. However, it is noteworthy that the prevalence of polyandry, wherein a woman marries multiple men concurrently, is not in the social context of Misings. Interestingly, the practice of cross-cousin marriage holds a significant place in matrimonial customs, with its historical roots dating back to the ancient Indian epic Mahabharata.

By the tenets of Hindu mythology, it is documented that *Arjuna*, a significant character within the Mahabharata epic, entered matrimony with Subhadra, the daughter of his maternal uncle. Hence, it is paradoxical that this marriage custom is most widespread within the Mising community. Cross-cousin marriage, a prevalent matrimonial practice, encompasses the choice of an individual to enter a marital relationship with either the daughter of their paternal aunts or the daughter of their maternal uncle. By examining the dynamics and consequences of cross-cousin marriage, we can gain a deeper understanding of its role in shaping familial and kinship structures.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the wedding rituals observed by the Misings, it is imperative to undertake a thorough analysis of the various traditional forms in which these ceremonies are conducted. Thus, just before entering formal matrimony, the Mising community observes in thorough discourse the customary practices and traditions that are innately linked to the holy bond of marriage. A typical instance of such customary practice is the ceremony known as *Yamn  Tatgod*, in which an older male relative of the boy's uncle or aunt visits the home of the girl and presents a bag of apong, a traditional alcoholic beverage, by their cultural norms. After the receipt of the package, the family of the girl promptly proceeds to call up the respective heads of their households, thus permitting the delivery of a formal message expressing their explicit approval or disapproval to the family of the boy. The Mising people also have a long-standing tradition known as *Yamn  Tatgod*, which is widely recognised as the ceremonial practice through which the groom's household formally seeks a bride. Following the occurrence of this event, it is customary

within the Mising community to engage in an older custom known as *Magbo Dugnam*. This practice holds deep-rooted significance and is observed by long-standing cultural norms. This customary tradition entails the prospective groom residing at the domicile of the prospective bride for a duration of approximately one to two months before their matrimonial connection. During this period, the groom assumes the responsibility of fulfilling the tasks typically assigned to the male members of the household, starting with the agricultural endeavours of the bride's home. This customary practice is widely believed to promote the establishment of emotional rapport and reciprocal understanding between the betrothed individuals while also providing the bride's family with an opportunity to discern and evaluate the groom's character. After the successful completion of the *Magbo Dugnam* ceremony, specific individuals from the groom's household go to the home of the bride to determine the exact time and date for the upcoming wedding. This event, known as *Yamn  Tadp r*, serves as a pivotal step in the wedding planning process.

In the customary practice known as *Yamn  Tadp r*, the families of the bride and groom undergo detailed discussions of the requisite ceremonial elements to be procured from their respective households. These items can include a diverse range, including but not limited to parcels of apong (a traditional alcoholic beverage), betel nuts, and pig livestock. Following the completion of customary rituals, the ceremonial relationship known as *midang*, or marriage, is joyously commemorated on a predetermined date and day. The *midang* (wedding) is a cultural institution that holds significant importance in Mising society. In Mising society, the union between a young male and female can be solemnised through three distinct matrimonial customs and traditional rituals the follows;

1. *Daro Midang*

The *Daro Midang* is a traditional matrimonial practice that involves the formal union of a groom and a bride. This marriage is established through negotiations conducted by the parents of the individuals involved. Following the end of the negotiation process, the matrimonial ceremony is conducted on a prearranged date at the residence of the bride's parents. On this momentous occasion, venerated priests from the nearby community confer their blessings upon the betrothed couple, thereby granting them consent to commence their matrimonial voyage. Following this, the bride is escorted to the home of the groom, where she is ceremoniously welcomed amidst melodious melodies and rhythmic motions, harmonised by the reverberating cadences of percussion instruments. Subsequently, she is elegantly ushered into her new home. The following excerpt presents an array of lines from the melodious melodies and rhythmic motions of *Midang Ni tom*.

*Ngoluk yamn : kangkanow  t r l  t r l 
Donyi t mp  undankan  t r :r t :ra
Ngoluk yamn  kayumow  t r l  t r l 
Polo t mp  lolatkan  t r :r t :ra
Ngolukyamn : kangkanow  t r l  t r l 
Ki:n  na:n p baddanka:n  t r :r t :ra
Ngoluk yamn  ka:yumow  t r l t r l 
Doying bottap baddanka:n  t r :r t :ra
Ngoluk yamn : kangkanow  t r l t r l 
Leke ege: g yumow t  r :r t :ra
Ngoluk yamn ka:yumow  t r l t r l 
A nl ngk r g yumow  t r :r t :ra
Ngoluk yamn : kangkanow  t r l t r l 
Kob ng kong : g yumow  t r :r t :ra
Nokk  mikmo:m lengkanyoka t r l t r l 
Pongkapsula: du:tokana t r : r t :ra
Nokk  kangkan ka:yum m t r l t r l 
Amme lomka pakang k  t r : r t :ra.*



Fig.1. Da:ro Midang

2. *Kumsu-Jo:su*

It is a rite practice characterised by a modest wedding ceremony, during which the prospective couple is bestowed with blessings from a specially selected group of village elders. This sacred ritual takes place in the intimate setting of the bride's home. The ceremonial practice described herein serves the purpose of formally establishing the legal framework that underpins the union between two individuals, thereby granting them the ability to commence a mutually shared marital existence. Marriages of this nature are frequently entered into as a result of economic constraints or rare circumstances.



Fig.2. *Kumsu Jo: su*

3. *Dugla la:nam*

It refers to matrimonial traditions distinguished by elopement. In this practice, a young man and woman, who share a deep affection for one another, opt to flee from their respective families due to parental disapproval or maybe financial constraints. Following the consent of their parents, they establish their marital union within the premises of the boy's home, embarking on their journey of matrimony.



Fig. 3. *Dugla la:nam*

4. *Sola la:nam*

In the earlier Mising society, a customary practice known as *Sola la:nam* was observed, whereby a young woman could be coerced into a matrimonial union without her consent. Within the realm of matrimonial customs, a male person, harbouring a desire to enter wedlock with a particular female who exhibits unwillingness towards such a union, turns to the act of forcefully dragging the young woman away from her home. This action, executed through coercive methods, forcefully recognises her as his lawful spouse. The preceding practice has become vintage in the context of the present day.

Transition and Adaptation in the Contemporary Era

Amid progressive evolution in society and rapid transformations, individuals and communities are faced with the complex challenge of navigating these complexities. The development of productive transition and adaptation skills has emerged as a pivotal competency, enabling individuals to adeptly navigate new situations, and overcome challenges. The customary wedding rituals of the Mising tribe have undergone significant transformations in recent times, owing to a range of factors including urbanisation, education, and increased exposure to diverse cultures. These factors have played a pivotal role in shaping the change in traditional wedding practices within the Mising community. The impact of these factors on the customary wedding rituals of the Mising tribe is very critical in the contemporary era. Urbanisation has emerged as a key catalyst for the transformation of Mising wedding rituals. As more Mising individuals migrate to urban areas in search of better economic opportunities and improved living conditions, they are exposed to new ideas and lifestyles. This exposure to urban environments has led to a gradual shift in the way Mising weddings are conducted. Traditional practices are being influenced by urban customs, resulting in a fusion of traditional and modern elements in Mising wedding ceremonies. Education has also played a significant role in reshaping Mising wedding rituals. With increased access to education, misinformed individuals are becoming more aware of alternative practices and perspectives. This newfound knowledge has led to a re-evaluation of traditional wedding customs, with some elements being modified or abandoned altogether. Throughout human history, numerous noteworthy shifts and adjustments have emerged, captivating the attention of these individuals. The profound transformations and adjustments observed in human development have not only exerted a significant influence on its trajectory but have also yielded valuable insights into the remarkable resilience and ingenuity exhibited by humans. This part of the analysis seeks to shed light on the intricate changes that have occurred within these ceremonial practices. Such transitions and adaptations of the wedding rituals of the Mising tribe have been discussed as follows:

The phenomenon of *Yamn  tadgod* has undergone a noticeable transformation, wherein the customary practice of designing *Yamn  tadgod* by parental desires without soliciting the input of the betrothed couple has experienced a shift. In contemporary times, the ceremonial practice known as *Yamn  tadgod* has shifted to include the involvement of all and the mutual

agreement of both the bride and groom. The ritual practices of *Yamné tadgod* have undergone significant transformations over time. Previously, individuals would commonly transport various items, such as dried fish, Apong, and betel nuts, as part of these rituals. However, it is noteworthy that in contemporary times, the inclusion of such items has become infrequent. When setting out on the quest to *Yamné tadgod*, it is customary to solely bring along parcels containing Apong and coconut beverages. In the contemporary era characterised by a fast-paced and industrious lifestyle, it is observed that cultural practices such as the *Magbo dugnam* are gradually diminishing within the Mising community.

The growing inclination among Mising couples to adopt modern attire, such as suits and wedding gowns, during their matrimonial ceremonies has become another transformation for Misings. Departing from the customary Mising clothing that has been traditionally worn, this contemporary trend reflects a significant shift in cultural practices. Traditionally, Mising couples would adhere to customary clothing during their wedding ceremonies. Traditional Mising attire consisted of intricately woven garments, reflecting the community's rich cultural heritage. These traditional outfits, characterised by vibrant colours and unique patterns, held deep symbolic meaning within the Mising community. They were considered an integral part of the matrimonial ceremonies, representing cultural identity and ancestral heritage. However, in recent years, there has been a discernible shift towards embracing modern attire, such as suits and wedding gowns.

Throughout history, technological advancements have undeniably transformed and revolutionised numerous aspects of human life. From the early days of primitive communication methods to the modern era of instant global connectivity, the evolution of technology has played a pivotal role in shaping the way we interact and communicate with one another. In the realm of communication, the advent of telecommunication systems has completely changed the way information is transmitted across vast distances. Through email, social media platforms, and instant messaging, in recent years, the integration of technological advancements has become increasingly prevalent in various aspects of our lives, and Mising weddings are no exception. One area where this incorporation has been particularly noteworthy is in the realm of photography and videography. With the advent of advanced cameras and video recording devices, couples now have the practice that is being referred to here, which

serves a very important purpose. Its main goal is to carefully and thoroughly document and safeguard the sacred ceremonies that take place. By doing so, it guarantees that these ceremonies will be passed down and preserved for future generations to experience and appreciate.

Throughout history, various religious traditions have had a significant impact on the Mising tribe, a vibrant indigenous group that lives in northeastern India. Among these, the Hindu, Christian, Sankar Sangha, and Krishna Guru religions have played a particularly significant role in shaping the cultural fabric of the Mising tribe. The introduction of Hinduism to the Mising tribe has brought about a profound transformation in their religious practices and rituals. With time, Hindu customs and traditions have become deeply ingrained in the everyday lives of the Mising people. This assimilation is particularly evident in their customary wedding ceremonies, where Hindu rituals have seamlessly blended with their indigenous customs. The Mising tribe, traditionally adhering to their own unique spiritual beliefs, has embraced Hinduism as a complementary aspect of their religious identity. The incorporation of Hindu rituals into their wedding ceremonies is a testament to the harmonious coexistence of multiple religious influences within the Mising community. This syncretic approach has not only enriched their cultural heritage but has also fostered a sense of unity and inclusivity among the tribe members.

The Christian faith has also made its mark on the Mising tribe, with a growing number of individuals embracing Christianity as their chosen religion. However, the introduction of Hindu teachings and practices has brought about a shift in spiritual practices such as the *kanyadaan* ritual that are deeply rooted in cultural traditions and hold immense significance in various communities. This ritual, which is commonly observed during Hindu weddings, involves the father of the bride formally presenting his daughter to the groom. The act of *kanyadaan* symbolises the transfer of responsibility and guardianship from the father to the groom. The *kanyadaan* ritual is a poignant moment that marks the transition of the bride from her paternal family to her marital family. It is a symbolic gesture that showcases the father's acceptance of the groom as his daughter's life partner and his willingness to entrust her happiness and well-being to him. This act not only signifies the father's love and affection for his daughter but also highlights the trust and faith he has in the groom to take care of her. The significance of the *Kanyadaan* ritual goes beyond its surface-level representation. It represents the sacred bond between families and the union of two individuals. It is a moment of

emotional significance, as the father acknowledges that his daughter is embarking on a new journey, leaving behind her childhood home and embracing a new life with her partner. It has become deeply ingrained in their cultural fabric, shaping their traditions, beliefs, and way of life. This practice holds immense sway over the tribe, exerting a profound influence on their social dynamics, economic activities, and even their spiritual rituals.

In recent times, there has been a noticeable shift in societal attitudes towards inter-caste and inter-religious marriages. Which were once frowned upon within certain communities, are now being increasingly accepted and embraced. This transformation signifies a significant departure from the traditional norms and values that governed these communities for generations. Historically, inter-caste and inter-religious marriages were viewed as taboo and were met with disapproval from the Mising community as well. The rigid social structure and deeply ingrained beliefs often prevented individuals from venturing outside their own caste or religious group when it came to choosing a life partner. The fear of social ostracism and the potential loss of community support acted as deterrents, discouraging individuals from pursuing relationships that crossed these boundaries. However, in recent years, there has been a gradual erosion of these barriers. Society has become more open-minded and inclusive, recognising the importance of personal choice and individual happiness in matters of the heart. The younger generation has played a pivotal role in promoting inter-caste and inter-religious marriage in Mising society.

Challenges and Preservation Efforts

The Mising tribe, an indigenous community residing in a remote region, faces an array of intimidating challenges as they endeavour to safeguard and uphold their age-old wedding customs amidst the constantly changing landscape of the contemporary world. This resilient tribe, deeply rooted in their cultural heritage, grapples with a multitude of obstacles that threaten to erode the essence of their traditional matrimonial practices. In an era marked by rapid globalisation and the pervasive influence of modernity, the Mising tribe finds themselves at a crossroads, torn between preserving their ancestral customs and adapting to the changing times. The encroachment of external forces, such as urbanisation and the infiltration of mainstream ideologies, poses a significant threat to the sanctity of their wedding rituals. One of the foremost challenges faced by the Mising tribe is the dilution of their traditional values and practices. As younger generations become increasingly exposed to external influences, there is a

growing tendency to embrace more contemporary and Westernised wedding customs. This gradual shift towards modernity often leads to a decline in adherence to age-old traditions, leaving indigenous communities across the globe confronted with a vast array of challenges that have a profound and lasting impact on the very essence of their cultural fabric.

One significant challenge that many individuals and communities face is the gradual decline of their cultural identity. This decline can be attributed to a multitude of external factors that exert influence and impact on the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage. One of the primary reasons for the decline of cultural identity is globalisation. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, cultures are exposed to a wide range of external influences. The spread of Western ideals, values, and practices through media, technology, and trade has led to the homogenization of cultures, eroding the unique aspects that define a particular community's identity. The dominance of globalised industries, such as the entertainment and fashion industries, often promotes a standardised and commercialised version of culture, overshadowing traditional practices and customs.

Furthermore, the rapid urbanisation and migration of populations have also in today's interconnected world, the pervasive influence of other cultures become increasingly prominent, posing a potential threat to the preservation of unique traditions and practices. As societies become more interconnected through globalisation, the boundaries that once separated cultures have become more porous, allowing for the exchange of ideas, values, and practices. While this cultural exchange can be enriching and foster mutual understanding, it also raises concerns about the potential erosion of cultural diversity. One of the primary challenges faced by communities striving to preserve their unique traditions is the homogenising effect of globalisation.

As Western cultural values and practices permeate various aspects of life, there is a growing risk of diluting or even eradicating indigenous traditions. Furthermore, the predicament that they face is worsened by the fact that there is a lack of comprehensive documentation regarding their customs. This absence of detailed information about their cultural practices and traditions only adds to the complexity of their situation. Without a thorough understanding of their customs, it becomes even more challenging for them to navigate through various social and cultural contexts. The absence of comprehensive documentation not only hinders their ability to preserve and pass down their cultural heritage but also

limits their opportunities for cultural exchange and understanding with others. It is crucial to recognise the importance of documenting and preserving the customs of different communities to ensure their cultural richness and diversity are safeguarded for future generations. The various challenges faced by indigenous communities have a significant impact on their vulnerability, making it crucial to closely monitor and provide support to address these issues. These challenges encompass a wide range of factors that affect the well-being and resilience of indigenous populations. One of the key challenges faced by indigenous communities is the loss of traditional lands and resources. Many indigenous groups have historically relied on specific territories for their livelihoods, cultural practices, and spiritual beliefs. However, due to factors such as land encroachment, resource extraction, and urbanisation, indigenous communities often find themselves displaced from their ancestral lands. This loss not only disrupts their way of life but also undermines their connection to their cultural heritage and traditional knowledge. The community members are deeply committed and actively involved in a wide range of endeavours that are specifically designed to protect, preserve, and promote their invaluable cultural heritage. They understand the significance and importance of their cultural heritage, recognising it as an essential part of their identity and collective memory.

Through various initiatives and projects, the community strives to safeguard their cultural heritage from any potential threats or risks that may arise. They are proactive in identifying and addressing issues such as environmental degradation, urbanisation, and globalisation, which can potentially erode or dilute their unique cultural practices, traditions, and artefacts. One of the key ways in which the community actively engages in the preservation of their cultural heritage is through education and awareness programmes. They organise workshops, seminars, and exhibitions to educate both the younger and older generations about the significance of over the years, numerous initiatives have been taken by various socio-cultural and political organisations to tackle this pressing issue. These efforts have been ongoing, with a consistent focus on finding effective solutions and implementing them promptly. These initiatives have been driven by a deep understanding of the importance of addressing this issue and the potential impact it can have on society as a whole. Socio-cultural organisations have played a significant role in raising awareness about this issue and mobilising communities to take action. Through various campaigns, workshops, and educational programmes, these organisations have strived to

educate individuals about the importance of addressing this issue and the potential consequences if left unattended. By engaging with people from different walks of life, they have been able to create a sense of urgency and encourage collective action.

In the realm of cultural preservation and promotion, a multitude of community-based organisations within the Mising community such as *Takam Mising Porin Kébang* (Student Apex Body), *Mising Bané Kébang* (the Great Assembly of Mising), *Mising Agom Kébang* (Literary organisation of Mising), *Mising Mimag Kébang* (Action Committee of Mising), *Takam Mising Mimé Kébang* (All Mising Women's Wings), *Mising Dírbí Kébang* (Cultural Organisation of Mising), have emerged as prominent actors. These organisations ardently dedicate themselves to safeguarding and advancing their rich cultural heritage through a variety of means, including the facilitation of workshops, seminars, and cultural exchange programmes. These proactive initiatives serve as vital platforms for the Mising community to actively engage in the preservation and transmission of their traditional practices, customs, and values. By organising workshops, these organisations provide a space for community members to acquire and refine skills related to their cultural heritage, ensuring its continuity for future generations. Furthermore, seminars serve as intellectual arenas where community members can engage in meaningful discussions, exchange ideas, and deepen their understanding of the Mising cultural heritage. These gatherings foster a sense of collective identity and pride as participants gain insights into the historical significance and contemporary relevance of their traditions. In addition to workshops and seminars, cultural exchange programmes play a pivotal role in connecting the Mising community with other cultural groups.

Again, in the realm of scholarly discourses, a significant number of erudite individuals hailing from diverse disciplines have embarked upon the noble endeavour of meticulously documenting and comprehensively studying the customs and rituals of the esteemed Mising tribe. This scholarly discourse encompasses a wide array of facets, including the profound talk and investigation of their time-honoured matrimonial ceremonies, which hold a significant place within their cultural tapestry.

Conclusion

The exploration and analysis of the wedding customs and rituals practised by the Misings, a tribal community, have revealed a complex and intricate interplay between their deep-rooted traditions and the forces of modernity. This study has not only provided valuable insights into the unique cultural practices of the Mising tribe but has also shed light on the various challenges and opportunities they encounter as their society undergoes significant transformations. The Misings, an indigenous tribe residing in the northeastern region of India, have a rich cultural heritage that is deeply intertwined with their traditional rituals and customs. One such aspect of their culture that has been extensively studied is their wedding rituals. These rituals are not merely ceremonial events but serve as a reflection of the tribe's social structure, beliefs, and values.

The wedding rituals of the Misings are characterised by their elaborate nature and the significant role they play in the community. These rituals encompass a series of events and practices that span several days, involving the active participation of the entire community. From the selection of the bride and groom to the final ceremony, each step is meticulously planned and executed, showcasing the tribe's adherence to their age-old customs. However, what makes the study of Mising wedding rituals, particularly intriguing is how tradition and modernity intersect. As the Mising tribe finds itself amid societal transformation, influenced by factors such as globalisation, urbanisation, and changing social dynamics, their wedding rituals have also undergone certain modifications. This adaptation to the changing times is evident in the incorporation of elements from the modern world into their traditional ceremonies. For instance, it has come to light during this study that the Mising tribe's wedding traditions demonstrate a remarkable degree of resilience in preserving their cultural heritage.

However, it is important to note that these customs have not remained completely immune to the influences of societal transformation and modernization. The adaptations that have been observed can be understood as practical and strategic responses to the current circumstances that are prevalent. These circumstances encompass a range of factors, such as changes in economic structures, shifts in social dynamics, and the impact of external forces. These adaptations are not arbitrary or random, but rather purposeful and driven by the need to navigate and thrive in an ever-changing environment. One significant aspect of these adaptations is the response to transformations in economic structures. As economies evolve and undergo shifts, individuals and

communities must adjust their behaviours and strategies to remain viable and competitive. Furthermore, the observed adaptations also reflect responses to transformations in social dynamics. Society is constantly evolving, and individuals must adapt to changing norms, values, and expectations. This may involve modifying behaviours, attitudes, or beliefs to align with the prevailing social context. For example, as societal attitudes towards gender roles evolve, individuals may adapt by challenging traditional gender norms and embracing more egalitarian practices. These adaptations are essential for individuals to navigate social relationships. The statement highlights the innate ability of cultural practices to adjust and transform in response to changing conditions. It emphasises how cultural traditions have the flexibility to accommodate and align with evolving circumstances. This adaptability is a testament to the resilience and dynamic nature of cultural practices, which can seamlessly integrate new elements while still retaining their essence. Cultural practices, whether they be rituals, customs, or traditions, possess a remarkable capacity to evolve and adjust, ensuring their continued relevance and significance in an ever-changing world. This ability to adapt is a testament to the enduring power and vitality of cultural practices as they navigate the complexities of modernity while staying rooted in their historical and cultural foundations. It is through this process of adaptation and shifting that cultural practices remain vibrant and meaningful, serving as Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge the enduring significance of the continuation of ceremonial practices within the Mising community. These practices not only hold immense cultural value but also contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding the preservation and protection of cultural heritage. The Mising community, an indigenous group residing in the northeastern region of India, has a rich cultural heritage that is deeply rooted in their traditional practices and beliefs. One of the most prominent aspects of their cultural identity is the performance of various ceremonial rituals, which have been passed down through generations. These ceremonial practices serve as a testament to the resilience and perseverance of the Mising community in preserving their cultural heritage. Despite the challenges posed by modernization and external influences, the Mising people have managed to maintain and continue these age-old traditions, which are an integral part of their collective identity. The significance of these ceremonial practices extends beyond the boundaries of the Mising community. They contribute to the broader discourse on the safeguarding and conservation of cultural heritage. In a world where globalisation and homogenization threaten the diversity of cultural expressions, the continuation of

these practices serves as a powerful example of the importance of preserving and celebrating cultural diversity. By actively engaging in these ceremonial rituals, the documentation and understanding of rituals play a vital role in various aspects.

Firstly, they serve as a valuable tool for anthropological observation. By studying and documenting rituals, researchers can gain insights into the beliefs, values, and practices of different cultures. This allows for a deeper understanding of human societies and their development over time. Moreover, rituals hold immense cultural significance and are an integral part of human traditions.

In conclusion, it is of utmost importance to underscore and highlight the significance of delving into the intricate and multifaceted realm of the matrimonial customs observed by the Mising tribe. This scholarly pursuit is not a static or stagnant endeavour but rather a dynamic and ever-evolving field of study that constantly undergoes refinement and transformation. The exploration of the matrimonial practices within the Mising tribe is a complex and nuanced undertaking that requires a comprehensive understanding. However, it is of utmost importance that this particular aspect not merely be seen as a standalone entity but rather as a pivotal force that propels and stimulates the unceasing endeavour of delving into the depths of scholarly research. In this vein, it becomes imperative to emphasise the significance of meticulous documentation, which serves as the bedrock upon which the edifice of knowledge is built.

Furthermore, it is crucial to recognise the indispensable role that constructive dialogue plays in this process. By engaging in meaningful and respectful conversations, scholars can exchange ideas, challenge assumptions, and refine their perspectives. The exploration and examination of numerous studies within this particular field have the potential to greatly enhance and deepen our comprehension of the complex interplay between tradition and modernity. By delving into a wide range of research, it can gain valuable insights into the ongoing discussions surrounding the preservation of cultural diversity in an ever-evolving global landscape.

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Fishing the Fish from Bengali Rituals: An Ethno-historical Study

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Abstract

Fish is not just a staple in Bengali cuisine but a cornerstone of their culture. Bengal, situated in the eastern region of the Indian subcontinent, boasts a unique landscape characterized by the fertile Ganges delta, interlaced with numerous rivers, including the Ganga and Brahmaputra. This eco-tone, shaped by the interplay of freshwater and saline water, has fostered a remarkable diversity of flora and fauna, profoundly influencing the cultural adaptation of its people. Among the various aquatic species that call this region home, fish stands out as the most cherished, particularly in modern-day Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal. Every Bengali shares a deep-rooted connection with fish, manifesting in its significant role in their daily life, religion, and social customs. Fish plays a pivotal role in the ritualistic practices of Bengali culture, where rituals evolve over time, shaped by the local landscape and climate. Rivers, ponds, and seas in Bangladesh and West Bengal teem with diverse fish species, including Hilsa, Rohu, Catfish, and Pabda. Consequently, Bengalis have a strong tradition of fishing and consuming fish, integral to their various ceremonies. Folklore, folk songs, and historical sources illuminate the ancient reverence for fish in religious ceremonies. Birth, marriage, and death, representing critical life transitions, are steeped in cultural and religious traditions passed down through generations, all featuring fish prominently. This study reveals how birth, marriage, and funerary ceremonies in Bengal are multifaceted, with intricate rituals and cultural practices in which fish plays a central role. This study provides valuable insights into the rich cultural practices and beliefs surrounding fish in Bengal. Its findings are pertinent to scholars and researchers exploring the anthropology of cultural practices and religious beliefs, not only in Bengal but also in other parts of the world.

Keywords: Fish; Rituals; Birth; Marriage; Funeral.

Introduction

Rituals, as a fundamental aspect of human culture, encompass a wide range of symbolic actions, ceremonies, and traditions that hold profound significance in various stages of life. These rituals serve as a means of expressing shared beliefs, values, and emotions within a given society. From birth to marriage, and ultimately to death, these ceremonies provide structure, meaning, and continuity to the human experience. Whether they mark the transition from one life stage to another or commemorate significant events, rituals play a vital role in shaping

our identities, fostering a sense of belonging, and connecting us to the cultural tapestry of our societies.

Fish holds a unique and significant place in the various stages of a Bengali's life. In all societies rituals are an important part of human culture and these rituals can evolve in various ways over a period. It is important to highlight that landscape and climate have a great impact on this. In Bangladesh and West Bengal, the rivers, ponds, and sea are abundant with different varieties of fish, including *Hilsa*, *Rohu*, Catfish, *Pabda*, and many more. As a result of it, Bengalis have a strong tradition of fishing and consuming fish, and it is an integral part of their rituals in different ceremonies. Folklore, Folk songs, and other historical sources suggest that since the ancient past fish has been considered a sacred animal and used in religious ceremonies. Birth, marriage, and death are seen as significant events that mark important transitions in one's life. These rituals are often deeply ingrained in cultural and religious traditions and have been passed down from generation to generation. The most important fact is that in Bengal, fish had been used in each of these ceremonies.

In Bengali culture, it is not merely a dietary preference but a symbol of deep-rooted traditions and values. From birth to marriage and even in death, fish plays a pivotal role. It is often the first solid food introduced to infants, symbolising nourishment and a prosperous beginning. As Bengalis grow, fish remains a staple, providing essential nutrients and flavours in their cuisine. Moreover, during weddings and other celebrations, fish dishes are central, symbolizing fertility, prosperity, and abundance. Even in times of mourning, fish is offered as a gesture of remembrance and respect. This enduring significance of fish in Bengali life reflects its cultural and emotional importance, transcending mere sustenance to become a symbol of identity, tradition, and the interconnectedness of life's various stages. This essay will delve into the rich tapestry of Bengali culture and explore how fish has become an integral part of their socio-cultural and religious ritualistic traditions.

Study Area

In the pursuit of understanding the profound significance of fish in rituals within the Bengali-speaking community, the researcher embarked on a journey with West Bengal as the chosen study area especially North and South 24 Parganas, Bardhaman, Birbhum district. It is noteworthy that both East Bengal (Bangladesh) and West Bengal share an equal veneration for fish in their respective rituals, as these traditions are deeply rooted in the folklore of the entire Bengali-speaking populace. However, West Bengal was selected as the focal point for this research endeavour. Situated between latitudes 21°38' N to

27°10' N and longitudes 85°38' E to 89°50' E, West Bengal is a unique Indian state that spans from the Himalayas in the north to the Bay of Bengal in the south. A significant portion of its geography encompasses transitional zones, bridging the Himalayan terrain to the north, the Chotanagpur plateau to the west, and the fertile plains of the Ganga-Brahmaputra delta to the south and east. This diverse landscape contributes to West Bengal's rich freshwater fisheries resources, comprising 6.08 lakh hectares in the form of Ponds and Tanks (2.88 lakh hectares), Beels and Boars (0.41 lakh hectares), Reservoirs (0.27 lakh hectares), 22 river drainage basins (1.72 lakh hectares), and Canals (0.80 lakh hectares). Notably, the basins of the river Ganga (covering 81% of the area), river Brahmaputra (12%), river Subarnarekha (4%), and two small coastal rivers (3%) collectively constitute a vital domain for freshwater fish biodiversity within West Bengal. This choice of study area thus provides a unique perspective for delving into the intricate relationship between Bengali rituals and the abundant freshwater fish resources that grace the state's diverse landscape.

Methodology

The methodology employed for this research investigating the significance of fish in Bengali culture and rituals is indeed comprehensive and carefully designed to provide a nuanced understanding of the subject and is based on an ethno-historical approach as the foundation of study. Ethno-history is a field of study that delves into the customs and cultures of indigenous peoples and various ethnic groups by examining historical records and a wide array of other sources detailing their lives and histories. Ethno-history draws its foundations from both historical and ethnographic data, going beyond traditional document-based research. Practitioners acknowledge the value of diverse source materials such as maps, music, artwork, photography, folklore, oral traditions, archaeological findings, site exploration, museum collections, enduring traditions, language, and place names (James 1979,1-13). This approach allowed the research to delve into the subjective experiences and perspectives of the people involved in Bengali ceremonies where fish plays a central role. Several methods were utilized to gather data. Participant observation, a crucial aspect of the research, involved the active engagement of the researcher in Bengali ceremonies where fish-related rituals were practised. This hands-on approach offered invaluable insights into the actual practices, traditions, and the role of fish in these events. Furthermore, interviews with members of the Bengali community provided a deeper understanding of their beliefs, values, and practices related to fish. These interviews served to humanise the cultural significance of fish and provided rich qualitative data. Quantitative data, essential for complementing the qualitative findings, was collected through questionnaires and village-to-village surveys.

This approach ensured a more holistic understanding of the prevalence and variations in the use of fish in Bengali ceremonies. For this study researcher conducted a preliminary survey of fish markets across Bengal, specifically targeting regions such as North 24 Parganas, South 24 Parganas, Birbhum, and Bardhaman districts to assess the demand and availability of various fish types in these areas.

In addition to these primary data collection methods, a comprehensive analysis of secondary sources, including folklore, folk songs, written records, historical texts, and religious scriptures, was undertaken. These sources offered a historical and cultural context to the significance of fish in Bengali culture. The findings of this study ultimately shed light on the multi-dimensional nature of birth, marriage, and funerary ceremonies in Bengal, highlighting the intricate rituals and cultural practices where fish is a central element. This research contributes not only to a deeper understanding of the cultural significance of fish but also provides valuable insights into the anthropology of cultural practices and religious beliefs in Bengal. Furthermore, it serves as a valuable reference for scholars and researchers interested in similar studies, not only within the Bengal region but also in other cultural contexts worldwide.

The Significance of Fish from Historical Perspective

Fish are important faunal remains that are and have been recovered from many South Asian and Arabian Sea archaeological sites (Beech 2004; Blecher, 1998; Besenval and Desse, 1995; Meunier 1994). Puranic customs depict *Matysa* as an important avatar of the god Vishnu and is considered among his ten avatars. *Matsya* is represented as a giant/anthropomorphic fish with the torso of a four-armed man and the tail of a fish. In many religions of South Asia like Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, fish is considered one of the seven auspicious signs of the Astamangala representing fertility and abundance (Parpola 1994a, 188-189). In Sanskrit literature, a comparison is done of both the *rohita* (*Labeo rohita*) and the *sakala* (murrel or snakehead, *ophicephalus sp.*) fish with that of the female sexual organ and they are associated with the Goddess Durga (Parpola 1994a, 194). Fish and some reptiles especially carp *rohita* and the Indian gharial or crocodile, are considered important sacrificial things for Goddess Durga. Drinks and fish are important parts of sacrifices belonging to various fertility spirits and serpent gods (Hora 1935, 1948a, 1948b). Fish evidence is found as the earliest prehistoric artefacts (Allchin 1982, 69,287; Sarkar 1954). Harappan civilization sites have also reported fish as artefacts as well as on Harappan pottery (Piggott 1950, 88,199; Allchin 1982, 194,199; Sarkar 1954; Bagchi 1955).

Fish also finds its mention in literary evidence as found in the Rig Veda where methods of catching fish by the net and those people who catch it are mentioned. The *Vajasaneyi Samhita* and the *Tattiriya Brahmana* give the list of those who live by fishing such as the *Kaivarta*, *Puanjistha*, *Dasa*, *Mainala* etc (Das 1931, 294-295). The Arthasastra gives evidence of fisheries such as aquaculture, and fishery produce and fishermen were taxed while fish was also used as manure for agriculture. (Hora 1994b, 7-9). Fish are also mentioned in the Asokan Pillar Edict where the protection of fish during breeding and measures to limit their careless slaughter are talked about (Hora 1950, 50-54; Thapar 1961, 71-72, 264).

The *Gautama Dharmasutra*, the *Vasistha Dharmasutra*, and the *Yajnavalkya Smrti* all mention that fish is a permissible food item when offered voluntarily, according to (Hora 1953, 65). Additionally, the *Gautama Dharmasutra*, the *Apastamba Dharmasutra*, the *Manu Smrti*, and the *Yajnavalkya Smrti* provide guidance on the inclusion of fish in *sraddha* rituals (Hora 1953, 65-66). However, these texts also contain specific prohibitions related to certain types of fish, such as deformed fish, snakeheaded fish, and fish that primarily consume flesh, such as sharks (Hora 1953, 66-68). It's worth noting that Hora points out contradictions within these texts as well. For instance, the *Yajnavalkya Smrti* prescribes a three-day fast as a penalty for consuming fish in one passage, while in another, it lists specific types of fish considered suitable for consumption even by brahmanas. These fish include the *Simhatundaka* (*Bagarius bagarius*), the *Rohita* (*Labeo rohita*), the *Pathina* (*Wallago attu*), and the *Rajiva* (*Mugil corsula*) (Hora 1953, 68, 74-75).

According to (Hora 1953, 75), it can be reasonably inferred that between 600 B.C. and 200 A.D., fish held a generally esteemed position as a food source within Hindu culture. Nevertheless, there were certain species or types of fish that were prohibited for consumption, for various reasons. Furthermore, among those considered suitable for consumption, there existed a hierarchy in terms of quality or value. The Smritis, during this time frame, presented conflicting statements regarding the acceptability of fish as food. These contradictions reveal the influence of social, religious, and political factors that later led to the establishment of taboos against consuming any form of animal flesh. The conclusion that fishes were not a common component of the early Indian diet posed a paradox that Tarak Chandra Das aimed to address through his articles. He acknowledged that in Bengal, fish held significant dietary importance for people across various social strata. He also drew on the work of S. T. Moses, as extensively cited in Das's writings (Das 1931, 299, 302-3; Das 1932, 96), to highlight that a similar dietary pattern existed in many parts of South India, particularly among specific groups (Moses 1922-23, 549-50).

Das argued that the Bengalese utilized fish as a dietary staple to a greater extent than those in other regions of India. He noted that reports from the period just before and after World War I indicated that possibly more than 80 per cent of the population in Bengal were consumers of fish (Das 1931, 276). While acknowledging that fish was consumed by lower social groups and tribal populations across India, Das pointed out that in Bengal, as well as in the "*Mahratta tract*," higher social classes also included fish in their diets, in contrast to the strong taboo against fish consumption observed by the highest castes, particularly the Brahmins, in the central Ganga-Yamuna valley (referred to as "the Midland of the ancients" or "*Madhyama Dis*" in vedic India or "*Madhya Desa*" in the Puranas (Schwartzberg 1978, 13, plate III.A.1 and 27, plate III.D.3), and in South India (Das 1931, 276-77). Das noted that the main exceptions among the higher castes in Bengal were Hindu widows of the upper castes, who were prohibited from consuming fish after widowhood (Das 1931, 276, 286), Vaishnavas to some extent (Das 1931, 276), and Brahmins aiming to maintain orthodox purity standards (Das 1931, 276).

To address this paradox, Das analysed what he referred to as a "fish trait-complex" in Bengal. This complex encompassed various aspects of fish use in ceremonial and ritual contexts (Das 1931). The occupation of fishing has a long history in South Asia, dating back to prehistoric times. However, it's interesting to note that fishing communities are rarely mentioned in literary sources, and their presence in the archaeological record has only recently gained attention. One of the earliest pieces of evidence for such fishing communities in South Asia can be found in Sri Lanka. The archaeological site of Mantai has provided valuable insights into the utilization of marine resources like various molluscs, fish, sea turtles, and dolphins during the prehistoric Mesolithic phase, which dates back to the early 2nd millennium BC (Prickett-Fernando 1990, 115). Similar evidence with comparable dates has also been uncovered in late prehistoric sites in western India. This highlights the role of fishing as an integral part of a broad spectrum of resource utilization, extending from prehistoric times onwards. However, it's worth noting that the study of fishing in the context of Bengal is an area that still requires further exploration and research (Ray 2006, 68-95).

The Significance of Fish in Rituals throughout Various Life Phases

Birth, marriage, and death stand as the three most significant phases of human life, universally acknowledged and commemorated through a myriad of traditional and ethnic rituals across the globe. In the rich tapestry of India's diverse cultural landscape, each region boasts its unique ceremonies intertwined with indigenous customs that honour these pivotal life events. The state of West

Bengal, nestled in the eastern part of India, is no exception to this rich tradition. In West Bengal, as in other parts of India, these customs highlight the deep importance of these life stages and stand as evidence of the region's enduring cultural wealth. Fish holds a special connection to all these rituals, and the detailed significance of fish in these ceremonies is elaborated below.

Birth Ceremonies

In Bengali culture, birth ceremonies encompass both i) pre-birth and ii) post-birth rituals, with a central theme of fish symbolising good health and blessings. In the pre-birth phase, known as "*Sadh-vokkhon*," prayers are dedicated to the unborn child's well-being, and fish is integrated into these rituals as a symbol of hope and prosperity. Transitioning to the post-birth phase, "*Annoprashon*" marks the introduction of fish into the infant's diet, emphasizing its crucial role in nourishing the child and ensuring a healthy start to life. Additionally, "*Sasthi-pujo*," a post-birth ceremony dedicated to the goddess *Sasthi* for maternal and child well-being, often includes offerings of fish to invoke blessings and protection. The use of fish throughout these birth ceremonies underlines its profound significance in Bengali culture, highlighting the inseparable connection between food, tradition, and the well-being of the newborn. A detailed discussion of each ceremony is given below-

Pre-Birth Ceremonies

Sadh-vokkhon

Sasthi-pujo is one of the most significant post-birth rituals in Bengali tradition, typically observed on the 21st day after a child's birth. During this ritual, the mother of the child performs a *pujo* and fervently prays to Goddess *Sasthi*, seeking her divine protection for the newborn. It's worth noting that the exact day of this *pujo* may vary from one region to another within Bengal, adding regional nuances to the practice. Goddess *Sasthi* plays a crucial role in this tradition, symbolising fertility and maternal well-being. While depictions of her do not explicitly show her holding a fish, the symbolism of her *vahana*, the cat, and the fish runs deep in Bengali culture. The cat's association with fish signifies Goddess *Sasthi*'s nurturing and protective qualities. This fusion of the cat and fish symbolism represents a potent force in promoting reproduction and ensuring the health of both women and children. Consequently, these symbols become integral components of Bengali rituals and beliefs, enriching the cultural significance of the tradition. In addition to this *puja*, another *Sasthi pujo* is performed after marriage, which will be discussed in the category of post-marriage rituals.

Annaprasana

Annaprasana word comes from two Sanskrit words *anna* meaning rice and *prasana* meaning feeding. It also called *Mukhe-bhaat* in Bengali language is an ecstatic ceremony for Bengalis, where newly born babies are fed solid food for the first time. Every member of the family, relatives, friends and neighbours attend this occasion of the baby's first consumption of rice. The *annaprasana* ceremony is significant in marking the next stage of a child's growth. During the vedic period. The *Grihasutras* and the *Smritis* of Manu and *Yajnavalkya* state the necessity of *annaprasana* as a *samskara* in the sixth month of a child. *Annaprasana* is also mentioned by *Sushruta* who is considered as the father of *Ayurveda*. (Mothilal 2007, 36-37)

The ceremony occurs in the maternal uncle's house or maternal grandparents' home or a grand banquet hall in modern times. The ceremonies begin with babies dressed in traditional attires with a *Topor* and a specific variety of foods which also contain fish dishes. Conch shells with ululation by attending women marks one of the important parts of the ceremony marking the holiness of the occasion, while it is the child's maternal uncle or maternal grandfather who will feed them (**Fig. 2**). In some Bengali cultures, mothers are prohibited from watching this ceremony. At last, a game is played for the baby to participate in where they are encouraged to pick any one of the placed items in front of them be it a book, pen, gold, soil or food with each one having its significance with life choices.

Marriage Ceremonies

Bengali marriage ceremonies are a vibrant and intricate tapestry of rituals and traditions that reflect the rich cultural heritage of the Bengali community. Fish plays a pivotal role in Bengali marriage ceremonies, symbolising fertility, prosperity, and the bond between the couple. From pre-marriage blessings to the grand wedding feast and post-marriage rituals, fish is a central element that underscores the cultural richness and significance of Bengali weddings. These ceremonies can be broadly categorised into two distinct phases:

- i) Pre-marriage and Marriage ceremonies,
- ii) Post-marriage ceremonies,

Bengali marriage rituals are steeped in tradition and symbolism, emphasizing the sacred bond between the bride and groom. Bengali people often refer to wedding ceremonies as the union of not just two individuals but of souls for seven lifetimes, is a profound and intricate affair. It involves the exchange of vows in front of the sacred fire, the chanting of mantras, the exchange of symbolic items

like *Mala-badal* (exchange of garlands), and the application of vermilion. Bengali weddings are marked by distinct customs that vary between East Bengal and native traditions. Pre-wedding rituals commence with *Paka-Dekha* or *Patipatra*, where families meet to finalize the wedding date and discuss arrangements. *Aiburovat* involves inviting the bride or groom-to-be for a special meal as they bid farewell to their unmarried status. The bride's visit to a sacred temple for the *Shankha and Pola* ceremony, symbolizing purity and commitment, is a significant ritual. *Jol Soite-jaoa* involves fetching holy water for the bride and groom's pre-wedding bath. On the wedding day, the groom arrives at the bride's house, where rituals like *Asirbad* (blessings) and *Sat-pak and Shuvo Drishti* (exchanging vows and blessings) take place. *Kanyadan* symbolizes the giving away of the bride, and *Yajna* involves the sacred fire ritual. *Saptapadi* sees the couple taking seven vows while circling the sacred fire. Other customs include *Khoi Porano* and *Sindurdan*, where the groom applies vermilion on the bride's forehead.

Each of these ceremonies has its own significance and customs. Among these, the presence of fish plays a pivotal role, symbolising fertility, prosperity, and the bond between the bride and groom. Ceremonies in which fish played an important role are discussed below.

Pre-Marriage and Marriage Ceremonies

In the pre-marriage ceremonies, the *Aashirwad* or blessing ceremony marks the beginning of the wedding festivities. Here, fish is a prominent element in the menu, often served as a delicacy to invoke blessings for the couple. Additionally, the *Adan-pradan* ceremony, where the groom's family visits the bride's home, often involves the exchange of gifts, including fish, as a symbol of goodwill and acceptance. This *Adan-pradan* is known as *Tattwa*.

Aiburobhaat

Aiburobhaat, a significant ritual in Bengali tradition, holds great importance, particularly in the lives of unmarried young adults about to embark on the journey of marriage. This final banquet, often referred to as *Aiburo* (unmarried young adult male or female) and *bhat* (rice), is a poignant moment where the bride or groom consumes their last meal of rice as a bachelor or spinster (Fig. 3). This event is a testament to the affection and indulgence of parents and relatives, who spare no effort to orchestrate a lavish feast for the occasion. However, what truly makes *Aiburobhaat* distinctive is the central role that fish plays in this ritual. Fish dishes, ranging from the creamy *doi maach* to the spicy *maacher jhol*, are chosen with meticulous care and prepared to perfection, delighting the

wedding guests with their flavours. The fish dishes not only exemplify the rich culinary heritage of Bengal but also carry profound symbolic significance. As part of the ritual, a fish head is presented to the bride or groom, who must take a small bite before passing it on to their sibling. This gesture symbolizes the transfer of marital blessings and is believed to bring good fortune, with the hope that the sibling will soon find a compatible partner and embark on their own matrimonial journey. *Aiburobhaat*, with its delectable fish dishes and meaningful traditions, encapsulates the essence of Bengali culture and the transition from youth to married life.

Tattwa

In a Bengali wedding, there's a unique tradition called *Tattwa* where a fish plays a special role. For this ceremony, the bride's family brings a big fish, often a *Rohu*, and dresses it up like a bride along with other gifts. They adorn the fish with jewellery, turmeric paste, and a beautiful silk saree (Fig. 4) It's a way of symbolising the bride's journey into married life. In return, the groom's family gives the bride a gift to express their best wishes for her happiness. In this tradition, fish like *Hilsa*, *Rohu*, or *Katla* are often used because they are considered auspicious for religious rituals. Sometimes, a pair of fish is dressed up as a bride and groom and included in the *Tattwa* as well. In some regions such as Birbhum, Burdwan, and Nadia region it is customary for the groom's family to present a saree to the bride in *Tattwa*, skilfully wrapped in the shape of fish. This adds a special touch to the ceremony, making it even more meaningful and unique.

The *Tattwa* ritual is a significant part of the *gaye holud* ceremony, which is one of the most important rituals in a Bengali marriage. Interestingly, the bride's family also sends *Tattwa* to the groom's family on the day after the wedding when they visit their daughter in her new in-laws' house. Both the bride's and groom's families apply turmeric paste to their bodies as they prepare for their *gaye-holud* ceremonies on the wedding day. It's a tradition that signifies purification and the start of their new lives together. What's unique is that during the *gaye holud* celebration, the groom's family visits the bride's house without the groom, and they celebrate the bride's *holud*. The meticulous observation of these customs revealed the profound symbolism attached to fish throughout the marital journey of a bride. In the preliminary ceremonies leading up to marriage, it was customary to include fish among the items sent to the homes of both the bride and groom. In eastern Bengal, these pre-marital offerings invariably featured a pair of fish, one notably larger than the other.

Tarak Chandra Das, in his extensive study, emphasises the significance of fish in various Bengali customs, including their role in the *Gaye-holud* ritual in western Bengal, which involves applying turmeric paste. (Das 1931, 284). Thus, right from the inception of marriage, the presence of fish marked an auspicious beginning, a tradition that endured not only during the wedding but also throughout the married life. He noted a pervasive connection between fish and marriage, stating that this association transcended geographical boundaries within the province (Das 1931, 284). Even after the symbolic marriage tie was established, fish remained a constant part of the couple's diet (Das 1931, 285). It became a ritual for women to consume fish on specific occasions, such as during menstruation, as part of ceremonial purification, or when transitioning between her father's and husband's households (Das 1931, 285-86). This practice extended beyond the wedding, with the exchange of fish and betel continuing to hold social significance, especially among wealthier individuals (Das 1931, 285-86). In essence, Das's research highlighted the intricate web of customs and traditions that intertwined fish with the sacred and social aspects of marriage and life in the region. The humble fish, through its symbolism and presence, played a crucial role in shaping the cultural tapestry of the community, fostering both unity and continuity across generations (Das 1931, 284).

Post-Marriage Ceremonies

These post-marriage ceremonies in Bengali tradition are not only a continuation of the wedding festivities but also a way to strengthen familial bonds and celebrate the union of two individuals and their families. Each ceremony has its unique significance and contributes to the rich tapestry of Bengali culture and traditions

Catching fish by the bride

In the vibrant tapestry of Bengali post-marriage rituals, a unique and cherished tradition unfolds known as the *chang or latha* (*Channa punctata*) fish-catching ceremony. This enchanting custom involves the bride, in her new role as a wife, attempting to catch a live fish from a pot of water. The symbolic act of capturing the elusive fish signifies her adaptability and readiness to take on the responsibilities of her new household. It is believed that her success in this endeavour foretells her ability to navigate the challenges of married life with grace and skill. As the bride skilfully manoeuvres the water, chasing the fish, it serves as a playful yet profound moment that signifies her initiation into the intricacies of her marital journey, while also adding a touch of joy and excitement to the post-wedding festivities in Bengali culture.

Bhat-kapor

The inclusion of fish, particularly the fish head, in the *Bhat-kapor* ritual holds significant importance in Bengali marriage ceremonies. This ritual, conducted on the day following the wedding, symbolises the groom's acceptance of his responsibility for the bride's well-being, encompassing her sustenance, clothing, and overall welfare. The offering of a saree, *sindur*, and other essential elements of a married woman, meticulously arranged with traditional Bengali cuisine on a plate, signifies the groom's commitment to ensuring his bride's happiness and prosperity. The fish head, a central component of this offering, carries profound symbolism. In Bengali culture, fish is synonymous with fertility and abundance, making it a symbol of prosperity and marital bliss. By presenting the bride with the fish head, the groom expresses his desire for a harmonious, fruitful, and prosperous life together. This tradition beautifully encapsulates the deep-rooted cultural significance of fish in Bengali weddings, emphasising the role of this cherished ingredient in heralding a prosperous and fruitful union.

Jamai-sasthi

Bengali *Jamai-sasthi* is a heart warming celebration steeped in folklore and cultural significance. According to the legend, it all began with a housewife who unjustly blamed her cat for eating all the food in her home, angering Goddess *Sasthi*, who rides a cat herself. Consequently, when she gave birth to her children, one of them mysteriously went missing. To appease Goddess *Sasthi* and recover her lost child, the woman-initiated ceremonies dedicated to the goddess. Miraculously, the goddess returned her child, leading to the inception of *Jamai-sasthi*. On this auspicious day, parents eagerly invite their daughters and sons-in-law to their homes in a spirit of reunion and happiness.

The celebration involves elaborate rituals and sumptuous feasting, with *hilsa* fish taking centre stage on the dining table. The son-in-law is traditionally welcomed with a *phonta* of curd on his forehead and a yellow thread called '*Shashti-suto*' around his right wrist and forehead, symbolising Goddess *Shashti*'s blessings for children. Gifts and sweets are exchanged between the son-in-law and mother-in-law, strengthening their familial bond. The cuisine is an integral aspect of the day, showcasing Bengali culinary expertise. The sumptuous spread includes a variety of seafood dishes, *chingrir-malaikari*, and the quintessential Bengali dessert, *sandesh*. The mother-in-law's meticulous preparation of these delights is an expression of her love and devotion to her son-in-law, making the day an occasion to savour not only delicious food but also strong family ties.

Offering *pujo* adds a spiritual dimension to the festivities, and the involvement of all relatives makes the day even more enjoyable and entertaining.

Bengali *Jamai-sasthi* is not just a tradition; it's a celebration of family unity, culinary excellence, and cultural heritage that resonates deeply within Bengali culture, fostering harmony and love between the in-law family and the son-in-law.

Funerary Ceremonies

Before discussing in detail, the role of fish in funerary rituals of Bengali tradition, one needs to get a clear picture of each and every ritual connected with funerary practice among the Bengali. In Bengali culture, funerary rituals are a significant and intricate part of the mourning process after someone passes away. These rituals aim to honour the departed soul and ensure their peaceful transition to the afterlife. The sequence of events begins with the announcement of the death and the careful preparation of the body, followed by a procession to the cremation or burial site. The choice between cremation and burial is influenced by religious beliefs, with Hindus favouring cremation and other religious groups opting for burial. During the mourning period, which typically lasts for 13 days, the family refrains from joyous activities.

The central ritual in Bengali funerary practices is the *sraddha* ceremony, usually held on the 13th day after the death. This ceremony involves various customs, including *tarpan* (offering water to the departed soul), *pinda daan* (offering rice balls to ancestors), feeding Brahmin priests, and making charitable donations in the name of the deceased. The final rituals on the 13th day culminate in the immersion of ashes or the burial of bones in a sacred water body. These rituals are deeply rooted in religious traditions and serve as a way for the family to express their love and respect for the departed while facilitating their journey to the spiritual realm. Friends and relatives play a crucial role in providing emotional support throughout this mourning period, offering condolences and assistance to the grieving family.

Funerary rituals hold a profound significance as one of the most important and final phases of life. These rituals serve as a bridge between the world of the living and the realm of the departed, offering solace and closure to grieving families and communities. They provide a space for mourning, remembrance, and the sharing of collective grief, enabling the emotional healing process. Funerary customs also reflect cultural and religious values, preserving traditions and honouring the deceased's legacy. In essence, funerary rituals underscore the importance of acknowledging and commemorating the end of a life journey, ensuring that the memories and impact of the departed continue to resonate in the hearts and minds of those left behind. In the context of Bengali funerary

traditions, fish played a significant role in various rituals and offerings to the departed souls and ancestors.

Kak-Bolir Bhat

A unique aspect of these post-death rituals is the *Kak-bolir Bhat* ritual, observed on the 13th day. During this ritual, the deceased's family cleans and marinates fish with turmeric, placing it in an earthen pot along with rice and pulses (Fig. 5). This pot is then incorporated into the *Sraddha puja*. A Brahmin conducts the *puja*, after which the earthen pot is taken to a hearth, where the food is cooked (Fig. 6). The women of the family, especially the deceased person's daughter, place the food near a water body, mixing the rice and fish. They imagine this act as feeding the deceased person's soul (Fig. 7). Some Brahmins suggest that the *Kak Bolir Bhat* is offered to the crow, symbolising Yama's *vahana*, to request the safe passage of the departed soul to heaven. This ritual reflects the intricate and culturally rich practices associated with death ceremonies in Bengal.

These funerary practices were documented by Das in 1931, who delved into the unique customs of Bengal regarding the use of fish in religious and social rites (Das 1931: 287). Among these customs, fish featured prominently in the *adyasraddha*, where offerings were made to the departed soul, and in the *abhyudhayika sraddha*, dedicated to the ancestors. For brahmins, including the *agradani*-a class of degraded brahmins who received gifts at funeral rites—cooked food, including fish, was offered. Conversely, non-Brahmans offered uncooked fish, which was then taken away by the *agradani* (Das 1931, 287). Das further noted that in certain regions of Bengal, during the *adyasraddha* ceremony, a piece of burnt fish was offered to the *preta*, or corpse (Das 1931, 288).

Mention of fish in Bengali Folk songs

Bhatiali and *Sari*, are two important genres of folk songs which not only tell us about the social life but also serve as valuable repositories of knowledge about the significance of fish in the lives of these ancient boatmen and fishermen. As these individuals embarked on sea voyages, their primary objectives were either catching fish or transporting goods, and their songs often contained a wealth of information about fish species, their cooking patterns, and the popularity of specific fish in different seasons. In the verses of these songs, one can find detailed accounts of various fish species encountered during their voyages, along with descriptions of their characteristics, habitats, and the best methods for catching them. These songs acted as oral archives, passing down generations of knowledge about the marine life that sustained their livelihoods. Moreover, these

songs shed light on the culinary practices associated with fish. They offered insights into how different fish were cooked, seasoned, and prepared, reflecting the intricate relationship between the people of Bengal and this essential source of sustenance. Whether it was the celebration of a special catch or the preference for certain fish during particular seasons, these songs provided cultural context to the culinary traditions surrounding fish. In essence, *Bhatiali* and *Sari* folk songs not only narrated the emotional and experiential aspects of the fishermen and boatmen's lives but also functioned as valuable repositories of practical knowledge about fish and its cultural significance. They served as a means of passing down not just melodies and stories but also the wisdom of generations intimately connected.

Conclusion

This comprehensive ethno-historical study has successfully illuminated the profound significance of fish within the intricate fabric of Bengali cultural rituals and traditions. Through a meticulous blend of research methodologies encompassing participant observation, interviews, questionnaires, surveys, and a thorough examination of secondary sources, this investigation has unveiled the multifaceted role of fish in the lives of the Bengali-speaking community in West Bengal, India. This study has unequivocally demonstrated that fish extends beyond its role as a dietary preference; it emerges as a symbol deeply entrenched in Bengali traditions and values. Its presence in various life stages, from birth to marriage and even death, underscores its cultural and emotional resonance. Fish, in this context, serves as a powerful symbol, embodying hope, prosperity, fertility, and nourishment, weaving itself into the very fabric of Bengali culture.

From a historical vantage point, the study has underscored the centuries-old entwinement of fish with South Asian cultures, finding references in religious scriptures, literature, and archaeological artefacts. This historical significance has further solidified fish's integral role in cultural rituals and ceremonies.

In birth ceremonies, fish signifies the promise of a flourishing and nurturing life for the newborn. Within marriage ceremonies, fish stands as a central element, symbolizing aspirations for fertility, prosperity, and a resilient bond between the wedded couple. Even in funerary rites, fish plays a pivotal role in ensuring a safe passage for the departed soul to the afterlife while acting as a symbol of remembrance and respect.

Furthermore, the study has shed light on the unique geographical context of West Bengal, a region characterized by its diverse landscape stretching from the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal. This geographical diversity has contributed significantly to the state's abundant freshwater fisheries resources, which, in turn,

have profoundly shaped the cultural and ritualistic practices of the Bengali people. In summary, this research transcends its immediate focus and offers insights that extend beyond the boundaries of West Bengal. It enriches our comprehension of cultural anthropology, unveiling the intricate interplay of cultural practices and religious beliefs. Fish in Bengali culture transcends its role as sustenance; it carries the heritage and essence of a vibrant and diverse community. The findings of this study not only enrich our understanding of cultural practices but also provide a valuable reference point for scholars exploring similar phenomena in diverse cultural contexts worldwide.

Ultimately, this research underscores the enduring and profound importance of fish in the rituals and traditions that define Bengali identity and culture. It is a testament to the resilience and richness of cultural practices that continue to thrive amidst evolving landscapes, reaffirming the enduring legacy of fish in the hearts and minds of the Bengali-speaking community.



Fig. 1. *Sadh Vokkhon*



Fig. 2. *Annaprasan*



Fig. 3. Aiburobhat



Fig. 4. Tattwa



Fig. 5. Kak Boli: Marinated fish in earthen pot.



Fig. 6. *Kak Boli*: Cooking of food



Fig. 7: *Kak Boli*: Offering to the deceased person's soul

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Reading the Chenba Marriage of the Ethnic Meitei Community through a Gender Lens

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Abstract

Marriage is one of the most common rites of passage in any culture. This paper proposes to study chenba marriage, a form of more commonly known elopement, among the Meitei community in Manipur, India. Marriage by elopement in Meitei community is called chenba. It is used as a way of announcing by the couple that they are interested or ready for marriage. Several studies on elopement marriage have reported about the discrimination and violence done on the couple by their family members. However, in Manipur, chenba is followed with a detail marriage ceremony and it is generally believed that both men and women enjoy equal liberty in choosing their partner in the context of chenba marriage. This paper will critically examine the rituals and practices followed in chenba marriage practices to critically analyse the notion of equal liberty that is generally perceived among the Meiteis. This paper will examine the various rituals associated with chenba marriage to arrive at an in-depth understanding of this particular rite of passage. The paper will, through its analysis of the ritual practices, establish that patriarchal gender roles are reinforced. This working hypothesis will prove the commonly perceived notion of empowerment among Meitei women as wrong. The paper will establish that purity, virginity, chastity, sexual control, lack of consent, all the parameters of hierarchical power are exhibited during this rite of passage, albeit under the guise of consent and empowerment. Thus, this paper, a study of a rite of passage among this ethnic group, Meitei, becomes significant as it is an interface between identity studies, women studies, anthropology, folk culture studies, and ethno linguistics.

Keywords: Chenba marriage, Meitei, Manipur, gender

Marriage is one of the most common rites of passage in any culture. The rite of passage groom people to face every new turn in their life (Van Gennep 1994). It can help the bridegroom prepare for the new phase of life and its challenges. Even though marriage is traditionally regarded as a sacred bond that unites two souls in love and harmony, it is also a social institution that involves many customs and traditions that vary across cultures and regions. This study on the *chenba* marriage practices among the Meitei community showcases the reinforcement of the gender roles, objectification and subordination of women by emphasising its focus on the rituals of the *chenba* marriage.

Chenba Marriage among the Meiteis

Meitei is one of the ethnic communities in Manipur, one of the Northeastern states of India. One of the most popular types of marriage in this community is *chenba*. *Chenba* is practiced with a detailed marriage ceremony and it is generally believed that both men and women enjoy equal liberty in choosing their partner in the context of *chenba* marriage. However, when we critically observe the rituals and practices followed in *chenba* marriage, we find contradictory notion of equal liberty, that is generally perceived among the Meiteis. To understand better we will discuss select important rituals in *chenba* marriage and relocate the gender norms and its issues within its contexts.

The ritual of the *chenba* marriage starts from the day of the *chenba* itself. The couple, who wants to get married, decides an auspicious day (the days which falls on an even number based on the lunar calendar) for the *chenba*. During *chenba*, the boy takes the girl to his relative's or friend's home. It is inappropriate for the family to refuse shelter to the couple. The family is obliged to give shelter to the couple and notify the boy's family about the incident. The hostess is in charge of the well-being of the girl. The hostess must give new clothes to the girl to wear, feed her delicious food and make arrangements for the couple to sleep comfortably with each other or with any of the female members of the family, depending on the choice of the couple.

Paopiba

Paopiba means to give information to the boy's family about the intended marriage. In a *chenba* marriage, the boy cannot bring the girl to his home directly. For *chenba*, he has to take the girl either to his friend's or relative's home. It is the responsibility of this chosen family to take care of the couple. The friend or the member of this family, where the concerned couple spent the night, has to inform the boy's father about the *chenba* at the earliest the next morning.

Nupi Haidokpa

After getting the information about the *chenba* early the next morning of the *chenba*, the boy's father should inform about the *chenba* to the girl's father. On this day, after the father of the boy gets information about the *chenba*, he has to request/invite two elderly male members from his relatives or from his locality to accompany him while visiting the girl's home and informing the girl's father and her family members about the *chenba*. This ritual is called *nupi haidokpa*. In this ritual, the boy's father along with some of the family or elder male members visit the girl's house. They apologise for their son's behaviour, inform the girl's father/family about the present situation, and request them to set a date for the

marriage. If this negotiation fails, it is taken as an insult by the boy's father / his family and it affects the marriage of the respective couple. While going for *nupi haidokpa*, it is customary for the father of the boy and the other members to wear a traditional dress that is white in colour dhoti with *pungyat* (it is a type of kurta which is worn on the upper part of the body). They also should wear *chandan* on their forehead and if they neglect any of the above-mentioned customs, they are not regarded as civilized people.

On the other hand, at the girl's home, the father and the other elderly male members of the family or relative, dressed in the traditional clothes with *chandan* on the forehead, wait for the arrival of the boy's father. A traditional mat called '*Phak*' is kept in place at the right side of the veranda of the house and another at the left. The girl's father sits on the *phak* of the right side, and the guests, that is the boy's father along with the other members, sit on the left *phak*. Only the head of the family and other male relatives who are older than the head of the family can sit on the right side of the *phak*. Sitting on the *phak* which is placed on the right side of the house shows the position and the authority of the man who is sitting on it. Both the parties fix a date to meet again to decide on a date for *luhongba*.

Machin Hangba

After *nupi haidokpa*, in the evening of the same day, the mother and aunt of the girl with some of her female friends visit the place where the couple had been staying. They will enquire whether she performed *chenba* with the guy with her consent. If it is found out that the girl was being forced into *chenba* without her consent, then a big fight would ensue between the family of the boy and the girl. In such a situation, the marriage is cancelled. However, it is often found out that the girl accepts the *chenba*, even though she was forced to do it. It might be because of the fear of the stigma of spending a night with a guy who poses questions about her chastity. In the process of *machin hangba*, the girl is given a chance to accept or reject the marriage with the guy with whom she had run away. However, the irony is that most of the girls do not reject it, despite being forced into a *chenba* with the guy, mostly because of the perceived damaged chastity.

Heijingpot or Heijing Kharai Puba

Heijingpot is a ceremony performed two or three days before the *luhongba* at the bride's place. Without *heijingpot* the ceremony of *luhongba* is not considered to be complete. Women who have performed *luhongba* without the ceremony of

heijingpot are not allowed to participate in the ceremonies of *Heiruk Nungsang Puba*¹⁰⁰ and *Apok Nungsang Puba*¹⁰¹.

And then those men are not entitled to the *Piba*¹⁰² of his clan and they also cannot cook food during the ceremony of *Chaklongkatpa*¹⁰³ of his clan. The child borne by such couples is ridiculed by calling them 'Heinai-Sungnairaktaba' and *Heinai-Sungnairaktabagi Macha*. In the *heijingpot*, only the members of the bride and groom's family, a few relatives and elder members of the neighbourhood participate. This ceremony is performed with rituals and offerings to the deities. Fourth is ceremony, the groom's family brings vegetables, fruits and sweets, and presents these to the bride's family. These items are offered to the bride's clan god called *Sagei Shallai Pokpa* deity and village god *Lamlai*. The vital item in *heijingpot* is *Heijing Kharai* which is a basket used for ritualistic purposes. This basket includes *Heikru* (Amla), *Heining* (wild mango), *Heijang* (citron), a cluster of bananas which should be in odd numbers when counted in pair, white sugarcane, *Heiruk Kwa Maru Mana* (betel leaves and areca nuts), *hamei*¹⁰⁴, *Leisang* (huperziasquarrosa) and *Laiphi* (cloth for deity). Among these items, *heikru* and *heining* are mandatory, and without these two items, *heijingpot* cannot be performed. During the off-season of *heikru* and *heining*, the leaves or the bark of the *heikru* and *heining* trees can be used. Above all this, along with the *heijingkharai*, clothes and ornaments are also brought as gifts for the girl. This gift is brought only to show the items to the bride. The bride will wear these clothes and ornaments on the day of *Mangani Chakouba*. Special sweetmeats are also brought for the bride and her friends. On this day, especially so during the olden days, bamboo was erected at the centre of the courtyard of the bride's house. This is called *Shumai Urong Khinba*. This symbolises that the girl has been owned by the boy's side and no one is allowed to take her away. This ritual is only for the bride's side. There is no such ritual for the groom.

We see here, that by performing this ritual, the bride is treated as being special by gifting her and at the same time it reduces the status of the bride into an object which is owned by the groom's side. After one day of *heijingpot*, a wedding ceremony is performed which is called as *luhongba*.

¹⁰⁰ Heiruknungsang is the fruit items brought by the groom's side in luhongba and puba means to carry.

¹⁰¹ Apoknungsang is the items brought by the groom to offer to the ancestor of the bride's clan.

¹⁰² Piba is the head male member of the clan.

¹⁰³ It is a ceremony in which food is cooked by the piba and offers to their clan ancestors.

¹⁰⁴ It is a local ingredient used in making liquor.

Luhongba

Luhongba (marriage) is performed at the bride's home in the evening. The ceremony of *luhongba* is organised at the bride's place. However, some rituals have to be performed at the groom's place also. The first ritual on the day of *luhongba* starts with food being served to the groom by his mother (this ritual is also performed at the bride's home). The mother has to cook the food and the groom is served first with the food. After the meal, the groom dresses in a white dhoti with *pungyat* and a turban on his head. Such a turban is worn only by God, kings and the groom. Other men cannot wear it. This signifies that the groom is being regarded as the god or a person who has divinity in him for that particular day. According to the Meitei beliefs, the white colour represents the light of the Sun. In the afternoon, a *phak* is placed on the right side of the veranda of the groom's house covered with a white cloth. The groom sits on the *phak* facing the east direction. A small ritual called *Iratphu Macha* and *Fambal Macha Latpa* is performed by a priest to usher the auspicious times to the groom's journey for marriage and to avoid all the bad omens.

After this ritual, the groom starts his journey to the bride's house after taking blessings from his parents. His journey is led by the women who carry *jatra*. *Jatra* consists of seven different items. The first item is *chengluk nungsanggi firuk* (it is a tradinal basket for carrying thing), secondly, *firuk* for the bride's *fungga apokasha*, third, *firuk* for the local deity of the bride's place, fourth, one *firuk* for the bride's clan deity, fifth, it is carried by specially select five women. The lead woman among these five should be married, whose husband is still alive, and also her firstborn child should be a male. Added to all this, she should be physically attractive too. Other women in the *jatra* should also have similar qualities except the condition of their first child being a male.

Before the arrival of the groom at the bride's place, three elderly men from the groom's side will arrive earlier at the bride's place. After the arrival of these three representatives from the groom's side, the *nat sankritana* (religious songs based on Hindu god *Krishna* and *Radha*, for those who are Hindus; and songs based on the *Sanamahi Sidaba* and *Leimaren Sidabi* for those who follow *Sanamahism*¹⁰⁵) will start. *Nat sankritana* is sung during the whole process of *luhongba*. Just after the *nat sanskritana* starts, the bride can start wearing her traditional costumes for the marriage.

The bride wears a green colour blouse, white shawl and *potloi*¹⁰⁶ or a *mapananaiba phanek*¹⁰⁷. The green colour blouse represents the earth. The bride

¹⁰⁵ It is the Indigenous religion of Meitei

¹⁰⁶ Potloi is a traditional skirt wear by the bride in Meitei Hindu marriage.

is portrayed as the mother earth. The groom is welcomed at the bride's home once he reaches from his house. The groom is welcomed with *meira okpa* performed by three to four male members of the bride at their gate. *meira okpa* is a kind of bonfire in which three strips of a pine tree are burnt with a herb known as *Khoiju Leikham*. Puffed rice is also sprayed over the fire. This is done toward off evil spirits from the groom. This *meira okpa* is done three times. After *meira okpa*, the groom with his friends sits at the place which is specially arranged for him. This sitting arrangement should be either at the left side of the *mamangsango*¹⁰⁸ or *awangsangoi*¹⁰⁹. After a while the groom enters the centre of the *mandap* and sits on the *Luhongphal*¹¹⁰ which is kept adjacent to the *tulsi* (holy basil) or *tairen*¹¹¹ plant planted at the centre of the courtyard. Then, a priest performs a ritual of *Iratphu* and *Phambal Latpa*. It is a ritual in which the bride's father or a representative of the bride's father will offer a handful of rice and flower to the bride's clan deity and pray for the blessings of the bridegroom.

After this ritual, the bride comes to the *mandap* and sits next to the groom on the left side followed by another ritual called *Kujaba*. For the *kujaba*, the right hands of both the bride and groom are tied together with a cotton thread by the mother or a woman who can stand in as an equal representative on behalf of the bride's mother. Groom's hand is kept at the bottom of the bride's hand. The items for *kujaba*-fruits, scissors, and knife, are kept on a terracotta plate and placed in the hands of the bridegroom. The parents of the bridegroom give blessings during this ritual and then the other audience, who are present at the wedding ceremony, come to the *mandap* and give blessings and money to the bridegroom. After the completion of *kujaba*, the bride goes around the groom clockwise. After the completion of the first round, she showers flowers on the groom and bows with folded hands.

The process is repeated till the completion of seven rounds. This ritual signifies that the groom is the god of the bride and she is the devotee to him. After this, the bride garlands the groom with a pair of garlands of *kundo* (star jasmine flower) around his neck. She, then sits on the left side of the groom. The groom takes out one of these garlands and puts it to the bride. These garlands should be specifically made by *kundo*. In the off-season of this flower, the leaves can replace it. Basanta (2010 pp 169-170) describes that:

¹⁰⁷ Phanek is Manipuri traditional cloth wear for the lower garment.

¹⁰⁸ Out house built at the eastern side facing opposite to the main house.

¹⁰⁹ Out house built at the northern side of the main house.

¹¹⁰ Luhongphal is a bench placed at the centre of the madap. Underneath the bench pallandabipafan is drawn.

¹¹¹ Tairen is a medicinal plant use by Meitei for purification.

‘the belief behind the garlanding is that *Malem* (the earth) was separated from the sun. The name is so given that the sun attracted the *Malem* to its fold again but the *Malem* remained restrained at the last limit of the Sun’s gravitation pull or attraction of power. To acknowledge that the two celestial bodies emerged out of a single body, the two garlands are using a symbol of the two heavenly bodies. Again, the act of garlanding the bride by the groom by removing a garland from his neck symbolises that *Malem* was separated from the sun.’

After the exchange of garlands, the bride and groom are taken inside the house of the bride. There the bride and groom exchange *Kangsubi* (a sweetmeat) and *Kwa*. With this ceremony, the main procedure of the wedding is completed. After this, the bride is brought to the groom’s home accompanied by her family members, friends and relatives except the bride’s mother. At the groom’s place, all the people who came with the bride are treated to food. After the bride’s family members, relatives and friends leave, the groom takes his first dinner after the *luhongba* and he has to leave some amount of his food and this leftover food is served to the bride. The inner meaning of eating the leftover food of the groom is to symbolise that from that day the bride has submitted herself to her husband.

Mitam Nga Thaba

This ritual is performed simultaneously with the rite of *kujaba*. *Mitamnga thaba* is called the releasing of fish. It is conducted by three women, two women from the groom’s side and one woman from the bride’s side. One of them from the groom’s side will hold the lamp and the remaining two women will hold the fish. These three women will go to a nearby pond of the bride’s house and release the fish. It is believed that the fish carries away the sorrows and sufferings of the bridegroom. The women who perform this ritual are selected carefully. First, they should be comparatively good-looking or attractive, they must be mothers of first-born sons, and they must not be divorcees or widows.



Fig. 1: Women performing *mitam nga thaba*

Mangani Chakouba

On the fifth day after the marriage, the bride, groom and their family members, relatives and friends are invited for a grand feast at the bride's home. This feast is served with varieties of fish curry. With this *mangani chakouba*, the marriage ceremony is completed. After *mangani chakouba*, the cooking skill of the bride is tested at the groom's place. The entire food has to be cooked by the bride. However, her in-laws help during the preparation of the food. The relatives are invited and served food. Women are expected to have good skills in cooking.

Reading the Symbols of the Rites in Chenba marriage

Turner (1967) describes that symbol is the smallest unit of the ritual and it carries the specific properties and the structure of the ritual. The symbol can be in the form of objects, activities, relationships, events, gestures and spatial units performed in the ritual. After a keen observation of the rituals performed in the *chenba* marriage among the Meiteis, we can witness several symbols used in the form of objects, activities, relationships and gestures. Turner (1976) interprets symbols into two categories-

1. the sensory pole and
2. the ideological pole.

The sensory pole is the symbol which is related to the characteristic of the outward form of a thing. The ideological pole refers to the symbols which define the ideological belief of a particular culture. Using the interpretation of both the sensory and ideological poles defined by Turner (1976), here, we will analyse the symbols which are used in the *chenba* marriage rituals.

Symbol in the Form of Gesture through the Clothes Worn by the Bride and the Groom in *Chenba* Marriage

In *chenba* marriage, the bridegroom and the audience who are present in the *luhongba* have to wear uniformed attire. The bride wears a green colour blouse, a white scarf and a pink or red coloured lower garment which is called *potloi* or *phanek* and the groom wears a white turban, *pungyat*, *dhoti* and shawl. The bride must wear a green coloured blouse and the groom, white clothes. It represents the earth. The bride is embodied as the mother earth. Whereas, the white-coloured attire of the groom represents the Sun and the light. It also represents the union of all the *salais* (clans) of Meitei. The male audiences have to wear a white *pungyat* with a white dhoti and the female, particularly married women, have to wear a white shawl with a pink coloured *phanek*. The unmarried women can wear colourful shawls with *phanek*. The attires of the bridegroom symbolise

Meitei's belief of the woman as a child bearer and the man as a seed producer. The bride is idolized as a body that carries reproduces and nurtures it. The groom represents the light which gives light to the earth. The bridegroom also represents *Sanamahi Sidaba* and *Leimarel Sidabi* (the deities of the *Sanamahi* religion) in the *Sanamahi* religion and Lord Krishna and Radha in the Hindu religion.



Fig 2. Bride and groom in their wedding attire for Hindu Meitei

The Symbol in the Form of Activities in Chenba Marriage

The symbol as an ideological pole through activity is further displayed in the performance of *natsanskritana*. The *natsanskritana* performers sing hymns describing the charismatic beauty of Lord Krishna and Radha (Hindu religion) and the *Sanamahi Sidaba* and *Leimarel Sidabi* (*Sanamahi* religion). These hymns not only portray the beauty of the god and goddess but also represent the *Yagna*. In other parts of India, during a Hindu marriage ceremony, a fire is lit up. The fire is the witness of the marriage. However, in the Meitei community, *nat sanskritana* signifies the *Yagna*. The singing of *nat sanskritana* purifies the whole ceremony. The bridegroom and the whole audience are deeply devoted to the *nat sanskritana*. This devotion brings an auspicious starting point for the new life of the bride and the groom.



Fig 3. Bride bowing to the Groom after completion of one round

Nat sanskritana also symbolises the creation of human organs and the creation of complete human body. The movement of the singers and the *dhulok* (a musical instrument like a drum) players follow the structure of the physical formation of *Pakhangba* (one of the supreme gods of the Meiteis). While performing the *nat sankritan*, they move in such a way that the structure of *Pakhangba* is formed on the stage, symbolising the creation of the human body and its organs and the processes of birth and death. The ritual, *iratthouni latpa*, is performed for both birth and death ceremonies. The *luhongba* ritual comes under the *iratthouni latpa* of birth. In this rite, a priest or *maiba* performs a rite and prays to the clan ancestors of the bridegroom to bless them. He prays to the ancestors to

bless them to be able to reproduce *piba* (male) and spread the progeny of the groom's *salai* (clan) to seven generations.

Another symbol that is displayed in the form of activity is the bride going around the groom seven times and bowing to him. This activity has different interpretations according to Meitei Hindu and Meitei *marup*. It symbolizes the bride as the earth and the groom as the sun and the rotation of the earth around the sun. Another interpretation explains that the bride is the creeper and the groom is the tree and the bride going around the groom is the imitation of the creeper wrapping around the tree.

The Symbol in the Form of Object in *Chenba* Marriage

Symbols as objects can be traced in the form of the flower garland made of *kundo*. *Kundo* is essential for making the garland. The garlanding is the ending or completion point for the marriage. No other flower than *kundo* can be used for this purpose. According to Meitei's belief, there are two versions of using *kundo*. One, *kundo* is a flower that has no smell. It is not pollinated by insects and it signifies its purity and virginity. Therefore, it is used in the marriage ceremony and symbolises the completion of the marriage. On the other hand, it also

emphasizes the importance of virginity. The other version says that *kundo* is the incarnation of the goddess *Sidapi*. She was battered by her husband *Sidapa* the god in anger. *Sidapi* bears this pain by sitting with their head hugging knees which is explained as '*khuru kulaga khangba*' in Manipuri (Ibotombi, 2004, pp.3). The posture of the *khuru kulaga khangba* looks similar to the shape of *kundo* flower. Hence, the goddess *Sidapi* is born in the form of *kundo* flower. The *khuru kulaga khangba* of the goddess while the god *Sidapa* battered her is the sensory pole.



Fig 4. The groom puts garland on the bride

Turner (1976) explains that in the sensory pole, the content of the symbol is related to the outward form of the thing which is used as a symbol in the ritual. Here, the unpollination of the *kundo* is related to the maintenance of the virginity of the bride and the groom. In the Meitei community, sexual contact between men and women is not permitted before marriage. The chastity of the bride and the groom before the marriage is idealised. In the olden days, marriage ritual was not performed if the intended bride was not a virgin. However, with the advent of modernisation in Manipur, this principle is exempt and *luhongba* is performed with all its rituals. Through these symbols, we can observe that the *luhongba* of the Meitei community is about the sexual contact of men and women and producing the patriarchal lineage of the *salais*.

Gender and Language in *Chenba* Marriage

Feminist studies on language have opined that language is patriarchal and, therefore, hierarchical (Fan, 1996). It is androcentric in nature. Language perpetuates devaluing women. The analysis of language in the context of *chenba* marriage would provide the starting point for understanding how the husband and wife's relationship is conceived, how the institution of marriage is organized and how the language is used in the institution of marriage to establish the identity of men as superior and women as their subordinates.

In *chenba* marriage, the term *chenba* or *nupichenba* implies the action of women. Here, the hidden meaning or the underlying meaning of *chenba* is related to the involvement of sexual acts. Once a person elopes, his or her virginity is under scrutiny. Losing virginity before marriage is taboo and stigmatised. The term *nupi chenba* indicates the woman involved in sexual acts before marriage. Her act of *chenba* brings dishonour to herself, and her family. On the other hand, the word *nupi chelakpa* in which *nupi* means 'woman' and *chelakpa* means 'to bring' explains how the boy as the commander of the act of *chenba* and the girl as a mere follower of his commands. This shows the relation of 'master' and 'subservient'. Man acts as the master and woman as his subservient.

Again, the word *luhongba* is made of two words *lu* meaning 'head' and '*hongba*' meaning 'change.' The word '*luhongba*' also means changing from one clan to another clan. In *luhongba* or marriage, it is the woman who changes her clan to her husband's clan. Both the terms *nupi chenba* and *luhongba* project the women's passage through the marriage institution. There is no such word as projecting men in the same way, as the girl, in the marriage institution. To substantiate the above analysis, we also offer another observation: the unmarried man is called *pakhang* and unmarried women are called *leisabi*. After marriage, women are called *mou*, however, there is no word or term in Manipuri for a married man. Men are free from being labelled within the framework of marriage institutions. The labelling of a woman as *mou* confines her position to her married life and limits her relation as wife to only one man, whereas; due to the non-existence of a word/term for a married man, he is free from such restrictions and responsibilities are borne of such labelling. There is a saying in Meitei that a man is the owner of a woman. The Meitei customary law allows for polyandry.

Further, after marriage, the wife calls her husband *tamo* or *dada*. In the Manipuri language, *tamo* and *dada* are used to address the elder brother. It is the symbol of showing respect to the elder male. In another way, it also carries the power or authority over the addresser. Therefore, when a wife addresses her

husband as *tamo* or *dada*, it shows the power relation between the person being addressed and the addresser.

This simple analysis of the language used in the Meitei marriage indicates that women are devalued, bound to their role prescribed by the marriage institution and are subordinate or subservient, whereas, men are praised for their actions and enjoy authority over women. It also indicates that the patriarchal forms of meaning and domination are indeed structured through the practices of the language. The usages of such words play a significant role in instilling the patriarchal norms and values in the people and the same is internalised by them through daily practice.

In the book *Rites of Passage* (Van Gennep 1994), demonstrates that every human being has to go through some kind of rites of passage in their life. This passage brings the person from one group to another group; an example of which will be the passage from boyhood to adulthood. Further, this passage involves some kinds of rites according to the beliefs within the community. By performing it they believe that they will be saved from any kind of ill fate or incidents which they might encounter during the transition period or after joining the latter group. He also opines that these rites make a shift from profane to sacred. Through the performing of rites, the person's status is shifted from being profane to sacred and therefore, every community has some kinds of rites which have to be performed at every stage of life and these rites are influenced by religion. He has termed it as magico-religious. He further says that this form of rites can be divided into three types that are a) rites for separation b) rites for transition and c) rites for incorporation.

Through marriage the couple goes through all the separation period, transition period and incorporation period and every society has its magico-religious foundation through which the rites or rituals are performed (Van Gennep 1994). Here, what we would like to add is that the function of these rites is not only for safeguarding the couples from any bad luck but also for socializing or reinforcing gender roles to the couple which they have to perform in their married life. Through these rituals or rites, the men and women or the husband and wife are made to believe that they belong to a certain division of roles and responsibilities which they must perform to bring peace in their married life. The rites or rituals act as a system of orienting the husband and wife to their gender roles. Further, if we look critically at these roles defined, we can observe that these roles reinforce the idea of the public sphere for men and the private sphere for women. Through the process of rites, the couple learn and internalise their roles deeply. They further carry out these roles sincerely as these rituals are sacred. It is their tradition and custom which have been carried out

from time immemorial. The feeling of sacredness frequently makes people forget about the biased nature of the gendered roles. They start blindly adopting it as their definite duty.

One can observe the biased gender roles and responsibilities in chenba marriage rites through all these separations, transition and corporation periods. The analyses of the rites one by one are stated below and explained as to explain how there exists a gender bias in these marriage rites.

Androcentrism in Language of *Chenba* Marriage

Firstly, the words or the terms used in this form of marriage are more implied towards the women. The structure and formation of the term *chenba* has been explained before. The period from *chenba* and betrothal is the period of separation in which the girl is taken away by the boy from her home for performing the *chenba* rite. Then the girl is brought back to her home and she is not allowed to go out from her home till she gets married. In this way, the girl is kept separated from the outside world. This is not necessary for the boy. He takes the main role in arranging for the marriage with the help of his friends and family members. This is because of two reasons. First, it is not appreciated of a girl to come out in society after *chenba* as she has indulged in pre-marital sex. Second, now she is entitled to the man with whom she eloped. If she goes out it might give chance for other prospective men who want to marry her. The first reason shows that only girls are made to feel guilty of her action and the second reason is where the girl's choice is not taken into account. Millet (1962) in her book, '*Sexual Politics*' described that woman's sexuality is labelled as a bad influence, however, a man's sexuality is taken as heroic and desired. In *chenba* too, a girl's sexuality is regarded as a bad influence and therefore, she is made guilty of her action. Hence, she is not allowed to go out until her marriage ceremony is completed and on the other hand, a boy is allowed to be involved in the arrangements for his marriage and meet friends and relatives as his action through *chenba* is seen as heroic and desired.

Objectification of Women

Objectification of women's body is one of the issues which have been discussed in feminist researches. Szymanski, Moffitt and Carr (2011) have quoted from the objectification theory established by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997). According to Fredrick and Roberts, women are sexually objectified and treated as an object to be valued for its use by the other. Her body has been singled out from other women. This contributes to the mental health problems and disproportionately affects women in two ways. First, it is direct and overt and involves sexual

objectification experiences. Second, it is indirect and subtle and involves women's internalization of sexual objectification experiences or self-objectification.

In the context of *chenba*, the objectification of women can be seen in the ritual called *Sumang UrongKhinba* and the *Mitam Nga thaba*. In *Sumang Urong Khinba* the erection of bamboo at the centre of the courtyard of the bride's residence symbolises the possession of the bride by the groom. She cannot be taken away by any other men. Here the bride becomes an object which is owned by the groom whereas there is no such case for the groom's side. Again in *Mitam Nga Thaba* we can observe that the women's body is given importance. They must be comparatively beautiful and especially they must be the mother of a first born son and must not be divorcees or widows. Women with such qualities are taken as auspicious and fortunate (Brara, 1996). This shows the very stereotypical patriarchal perspective which discriminates those women who are less attractive or who bear female as a first child or other single women.

Women as Secondary Position

Women are considered as secondary in the role. In the entire process of the marriage ceremony, starting from the beginning of *chenba*, men are at the core of decision-making. On the *chenba* day, the boy takes all the responsibilities. Then on the next day of *haidokpa*, it is the father of the boy who comes and informs about the *chenba* to the girl's father. The decision of whether to accept or reject for fixing the marriage wholly depends on the girl's father. It is a transaction between man and a man. Women do not have the right in decision-making. In the wedding ceremony, they remain a secondary actor and obey the family decision. Moreover, the first dinner which is served to the bride, signifies the subordination of the woman's status as a wife.

Embodiment of God and Goddess

On the wedding day, Meiteis believe that the bride and groom obtain divinity. In Meitei Hindu, the groom is believed as the incarnation of Lord Krishna and the bride as Radha. In Meitei *marup*, the groom is *Sanamahi Sidaba* and the bride is *Leimarel Sidabi*. The incarnation of the bride and groom as having a divine body is the shifted from profane to sacred. It is also a transition period where the rites or rituals are performed through which the bride and groom pass from one group to another group; that is from a single life to a married life. In these rites, both bride and groom are to be believed that they possess divinity. However, a question arises if this power of divinity is divided equally between both the bride and the groom. In the above explanation of *luhongba*, we found out that the

groom is made to sit at the centre of the courtyard where the marriage ceremony is performed and the bride walks around the groom clockwise. After completion of first round, she showers flowers on the groom and bows in front of him with folded hands. The process is repeated till the completion of seven rounds. This ritual signifies that the groom is the God of the bride and she is his devotee.

Conclusion

In all the periods of separation, transition and incorporation, the rites or rituals performed through these periods act as an agency for socialising the husband and the wife to their traditional gender roles and responsibilities which is very discriminating in nature. Women are kept in subordinate positions through these rituals. The couples are made to internalise their roles. The process of role-learning is ongoing. Girls and boys learn the appropriate behavioural roles for their sex during primary socialisation, through interaction with adults, especially parents. Families are of paramount importance in gender socialization, including the education system and the mass media.

However, from the study of the rites and rituals of Meitei community, it is observed that marriage institution also plays a very important role in socializing gender role especially the role of husband and wife. Through the *chenba* marriage it can be observed that the emphasis of the gendered division of labour, men as superior and women as subordinate, women's sexuality as taboo and objectification of women's body. Therefore, to understand the power play between the men and women's position in the family, it is also important to look at the marriage rituals and rites which reinforce gender roles in the form of the role of a wife and that of a husband.

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Beyond Death: Funeral Rituals and Megalithic Traditions Among the Bhil Tribes of India

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Abstract

The study of funeral rituals not only provides information about human lifestyles but also offers insights into various aspects, including belief systems, traditions, economic status, social hierarchy, and the adaptive environment of different communities. Furthermore, it aids in understanding prehistoric religions. As Murphy (1989:211) states, the onset of death is universally marked by rituals, and there is no human society that simply discards the body without any ceremony. Although the earliest traces of funeral rituals in the Indian Subcontinent date back to the Mesolithic period, data from various parts of the country indicate that this tradition gained popularity during the Neolithic and Iron Age periods in India. Besides, during the iron-age period, we have found evidence of megalithic tradition and the megalithic sites found in the Indian subcontinent reveal an elaborate process of death rituals. However, this present study focuses on first-hand data obtained from the southeastern part of Rajasthan, India. The data unveils many hidden aspects of funeral rituals and megalithic traditions related to the Bhils community. To gain a better understanding of death rituals, beliefs about the afterlife, and the erection of memorial pillars on behalf of the deceased, the author compares the death rituals of the Bhils with those of the Munda communities in the central-eastern parts of India.

Keywords: Death, Rituals, Megalithic, Bhils, Rajasthan, India

Introduction

Death is a universal truth and more or less in every human society we find evidence of death rituals and practices which are different among groups as well as regions. The rituals are not only found in India, but they also exist in many parts of the world (Chapman 1981, Hertz 2004). However, in the Indian subcontinent, we have found many traces of death rituals right from the beginning of the prehistoric age (Allchin and Allchin 1983). The available literature suggests that prehistoric men possibly followed different types of rituals with their existing beliefs, customs and traditions (Leshnik 1974:21-5; Lukacs et al, 1982; Sahi 1991; Rajan 1994:39-40). Besides, this tradition changes through time and space and creates a strong belief in life after death (Tylor 1871; Emerson 1989; Sugiyama 1992). Death rituals are not just like a simple ceremony to help the dead person in his or her final journey rather this process involves a series of activities that help the family of the deceased, to

maintain their social relation with the other members of society, whether they belong to a higher class or lower class (Braun 1979: 66-79; Chapman *et al*, 1981). Further, the rituals and practices help to settle the unsettled life of the deceased family, this influences the atmosphere and gives positive psychological impacts to the close associates of the deceased. As compared to the other parts of the world the death rituals prevalent among the native Indians are highly elaborate (Chapman *et al*, 1981). Sometimes, the rituals highlight philosophical and mystical aspects of death (Kumari 2021). Scholars believe that there are certain relevance and science behind the process of traditional death rituals. Furthermore, nature has always played a significant role in the development of human society. This is exemplified in the final rites observed at *ghats*, which are public open-air pyres often located beside rivers and oceans. These locations hold profound symbolic significance as sacred places where cremated remains are disposed of, and funeral rituals are performed (Quinn *et al*, 2014).

In addition, E.B. Tylor (1871) in his book *Primitive Culture* provides supplement information about the origin of tribal belief in the soul is quite interesting. He propounded the theory of Animism, and thinks that in his dreams, the primitive man met his ancestors; but when he awoke, he heard his voice as echoes and saw his shadow in ponds and rivers. He was unable to dissociate and differentiate himself from these shadows. Furthermore, Tylor (1871) says that primitive man visualized two souls within himself, one of which is active during the daytime and the other during the night. The soul, which resides in the body of a man while he is alive is the one which stimulates him to carry on his work as a human being (body soul) and the other soul is the one which leaves the body permanently at death and wanders about in the form of a ghost or spirit. To find out whether the second soul (free soul) left the body temporarily or permanently some tribal peoples, for example, the people of the Megalithic period (Iron Age) practised double funerals, namely primary burial (green) and secondary or fragmentary burial (dry). The second burial takes place after a period of a fortnight or so when it is presumed that there is no hope of the return of the soul. The dry burial marks the end of the dead man's connection with this world and his entry into the other world. The Todas, (Breeks 1873, Walhouse, 1873, 1874), Hos and Kotas practice both green and dry burial. Besides, the study of death rituals gives us information about a particular group such as their beliefs, traditions, social organisation, individual action, economic condition, and social hierarchy.

Death rituals and Megalithic tradition among the Central Indian tribes

Funeral rites are a very common tradition found among the tribal community (Elwin 1939, 1945; Haimendorff 1943), also people from other castes and religions performed such kind of rituals and practices. During the time of exploration, I encountered several cremation grounds in many villages which are called Smasanas or Masan and the cremation grounds belong to many tribal communities but these are separate from each other. The last rites are generally performed by the eldest son of the deceased. The tribals bury the dead bodies in the family ossuary. Some rich tribal families practice cremation, but their beliefs, motives and procedures are different from each other. The Oraons put the dead body in a pit with the head towards the north and the face upwards. The first stage of purification takes place on the 5th day whereas the last day of purification is observed after a few months. The tribal priest arranges a libation for the departed spirit. In the case of the Bhuiyan, they adopt both cremation and burial for disposing of the dead. Usually, persons dying of cholera, smallpox, snake bite etc., or the dead body of a pregnant woman are buried. The Kisans after disposing of the dead body make a diminutive effigy of the deceased and worship it. On the next full moon day of Margasira (November- December), the effigy is thrown away into a river and the final purification ceremony ends. Among Kharias burial practice is very common, but important persons are generally cremated. In the burial ground the corpse is put in a pit. A utensil, a few grains of paddy, oil, and some coins are deposited in the pit along with the corpse. The mourning is observed up to the 12th day. On the final day, friends and relations are invited and entertained with a feast after which death pollution ends. However, the Mundas perform ten types of mortuary practices with regional variations throughout the Chotanagpur plateau (Roy 1912; Das 1931; Mendaly 2019). The entire process of the funeral custom is broadly divided into two types - the primary funeral or Green funeral, which occurs immediately after the death of a person and the secondary funeral or Dry funeral, which occurs after a few days or several months, sometimes it takes a year. The funeral rituals of the Gond community start on the day when the deceased dies, but generally, they start on the third day and continue for twelve days. On the tenth and twelfth day, Gonds organize ceremonial feasts.

So the practice of death rituals among the Indian tribes is very common but there is very little literature available on megalithic tradition with the association of death rituals. As compared to other tribes the Mundas of Chhota Nagpur plateau followed an elaborate process of death rituals as well and they erected a variety of megalithic structures. These traditions symbolized their beliefs about life after death and indicated the socio-cultural unity among the groups.

Present area of Study

The present study is grounded on primary data collected through extensive field surveys, complemented by the utilization of secondary data to gain insights into cultural transformations that have unfolded in recent years. The fieldwork was specifically conducted within selected regions situated along the borderland between Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. Our research encompassed areas within the Rajasthan state, including Bhilwara, Bundi, Baran, and Jhalwar districts as well as regions within the Madhya Pradesh state, namely Guna, Gwalior, and Shivpuri districts. To comprehend the intricacies of the death rituals, we employed interview methods that involved engaging with village leaders, members of the village council, and tribal leaders as well as the local inhabitants. These interviews provided valuable insights into the processes associated with death rituals within the Bhil tribes residing in the aforementioned areas. Furthermore, our study involved a comparative analysis of the death rituals of the Bhil tribes with those of the Munda tribes located in central-eastern India. This research methodology allowed us to gain a comprehensive understanding of the cultural shifts occurring in the studied regions and shed light on the unique aspects of death rituals within these tribal communities.

The Bhil tribes in India

The word Bhil is derived from the Dravidian word Bil, which means bow. However, the Bhil tribe is mostly settled in the western part of India which includes Rajasthan, Gujrat, Madhyapradesh, and Maharashtra. They are considered the largest tribal group settled in the western part of India. Besides, their settlements are found in and around the border area of Karnataka. In some specific areas, they are highly concentrated, i.e. Jhabua, Ratlam, Dhar, Mandasaur and Nimar districts of Madhya Pradesh, Bhilwara, Bundi and Dungarpur districts in Rajasthan, Panchmahal, Vaad, Mehsana, Sabar Kantha, Banaskantha and Bharuch district of Gujrat. However, they were traditionally inhabitant of the Aravali, Vindhyas and Satpura hill ranges.

The Bhils are divided into several endogamous territorial divisions, which in turn have several clans and lineages. In Rajasthan they were settled as Dungri Garasia, Dholi Bhil, Bhil Garasia, Dungri Garasia, Mewasi Bhil, Barda, Warli, Bagdi, Dhodia, Rawal Bhil, tadvi Bhil, Nirdhi Bhil, Gamit, Bhagalia, Bauris, Rathwa, Bhilasa, Pawra, Barda, Nayak, Warli, Dorepis, Mathvadi, Dhanka, Vasava and Vasve. Like other tribal societies in every Bhil village, we have found a village headman called *Gameti* and the *Gameti* plays an important role in every village affairs; he has been vested with the power of decision making of their village society. Further, the local village deities are commonly found in

every Bhil village, their ritualistic aspects and traditional belief patterns may differ from one to another but in most cases, the village deity or Grama Devata are symbolized with stone. Besides, every household, they have its own *kula-devata* or jati devata. In addition, the Bhil communities hold a rich tapestry of belief in various deities that play integral roles in their spiritual and daily lives. Among their pantheon of gods and goddesses, each serves a unique purpose and holds a special place in the hearts of these communities. 'Bhati dev' and 'Bhilat dev' are revered as serpent gods, embodying the enigmatic and powerful qualities of serpents. 'Baba dev' is celebrated as the village god, guardian of the community and its well-being. Karkulia dev holds a special place as the crop god, responsible for the fertility and abundance of their agricultural activities. Gopal dev - the pastoral god is revered by those whose livelihood depends on herding and cattle. Bag Dev, the Lion god, is an embodiment of strength and courage. Bhairav dev, or the dog god, holds a unique position, symbolizing loyalty, companionship, and protection (Naik 1956).

However, the economy of the Bhil community is based on agricultural practices as well as the domestication of animals like goats, sheep and cows. Besides, the Bhil people who settled near the forest region involved themselves in collecting food and different types of medicinal roots from the forest region. Besides, nowadays due to urbanization most of them are engaged in government as well as in the private sector.

The Death Rituals of Bhils

"The Bhil people follow an elaborate process of death rituals. According to their beliefs, sometimes a bird is seen on top of the house of the deceased, but this does not necessarily precede death. However, when family members confirm that a person in their family has passed away, they all weep loudly, and nobody is allowed to leave the house. Generally, children are sent to a neighbour's house to shield them from the unfamiliar and emotional event. Family members and other relatives pour a small amount of liquor, known as '*chhak pade*,' into the deceased person's mouth, saying, 'drink my share,' as they pay their final respects to the departed."

Harwani or old widow play an important role in the process of death rituals; she is responsible for managing the process of death rituals. However, in this process, the *Harwani* collects a handful of rice from every family member and cooks this rice in an earthen cooking vessel. After the rice is cooked, morsels are prepared and a chicken is also cooked. Mostly they prefer black chicken and that is not killed on ordinary occasions, but in a different way: its neck is twisted and feathers plucked out. The last item to be cooked is fish but in most of the

cases, we have noticed that they prefer to cook dry fish. For the preparation of this food, the family members of the deceased pay some money or goods to the *Harwani*.

Further, the other member of the society brings water from the nearby area to bathe the body of the deceased, most of the time the sister of the deceased brings this water. Besides, it is very interesting to know that if a man is dead, his wife has to lay with the dead body for some time; if it is a woman, her husband has to do so. If the body is stinking, the person may just sit down on the cot and get up. If a widower dies, this ceremony is not performed not even if it is a widower married for a second time. This is only for the man who dies during the lifetime of the first wife. Such type of ceremony is not found in any other tribal communities, not even found among the Mundas or Gonds the two largest populated tribes settled in the central-eastern part of India.

A casket is prepared to take the dead body to the *Mahan* or burial ground. Any four members of his family carry the casket; they are generally called *Khatnawala manaho*. A man with a sword goes in front of the carriers; *Kotwal* plays on his *tur* all the time till they return from the burial ground. After going some two to three hundred meters they stop; this place is called *nihamo*, where they put down the cot. From this place, the female member gets separated from the males and the male members carrying the dead go towards the *Mahan* and the woman goes to the stream. The female members take with them the sickle and black pot which were used in bringing bath water for the dead; they also carry caskets and all sorts of grains, vegetables and pulses. Each of them takes also a bottle of liquor from her own house. Finally, they choose a place and they put all their grains and vegetables even the liquor bottles are broken there. The wife of the dead man goes with her ornaments then the old widow or *Harwani* unties and breaks her ornaments, the pot is broken and its water is sprinkled on the unfortunate woman. This ritual is performed by the women and it is called *pae deta ha*.

When the dead body is carried towards the burial ground the village headman who directs all the process of rituals of the death ceremonies, carries a piece of burning cow-dung cake in a black pot, further he advises other villagers to collect some dry wood from the roadside and nearby forest area. Besides, the headman selects a suitable place in *Mahan* for the final passage. In the *Mahan*, they put down the cot with the head of the corpse to the north. The relatives sit on the cot, hold an umbrella over his body and keep on fanning it with their hands and the family members weep all this time. The old men of the company arrange the pyre. If the dead man was rich they kept some rupees on the ground

where the pyre is to be arranged, sometimes the old men distribute country liquor among the members.

Three to four fire logs are kept widthwise at a distance of about one foot from each other and on these the other pieces are placed lengthwise, making the pyre waist-high. The cot is moved five times around the pyre and then placed on it with the head again to the north. The proportion of the north position is maintained by many tribal groups; not only Bhils but also the Munda and Gind also maintain the same position (Mendaly 2015, 2017, 2019). Further, the Bhils follow interesting rituals, they tie bullocks, buffalos and cows near this pyre and it is based on the economic condition of the deceased. The *Harwans* bring some water to wash the dead man's mouth and face, and his own hands. Then the *Harwans* cook food and he takes the cooked food in two *bodies* or leave ports or sometime in earthen port and he throws them away towards the feet of the deceased. After *Harwans* the other relatives of the deceased feed the dead man and they further offer some food in the crossed hands of the *Harwan*, touch the feet of the deceased and say "*These relatives belong to you and they feed you please accept and forgive them for everything, give him plenty, do not harass his family members and cattle and bless him for their socio-economic developments*".

This practice is not compulsory for all the members of the family and it is done by all who wish to feed him. Then the head of the family members gives some money to the *Harwan* for these rituals. Further, the *Harwan* offer some rice in a leaf cup and say: Eat this from us and take some of it to our relatives who are also there. Sometimes they put some agricultural implements over the pyre to burn with the deceased. Finally, *Harwan* informs the head of the family member that every ritual of the burial ground is over and everything is ready to light the pyre. The men with fire go from west to south, from south to east and from east to north and continue this walk for seven times and then he lights the pyre from the head side. After the pyre is lit they go away to the stream, take their bath and wash their clothes. Then they embrace each other and out of the liquor they take with them, some is offered to Pae-Devi or their village deity and come towards the home, they wait at a little distance from the unhappy house. The *Harwan* places there some flour of any grain, again a fowl is sacrificed in the name of the deceased and some liquor is offered, and he prays to the dead in the same manner as before. This is called *Khetaru Karwa* after this the liquor is offered to all men and women. The mourning house does not cook or prepare their food; rather the other village members share their food with the family members of the deceased. However, food for the deceased is necessarily to be cooked in the same house.

The death ritual continues for twelve to thirteen days and every day the family members of the deceased follow certain traditions and customs. Generally, they complete the process of death rituals under the guidance and supervision of the *Harwans*. The village headman forms a group of elders that takes responsibility for supervising the family members of the deceased.

Rituals of *Nakud Hedkyo Goena*

The unique ritual known as *nakud hedkyo goena* is a distinct tradition observed on the second day following the death of an individual. This ceremony is not commonly found among other tribal groups residing in the central-eastern part of India, including the Munda and Gond tribes. On the second day after the passing of the deceased, the *Harwan*, accompanied by a few other Bhil community members, travels to the Mahan area, carrying a bundle of firewood. The *Harwan* carefully inspects the remains of the deceased to ensure that the body has been adequately cremated. If there are any remaining un-burnt portions, additional firewood is placed on the pyre and it is ignited. This act of adding firewood to the funeral pyre is referred to as *nakud hedkyo goena*.

This unique ritual underscores the systematic nature of death rituals within the Bhil communities, highlighting a distinctive practice that continues to be preserved and observed." "On this particular day, a ritual is observed involving three leaf cups. The first cup contains a mixture of khichdi and curds, the second cup holds water, and the third cup contains various cereal grains. Additionally, some rice or jawar grains are scattered on the floor. Following this, the three cups are covered with a basket, and a stone is placed on top to prevent any animals from disturbing them. The following morning, the cups are examined, and any finger or palm prints found on them are interpreted as a sign that the deceased has visited the house. This is considered an ominous omen, and it may be believed that the family could face unfortunate events following this occurrence."

Tijaro

On the third day following the passing of a loved one, the Bhil community comes together at a central location within the village, often at its heart, to discuss the next steps in the death rituals. During this gathering, the village headman plays a significant role. He allocates various responsibilities to other members of the community, coordinating the process. On this day, the head of the deceased's family, with the assistance of the *Harwan*, offers a meal consisting of *khichdi*, maize, *chhole*, and cow's milk to honour their ancestors. The *Harwan* arranges these foods on leaf plates, which are then placed inside a

basket. Additionally, the *Harwan* carries two bamboo tubes, one containing milk and the other cow's urine, which are also secured in the basket, and tied with a piece of cloth. A bundle of grass is laid over the cloth.

The *Harwan* carries this offering to the burial ground or *Mahan*, with the family members of the deceased accompanying him up to a certain point called *name*. At this juncture, the head of the deceased's family approaches the *Harwan* and says, 'If there are any remaining tasks or guidance needed, please inform us. We are willing to complete them. However, please do not trouble our family members, as they are under your care.' Subsequently, the *Harwan* gathers the ashes into a heap, incorporating the barks from all four sides. This gathering of ashes is known as *Khari walvi*. A portion of the prepared food is spread on the ash heap, water is poured over it, and the basket is torn on top of it. Next, the *Harwan* uses six sticks to construct a small structure, typically about a foot high, resembling a house. The bundle of grass carried earlier is used as a thatch for the roof. Underneath this structure, the food is divided into three portions, and milk and cow's urine are poured into each. This structure is referred to as a 'house' or *koo bandhoo*. After these rituals, the participants return home. The rituals observed on the third day are collectively referred to as *tijaro*. On this day, family members also provide some rupees and a piece of cloth to the *Harwans* as a token of appreciation. Additionally, male members of the deceased's family and their relatives shave their beards on this day. Discussions also revolve around the 'feast of merits,' which typically occurs on the twelfth day. The village headman assigns responsibilities and tasks to various relatives during these discussions."

The Feast of Merit

The feast of merit is not only found among the Bhil community but also similar kind of the tradition and custom found among many Indian tribes. Even the Mundas and Gond community organize their merit feast after the twelfth day of the death of the deceased. Although, the Munda community does not fix any date to perform these rituals, when they are capable they call for a feast of merits, but generally it should be organized after twelve or thirteen days.

On the twelfth day following the passing of a loved one, a gathering is held for friends and relatives, known as *kaththaitu* or *kaitu*. The dinner features traditional dishes such as Rotla or 'manda' along with 'dal' as the main course. During this meal, a portion of the food is set aside and offered to the deceased, with everyone saying, 'Our beloved such-and-such elder has passed away. May this offering reach them?'

Following this solemn ritual, the atmosphere transforms into one of celebration. People engage in lively activities such as playing tom-toms, shooting arrows into trees, and dancing. Amidst the joyful chaos, they complete their dinner. In certain Bhil regions, this commemorative dinner involves the distillation of a significant amount of liquor and the preparation of a dish known as *ghughri*. Ghughri is made by boiling Indian corn, gram, and wheat together.

Guests often assemble in large numbers, sharing liquor, and each guest receives a small portion of the meal in a leaf. Typically, relatives bring tokens of goodwill for the deceased's son, which may include a goat, a young buffalo, or several yards of traditional country cloth. If they bring cloth, it is presented upon their departure. However, if they bring a goat or young buffalo, it is promptly slaughtered, and the head is placed on the roof of the deceased's house. The remaining meat is taken to a separate location, cooked, and shared among the attendees. For a year following a person's passing, a daily ritual is observed where the deceased is offered food and water twice a day, from the same meals that the family consumes. During all festive occasions, a special practice is followed where all the deceased members of the family, numbering anywhere from one to two hundred or however many are remembered, are honoured with a portion of the food. In cases where it becomes challenging to recall all the names of the departed, a customary approach is taken. The family addresses the most recently deceased individual, saying, *'This offering is for all our departed loved ones who are with you. Begin by giving to the leader of our village settlement among the departed, and then extend it to the others.'* This tradition serves as a way to pay respect to their ancestors and remember those who have passed on."

"When a grown-up child passes away, their body is traditionally cremated, while very small children are typically buried. A custom observed during the burial of small children involves placing a small amount of liquor into the child's mouth. The body is then carried to the burial site, enveloped in a white cloth, accompanied by mourning villagers. At the burial site, a pit is carefully dug, and the child is gently placed inside it, often with a few copper pieces in their mouth. The pit is subsequently filled with earth or stones, with each mourner contributing a stone to cover it. In a symbolic gesture, they scatter gram, paddy and kodra grains around the grave, signifying an offering to the departed child, as if to fulfil a promise that might have been made by a priest (Badva) if the child had recovered from illness. Additionally, four stones, one at each side, and the cradle swing rope are placed on top of the grave, and the swing cloth is also buried nearby. Following these rituals, the mourners return home, bathe, and gather at the bereaved family's house to share in drinking liquor together. In the case of a deceased child who was still nursing at its mother's breast, a tradition involves offering the child its mother's milk and cow's urine on the third day

after death. For those who meet unnatural deaths, such as from smallpox or cholera, burial is the customary practice. When lepers pass away, the responsibility for performing all funeral rites, including burials, falls to the Kotwal. The *Harwan* and the *Harwani* are not invited to participate in the obsequies for lepers, and the Kotwal is compensated according to his requested wages for these services."

A megalithic tradition among the Bhil

From the first half of the 18th century A.D. the evidence of Megalithic tradition among the tribal community was widely reported from central India, North-eastern India as well as tribes settled in southern parts of India (Breeks, 1873; Walhouse, 1873; Dalton, 1872; Austeen 1872; Roy 1912; Gurdon 1914; Hutton 1922; Haimendorff 1943; Elwin 1945). However, the living megalithic tradition continues and is prevalent within a few numbers of tribal groups that were mostly settled in Central-eastern as well as the North-eastern part of India. In the central-eastern part of India tribes like Munda, Gonds, Ho, Gadabbas and Bondo continue the tradition of megalithic building for the memory of their ancestors (Haimendorff 1943; Mendaly 2015:1-6 2016, 2017:930-943, 2017a, 2018:594-605, 2019:1-13; Mahanta 2015). Besides, in the Northeastern part of India, tribes like Nagas, Khais and Jayantia still erect memorial pillars and organise ceremonial feasts for the memory of their deceased (Binodini Devi 2013; Jamir 1997-98). Although, we have found many regional and interregional variations among the groups and it mostly depends upon the time and space as well as the socio-economic condition of the deceased. However, the megalithic types are very diverse in the central-eastern part of India as compared to the other parts of the country. In addition, in human society, monuments represent social bondage, economic conditions, beliefs, tradition, clan unity, and adoptive milieu in different environmental conditions (Chapman 1981). The megalithic tradition among the Bhils is not commonly found in every Bhil settlement. At present, many of them are not aware of this tradition, and consequently, they have not erected any memorial pillars or constructed dolmen structures. This tradition is predominantly confined to specific areas. The Bhils typically construct two types of megaliths: Menhir or memorial pillars and Dolmen Cists. Memorial pillars and Dolmen cists, significant features of the megalithic tradition, are typically erected within the context of a series of rituals and practices related to death. In some instances, these structures are raised solely in memory of ancestors who have passed away. The process of erecting these memorial pillars or constructing Dolmen cists involves a distinctive element - the sacrifice of a goat or black chicken. The specific ceremonies and rituals carried out during this process, however, are determined by the family members involved. Notably, there is

often a distinction in the level of elaboration and complexity of these rituals based on the socio-economic status of the family. Affluent families tend to incorporate more intricate and unique practices, setting them apart from others who might follow more standard procedures.

Furthermore, when the deceased individual holds a position of particular importance, special measures are taken to honour their memory. Before these memorial stones are raised, they are meticulously washed and adorned with red powder. Simultaneously, a goat is sacrificed, and its blood is ritually sprinkled over the stone, signifying the reverence and significance attached to the deceased. It's important to note that the timing of the erection of a memorial pillar is not fixed and varies from case to case. The decision hinges on the socio-economic circumstances of the family involved. This means that there is no universal or predetermined schedule for this megalithic tradition; rather, it is adapted to the specific conditions and means of each family.

The memorial pillars typically measure 6-8 feet in height, 1-1.5 feet in width, and 0.2-0.5 feet in thickness (Fig.1 & 2). The process of erecting these pillars requires a considerable amount of manpower. Stones are usually quarried from nearby hill areas, with the village headman playing a significant role. The headman sets the date and time for the quarrying process and informs the family members accordingly. Relatives are also notified to join in this process. During the stone quarrying, the family of the deceased distributes country liquor and food grains to those participating. Bullock carts are commonly used to transport the stones from the quarry site. The family members believe that if they do not commemorate any memorial pillars for their ancestors then they may face different types of problems and for that reason, they follow these traditional ritual practices. They believe that their ancestor is the protector of their family from outside evil powers or uncertain things. During the time of the survey, we came to know from the local people about an incident which has recently happened in this region i.e. “an individual who defied the sacred megalithic structure”.

“This person not only drank and kicked the memorial pillars but also verbally abused the deceased person to whom the pillar was dedicated. Furthermore, the individual attempted to destroy the structure. The following day, the person's family members noticed a drastic change in his behaviour; he was acting erratically as if he had gone mad. Concerned for his well-being, they brought him to a nearby medical facility, but his condition continued to deteriorate. After traditional medical treatment proved ineffective, the family decided to seek the help of a practitioner with expertise in mystical and magical practices, often referred to as a Tantric. The Tantric inquired about the events

surrounding the megalithic structure and provided specific instructions for the family to follow. Following Tantric's guidance, the family members approached the memorial pillars, expressed their remorse for the disrespectful actions, and offered new pillars in honour of the same deceased individual. They also conducted certain rituals and practices as directed. Remarkably, as they performed these actions, they observed a gradual improvement in the affected person's health”.

Comparative study of Death rituals among the Bhils and Munda

The Mundas were settled mostly in central-eastern India, it includes the states like Jharkhand, Odisha, Bengal and some parts of Chhatisgarh. They belong to the Austro-Asiatic language family, spoken mainly in South-East Asian countries. The Munda people call themselves *horo-ko* (men) and the word Munda is given to them by their Hindu neighbours (Roy 1912). To perform the socio-religious functions of the village a representative called *pahan*. Generally, almost all the tribal communities have their village elders or headsmen. The village headman may be called in different names but their functions are similar, they make all the necessary decisions as well as the responsibility of their belonging. However, the Mundas perform ten types of mortuary practices with regional variations throughout the Chotanagpur plateau (Roy 1912, Topno 1955).

The death rituals of the Munda community are *Rapa* (The cremation ceremony), *Umbul- ader* (calling back the shadow of the dead), and *Jang-topa* (the annual bone burying ceremony), (Sekhar et al. 2015). Further, they organize Jagin festival on the day of the erection of memorial pillars. In addition, they perform another ceremony on the tenth day, it's known as *Dasa* or *Hoyo Racham*. In this ceremony, they invite people from the same lineage and tribal community of their village and also their relatives from other villages are awaited. During the time of *Hoyo Racham* they sacrifice two black chickens: one in front of his clan deity and another in front of the village deity. They believe that if someone does not perform this ritual, then the evil powers create several problems for his family (Mendaly 2019). However, the Bhil's were observed as *nakad hedkyo goena*, on the second day following a death. On the third day, the Bhil community comes together for a series of rituals known as *tijaro*. Further, like other tribal groups the Bhil's also organize the 'feast of merit,' on the twelfth day and this ritual is accomplished with the guidance and help of *Harwani* and village headsmen.

The megalithic types of Munda comprise cairn heap, menhir, dolmen cist and stone slabs (Fig. 3, 4& 5). Besides, the size of the megalithic is varied from region to region. Besides, the Mundas always prefer to erect this memorial

structure within the surrounding of their houses or they have specified a place called *mashan* where they mostly build cairn heaps and stone slabs. Further, the Mundas erect their memorial pillars on the side of their village pathway and the place of the megalith is very significant for Munda communities. It indicates whether the person has died within the village or outside of the village, because in most cases if the person died outside of the village then they only put a memorial pillar on the side of the village pathway. However, the Bhils were constructing menhir and dolmen and we didn't find any specific place for their erection, nor did they put any memorial pillars on the side of the village pathway, although, the Bhils constructed megalithic within the area of their village. Besides, before these memorial stones are raised, they are meticulously washed and adorned with red powder, such type of tradition of colouring stones is not prevalent within the Munda communities.

Discussion and Conclusion

The Bhil people, an indigenous community in India, possess a rich and diverse tapestry of death rituals and megalithic traditions that are deeply intertwined with their cultural beliefs and social fabric. These customs, which have been practised for generations, provide a structured and symbolic means to bid farewell to the departed, pay their respects, and ensure the well-being of the spirits of their ancestors. In this conclusion, we reflect on the significance of these practices, their uniqueness, and the broader implications of their preservation in the face of cultural change and modernization. The death rituals of the Bhil community are a vital aspect of their identity. When a member of their community passes away, these rituals serve as a way for family and friends to collectively mourn and celebrate the life of the deceased. They create a sense of continuity and connection between the living and the dead. The intricate details of these rituals reflect the Bhil people's deep-seated respect for their ancestors and their belief in the role of the deceased in protecting their families from external threats and uncertainties.

The Bhil's death rituals are distinct in various ways. One of the striking features is the role of the 'Harwani' or old widow in managing the rituals. Their involvement ensures that the customs are carried out with precision, as they oversee the preparation of food, bathing, and other essential aspects of the ceremonies. The unique practice of family members sending children to a neighbour's house to shield them from the emotional event underscores Bhil's awareness of the potentially distressing nature of these rituals for the young.

The concept of a brief reunion between the spouse and the deceased is a practice that distinguishes Bhil death rituals from many others. This ritual,

wherein the surviving spouse briefly lies with the body of their loved one, serves as a poignant farewell, demonstrating the enduring connection between spouses even in death. The *Mahan*, or burial ground, is a central location where the Bhil community gathers to conduct the final rituals for their deceased. The unique orientation of the deceased's head to the north is shared with other tribal groups, emphasizing the cultural significance of this practice. The inclusion of offerings such as agricultural implements and liquor to ensure the socio-economic well-being of the deceased's family reflects Bhil's holistic approach to these rituals.

The *nakad hedkyo goena* ritual, observed on the second day following a death, is a practice that sets the Bhil community apart from many other tribal groups. It involves a careful inspection of the cremated remains, to ensure a thorough cremation. This is a testament to the Bhil's commitment to honouring their deceased with utmost care and respect. On the third day, the Bhil community comes together for a series of rituals known as *tijaro*. This gathering is marked by the village headman's role in coordinating the proceedings. The head of the deceased's family offers a meal to honour their ancestors, symbolising the Bhil people's reverence for their family history and the importance of ancestral remembrance. The 'feast of merit,' celebrated on the twelfth day, is a pivotal occasion where friends and relatives gather to remember the deceased. This festivity underscores the Bhil's commitment to celebrating life and maintaining their cultural traditions. The offerings during this feast symbolise the community's unity and support for the bereaved family.

The megalithic tradition among the Bhil is another fascinating aspect of their culture. The erection of memorial pillars and the construction of dolmen cists serve as a tangible representation of the Bhil's reverence for their ancestors. These structures are meticulously washed, adorned, and ritually sprinkled with the blood of a sacrificed goat, highlighting the Bhil's deep respect for their ancestors and the importance they place on the memories of those who have passed on. Although the megalithic tradition is not prevalent among the Bhil it's confined some certain regions and families. The socio-economic status of the family plays a significant role in determining the complexity of the rituals. The uniqueness of these practices, both in the construction and ornamentation of memorial pillars and dolmen cists, underscores Bhil's commitment to preserving their cultural heritage.

In a world marked by rapid cultural change and modernization, the Bhil's death rituals and megalithic traditions stand as a testament to the enduring strength of their cultural identity. These customs serve as a bridge between the past and the present, reminding the Bhil people of their roots and the importance of preserving their unique heritage. In the face of globalization and the

increasing homogenization of cultures, these traditions maintain the Bhil community's distinctiveness. These rituals and megalithic practices are a living embodiment of the Bhil people's cultural resilience. They offer a lens through which we can appreciate the depth of human diversity and how communities like the Bhil continue to honour their ancestors and celebrate their culture. As we move forward in an ever-changing world, the Bhil's traditions serve as a poignant reminder of the significance of preserving cultural diversity and heritage.

In the world of the Bhil people, death is not the end; it is a continuation of the journey. The funeral rituals and megalithic traditions practised by the Bhil community go beyond the mere ceremonies for the departed; they are a profound testament to their cultural identity and an unwavering commitment to honour their ancestors. These practices are imbued with uniqueness and symbolism that reflect the Bhil's deep respect for their heritage. In an era marked by rapid cultural transformation, the Bhil traditions stand as a remarkable example of how communities can both embrace change and sustain their cultural distinctiveness while preserving their history. The title of our paper, 'Beyond Death,' aptly encapsulates the essence of these enduring traditions that transcend mortality, echoing a culture's resilience, unity, and enduring legacy. It serves as a reminder that in the face of evolving times, the Bhil people, and cultures like theirs, continue to thrive, connected to their roots, and embracing the future with profound respect for the past.

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